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Santa Barbara

(Trans)formation of Liberian Immigrant Identities in the United States

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My wife - Theresa Haddow

My parents – Heather and Wilson Haddow

My Liberian family – Pastor Cyrus Greene, Betty Greene, and Cyrus Greene Jr.

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ABSTRACT

(Trans)formation of Liberian Immigrant Identities in the United States

by

Gary Laurence Haddow

In 2010, an estimated 214 million people migrated throughout the world seeking out a temporary or permanent nation of residence (Koyama & Subramanian, 2014, p. 1). This massive movement of people creates particular challenges regarding the ways in which immigrants are coming to understanding their old and new worlds as they define and redefine themselves and their environment. Rather than solely reaffirming their past identities and reconstructing their old lives, immigrants are focusing on new spaces of meaning that reveal the unique experience of each immigrant and their respective group. By redefining their sense of self through their ethnic, racial, pan-ethnic, national, or transnational identities these immigrants are actively dictating how they interact and identify with their community, their new nation, and their homeland. As these individuals create new identities issues of hybridity, marginality, and liminality arise as a result of the clashing of cultures as immigrants assimilate, acculturate, and adapt to the culture of their new country of residence.

This dissertation seeks to further understand and explain the ways in which immigrants and refugees come to define their new lives and the communities in which they reside. By conducting twenty-five in-depth interviews with Liberians immigrants and refugees in an ethnic enclave in southwest Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, this research examines how identities are formed and transformed as a result of the issues that catalyze

migration and the challenges faced as migrants interact with their new communities and their new societies. Additionally, this research seeks to understand the key actors and organizations involved in the identity-making process of the community by interviewing key informants with regards to the impact that community organizations have on the day to day lives of the Liberian population.

The data suggests that while cultural assimilation may be the primary manner in which cultural interactions have historically occurred, a shift may be occurring in which immigrants are holding steadfast to their cultural heritage and merging it with the dominant culture rather than altogether relinquishing theirs. In an attempt to retain their Liberian cultural heritage, many community members were participating in community organizations that empowered them to make a difference in their local and transnational communities. This newfound sense of agency in one's life was a byproduct of the exchange of cultural values as individuals became immersed in American culture while still holding on to their own. Although the outcome of this exchange was not always perceived as positive, overwhelmingly the interviewees viewed their transformed identities as increasing their ability to create positive change. Rather than fully assimilating into American culture these immigrants selectively chose which attributes to merge with their own heritage in an effort to create a new hybrid set of individual and community values. These findings promote the notion that alternative cultures should not only be accepted, but embraced, because through this process unique and transformative manifestations of culture can occur to empower individuals and the community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction and Research Questions

It is estimated that in 2010, 214 million people migrated throughout the world seeking out a temporary or permanent nation of residence (Koyama & Subramanian, 2014, p. 1; World Bank, 2011). Migration theorists understand this global movement as the result of issues of employment, poverty, civil unrest, food scarcity, and livelihood opportunities, and that the absence of resources pushes and pulls individuals and families to become migrants (Takyi, 2002). This massive movement of people creates particular challenges to the existing perceptions of the ways in which immigrants are understanding their old and new worlds as they define and redefine themselves and their environment (Chacko, 2003; Clark, 2009; Copeland-Carson, 2004; Ilcan, 2002; Myers, & Zaman, 2009; Okpewho & Nzegu, 2009; Ong, 1999; Rong & Brown, 2001; Waters, 1994).

Rather than solely reaffirming their past identities and reconstructing their old lives, immigrants may focus on "the potentialities and possibilities their connected world offers, [as such] their interest is not in the hybridity, resistance or even reappropriation, but rather in creating new connections, new meanings, and novel forms of resistance" (Moore, 2001, p. 9). These new spaces of meaning reveal the "hybridities, pluralities, and flexibilities of migration" that affect the unique experience of each immigrant and their respective group (Koyama & Subramanian, 2014, p. 1). By redefining their sense of self through their ethnic, racial, pan-ethnic, national, or transnational identities these immigrants are actively dictating how they interact and identify with their community, their new nation, and their homeland (Arthur, 2009; Chen, 2014; Clark, 2009; Copeland-Carson, 2004; Humphries, 2009; Koyama

& Subramanian, 2014; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Myers & Zaman, 2009; Rong & Brown, 2001; Smalls, 2014; Waters, 1994).

This dissertation seeks to further explain the ways in which immigrants and refugees come to understand their new lives and the communities in which they reside. By interviewing Liberians immigrants and refugees in an ethnic enclave in an American East Coast city, this research examines how identities are formed and transformed as a result of the issues that cause migration and the challenges faced as migrants interact with their new communities and their new societies.

With respect to the United States and the breakdown of immigrants since the 1960s (following the 1965 Immigration Act), 52% came from Latin America and the Caribbean, while 29% came from Asia and the Middle East (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 9). Koyama and Subramanian (2014) estimate that one million immigrants come to the United States every year, and that according to the 2010 US Census, currently forty million Americans are immigrants. Though Rumbaut & Portes (2001) do not specifically address African immigrants, McCabe (2011) states that more than 1.5 million African immigrants or refugees have relocated to the US since the 1980s with over half of these immigrants arriving since 2000. In fact, since the 1980s the US has seen the largest migration of black Africans since the end of the Atlantic slave trade (Okpewho & Nzegu, 2009; Smalls, 2014; Takyi, 2002). Clark (2009) takes this claim even further by stating:

> If one accepts the popular estimate that 10 million Africans were brought to the Americas during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and that only 5-6 percent of those ten million arrived in the U.S., then scholars are right in claiming that more Africans have arrived in the US in the past twenty years than throughout the entire period of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. (p. 255)

This wave of African migration has come in two waves: first, from South Africa and Egypt in the late 1980s and early 1990s; then, following the Refugee Act of 1980 and Diversity Visa Program of 1990, the main sending countries became Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Somalia, and Sierra Leone (Takyi & Boate, 2006, p. 53).

According to the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy (NCIIP), Liberian migration has steadily increased since the 1980s. In 1980, 3000 Liberians lived in the United States, then 10,000 in 1990, up to 39,000 in 2000, and almost doubled to 64,000 by the end of 2009[1]. The increase in the early 1990s was a direct result of the Liberian civil war between 1990 and 2003. Then the doubling over the past decade can be attributed to the phenomenon that as more refugees and immigrants permanently settle in the United States, there is an increase in the number of family members who apply for residence within the United States. This steady increase is congruous with the social upheaval via the civil war and the ensuing attempts at maintaining peace that have occurred over the last twenty five years in Liberia (Chacko, 2003).

December 24, 1989, the Liberian civil war began as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia led by Charles Taylor began its violent course of action culminating in the overthrow and assassination of President Samuel Doe. With the eventual cessation of fighting on August 18, 2003 and the signing of the Accra Peace Accord, the civil war came to an end. Approximately two decades of political instability and civil war significantly eroded Liberia's productive capacity and socio-economic infrastructure and cost the lives of over

[1] These were the most up to date statistics I can find relative to Liberian immigration statistics.

250,000 and displaced over a million (out of a population of just over three million) (Mutisi, 2012, p. 92).

Post-conflict transition, such as in Liberia, involves the renegotiation of the relations between groups, generations, genders and regions which may lead to the redefinition of identities, and the definition of new bases for citizenship and belonging to local communities or to new countries of residence. These similar processes are further emphasized for people who had to flee their country during conflict and are attempting to resettle in another. As such, how is the renegotiation of intergroup relations and national belonging taking place in transnational spaces for immigrants and refugees within these new nations? And how can that renegotiation build upon, sidestep or even block the sense of belonging within these groups? (Sall, 2004, p. 597).

Now twenty-five years since the start of 1989 civil war, it is yet to be seen if the renegotiation of intergroup relations within the United States has fostered or impeded the development of a sense of national belonging and whether this renegotiation is strengthening the local bonds of family and community. As such, it is the goal of this research to further understand the process of negotiating ethnic, racial, national, and transnational identities (defined in the Literature Review) as they relate to the practices and perceptions of civic engagement for Liberian immigrants in the United States, and more specifically in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The latter is one of many cities on the East Coast that boasts a large West African population, and, in particular, one of the oldest and most vibrant Liberian populations.

While Liberia has been plagued by interethnic strife and persistent conflict since 1847, it was not until the military coup d'état of 1980 that full-scale warfare began. This can be attributed in large part to the underdevelopment of a vast majority of its citizens through the politicizing of ethnic identity (Dolo, 2007; Kieh, 2008). While many assessments of these social and political conditions have been conducted, Dolo (2007) asserts that assessments "need to be an interdisciplinary and social process that links knowledge and action in civic engagement aimed at identifying and analyzing the cultural contexts of social events" (Dolo, 2007, p. 145). As such, one goal of this research is to further understand the sense of democratic citizenship that is constructed by the vision of the roles and responsibilities Liberians have as members of the communities in which they live within the United States. It is within this context of conflict and post-conflict that most Liberians came to the United States. Therefore, one of the goals of this research is to deconstruct how the renegotiation of identities within the US has helped to alleviate the tensions caused by the Liberian civil war (Dolo, 2007). Simultaneously, this research demonstrates the active ways in which Liberian immigrants and their groups are transcending ethnic hatred to pursue a new Liberian and/or American identity based on social cohesion and equality. Therefore, this research is an exploratory analysis of various members and groups of Liberian immigrant society, but has as a large component a comparative analysis of youth and elders and their practices and perceptions with respect to new identity formations—ethnic, racial, national, transnational.

With the above information in mind, the questions guiding this research are as follows: 1). How have Liberian immigrants changed with respect to their ethnic, racial, national, and transnational identities? 2). How do Liberian immigrants learn about and perceive their sense of belonging within their new nation? 3). Who are the key actors in the

development of these new identities and perceptions? 4). How have group relations and identifications changed as a result of individual's participation in civil society since coming to the United States? 5). In what ways do community organizations play a key role in creating community cohesion? By exploring the relationship among multiple identity sites, including participants' narratives, group affiliations, and perceptions of ideas of citizenship, this study makes visible the multiple ways in which individuals in a Liberian enclave in Philadelphia reconstruct personal, cultural, and political meanings and identities.

This study explores the concepts of immigration and identity by examining the creation and transformation of ethnic, racial, national, and transnational identities of first- and second-generation Liberian immigrants. Though the study is restricted to a particular Liberian enclave in Philadelphia, this research is intended to further expand the understanding of identity (trans)formation for immigrants, and in particular, for sub-Saharan West Africans. Immigrants from this region have repeatedly been left out of studies regarding immigrant identity, and thus this research intends to add to the dearth of literature on the topic. Additionally, because literature on Black immigrants tends to focus on the interaction of racial ascription, it my goal to focus primarily on the role of ethnic, national, and transnational identity (trans)formation through the lens of perceptions of citizenship, but not at the expense of neglecting the impact of racial identity. Finally, despite the emphasis on Black immigrants this research contributes to the intersectional understanding of all immigrants as citizens and/or residents of the United States.

Background on Liberia

It is necessary to emphasize that while Liberian immigrants and refugees are currently living in the United States, and may remain there for the rest of their lives, they came to America from a country engaged in full-scale warfare or while attempting to rebuild following the destruction of the war. As such, understanding the experiences with respect to ethnic differences and perceptions of national government may influence the ways in which Liberians reconstruct their lives within the United States. While a goal of this research is to understand this reconstruction process, it is necessary to explain the historical context to be fully aware of any preconceptions individuals may have brought to the United States with respect to other Liberians, other Black people, government, and the consequent issues of trust. The analysis of the war in the following paragraphs is an attempt to bring to light some of the events that may frame the ways in which people interact with their environment and social relationships.

In 1822, the American Colonization Society (ACS) sent freed African American slaves to the territory of Liberia and administered the territory until 1847 when the settler class, or class of freed slaves taking charge of the forming government, declared their independence, effectively ending their relationship with the ACS. The 1847 constitution led to several long-lasting issues, the effects of which are still being felt today, and were the precursors to the Liberian civil war (Sawyer, 2008). Legalized segregation and discrimination via the denial of citizenship of the indigenous population was institutionalized until this was changed in 1944. Additionally, only those Liberians with property were allowed to hold major public office and had the right to vote, thus eliminating the vast majority of the population from having any voice in politics because traditional communal ownership of land was not recognized. The Americo-Liberians formed the True Whig Party

and controlled all aspects of Liberian social, economic, and political life until the 1980 coup d'état (Mutisi, 2012). Following almost a decade of similar governance by the military ruler, Samuel Doe, the Liberian civil war began and culminated in the death of 250,000 and the displacement of between one and two million Liberians (Mutisi, 2012).

A variety of causes leading to the onset of the Liberian civil war have been identified and five frameworks or theories analyzing these causes are described below: the ethnic framework (Dolo, 2007; Eros, 1995; Levitt, 2005); elite pathology (Kieh, 2008; Lowenkopf, 1976); institutional pathology (Dolo, 1996); political culture theory (Yoder, 2003); and, the crises of underdevelopment (Kieh, 2008). Eros (1995) argues that the Americo-Liberians dominated political, social, and economic life for more than 130 years although they were only 5% of the Liberian population. Additionally, Eros (2005) asserts that ethnic privileging occurred for the Krahn people despite the democratic claims of the Doe regime following the 1980 coup d'état. Thus, the "hegemonic practices" of the Americo-Liberians and the newly empowered Krahn ethnic groups monopolized power and disadvantaged all other ethnic groups setting the stage for the civil war (Eros, 2005, p. 2). These "hegemonic practices" are representative of the pervasive use of ethnocentric nationalism throughout Liberian history (Dolo, 2007; Eros, 2005). Ethnocentric nationalism refers to the use of state apparatuses including money, military, power, and other human resources to uphold the superiority of the dominant ethnic group holding political power while continuing prejudice and animosity towards those groups with little or no political power (Dolo, 2007, p. 10). Because of this practice of ethnic privileging at one time or another every group in Liberia has been vastly oppressed, marginalized, and excluded from social, economic, or political power. Most importantly, only a few ethnic groups have had the chance to have legitimate political and

economic power. My research aligns with Dolo (2007) and Eros (2005) in recognizing ethnic privileging as a core historical factor in the creation and continuation of the war, and the subsequent attempts to rebuild at home and abroad.

Within the elite pathology framework, the emphasis is on the corruption and immoral behavior of the ruling elites such that the majority of Liberians wanted a new regime following the failed "democracy" attempted by Doe (Kieh, 2008; Lowenkopf, 1976). Similarly, Dolo (1996) situates the failure of the government as a byproduct of how the government and its institutions were originally established such that these institutions instilled a "culture of apathy" within the ruling elites (p. 4). And yet political culture theory attributes the start of the civil war to the illiberal and undemocratic values that emphasize order and stability with little or no importance placed on tolerance or accountability (Yoder, 2003). While each of these frameworks individually has weaknesses, they combine to create a more complete picture of the interlocking frameworks (each with its own respective level of importance) that led to the onset of the Liberian civil war. The four frameworks discussed above all identify causal agents for the crises of underdevelopment framework discussed by Kieh (2008).

The crisis of underdevelopment identifies three areas of underdevelopment: cultural, political, and economic (Kieh, 2008), all of which are rooted in the practices of the settler or Americo-Liberian class with respect to the indigenous Liberian population, and continued by the Doe regime in 1980, and again by the Taylor regime in 1997. The settler class denied citizenship to the indigenous population of the Liberian state as indigenes were deemed to be inferior to the Americo-Liberian group and thus unworthy of the provisions granted with citizenship. As such, the ruling class utilized the natural resources of the country for their

own personal wealth accumulation, therefore leaving the rest of the country poor and lacking in any social or economic development. Even once citizenship was granted to the indigenous population it was done in a de jure manner, while the population remained de facto second-class citizens (Kieh, 2008, p. 130). Then after the 1980 coup d'état, the Doe regime continued this ethnic privileging by primarily granting his Krahn ethnic group access to any of the opportunities afforded the ruling class.

These conditions provided the pretext for Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) to start the first civil war (1989-1997) on December 24, 1989 with the goal of overthrowing the Doe administration. This led to all-out war, as several other militias used these grievances to join the fight such that seven distinct factions were fighting between 1990 and 1997.[2] All seven factions appealed to ethnic differences with varying degrees of success as a tool for recruitment and mobilization (Kieh, 2008). The initial war ended in July, 1997 with the election of President Charles Taylor and the signing of the Abuja II Peace Accord. However, the ceasefire was short lived as in 1999, after the continued ineptitude and undemocratic practices of the Taylor regime, two new rebel groups – Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) – renewed the fighting until August, 2003 with the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement (Mutisi, 2012). By the end of the fourteen year war, all economic production had ceased; there was massive capital flight; the hydro-electric plant and water purification systems were destroyed, as well as electric poles, bridges, roads,

[2] The seven factions were the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL); the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL); the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO); the ULIMO-K (an off-shoot of the ULIMO under Commander Kromah); the ULIMO-J (an off-shoot of the ULIMO under Commander Johnson); the Liberian Peace Council (LPC); the Lofa Defense Force (LDF); and, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia – Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC). (Mutisi, 2012)

private and publics buildings including many schools, and, most health facilities; thus, the entire infrastructure of the country had been decimated: (Kieh, 2008; Mutisi, 2012).

This historical overview of the core concepts that preceded and led to the civil war identifies ethnic and class animosities as the main areas in desperate need of renegotiation by individuals, civil society, and Liberia as a whole. As such, this research emphasizes the processes through which Liberian immigrants have defined and redefined their identities and their social relations to see if the ethnic and class animosities have persisted or if they were relinquished through the adoption of new or reconfigured identities.

Background on Refugee Immigration Policy

After World War II, the U.S. government allowed the admission of 250,000 displaced Europeans, and subsequently the first refugee legislation, the Displaced Person Act of 1948, was created by U.S. Congress. This provided the entrance of 400,000 more displaced Europeans, and this set the stage for the Refugee Act of 1980 following the 1975 resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Indochinese. This act, in addition to incorporating the United Nation's definition of "refugee," also standardized how refugees were resettled once admitted to the U.S. (Refugee Council USA). As a result of the 1980 Refugee Act and the subsequent Diversity Visa Program of the Immigration Act of 1990, over three million refugees have resettled in the U.S with more than "36,000 African refugees, escaping civil war and totalitarian governments, admitted as permanent residents to the United States under the refugee acts between 1980 and 2000" (U.S. Census Bureau 2002 in Chacko, 2003, p. 495; Takyi, 2002).

Once refugees are in the U.S. there are three main outcomes: they become citizens by passing the citizenship test; or, they become permanent residents; or lastly, they are sent back to their country of origin. Through the first two options refugee communities expand because once an individual is granted permanent status as citizens or residents many are able to sponsor the entry of their family into the country (Chacko, 2003). However, the latter option has two stages before deportation that can increase the length of time in the United States. First, a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) can be provided by the Secretary of Homeland Security, which is a "temporary immigrant benefit that allows qualified individuals from designated countries (or parts of countries) who are in the United States to stay here for a limited period of time" (Department of Homeland Security). This status may be conferred based on conditions within one's country of origin that prevent a safe return (on-going violent conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary conditions), or conditions that cause the country's government to be unable to take the returning refugees (Department of Homeland Security). Secondly, should the Temporary Protected Status of a group expire, the President can issue a directive under which Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) occurs allowing qualified individuals to stay in the US for certain amount of time (Department of Homeland Security). Both statuses are important for the Liberian population as they were under TPS protection until September 30, 2007 when President George W. Bush granted DED and subsequently President Obama has reaffirmed this four times.

With the war now ten years removed the constant threat of a return to violence hangs over Liberian society. Until there is a pervasive belief that modest attempts at development and democracy are being undertaken there will always be a concern for the fragile state of the nation. In addition, until Liberia can remove its categorization as a fragile state immigrants

and refugees may remain living abroad due to the limited economy and infrastructure and out of fear for a return to violence. This creates a precarious situation in which one's sense of national belonging is at the most only certain for 18 months. This sense of national fragility and limited sense of belonging is currently compounded by the recent outbreak of Ebola in West Africa that has ravaged Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia. With the country being crippled by the deadly virus, the impact on Liberians and affected West Africans abroad is yet to be seen, but it can be assumed that the virus only further highlights the national disparities between America and Liberia thereby further complicating immigrants' notions of home and belonging.

Furthermore, the above historical overview of the development of the refugee category from a legal/governmental standpoint is useful to reiterate the liminal space within which refugees exist. Their notion of belonging and sense of identity attached to national citizenship is potentially a site for continual concern and stress as they live between both a homeland who cannot provide for their safety and a country that will not guarantee their residence (Ilcan, 2002). It should be noted that the Liberian government does not allow its citizens to hold dual citizenship with any other country. As a result no discussion of Liberian immigration "is complete without an examination of the multiplicities of citizenship—from the official and institutionalized conceptions of citizenship codified in policy to the enacted forms of belonging and participation" (Ilcan, 2002, p. 3).

Overview

This original dissertation is based on an immersive eight week interview project conducted in the area around Southwest Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the fall of 2014. The

interviews were conducted with Liberian immigrants and refugees representing a wide range of the Liberian community's population in terms of age, gender, ethnic group, and educational levels. The interviews were centered on understanding the formation and transformation of Liberian identities in the United States' context with respect to the individual, their community, America, and their homeland. The interviews revealed that individual's sense of identity and group or community cohesion was a source of affinity and contention simultaneously. From outside the group and within, participants continually referenced the constant maneuvering of their identities depending on their situations, and also the realization that a unified sense of community may be the goal at large, but in practice is something left to be desired and needing to be worked on.

This dissertation begins with an overview and background of the history of the circumstances that led to the migration of Liberians to the United States, with a particular focus on the causes and effects of the Liberian civil war. Outlined in chapter 2 are the theoretical underpinnings that are the foundation for this research project highlighting the ways in which identities transform and change within various contexts. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which individuals come to understand their sense of citizenship, civic engagement, and the role that these identities have in empowering individuals and communities to become active participants in their lives and the lives of those around them. The overview of the theoretical framework supporting this research is followed by a discussion of previous research concerning African immigrant identity in the United States. Chapter 3 provides a synopsis of the methodology utilized in the creation of this research project: the location, the participants, and the research strategies selected.

The findings based on the interviews as described below in chapter 4 highlight the marginal, hybrid, and liminal identities that simultaneously create tensions, interactional cohesion, and opportunities for sites of community via a variety of factors such as the different notions of individual and group identities. By looking at the national, transnational, ethnic, regional, and racial identifications discussed by participants this research highlights the fluidity of Liberian immigrant life living in a predominantly African and African American area.

Then in Chapter 5 the cultural differences of Liberia as compared to the United States are discussed with the issue of family culture creating generational and educational gaps that serve to strengthen and simultaneously sever ties between participants and individuals in their circle of friends, family, and acquaintances. These cultural factors are sites for the creation of community through the maintenance of Liberian culture such as food, dance, and song, and are used by different individuals and groups to broach issues of cultural adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation. In particular, issues of gender and gender rights become salient throughout the interviews due to the clash of American and Liberian perceptions of the role of men and women with respect to family and social mores.

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the ways in which local, national, and transnational organizations allow individuals and the community to maintain their connection to their community and Liberia through aid within the community and abroad to Liberia. These organizations serve to empower Liberian immigrants to become civically engaged citizens within the United States and transnationally in Liberia by giving the community a political voice and developing financial assistance programs.

This research concludes in chapter 7 with an analysis of the information presented in chapters 4 through 6 by connecting this analysis to the existing research discussed in chapter 2 and identifying the implications for this dissertation on future research, practice, and policy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

> *To my mother's family, I was their African cousin; to my father's, I was a Kibona who had been lost to America. Outside of my family, my identity has been held hostage by the attitudes and perceptions of anyone with their own idea of who and what is an African and/or an African American. (Clark, 2009, p. 255)*

This chapter focuses on the core theories that will be explored in this research, but more importantly, are hypothesized to be the foundational concepts through which individuals learn, conceptualize, act, and in particular, identify within their network of social relationships and organizations. I begin with an overview of the theoretical models of the transformation of cultures and identities when immigrant groups are introduced to the society and culture of their new host culture: assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation (Chacko, 2003; Daniel, 1993; Gans, 1992; Gordon, 1964; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rong & Brown, 2001; Shepard, 2009). Then, I continue with a discussion of the identity categories that this research will be focused on: ethnic, racial, national, and transnational (Arthur, 2009; Chen, 2014; Clark, 2009; Copeland-Carson, 2004; Humphries, 2009; Koyama & Subramanian, 2014; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Myers & Zaman, 2009; Rong & Brown, 2001; Smalls, 2014; Waters, 1994). This is followed by a discussion of the construction of identity and the ways in which identity can manifest itself with the multiplicity of identity: hybrid, marginal, liminal (Bhahba, 1994; Park, 1928; Turner, 1968). Finally, in the final section, the above models are discussed in terms of an individual's notion of citizenship, civic engagement, and the process of learning and developing a sense of empowerment and agency through civic participation (Diamond, 1994; Knight & Watson, 2014; M'Cormack-Hale, 2010;).

Identity Theory. With a definition of identity that is based on self-narrative the concepts of human agency and the dynamic nature of identity are emphasized and brought to the forefront of any analysis (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 17). Additionally, because of the emphasis placed on social interaction and collective organized action within civil society, identity becomes necessary for analysis. Sfard and Watson (2005) assert that "identity features prominently whenever one addresses the question of how collective discourses shape personal worlds and how individual voices combine into the voice of a community" (p. 15). Together with the acceptance of identity as the centerpiece of new research discourses comes the assertion that human beings are active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of social life and in shaping individual activities (Dolo, 2007; Mutisi, 2012; Saleeby, 2002; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; White & Wyn, 1998). Thus, "identity-staking" or creating is viewed as the ongoing negotiation, navigation, and contestation towards the active formation and transformation of aspects of one's identity (Koyama & Subramanian, 2014, p. 6).

In the context of the discussion below, "the term identity is to be understood as the activity in which one uses common resources to create a unique, individually tailored combination" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15). With respect to immigrants, Chen (2014) emphasizes "the subjective experiences of displacement and hybridity, as well as of the rearticulation and restructuring of new identities. [This] implies that identity is not a fixed essence, but constantly in the process of changing and being remade" (p. 9). As such, identities have a very fluid nature in which certain resources are utilized at different times and in different situations thus leading to a wide spectrum of the ways in which identity can manifest between the individual, their community, and the nation.

Identity Transformation. Upon initial interaction with a new host society there is an expected social and cultural difference that will lead the subordinate group to ultimately choose how to adopt the new culture and/or maintain their own (Chacko, 2003; Daniel, 1993; Gordon, 1964; Park 1928; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rong & Brown, 2001; Shepard, 2008). Integration is the process through which interactions between various ethnic or national groups occur that leads to a reduction in the maintenance of group boundaries (Daniel, 1993). While integration in and of itself does not imply a hierarchical arrangement, within the United States when groups of color enter in the dominant American or White culture, classic or standard assimilation tends to occur such that the dominant cultural norms are adopted by the minority group whether through force or by choice (Daniel, 1993; Chacko, 2003). The idea of assimilation may be straightforward for "White," or predominantly European immigrants as successive generations further adopt the cultural traits of the dominant society and thereby become absorbed into that society. Thus, "Immigrant identity is configured through the process of adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation" (Chacko, 2013, p. 504). Within this framework assimilation refers to the individual or group absorption of cultural traits of the dominant national group at the expense of their own cultural traits, acculturation refers to uptake of the dominant culture coexisting simultaneously with one's own cultural heritage, and adaptation refers to merging the two cultures to create a new unique culture (Daniel, 1993; Chacko, 2003; Portes & Zhou, 1993). All three of these processes simultaneously take place within immigrants, and this research examines when and to what extent each process takes place within given contexts and with respect to different identity categories (discussed in the next section). These processes are highlighted by Chacko (2013) in his description of young Ethiopian immigrants who "create a sense of identity through

self-determination, but also within the framework provided by socioeconomic setting and a cluster of cultural prescriptions and proscriptions, modified by norms in the receiving country" (p. 504).

Because of the phenotypical difference of Black immigrants' full assimilation into "White" society may be completely impossible due to the rule of hypodescent in America dictating that a single drop of Black blood makes an individual Black (Daniel, 2001). However, adopting the cultural mores of America becomes the main area of contestation for immigrants, immigrants of color, and particularly for successive generations (Chacko, 2003, Rong & Brown, 2001; Waters, 1994). Discourses surrounding assimilation into America for immigrants of color are much more relevant when American society is viewed as relative to the Black immigrant experience and is constructed as African American (Black) culture rather than White culture given the phenotypical similarity and potential ability for Black immigrants to fully assimilate into African American society (Rong & Brown, 2001; Smalls, 2014; Waters 1994).

When minority groups are able to maintain their cultural identity without having to absorb the dominant culture, a pluralist model of society is created based on adaptation or acculturation (Daniel, 1993; Gans, 1992). Pluralism connotes the idea that different cultures can co-exist without assimilation by subordinate groups to the dominant culture. Within this model there is a spectrum of acceptance of subordinate cultures ranging from acceptance as equal all the way to a distrust and hatred of non-normative behaviors (Daniel, 1993; Rosaldo, 1994). This outright acceptance of difference is conceptualized as "cultural citizenship" by Rosaldo (1994) and "refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory

democratic sense" (p. 402). However, given the variability of opinion surrounding non-American or non-normative cultures, this ideal is rarely, if ever, lived up to.

In an effort to bridge assimilationist and pluralist constructs, Gans (1992) highlights the ability of some immigrant groups to "accommodate dominant-society norms while retaining strong ties to their respective ethnic groups" (Gans, 1992 in Chacko, 2003, p. 493). This model of accommodation and adaption is the most relevant for Black immigrant groups as they navigate and combine the multiple identities that exist within their country of origin and what they represent within the US (Shepard, 2008). Contrastingly, acculturation is picking and choosing certain new and old world traits, but keeping these distinct from one another. According to Rong & Brown (2001), "The search for a better theory of assimilation points towards a synthesis of research on immigration and gender, social class, race, ethnicity, and nationality" (p. 557). While developing a unique theory of assimilation is not the purpose of this research it is nevertheless necessary to understand the full spectrum of identity categories that make up an individual's social and cultural identity.

Identity Categories. ***Nationality*****.** According to Benedict Anderson (2006), the nation is constructed through an imagined community made up of a physical space within a bounded territory, the social interactions of the people within the parameters of this territory, and the cultural systems through which the people interact. Nationalism is therefore to be understood as individuals aligning with the larger cultural system(s) out of which the nation came into being. Anderson (2006) defines the nation as:

> An imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (p. 6)

Nationalism, as such, can be used to depict an expression of a claim for political rights, recognition and legitimacy (Pedersen, 2002). Though diversity within a nation can provide for a horizontal distribution of resources, ethnicities can also be seen as one of the main obstacles for the production and maintenance of democracy as it can lead to the imposition of ethnic interests over national interests via ethnocentric nationalism, favoritism, nepotism, and thus the continuation of social inequality (Wonkeryor, 2007). It is because of these alternative identities that the character of official nationalism becomes an anticipatory strategy adopted by powerful groups threatened with a loss of power through marginalization or exclusion from a newly emerging nationally-imagined community (Anderson, 2006, p. 101). To circumvent the emergence of sub-groups that may overthrow the power distribution of a country, nationalism can be used as a means to maintain supposed stability.

With regards to immigrants coming into a new country of residence the perception of national identity and citizenship is a powerful pull for people to conform and assimilate to the dominant system of cultural practices and beliefs. Ong (1996) identifies part of this as the desire for "cultural citizenship" which here refers to the "cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory" (p. 738). The idea of belonging and the desire for such a feeling is powerful enough to cause individuals to change their social and cultural practice to be deemed more desirable by the state and by the citizens that the state represents. Given that many immigrants and refugees come to their new country of residence in pursuit of a better life, one of the easiest way for people to assimilate and appear as if they belong is to manifest authentic practices and beliefs relative to that nation. As such, a belief in the importance of national identity and

the notion of citizenship can be of the utmost importance for many immigrants (Ong, 1996). However, regardless of the pull of the new residence, it may be difficult to relinquish ties to one's country of origin.

The connection to one's homeland can manifest via a "nostalgic citizenship" that causes individuals and communities to hold on to the cultural traits and heritage of their homeland (Smalls, 2014, p. 22). For many youth, especially second-generation, their parents attempt to instill in them a knowledge of these cultural traits such that their heritage will remain a part of their sense of self (Chacko, 2013). This research attempts to highlight the dialectic between individual's sense of American national identity and their Liberian identity, and how this potential tension manifests in the day-to-day actions of individuals. Additionally, how do the historical connections between America and Liberia affect the identity (trans)formation of Liberian immigrants? While this question is not a major area of focus for this project, it is necessary to investigate whether historical notions of connectedness play a role in the development of contemporary identities.

Ethnicity**.** According to Ian Robertson, "ethnicity refers to cultural features that may be handed down from one generation to the next. These features may include language, religion, national origin, dietary practices, a sense of common historical heritage, or any other distinctive cultural trait" (Robertson in Bangura, 2007, p. 123). More important than its definition Fearon (2004) notes that, "Ethnicity is socially relevant when people notice and condition their actions on ethnic distinctions in everyday life. Ethnicity is politicized when conditions are organized along ethnic lines or when access to political or economic benefits depends on ethnicity" (p. 2). Ethnocentrism then, is the general inclination to reject a person or group based on their ethnic identity while disregarding their humanity and any positives

they add to the society (Rothchild and Groth, 1995). As such, within the imagined community that constitutes the nation, ethnic identity and national identity can be antagonistic sentiments for some, while being opportunistic for others (Hansen & Hesli, 2009; Wonkeryor, 2007).

While there is a reoccurring discussion of the negative impact of ethnocentric nationalism throughout the history of Liberia, this phenomenon is only one result of the pride that individuals and groups feel towards their ethnic identity. Rather than being an explicit daily action, ethnocentric nationalism is a macro-level conceptual analysis of the culmination of events over multiple years. As such, the negative association of ethnicity via ethnocentric nationalism does not erase the fact that ethnicity manifests mentally as an identity and physically through cultural practices and traditions is an empowering lens through which individuals and groups not only see the world, but also, live in the world. Thus, ethnic affiliation can be used as a potent signifier of in-group relations for the purpose of community building and strengthening community cohesion. This can be seen in Chacko's (2013) study of Ethiopians in Washington D.C. in which he states that "physical and mental recognition of a community of co-ethnics and the invisible bonds that this identification engendered helped create a strong and pervading sense of ethnic unity among all of the Ethiopian immigrants" (p. 501). Rather than allow ethnic affiliation to create a wedge within an immigrant community, many communities may opt to put aside previous ethnic animosities towards the creation of a better, stronger community.

It should be noted that while general public sentiment in the United States is such that ethnicity tends to be conflated with race, this is a highly contentious debate. For many,

ethnicity is less problematic as a group signifier due to the horrific ways in which race has been used within the United States (Daniel, 2001). The connection between the categories stems from the idea that because individuals with a similar ethnicity tend to have a common origin or ancestry, they therefore have similar ancestral and/or common geno-phenotypical traits that distinguish them from other social groups (Daniel, 2001). However, the notion of ethnicity as a cultural formation differs from the idea of a racialized ethnicity in the preceding sentence. For this research within the context of Black African immigrants, ethnic identity is utilized as a cultural expression of ancestry and group belonging similar to the notion of "tribal," heritage, or community affiliation. Within this researcher's conceptualization of ethnicity emerges a way of thinking about one's self and their affinity group that allows for a positive valuation of one's own culture as related to languages, traditions, and family or community practices.

Race. One of the most unique parts of coming to the United States for most Black immigrants is the entrance into an already racialized society separated into a Black/White binary premised on the rule of hypodescent in which a single drop of black blood dictates that one is Black regardless of phenotypical approximation to Whiteness (Daniel, 2001). "Because the U.S.'s racial history and racial present infect the everyday lives of most individuals, for some African newcomers, cultural belonging becomes almost contingent on racial belonging" (Smalls, 2014, p. 22). Because of the well-known discrimination experienced by African Americans, there is a frequent attempt by most Black immigrants to identify themselves within an identity that is separate from that of African American. While ascription into the Black race may be seen as an afterthought for most native or non-Black residents, this racial identification appears to be the most contested aspect of life in America

for Black immigrants (Arthur, 2009; Chacko, 2003; Clark, 2009; Humphries, 2009; Rong & Brown, 2001; Smalls, 2014). Humphries (2009) appropriately sums up this contested identity by stating that "to subsume the racial identity of African immigrants and African Americans under the superordinate racial category of 'Black' fails to recognize how different sociohistorical processes help shape Black diasporic populations in the socioeconomic structure of the U.S. and larger global community" (Humphries, 2009, p. 276).

What appears to happen within this racial ascription is that policies are created that "lump heterogeneous 'immigrant' students, or lump Black immigrants and US-born Black students together, and effectively underestimate the material significance, and complex nature, of Blackness as a racial category in the U.S." (Smalls, 2014, p. 20). These policies make it even more difficult for Black immigrants to distinguish themselves from the native-born Black community, and therefore leads to the generation of new types of hybrid identities focused on distancing themselves from the native-born Black Americans and towards other Black immigrants. One of these new hybrid identities is based on a "pan-ethnic" identity that is focused on the similarities of experience between immigrants from West African countries and is seen as a way to counteract the discrimination inherent in the ascription of an African American identity (Arthur, 2009, p. 108). This new identity is "based upon a Black African ethos devoid of the victimhood mentality and powerlessness often portrayed by Black cultural and social society" (Arthur, 2009, p. 109).

Transnational. While the above identity categories tend to exist within a single national boundary, many immigrants decide to not relinquish the ties to their country of origin and instead adopt a transnational identity based on a flexible citizenship in which they

maintain social, cultural, and political ties in more than one nation state (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1990; Humphries, 2009; Ong, 1999; Smalls, 2014). Glick Schiller and Fouron (1990) define transnationals as "migrants who are fully encapsulated neither in the host-society nor in their native land but who nonetheless remain active participants in the social settings of both locations. They construct their identities in relation to both societies" (p. 330). While this identification may be more common in practice than in explicit affiliation, transnationalism is a purposeful identity for many immigrants and especially refugees as it seeks to reposition one's nationality from being liminally between borders, but rather exists as a hybrid national construct as member of multiple nation-states and citizenries (Ong, 1999; Smalls, 2014). As such, Das Gupta (2006) calls this process space-making, or the process by which transnational migrants create a space or spaces within and between existing policies, cultures, and citizenships. In a sense, the purposeful extra-territorializing or being beyond a single territory is an identification of empowerment following a period of being without a "home" or country of belonging (Ilcan, 2002).

Generational. With respect to immigrant's (trans)formation of identity, one of the largest key factors is the role that generational differences make from one generation to the next. According to classical assimilation theorists the extended length of time for which immigrants reside in the US will increase the likelihood that they adopt an "American identity" (Rong & Brown, 2001). However, studies have repeatedly shown that first-generation immigrants, or those that were born in their country of origin, tend to maintain stronger social and cultural ties of their homeland (Chacko, 2003; Rong & Brown, 2001;

Rumbaut & Portes, 2001)[3]. With each successive generation, second-, third-, and so on, the strength of attachment to their cultural heritage diminishes respectively (Rong & Brown, 2001). Additionally, for successive generations theories of classical assimilation tend to be less relevant and selective or segmented assimilation more accurately describes the cultural adaptations of youth (Chacko, 2003; Faulkner, 2011; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). Segmented assimilationists identify the divergent levels of assimilation between different groups because of the access to opportunities that were made available to their parents. As such, each group has different levels of success relative the first-generation's success. The impact of these divergent levels is such that second-generations are more susceptible to redefining themselves within American terms as they eschew their country of origin's heritage. In combination with the pressures placed on Black immigrants to adopt alternative identities such as becoming African American, and adopting to an increasingly modern society, second-generations and beyond are much more likely to have different identity (trans)formation practices and processes than their parents. (Chacko, 2003; Rong & Brown, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001)

Identity Constructs. The amorphous nature of culture and identity has led to the conceptualization of three overlapping constructions of identity: hybridity, marginality, and liminality (Bhabha, 1994; Park, 1929; Turner, 1969). With the emergence of nationalism as a means for constructing a unified identity, fragmented groups within nations have fought to

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[3] For the purposes of this study, first and 1.5 generations (young children who immigrated to another country of residence) shall be lumped together as first generation due to the age difference between my two research groups (youth – age 18-25, and elders – age 45 or older) (African Youth Charter, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). This is based on the idea that most participants that came as young children in the early 1990s will now be above the age of 25, and most second-generation will be below the age of 25 given the onset of war in 1989.

establish their own sense of identity (Anderson, 2006). As such, within a nation individual, group (communal, ethnic, racial), and national identities have been continually changing and redefining the social and cultural landscape of nations. Ilcan (2002) describes this as "people living with the tensions and consequences of globalization, deterritorialization, and mass migratory movements, 'belonging' to a place, a home, or a people becomes not so much an insulated or individual affair as an experience of 'being within and in-between sets of social relations'" (p. 2). This continual transformation of cultural categories resulting from transnational movements is one such phenomenon through which one can interrogate the implications of hybrid, marginal, and liminal identities.

According to Homi Bhabha (1995) culture is a discursive practice that emerges in a particular time and space. This emergence is at the intersection of cultural boundaries where in this contested space meanings and values are created and "(mis)appropriated" (Bhabha, 1995, p. 206). The discursive nature of culture is a result of the creation of meaning at the moment of utterance in which "the production of meaning requires that these two places [present time and specific space] be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space" (Bhabha, 1995, p. 208). This dialectical interaction ensures that the meaning is never a construction of a single idea, but rather the negotiation of separate symbols or ideas (Bhabha, 1995). As such, culture is the construction of enunciation and interpretation that creates a "Third Space" or hybrid space of meaning (Bhabha, 1994). Furthermore, while Bhabha views culture as perpetually hybrid in nature, whether this cultural meaning reinforces hierarchical notions of culture ("colonial hybridity") or reconstructs that same hierarchy in a more egalitarian way ("post-colonial hybridity") is the true significance of the role that hybridity plays in the modern world (Bhabha, 1995, p. 66; p. 171).

Bhabha (1994) understands cultural identity as existing within multiple identities simultaneously. For those exhibiting a hybrid model of cultural identity they are able to constantly see the world from multiple perspectives and on equal terms. Contrastingly, some exhibiting a hybrid model will see the co-existing worlds and use this for individual or group advantage to maintain hierarchies.

Out of this perpetual cultural transmission between individuals and groups "appeared a new type of personality, a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples" (Park, 1929, p. 892). However, this man is "never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of prejudice in the new society in which he now sought to find a place" (Park, 1929, p. 892). However, it was the lack of acceptance for this "marginal man" that kept him in-between two societies, never becoming fully integrated into either society. Though this lack of acceptance could be seen as a period of mental crisis from which a "divided self" may emerge, Park theorized that this period of mental crisis would evolve into a personality type, or a state of being (Park, 1929, p. 892-893). He believes the marginal man is open to the variety of ideas presented to him from all the groups that view him as a stranger, thus giving him an advantage when interacting with members from the respective groups. There is a sense of agency created when an individual is told to choose between two identities, but in choosing to hold on to both is accepted by neither (Daniel, 2001). Marginality can be emphasized as a forced separation because dual group membership is seen as an abnormality or abomination. While marginality consists of existing outside of one's dual memberships, liminality finds individuals or groups existing outside of any group membership.

In conceptualizing the various rites of passage for the Ndembu tribes, Victor Turner (1969) further developed Arnold van Gennep's (1960) "liminal phase" of *rites de passage* (Gennep in Turner, 1969, p. 94). Turner's conceptualization of liminality focuses on the attributes of the "liminal personae [as] necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). By existing between and outside of existing social structures liminal groups or individuals are presented with the possibility of transcending social limits and thereby deconstructing structural inequalities and/or positions. This "anti-structuralist" potential is a fluid space, which can be used as an effective space to challenge the existing social order (Turner, 1969, p. 167). Similar to Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial hybridity, other liminal actors can "adopt a subversive strategy that seeks to convey the ambiguity of their position into an asset, and [thus,] challenge the existing social categories" (Rumelili, 2012, p. 503).

These concepts represent three distinct but similar conceptualizations of the way individual cultures can coalesce or dissociate in the negotiation of one's place in and view of society. Hybridity focuses on being a part of two or more cultures simultaneously and being accepted by them all. "Renato Rosaldo defines hybridity 'as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (mutual borrowing and lending between cultures)'" (Rosaldo in Daniel, 2012, p. 182). Marginality, on the other hand, refers to being a stranger to multiple cultures despite one's own feeling of belonging, thus creating a space where an individual feels as part of the in-group, but is seen as part of the out-group from those within, thus creating a toxic mental schism (Park, 1929). Liminality, on the other hand, results from individuals

existing outside of those groups with which they have the closest proximity. Rather than the "and/both" phenomena of hybridity and the "either/or" of marginality, liminality consists of the "neither/nor" construction of sociocultural association (Daniel, 2001). What is most important to garner from the marginal and liminal distinctions is that marginality for this research is a negative manifestations of being held outside a group to which one claims an affinity, while liminality is an empowering identification (a positive marginality) in which the individual is creating a new space of identification. Each of these three concepts (hybridity, marginality, and liminality) can be explained through the experiences of individuals and groups in transition or settled in a new country of residence, but first it is necessary to interrogate the notions of ethnicity, race, and nationality as they are basic identity frameworks within which the three identity concepts can become transformative or oppressive.[4]

In a study of Ukrainian citizens, Hansen and Hesli (2009), envisioned that the degree of tolerance towards out-groups when combined with the attachment to one's in-group would create a spectrum of affinity to or distancing from a strong civic identity (national identity) compared to a strong ethnic identity (p. 3). They identified four major categories of ethnic versus national identities: civic, ethnic, hybrid, and atomized national identities (Hansen & Hesli, 2009). A civic national identity is an inclusive identity that lacks a strong ethnic attachment, which contrasts with ethnic nationals who place importance on their in-group to the exclusion of the nation or other groups. Additionally, hybrid national identities consist of citizens that exhibit inclusive attitudes towards societal out-groups, but also, identify strongly

[4] Ethnicity, race, and nationality are not the only frameworks (e.g. gender and class) that can be analyzed within the hybridity, marginality, and liminality concepts. However, they are the most relevant, as well as gender, for the discussion of Black African immigrants, which is the focus of this paper.

with their ethnic group thus representing Bhabha's (1994) hybrid identity. Finally, atomized national individuals "hold relatively negative attitudes towards both their ethnic in-group and towards societal out-groups" (Hansen & Hesli, 2009, p. 7). While atomized individuals exhibit liminal characteristics, rather than being forced into a liminal space, they opt to exist within a liminal identity outside of both civic and ethnic identification.

In Liberia, the government has continually practiced ethnnocentric nationalism, thus creating a hierarchy of ethnic groups, continuous ethnic tensions, and a similar spectrum of national versus ethnic affiliations (Dolo, 2007; Wonkeryor, 2007). The combination of the four types of national identities and the real practice of ethnocentric nationalism creates a space where the contours of hybrid, marginal, and liminal identities can be exposed. As discussed in previous sections, ethnocentric nationalism has been used by the various governments of Liberia for decades by creating and perpetuating ethnic hierarchies thereby exacerbating ethnic tensions, which automatically leads to the use of colonial hybrid identities to reinforce a rigid power structure (Bhabha, 1994; Wonkeryor, 2007). Within this study it will be shown that these ethnic animosities from pre-, during, and post war have continued within Liberian enclaves, and conversely have strengthened individuals' notions of the importance of ethnic affiliation and identity, but to varying degrees.

While colonial hybridity, negative marginality, and structural liminality all reconstruct social orders and structures, each does so through a different interaction with the identities and groups that define the status quo. Contrastingly, post-colonial hybridity, positive marginality, and anti-structural liminality breakdown the oppressive structures that order society in a hierarchical arrangement. By creating their own empowered space these transformative identities have the capacity to construct Liberian immigrant identities in a

more egalitarian and equitable distribution of power than when they left Liberia. Thus, this research identifies the practices and perceptions of individuals with respect to their identity (trans)formations and how these six identity frameworks can be used to map out these changes.

Agency and Empowerment Theory. While attempting to understand the process through which an individual undergoes their transformation into a civically engaged citizen in a new country of residence it is important to note that these processes are not mere accident, rather they are the choice of the individual to empower themselves and exert their own sense of agency (Dolo, 2007; Mutisi, 2012; Saleeby, 2002; White & Wyn, 1998). Agency is defined by Mutisi (2012) as the "capacity of individuals to think and act independently, make choices and impose those choices upon the world" (p. 101). And it is this capacity for individual thought and choice towards "goal oriented actions" that allows individuals to continue their growth as citizens (White & Wyn, 1998, p. 317). White and Wyn (1998) continue by highlighting three aspects of agency: "consciousness of the potential to take action, the willingness to take collective action, and the knowledge and willingness to change social structure" (p. 318). Here the authors emphasize the capacity for not just individual actions, but also, for collective action, which is of crucial importance for the maintenance and function of an active community, its organizations, and civil society at large. By doing so, it seeks to change or reverse disparities in power and forges an equitable distribution of resources. Saleeby (2002) explains: "promoting empowerment means believing that people are capable of making their own choices and decisions. It means not only that human beings possess the strengths and potential to resolve their own difficult life situations, but also that they increase their strength and contribute to the wellbeing of society

by doing so" (p. 110). Thus, empowerment and agency theory are useful frameworks for analyzing the Liberian immigrant situation as a result of the various groups that were polarized by the lack of development and pervasive use of ethnocentric nationalism and thus can help bridge differences and lead to the potential for collective action within the Liberian community at home abroad (Dolo, 2007).

Civic Engagement. M'Cormack-Hale (2010) provides an operational definition of civic engagement as "membership in civic organizations and participation in collaborative community-driven development schemes" (p. 163). This definition implies that engagement is directly connected to the process of learning about what it means to be an engaged community member or citizen. Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) find that the "quality of citizenship improves as [citizens] learn to identify their leaders, understand how the political system works, and become exposed to contemporary policy debates" (p. 4). On the most basic level, citizenship bestows upon individuals membership in a national political community (Howard, 2006, p. 444). But how do students, youth, and the general population come to understand what is citizenship? And understand how to be an engaged community member or citizen? For the purposes of this research, the term citizen is understood as the physical representation of membership in a national or local political community and the subsequent benefits of that membership, while citizenship implies the active participation within a local, state, national (or even transnational) political community (Howard, 2006). As such, while an individual may not be a citizen, their active participation or civic engagement, highlights their willingness to participate in local or national community. According to Knight and Watson (2014) "a broadened participatory civic society engages multiple perspectives on teaching and learning as enriched and negotiated in dialogue and mediated

within and across varied contexts in which teaching and learning is viewed as a social process" (p. 545).

Torney-Purta et al. (2001) developed a model of learning that is based on "communities of discourse and practice" rather than merely on in-classroom learning (p. 22). They suggest that young people are "active constructors of their own ideas, as people whose everyday experiences in their homes, school and communities influences their sense of citizenship" (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001, p. 21). Continuing they explain that "learning about citizenship involves engagement in a community and development of an identity within that group. These 'communities of discourse and practice' provide the situation in which young people develop progressively more complex concepts and ways of behaving" (p. 22). This model is directly based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1998, 2001, 2005) seminal theory of ecological development, which posits that a child's development is not only influenced by their own biological makeup, but also by their socio-cultural and physical environments, and the interactions with their different spheres of influence. As such, the Torney-Purta et al. (2001) model suggests that not only are students influenced by their immediate spheres of influence including school, but all of this is within their personal civic context which helps foster their own political understanding and engagement. These ideas are furthered by current discourses on civic learning and action that largely delineate knowledge, skills, or activities through which an individual in a civil society learns what it means to be an engaged citizenry, prioritizing widely acknowledged participatory forms of civic learning and action such as voting, performing community service, or following currents events (Knight & Watson, 2014, p. 545).

Similar to the Torney-Purta et al. (2001) model, Knight and Watson (2014) explain: "varied norms of interacting and knowing among groups of people for participatory communal citizenship occurs within community events such as festivals or funerals in which members teach local knowledge, history and culture; engage multiple forms of civic learning; and compel action on behalf of others" (p. 545). This is further supported by Dei (2002) while examining the role of local knowledge for educational change in Ghana found that "learning proceeds from knowing the self, history and culture. Local knowledge is significant for this learning process to be effective" (p. 344). Though this refers to the transfer of Ghanaian local knowledge, this model as a "West African" model may be one such model that was transferred to the Liberian immigrant community as they may have retained their own methods of transmitting local knowledge (either Liberian knowledge or local knowledge of life in America). Furthermore, such perspectives by encompassing the embedded environments of individuals are increasingly emphasizing the role of "identity construction towards civic learning as participatory" (Knight & Watson, 2014, p. 545). And, therefore, as identities tend to act as self-fulfilling prophecies, they also play a crucial role in the success of the process of learning (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Civil Society. Civil society, generally conceived as the "space in a society between individuals and families, on the one hand, and the state or government on the other" (Carothers, 1999, p. 209) is perceived as the arena through which democratic attitudes and behaviors can be learned and cultivated (M'Cormack-Hale, 2010). According to Diamond (1994) civil society is:

> The realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, [and] autonomous from the state… It is distinct from society in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to

> express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. (p. 4)

In general it is the realm of society within which citizens come to understand their perception of citizenship as they become socially and politically active while potentially developing their sense of community and national identity. This realm is primarily composed of independent organizations at the local, regional, state, and national levels that make up the network of relations constituting civil society.

The term civil society organizations provides an umbrella term for community-based organizations, or non-governmental organizations (Kamat, 2004; Nishimuko, 2009; Sayndee, 2009). Regardless of the specific level of focus all operate under the assumption that people should participate at the local, national, and international levels in the decisions made that affect their lives (Sayndee, 2009, p. 176). More specifically, civil society organizations have a broad spectrum of areas of focus, but all derive their legitimacy from their ability to develop a membership base that actively participates in their community projects (Kamat, 20004). These organizations are engaged in various types of activities aimed at improving citizens' knowledge and awareness about political processes, including civic education. In doing so, they contribute to the development of a civil society that is informed, civically engaged and knowledgeable, and thus able to articulate citizen demands and hold their government accountable (M'Cormack-Hale, 2010). These public interest groups have the potential to reduce the hold that public apathy has on citizens and also provides the means by which to network and coalition build. As such, this affords the opportunity to see other citizens in a constructive light, thereby breaking down the perceived social barriers between different ethnic, racial, or class groups. Civil society organizations, thus, may be able to

counter the destructive perceptions of difference which led to the Liberian civil war and which may have migrated with the refugees to America (Dolo, 1996, p. 132-133). Additionally, they may provide a sense of security and belonging towards community cohesion for the group of disparate immigrants now forced to find a communal bond with one another (Rosaldo, 2004).

The promotion of community involvement is suggested to create a sense of pride rather than imposition with the ultimate goal of community projects to provide training, skills, and in some cases, the transmission of cultural heritage of the community for lasting and ever-expanding change. Developing and utilizing the skills and talents of the local community for productive purposes can create a sense of the community as providing for their own livelihoods and as creators of their own future (Sayndee, 2009, p. 184). This allows community members to become contributors to their own development and transmit these values, knowledge, and skills to succeeding generations (Sayndee, 2009). This is particularly relevant for marginalized communities and immigrants throughout the developing and developed world as the process-oriented approaches and participatory methodologies can help participants develop a sense of being in control of their own destinies and create a strong connection with their cultural heritage and country of origin (O'Sullivan, 2008). As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) claim, "A crucial consequence of social and economic marginalization is the emergence of a measure of solidarity in opposition to external discrimination, based on the central notion that the plight of the minority is due to the hostility in mainstream institutions" (p. 60). As such, it is critical to understand the role that civil society plays in the lives of Black immigrants, and to what extent these networks of community or national organizations affects the practices and perceptions of immigrant identities.

Theoretical Summary

As immigrants arrive in the United States they are presented with the option of relinquishing or maintaining their social and cultural ties to their country of origin. For many, the choice to assimilate and become American is an easy one, even as ties with their homeland may be severed. For others, this choice is rather difficult and some opt to acculturate to American customs and norms by picking and choosing which characteristics of being American they wish to adopt and which ones to disregard. Additionally, others may choose to adapt the presented Americanisms and blend them with their cultural heritage to create new hybrid traits. However, this process of cultural transformation is complicated by the pre-existence of established identity categories within the United States that readily ascribe social and cultural traits on to groups as a result of their race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. In combination these two processes occurring internally and externally create continuously shifting patterns of identification. To adapt to and create a hybrid culture may allow individuals to exist within multiple identity categories at once or even create new identifications such as pan-ethnicity or transnationalism (Arthur, 2009; Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1990). Contrastingly, assimilating to American cultural norms may lead to the marginalization of individuals as dominant American society refuses to accept them as authentically American, and their community of "nationals" from their country of origin may see their Americanization as a rupture away from their homeland. Lastly, through the process of acculturation individuals or groups may selectively choose what traits to adopt thereby relinquishing ties to any specific group and thereby live within a liminal cultural space outside of being American and far from the traditions of their homeland. With all of these processes continuously at play as immigrants maneuver through their day-to-day interactions,

it is important to further understand the choices that people make with regard to these identities and the ways in which identification serves as a tool to navigate the multiplicity of life as a transnational immigrant.

Prior Research

This is a review of some of the empirical literature dealing with identity (trans)formation in immigrant populations, and African immigrants in particular. As a result of the migration to a new country of residence immigrants are seemingly forced to reconstruct their social and cultural practices and perceptions in the face of a new network of organizations and social relations. The research discussed below are empirical studies analyzing the ways in which Black immigrants have situated themselves in the U.S. However, as many researchers have pointed out there is a limited amount of research on African immigrants and therefore Black immigrants from Afrodiasporic regions such as the Caribbean are also discussed due to the relative understanding among Caribbean immigrants of the social dynamics faced by African immigrants.

National Versus Racial Identity. In one of the most well-known studies of Caribbean immigrant youth, sociologist Mary Waters (1994), set out to understand the different types of identities that emerge within this immigrant community living in New York City. Through her interviews she was able to construct a typology of identity formations for Caribbean immigrant youth based on subjective identities (Waters, 1994). She explains that these immigrants expressed an identity based on nationality (Haitian or Jamaican), a pan-national identity (Caribbean or West Indian), a pan-ethnic identity (Black American), or an unhyphenated identity (American) (Waters, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001).

These identities exist along a continuum and are not mutually exclusive, rather they are contested identities based on situated contexts.

According to Waters (1994) these identities "produce different perceptions and understandings of race relations and opportunities in the United States" (Waters in Rong & Brown, 2001, p. 542). It is intentional with respect to the participants' identification that only one of the typologies addresses race and being Black in America due to the intense discrimination and racism faced by native-born Black Americans. This sentiment is further supported in various research, and explained by Rong & Brown (2001) as:

> for all immigrants, becoming American involves developing an understanding of racism, including its subtle nuances. Blackness in the United States may have a more negative meaning to people of African origin than it does in Haiti or Jamaica where Blacks are not a racial minority and the racial hierarchy is more flexible than it is in the US (p. 542; Chacko, 2003; Shepard, 2008).

The formation of Black immigrant youths' identities are viewed as a choice regarding the type of American that they wish to be seen as given the ability to negotiate the meaning of their racial identity despite living within the context of mainstream society's binary perception of Black and White (Chacko, 2003; Lindsey & Wilson, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001; Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1994).

Similar to Waters (1994), Smalls (2014) illustrates this process which she describes as "identity-staking" among Liberian transnational students as attempts to create different kinds of Blackness that is more representative of their intersectional identity and more symbolic of the multiplicity of their transnational identity. As such, "alternative citizenships" that are premised on a national or pan-national identities allows immigrants to escape the discrimination and association of native-born Black American's histories and

daily lives (Smalls, 2014, p. 22). According to Shepard (2008), “the extent to which African immigrants accept (or reject) an ascribed racialized identity carries with it certain ways of acting, and speaking, in response to a social discursive that has already constructed ‘Blackness’ as a performative category” (p. 15). Along these lines, immigrant youth are able to utilize these new conceptualizations of national or transnational identity to maneuver their social behavior to conform or reject racial and national identity relative to the given social context while continuously allowing room for the maintenance of their cultural heritage. Rather than simply being African or African American, Smalls’s (2014) participants opted for hyphenated identities such as Liberian-American or even American-Africans to delineate non-native Black immigrants.

The contested notion of racial identity within America is not merely an issue taken up by immigrants themselves, but also native-born Black Americans are antagonistic towards Black immigrants (Chacko, 2003; Smalls, 2014; Shepard, 2008; Traore, 2004). In an analysis of perceptions of high school student immigrants with respect to their treatment by African Americans, Traore’s (2004) participants identified the media, school, and home environments as fueling the antagonism and separation among Africans and African Americans (p. 350). In particular, these participants focused on their frustrations with the quality of their educational experience by virtue of four general categories:

> (a) being asked ridiculous questions about Africa and Africans by both peers and adults, (b) a lack of respect between teachers and students and with their peers, (c) a lack of understanding on the part of teachers and students regarding their backgrounds and abilities, and (d) a negative attitude about their accents. (Traore, 2004, p. 357-358)

These areas of frustration highlight the lack of understanding and knowledge not only on behalf of other students, but surprisingly by teachers and adults within the surrounding

community. By questioning the social and cultural beliefs and behaviors of the immigrant students, the native students are simultaneously causing a rift between the students as distinctly separate and not Black Americans, and also, causing the immigrant students to feel uneasy about their own native culture and behaviors thereby placing a strain on the maintenance of cultural beliefs and practices. While these behaviors on behalf of students are to be expected to some degree, the fact that teachers and authority figures within these schools are reinforcing the cultural difference as a seemingly negative aspect of one's identity must have severe consequences on a student's self-esteem and view of their own culture. These school interactions perpetuate the separation of difference between immigrant communities and native born, thus it is no surprise that multiple immigrants wish to maintain an identity separate from native-born Blacks (Chacko, 2003; Smalls, 2014; Shepard, 2008; Traore, 2004; Waters, 1994).

Chacko's (2003) study of Ethiopian immigrants in Washington D.C. identified similar trends as the authors discussed above. However, Chacko's analysis was focused on the community at large rather than identity within an educational setting. In an effort to resist the association of the Ethiopian community as being a part of the African American community there was a particular emphasis on the "physical and mental recognition of a community of co-ethnics and the invisible bonds that this identification engendered and helped to create a strong and pervading sense of ethnic unity among all of the Ethiopian immigrants" (Chacko, 2003, p. 501). For these participants the community consisting of the family, neighborhood, school as well as religious institutions and community organizations all contributed to the molding of the sense of identity (Chacko, 2003, p. 504). As a result of the strength of the community within which Chacko's (2003) research was conducted there was minimal, if any,

reference to a hyphenated Ethiopian-American or outright American identity. All participants considered themselves to be Ethiopian and were focused on the ways in which their environment helped strengthen this identification. Chacko (2003) emphasizes that even for second-generation youth an Ethiopian identification remained, and asserts that this may be the result of their parents who "try to be active agents in reinforcing the traditional culture of the home country among their children" (p. 500). This is primarily done through practices at home, communal gatherings, and through daily activities in which the uniqueness of Ethiopian culture is reinforced promoting not only a pro-Ethiopian identity but also a pro-African one. By promoting a pro-African culture, the community is reaffirming the lack of interest in adopting a Black American or African American culture or identification. It should be noted that while even the second-generation participants did not adopt a partial American identity, they nevertheless faced tremendous pressure from those outside the Ethiopian community to conform to the national racialized binary.

Generational Identity. When looking at the differences between first, second, and third (and beyond) generations, there is consensus on the intensity of pressure placed upon the second-generation by forces outside of one's ethnic enclave to assimilate into the dominant culture (Chacko, 2003; Rong & Brown, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). Rumbaut & Portes (2001) theorize that second-generation immigrants tend to undergo a different form of assimilation than their parents' classical assimilation, known as segmented assimilation. This variation is the result of the outcomes of assimilation for different first-generation immigrant groups. Rather than the "rapid integration and acceptance into the American mainstream" which is commonly associated with second-generation assimilation, this is seen

to be just one possible outcome (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 6). The variability in second-generation assimilation is due to four factors:

> 1. The history of the immigrant first generation, including the human capital brought by immigrant parents and the context of their reception; 2. The differential pace of acculturation among parents and children; 3. The cultural and economic barriers confronted by second-generation youth in their quest for successful adaptation; and, 4. The family and community resources for confronting these barriers. (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 6)

These four factors combine to intensify the composite advantages and disadvantages for each immigrant group. With respect to the human capital brought to the United States and the context of reception, this overwhelmingly creates a barrier for African immigrants as they are susceptible to racial prejudices that already exist within America upon their arrival and this is compounded by the arrival from what tends to be a country with minimal infrastructure and resources. As such, the limited human capital brought by African immigrants needs to be counteracted by an established robust community network such as in Chacko's (2003) Ethiopian community in Washington D.C. This sentiment is reiterated by Rong & Brown (2001) in their analysis of Black African and Caribbean immigrants as they highlight the role that "networks of churches, neighborhoods, and voluntary organizations" have in contributing to the success of second-generation Jamaican and Haitians (p. 556). In regards to the "pace of acculturation among parents and children," this is directly tied to the "family and community resources" as highlighted within the description above of the Washington D.C. Ethiopian community (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 6; Chacko, 2003).

Civil Society and Community Organizations. Community organizations serve as one resource for alleviating the cultural and economic barriers to success while simultaneously maintaining the cultural heritage of ethnic enclaves and additionally creating

and empowering youth and community members to become active participants through notions of citizenship and belonging. M’Cormack-Hale (2010) highlights four outcomes from increased community organization participation in civil society. First, individuals with some level of involvement in civil society are “more politically informed and more knowledgeable about political leaders and opportunities for political participation;” second, these individuals are more likely to openly discuss their support for democracy; third, “at the level of political participation, respondents that have been exposed to NGO projects will belong to more groups and associations than other respondents [that have not been exposed to NGO projects];” and fourth, that such citizens tend to participate in the political area via attending meetings and contacting political leaders (M’Cormack-Hale, 2010, p. 103-104). These findings are optimistic for the expanded participation and understanding of community and national identity in civil society, and thus directly connect to notions of citizenship. Participation in local, state, or national level organizations provides for the potential to fulfill Rosaldo’s (1994) notion of belonging as “cultural citizen” wherein “[t]he notion of belonging means full membership in a group and the ability to influence one’s destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions” (Rosaldo, 402). This sense of belonging is a necessary part of believing in one’s agency and empowerment to create change within their physical and social reality. For youth, the necessity to feel empowered is critical in forming one’s identity and using that identity to construct a unique place within one’s micro or macro level environment.

Contributing to Prior Research

According to Rong & Brown (2001) most research literature focuses little on Black immigrant youth, in particular African youth, and as such contains little information about

"intragroup differences" in the cultural identities of black youth (p. 557). Most studies on recent immigrants to the U.S. focus on immigrants from the major sending nations and world regions (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). Similarly, Shepard (2008) highlights the lack of knowledge and research surrounding immigrants from Africa. As such, this study fills in a small part of the dearth of research relating to African immigration, and, in particular, to their identity (trans)formations.

The final remarks of Takyi (2002) in his analysis of African migration patterns to the United States advance the notion that further research must seek to understand "How do recent Black Africans see themselves in terms of issues of identity formation, and racial and ethnic solidarity and identification?" (p. 39). As such, this research contributes to this limited research and provides a unique approach in its emphasis on identity (trans)formation beyond the oft focused racial aspect (Smalls, 2014). By interviewing Liberian immigrants and key actors in local community organizations this research attempts to further understand "issues of identity formation" with a particular emphasis on ethnic, national, and transnational identity formations (Takyi, 2002, p. 39). With this area of focus I hope that this research not only fills a void within immigration studies, but also builds upon research to create a more robust understanding of immigrant identity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Site

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is one of many cities on the East Coast of the United States that boasts a large West African population, and, in particular, a vibrant Liberian population. “Recent U.S. Census Bureau five-year estimates put the number of people of Liberian ancestry in Philadelphia at 3,769, though community leaders estimate that the numbers are over 5,000” (philly.com-a). One prominent refugee organization identified upwards of 10,000 Liberians as having arrived since the early 1990s to the Philadelphia area. These Liberian immigrants and refugees are the result of the Diversity Program, Refugee Resettlement Program, and a growing number of resettled Liberians since the 1970s, as referenced by my research participants. As a result of two events (a fire and a teenager being beaten up) issues of ethnic, national, and racial identity as well as citizenship were fresh in people’s minds and thus provided the circumstances for a robust study. Given that my research interests primarily focuses on understanding the changes in ethnic and national identities, Philadelphia was deemed a viable research site due to recent events that have heard the Liberian community speak out against the local, state, and national government (frostillustrated.com; philly.com-b).

Participants

In Liberia alone, there are at least 18 ethnic groups. The breakdown is as follows: “Kpelle 20.3%, Bassa 13.4%, Grebo 10%, Gio 8%, Mano 7.9%, Kru 6%, Lorma 5.1%, Kissi 4.8%, Gola 4.4%, other 20.1% (Mandingo, Fante, Gbandi, Vai, Bella)” (2008 Liberian Census). Therefore, it is a reality of life that by virtue of the

number of ethnic groups that they will compete for resources and pursue ethnically relevant political interests especially since the political boundaries are created in such a way that each county or political subdivision has historically reflected the dominance of a few ethnic groups (Dolo, 2007, p. 104). Though this research was not conducted in Liberia, it is still important to note the diversity of ethnic groups as these distinctions were still prominent in the Liberian community in Philadelphia. While I do not have the ethnic breakdown for the Liberian population in Philadelphia, given the areas of greatest impact from the war (Nimba and Grand Gedeh County were thought to be epicenter), the community appeared to have a high number of Liberians from these areas. Lastly, it should be noted that Liberia is an English-speaking country, though many speak an indigenous dialect. However, due to the length of time since the war broke out, most of the Liberian community was fluent in English. Nevertheless, I only interviewed English speaking Liberians to alleviate communication issues.

For this study, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews, twenty-five in total with a breakdown located in Table 1. I conducted interviews with approximately thirteen Liberian youth (age 18-35) with a gender balance among participants (six males and seven females). This age range was to allow participants to provide the perspective of first and second-generation Liberians, or immigrants who were children (below the age of 10) during the immigration process. Additionally, as the youth of the community, they are poised to become the future leaders of their communities, and have direct insight into various institutions or organizations such as schools and/or community organizations, although civic participation was not a pre-requisite for inclusion as a participant. Though asked about demographic information such as ethnic identification, I did not exclude anyone because of their

affiliation, nor did I seek out participants from a particular group. That being said, while my intention was to have an ethnically diverse sample of the community to adequately see if ethnic differences among community views and participation, this was more difficult than expected. As such, a majority of my participants are from Nimba County. Beyond the youth participants, I additionally conducted interviews with 12 adults in the community, five men and seven women (aged 35 and up)[5]. Similar to the restrictions of youth participants, I focused on having an ethnic diversity appropriate to the community.

Additionally, I sought participants regardless of age who have a diverse educational background. Because of the politics surrounding immigration and refugee status, I wanted to ensure that my sample is representative of the entirety of the Liberian community, and not just those who are more educated and may have had an easier time immigrating to the United States. This educational component is important due to the correlation a parent's educational level has with their child's educational level. As such, I found a balance among those who arrived via the Diversity Visa Program, the Refugee Resettlement Program, and the Family Visa Program (in which a spouse or parent came as a result of either the Diversity of Refugee program).

[5] This age range is based on the African Union Youth Charter (2006) discussed in the literature review, in which youth are considered 18-35, thus adults are above 35.

Table 1

Descriptors of Interview Participants

Name [a]	Age	Means of Immigration	Residency Status	Year of Arrival	Ethnic Group	County of Origin
Anthony	56	Diversity Visa	Citizen	1998	Dahn	Nimba
Daisy	24	Family Visa	Permanent Resident	2000	Loma	Lofa
Donald	48	Refugee	Temporary Protected Status	2007	Mano	Nimba
Edward	28	Diversity Visa	Permanent Resident	2012	Krahn	Grand Gedeh
Eric	26	Diversity Visa	Permanent Resident	2011	Dahn	Nimba
Fiona	53	Refugee	Temporary Protected Status	2006	Loma	Lofa
Frank	26	Diversity Visa	Permanent Resident	2014	Gio	Nimba
Harold	27	Diversity Visa	Citizen	2010	Dahn	Nimba
Jason	68	College Scholarship	Citizen	1972	Mano	Nimba
Jessica	31	Family Visa	Permanent Resident	2009	Mano	Nimba
Joanna	26	Family Visa	Permanent Resident	2004	Krahn	Grand Gedeh
Kaity	63	Family Visa	Citizen	1974	Mano	Nimba
Kelly	33	Born in USA	Citizen	----	Mano	
Kim	54	Refugee	Permanent Resident	1997	Gio	Nimba
Maggie	29	Family Visa	Permanent Resident	2001	Loma	Lofa
Maria	20	Refugee	Temporary Protected Status	2004	Dahn	Nimba
Megan	50	Refugee	Permanent Resident	2007	Krahn	Grand Gedeh
Nate	60	Diversity Visa	Permanent Resident	1996	Grebo -Kru	Sinoe
Phil	59	Refugee	Temporary Protected Status	2000	Gio	Nimba
Randy	25	Diversity Visa	Citizen	2010	Gio	Nimba
Sam	27	Diversity Visa	Citizen	2009	Mano	Nimba
Sarah	19	Born in USA	Citizen	----	Loma	
Tami	47	Refugee	Permanent Resident	2003	Mano	Nimba
Vicky	47	Refugee	Permanent Resident	2008	Dahn	Nimba

Zelda	49	Refugee	Permanent Resident	2002	Dahn	Nimba

[a] *All names are pseudonyms.*

Of the participants there are twelve males and thirteen females with thirteen between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five and twelve between the ages of thirty-five to seventy. There are a total of eight participants who came to the United States through the Diversity Visa Program, nine participants came through the Refugee Resettlement Program, five participants came through the Family Visa Program, two participants were born in the United States, and one participant came on a college scholarship. In fact, Jason, who was known as the elder for residents from Nimba County throughout the Philadelphia region, was one of the earliest students to come over and study at a local university. He was one of the founding members of the United Community Group for Nimba County Residents (UCGNCR), which will be discussed in later chapters. Sixteen participants originated from Nimba County, three participants from Grand Gedeh County, three from Lofa County, and one from Sinoe County. Seven participants were of the Dahn ethnic group, seven participants considered themselves from the Mano ethnic group, three participants were from the Krahn ethnic group, four participants were from the Gio ethnic group, three participants were from the Loma ethnic group, and one participant was from the Grebo-Kru ethnic group. Though my initial contacts were with a community organization with no specific ethnic affiliation, due to the snowball effect with interviewees and spread via word of mouth I ended up with a majority of participants from Nimba County.

Lastly, I was able to get a sense of perception of the relationship between individuals and civil society because many of the interviewees were established community leaders

through their community organizational involvement, and they were asked about the role their organizations play in the community. Additionally, I interviewed one non-Liberian community organization leader who works closely with the Liberian community. Table 2 provides a typology of the organizations that were discussed and the key informants who provided details about each. Through the seven organizations I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how the immigration process occurred, still continues to occur, and how the community operates at a more macro level. Additionally, this helped explain the process through which an individual continued their civic participation beyond the initial stages of being merely a member of civil society to an active participant and/or leader, and therefore informed notions of citizenship from a more engaged perspective.

Table 2

Typology of Community Organizations and Their Key Informant(s)

Name [a]	Type of Organization	Area of Focus	Key Informant(s)
African Culture Association of the United States (ACAUS)	Cultural Maintenance	African culture throughout the United States	Kim
Liberian Philadelphia Association (LPA)	Community Development	Liberians in southwest Philadelphia	Sam Randy Anthony
Liberian Resettlement of Refugees (LRR)	Community Development	New immigrants and refugees to southwest Philadelphia	Anthony
Liberian Women's Musical Group for Community Advocacy (LWMGCA)	Cultural Maintenance; Empowerment – Gender Based Violence	Liberians in southwest Philadelphia	Fiona Zelda Megan Tami
Philadelphia Anthropological Group (PAG)	Cultural Maintenance	All minorities of Philadelphia	Tina
United Community Group for Nimba County Residents (UCGNCR)	Community Development	Nimba County Residents in Philadelphia; in Liberia	Jason Kaity Vicky
United Men's Association (UMA)	Educational Development	Education in Liberia	Edward

[a] *All names are pseudonyms.*

Recruitment and Acceptance

All participants were recruited once I arrived in Philadelphia and had become acclimated to the community in which I was living. I spent eight weeks in the community and was welcomed by participants who were willing to be interviewed. I established email contact with three community organizations and while they did not specifically approve being interviewed prior to my arrival, I used these initial contacts as key informants to help find other participants. Additionally, by attending community events I was able to find the majority of my participants. Though I was an outsider, culturally, nationally, and phenotypically, I found that my unique experience with the Middle Grounds Primary School in the Buduburam Refugee Camp while conducting my Master's Thesis research relieved many potential tensions upon my arrival in the community and eased my initial interaction with each respective participant.

Data Collection

Each of the interviews followed a similar protocol via an interview guide approach and a standardized open-ended interview, provided in Appendix A (Patton, 2002). The interview protocol consisted of questions focusing on 1) Demographic information; 2) Knowledge and experiences regarding identity categories; 3) Future or expected experiences regarding identity categories; 4) Perceptions of identity constructs in their community, America, and Liberia; and, 5) any experiences with civil society that have impacted the development of their sense of ethnic, racial, or national identity and community cohesion. Given my intention to further understand the practices and perceptions relating to ethnic and national identity (trans)formations and the connection that this has to interactions with civil

society, I found that this interview protocol provided a framework that was highly useful to interview any of the above participants (youth, adults, and community leaders). Also, while attending community events I took field notes while being a welcomed guest.

Interviews lasted from one to one and a half hours in length, depending on how long participants wished to continue the conversation. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, but handwritten notes were also be taken during each interview. They were kept on my password-protected computer in a password-protected file to which only I had access.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was guided by two general strategies suggested by Yin (2014) and by Merriam's (2009) approaches to qualitative data analysis. Yin (2014) suggested working with theoretical propositions and working directly with the data from the "ground up." According to Merriam (2009), data analysis "begins by identifying segments of your data set that are responsive to your research questions" (p. 176). Each segment is a unit of data that helped answer the research question; in this study, the units of data were the interview questions. To analyze multiple or comparative studies, Merriam (2009) offers two stages of analysis—"within-case analysis" and "cross-case analysis." Each individual interview was analyzed in-depth, and then cross-case analyzed to compare across all participants within their respective groupings (youth, adult, and community leader) and then compare participants across groups. This process similarly occurred in analyzing the roles of organizations in the community.

After the more structured approach of analyzing the data using my theoretical propositions, I approached the data from the "ground up." With this strategy, I was able to

examine the data for new topics that emerged and were not part of the conceptual framework. This required highlighting and organizing any data that was not previously coded by the research questions or in the conceptual framework. The new data was synthesized and organized into initial categories. This data underwent multiple rounds of analysis until final categories were assigned. Lastly, field notes from participant observation at community or organization events and meetings were used to corroborate and add to the interview data.

The theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous sections were used to organize my analysis of my interview transcriptions. In particular, I came to further understand the ways in which participants referenced their own sense of identity(ies) and what were the main contributing factors to how these identities were formed and transformed. For many, this process was an on-going process and for others this was primarily focused on the first few years of living in the United States. Regardless, I first identified what factors contributed to the creation and transformation of identities and then attempted to understand how the different individual processes mapped on to existing conceptual frameworks such as assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation, with a particular emphasis on how participants' identities were representative of hybrid, marginal, and liminal constructs. Due to the lack of information currently available regarding these topics, and the even fewer attempts, if any at all, to connect these identity categories with these particular constructs and concepts, the findings and analysis presented below will provide a unique vantage point from which to understand the life of Liberian immigrants and as such can contribute to existing immigrant and identity literature.

Chapter 4: Self-identity within a Foreign Land

Upon arriving in the United States immigrants and refugees begin forming and transforming their new and existing identities as they begin interacting with different members of their homeland and through their interactions with those already living in the U.S. For the Liberians participating in this study their understanding of America was instantly changed the minute they first arrived as their preexisting expectations of the U.S. began clashing with the realities of life in America. This dissonance greatly impacted the ways in which an individual began forming their new identities as one's national sense of self was continuously redefined.

Through interactions with Americans (native born or established immigrants) the participants expanded their understanding of America and what it means to be American due to a variety of factors. These factors included the vast availability of resources as compared to Liberia, the acceptance by those living in their new homeland, movement towards or away from adopting U.S. citizenship, and doing all of this within the racialized U.S. context. Additionally, newfound definitions and affirmations of ethnic and regional identity became prominent as Liberians from all over their homeland formed an ethnic enclave (in southwest Philadelphia for this research). Previously intermittent interactions of individuals from different ethnic and/or regional groups became daily occurrences due to the forced migration of thousands of Liberians, creating spaces for conflict, cohesion, and the potential to redefine what it means to be Liberian.

National Identity

Expectations versus reality. For many participants any previous interactions with Americans came from Peace Corps volunteers, missionary school teachers, or workers at international governmental and non-governmental organizations. This created a positive image of the caring, selfless, and generous American who simply wanted to help and provide aid however they could. While this image was found in the United States, it was the minority personality rather than the majority. These interactions while living in Liberia perpetuated the image of life in America as a land of wealth and prosperity where every citizen and resident were given the means and the opportunity to do anything they wanted and become whoever their dreams desired.

Such a positive image of America and the optimism of their new homeland led to a sense of pride to be living in the U.S. Described by almost every participant, the U.S. was the "Land of Milk and Honey." This image was particularly prominent for participants who had never encountered Americans prior to their migration. Joanna explained her first experience in America and how her expectation of American wealth was quickly dispelled upon her arrival:

> When you are in Liberia, everyone tells you that America is Second Heaven. You are told that when you get to America if you and someone talk together then they are going to pay you for talking together. So when my brother and I were at JFK airport, we planned to talk to a white man and so we went up and said 'Hello sir, what is the time?' And he told us, and then we said 'But wait aren't you supposed to pay us?' And he said 'Why?' 'Because we talked to you!' and he said 'That's not how it works here, you gotta work for the money.' Even people in Liberia say you guys living in America are living the good life, you can't send no money? and I say no, it doesn't work like that. They think that when you live in America that when you go walking you find money in the street.

There was a belief by Joanna before she arrived in the United States that if an individual were talking with someone and both said the same word, the first person to say "Jinx" would be handed money by the other. These were the types of stories that children and adults were told to believe before arriving in the United States, and thus came to believe it was the "Land of Milk and Honey". However, the picture of America was murky for some participants such as Harry who stated that "Back home when we hear about America we hear you have money and enjoying life, but really we never had a clear picture of America. All the really sound people would know that you can't go somewhere and just find money on the ground. Although it is better than Liberia, but we had no clear picture of what America was." Much of the concern about the difference in American and Liberian identity came from the availability of money and resources, national programs of aid for residents, and the provision of what Americans believe to be the protection of basic rights and securities.

Availability of Resources. Because Liberia continued to lack the ability to give basic provisions to its citizens, a schism developed for many participants as to the desire to become an American, while not wanting to relinquish citizenship to one's homeland. Jason, the oldest of the participants, and the first to arrive in the United States, finished his college degree and headed back to Liberia in the late 1970s and was offered a government job. However, he "had to decline due to lack of pay to sustain my family, who had finally come over [to the U.S.]. I went back to the United States because the money and healthcare is much better! I even became a prison guard until I retired." The lack of resources available in Liberia was also discussed by Randy and Franklin: "Liberia does not allow you to become what you want to become, but here in the U.S. if you want to become something and you actually work for it, then you have the opportunity for that to happen. You really have to work for it and take

advantage of the opportunity or fall by the wayside. But the opportunity is there" (Randy). Also, Franklin stated that "In our country the government does not easily provide for its citizens. The government does not really prioritize issues that are of importance to the society. We have many youth that are wasting away out there because there are no jobs and a whole lot of wasted potential, but they do not have the means to move forward." The inability of developing nations to compete with the resources available in the United States was not a new phenomenon, but the lack of dual citizenship allowed by the Liberian government was something that caused participants to question their identity, who they were, and who they wanted to become.

Acceptance, by whom? Of the twenty-five participants only eight had adopted American citizenship (two of these six were born United States citizens), while thirteen were permanent residents, and four remained under the Temporary Refugee Status. Those that became American citizens had come to see themselves simultaneously as potentially marginalized Liberians citizens, and also, as American cultural hybrids. Kaity, due to her financial situation, has the luxury of returning to Liberia every few years even though she was an American citizen. For Kaity, she said that "everyone back home knows that you are American, as if something has changed. I don't see it, but I feel as though I am treated differently." And in referring to bringing her two daughters (both age fourteen at the time of the interview), she discussed that they were no longer seen as Liberian, they were purely American. However, this contrasted with how Kaity thought of herself and her family. To Kaity, she was a Liberian who lives in America, and her children were Liberian-Americans.

Contrastingly, those that maintained permanent residency (the standard outcome of coming over under the Refugee Resettlement Program) felt marginalized as American

citizens, but nevertheless felt they too were American cultural hybrids. Nate felt as though he was happy to be in America, but still saw himself as Liberian, even though he did not have the luxury of returning home as frequently as he would have liked. And finally, those that came under Temporary Refugee Status existed outside of both American and Liberian cultural and political life, stuck in a liminal state. Phil came to the United States under the Temporary Refugee Status, and still had yet to return to Liberia. He was burdened by his inability to get a job in the United States, and yet did not want to risk leaving because he believed he would never be able to return.

There were a few respondents who while maintaining that they were Liberians living in America were nevertheless African at heart, and felt an affinity to the idea of an African identity. Daisy saw her identity in the United States as one of a Liberian living in America, but that while she was "raised more Liberian, I am more African than anything." According to Daisy, "Africa as a whole has one way of raising their children, and that is how I was raised." While the ideas surrounding family and culture will be further discussed in the next chapter, this view of an expanded identity beyond that of Liberian was a transformative concept for ideas of national identity. Similarly, Sarah discussed her identity in stating that:

> At my high school that I went to there was a lot of Liberians and Africans, and there came a time during freshman year of high school when African people would look at me as American and American people would look at me as African. But I am just a normal person, but that's one of the issues I dealt with in high school. I focus on being African as a whole. Unless I am specifically asked where I am from, then I identify as African more so than Liberian.

The identities being utilized by Daisy and Sarah as a transnational "African" were constructed as a post-colonial hybrid model to move beyond the singular nationalist citizenry concept and created a new identity of the "African" being. Feeling accepted by Americans,

Liberians, and yet maintaining an affinity to a larger transnational group skirted the notions of liminality (or positive marginality) to exist as neither/nor by creating a new and/both category (Daniel, 2001).

While many participants were vocal about their relationship to family and friends back in Liberia several of the younger interviewees said the most common place they encountered issues of acceptance was at high school. First generation immigrant, Maria, moved to the U.S. with no knowledge of English and was put into the English as a Second Language track at her high school. Maria tells stories of a second generation American born Liberian girl at her school that constantly made fun of Maria every chance she could. Maria recalls how this girl would call her "J.J.C." which stood for "Johnny Just Came," an insult meant to emphasize Maria's immigrant and, thus, subordinate status. These insults continued to the point of a physical altercation. Maria finally confronted the girl asking "You're Liberian just like me. So why are you always harassing me?" The girl was quick to respond, "I'm nothing like you, just because my family once lived in Liberia, doesn't mean we are anything alike. You can barely even speak English." The girl pushed Maria trying to assert her dominance in front of other students, and although Maria wanted to she did not resort to fighting back. Maria explained, "She just didn't get it, by making fun of me, she is making things worse for herself and other Liberians." The girl's negative emphasis on Maria as an immigrant, was similarly addressed by others with regards to being accepted as a citizen versus always being seen as merely an immigrant living in a foreign land.

Citizen or Immigrant. The identities described above by participants were all ideas and concepts that were discussed in terms of how they felt about their own identification, however, when discussing the ways in which outsiders in the community looked at them, in

many cases, there was a dissonance with their own beliefs. Many respondents felt the marginalization and stigma of never being seen as American regardless of their citizenship status.

> American society is interesting. It is a society of contradiction. All the beautiful things such as acceptance and diversity and all the things they talk about, but they don't try to accept your culture. The American mindset is, how do you call it? One solution fits all, which is not true. Because for you to just require me to change my way of life to instantly be like yours is ridiculous. Just imagine how you guys would feel if someone came here and wanted you to change to their culture, and we have thought that there is a need to work on that. There needs to be more accommodating. That is causing a lot of problems, ruining a lot of homes, destroying a lot of families. (Nate)

The participants felt that even after living in the United States for upwards of forty years and becoming a citizen of the United States that other "naturalized" or American-born Americans would forever see them as outsiders. This sentiment was further highlighted by Jason as he discussed his desire to maintain his permanent residency status for over twenty years given that he never felt truly accepted, however, just before the interviews took place he adopted his American citizenship—mostly for his daughters' sakes. This highlighted the fluidity of one's identity within a national concept. While one may identify as American, they may never be allowed to be seen as American, and rather than be seen as the alternative category of Liberian (their homeland), they are seen as the generically African. While the identification of African was seen as a source of pride and positive self-affirmation as discussed by Daisy, the idea of African became a way to lump the entire community together as the marginalized "other" due to the combination of race, ancestry; and, according to the participants, ignorance on behalf of the non-African born Americans.

Coming from a more positive perspective Harold, Sam, and Randy believed the idea that becoming a citizen was more than an identity. Rather, it was a prideful act that they cherished. Each saw citizenship as something that must be earned. Harold became a citizen in 2010 and enlisted in the United States Army immediately. "I don't believe in begging, I believe in work, and paying back those who have helped me, like the US government in paying my tuition for college for me joining the Army. I want to be there to give back to them. They made it possible for me to better my life." He believed that it was necessary to give back to the country that had provided so much for him. Admittedly, the Army was also a means to an end with regards to paying college tuition, but that "is an added bonus to serving my new homeland." Having just finished his four year tour of duty, Harold was beginning to focus on furthering his education.

Sam and Randy felt similarly about giving back to America, but for them this meant becoming engaged citizens. They both studied Political Science at a local university and wanted to become politicians, if possible. Sam was the most vocal participant about the need to be active in local and state community governance and organizations. Sam stated that,

> When you get to the US life will be easy, people think, and it can be easy, but it is based on your hard work. You cannot just sit there and money falls down from the sky or from the money tree, that particular expectation is there, but it is not the truth. This is a country where you can work in the garden for $8.50/hour, versus in Liberia where you can get $20/month for babysitting. Due to the limitations at home people try to blame the US government, and say that there is no aid coming, so when they get the opportunity to come here they believe they will be given everything. But you have to work for it.

By staying involved through volunteer work and positions in local associations Sam believed his efforts contributed to making his local and national communities a better place. Rather than accept the immigrant or African labels, these three participants actively sought out ways

to emphasize their American identity, and lend a hand in "making this country the amazing country it is" (Sam). However, regardless of the intent to become citizens, Liberian immigrants entered this country as a racialized black minority, which compounded their identity struggles.

Racial identity

When participants in the study were asked to describe issues within and outside of the Liberian community, rather than discuss issues of racial difference perpetuated by White Americans, they said that the issue of race was one with Black Americans. Almost every participant, seventeen of the twenty five, made reference to the stigma placed upon them by the surrounding Black community. Although these references ranged from being ignored and looked down upon to direct insults to the threat of violence, all of the anecdotes and references spoke to the discrimination felt by each participant.

For many, White Americans treated them better than they treated other Black Americans, and when asked why they believed this to be the case, they shrugged. As Kaity stated "we don't have the history that the Blacks have here, we are new to this country, and even though we look the same (as Black Americans) they treat us different." This theme was repeated by the seventeen respondents with the exception of a couple of encounters "with some people who were mean just because I was black I guess, but they are pretty much the exception, everyone else has treated me normally" (Anthony). Kaity continued her previous statement by saying that even her American born Liberian daughters were treated differently because of their heritage, a sentiment shared by both Kelly and Sarah (the native born participants) and Maggie. Both the younger and older participants claimed that it was Black

American students who were the ones that mistreated them. Maggie stated that when she was in high school in Philadelphia she was asked if she “lived with lions and monkey,” only to roll her eyes and respond “we don’t even have lions or monkeys in Liberia.” Inquiries from other students like these, mostly of the ignorant, but less aggressive manner, came up in interviews with other first and second generation younger respondents. However, one older respondent, Anthony, told a story of working at a gas station where

> There [was] serious conflict between us. I was a supervisor at a parking lot downtown, and I hire a guy and this one guy was an American guy who was working for me, and he produce a song, rap music. It was all nothing but cuss and he refer to me as nigga, African black nigga taking our job, mother F dis dat. So I was told by my boss that I was to fire this gentleman, but instead I pulled him into my office and had a conversation with him.
>
> I said to him: ‘You have been singing this song here for a week now. What have you gotten out of singin that song? Have you learned anything while singing it?’ He said uh no. I said to him, ‘Look I am African, if you cut me right now you will find blood. If you cut yourself, then you will bleed red blood, no matter if you are white or green, we all bleed red blood’. He said ‘What do you mean?’ If you cut a white person you are gonna find red blood. So what does that tell you? My point here is that it doesn't matter where you come from. What matters is what you do with the life and the time that you have. Leave the black people alone, the rapping song will not help you. The other black people they didn't just get here by mistake, they are here legally.

For Anthony, this time he was able to take the gentleman aside and successfully teach him that the hatred Black Americans felt towards Liberians and other Africans was for no reason. Africans were not here to take anyone’s job, and “not here to do anything but keep their head down and make a living on their own, exactly like everyone else” (Anthony). In this instance, Anthony was able to make a change, but he said that was one of the only successful stories he had, though he had many more about being harassed for “stealing jobs and taking over the neighborhood.” Rather

than discussing the racism experienced at the hands of White Americans, participants felt the racism coming from other Black individuals.

This discussion of race further exemplified the constant maneuvering of identity that came from Liberians living in a racialized American world. As Anthony noted, Liberians were the same as everyone else in America, even though they came from a different place. This was a conscious attempt at post-colonial hybridity to bridge the supposed differences in culture, but for many others these sorts of interactions served to further marginalize the Liberian population. Rather than feel an affinity with their "Black skinned brothers" as Randy put it, "we are forced to be scared of the Black Americans." When combined as being neither Black American nor American, Liberians were marginalized, but when seen as Daisy did as an opportunity to embrace her Liberian and African identity a transformative liminal space was created.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity was the focal point of pride, confusion, and dissonance for many participants as they were attempting to create a new Liberian identity without their ethnic background as a basis of relationship formation due to the disastrous impact ethnic identity had during the war. However, according to most participants the creation of a new Liberian identity should not come at the cost of losing sight of their cultural heritage or their ethnic group. Donald made this point clear when he stated that "you have to be careful of identifying yourself. You don't want to be tribalistic. We are all Liberian, one common thing. But I am from Nimba, and Nimba is said to have started the war." Despite these concerns,

Donald continued by saying that “tribalism is an issue if people want to make it an issue, and most want to move on, and make it NOT an issue.” This was concurrent with the knowledge that some individuals still held on to the animosities that existed pre-, during, and post-war although for many they explained that this animosity was placed on them, and while they did not explicitly feel animosity towards others groups, they admittedly would allow some of the stereotypes to change the way that they interacted with individuals from certain other ethnic groups.

Despite the existing literature and history of Liberia that emphasized the continual exclusion of others, participants almost always discussed the need and desire for a singular Liberian community as the way to move towards a better future. Notions of difference and out-group animosities were discarded as participants emphasized the need for organizations such as the Liberian Women’s Musical Group for Community Advocacy and the Liberian Philadelphia Association in bringing together people from all ethnic groups. The belief as discussed by one participant was that “though we may live in our homeland, here in America, we can create a community strong to show the people back home that we are one” (Tami). Not only did this emphasize a common national identity, this also implied the desire of all in the community to use the liminal space as a location for reconstructing the community in America and for all of Liberia.

The idea of a common national identity was put forth by the women of the LWMGCA through the metaphor of an umbrella. The Liberian community and the nation of Liberia is comprised of groups from different ethnic backgrounds and tribes. They must all work together to keep hatred, violence, and a reversion back to the pre-civil war animosities. By working together all the groups combine to create a new Liberia. As such, the women in

the group saw this new Liberia as like an umbrella in that if any of the groups choose to not uphold their part of struggle to maintain peace, then hatred and violence would rain down upon the entire community or nation. Just as when one section of an umbrella breaks and gets everyone under the umbrella wet, similarly, Liberian society would falter unless everyone helped out (Fiona). This transformative view allowed these transnational actors to use their displaced positions to create lasting change through a hybrid Liberian identity based on the inclusion of all within the community. However, despite the egalitarian view of the community, many of these same participants would later in the interviews suggest a segmented community based on pre-existing stereotypes and notions of difference.

For many participants when asked to describe the issues facing the Liberian community in Philadelphia they described the on-going ethnic tensions that existed from before and during the war. Many of the participants were from Grand Gedeh and Nimba counties, two counties that were focal points during the onset of the war and as such respondents had lasting stereotypes and negative views of those they were fighting against or that were fighting against them. This was highlighted during the interview with Sarah:

> Sarah: Like a lot of people say that certain tribes do certain things or act in a certain way. Some people might say that, for instance, Vai people are stubborn or something else. Even last night I went out and overheard some people talking about how Gio people are all mean and only worry about their own people and they don't care about others. They won't help you or promote you.
>
> Me: Do you hear this from adults, or older people, or your friends?
>
> Sarah: Definitely older people, I never hear my friends talking about ethnic problems. They just have a normal regular gossip drama thing.

There were stereotypes continually voiced about individuals from the Krahn ethnic group (largely located in Grand Gedeh) versus the Mano tribe (located in Nimba). Joanna, a

member of the Krahn ethnic group, frequently reference that when visiting a friend's home, if they were from the Mano ethnic group, she felt threatened by them and that they saw her as an aggressive person. She even went so far as to discuss how at certain events she was treated as if she was "violent, hot-tempered and selfish," and that her ethnic group, the Krahn, were "selfish to exclude other groups in their community organizations." It should be noted that almost every ethnic group and county had some sort of an organization that held community gatherings. This was important because despite the similarities in actions, individuals still felt they and their ethnic group were stigmatized for acting in the same manner as everyone else. By espousing these beliefs they were implicitly and explicitly perpetuating the ethnic animosities that had existed in Liberians for decades and centuries.

While maintaining that a unified culture and movement forward as an immigrant community was the goal of community projects, these statements about one another highlighted the inherent continuation of marginalizing one's own national kin at the expense of group cohesion. Thus, the fluid notion of community, and even one's sense of national identity, was highlighted by the discussion of suspicious inclusion of others outside of one's ethnic group. However, more prominent than the role of ethnic identity in the daily lives of individuals was the impact of one's regional identity, or from which county in Liberia they came.

Regional identity

Regional identity was the most prominent factor in the daily lives of participants for many reasons, the most obvious being that the kin they most closely associated or lived with tended to be from the same county or area. More than just a matter of convenience in their

day to day experiences, where a participant came from was seen as a source of pride. While interviews would start out with demographic questions such as “What is your name?” and “Can you please tell me your age?,” the next question was “Please tell me the story of how you came to America.” This set of three questions almost always was followed by a response including the information on a participant’s county of origin. For many the divulging of ethnic affiliation was not spoken until prompted by the interviewer; however, more than likely the participant would make certain it was known where they were from. By providing this information in an unprompted manner, it became clear that which county an individual was from was seen as a source of pride for the individual. While at first the pattern went unnoticed, towards the end of the interview a question was always asked “Which do you identify with most: being American, being Liberian, your ethnic group, or some other aspect about yourself?” This question was usually answered in two parts “I am either American or Liberia,” and followed up with “and I am from Nimba County” (for example). As the research continued it became clear that the reason region was such an explicitly discussed part of a participant’s identity was because outside of their kinship group, most participants belonged to at least one community organization: their county organization. These organizations had names emphasizing their county community: the Grand Gedeh Community Organization; the United Community Group of Nimba County Residents; or the Lofa Organization. Though the roles of these organizations will be further discussed in chapter 6, for the purposes of this chapter it is important to see the levels of identification that each individual explicitly expressed with regards to the role of these organizations.

For most participants the inclusion as a member in their county organization was another connection to their home. This membership was a continual source of the hybrid

identity being created while living in the United States. Even for one of the community elder's that was interviewed, Jason, despite stating that first and foremost he was American, and had been an American for almost forty years, he still attended every United Community Group of Nimba County Resident's event (UCGNCR). According to him, "the events by UCGNCR are the way I see the people in my community, and the way that we help each other." In these organizations ethnic identity fell by the wayside as one another was welcomed as a brother or sister because they were from the same community. The walls put up by the marginalization of others with regards to their differences were broken down by the knowledge that someone was from the same county. Despite the fact that neighboring ethnic groups could maintain hateful and spiteful relationships, most participants emphasized the expansive family that could be found by knowing that someone was from your county back home. For Jason, his regional organization became a way to shift between a citizen that had moved on from his country to a new homeland, marginalizing himself from Liberian citizenship, to a hybrid citizenship in which he remained engaged with those around him in an unified effort for change.

Summary

Liberians living in the United States were constantly confronted with the decisions regarding how to maintain and maneuver their identity within and outside of their community. The internal decision to adopt an American identity and become a citizen came at the cost of letting go of their Liberian citizenship, which was a home that most wanted to return to someday. By creating new lives in America, many respondents were able to create a hybrid sense of self in which "I am American, but am Liberian also" (Kaity). While issues of being marginalized came from within the community through ethnic animosities, the

respondents continually expressed that in certain situations they were left outside the spectrum of American society due to their immigrant or refugee status and yet could still not return home due to a lack of available resources to get them home and to sustain them once back in Liberia. These participants remained within the liminal confines of the refugee status one day hoping to return to their home, and rid themselves of America. For all, the sense of one's regional identity was where they found solace regardless of their situation, and where they could feel a piece of Liberia wherever and by whatever means they were living.

For participants, their sense of national belonging was constructed out of reactions to a variety of factors. Upon moving to the United States these individuals were forced to confront the dissonance of their expectations of America as compared to the reality of life in their new homeland. While wanting to maintain the optimism of their pre-migration lives about the United States, the lack of ubiquitous prosperity forced many to question their own desire to actually remain here. However, despite the lack of wealth immediately bestowed upon new arrivals, America still presented better life opportunities, in particular, for younger generations. As such, only five of the twenty-five participants opted to obtain American citizenship (two participants were born as American citizens). Although the above number appears low, fourteen of the participants elected to become permanent residents, implying a desire to remain in the United States for an extended period of time. For some, the decision to embrace an American identity and eventual citizenship was an easy decision, while for others their time in the U.S. was merely a stop-gap until Liberia was ready for them to return. Regardless of how each participant wanted to be seen with regards to their national citizenship, the people and world around them continually ascribed their own perceptions and beliefs onto the individual.

The combination of the above factors created a situation in which some individuals utilized a hybrid identity to maneuver through their daily lives as they were able to adopt a different national sense of self within different contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Daniel, 2001). In doing so, these individuals were exhibiting a post-colonial hybrid model that served to break down the walls put up between Americans, immigrants, and those shunned for embracing an American identity (Daniel, 2001). Rather, by effusing a hybrid identity, these individuals were able to reduce the negative stereotypes and assumptions by blending in with a multitude of crowds thereby reducing the tensions that were created. However, not all participants had such positive outcomes from their identity transformation. Even those that exhibited a hybrid identity still found themselves situationally marginalized. While the above pages emphasize the internal and external pressures to adopt a sense of identity, for many the clash of American and Liberian cultures led to the strengthening of relationships and yet also the breaking apart of families.

Chapter 5: Cultural Differences of the United States and Liberia

For many immigrants, maintenance of one's cultural heritage and social practices was paramount to their daily lives. Holding on to the cultural practices in which an individual, family, or community acted and behaved could be one of the strongest ways for people to keep an attachment to their homeland alive and thriving. However, as immigrants were immersed in the culture of their new homeland, these cultural practices were maintained, transformed, and merged with the dominant cultural group. In this case, the attempted maintenance and changes that occurred within the Liberian community came about via the daily interactions with the culture of the United States. Of the utmost importance to many participants was the impact that this cultural mixing had on issues of gender and family dynamics. In the opinion of many participants, a benefit of living in the United States was living in an egalitarian society based on equality for men and women, while for others this equality had served to create tensions and rifts within the Liberian community. Beyond gender, family dynamics were being challenged as each generation of youth had a widening gap between those who held on to their cultural heritage and those who were moving towards the individualistic spirit boasted by Americans. In particular, education as the primary means of socialization became a contested site of cultural maintenance as children were immersed in the culture of one's new homeland. While changes did occur between successive generations, even for first generation immigrants, education and schools were the main creator of social and cultural change. Schools also served as one of the main reasons that parents chose to keep their children in the United States rather than send them back to Liberia. The result of this cultural mixing was an attitudinal shift among some Liberian youth that strayed away from their Liberian culture and contributed to a generational gap and

consequently impacted the ways in which Americans in turn perceived the Liberian community.

Family and Culture

Many of the older participants in the study came across as part of the Refugee Resettlement Program, under which they came by themselves and established work and a home, and then applied to bring over their immediate family (husband/wife, sons/daughters) and, then, eventually their extended family. This emphasis on maintaining a connection to their home and family for the first few years of living in the United States further emphasized the deep rooted adherence to respecting one's family and elders; a tradition commonly found throughout Africa. Maintenance of cultural traditions throughout the Liberian community was of the utmost importance for those trying to maintain a deep connection to their Liberian identity. These cultural traditions began with practices within the family, the three most commonly mentioned being food patterns, song and dance, and behavior in the form of deference to one's elders.

Food. For Jason and Kaity, raising their American born children in a Liberian culture began with the food that they ate. Kaity emphasized that all of their meals kept the staple ingredients and cooking methods that had been passed down from her mother and grandmother. "Teaching my girls where to find potato leaves or cassava and then how to cook them, is something that I do as their mother" (Kaity). Similarly, rice, a seemingly innocuous ingredient, was such a staple part of Sarah's food patterns that it directly connected her to her heritage. She found that going out to eat with friends or at a friend's house she was never quite full. As soon as she returned home she made a pot of rice, and was

able to satiate her hunger. She attributed this to how her mother, Kim, raised her and the fact that growing up she had rice every single day. She explicitly stated that rice "is just something that every Liberian can't live without" (Sarah). Born in America, Sarah found that her love of rice was a daily reminder of her Liberian heritage and her mother's upbringing. For Sarah, the daily eating of rice was a particular cultural practice that contributed to her hybrid American-Liberian identity. Though she may have grown up around American children at school and taken on some of their culture and values, at the end of the day what she craved as her comfort food was a bowl of plain white rice. While Sarah emphasized the foods on which her mother raised her, it was her mother, Kim, who emphasized transmitting knowledge of cultural traditions such as traditional dances.

Song and Dance. Five of the participants had all spent part of their lives being professional singers and/or dancers in Liberia, and continued on the practice of singing and dancing in Philadelphia. For these women, although the role of music and dance in their lives used to be a way to make a living, it also was and continued to be a way for them to connect across generations, across a country torn apart by war, and to reunite groups once pitted against one another. Additionally, these women had taken on the task of teaching not only their family, but also, their community the songs and dances they knew in an effort to heal the wounds of war and maintain their cultural heritage.

Kim began dancing when she was a young teenager and was quickly picked up by the Liberian National Troupe, a group of singers and dancers that travelled around Liberia sharing the different songs and dances of the various ethnic groups. Rather than emphasize the songs of a particular group in their travels, this group would highlight the unique folklore of tribes throughout Liberia. After coming to the United States as a refugee Kim took a break

from dancing as she moved around America, eventually settling in Philadelphia. Once her daughter, Sarah, was old enough to be taught the dances she grew up dancing herself, Kim taught Sarah everything she knew. According to Sarah:

> A lot of older Liberian people say that younger people like my age have lost their way and their culture. So I do see it as an issue, because they are saying we lost our culture, but at the same time, if they don't put the effort in teaching them the culture as they grow up, for instance as my mom taught me growing up. My mom she does dancing, and teaches dancing and so I was like born into dancing too, so that culture is implanted in me. People say we are trying to be more American than Liberian, but I feel like if they don't take the time to teach them then they won't put in the effort.

Through these lessons Kim was able to keep alive the culture of Liberia despite living thousands of miles away from her homeland. As the lessons with her daughter expanded to include Sarah's friend, Daisy, Kim began to see the potential for these lessons to begin traveling around the Philadelphia Liberian community. As a group, the girls and women would travel to different community events and show community members the dances that had been central to community events back in Liberia. In essence, as Kim put it "we brought a piece of Liberia to America." Due to the positive reception of the dancing, Kim convinced an old friend, Fiona to form a group of women singers who similarly would perform at these community events.

Fiona, Tami, Zelda, and Megan formed a group to sing the songs of their country while traveling around their community at different events. While Kim's goal was and continued to be keeping Liberian culture alive, Fiona, Tami, Zelda and Megan took this a step further by using their songs to start repairing the rifts and tensions that had been opened during the war. It was this group of women, each from a different ethnic group; Fiona – Loma; Tami – Mano; Zelda – Dahn; and, Megan – Krahn that developed the umbrella

metaphor described in Chapter 4. Zelda described their efforts by stating, "I'm honored that three other accomplished Liberian singers of various ethnic backgrounds have joined me in this. Liberians continue to need to work on ethnic reconciliation, and we model this by working together". Through their songs from all different ethnic groups and sung in all different dialects of Liberia, they emphasized the necessity of uniting as a community here in America and setting aside any wartime animosities towards the creation of a unified Liberia. They believed that by expressing the pain that all Liberians had experienced during and after the war that they could contribute to the healing of individuals and groups. For these women, their position stuck as refugees, immigrants, and citizens in a new land presented an opportunity to take the microcosm of Liberian identities that had been thrown together and generate change.

Through their liminal positions placed upon them by the circumstances of war, they were able and continued to be able to erase the marginalization being felt by individuals because of their ethnic background. Furthermore, by blending the different Liberian experiences through their songs they were creating a new Liberian identity based on the hybridized experience of past memories, as well as, the similar circumstances dictated by their placement living in United States.

Respecting One's Community and Elders. The value of the transmission of cultural traditions and heritage by these five women highlighted the importance of respecting one's elders because of the wisdom and knowledge they had based on their life experiences. Liberians showed respect to those around them by calling those of the same age "brother and sister", others that may be slightly older were "auntie or uncle", and anyone that was their parents age and older were known as "mama and papa". This tradition of calling members of

the community by these names was more than just a sign of respect, it was also a reference to the notion of communal responsibility for each individual to care for those around them, and especially for individuals to care for the younger generations of their friends, family, and community members. To Maggie, the loss of respect for one's elders was one of the largest disappointments with life in America. She stated that:

> Though the living standard is okay, you can walk on the street and see kids cursing their mother out. Even a kid cursing out anybody that is older than you. You can't do that in Liberia! You will get a whipping. There is too much human rights! We don't believe in human rights. In Liberia you would *never* disrespect you auntie, uncle, mama, or papa. There is a saying it takes a village to raise a child, so if I disrespect my next door neighbor I will get a spanking. And if I tell my parents that my neighbor hit me, then they will beat me too because they will know that I did something wrong! I don't get the levels of disrespect here!

Maggie was completely taken aback by the way younger generations were interacting with their elders. She believed that this was a major flaw in the way American culture was being adopted over Liberian culture.

Additionally, this viewpoint was not unique to Maggie, and was quite common throughout the participants, so much so that Daisy while highlighting her belief in her identity as more than a Liberia, but as an African, emphasized the impact that living in America was having on younger generations forgetting their deference for their elders. She noted that "younger kids go to school with the other Black kids and start trying to fit in by acting American. They forget where they came from and start to disrespect their parents and aunties and uncles." Daisy continued by explaining that while this may even seem like a trivial thing, it actually illuminated the change that was occurring in the younger generation as they attempted to assimilate to the American way of life. "It begins with them changing how they talk to their parents, then who they are hanging out with, and not caring about

where they came from," explains Daisy. This sentiment was repeated by more than just Daisy, as both Nate and Phil emphasized the loss of control of Liberian youth due to the influence of their American peers. Though they did not specifically discuss the ways in which youth addressed their elders, Nate and Phil were emphatic that the American education system and the provision of rights to children created the loss of control by parents and further exacerbated the problem of generational differences leading to increased incarceration rates (according to them).

American Culture Changing Group Dynamics for Better or Worse.

For the participants of this study, the cultural practices of the Liberian community were in a constant tug of war with United States culture. This tug of war was not always a cause for concern, rather, for some, it was a cause for celebration through the creation of hybridized identities and a newfound sense of social equality. While parents were teaching their children the value of their traditions and their cultural practices, some found that American cultural values being instilled in the community were creating a schism between genders and generations. Some interviewees found these same positive attributes of American society were the major cause of the degradation of the Liberian community, culture, and specifically, the family unit. In particular, the participants discussed the promotion of individualism as a major source of inspiration and, simultaneously, a trait that was ruining the Liberian family. This individualism was compounded by the emphasis on social equality for women and children creating an empowering society for some while others felt their community was being stripped of its core values. Though education was not the sole mechanism for socialization, it was a major area of contestation among interviewees

with respect to the spread of American values while also increasing the available life opportunities in the United States.

Gender rights that uplift and break down the family unit. Gender rights are a conversation of the elevation of male dominance above women's and children's rights. The promotion of the equality of women and the protection of their children was a staple part of the American ideal and cultural value system. However, some participants questioned this system of ideals and the spread of Western cultural values that were chipping away at the established gender hierarchy for Liberians. These two viewpoints created a challenge within the Liberian community to adapt to United States culture and thus led to some respondents adopting perceptions of the United States that left them feeling marginalized from the rest of the community.

According to those participants who saw American values as a source of inspiration towards equality for men, women, and children, living in the United States provided the basis for generating change within the family. These participants learned of the laws protecting women from their husband's verbal and physical abuse and spread this knowledge to other women in their community. By teaching women about their rights, women were sticking up for themselves and putting an end to the abuses of their husbands. The empowerment felt by these women extended to their children as the women were being more protective of the ways in which men treated them. According to Zelda, "Our aim is to connect with our Liberian sisters, through our music, encouraging them to value themselves and to recognize abuse. They need to break their silence and reach out for help". It should be noted that the women who were the strongest proponents of equality in the family primarily focus on violence against women, but did also discuss with those who attended their workshops or

events that Gender Based Violence could be female against male. It was believed that this message was important for men in the community to hear so they did not feel as though they were being attacked by these community organizers. Rather than solely putting forth a message about the evils of male domination and the dangers of men, these women preached empowering lessons of how to stand up for one's self and their children. While most individuals would cherish the dissemination of ideas of equality for the betterment of the community, there were some participants who saw these traits as corrupting the Liberian community.

With the spreading of ideas of gender equality, two male participants both felt that the community had lost control of its women such that a man was unable to speak his mind and express his dissatisfaction with the actions of his wife and/or children. Nate and Phil both referenced the seemingly high rates of restraining orders that were taken up by women as they became "sick and tired of listening to their men" (Nate). However, according to Nate and Phil, these women were using the system to their advantage and embellishing stories to hold back the men in the community. According to Nate:

> We believe in the Bible, and that the man is the head of the home, but when our women come here they are indoctrinated to practice being equal to man. So that is a problem. For us and for all African countries that just arrived here. If you were to go to Nigeria there is a certain way that women behave. But here, women call the police and then the police say you have to come with me and the next thing you know the woman is getting a restraining order. Then once you are out of the house the woman is unable to manage it and the house goes into foreclosure, the family got no home and the family scatter. (Nate)

By claiming the protection of the law, some women were causing a situation in which Liberian men were vilified in the eyes of the American public, and in particular, in the eyes of the law (according to Nate and Phil). Rather than working out their marital or familial

issues within the confines of their homes, it was suggested that some women were jumping straight to legal protection and thus breaking up families that needed not be broken up. This in turn created a negative perception of the Liberian community in the eyes of the surrounding American community. While it should be noted that Nate and Phil were older gentlemen and were also only two members of a twenty-five participant study, there were other participants who extended the discussion of rights beyond a man and his wife to the lack of control parents had over their children.

Three of the younger female participants spoke at length about the breakdown of respect among their peers towards their parents and elders within the community because of the myriad laws protecting children from their parents. Kelly, Maggie, and Jessica suggested that while in Liberia spanking or taking a switch to a child as a means for punishment was appropriate, while here in the United States such parental strategies were deemed as illegal. According to Kelly, some children used this knowledge and called Child Protective Services which created a situation in which the children became more likely to engage in bad behavior due to the inability of the parents to appropriately control their children. Maggie and Jessica did acknowledge that while the kids utilizing this strategy tended to be the children that were already getting into trouble, they nevertheless questioned the availability of such a tactic by children. Given that these participants were made up of two first generation Liberians and one second generation born in America, their words highlighted the ways in which the American system of values was selectively adopted and assimilated within the Liberian community, and yet, also discarded by others.

Educational Differences

Education was the be all and end all for many families in this study and was the reason that non-citizen families stayed in the United States to ensure a proper education was secured for themselves or their children. This tale of the importance of education was discussed by all the participants and has been found in many immigrant groups as education is seen as the way out of poverty, and as a means to create change in one's world (Heninger & McKennna, 2005; Knight & Watson, 2014; Koyama & Subramanian, 2014; Rong & Brown, 2001; Tourney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald & Schulz, 2005). However, what was particularly salient in the Liberian immigrant context (as may be for other African immigrant groups) was the emphasis on excelling in education to take advantage of the opportunities generally not available in Liberia, and also to separate one's self from those that fall into the cycle of poverty that was prevalent for many immigrants and refugees. The importance placed on education was seen as a means to an end, especially when believed to be a way to help create change in Liberia through development aid or by moving home once a United States education was completed. While potentially promoting education as a tool for the betterment of Liberia and as such, the promotion of a Liberian centric identity, education simultaneously reinforced the identity crisis of many immigrants given that, for some, the educational system became a means to be thrust into the racialized cycle of poverty and criminality. As the major mechanism of socialization, education represented the dominant means for inculcating Liberians with American values, for better or for worse. The above issues were compounded by an educational system that promoted the ideas of individualism rather than communal responsibility. In doing so, first and second generation students were interacting with their peers and adopting the new values as they saw fit; however, many of

these beliefs flew in the face of traditional Liberian values. This is not to suggest that Liberia and every other country did not have its own issues of youth and rebelliousness, but these youth were immigrants in a racialized system that was very much not in their favor potentially creating drastic legal ramifications.

The importance of education as the sole reason for remaining in the United States was discussed by Daisy at length. For Daisy's father, there was no reason to live outside of Liberia given the war was over, unless an individual was doing something that would eventually help Liberia. He impressed upon Daisy this notion to the extent that "growing up, all I did was go to school, do homework, study, and volunteer so I could go to a good college. I didn't really have friends, my friends were my cousins who I would see at family events once a week. Other than that all my dad would let me do was focus on school." It should be noted that the interview with Daisy was conducted in her dorm room at a well-renowned university in northwest Philadelphia where she was studying Biology as part of a pre-medical degree. Taking her father's beliefs to heart, Daisy wanted to become a doctor then move back to Liberia where she could put her education to use helping develop and rebuild Liberia. "It has never crossed my mind to stay here and become a citizen. I know what I should be doing, and how to get there" (Daisy). Daisy's conviction to use American resources and education to create change in Liberia were similarly discussed by others in the context of helping out the local Liberian population and helping individuals to better themselves.

Anthony came to the U.S. with a high school diploma and aspirations of helping out as much of his community as possible. He believed that to truly help people, he would need to get at least a Master's degree so he could establish his credibility within the enclave of

immigrants. After obtaining an Associate's degree at the local community college, he proceeded to get a Bachelor's degree in Nursing and then a Master's degree in Public Policy. Through the combination of Nursing and Public Policy Anthony found he could get a well-paying job while simultaneously further his understanding of the NGO landscape and how to run a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. At the time of the interview Anthony was running an organization, the Liberian Resettlement of Refugees, designed to help new immigrants or refugees become acclimated to life in the U.S. by educating them in basic skills and knowledge of the American way of life. "Without my education, would I still be able to have done all this? I don't know, but because I took advantage of the opportunities around me, I am now able to give back and live comfortably" (Anthony). As discussed in Chapter 4, Sam and Randy both shared this need to give back to their community and believed through education they would learn how best to achieve that goal. Despite believing so fervently in the promise of education, Anthony, Sam, and Randy each independently stated that they could not understand why people in the community, especially younger generations, did not take advantage of the opportunities and resources around them. They believed that by doing nothing people end up "getting into trouble, lost in the U.S., and becoming criminals or gangsters," according to Anthony.

Although all participants saw the value of education, there were a few who believed a direct result of the U.S. education system was the creation of problems in their community. Similar to the above sentiment about falling into a life of crime, Donald emphasized how schools in the area "just see these kids as Black students, and tend to forget about them… Kids these days think their teachers hate them, so they stop caring and find quick ways to gain respect like by joining gangs." Similarly, Anthony spoke of how he viewed education,

his concerns about his son's education, and how Liberians fit into the American education system:

> We create the goal to actually educate you, because what you don't know is what can hurt you and even kill you. So what is the goal? That you won't get lost. And we were able to talk with some of them and they come over here with bad behavior. Some of these kids have witnessed killing, stabbing, it was a common thing for those coming from Ivory Coast and Liberia during the civil war. That kind of behavior needs to be changed and war is not the solution and fighting will not be answer, but education will be the answer. So that is why we started to educate those that were coming over. Prepare them for the future. Dress code, in particular, I told my son that the day you have your pants down below your waist you are moving out. Oh yeah he listened to me. He had two friends that were doing that, so I said not in my house, not here, it is your right to dress anyway that you would like, but not in my house. As long as you are living with me, you will not be showing your underwear outside, that is not decent. Some of these things you have peer pressure and you can't just say I am not going to say anything, you've got to say something. I told him smoking was not right! People who came from Africa came exposed to violence and some were young soldiers and had to deal with that. Those who did not listen, do you know where they are today? They are behind bars, because America does not have tolerance here. If you are not a civil minded person then you are not to live in civil society. So if you commit a crime there will be consequences for your behavior.

Because these Liberian youth were Black and immigrants should they turn to a life of crime, Donald, similar to Anthony, believed that they were given no leniency from the police or the courts and, thus, ended up in jail at higher rates than others in the community. Similarly, Nate had issues with the U.S. education system as he also believed the ideas taught in school were ruining Liberian families by indoctrinating students with American values that defied traditional Liberian beliefs and values.

As discussed in the previous section, Nate and Phil both believed that U.S. cultural values were destroying Liberian culture and families because youth were being taught ideas of individuality. As a result, these students were putting their individual rights above the "wellbeing of the family and community" (Nate). Additionally, Phil described this by stating

that “every time one of these kids calls the police because their parents hit them, they are making it so the parents can no longer control them.” Because these parents were no longer able to reprimand their children, according to Nate and Phil, the kids became unruly and headed into lives of drugs, crime, and the cycle of poverty. While their views were in the minority, they brought up an important idea about the interaction of U.S. and Liberian culture (or Western versus more traditional cultures). When supposed “progressive” or Western values are taught to younger generations should they choose to assimilate or acculturate to these ideas changes begin to occur between generations (Rong & Brown, 2001). Though these changes can be for the better as shown by Sam and Randy, the views espoused by Nate and Phil highlighted how problems could arise.

The interactions of the U.S. and Liberian value systems exemplified the gaps that can be created when youth were choosing American values over Liberian ones. Rather than working hard to succeed some youth were looking for a shortcut to “success” (Anthony). As Americans may cherish the system that is in place, but the potential indoctrination into a system different from the one a child’s parent understands contains the possibility for schisms between a child and parent. To some respondents, the act of straying away from traditional values without the guiding presence of parents led youth down a path of crime. Accordingly, within the U.S. racialized system immigrants lost their sense of communal responsibility, and lost the availability of community resources which were a staple part of Liberian lives.

Summary

This chapter discusses the cultural differences of Liberia as compared to the United States through the issue of family culture. These cultural factors were sites for the creation of community through food, dance, and song, but also, were used by different individuals and groups to broach issues of cultural adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation. In particular, issues of gender and gender rights became salient throughout the interviews due to the clash of American and Liberian concepts of male dominance and gender equality. Additionally, the interaction of cultures created generational and educational gaps that served to strengthen and sever ties between participants and individuals in their circle of friends, family and community.

For many participants taking on American values allowed them to enhance their ability to contribute to their community and redefined how they allowed themselves to be treated by others. Assimilating into American culture was the catalyst they needed to make changes for the betterment of themselves and those around them. This positive assimilation was espoused by an overwhelming majority of the participants through their use of education to obtain jobs, use of resources to become active agents in their community, and through the assimilation of American values to create a more equitable society. Contrastingly, the assimilation of American culture by younger generations can have a lasting negative impact on the individual and their families according to some participants. Although this position was the minority viewpoint, nevertheless, both younger and older participants, and male and female found issues resulting from the clash of American and Liberian cultures. However, taking advantage of existing resources while allowing both American and Liberian cultures to coexist provides the space for individuals to fully develop the ways in which they give

back to their community. This was particularly salient in the discussion provided by the Liberian Women's Music Group for Community Advocacy.

Chapter 6: Community Organizations and Empowerment

As is the case with organizations being a key part of daily life in Liberia, so too did this system of civil society exist within the Liberian community in Philadelphia (Sayndee, 2009). These community organizations took on a significant role in the maintenance of Liberian identity through a variety of means. Cultural organizations provided an outlet for individuals to share their heritage and thus connect the community back to its Liberian roots. This was particularly significant for second generation Liberians and beyond as they may not have grown up with Liberian culture as part of their daily lives without these cultural organizations. Additionally, these cultural organizations served to strengthen the sense of community through the notion of a shared heritage. As such, this shared past allowed organizations to help rebuild and repair the rifts that became entrenched in the community prior to and during the civil war. As individuals became more actively engaged in their community they dually empowered themselves by realizing their own sense of agency in helping themselves, and also, by helping out individuals in their community they were developing their own agency. This enhanced civic engagement went beyond the local and even national community to the provision of socioeconomic and political aid to Liberia. These transnational community organizations were the main artery through which individuals came together as a group to help one another on a local and transnational scale. Each of these different types of organizations could be found in the Liberian community around Philadelphia and each filled multiple roles in the maneuvering and positioning of identities within the United States. These organizations went so far as to introduce non-Liberian Americans to Liberian culture and thus impacted the ways in which identities were not only

discussed by individuals, but also, how they were ascribed on to the Liberian community by non-Liberians.

Three Key Organizations

The Philadelphia Anthropological Group was established almost thirty years ago to provide the local communities a way to catalogue and showcase their cultural traditions through living heritages of folk culture. As stated by the head of their organization their mission was to:

> pay attention to the experiences and traditions of 'ordinary' people. Our focus is to build critical folk cultural knowledge, sustain vital and diverse living cultural heritage in communities in our region, and create equitable processes and practices for nurturing local grassroots arts and humanities (Tina).

This mission spans all races, ethnicities, nationalities, and includes both new immigrant cultures and traditional "old country" cultures of America's heritage. Philadelphia as a major metropolitan area was perfectly situated for such an organization, and the PAG made an effort to showcase as many ethnic and national heritages as possible. It was a goal of the PAG to ensure that cultural traditions were kept alive and documented for future generations. By including all different races and nationalities, the PAG generated a new sense of community around a common bond of ancestral heritage. They did much work with the Liberian community, however, this had only been in the previous couple of years to the time of this research (2014). In fact, it was through the PAG that I was introduced to two of the main organizations this research has focused on, the Liberian Women's Musical Group for Community Advocacy (LWMGCA) and the United Community Group for Nimba County Residents (UCGNCR).

The Liberian Women's Musical Group for Community Advocacy was created in conjunction with the PAG by two existing members of the four woman singing group and the director of the PAG. This initiative was initially started by Kim, who was an established dancer. Kim then introduced Tina from PAG to Fiona, who was a famous singer in Liberia. The group had two primary foci: first, to ensure that Liberian singing traditions are maintained and kept alive within the community; and, second, to discuss community issues in an open, safe space. They successfully created a group whose goal was to have honest conversations with members of the community about real problems that were being faced daily. When they went around talking to women in the community, they found that one of the most recurring issues was physical, verbal, and mental abuse against women by men.

Having heard the people speak, Fiona assembled her four woman group consisting of Tami, Zelda, Megan, and herself (each from a different ethnic group). Sponsored by the Philadelphia Anthropological Group, the musical group traveled to different community events all over Philadelphia, but primarily sang in southwest Philadelphia. They conducted concerts that discussed the civil war and its aftermath, as well as provided messages of female empowerment. Additionally, they followed up the music with an open dialogue of invited community leaders or any guests in attendance to discuss issues of Gender Based Violence (a rampant problem before, during, and after the war in Liberia, which continued in the Liberian enclave and beyond). The women did admit that while their messages were directed towards violence against women, they were always sure to be clear that violence against men occurred, just at much lower rates. Of the utmost importance to the group was the inclusion of all ethnic and regional groups in their concerts, and as such they sang in all Liberian dialects and catered their program towards particular groups if they had an expected

audience. Although the PAG and the LWMGCA did not directly work with the United Community Group for Nimba County Residents, it was at one of the musical performances sponsored by the PAG that I first came into interact with the UCGNCR.

Rather than focusing on cultural maintenance and spreading positives messages to the local community, the UCGNCR was a large group with the goal of providing individual, community, and national aid to those members living throughout the United States and Liberia. They had multiple events every month, whether they be fundraising events, such as the one I attended raising funds for a Nimba County Women's Center back in Liberia, or fundraising for a family who may have had a loved one in the hospital. Additionally, they held their official local and national meetings at which political statements were created in response to news and developments both here in the U.S. and in Liberia. As such, they were a lifeline for immigrants from Nimba County to stay connected to their region back home through aid and political suggestions, while simultaneously fusing a bond with those living temporarily or permanently in the United States.

The UCGNCR was originally created by Jason, the oldest of the research participants, back in 1974 when he had recently arrived at a local Philadelphia university. He and three other Liberian students found it difficult to help out loved ones back home in Liberia, so they began to pool their resources and then expanded their membership to include all Liberians from Nimba County living in the surrounding community (still less than the one hundred at that point, according to Jason). The practice of communal responsibility and helping out one another was their guiding principle and eventually when migration numbers increased so too did their membership. According to Jason and Kaity, at the time of this research, the UCGNCR had chapters in thirteen major metropolitan cities on the U.S.'s Eastern seaboard,

and had a membership over 5,000. Philadelphia was their largest chapter, though the President of the national organization came from the New Jersey chapter. Both Jason, and his wife, Kaity, had been Presidents between 2000 and 2010.

These three organizations represented the three dominant forms of organizational work encountered in the Liberian community: cultural maintenance, empowerment and local aid development, and national or transnational aid distribution. All three organizational categories overlapped with regards to their goals and the impact that they had on the community, and while these were only three highlighted organizations, there were another four that were discussed during interviews, all of which fell into one or multiple categories which will be discussed in the following sections. What is important to take away, and will be the bulk of discussion for this chapter are the ways in which these organizations were utilized by individuals and the community at large to create their own sense of agency and empowerment towards developing change at home in the U.S. and in Liberia.

Cultural Organizations

Cultural organizations in this ethnic enclave served to maintain the cultural heritage and traditions for future generations and keep alive the folk art, song, dance, and food ways of the original homeland. To continue to further develop an understanding of one's community these organizations were vital to not only the Liberian enclave, but also, to the interactions with the surrounding ethnic or national groups. Within the southwestern Philadelphia area that this research was conducted there were three levels of cultural organizations. The Philadelphia Anthropological Group, as described above, focused on the cultural traditions and heritage of all members of the larger Philadelphia area, such that all

groups from every continent found in the Philadelphia area would hopefully one day have been showcased and documented. Rather than focus specifically on a given region, such as Africa, the PAG wanted to create an inclusive "understanding of one's neighbors, co-workers, or the people they see while driving on the bus or in their cars" (Tina). Second, and more focused, were groups such as the African Culture Association of the United States (ACAUS) which primarily focused on regional based culture. In this instance the emphasis on African culture resounded massively within the largely Black and African southwestern Philadelphia area. A staple organization in the community, ACAUS brought individuals from all over Africa to interact with one another. While they shared their own country's unique culture, they also met to create cultural projects that reflected a Pan-African culture. Similar to the PAG, but on a smaller community scale, ACAUS was attempting to break down the walls of tension between African nationals from different countries that lived in the same community. Third, were country specific organizations such as the LWMGCA, which focused solely on Liberian culture and attempted to break down barriers of gender equality and ethnocentric nationalism that arose before, during, and after the civil war. For the LWMGCA members, their music was a way to "create a new idea of Liberia and move us towards that direction" (Zelda). By using different dialects and music from different regions they maintained the idea that Liberia is an umbrella and that all the groups needed to come together, because just as with an umbrella, if one piece of the whole was not contributing to keeping the rain out, then everyone under the umbrella would get wet (Fiona).

Each of these cultural organizations has a particular breadth of focus, but regardless each was dedicated to the preservation and performance of cultural traditions. With a particular focus on community cohesion, these groups strengthened the bonds that existed

within a community through the positive melodies, tantalizing dances, and beautiful art for everyone to see. Crossing across generational lines, these organizations served as the conduit for younger generations and those born outside their ancestral homeland to become indoctrinated into the ways of their family, homeland, and heritage.

Aid, Empowerment, and Agency

Community aid organizations served multiple purposes. The first of which was the provision of aid in times of need for organization members. This stemmed directly from the African belief in communal responsibility, and represented the saying "it takes a village to raise a child," repeated often by participants. When members had emergencies or deaths in the family then the community organizations would help out much like how a church would help by taking up donations for that family with the belief that when recovered, that family would contribute to helping out by donating for others in times of need. This was highlighted while at an UCGNCR gathering in which prior to the main event, a collection plate was passed around for a woman's mother who had fallen ill. Everyone seemed to contribute one to five dollars and then the event proceeded. This created a system in which, ideally, no single emergency would lead to financial ruin, and no donations would be too expensive as to prohibit community members from lending a hand.

Additionally, there was one organization, the Liberian Resettlement of Refugees, which helped out recently immigrated individuals and families as soon as they arrived in the United States. Started by Anthony, this organization attempted to provide knowledge and basic skills training rather than tangible financial and material aid by:

> Establishing positive behaviors. At the time the civil war in Liberia was happening for 20 years, and it was actually at this point that we had refugees, and we needed to provide support. So we had to support a lot of refugees in the community. Because when you come, you come with no status, and you will work with immigration and make arrangement and have interview forms set up for you. Then we help you, and help you find a job.
>
> I still do this, because I want to teach these kids how to be citizens. And instead of becoming a criminal, become good citizen. So these are the things that we have been doing. Sometimes we identify a church or go to a community hall to do presentation about that. You know HIV awareness, how to prevent these things from happening, we talk about that you know. They have been very helpful. And some of them we help them to buy a suit and learn how to be responsible for yourself rather than living on a government program, how to provide for yourself. And we taught some of them how to fill out applications, computer skills, how to create your own email account, how to download, how to print, and a lot that you can find on the internet.

This model that Anthony cherished, was part of a larger, less tangible, outcome generated by community organizations that acted as local conduits of aid for people in times of need. These organizations allowed individuals to help themselves and those around them, thus instilling a sense of confidence in their abilities and creating a positive feedback loop. Individuals became empowered to actively create the change they wanted to see in the world around them, and had been given examples and the experience as to how to go about making that change. Similar to the beliefs of Anthony, the LWMGCA was founded with "the goals to both start dialogues within families and the broader community about how to address violence against women among Liberian immigrants, and to connect social service providers to Liberians in need of support" (Tami). These women saw the necessity to become knowledgeable and action oriented community members to be able to help oneself out of a bad situation or to be able to pass on this knowledge to someone else. They aimed to

empower women to create change through their own actions, and to empower each woman to spread their agency throughout the community.

One of the main organizations for the Liberian enclave was the Liberian Pennsylvania Association (LPA) that acted in a similar manner to the regionally focused UCGNCR; however, all Liberians were welcomed. The LPA served as a semi-formal administrative and community body for the Liberian community. They helped provide aid and helped people to understand their own sense of agency by being a part of the process to develop their surrounding community. In terms of being a semi-formal administrative body, the organization allowed community members to become involved in the governance of their community, though not at the city or county level. For instance, after a recent fire in 2014, three Liberian children died and it was the LPA that took the charge in ensuring the city underwent a full investigation of proper emergency response teams (frostillustrated.com; philly.com-b). This was one such organization that participants ranging from Sam and Randy in their twenties to Anthony and Fiona in their fifties had been members of the governance board. For most participants, the skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy learned from these organizations was a part of creating a lasting impact back in Liberia.

Aid to Liberia

In Liberia, much of the aid coming into the country flows through international aid organizations that work with local community organizations (Sayndee, 2009). This flow of aid into the country rather than being generated from within created a situation in which many Liberians were not used to being the providers of aid to their family, friends, and extended communities back home. Living in the “Land of Milk and Honey” came with it an

expectation to send back remittances or other material resources. However, the reality of life in the U.S. was not quite so prosperous as once was expected, as such, using a similar model of communal responsibility to develop assistance, community organizations were able to raise funds for development projects in Liberia. According to Phil, community aid organizations were able to help Liberia by:

> Sending money, aid, food, clothes, books. There are a lot of initiatives that Liberians in America are doing at individual and collective levels; building homes, structural development, social economic development individually; collectively we contribute to the health care delivery, the schools system, we send equipment to hospital clinic and health centers, as well as education materials. Fund raising for the Ebola outbreak right now. That is how we remain engaged as a group through UCGNCR

This allowed individuals to stay connected to their homeland and do so without the massive undertaking of an individual project. This is highlighted by the cause for donation at one UCGNCR event that was hoping to raise one million dollars for building a women's empowerment building back in rural Nimba County. Though individuals were very excited to donate, the donations were below $200, and so the total donations for the night was just over $1500. While that figure was nowhere near the proposed $1,000,000, given that thirteen chapters existed, it became apparent that through concerted efforts towards an individual cause UCGNCR as a whole would be able to raise in excess of $20,000, which would go a long way to creating change for women in Nimba County. This collective action was the core of what made the community organizations work. Very few individuals could ever have donated $25,000, but as a collective group even larger than the Philadelphian enclave, there was the potential to create lasting change. This sort of change was highlighted on a smaller scale by Edward, a twenty-eight year old determined to help Liberia's education system grow.

Edward was the chairperson of the United Men's Association which focused primarily on raising funds for educational projects back in Liberia. They did fundraising, lunch sales, and donation drives to send back whatever materials they could gather. Coming from one of the worst hit counties during the war, Edward was particularly sensitive to the need to rebuild the educational system and understood the challenges that limited resources provided. "We are in the process of adopting school so that we can be able to provide full sponsorship of the school. Another thing we were doing was try to build an adult youth center, like a school, or something, basically, like empowerment" (Edward). However, for Edward, while returning home was his ultimate goal, he saw a silver lining for his time spent in the U.S. as he came to fully understand the full opportunities available in the United States and how to utilize them.

> I'm basically trying to go after the childhood education and stuff, because it's not like the United States, or advanced country where a child at 4 or 5 has the opportunity everywhere to go to school, back there you can barely get a dollar a day to live, so the chances of a child going to school is very low, and we need to recognize that need and go after it.

Because of the lack of opportunities available back home, not only did Edward feel proud to be able to go to school in the United States, but felt even more proud of his organization's ability to help support the educational system back home. The pride felt by Edward was similarly discussed by multiple participants of the UCGNCR as they expressed their joy in being able to send money and supplies back home.

> When the ebola break out started we had to put our efforts on hold so we could get supplies sent over. We were looking at the urgent need of the people, so that is why we started doing fundraisers all around Philly, so that we could generate money or supplies like gloves, hand sanitizers, or masks, or different stuff to send home for the prevention of Ebola. When this whole thing started, our people, a lot of people weren't educated so that's what

> caused the spread. So we needed to get the basics to Liberia to help with whatever we could. (Kaity)

This sense of empowerment and agency filled people with pride and the belief in their ability to change more than just their own circumstances, but also the circumstances of their extended families and transnational communities.

Summary

Cultural organizations provided a space for the maintenance of cultural traditions and one's heritage. Through this process individuals were able to gain a more positive perception of their homeland, especially for second-, or third-generation immigrants. According to the women of the LWCGCA, this site of cultural maintenance had profound effects on the maintenance of a Liberian identity rather than the assimilation of an American identity. Similarly, through the work of African focused cultural groups a pan-African or transnational identity may have developed, and through the work of Liberian groups, ethnic and regional walls may breakdown leading to a newfound sense of Liberian identity. Accordingly, organizations that provided aid for local, national, and transnational communities may have created a sense of agency within the self and one's community that led to more changes. By becoming engaged citizens, even if within one's community, individuals were taking active positions as to how they wanted their lives to proceed rather than sitting back as passive observers.

Chapter 7: Discussions, Implications, and Conclusions

This dissertation has examined how immigrants and refugees in a Liberian enclave in southwest Philadelphia formed and transformed their national, racial, ethnic, and regional identities, and how the interaction with American culture impacted the maintenance of Liberian culture and values. Additionally, this research has looked at the role that community organizations have in the maneuvering of identities and culture through the empowerment of individuals and their communities in an effort to become active agents in the development of their family, local, national, and transnational community. Through the analysis of "identity staking" via in-depth interviews with Liberian community members this study illustrates the formation and transformation of identities and culture as situationally based on specific contexts of interaction that provide space for participants to maneuver their identities in synergistic and subtractive ways (Koyama & Subramanian, 2014, p. 11). The findings highlight the active role that immigrants and refugees take in defining themselves and in negotiating the trajectory of their family and community groups. As such, this study challenges the tendency among researchers to view the African immigrant experience through a racialized context, and reveals the importance of studying the multiplicity of identity categories that contribute to the creation of a robust community within which these identities are maneuvered.

The findings also suggest that living in the United States creates a contentious situation wherein individuals find positives and negatives from which they see the maintenance and simultaneous breaking down of Liberian cultural values. In particular, the American education system is seen as an institution that can uplift Liberian youth, while simultaneously tearing down the connection to one's heritage and thereby causing a break

from the Liberian community with negatives consequences. However, within the community the results indicate that community-based organizations acted as sites of agency as they tried to counteract the assimilation into American culture and empowered individuals to become active participants in changing their own realities. Below I will discuss the results obtained from this study in relation to the issues raised in the literature review.

The (Trans)formation of Identities of Liberian immigrants

By looking at the factors that contributed to the identity formation of Liberian immigrants this research continues research on the creation of meaning within new spaces of community and living (Chacko, 2003; Clark, 2009; Copeland-Carson, 2004; Ilcan, 2002; Myers, & Zaman, 2009; Okpewho & Nzegu, 2009; Ong, 1999; Rong & Brown, 2001; Waters, 1994). This research focused on the role that hybridized identities played in the immigrant experience as national, racial, ethnic, and regional identities all combined in multiple ways to create new cultures and a new individual sense of self. This research confirms the idea put forth by Chen (2014) that "identity is not a fixed essence, but constantly in the process of changing and being remade" (p. 9). While the notion of multiple identity categories is not novel, when applied to African immigrants, there is a particular emphasis on the racialized experience of life in America (Chacko, 2003; Shephard, 2008; Smalls, 2014; Traore, 2004). This research contrasts these previous notions and finds that race plays a minimal, or somewhat different, role in the lives of these participants, as issues surrounding American versus Liberian identity and culture became more prominent in their daily lives.

All participants who decided to become a U.S. citizen were required by the Liberian government to relinquish their Liberian citizenship. While they were still able to return to

Liberia, it was via a controlled visa status similar to as if any American or foreign national entered Liberia. As described by Kaity with regards to her daughters, beyond the administrative differences of citizenship, Liberian nationals began to view Liberian-American residents, citizen or non-, as becoming American after only a few years of living in the States. As such, different situations emerged within which individuals were marginalized by their Liberian brethren because they embraced a Liberian-American hybrid identity. Individuals refused to accept their new homeland and lived outside of U.S. society instead waiting for their chance to emigrate back to Liberia, ultimately marginalizing themselves from American society. Individuals also became marginalized into a liminal existence living as neither an American nor a Liberian. This liminal space was embraced by various participants to create a new transnational identity in which an individual maintained social, cultural, and political ties in more than one country creating a flexible citizenship (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1990; Humphries, 2009; Ong, 1999; Smalls, 2014). These individuals fully adhered to Glick Schiller and Fouron's (1990) definition of transnationals as "migrants who are fully encapsulated neither in the host-society nor in their native land, but who nonetheless remain active participants in the social settings of both locations. They construct their identities in relation to both societies" (p. 330).

This identity became more tangible in the discussion of community organizations that conducted local and transnational development projects. Although the impact of one's national sense of belonging was important in that it provided a belief in where one's home was and the community to which an individual belonged, beyond the macro-level national community, participants expressed their notion of belonging with respect to their racial, ethnic, and regional identities as well.

However, the findings of this dissertation do agree with prior research about the ascription of racial identification that “lumps heterogeneous ‘immigrant’ students, or lump Black immigrants U.S.-Born Black students together” (Smalls, 2014, p. 20). In school and judicial situations the participants identified this conflation of identities with respect to the superordinate category of “Black.” With this conflation came the negative ascription of stereotypes associated with non-Whites in the United States, and led some students to fall into the cycle of poverty directly associated with such stereotypes. However, the participants when confronted with issues of race in the community spoke less of issues of being seen as Black or inferior to Whites rather they emphasized African Americans as the group continually subordinating the Liberian community.

As a result of the treatment by Black Americans, the Liberian community created stronger ethnic and regional bonds to strengthen the walls of their own community. Similar to Chacko’s (2013) study of Ethiopians, the Liberians in southwest Philadelphia emphasized the “physical and mental recognition of a community of co-ethnics and the invisible bonds that this identification engendered” (p. 501). This emphasis on ethnic affinity, while normative for immigrant enclaves, was a particularly salient issue in the Liberian community due to the civil war. Because of the concern over emphasizing ethnic animosities individuals focused their attention on their regional bonds. Thus, while the relational bonds that formed the Liberian community are similar to Chacko’s (2013) study, the rational for such bonds to exist differed. Rather than race as the main area of differentiation between the dominant and immigrant group creating alternative rallying points of community, Liberians sought to strengthen their community to alleviate tensions with their African American neighbors and their own ethnic tensions within their community. Additionally, the Liberian participants

contrasted with the Liberians in Small's (2014) study as she stated that "for some African newcomers, cultural belonging becomes almost contingent on racial belonging," (p. 22) whereas, in this study cultural belonging was contingent on the maintenance of Liberian culture rather than assimilation into American society.

Cultural Differences of the United States and Liberia

This research contributes to existing literature that focuses on the adoption of the cultural mores of America as one of the main sites of contestation for immigrants and, in particular, for successive generations (Chacko, 2003, Rong & Brown, 2001; Waters, 1994). The respondents in this dissertation emphasized the role that cultural differences had in creating spaces of conflict and cohesion within the Liberian community. In particular, the family unit and issues of gender equality became salient throughout the interview process. Through these topics the findings suggested that these Liberians assimilated, acculturated, and adapted to American culture with varying degrees of success and acceptance by their surrounding community (Daniel, 1993; Portes & Zhou, 1993). This research contributes to the existing field by emphasizing that while the ways in which individuals adopted American culture or maintained Liberian culture tended to follow previous models, the outcome of such interactions did not always conform to previously suggested positive outcomes (Gans, 1992; Rong & Brown, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Shephard, 2008; Smalls, 2014).

As a site of community harmony, Liberian culture, its values, and mores served to bond members together through a shared unique heritage. The discussion by participants of behaviors such as food practices and deference to one's elders highlighted the necessity of maintaining cultural traditions to strengthen the community. As individuals began to assimilate into American culture, had they lost sight of the basic practices of food and

deference, they began to distance themselves from their friends, family, and community (Daniel, 1993; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Although assimilation into the dominant culture is not in and of itself a negative thing, many of the participants believed that adopting American values would sever ties to the community that could not be mended. Rather than assimilate into American culture, the optimal outcome of this cultural interaction for many participants was to acculturate such that an individual had dominant cultural traits coexisting simultaneously with one's own heritage. Additionally, rather than coexistence of cultural values, some individuals adapted the two dominant cultures in their life, Liberian and American in this case, to create a new unique culture. Interestingly, many of the women in this group opted to simultaneously acculturate and adapt with their surroundings.

Fiona, Tami, Megan, Zelda, Kim, Sarah, and Daisy all emphasized the maintenance of their cultural traditions through song and dance. They believed that it was necessary for all generations to know about the songs and dances of their tribes and regions to connect them with their ancestral homeland regardless of if they were born in Liberia or America. These women exhibited a "nostalgic citizenship," borrowing the term from Smalls (2014), which caused individuals and the community to grab hold of their heritage as part of forming a unified community. The practices of these women also highlighted the notion put forth by Gans (1992) of "accommodate[ing] dominant-society norms while retaining strong ties to their respective ethnic groups" (in Chacko, 2003, p. 493). They continued to reaffirm and distribute knowledge of their ancestral culture and of their devastating past in an effort to build community. As such, these women were using the space provided to them in their enclave and with the help of the Philadelphia Anthropological Group to have their Liberian culture coexist within an American space, and thus acculturate their youth to both American

and Liberian ways. However, it is the adaptation of these two cultures that created the most robust cultural constructions.

The Liberian Women's Musical Group for Community Advocacy emphasized the Western ideas regarding gender equality towards the goal of empowering women to protect themselves and their children from Gender Based Violence. These women were exhibiting an adaptation of American ideas of gender equality where the ideas were diffused throughout the community via their cultural concerts, thus merging the two cultures to create a new unique Liberian-American cultural organization. This adaptation was a form of post-colonial hybridity in which the hybrid culture was being used to break down the gender hierarchies found throughout the community by spreading empowering knowledge regarding the rights of women and children (Bhabha, 1994; Daniel, 2001; Saleeby, 2002). Thus, these women further emphasized the importance of studying the ways in which immigrants were understanding their old and new worlds as they redefined themselves and their environments. However, while the work that these women were doing was uplifting and community changing, there were some participants that saw the cultural interactions as for the worse, providing a counter point to the positive association of cultural mixings fostering change.

The findings also suggested that the acculturation and adaptation of American culture by some immigrants could also lead to the assimilation of successive generations and create issues of negative marginalization (Daniel, 1993; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rong & Brown, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). As successive generations in the Liberian community became assimilated into American culture and adopted American values, participants suggested that this adoption led to community exclusion as the younger generations broke away from their family and community. These results continue the findings of Rong and

Brown (2001) that suggested the strength of attachment to successive generation's cultural heritages reduces with each generation. However, the adoption of an American identity was not a foregone conclusion for all immigrant youth similar to Chacko's (2013) study of Ethiopian's in Washington D.C. which found that despite intense pressure to conform to American values, the second-generation participants solely maintained their Ethiopian identity. According to the participants of this research, by assimilating to American culture and withdrawing from their Liberian peers, some youth were actively marginalizing themselves as they became absorbed into the dominant society. The interactions of cultures created issues for successive generations such that education while a tool of empowerment was further breaking apart the Liberian community whether indirectly or directly.

Although education may be the predominant reason that individuals and families elected to stay in the United States despite maintaining Liberian citizenship, this research suggests that the education system also marginalized students even if unintentionally. With the complete breakdown of the Liberian education system in the last twenty years many participants had opted to stay in the United States believing that an American education presented the best available opportunity for themselves and their children. However, many students encountered a situation similar to the one described by Traore (2004) in which students were constantly shown a lack of respect by their peers and even their teachers through outlandish questions about Africa, highlighting a complete lack of understanding of their background and abilities, and an overall negative view of their accents and immigrant status (p. 357-358). Because of this situation, many Liberian youth chose to neglect school and focus on regaining their lost respect, and for many this path led them to gang life or a life of crime, as reported by the participants. As such, while the education system was

empowering in its ability to provide the opportunity for children from developing countries to fulfill their ultimate potential, the double edged sword was that without the right encouragement from families or schools the education system became a conveyor belt for the prison industrial complex, as suggested by participants.

These ideas suggest that Torney-Purta et. al (2001) were correct in their assertion that young people are "active constructors of their own ideas, as people whose everyday experiences in their homes, school and communities influences their sense of citizenship" (p. 21). When not adequately supported at home or school the issues of identity as discussed above became less relevant as youth became engaged in an internal battle of self-worth in addition to an attempt to identify where they fit in with their community. As discussed by participants, when the educational system failed youth then their paths aligned with sentiments suggested by Rong and Brown (2001) which highlight the role that community organizations have in contributing to the success of second-generation Black immigrants. Should youth neglect the role that community organizations have in the maintenance of cultural and community cohesion, then they are much more likely to become further removed from the community as a whole. However, if students remain active participants in their community organizations then they are much more likely to continue to be positively contributing members of the community.

Community Organizations as Sites of Empowerment and Agency

This research suggests that in the Liberian enclave in southwest Philadelphia there was a thriving civil society that "involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals,

make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable" (Diamond, 1994, p. 545). Through the various community organizations Liberians were able to maintain their cultural heritage while simultaneously empowering individuals, families, and the community as a whole to become active participants in creating change not only in their immediate local community, but also at the national level in America and in Liberia. These findings highlight that it was through community organizations that the interviewed Liberians found a sense of security and belonging leading towards community cohesion (Rosaldo, 2004). In particular, through the three types of organizations discussed, the structure of civil society was able to develop and utilize the skills and talents of the local community for productive purposes to create a sense of community and provide for their own livelihoods as creators of change and their own futures (Sayndee, 2009). Additionally, the information discussed with regards to the community organizations emphasized the dialectic between identity and community involvement similar to Sfard and Watson's (2005) assertion that "identity features prominently whenever one addresses the question of how collective discourses shape personal worlds and how individual voices combine into the voice of a community" (p. 15). Cultural organizations directly impacted the empowered identities created through the maintenance of Liberian culture for specific ethnic groups, and also, for Liberian identities as a whole.

Through the inclusion and support of each ethnic group, dialect, and the collective experiences of Liberians, the Liberian Women's Musical Group for Community Advocacy called community members to believe in their unique self-worth. By emphasizing the "right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense" the LWMGCA promoted the acceptance of difference thereby contributing to the empowerment of the community

(Rosaldo, 1994, p. 402). Additionally, the promotion of gender equality and spreading of knowledge towards the goal of creating change in the community suggests this group was the definition of an empowering group. According to Saleeby (2002), empowerment means:

> believing that people are capable of making their own choices and decisions. It means not only that human beings possess the strength and potential to resolve their own difficult life situations, but also that they increase their strength and contribute to the wellbeing of society by doing so. (p. 110)

The women of the LWMGCA exemplified this definition of empowering individuals because they strove to not only help community members, but also, to allow them to handle future challenges by themselves, thus creating a sense of agency within each individual. The actions taken by the LWMGCA had a similar impact on the community as the United Citizen's Group for Nimba County Residents and the Liberian Philadelphia Association.

All three groups, and other similar groups in the community, focused on the ability of community members to become the makers of their own destiny and to be able to understand their own power to create change. Thus the "capacity of individuals to act think and act independently, make choices and impose those choices upon the world" is of the utmost importance for these groups (Mutisi, 2012, p. 101). The findings of this research support the acceptance of these ideas by community members given that individuals such as Anthony, Harold, and Sam were all acting out their agency via a "consciousness of the potential to take action, the willingness to take collective action, and the knowledge and willingness to change social structures" (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 318).

Changing how Americans view Liberians

The cultural and aid organizations described above all led to an unintended consequence such that the cultural programs that existed fostered more than just cultural and

community pride, they were also a means for the U.S. to see Liberian culture and to expand Americans' understandings of foreign cultures. According to Tina, the LWMGCA singing events were almost always attended by multiple people that were not from Liberia and had limited knowledge of Liberian culture prior to the events. These newcomers were attending the events because the Philadelphia Anthropological Group were the sponsor and they wanted to see what other unique cultures were being showcased by the PAG. While there are limitations to this logic, given that those that were the most close-minded were the least likely to attend such an event, the potential for expanding knowledge of a particular culture existed within this model of cultural maintenance. As Americans came to see a culture to which they had not been previously introduced, there was an increased likelihood that they would discuss what they saw with others and thus Liberian culture could slowly spread. Additionally, PAG's monthly magazine showcased multiple ethnic or national groups and provided readers the chance to learn about other groups than their own. Moreover, the cultural organizations helped explain the foreign cultures while also providing the historical context for mass migration to the United States, which may have helped decrease anti-immigrant sentiment. The historical context of migration allows other groups to further understand the disparate situation from which immigrants, and in particular refugees, come from, and decreasing anti-immigrant sentiment can further improve the perception of certain groups as they see those groups being increasingly self-sufficient.

Similarly, the aid organizations and their emphasis on self-empowerment may cast off the negative perception of immigrants, and refugees in particular, as living solely off of government resources. By remaining self-reliant in the efforts of these communities to help out their neighbors, these organizations were reducing stereotypes of immigrants as being a

leech on the U.S. government. This may have a positive impact on issues of national and racial identity, as groups seen to be more self-reliant have historically been deemed more acceptable as Americans. And more acceptance may lead to more integration, creating a positive feedback loop for the ability of individuals to give back to their community.

Summary of Theoretical Implications

The data suggests that while cultural assimilation may be how cultural interactions have historically occurred, a shift may be occurring in which immigrants are holding steadfast to their cultural heritage and merging it with the dominant culture rather than altogether relinquishing their own. In an attempt to retain their Liberian cultural heritage, many community members were participating in community organizations that empowered them to make a difference in their local and transnational communities. This newfound sense of agency in one's life was a byproduct of the exchange of cultural values as individuals became immersed in American culture while still holding on to their own. Although the outcome of this exchange was not always perceived as positive, overwhelmingly the interviewees viewed their transformed identities as increasing their ability to create positive change. Rather than fully assimilating into American culture these immigrants selectively chose which attributes to merge with their own heritage in an effort to create a new hybrid set of individual and community values. These findings promote the notion that alternative cultures should not only be accepted, but embraced, because through this process unique and transformative manifestations of culture can occur to empower individuals and the community.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Further Research

As ever-increasing numbers of immigrants come to the United States for a variety of reasons it is necessary to continue to understand the ways in which immigrant individuals and communities are negotiating their daily lives as they interact with dominant society. Government sponsored immigration organizations, though not discussed in this research, are a staple part of the immigration process and with government sponsorship comes the necessity to understand how immigrants are acclimating to their new surroundings. This research contributes to such notions by interviewing members of the Liberian community across generations and across Liberian differences. Furthermore, federal funding for projects for non-governmental organizations is predicated on the knowledge generated in qualitative studies such as this. With the acknowledgement that the United States still remains a racialized society, understanding the ways in which Black immigrants maneuver their identities while remaining conscious of the pre-existing conditions of their new homeland helps to distinguish the activities that can help immigrant communities. Rather than creating policies that combine the experiences of African-American U.S. born Blacks and those of Black immigrants, research such as this helps to distinguish how policies need to acknowledge these differential experiences.

With regards to implications on the daily interactions and practices of Americans as a whole, this research contributes to the acknowledgement that immigrant groups are not criminal, welfare sucking, free loaders. These negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media, and even presidential candidates, do not serve any productive purpose. As such, this research completely rejects those notions and highlights how the Liberian community in southwest Philadelphia at the time of this research was self-efficacious through empowering

organizations that instilled a sense of agency in individuals to promote positive changes in their world. As the negative stereotypes of Liberians as immigrants have been shown to be false, this research can contribute to defining the positive attributes associated with communities of color.

As research continues to look at the ways in which immigrants fit into American society, there needs to be a stronger push towards understanding the lives of refugees. Refugee situations are still a constant struggle throughout the world, as can be seen by the current four million Syrian refugees worldwide as a result of their almost decade long civil war (CIA Factbook – B). The precarious nature of the lives of refugees being thrust into new spaces of identity making and livelihood construction must continually be researched so to best understand the ways in which host nations can most effectively and efficiently help those in need. These same sentiments extend to immigrants who migrate voluntarily. With the ever-growing population and notion of the American melting pot, their needs to be a shift in policy and the ways Americans treat new comers, but these shifts will only occur through the diffusion of research such as this. Lastly, by combining the distinct theoretical models of hybridity, marginality, and liminality with the cultural interactive theories of assimilation, acculturation, and adaptation through the lens of empowerment and agency this research attempts to create new ways of understanding the spaces in which immigrants, refugees, and their civil societies live in abstraction and in their tangible day to day world.

In the future, my goal is to continue this research through a cross comparative study by interviewing individuals living in Liberia to gauge if the findings presented herein can be reproduced outside of the United States. Questions such as how have Liberian identities changed since the civil war? And, what were the processes through which these changes

occurred? Who or what are the key actors and organizations that influence the change of Liberian identities? And, what impact has the exodus of Liberians living in American for the past twenty years had on Liberian society? Answering questions such as this would allow for a study to understand much more deeply the lasting effects that violent conflicts have on a country and those that call that country home.

Limitations

This research was conducted over the course of eight weeks in Philadelphia, and with more time it would have been possible to interview more participants and more leaders of organizations. While I feel the sample size has provided for robust findings, any increase in the total participants would only serve to further enhance the reliability of results. Along these lines, a majority of the participants are from Nimba County which is a result of my initial interaction with some key informants at a Liberian Women's Music Group concert. These informants were from Nimba County and invited me to events for the United Citizen's Group of Nimba County Residents. As such, through snowball sampling I met a majority of Nimba residents during my time in Philadelphia. It should be noted that according to the participants, the majority of Liberian residents in southwest Philadelphia were from Nimba County. Additionally, through an increased number of participants I would have been able to interview more second generation participants. This would allow for another level of analysis for the study, and also make some of the claims with respect to generational differences by the older participants become more concrete.

Conclusion

The importance of these findings is to counter any stereotypes or notions of immigrants as complacent members of the American community that use American resources without contributing to the greater good of the world around them. Rather, many, if not all, participants were making sure that they gave back to the country from which they came, and to the country in which they resided at the time of the interview. By highlighting the role that these individuals played in their community organizations and towards the betterment of their surrounding community, this research further developed the understanding of what factors contributed to the development of an individual's sense of identity and counters the notion that race is the primary factor affecting the daily lives of Black immigrants. Rather, the necessity to feel they were making use of the opportunities provided for them while living in the United states seemed to be the main overarching factor as to how individuals acted, perceived themselves, perceived others, and interacted with their community. Although all participants did not agree on the outcomes of such actions, the research suggests that individuals were passionate about creating change as they adopted or discarded aspects of American culture and society and transformed their identities within situated contexts of interaction.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

- Please tell me the story of how you and your family came to the United States?
  - When will the rest of your family come to the U.S.?
  - How come the rest of your family has not yet come to the U.S.?
- What experiences had you had with Americans before coming to the United States?
- What kinds of expectations did you have of what life would be like in America?
  - How have those expectations differed from the experiences you have had in the U.S?
- What are some of the major changes that have occurred in your family's life since coming to the United States?
- How is America better or worse than life in Liberia?
- When you talk to people back in Liberia, how do you describe America to them?
- How have your beliefs about your Liberia changed since you came to America?
- How has Liberia changed since you come to America?
- How do you identify yourself to people outside of the Liberian community?
- And, how do you identify yourself to people within the Liberian community?
- How does your ethnic heritage and identity affect your daily life?
  - How do you make sure that your family is aware of their heritage?
  - How do they continue the cultural practices of your ethnic group?
- How do ethnic tensions still exist in the Liberian community here in the US?
- When you talk to people back in Liberia, how would you describe your community?
- How is this description different when talking to people in America?
- How does your community bring you closer to Liberia?
  - How does your community make you feel like more of an American?
- What are some of the community organizations and groups that you or your family and friends are active in?
  - How does these organizations help you and your community?
- What are some of the ways in which you feel you give back to your community?
- What are some of the ways in which you feel you give back to America?
- Which do you feel a stronger connection to: your ethnic group, to Liberia, or to America?
  - How do these three things create tension?
- What does being American mean to you?
- What do you think of when you think of America?
  - Has this changed over the time you have lived here?
- How does being Liberian affect the way Americans treat you and your family?
- Why did you decide to become an American citizen?
- Have you been able to go back to Liberia?
  - If so, how often?
- How can the people around you change Liberia for the better?
- Would you like to move back to Liberia or stay in the United States? How come?

- What questions do you have for me?

Community Leaders (additional questions to the one's above)

- Please tell me how you became involved in your organization and the role that your organizations has in the community.
- What would you say are the strengths of your organization in how it affects the community and beyond?
- If you could create your own organization what would it be and why?
- I understand that there are a lot of organizations out there, but how do organizations in your community create change?
- What does it mean to you to be an effective leader in your community?
- What do you think the next generation of community leaders will focus on as they attempt to create change?