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# Young Liberian Women in the Diaspora: The dilemma of returning 'back home'

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Young Liberian Women in the Diaspora: The dilemma of returning 'back home'

## **Abstract**

Women in Liberia have played an important role in ending the civil war in Liberia. This paper addresses the question of return for young Liberian women living in the diaspora particularly in Rhode Island, and the motivation and dilemma they may face in the process of deciding to go 'back home'. The division of Liberian citizens; Americo-Liberians and the indigenous Liberians created a series of civil wars, which later created a large number of Liberians to be resettled in the U.S. Rhode Island, is among one of the three states to have the largest population of Liberians in the U.S. This paper addresses the influence of history on a person's identity, and also addresses the way in which a person leaving a country influences their return. It identifies the factors that served as a basis for Liberian women's idea of return to their homeland namely, kinship and communality; status and experience.

## ACADEMIC HISTORY

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## DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my beautiful sister, Mary Adusei who continuously sacrifices and deprives herself to see the success of her younger sisters. Know that your hard work goes unnoticed; your selflessness act of giving is a quality I strive for daily. This paper is also dedicated to my mother, Nana Ama Adusei who taught me the meaningfulness of powerful prayers. Thank you both for your self-sacrificing love for others, you both exemplify the true meaning of, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Subjectivity Statement.....	5
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>6</b>
The Migration of Freed Slaves.....	9
14-year Civil War.....	12
Tribal groups in Liberia.....	13
<b>Literature Review .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Ethnic Identity.....	15
Kinship.....	17
Status.....	18
Resettlement.....	19
Homecoming.....	20
<b>Findings .....</b>	<b>22</b>
The idea of ‘home’.....	24
Belonging.....	26
Promise for those in the diaspora.....	27
Participatory approach for development in Liberia.....	28
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Reference .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Appendix 1.....	38
Appendix 2.....	41
Appendix 3.....	42

## List of Tables

Table

1.....14



## **Introduction**

This paper seeks to address the role of ‘ethnic identity’ for young Liberian women in Rhode Island, and how this influences their sense of belonging and the impact this has on their ‘return back home,’ without excluding the role of two civil wars that affected the country. The relationship between the U.S. and Liberia in the creation of Liberia in the early 1800s has led to differences in identity between the “Americo-Liberians” - those descended from US-born former slaves and indigenous Liberians - those whose identity was tied to their tribal affiliations. These differences ‘back home’ in Liberia have influenced the ideas of how people identify themselves in the U.S. My study found that ethnic identity shifted depending on who participants were engaging with. Thus when talking to an American this notion of Africanism is preferred, but with other Africans the notion of ‘mother’ Liberia differs from talking to other Liberians like themselves; this is when the tribal identity is acknowledged. Tribal/ethnic identity is often influenced by kinship; and with this the notion of kin identity for Liberians seems to persevere. Despite the early relationship of Liberia and the U.S, Liberians in the diaspora those who settled in RI want to have no relationship of their identity associated with the U.S., having emphasis on an Africa identity. In reading this paper the reader will become well knowledgeable about the ways in which Liberians sense of ethnic identity in the U.S. has changed, from when they were in Liberia, in refugee camps and today living in the U.S. Women in Liberia have played an important role in ending the civil war in Liberia. The role of women in Liberia remains important today; note that President Sirleaf of Liberia serves as Africa’s first elected female president.

Individual background provides importance in understanding the interconnectedness of histories of Africa and colonial sites where Africans and their descendants lived on the other side of the Atlantic. The notion of Africanism/Blackness that is found in those in the diaspora is largely influenced by the Americas.<sup>1</sup> Thus when asked about a sense of ‘ethnic identity’ most did not know how to answer this without mentioning kinship, experience, history of country and tribal group they identified with. So when it came to the question of identity, can people really self identify to a place based on where they are from. What does it mean when you ask a person where are you from? Is Selasi an African author correct in her share of the language of coming from a country misleading, but rather ‘experience’ being a form of ‘identity’? Selasi in her Ted Talk insisted on these principles; instead of where are you from what if we asked where are you a local. In asking where are you local a persons’ answer of their self-identity changes, I found that many of my participants identity was determined by their individual experiences.<sup>2</sup>

The paper is divided in three parts. The first addresses the motivation of my Liberian participants for returning, the dilemmas they face in returning and ethnic identity is in U.S. and how that influences a sense of belonging; and how all this influences the development of Liberia.<sup>3</sup> The UNHCR declared in 2011 that the 65,000 Liberians no longer merit *prima facie* status as refugees, a change that will likely compel many to take

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<sup>1</sup>Korieh J. C., (2006). African Ethnicity as Mirage? Historicizing the Essence of the Igbo in Africa and the Atlantic Diaspora.

<sup>2</sup> TED (2015) *Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local* | Taiye Selasi | TED talks.

<sup>3</sup> Siegel B., (1996) African Family and Kinship. Understanding Contemporary Africa, 2nd ed., Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996.

advantage of local integration or repatriation.<sup>4</sup> Unlike many African groups, language was not particularly associated with ethnic identification. Many self-identifications were based on kinship, claiming only to one parental side, even when there is no common language shared.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that language groups are not necessarily aligned with ethnic identity, for Liberians unlike other West African countries. In Liberia this self-identification being either associated with being American or a tribal Liberian. Many Liberians are settled in the north eastern part of the U.S. note that the ASC freed slaves that were sent back were sent from New York finding a sense of home in this part of the country, which I will further explain later in the paper. Liberians are found in large numbers in cities like Philadelphia, Minnesota, and Rhode Island.

### **Methodology**

The research was conducted through secondary data as well as primary data, through semi-structured interviews with Liberian women living in Providence Rhode Island. The individuals were chosen because of my contact and accessibility to them, through snowball recruitment. I also used the snow ball technique to identify participants based on my knowledge and shared experience of living in the community. I obtained an IRB from Clark University, which approved me to conduct my research, and obtained a verbal consent from my participants. I used code numbers to keep the identity of the participants' confidential. As an African from Ghana I some of these issues I can identify with but from a different angle. I used ethnographic approach in this research because my

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<sup>4</sup> Liberia - countries - office of the historian (no date) Available at: <https://history.state.gov/countries/liberia> (Accessed: 8 August 2015)

<sup>5</sup> 123. Personal Interview. 22 August 2015.

research topic seeks to understand particular individuals based on their experiences through interviews and a participant observation, which I will further explain in this paper.

I planned on starting my interviews during the early days in July and ending early August. I did most of the reading about the historical context of Liberia in the month of June and also literatures about identity, to become familiar with the topic and continued to read new materials throughout the research process. The sample questions that I asked the people interviewed, were questions that got individuals to talk about their sense of identity and what that means to them. The questions vary by individual: I was more concerned with having people share their experiences with me more than having every question I prepare answered. I interviewed four individuals with each interview lasting about an hour, and also went to three Liberian Association town meetings in Rhode Island and observed. My research participants included a diversify group, by including individuals of different tribes/ethnic background to participate in the interview. Before going into the field of interviewing and I read documents on identity in the U.S., Liberian diaspora, African self identification and anything that my research topic lead me to read, my interviews informed me on things that lead me to read many other materials. I used the Clark University Library as well as any academic online sources to collect data for the research.

In my research I began with a clear idea of what I wanted to accomplish but shifted as the research unfolded. I had to change the idea of interviewing people in the salon to doing individual interviews, which took up time but was definitely worth it. I was initially going to use the salon because my mother owns a salon in Rhode Island and has had this

for 8 years. I also found myself living in my interview. I questioned friends when I hosted a dinner that consisted of Africans from different countries, because this idea of kinship was new to me. I didn't understand it and I wanted to know if this was something practiced all over the Africa as a continent or just in some parts or it is all over tribal reasons. The idea of kingship and what it means to have kinship in order to return back home or not return meant a lot to me in finding out why some choose to go back and others were fine with not going back and even if they did they did not feel really connected to the place.

*Subjectivity Statement:*

As an African student, who lived in Rhode Island for 12 years and becoming familiar with Liberian population in Rhode Island, being a young African female also help me in conducting the interviews. Rhode Island has .4 percent of its population being Liberian.

During the interviews I remained a neutral outsider, due to my being from Ghana. The upper hand I had is having friends with a lot of Liberians growing up in Rhode Island I being familiar with the Kreyol English, I was be able to understand those with accent or terms that many may not be particularly familiar with. As well as being a young woman. I have spent most of my middle school, high school and college years at a Liberian friend's house, with the family constantly speaking Kreyol English. As an outsider I was often asked why my interest in this subject and why I choose to do a study involving this particular population. What normally followed this question was if I had interest in going

to Liberia to work/live after my studies. As a researcher I did not know how to answer that question and if my answer in any part affected the answers I received from my research.

During the interviews I encountered that many of my subject study were unable to first describe ethnicity, or identifying themselves based on a conceptual belief. But the term of race came easily. This can be in terms connected to the strong presence of race identity that is so present in the U.S. I then found myself asking interviewers where they are from or what tribe they are from which came easy for many of them to explain. All participants' age range from 18 to early 30 years old. I believe by having such a group narrowed down to the ideas I received. I used atlas.ti to transcribe my work, and coded the transcribed interviews that later lead me to narrow down what many of my interviewees mentioned. In reflecting back to my participant category I noticed that all participants had a higher education or was in the process of a higher education, I am not sure how much this influenced my findings but I am sure it did have an influence. In attending the community meetings I saw that the women outnumbered the men. Out of my interviewees only one has visited back and one would like to return to work; the rest although proud of being Liberian, do not wish to return.

### **Background**

This section of the paper will serve as reference of a few important to consider in your reading of this paper, also help as a guideline in framing the paper. Atlantic in the southern part of West Africa, Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte

d'Ivoire. It is comparable in size to Tennessee.<sup>6</sup> Liberia is known as Africa's first republic and was founded in 1822 as a result of the efforts of the American Colonization Society to settle freed American slaves in West Africa.<sup>7</sup>

The formation of Liberia rooted from the emancipation of slaves in the U.S. at the time Thomas Jefferson along with governors in the U.S. believed that the masters and slaves could not live together once slaves were free.<sup>8</sup> This idea of having slaves return back to Africa was the creation what is now considered Liberia in the early 1800s.<sup>9</sup> John Thornton maintains that the cultural disorganization of slave society made slaves much more dependent upon the culture of the Europeans or Euro-American rather than the transmission of their African heritage.<sup>10</sup> Enslaved African arrived the new world without a common identifiable African culture, ethnicity and clearly defined identity.<sup>11</sup> This difference disproportionally gave the slaves who returned power over the indigenous people.<sup>12</sup> In years down the line the ruling of those slaves who returned will cause the country to a series of tribal base civil wars that has caused many Liberians to be living outside Liberia today. The weakness in community based programs through participatory programing for Liberia is directly connected with the unrest tension between tribes,

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<sup>6</sup> Fladeland, B. and Staudenraus, P.J. (1961) 'The African colonization movement, 1816-1865'.<sup>8,9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Liberia - countries - office of the historian (no date) Available at:  
<https://history.state.gov/countries/liberia>

<sup>10</sup> Liberia - countries - office of the historian (no date) Available at:  
<https://history.state.gov/countries/liberia>

<sup>11</sup> Hier P. S., (2004). Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.

<sup>12</sup> Fladeland, B. and Staudenraus, P.J. (1961) 'The African colonization movement, 1816-1865'.

identity and refugee status. An estimate of about 100,000 Liberians lives in the United State today, some as immigrants and some through refugee resettlement.<sup>13</sup>

The capital city is Monrovia. The monetary it uses is Liberian dollar and English is the national language. Liberia's indigenous population is composed of 16 different ethnic groups. Many of these ethnic groups can be found in other West African countries such as Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, making the resettlement of Liberians in neighboring African countries easy to assimilate.<sup>14</sup>

For many Liberians living in the U.S., have had an experience living in a refugee camp in West Africa. Even though the livelihood in the camps are not stable, the vision of making it to America before returning back home to Liberia has kept many people in these camps even after they close. Many Liberians preferred resettlement, particularly to the U.S. Only majority-self identified refugees living in Buduburam camp envisioned returning home to Liberia.<sup>15</sup> The fallacy of homecoming is often articulated by the trouble of finding a job in Monrovia and the necessity of Americo-Liberian social connections.<sup>16</sup> Many of the people in the diaspora described the disparity of going back and not being able to find employment due to their status back home. There are many attributes to this; being from an elite background, knowing the right people or being an Americo-Liberian all are reason why many people attribute to not being able to find a job in Liberia. Interviewee 124 talks

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<sup>13</sup> Nilsson, D. and Staff, N. Africa Institute (2003) *Liberia: The eye of the storm - A review of the literature on internally displaced, refugees and Returnees: Nr 10: Studies on emergencies and disaster relief*. Sweden: The Nordic Africa Institute.

<sup>14</sup> Omata N. (2012). Struggling to find solutions: Liberian refugees in Ghana. *New Issues in Refugee Research*. School of Oriental and African Studies University of London.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Trapp M. Already in America: Transnational Homemaking Among Liberian Refugees. Pages 31-42



about her dad's connection in Monrovia being the reason for her going back and being able to carry out her project. If educational opportunities were not available, the fiscal resources associated with the far diaspora of America offered an alternative route to increased status. Status pre civil war and post civil war seem to influence how a person envision returning home to Liberia.

For decades Liberia was the most stable and flourishing country in Africa. Although coups and military governments seemed to be the common place throughout the African continent Liberia prospered. When stability ended with Doe's coup in 1980 the causes could be seen in the basic social structure of the country.<sup>17</sup> Liberia was and still divided into two distinct ways of life: the tribal life of the villages and the Westernized urban life, which has a social hierarchy with a small elite of wealthy people at the top.<sup>18</sup> Two decades of war and coups have had little effect on that division. Though many consider themselves as being from Monrovia (capital), the ethnic identity of the people is prominent in the ways they describe themselves.

#### *The Migration of Freed Slaves:*

The founding of Liberia in the early 1800s was motivated by the domestic politics of slavery and race in the United States as well as by U.S. foreign policy interests.<sup>19</sup> In 1816, a group of white Americans founded the American Colonization Society (ACS) to deal with the "problem" of the growing number of free blacks in the United States by

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<sup>17</sup> Fladeland, B. and Staudenraus, P.J. (1961) 'The African colonization movement, 1816-1865'.

<sup>18</sup> Hier P. S., (2004). Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.

<sup>19</sup> Fladeland, B. and Staudenraus, P.J. (1961) 'The African colonization movement, 1816-1865'.

resettling them in Africa.<sup>20</sup> The resulting state of Liberia would become the second (after Haiti) black republic in the world at that time. ‘Tucker hoped that freedman would voluntary emigrate in small numbers and thus avoid problems of mass-deportation, which would bring death by famine, by disease and other accumulated miseries.’<sup>21</sup> The idea that the American Colonization Society was founded on was something that came from the emancipation of President Madison.

Prominent Americans such as Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Randolph were among the best-known members of ACS.<sup>22</sup> Former President Thomas Jefferson publicly supported the organization’s goals, and President James Madison arranged public funding for the Society.<sup>23</sup> The motives for joining the society were vast as a range of people from abolitionists to slaveholders counted they members.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, ‘many abolitionists, both black and white, ultimately rejected the notion that it was impossible for the races to integrate and therefore did not support the idea of an African-American colony in Africa. Still, the ACS had powerful support and its colonization project gained momentum’.<sup>25</sup>

In 1818 the Society sent two representatives to West Africa to find a suitable location for the colony, but they were unable to persuade local tribal leaders to sell any territory.<sup>26</sup> In 1820, 88 free black settlers and 3 society members sailed for Sierra Leone, before departing they had signed a constitution requiring that an agent of the Society

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<sup>20</sup> 1. Take note of Colonization Society.<sup>21, 22,24,24</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Fladeland, B. and Staudenraus, P.J. (1961) ‘The African colonization movement, 1816-1865’.

<sup>26</sup> 1. Take notes of history on settlers who first arrived in Liberia.<sup>27</sup>

administer the settlement under U.S. laws.<sup>27</sup> They found shelter on Scherbo Island off the west coast of Africa, but many died from malaria and in 1821, a U.S. Navy vessel resumed the search for a place of permanent settlement in what is now Liberia.<sup>28</sup> Once again the local leaders resisted American attempts to purchase land. This time, the Navy officer in charge, Lieutenant Robert Stockton, coerced a local ruler to sell a strip of land to the Society. The Scherbo Island group moved to this new location and other blacks from the United States joined them. The local tribes continually attacked the new colony and in 1824, the settlers built fortifications for protection. In that same year, the settlement was named Liberia and its capital Monrovia, in honor of President James Monroe who had procured more U.S. Government money for the project.<sup>29</sup> Other colonization societies sponsored by individual states purchased land and sent settlers to areas near Monrovia. Africans removed from slave ships by the U.S. Navy after the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade were also put ashore in Liberia. In 1838 most of these settlements, with up to 20,000 people, combined into one organization.<sup>30</sup> The settlers attempted to retain the culture they had brought from the United States and for the most part did not integrate with the native societies. In 1847, Liberia declared independence from the American Colonization Society in order to establish a sovereign state and create its own laws governing commerce.<sup>31</sup> Today, about 5 percent of the population of Liberia is descended from these settlers.<sup>32</sup>

*14-year Civil war:*

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<sup>28</sup> Fladeland, B. and Staudenraus, P.J. (1961) 'The African colonization movement, 1816-1865',<sup>29,30,321,32</sup>

The Americo Liberians established a system that taxed the indigenous people heavily in crops and livestock, while they refused to pay tax.<sup>33</sup> By 1980 the continuing inequality between the Americo Liberians and the indigenous people was symbolized by the fact that 4 percent of the population owned 60 percent of the country's wealth, this set a stage of exploitation of ethnic rivalries.<sup>34</sup> This provided a backdrop for the coup of 1980 by seven low ranking soldiers, with the leadership of Master-Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe (of a Krahn tribe) and the other sergeants, President Tolbert along with twenty-six other occupants in the Executive Mansion in Monrovia were assassinated, before announcing the coup over the radio on April 12, 1980.<sup>35</sup> On n April 22, thirteen True Whig senior officials were executed on Monrovia beach on Television.<sup>36</sup> To many indigenous people this was their liberation from 133 years of settler's domination.<sup>37</sup> There was a lack of sympathy for the Americo-Liberian leaders executed, and this could be explained in by the brutal rule of the leaders and the fact that the True Whigs party themselves carried out public beating and executions during their rule.

Master-Sergeant Doe in his first nationwide broadcast on April 14 stated, "The Tolbert Government had to be removed because as we all know it disregarded the civil human and constitutional rights of the Liberian people".<sup>38</sup> Doe was the Liberian head of state from 1980-1990; during this time he eliminated potential rivals through assassinations or enforced exile. The 133-year rule of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy created a deep-

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<sup>33</sup> Nmoma, V. (2009) The civil war and the refugee crisis in Liberia.  
1. Take note of Doe's rule <sup>34, 35, 36, 37, 38</sup>

seated resentment and divisions within Liberian society and left historical scars on the oppressed indigenous population.<sup>39</sup> And the Doe regime did not help it, the brutality of Doe's rule deepened ethnic division within Liberian society, and the manipulation of ethnic differences and exclusion of rival ethnic groups help trigger the civil war in Liberia.<sup>40</sup> This gave Americo-Liberian Charles Taylor the opportunity to rally military support among Gios and Manos in the Nimba County, for the invasion of 1989.<sup>41</sup> Which lead to a 14-year Civil War that caused many Liberians to become internally displaced and refugees. The 2005 election which Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became president put stability in the country once again.

#### *Tribal groups in Liberia:*

Americo-Liberian are also referred to as the Congo people, who are the 5 percent Liberians of African American slaves or those who come during the end of the trans – Atlantic ended.<sup>42</sup> Since so many of the slave ships entered the Atlantic from the mouth of the massive Congo River, the native Liberians called the newcomers Congo People. Because the newly freed captives were released in Liberia at the same time that freed blacks were arriving in Liberia from America, all newcomers became known as Congo People. Americo-Liberians comprised about 3 percent of Liberia's population during the early settler days. After the addition of 'recaptured' Africans to the settlers, a new group emerged, akin to the Afrikaners of South Africa, called 'Congos' by the indigenous Liberians. This group also assimilated indigenous coastal people mainly from the Bassa,

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<sup>39</sup> Nmoma, V. (2009) The civil war and the refugee crisis in Liberia.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Advameg (1980) *Culture of Liberia - history, people, clothing, women, food, family, social, dress, marriage.*<sup>42</sup>

Kru and Grebo and evolved into an elite, educated minority group. Before 1870, light-skinned persons who professed Christianity and controlled the reins of power had characterized the Americo-Liberians.<sup>43</sup>

The indigenous groups in Liberia are referred to as the ‘country people’ a name that was giving to them by the Americo-Liberian.<sup>44</sup> Today the name is used to insult someone who establishes a country like behavior, or not western/civilized enough. This section serves as a reference throughout the entire paper and would help in how the participants I worked with identify themselves, in relation to ‘returning back home’.

Table: 1 - Major Liberian tribal groups:<sup>45</sup>

	16.3%
Bassa	
Belle	.5%
Dei	.5%
Gbandi	2.8%
Gola	4.7%
Grebo	7.6%
Kissi	3.4%
Kpelle	20.8%
Krahn	5.2%
Kru	8%
Loma	5.3%
Mandingo	2.9%

<sup>43</sup> Nmoma, V. (2009) The civil war and the refugee crisis in Liberia.

<sup>44</sup> Cooper, H. (2014) *Helene Cooper - Africa - Liberia*.

<sup>45</sup> Levy, P. and Spilling, M. (2009) *Liberia: By Patricia Levy and Michael Spilling*. 2nd edn. New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark. Table1 the percentage of Liberian tribal groups in Liberia. page 62

Mende	.5%
Vai	2.8%
Other Liberian tribes	.2%
Non Liberian tribes	.9%

### **Literature Review**

The Liberian civil war that caused many Liberians to lose their home, has affected the idea of going back home which is different from other West Africans. The idea of kinship in Liberia very much familiar to that of other African countries, where it is common to claim kin to where your father is from. The Liberian women I interviewed talked about the importance of kinship to their ethnic identity though, they did not connect it to language as many other Africans do, but simple to where they are from through tribal identity. The Liberian diaspora living in Rhode Island much different from that of other states or countries. In this paper you will learn more about the notion of resettling in America for Liberians living in the refugee camp, the role kinship plays on self-identity for many young Liberian females; and how all these influences the discourse around going back. Even though many say they want to return the dilemma of returning has made the road to returning unrealistic.

#### *Ethnic identity:*

Issues of identity can be tricky for refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants in general. From an essentialist perspective, finding oneself dislocated from the place where one was born and grew up, from the community where one's ancestors had deep

connections and ties, and perhaps where one feels that one belongs, is difficult to deal with.<sup>46</sup> Again, this comment reflects upon the issues of institutionalized labels, which not only create stereotypes but also cause ambiguities in self-identification.

Why do many people refer to themselves as ethnic Liberians and tribally Bassa, Vai or etc.? These are questions that I found myself asking in term of piecing together what ethnicity is and what tribal is. The two are do similar but yet different. Made me question after my interviews did the people interviewed understand the difference and how relevant is this difference or similar is this?

Tribe-a relatively small group of people (small society) who share a culture, speak a common language or dialect, and share a perception of their common history and uniqueness. Often refers to un-stratified social groups with a minimum of (or no) centralized political authority at all, organized around kinship lines. Ethnicity-the characteristic cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions that a given group of people use to establish their distinct social identity -usually within a larger social unit. (Hunter and Whitten, 1982)

Correa (2010) argue that while the process of identity formation may in general be difficult, this process is intensified and becomes more complex in the case of the 1.5-generation of forced migrants, often leading to a painful ‘struggle for belonging’.<sup>47</sup> There are several reasons why this is the case. Development of identity becomes particularly complicated for this group owing to imposed labels,<sup>48</sup> which will narrate who they are

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<sup>46</sup> Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S.M. and Barnett, A.G. (2010) ‘Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia’, *Social Science & Medicine*, 71(8), pp. 1399–1408.

<sup>47</sup> Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S.M. and Barnett, A.G. (2010) ‘Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia’, *Social Science & Medicine*, 71(8), pp. 1399–1408.

<sup>48</sup> Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S.M. and Barnett, A.G. (2010) ‘Longing to belong: Social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia’, *Social Science & Medicine*, 71(8), pp. 1399–1408.



without them playing the primary role as owners of these labels and categorizations.

Similarly, these people will, in latent or manifest ways and through institutional and public discourses, be notified that they belong with a certain kind of people and culture. How do these children define themselves? In what ways do these imposed labels affect their sense of 'self' and 'belonging'? What is the role of parents in the identity formation of their children? All of these questions are at the heart of this paper and they will be discussed in detail in the sections that follow.

Native Liberians routinely jumped at the chance to have their children reared by Congo families.<sup>49</sup> How did this change the identity of those who did this? In interviewing I asked interviewee 125 how her family received the name Richardson, knowing that she is of the Kru tribe, and the name being a typical name for an Americo-Liberian. Liberia's constitution denied indigenous Liberians equal to the lighter-skinned American immigrants and their descendants. Education and government jobs were only for the Americo-Liberians.<sup>50</sup> Identity and ethnic separation of Liberians started when the Congo people arrive in Liberia even Literature ties it to the coup of President Samuel Doe an indigenous Liberian the only tribal Liberian to be president.<sup>51</sup> Hier (2004) argues that the slaves who arrived in America were mostly illiterate, spoke a multitude of different languages, and had a few if any common ties.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, their color and status, bound them together, to

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<sup>49</sup> Cooper, H. (2014) *Helene Cooper - Africa - Liberia*.

<sup>50</sup> Appiah A. K. (1992). In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. Oxford University Press. Chapters two & nine.

<sup>51</sup> Adebajo, A. (2002) *Liberia's civil war: Nigeria, ECOMOG, and regional security in west Africa*.

<sup>52</sup> Hier P. S., (2004). Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.

understand the identity of Liberians we must first understand the historical principles that are tied to the way in which they identify themselves.

### *Kinship:*

While traditions that dictate the use of descent names to make it possible to identify large numbers individual as kin, the mere identification of kin is not sufficient to account for cooperation.<sup>53</sup> Other traditions that encourage enduring cooperation with those kin are necessary to produce the cooperative social relationships that form these individual kin into a society. Kinship was held as being so important in traditional societies that when interactions had to occur between unrelated individuals.<sup>54</sup> While traditions that dictate the use of descent name do make it possible to identify large numbers of individuals as kin, mere identification of kin is not sufficient to account for cooperation.

Who are you without kinship? What role does kinship play in the idea of identity? All of those I interviewed mentioned what it means to have this ideal of kinship. One interviewee said to me ‘my father always tells me that in my work I should not forget the Vai county and the people because that is where I am from.’<sup>55</sup> This is interesting as the interviewer has never lived in the county and only has visited the county once in her life. This was when I began to realize the importance of kinship, for all those I interviewed, as in many ways they all identified to the tribe of their father, even if they had never seen it. Kinship is crucial in determining social status among many groups, and I found to be the

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<sup>53</sup> Hunter, D.E.K. and Whitten, P. (1982) *Anthropology, contemporary perspectives*. Boston: Little, Brown.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>55</sup> 124. Personal Interview. 11 October 2015.

same in the groups interviewed. Chieftaincy belongs to particular families, although succession does not follow a strict father-to-son transmission.<sup>56</sup> Among the Liberian group, kinship determines less in terms of individual life chances but remains crucial in regard to citizenship, identity, and access to land and education, and employment.

Kinship plays a role in those who have found home in other countries as refugees. The Fanti tribe in Liberia can also be found in Ghana.<sup>57</sup> The Liberians who settled in Ghana found home in their resettled country if they were from the Fanti tribe, as many found family. There are many reasons why many people do not return back to Liberia this idea of kinship and the environmental factors which forced many to leave their homes also contributes to this. Americo-Liberians (elite Liberians) sent their children to the United States for education before returning to Liberia to inherit prominent government positions.<sup>58</sup> Americo-Liberian settler (the elite), denied rights to citizenship and land indigenous Liberians.

#### *Status:*

A non-Americo-Liberian could petition to individually own land, but would have to be Christian and adopt a Western lifestyle in order to be considered for citizenship. In this system, “native” children could potentially gain access to ‘civilized’ status through the foster system, whereby ‘civilized’ kin and non-kin had ‘native’ children within the house

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<sup>56</sup> Appiah A. K. (1992). In my Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. Oxford University Press. Chapters two & nine.

<sup>57</sup> 1. Take note of the role of kinship in context of where Liberians settled

<sup>58</sup> Levy, P. and Spilling, M. (2009) *Liberia: By Patricia Levy and Michael Spilling*. 2nd edn. New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark.

to perform household chores in exchange for ‘civilized’ training and possibly education. Such assimilative demands to become ‘civilized’<sup>59</sup> were further enhanced by education and occupation and became embodied through Western-style dress and home, eating habits, driving in cars, and the furnishing and care of the home. The status of a person today in Liberia is largely a reflected today on Liberians in the diaspora and where they see themselves when and if they return to Liberia.

*Resettlement:*

Stefansson adopted a ‘pragmatic perception of home’ to show how creating sustainable livelihoods, finding a place of relational identification, and developing a site of cultural attachment all contribute to homemaking, but gave some primacy to the economic condition.<sup>60</sup> Refugee identities (majority, event-related, and self-alienated) is conditioned by the initial flight affected how refugees envisioned the future, where only majority-identified refugees were likely to prefer a return home to Liberia.

“Sweden became my permanent home while Ethiopia belonged to the past. Several years have passed and despite the fact that I can speak Swedish without an accent, I am always being asked where I am from. This has made me question where my home really is and where I belong; this struggle to belong despite successfully integrating (at least linguistically, among other things) ignited my interest in the issue of identity and

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<sup>59</sup> Nmoma, V. (2009) *The civil war and the refugee crisis in Liberia*.

<sup>60</sup> Appiah A. K. (1992). In my Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. Oxford University Press. Chapters two & nine.

belonging.”<sup>61</sup> Although sociologically significant, these issues have for a long time been also at the heart of my life journey. Several of those I interviewed different from this Ethiopian immigrant though never lived in Liberia or left when young, did not struggle in the ways they identified themselves. Making the experience similar but interpretation or conditionality different. The question of where you are from can become problematic in the context and language around it alone. I found that the experiences of many of those asked always reflected on the shared idea of experience. Experiences changes how one relates, and self-identify.

#### *Homecoming:*

“Wasted years” was a derogatory term used in Liberia to describe people who had lived at the camp for a long time and then returned to Liberia with nothing.<sup>62</sup> Does this concept of wasted years apply to those who are in the U.S. without professional skills? In the statement by President Sirleaf with only wanting those with skills in the west to return during her 2014 speech for Liberians to return and help build the country really brings an interesting point of who needs to be back.<sup>63</sup> Omata confirmed the fallacy of homecoming by articulating the trouble of finding a job in Monrovia and the necessity of Americo-Liberian social connections.<sup>64</sup> Whereby refugees articulated a desire for resettlement as a means to gain ‘the necessary education, skills and economic

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<sup>61</sup> Kebede, S. (2010). The struggle for belonging: Forming and reforming identity among 1.5-generation asylum seekers and refugees.

<sup>62</sup> Website -*Yes Liberia inc, about Liberia.*

<sup>63</sup> Oneliberia (2010) *President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf extends a happy July 26 message.* Available at: [https://youtu.be/hQhlc1\\_AOQM](https://youtu.be/hQhlc1_AOQM).

<sup>64</sup> Omata N. (2012). *Struggling to find solutions: Liberian refugees in Ghana.* New Issues in Refugee Research. School of Oriental and African Studies University of London. Retrieved on February 20, 2015.

empowerment' to be able to contribute now in absentia.<sup>65</sup> Resettlement would allow them to 'go home with something'. How many of those who resettled really wants to go home or can find a home the country that may now be unfamiliar to them?

### **Findings**

This paper addresses the question of return for Liberian females living in the diaspora particularly in Rhode Island, and the motivation - dilemma they may face in this process. Though tribal differences may have had some influence on how many Liberians now view their new home of resettlement in the diaspora. Resettlement and immigrant migration has heavily influenced how Liberians relate to their new home, which makes me wonder if the question of returning to their native home even on their minds? With an estimated 15,000 Liberian residents, Rhode Island has one of the highest percentages of Liberians in the country.<sup>66</sup> Providence maintains one of the three largest Liberian immigrant communities in America.<sup>67</sup> This helped in conducting my research as I had to a larger participant pool. In addition, I have lived in Rhode Island for over 12 years and I am familiar with the environment and the culture. In analyzing primary research and participant interviews, there appear to be several common themes including; kinship in relation to ethnic identity, status and the notion of belonging all contribute to the dilemma of returning back home.

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<sup>65</sup> Website-*Yes Liberia inc, about Liberia.*

<sup>66</sup> Admin (2012) *Did you know? Liberians in Rhode island.*

<sup>67</sup> Admin (2012) *Did you know? Liberians in Rhode island.*

I found that many of the participants had a difficulty explaining their ethnic identity, and when they did they expressed a unified response, which they expressed as being determined by whom they were explaining their ethnic identity to. Kin and tribalism helped form many Liberian ethnic identity, this was seen in how they talked ‘even though I do not speak the language of the Krahn people I see myself like a Krahn girl’<sup>68</sup>. It is important to note that Language groups are not necessarily aligned with ethnic identity for young Liberian women in Rhode Island. It was much easier to describe identity through a tribal lens than through ethnicity. For many of my interviewees this was the first time they thought about the question of ethnicity and I found myself having to explain my sense of ethnicity to them.<sup>69</sup> In the context of belonging and sense of returning ‘back home’ many of the people I talked to related to this differently. The findings of the overall interviews really structured this idea of kinship and how important it was for the people of Liberia and how this influences how a person identifies themselves in the U.S. and among other Liberians and creates a barrier for returning ‘back home’. The idea of home in the findings is both described as current settlement for Liberian women in Rhode Island and also the home in terms of Liberia. Given the fact that the 13-year civil war in Liberia was a direct response to tribal issues in the country, which arise from the concept of kinship. The danger of self-identification was mentioned by one of the participants, and explains how ethnic identity has contributed to the civil wars in Liberia, and the effect it has had on how she self-identify.<sup>70</sup> Participant 124, talked about the danger in describing ones identity in terms of tribal relations, she said she often does not like to get in details of her tribal

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<sup>68</sup> Personal interview 123

<sup>69</sup> Personal interviews 121, 122, and 124.

<sup>70</sup> 124. Personal Interview. 11 October 2015.

background with other Liberians, and prefer to just say she is Liberian than going into details about her tribe. When I asked why she does this, she stated ‘it is scary to see how something like this has so much power in which a person is or becomes’<sup>71</sup>. A heartbreaking history of the Liberian tribal groups which influenced the war serves as another dilemma for why many do not wish to return.

### *The idea of ‘home’?*

Trapp (2015) describes a Liberian woman who lived outside the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana who did not want to return back to Liberia even though she had no source of livelihood in Ghana,<sup>72</sup> as a person who lost everything during the war and has no connections to Liberia post civil war. According to the UNHCR, despite the restored stability in Liberia and unfavorable situation living conditions in exile many are still settled in resettlement countries or refugee camps<sup>73</sup> (Omata, 2012). Identity and a sense of connectedness to their home country, how does this influence all of self-identification in the U.S. due to war, tribal, and dislocation? Belonging to a certain ethnic group remains important especially, how an individual describe himself or herself. A sense of belonging and self identification could help explain why many Liberians are reluctant to returning to their ‘home’ country. Trapp mentions the three forms of national identity that is crucial if a person ‘return home’; ethno-cultural, civic, and liberal shaped preferences. Refugees who embraced a liberal nationalism based on the visions of the freed slaves who settled in Monrovia in the early nineteenth century were more likely to prefer

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<sup>71</sup> Personal interview 123

<sup>72</sup> Trapp M. *Already in America: Transnational Homemaking Among Liberian Refugees*. Pages 31-42

<sup>73</sup> Omata N. (2012). *Struggling to find solutions: Liberian refugees in Ghana*.



resettlement<sup>74</sup>. This argument is demonstrated in Cooper's writing, as she talked about her grandfather a freed slave from New York, who was one of the ACS who settled in Liberia, during Doe's administration when her family relocated to New York found home. Cooper's settlement in New York can be compared to the Fanti tribal group in Liberia who also found home in Ghana during the 14-years civil war. The common cultural identity made it easy for both groups in there new found 'home'.

“For 23 years I hid in America, remaking myself into a nondescript black American woman. I polished up my American accent so that I sounded as if I were from New York. I dumped my Liberian passport, got a job as a journalist. In Liberia, we are called the Congo People — my family and the rest of the descendants of the freed American blacks who founded Liberia back in 1821. Elijah Johnson, my great-great-great-great-grandfather, was on the first ship that sailed from New York in 1820. Because of him, I would not grow up, 150 years later, as an American black girl, burdened by racial stereotypes about welfare queens. Nor would I have to deal with the weights of a sub-Saharan African girl, with a life expectancy of about 40 years, yanked out of school at 11 to fetch water and cook over a coal pot and rear children barely younger than herself.” (Cooper, 2008)

One advantage for Liberian Americans is that many Liberian customs, as well as social and economic traditions, originally came from the United States with the first wave of freed African American slaves in the early and mid-nineteenth century.<sup>75</sup> The history of the Liberia has helped many settle in the U.S. much easier than other immigrants, this paper could help organizations such as the UNHCR understand the experiences of Liberians in the U.S. which can contribute to shared experiences in the camps. When freed slaves settled in Monrovia they brought with them American customs such as Christianity, holiday celebration, clothing and the English language: all of the participants interviewed first language is English. This shared common social and economic tradition has

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<sup>74</sup> Trapp M. Already in America: Transnational Homemaking Among Liberian Refugees. Pages 31-42

<sup>75</sup> Advameg (1980) *Culture of Liberia - history, people, clothing, women, food, family, social, dress, marriage.*

influenced the notion of returning back home for many. It is important to note that Language groups are not necessarily aligned with ethnic identity for young Liberian women in Rhode Island.

### *Belonging:*

The question of ‘where are you from’ though simple in its context can be complicated and have indirect implication for the individual. I asked the question of how do you describe yourself to others instead, but this in a way was problematic. After carefully reviewing my interviews I found that many people identify themselves to the place where they are from, the origin of their ancestors. This made it easy to understand how Cooper (an Americo-Liberian journalist who wrote the New York Times article titled ‘In Search of Lost Africa) came to New York and made it her home, not thinking much about the home she once had in Liberia<sup>76</sup>. The intent and the impact of how a question is asked largely influences the answer the person gives. In asking my question about how you identify yourself in the U.S. many first answers were ‘I am Liberian.’ I then asked how do you identify yourself among Liberians and the answers I got were, for example, ‘I am from Vai County’. The tribal way self-identification only mattered among Liberians and many associated this as a way of pride and connection to their kinship ancestry.

Hier stated, the formation of African American identity post slavery as a collective of blackness based on experience.<sup>77</sup> This cultural experience that Hier talks about really enhance the experiences of Liberian identity in the U.S. The nationality of Liberians that

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<sup>76</sup> Cooper, H. (2014) *Helene Cooper - Africa - Liberia*.

<sup>77</sup> Hier P. S., (2004). Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.

varies in different tribes contributes to how individuals self identify. Interviewee 121 and 122 talked about the ways in which she loved telling people she was Liberian because she never wanted to be mistaken for being an African American. In describing why she felt it was important to do so they mentioned the need to be seen as someone who has identity and a notion of blackness. Are many people identifying themselves as African American or would be preferred to be identified as Liberian? This was a question that I had in mind in the initial organization of my paper and the answer I found was one that was surprising, because it was similar to that of Cooper's writing. When Cooper describes herself in the privilege of being 'not just a black girl' or a 'sub-Saharan African girl,'<sup>78</sup> but as having the best of both worlds. I interpreted this to be that Cooper's sense of identity was only when it served pillaged stand, which many of those I interviewed could not identify with. Of the participants that I interviewed all self identified as Liberians and strongly did not want to be labeled as 'just African American' Interviewee 122 expressed her views by stating 'African Americans do not have culture to trace back to'<sup>79</sup> her statement emphasized the idea of belonging. Interviewee 122 talks about the many things that set her apart from being 'just a black girl' by her ascent when she speaks English among many other things.

*Promise for those in the diaspora:*

The Sirleaf Administration on several occasions has stated the importance of the diaspora in development initiatives such as employment opportunities, investment and cultural reconnection. However, when many go back they are either disappointed by the

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<sup>78</sup> Cooper, H. (2014) *Helene Cooper - Africa - Liberia*.

<sup>79</sup> 122. Personal Interview. 21 August 2015.

lack of infrastructure and access to a sustainable livelihood. “I had mason worker who left Liberia during the civil and lived in Ghana for many years after the war and returned in Liberia in 2014 when the UN declared Liberia safe to live again, since being here he said it is like the old Liberia nothing really changed many people are still the in terms of finding jobs, he says to me that when looking for a job many do not consider him because he is not wealthy.”<sup>80</sup> These are the issues that many people face. Also the idea of the country they left behind will never change in their eyes based on the environmental state they left it in. Interviewee 123 stated to me I never think about going to Liberia I mean I was not born there, I mean my father left there about 30 years ago. “With the current state of Liberia the best option is for those educated elsewhere to be the ones to go back and help rebuild the country”<sup>81</sup> (this has been statement rephrased by both the UN and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf). So I went ahead and asked her what was her reason for going back to Liberia and the answer very simple was ‘because I have my family is there’. This was a very clear-cut reason of a sense of belonging. The way in which a person leaves a country was something that influenced on how many of my interviewees translated in the journey to return back to Liberia or not to return. While interviewing the participants I found the language used by many was almost always a transparent of what they remembered in Liberia and what their families told them about Liberia, whether first generation (born in Liberia), or 1.5 generation.

*Participatory approach for development in Liberia:*

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<sup>80</sup> 124. Personal Interview. 11 October 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Oneliberia (2010) *President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf extends a happy July 26 message.*

The government of Liberia seeks to formalize its relationship with the Diaspora, recognizing that they are partners in development (Oneliberia, 2010). According to Illich communities need to take responsibility for their community, in the process of development. This is in the sense of development; Liberians who return back to Liberia would help in building Liberia. But in a country like Liberia where many of those who can help in this process of development have left the country has a small chance of returning. The call for many to return and help build the country does not have a feasibility for those who which to do so after returning. Some real issues factors to the issue of kinship influences who will return back, the tribal influenced civil war that many can still remember, and the sense of lost hope for many people. The participatory theory of development in Liberia is far from practical with many of the NGO not being from there, but the bitter reminder of lost of trust in government due to civil war makes it impossible to reach this middle. Only a small chance of those I interviewed or interacted with really shared this idea of return to visit and an even smaller amount wanted to go back to live and work.

“Rhode Island is a small state. Rhode Island reminds us of Liberia. Liberia is just a little larger than Rhode Island,” a Liberian nurse stated in an online post in July 2012. This speaks to the sense of community and belonging that many Liberian immigrants have found in Rhode Island. It is easier for many Liberians to assimilate into the American culture due to the similarities they share. The country’s’ instability also contributes to why many find it so hard to return. Kinship and ethnicity is a common theme for many of the participants, though a big part of ethnicity is the language aspect most Liberians do not

associate their ethnicity to a common language but rather tribal identity. The idea of return in this study largely relates to a persons' experience and status. Trapp (2015) described that education in the U.S. was important for many in the refugees in the Buduburam camp in Ghana; it was a way to change their status when you return back to Liberia. Many of my participants had the education or was in the process of getting a higher education but the but the idea of returning back home does not seem to be something they think about doing. Is this idea of status change reality for most indigenous people even after educated in the U.S?

### **Discussion**

Who I was reflected on how my participants answered the question of 'ethnic identity', which in part played an influence in my finding. This would have been a stronger response in the answers from interviewees if I had. Major findings in connection to the development of Liberia found that there is a disconnection for those in the diaspora with the country itself. Many interviewed do not feel the need to return because of the mistrust in the government, and the inconsistency of sustainability within the country. Why are many reluctant to return back to their home country though there is peace now, what contributions could my research uncover that will help organizations better understand the people of Liberia through the lenses of identity or self-conception. The experiences that many faced while in Liberia and the conditions in which they left have left many with this idea of statelessness and a sense of belonging in their new country.

The importance of identity for indigenous Liberians, differ from that of other ethnic Liberians. Indigenous people how this changes things! What does going back home look

like for Africans who are now settled in Liberia especially Liberians. While doing my interviews I began to think to myself I these were the kind of questions I should be asking. How some of my interviewees were passionate about their identity, I found was how important or unimportant it was for some to be connected to the home country Liberia. Though all those interviewed shared their love for the country the intent to go back and do something was not the same. How does this kingship help shape the idea of returning and helping develop the country of origin? It was through this shift of origin and kingship that really changed the dynamic of my paper. And this focus has influence really what I started reading toward the end of my paper along with the ways I asked the question to those who I later interviewed. Going in as a researcher, I started to learn about myself. As well as how different cultures and a sense of belonging change over time in the perspective of those I interviewed.

### **Conclusion**

President Sirleaf in her call for Liberians to return from the diaspora excluded those in refugee camps who are often labeled as ‘wasted years’. The call was directed at a specific population and that is why I only interviewed those with in process of getting a degree or those who already have a degree. What colonization did created a space of separation among ‘blacks’ and Africans. And in Liberia it left the country torn which can still be seen today. The elite still control Liberia, which has left many doubtful of going back home but uneasy about calling the U.S. their home. It is important to note that Language groups are not necessarily aligned with ethnic identity for young Liberian

women in Rhode Island. Liberians are different from other Africans who settle in the U.S., by the historical influence of West not by white colonizers but by freed slaves who used their elite status to rule the people.

How a person leaves a country influence on their return to the country this is seen in the story of Helene, on how it never occurred to her to return back to Liberia, not even to visit. Her grandfather being a slave from New York who help establish Liberia disproportionately put her at an advantage to have relations with the U.S. when her family left in the early 80s. 'Ethnic identity' of Liberian immigrants settled in Rhode Island, has been largely connected to experience. Experience has a way of influencing all different aspect of a person's life but when certain uncontrollable incidents occur they have a larger power of controlling self-identification. In this research without experience it was heard to understand a persons' identity.

The danger of asking the question of where one is from was really confirmed by the readings and the interviews in this paper. Never thinking about it I believe that in directly, I influenced the ways in which my participants expressed themselves. Demonstrate patriotism in recognition of the long road to progress; celebrate the communities as a strong foundation for accelerated development,"<sup>82</sup> the Liberian President indicated (2015 Liberian independence day speech by President Sirleaf). When asked those I interviewed who have such a strong self identification to Liberia if they themselves have or do often participate in the Liberian independence the answer was something that reiterated that of

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<sup>82</sup> Oneliberia (2010) *President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf extends a happy July 26 message.*



'elite' Liberians in the founding of the country, in the ways that they answered the question.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1: IRB Consent Form*

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#### **INFORMED CONSENT FOR STUDY PARTICIPANT**

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**Title of Research Study:** The complex relationship between nationality, race and identity of Liberian immigrants and refugee in the United States.

**People in Charge of Study:**

Name	Phone	Email
Jedidia Adusei	401-573-3674	jadusei@clarku.edu

**Researcher Supervisor:** Anita Fabos  
Clark University  
950 Main Street  
Worcester, MA 01610  
Phone: 508-421-3826  
Email: anitafabos@clarku.edu.

#### **About this Research Project:**

The researcher, Jedidia Y. Adusei, working under the supervision of Professor Anita Fabos at Clark University, is researching complex relationship of nationality, race and identity of Liberian young women in the United States that will last for approximately one hour and thirty minuets. Your opinions and experiences will further our research and help and contribute to the research already done on race, ethnicity and identity through the perspective of young women, who's history and ties to the U.S. have a very important stand point in todays society.

You do not have to participate in this study. You can decide not to be interviewed. You will not be getting paid for participation. If you agree to participate, you will meet with the researchers once or twice for about one hour and at the MJE Beauty Supply and Salon to discuss your experiences on race ethnicity and identity as young women.

With your permission, the discussion will be recorded. The recordings will be stored securely on the researchers' computers, and will only be shared with the research supervisors. These recordings will be later destroyed three years after the end of the study. The consent forms will be stored in the International Development, Community, and Environment (IDCE) Department in a locked cabinet dedicated for this purpose.

There are no known direct risks or benefits to you or your family members for participating in this study. Focus group members will be asked to keep the information

provided in the groups confidential; however, a potential risk that might exist for some would be that information in the focus group might be discussed outside the group by other participants and be traced back to you. If this is a potential issue for you, you are encouraged to ask for an individual interview with one of the researchers who would then be knowledgeable of and bound by confidentiality. You may refuse to answer any question, stop the discussion, or ask to reschedule the meeting. These options are always available to you. The possible benefits of participating in this study include adding research on race, ethnicity and identity in the U.S, through your experience.

The results of this research may be published or shared with the agency, but your name or identity will never be used in any publication or in any conversations with other people. All identifying information (including name, date or place of birth) will be removed from any data.

None of the services you receive here will be impacted by what you tell us since your identity will remain confidential. Before the interview, the researchers will assign a random code number to be used in relation to your answers to protect your identity. That way, what you say and who you are will not be linked.

Please contact any of the people above if you have questions about this project, or if you would like to obtain the final report based on this research.

- This study has been approved by the Clark Committee for the Rights of Human Participants in Research and Training Programs (IRB). Any questions about human rights issues should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. James P. Elliott (508) 793-7152.

**Statement of person agreeing to take part in this research study**

STUDY TITLE: The complex relationship between nationality, race and identity of  
Liberian immigrants and refugee in the United States.

RESEARCHERS: Jedidia Y. Adusei

The process, aims, affiliation, risks and benefits of this study were explained clearly to me, and I freely give my consent to participate. I understand that I will be taking part of an interview about the complex relationship of nationality, race and identity of Liberian young women in the United States that will last for approximately one to two hours. There are no potential risks to my family members, or me and while the researchers will remove my identity from all data.

I was given a copy of this consent form for my records. I understand that if I have any questions, I can call Jedidia Adusei at 401-573-3674 or I can contact their supervisor, Anita Fabos, by phone at 508-421-3826 or by email at afabos@clarku.edu in addition to contacting their university directly at: Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Dr. James Elliott, Clark University, 950 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610-1477; phone: (508) 793-7152.

_____	_____	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Signature or thumbprint</b>	<b>Date</b>
I agree to be audiotaped (circle one): YES NO	_____	
	<b>Initial</b>	
_____	_____	
Signature of person obtaining consent		<b>Date</b>



*Appendix 2: Interview Questions*

1. Tell me about your self (school, job, married, unmarried, age, children).
2. While the distinction between race and ethnicity is often unclear, what do you believe race to mean to you? And what do you believe ethnicity to mean to you?
3. How do you identify yourself?
4. Can you tell me a little about why you identify yourself this way?
5. And have these views changed over time as you have migrated to the U.S.?
6. What are your views of race, and in what context?
7. Is this different for you in Rhode Island or even Providence?

*Appendix 3: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*

Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's July 26, 2010 Video Message to the  
Liberian Diaspora

[http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/20100715\\_26\\_Day\\_Video\\_Message\\_Liberian\\_Diaspora.  
pdf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/20100715_26_Day_Video_Message_Liberian_Diaspora.pdf)