

EYE/I AND EYES/WE: REFLEXIVITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN
AFRICAN GLOCAL VISUAL AND AUTO ETHNOGRAPHY

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EYE/I AND EYES/WE: REFLEXIVITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN
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This dissertation aims to explore West African transnational experiences in order to further understand how identity markers and politics manifest anxieties for transnational migrants and their movements between America and Africa. It engages and expands contemporary understandings of transnationalism with a focus on generational migrants. Generational migrants are defined as 1.5 through second-generation offspring of African immigrants. For the purposes of this research, "1.5-generation" is defined as an individual who was born in Africa and spent most of their lives in America, while "second-generation" is used to connote an individual who was born in America to African parents. Reflexivity, intersubjectivity, as well as identity negotiation and/or "code switching" are explored to explicate the experiences of generational migrants. Influenced by the theories and arguments of Stuart Hall, John Arthur, Joanna D'Alisera, W. E. B. Dubois, Pnina Motzafi-Haller, Audre Lorde, and Chandra Mohanty, this dissertation argues for a multiplicity and fluidity of identity (i.e.: holding multiple and sometimes contrary communities while constantly moving between continents), but also I am advocating for the possibility of fluidity in the reflexivity as one moves between these identity markers to create epistemological questions, constitute authorship, and expand representation. This argument is explored in each chapter via problematizing familial structures, African Fashion, ethnographic filmmaking, and auto-ethnographic writing. These contributions will transform the conceptualizations of African diasporic identities from one that is historically limited by bicultural formation into one that asserts the complexity of diasporic consciousness, which will construct new texts.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

For Nadia Sasso, the connection to the African Diaspora has always been strong. Born in America to Sierra Leonean immigrant parents, Sasso is a leader in establishing social and entrepreneurial connections across cultures and fostering civic responsibility. Her recent film *Am I: Too African to be American, Too American to be African* has been featured in media platforms, such as *Centric*, *Jet*, *The Huffington Post*, *Blavity*, *The ColorLines*, *OkayAfrica*, *Black Enterprise*, *AfroPunk* and has been recognized by film festivals nationally and internationally. She is changing the conversation on what it means to be African and American in America and on the continent via the digital landscape.

She has leveraged her background in diversity, marketing, communications, and new media across notable stages including The White House, The Smithsonian, and Universities all over the world. Through her entrepreneurial ventures along with her passion of making connections she has worked with Issa Rae, Luvvie Ajayi, Jose Antonio Vargas, Viacom, Nielson, UBS, Peace Corps and the United Nations.

Sasso has a dual Bachelor's degree in English and Sociology from Bucknell University where she was a Posse scholar. She has a Master's degree in American Studies with a certification in Documentary Film from Lehigh University as well as a Master's degree in Africana Studies from Cornell University. Sasso pursued her PhD in Africana Studies with a minor in Film Studies from Cornell University.

To the hard work and dedication of my very first teachers, Siah and Abdul Sasso

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Communities: Sierra Leonean Community, *The Am I: The Film* crew and cast, and *Shades: The DMV* crew and cast.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: TRANSNATIONAL ANXIETY IN AFRICAN GLOBAL POLITICS

Dissertation Synopsis

The dissertation title “Eye/ I and Eyes/ We: Reflexivity and Intersubjectivity in African Glocal Visual and Auto-Ethnography” threads together the themes of: *Migration, Language, Code Switching, Beauty Ideals, Community, Transnational Anxiety, and Gender*. The “Eye” is the point of view, as in what one looks at and how one looks inward which varies depending on the local. The “I” is both singular and plural-containing both the individual person as well as the communal consciousness. “Eyes” includes the audience, viewers, and participants when it comes to visual ethnography. “We” includes the shared authority between self and community and audience reception.

At the helm of this dissertation both intersectionality and transnationality problematize and allow for the development of new theories and social fields since transnational communities are challenging entrenched notions such as culture, community, space, and society. This dissertation not only argues for a multiplicity and fluidity of identity construction (i.e., holding multiple and sometimes contrary communities while constantly moving between continents), but also advocates for the possibility of fluidity in the reflexivity as generational migrants move between these identity markers to create epistemological questions, constitute authorship, and expand representation. Audiences experience the African intersections through places and time as well as multiple concepts, disciplines and forms of written text. Additionally, as a researcher, image-maker, viewer, and a generational migrant, I offer a toolkit of research concepts— from

polyphonic fashion objects to language, analysis identity. As a result, I utilize African fashion, film and ethnography as devices to aid in negotiating the relationships mentioned above as well as global tensions in effort of community building. The relationship of generational migrants to the country of origin vis-a-vis the country of settlement results in the abandonment of theories that promote polarity and marginality in the African diaspora (Levitt 2001; Kamanda 2004). Hence, the goal is to develop a more nuanced understanding of the way generational migrants and Sierra Leoneans are socialized to adhere and personify particular identities.

Subsequent chapters are structured as follows. Chapter 2, *Living in a "Post Westphalian Era: Complexities Inherent in Identity Formations and Citizenship of African Immigrants to the United States* looks closely at the institution and influence of family in order to discuss the "benefits" and "costs" that are associated with the interface of various identities based on socio-geographic spaces in Africa and the United States. Through the lenses of the familial structures, one can situate the adjustments and adaptations in transnational political involvement, racial and ethnic identities, gender relations, and financial responsibility. The common characteristics of the African family analyzed include: mate selection and marriage, multiple marriage systems, childbearing, gender roles, and intergenerational relationships. There are multiple layers of engagement by individuals, families, and associations with the country of origin ranging from the pragmatic to the most symbolic (Kamanda 2004). Thus aside from the positive signs of the presence of associations within the community, there are also the roles played, for instance, by the grandmothers and the more senior women (Kamanda 2004). The grandmothers fulfill the social role of persons to be consulted for advice on a whole range of issues especially by the younger members (Kamanda 2004). Additionally, they play a crucial role in the socialization of children into valid ethnic or tribal values (Kamanda 2004). Transnationalism, as grounded in the

daily lives, activities and social relationships of the social actors, includes a progressive cultural and social construction of the Mende person (Kamanda 2004). The elaborate celebrations of the life-cycle events may be occasions for negotiating and mobilizing social capital both in the country of settlement and in the land of origin (Kamanda 2004). The study helps in expanding knowledge of the different types of capital at work within these communities (Kamanda 2004).

To further explain, in this chapter the “Eye” is how one views the self in different contexts. The “I” is about 80/90%, and the “We” is 20/10% in the familial context. The effort to identify the knowledge that varies between but not within large cultural groups has led to the conceptualization of cultural knowledge in terms of very general constructs, such as individualistic as opposed to collectivist value orientations, apply to all aspects of life (Hong, Ying-Yi, et al 2009). The “We” also represents the Settlement dynamics, communities that have been created based on a continuum of ethnicity, nationality, region, and larger Diasporas. The “Eyes” is the audience participation of that outside of the diaspora or Americans and their reception/ perception of these different cultural dynamics. For instance, “I” is prioritized over the “We,” and as migrants try to maintain the “We” / family dynamic, the individual struggles to balance the anxieties and difficulties that may arise. Although one person migrates literally, the migration is symbolically plural; meaning the institution of family travels within the individual. The embedded cultural assumption of responsibility for family implies that when an individual migrates and attempts to pull him/herself up by their bootstraps in the United States, one is never solely lifting one’s self.

Chapter 3, *African Fashion as a Medium for Analyzing The Identity Narrative of Generational Migrants* tells multiple stories about Africa’s cultures and customs from all 54 countries as well those within the new African diaspora. The new African diaspora includes

those who are African descent dispersed worldwide: migrants and generational migrants from the mid 20th century onwards. We often hear about the West mimicking or echoing African fashion. However, the research is concerned with how "we," as in members of the diaspora, define African fashion and what stories designers and image-makers tell with their products. African fashion is clothing and textiles that showcase the culture and identity of African people. I chose African fashion rather than music to give cultural context given the physicality and visibility of its nature.

The "Eye" in this chapter includes the consumer, producer, image-maker, and designer. The "I" is the wearer and a representative culture, tradition, and knowledge. The "Eyes" represent the global stage, folks that dictate what fashion is and is not, a visual echo of "do I see or wear the colonizer." The "We" is a representation of the diaspora. The multiple perspectives reflective of the African fashion collective and the individual impact textile production and the wearing of cloth that re-inscribes a sense of self and culture. The communal refers to the object itself and the individual as in the "I" who made it and who wears it. However, the line between the thing and creator, or object and subject is often blurred or divided and sometimes both. An example of when this happens is when the image maker is of the continent and creates images that fit a trend rather than focus on meaning and history to make such images a teachable moment. Primarily, this chapter of the thesis examines the issue of African identity within the local and global context of a broader set of African cultural traits to understand the use and production of African fashion, its benefits and costs, and the role of design and consumption on the continent and throughout the diaspora.

Chapter 4, *Visual Autoethnography: The Role and Presence of Reflexivity and Inter-subjectivity* analyze how *Am I: the Film* [1]enhances the process of recovering and conveying my

collaborators' voices in the context of the gendered and racial stereotypes that widely circulate and attach to diasporic subjects. The chapter explores how reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and autoethnography "play out" in the use of visual media. In *Am: I the Film* the lines between subject and object of study are blurred because I am both the creator of the image and participant in how the said image is curated. As both an image creator, who shares her authorial voice, and as a character that responds to that voice, I create a multiplicity of consciousness. I intentionally walked this line to not only showcase those layers but also to spearhead an honest conversation on identity politics within my community. Doing so was an execution of reflexivity, where I'm contributing to the context of knowledge construction in my immigrant community. This consciousness affects my "eye" as the filmmaker and my "I" as the multidimensional positionality. This consciousness also impacts the communal we vs. us because I am not only thinking about my personal story but those in my family, as well as the broader scope and impact of the project itself. Both the "Eye" and "I" in this chapter are the Filmmaker, producer, ethnographer, editor, director, or perceived authority. The "Eyes" is the Audience participation and perception. The "We" is the Participant and image creator. Essentially, this chapter encapsulates the construction of spheres of negotiated authority between researcher and subject as well as the creation of polyphonic spaces of communication that explicitly or implicitly allow the practice of reflexivity.

In Chapter 5, *Free or Not Free in Freetown, Sierra Leone*, I illustrate my time in Sierra Leone conducting field research where I felt free of my racial identity but dejectedly constricted by gender. I presented my lived experience as a Sierra Leonean and American woman to deflect the critical voices that argue that I may need more facts, supported theory and "truths" to authenticate my ethnography. I struggled with my time in the field as well as articulating my

experiences for an academic audience. "I" was worried about the "eyes" that would assess my work and if my experiences as "I" would be valid. In this chapter, I use my personal experiences to problematize canonized depictions of identity and social reality by merging categories of native/non-native, insider/outsider, subject/object, and researcher/ subject. In this research, I locate myself and others in the "I, eye, we, and eyes" to expand, understand and discuss anxieties around identity in a glocal context.

[1] *Am I The Film*: www.amithethefilm.com

Relevance of Study

What does it mean to say one is from a single place with roots elsewhere, and how does that assertion contribute to patriotism and identity formation? Do anthropologists limit their inquiry regarding the identity of generational migrants to a single country of residence? And if so, are they minimizing the experiences of an individual and a community? In fact, several theorists isolate their research around diaspora to one community/one nation/one ethnic group; for example Dr. Kamanda only reviewed the Mende in Washington DC, and did not examine their experiences or experiences of similar communities in Sierra Leone, or the generational migrants linked to the Sierra Leonean, Mende community in the Washington Metropolitan area (Kamanda 2004). Thus, researchers tend not to take into account the frequent movement the same group or of generational migrants (1.5 through second-generation offspring of immigrants) who want to explore as well as connect to a place of origin.

Theorists such as Kamanda argue that studying specific ethnic groups in new locations, which are not their place of origin, tends to jeopardize the practices of Anthropology. Anthropologist Appadurai states, "As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects, the ethno in ethnography takes on a slippery, non-

localized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond” (Appadurai 2010; Fox 1991; D’Alisera 2004; Kamanda 2004). It is not enough to limit the study to how group identities are ruptured in anthropological practices. I expand this argument to include generational migrants on an individual level given that the individuals comprise the group. Groups and individuals are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historical unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous (Appadurai 2010; Kamanda 2004).

In the context of West African and more specifically Sierra Leonean transmigrants, shared values were created to develop one's cultural identity. Community is a social construct brought into being by the deliberate and conscious choices of actors (Kamanda 2004). The community’s foundation is composed of nostalgic references of events, places, objects, processes, and people, which do not always provide a solid foundation. It is not just enough that the actors have memories of certain events, places, persons, and processes from the homeland, but a shared interpretation of what those realities mean for them can exist (Kamanda 2004). The parents and grandparents operate from this ideology mentioned above and diligently work to share this with their offspring referred to as generational migrants. Thus, the reproduction of community in a transnational context is founded on interpretations of reality, making generational migrants multi-dimensional individuals.

This perspective on community recognizes that the sharing of physical space in and of itself does not necessarily represent the presence of community (Kamanda 2004, Rapport 2002). Sierra Leoneans, who share space with other nationals, even if transnationally located, does not always equate to the Sierra Leonean community (Kamanda 2004, Rapport 2002). Instead, a community is given meaning through strategically performed activities, symbols, and processes (Kamanda 2004, Rapport 2002). Kamanda neglects to address how the shifts in geographical

placement, however temporary or permanent, transform the performance of these activities, the interpretation of these symbols and processes, as well as ambiguities of the lived connections.

The Anxieties Expressed About *Am I: The Film* Release

Transitional anxieties evoke a misapprehension of race, ethnicity, or ethnocentric realization. These social constructs allow individuals to create, assign, and respond to “chosen” identities. They all contain social, political, and economic implications. However, I did not realize the need for such conversations and understanding until releasing *Am I: The Film* in 2015. The response to the film worldwide reveals the harsh reality of racial and ethnic tensions and the struggle to understand African diasporic identities. The battle highlights the need to change the way relationships are built, fostered and established across the African diaspora.

The comments from social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as well as online magazine and blogs in the appendix not only showcase transnational anxieties but also they show a need for more constructive conversations around multidimensional narratives of Blackness. As the image creator and participant of this film, I am not saying that this film controls every perspective or every conversation that needs to occur, but it is a start. While there have been films that touch upon the concepts of generational migrants such as Nikyatu Jusu’s short film *African Booty Scratcher*, this project does not build upon the work of other filmmakers; however, it does work in conversation with films such as *Bound* by Peres Owino which was also released in 2015. Each of these projects only touch upon aspects of *Am I: The Film*.

After releasing this film and interacting with thousands of people in live screenings and online forums including social media, I realized the potential to answer and form new epistemological questions in regards to the identity anxieties of generational migrants in the

United States and Sierra Leone. While the feedback and response were always unique, I was shocked that while in attendance of the screening in Accra, Ghana, and Freetown, Sierra Leone there remained the same intense conversations around the subject matter and its application to the location. I am excited to share the insights I have explored and garnered while pursuing this study.

Concept to Context

The experiences reflected in the film and expressed in the commentary allow for this dissertation to review and build upon the following themes:

Migration

Am I: The Film explores the history of African migration to the U.S. via the oral histories of the participants (Sasso 2014). Although the majority of the participants were born in the United States of America, thus, telling the story of their parent's migration, there was one person born in West Africa who migrated at an early age (Sasso 2014). Furthermore, many of the participants' parents migrated in search of new educational and economic opportunities. Coming to the United States of America, establishing and living in close-knit communities are often the first steps in creating a transnational experience (Sasso 2014). This community also aided in their parents raising them with an African centered identity (Sasso 2014). The uniqueness of this migration process and transnational upbringing has left the participants in a space where they had no choice but to learn how to negotiate various identities (Sasso 2014).

Most interestingly, the women that reside in West Africa found that as much as they had a hard time negotiating their dual identity in the United States of America, they also had a hard time negotiating their identity on the continent in their respective countries (Sasso 2014). However, they found the process more rewarding at "home" in Africa because they were a part

of something bigger than themselves, thus making the image of "home' positive (Sasso 2014). In the end, the women revealed that they felt it was necessary to visit or to move back home to be able to celebrate, be proud of, and thus "rebrand" home.

Language

Many of the participants encountered linguistic bias in multiple areas such as: having an American accent when speaking the native language, "talking White," and speaking African American Vernacular English (Sasso 2014).

Code Switching

The various language obstacles translated into performing specific identities including being American, White, African American, Black, African, and the ethnicity of their respective countries (Sasso 2014). To maintain all of these multiple identities resulted in being teased (Sasso 2014). Almost everyone interviewed remembers being called an African booty scratcher as a child or adolescent (Sasso 2014). In addition to being teased for being African because of negative portrayals in the media, most of the women in the film were also scared of being associated with non-immigrant Blacks (Sasso 2014). For some, it was something their family had warned against given the negative media portrayals of Blacks (Sasso 2014). For others, being read as Black or African American was something they could not relate to because American Black communities were assumed to be without culture (Sasso 2014). Participants find themselves relating to the discriminatory racial and ethnic experiences of their counterparts, but they like to shy away from the negative attributes associated with "blackness" (Sasso 14). In United States of America, Blacks are criminalized and face stereotypes of being lazy and violent (Awokaya 2009; Sasso 2014).

The stage upon which such identity politics surfaces in United States of America is less about categories and classifications and more about performing race or ethnicity (Sasso 2014). "Identity" is not so much the issue (Sasso 2014). Instead, it is the politics by which identity must adhere to in the context of the rigid and plastic strategy known as identity politics (Sasso 2014). These discourses continue to restrict and flatten the complexity of identity. As such it not only affects the President of the United States but everyday citizens such as the women interviewed for this thesis *Am I: The Film* (Sasso 2014).

Beauty Ideals

The film discusses beauty ideals that include both hair and fashion. There are also shared perspectives on natural hair, weaves, colorism, African Fashion, and upholding western beauty to assimilate and succeed.

Community

The women of the film were comfortable talking about dating, marriage, and raising kids both in United States of America and West Africa, and how their dual identities affect or will affect that aspect of their lives (Sasso 2014). Many feel that the close-knit community they once knew to help with the identification process will no longer be around when they are ready to have kids (Sasso 2014). Those that live in West Africa with kids depend on the family-oriented community of their home country to help with all-around family life (Sasso 2014).

Transnational Anxiety

For many of the subjects growing up, the home was so African centered in the United States of America that many felt as though they had to choose the more dominant culture, in this case, American culture (Sasso 2014). This choice was necessary to acclimate themselves socially outside the home because they felt as though it clashed with teachings deemed

unacceptable to parents and family. This experience, known as the Transnational Circuit, "in which the distance between seemingly separable worlds, is brought into close juxtaposition, creating complex heterogeneities" (Rouse 1991; D'Alisera 2004; Sasso 2014). Thus, making many of my subjects transnationals; individuals that establish links between multiple sites, situating themselves exclusively in neither one nor the other, community and who can no longer be understood in terms of a single central orientation (D'Alisera 2004, Sasso 2014).

The concept of "transnationalism" has had parents viewing their children as strangers, as parents struggle to make those children familiar with national and cultural identities (D'Alisera 2004, Sasso 2014). They lament that their children, neither fully Sierra Leonean nor any other West African nationality, nor thoroughly American, do not know who they are—or who their parents are (D'Alisera 2004, Sasso 2014).

Gender

The majority of the cast are women. As the director strived to tell a story inspired by her grandmother and mother, it was intentional to interview women. Given the cultural, social, and political significance of the project, I found it imperative that women own their stories. Lastly, she wanted to inspire not only the African diaspora but also the women in the diaspora to highlight that women too have a voice need to be heard.

Research Objectives

The core interrelated objectives that underlie this study are the following:

1. To provide critical insights and an alternative conceptual framework based on the reflexive nature of ethnography, likely to positively influence the development and comprehension of identity politics;

2. To document generational migrants opportunities, processes of understanding self and community, strategies, as a basis for informing anxieties, to empower and improve their social negotiations and capabilities;
3. To appraise the actual and potential contributions of generational migrants in home and host country developments through family structures built and re-imagined, film, fashion, and life stories, thereby uncovering the pattern of reinvestment within the glocal home.

By imposing rhetoric with reality through ethnographic accounts of generational migrants, the study seeks to address identity negotiation and "code switching" to further understand identity anxieties and politics amongst transnational migrants. This approach also entails providing contextual accounts on modes of identification evinced throughout the diaspora that are excluded from scholarship on race and ethnicity, based on emic perspectives, to dispel incongruities and dissonances in priority and efforts to promote transformative conceptualizations of African diasporic identities.

Finally, considering the anxieties expressed by the majority of the generational migrants in the United States and Sierra Leone, I endeavor to encourage a culture understanding of identity fluidity, beyond the scope of this study. This dissertation draws attention to the support for multidimensional narratives of race and ethnicity as it relates to Blackness, an understanding of history and connectedness amongst Africans with an appreciation for difference, as well as the convergence of innovative practices in fashion, film, art, and academia. The intent is to reinforce the agency and capabilities of generational migrants to shape and affect policies and social practices that determine their understanding of self and aspirations without the pressure of performance and therefore wield positive impacts on their lives.

Research Questions

Five clusters of interrelated questions are included to frame this research. They also guide the data collection and subsequent data analysis in each chapter.

Settlement Practices

First, I explored how African immigrants created and sustained their communities and how this community building affects the assimilation process in the de-territorialized home. I also explored the reasoning for migration. I asked questions to generate answers as to where participants and their parents were born, their family dynamics, places they have resided when and why the description of community dynamics and where would they ultimately want to live and why. Additionally, settlement practices in Chapter 2: *Living in a "Post-Westphalian Era:" Complexities Inherent in Identity Formations and Citizenship of African Immigrants to the United States* are essential in dissecting family structures and patterns of migration.

Social Mobility

Second, I identified patterns and practices in social mobility from both a historical and contemporary perspective in comparison to host and home country born racial/ethnic groups. I asked participants to describe their social class standing and how it may have differed or stayed the same. Social mobility is evident in Chapter 3, *African Fashion as a Medium for Analyzing The Identity Narrative of Generational Migrants*.

Re-defining Ethnic Identity

Next, I examined the assimilation processes of African immigrants from an individual perspective via personal narratives. I asked participants to define themselves by race, ethnicity,

and culturally. I wondered what or how others might perceive them and how the places they have lived have affected their respective identities taking into account education, careers, cultural celebrations, upbringing, access to publications, fashion and beauty choices, dating any societal pressures. The redefining of ethnic identity is visible in Chapter 4, *Visual Autoethnography: The Role and Presence of Reflexivity and Inter-subjectivity*.

The Effects of Language, Religion, and Politics

Afterward, I analyzed how language, religious institutions, and political affiliation and knowledge affected the assimilation process for generational migrants. I asked participants what languages they spoke, if they had ever experienced linguistic bias, what their religious/ political beliefs, what policies did they follow or what policies impact their lives, how did any of the impact mentioned above their cultural identity? There is evidence of the effects of language, religion, and politics in Chapter 5, *Free or Not Free in Freetown, Sierra Leone*.

Transnational Identity Formation

Lastly, I explored the progression or lack thereof for generational migrants concerning politics, education, and income and the impact of immigration/returnee policies or politics. I asked them how their transnational identity affected them, where did they imagine themselves in the next ten years, and if it was vital for generational migrants to reach back to the home country. The reader can conceptualize the theme of transnational identity formation in every chapter. This framework is apparent in Chapter 1, *Transitional Anxiety in Glocal Politics*.

Assumptions Underlying this Study

Within the foundational themes of the dissertation, an initial hypothesis is that this study will establish and advocate for a multiplicity and fluidity of identity construction (i.e., holding multiple and sometimes contrary communities while always moving between continents). This argument is feasible given the strict and rigid theories of identity politics, and race/ ethnicity construction and performance. The present study underscores that generational migrants created transnational identities via language, culture, and acclimation. These multidimensional individuals often existed in contention with themselves--creating a polarizing effect on their identity formation. This content, although often dismissed, should be celebrated to establish fluidity and stability.

The institutional framework for theorizing identity anxieties intended for generational migrants has not worked effectively. Instead of a polarized and fixed structure when addressing such tensions, it useful to not only conceptualize their identities on a continuum of fluidity but also advocate for the possibility of fluidity in the reflexivity as one moves between these identity markers to create epistemological questions, constitute authorship, and expand representation. There is still room to improve upon the theories surrounding fieldwork that legitimize the researcher/scholar as well as his/her findings. This work is not necessarily innovative but it has yet to be put in to practice, and it is a reasonably flexible framework to allow for dynamic developments in academia and society at large. Adapting this approach in its entirety makes sense for utilizing the positive strengths of reflexivity in academia to celebrate the nuances of understanding race, ethnicity, or ethnocentric realization to empower individuals and their respective communities. Ethnocentric consciousness, explains how marginalized groups within the African American category (Johnston-Guerrero et al 2016) come to realize that their ethnicity

is not valued or represented within the larger racial group and therefore reject being identified as African American and advocate for the needs of their specific ethnic group (e.g., Sierra Leonean American/ Nigerian American).

The dissertation posits a change of practice from Dubois' double consciousness and even triple consciousness, whereby it limits those that do not fit the classification in its entirety. This study will address the theory and socially derived impediments preventing generational migrants from maximizing their full potential. The created transnational identities via language, culture, and acclimation often existed in contention with the individual establishing a polarizing effect on their identity formation and making space for both literary and cultural perspectives on the nexus of multi-dimensional and the self-yield a kaleidoscope of options, visions, and positions. Hence, this allows for the limitless potential for new patterns and narratives of identity. This contention while often dismissed, should be celebrated to establish fluidity and stability.

A shift of practice and paradigm toward academic fluidity is needed because it allows for more scholars to exercise innovative processes to develop and express a theory. In this case, building upon the renewed interest in personal narrative, in life history, and autobiography amongst anthropologists can provide a stronger foundation for enhancing texts of the multidimensional individual. This slow pace in shift in practice and paradigm is a result of the politics of difference wherein society values difference in and for itself rather than as a manifestation of something more constitutive. Both the United States and Sierra Leone, countries that take pride in its multicultural identity yet continues to oppress its minority groups through political, economic, and symbolic violence that concentrates on the critical representations of

both. Thus, acknowledging that the field is changing given the notions of postcolonial and postmodern society.

The concept of autoethnography reflects a changing conception of both the self and society. This concept enables access to both formal and informal sources of information, resources, and knowledge likely to enhance the understanding of generational migrants both in Sierra Leone and the United States. Moreover, such processes and collaborations ensuing from such reflexive texts may provide an empowering context for innovation, risk-taking, and creativity, likely to enhance the self-confidence and self-worth of the generational migrant and the image creator. It is imperative to inspire change considering the traditions exercised in the social and academic realms have proven to be barriers to innovation and change. This concept can catalyze academics in advancing their interests in the informal and formal social context. The role of image-makers of the diaspora can change the lenses in which we are viewed by controlling the narrative.

Contributions of the Study

The contributions of this study are theoretical and practical explanations of identity anxieties amongst generational migrants. First, this study contributes to a relatively sparse body of knowledge on generational migrants moving between the home and host country and more specifically the unique history of Freetown, Sierra Leone. This study illuminates the epistemological positions that can inform a better understanding of generational migrants identity development, inherent capabilities, and knowledge. Such insights can guide culturally informed policies that build and foster relationships across various industries in the African diaspora.

Additionally, the study generates insights on the pertinence of social learning as a strategy and framework for understanding personhood and identity development. It prompts new perspectives for taking stock of the psychosocial and cultural attributes of the social networks linked to generational migrants. It sheds light on how racial and ethnic consciousness and group membership impacted identity development among generational migrants who are intrinsically linked. The study extends the definition and conceptualization of racial and ethnic consciousness applied to generational migrants and identifies unique properties and assets likely to lessen identity anxieties. Such assets are conducive to expanding generational migrants personal and community development, their chosen identities, identity performance, and managing roles and expectations to understand the self.

- It highlights the need to expand double consciousness. Classical scholarship on African Americans, for instance, describes movement back and forth between “two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings, and two warring ideals” (DuBois 1903/1989). Bicultural individuals are people who have internalized two cultures to the extent that both cultures are alive inside of them. Many bicultural individuals report that the two internalized cultures take turns in guiding their thoughts and feelings (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). We are now moving beyond bi-cultural attributes to include multidimensional individuals because previous studies suggest that internalized cultures are not necessarily blended and absorbing a second culture involve replacing the original culture with the new one. We know that is not true via the experiences of generational migrants.
- This study enriches the conceptualization of code-switching. Code-switching isn't merely about language but also includes performance and dress.

- Provides emic and etic measurement of ethnic identity, as a construct deemed a necessity in sub-Saharan Africa. This theory may provide insight into the conceptualization of ethnic identity within the region.
- In-depth knowledge of aspects such as affluence, political climate, or intercultural relations may also be relevant for understanding the relationship between ethnic identity and psychological well-being.
- Contribution to positivist constructivist theory in regards to boundaries becoming permeable and flexible via ethnic socialization. With deeply internalized socialization, individuals are more likely than not to use it as "practical knowledge," which helps them locate themselves and others.
- The need for Academia to embrace fluidity in research and text structure.
- Explaining the necessity for image creators to utilize power as cultural influencers.
- Contribution to national policy formation to capitalize on generational migrants.
- Businesses can use this data to understand the diversity of Black consumers in the United States.
- Provides a model such that future researchers and practitioners have an alternative to practice reflexivity through contextual praxis that embraces a dialogic approach. Reflexivity speaks to the crucial conversations that result from the dialogic spaces created from multi-vocal and multi-situational standpoints and representations.

Limitations of the Study

The research has limitations in part because it is bounded in the specific socio-economic and political context of the United States and Sierra Leone, and is limited to a few cases. Although I acquired data film audience reception and interviews, it may be too limited in scope

to justify generalizations. However, the content and approach of this inquiry have possibilities for application in other contexts. Studies seeking to comprehend generational migrants and their experiences should take into account the specific context and socio-political dynamics that affect generational migrants. It is imperative to exercise caution before generalizing to take into account appropriate cultural settings, geographical locations, and socioeconomic categories. Additionally, I chose to conduct an examination of generational migrants across a broader spectrum of backgrounds and locations rather than a detailed analysis of one case in one arena and one place. This trade-off between breadth and depth in this research was to provide instructive accounts for analyzing and supporting the development of generational migrants. It may also be a weakness in this study.

In the subsequent chapters, I hope to engage and expand contemporary scholarly understandings of race and ethnicity amongst West Africans both in the United States and on the African continent. The focus of this is to address identity negotiation and "code switching" to further understand identity anxieties and politics amongst transnational migrants. Furthermore, I hope to give voice to the different generations and modes of identification evinced throughout the diaspora excluded from scholarship on race and ethnicity. These contributions will transform the conceptualizations of African diasporic identities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Justifications

This study highlights the praxis of fluidity and reflexivity in racial and ethnic identities and why it is essential to decrease the anxieties that arise from the socio-cultural contexts of generational migrants. This approach is justified because of its immediate relevance to the welfare of generational migrants, and the urgency to provide responsive and practical solutions to multifaceted challenges of having multiple identities, being misunderstood, and becoming empowered to push against the status quo given socio-political ramifications of being both American and African. This approach is imperative to fostering positive change, communication, and development from an individual perspective to the African diaspora.

Within the broader context and general socio-political of development, there is a sense of urgency in devising sustainable and innovative strategies to allow and accommodate diverse narratives and experiences of generational migrants. The goal is to move beyond Adichie's theory of "Dangers of a Single Story," in which she proposes that for one to find an authentic voice and to minimize the risk of critical misunderstanding, there is a need for multiple and dimensional stories (Adichie 2009; Brown 2013). When stories lack variety and dimension, one can only question self. Questions of identity are ignited such as "Who am I?" "To what extent am I able to define myself?" "What labels do others place on me?" Defining oneself and the groups to which one belongs often means distinguishing "us" from "them." As Rudyard Kipling writes in the poem *We and They*, "All the people like us are "We" and everyone else is "They,"

and this establishes we/they" dichotomy, which results in the We/They divide (Kipling 1926; Adichie 2009; Brown 2013).

Complementary measures for multidimensional texts and applying responsive strategies decrease the social cost and increase the social benefits. This strategy is critical to avert rejection and potential negative consequences unique to generational migrants. From a macro level, social and political institutions tend to know the theoretical implications of rigid and liminal boundaries that produce canonized texts but remiss the opportunity to put such theories into practice in opportunities provided to students, mentorship, and disruption of the systems of systems in which they must operate. Business leaders make the same mistakes when it comes to recruitment, marketing, understanding the diversity of its consumers, and instead follow industry standards. Image creators, while having a sense of autonomy, give in to trends and leave their opportunity of disruption to go amiss. Politicians and policyholders resolve their chance to highlight and represent their diverse constituencies by reducing complex issues to fables and upholding or adhering to the ideology that the "West is best." The lethargy in the development and understanding of generational migrants expressed in the social and political institutions of the United States and Sierra Leone compels and justifies a search for change.

Empowering generational migrants and preventing bias interpretations, stereotypes, policies and access to opportunities are compelling reasons to test alternatives and make a contribution to programs and texts. New thinking and cogent options are required to minimize the entanglement and dependency on adhering to the social status quo, and to harness the potential for social change.

Background of Study

To illustrate the complex cultural production of African identity formations in the context of the United States of America, I utilized interviews from *Am I: The Film*. From that film, I was able to analyze audience reception and reviews from media publications. Utilizing film made me realize that we (as in image makers of the diaspora) can change the lenses in which we are viewed by controlling the narrative (Oluwole 2018). We need to create stories for us and by us, and not necessarily as an explanation to the other(s) (Oluwole 2018). We can include text, photography, video, audio, graphic illustrations, and social media to tell our multidimensional stories. These storytelling tools are powerful resources as we seek to expand our knowledge of pressing transnational issues and build ties across cultures (Oluwole 2018). The wide variety of new digital media tools and platforms has created an unprecedented opportunity for people from all disciplines and backgrounds to share auto ethnographies with global audiences (Oluwole 2018). Hence, this study, constructed in several exploratory field research trips from September 2015 until May 2017, became the core research. The final data collection in Freetown, Sierra Leone occurred between September 2017 and October 2018. This study builds on the *Am I: the Film* as I decided to assess audience reception and commentary that took place in various parts of the United States and Accra, Ghana and Freetown, Sierra Leone from September 2015 until May 2017.

I illustrated the complex cultural production of African identity formations in the context of the United States of America through interviews from *Am I: The Film* and audience reception to the film, as well as reviewing media publications that highlight the ways diasporic peoples and cultures are shaped and performed. *Am I: The film* generated qualitative insights into the fusion of U.S. and African experiences and captured critical visual expressions of those moments of

fusion. Interviewees in the film were especially poignant when it came to personal conflicts with identifying culturally, racially, ethnically, religiously, politically, socially, and creatively in the digital age. The film also highlighted how the individuals created transnational identities via language, culture, and acclimation. These multidimensional individuals often existed in contention with themselves--creating a polarizing effect on their identity formation. This contention while often dismissed should be celebrated to establish fluidity and stability.

Methods from visual anthropology have proven and continue to be very valuable in exploring documentary film as a platform to address public understanding, interpretations, and misconceptions of identity politics for those who identify bi-culturally between the US and West Africa. Asking people about their response to films was straightforward and effective in generating information about perceptions and attitudes towards topics in *Am I: The Film*. *This method* forced respondents to wrestle with concepts of race, complexion, gender, and heritage among other issues.

As I attended live screenings and moderated online discussions, I sought to explore how people mediated audiovisual messages through the lens of their life experience and the relationship between private mediation and more extensive social processes (Abu-Lughod 1991). The initial methodology included: observing question and answer sessions after screenings; tracking the networks through which audience members engaged after the screenings; identifying other media sources where audience members heard about the related topics, and analyzing the differential impact of these media; and finding leaders in each community to continue the process of film distribution and facilitation.

These strategies enabled me to consider the negotiations that take place between the encoding and decoding of messages and the impact of the fields of power and embedded social

relations in the media. This approach draws directly from current theoretical work in visual anthropology and applied research: most notably the paradigmatic shifts in audience reception theory from the 'hypodermic needle' model to postmodernist interpretive paradigms (Pink 2015). Utilizing these theoretical insights, I was able to explore 'the after-life of the film' to identify the social networks through which information about the films spread from audience members outwards to friends, family and the community (Levine 2007). Tracking the routes along which stories traveled confirmed the mobility of messages and the fluidity of interpretations that attend the movement of media messages (Levine 2007). Tracking the afterlife of the film cemented the notion that media messages never enter a person, household or community unfiltered, but are spread, interpreted and re-interpreted by individuals within social fields (Levine 2007).

A field research assignment in an Ethnographic Field Methods course with Professor Vilma Santiago-Irizarry inspired this study. I evaluated my relationship as a researcher with my collaborators. I also evaluated the ability for films to generate polyphonic narratives and "texts" that transcend the authorial voice and retain the dialogical nature of human interactions; and lastly the use of reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and autoethnography in creating visual media and analyzing identity anxieties.

This multi-site study is not, in essence, a comparative study; instead, it is a grounding of identity anxieties experienced by generational migrants offering opportunities to explore reflexivity, intersubjectivity, as well as illustrates identity negotiation and "code switching" to explain the experiences. According to Appadurai, groups and individuals are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous (Appadurai 2010). Hence, after touring various cities in the United States, I decided to conduct

the second collection in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Freetown holds many layers of African diasporic history. Human rights activist Joseph Kaifala describes Freetown below.

If Africa is the cradle of humanity then Sierra Leone, a small diamond-shaped country of approximately 28,000 square miles on the west coast of Africa, is the home of its abandoned children. A bonafide melting pot of cultures was the country better than it has been, humanity east and west, north and south, would have come knocking at its door in search of their heritage or at least evidence of that macabre transatlantic commercial transactions in human beings. (Kaifala 2017)

Sierra Leone's dynamic interaction with the world began when it became home to slave ports that supplied plantations in the Americas and West Indies with the human cargo needed to maintain the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Kaifala 2017). The interactions intensified when British abolitionists chose Sierra Leone as a resettlement colony for freed slaves at the end of the slave trade. The resettlement started with the arrival of the Black Poor from London in 1787 then the Nova-Scotians, free African-American slaves who fought alongside the British in the American Revolutionary wars, arrived five years later, in 1792 (Kaifala 2017). Afterward, the Maroons, rebellious African slaves in Jamaica, were also repatriated to Sierra Leone through Nova Scotia in 1800. The re-captives, those freed onboard illegal slave ships in the enforcement of British slave trade abolition laws, were the last group of freed slaves to settle in Sierra Leone. The most famous case of the re-captives was La Amistad since the ship was navigated to US shores and eventually returned to Freetown.

These descendants of the former slaves and captives worked extensively to establish their credentials as a distinct "ethnic group" known as Krio. The eminent Sierra Leone historian Akintola Wyse, who argued for the use of the nomenclature Krio, instead of Creole, insisted that the Krio was "in essence Black Englishmen, [who] would eventually be the agents for the propagation of European civilization 'as beacons of light in darkest Africa' (Cole 2013). This ideology leads the Krio not only to disregard critical assessments of the British but also highlight identity anxieties that have obscured their religious, class, and cultural beliefs. Dr. Gibril Cole acknowledges that "the process of forging a Krio identity in nineteenth-century Sierra Leone was a dynamic and deeply contested one that pitted members of Krio society against one another, "outsiders," and British colonialists" (Cole 2013). The development of Krio identity and society allowed for the transcendence of ethnic, cultural, class, and religious differences. It also served as a case study of multidimensional individuals undergoing identity anxieties to situate themselves in a glocal reality.

Understanding the emergence of the Krio society is unique to this study because they had managed to converge different elements from a variety cultural backgrounds and continuously re-create themselves in response to the changing socio-political realities of nineteenth-century British colonialism (Cole 2013). Their malleability and adaptability derive partly from the transatlantic slave trade and creolizing experiences of the first batches of repatriated Africans resettled in the Sierra Leone Peninsula in the late eighteenth century (Cole 2103). Groups such as the Krio had experienced the horror of slavery, survived cultural acculturation in Europe and the Americas, and then returned "home" to Africa with only cultural fragments from the different lands to reconstitute a new "province of freedom" known as Freetown (Cole 2013). Ironically, in the film, many characters stated that they did not want to be read as Black or African

American because it was something they couldn't relate to as an identity. Participants assumed being Black and/, or African American was to be without culture. However, given the historical significance of the transatlantic slave trade, Freetown, and the emergence of the Krio, we know that the African diaspora is closely connected. In this study, we see that subsequent generations of repatriated Africans, although more grounded in a cultural foundation, they still experience an intense process of malleability and adaptability in a creative manner that deepens the processes of creolization/kriolization (Cole 2013).

The Krio believe that Sierra Leone was better as a British colony because unlike many other British African colonies, Sierra Leone flourished under British administration. In the past, as a colony, Freetown was referred to as the "Athens of West Africa," a place where black intellectuals and philosophers often frequented because of the developed educational institutions and the most prominent being Fourah Bay College. Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961 and continued to prosper until the death of its first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, in 1964. Coups and counter-coups marred the ensuing years.

In more recent history, more than half a million Sierra Leoneans are estimated to live in the United States and Britain alone. That represents a considerable brain drain for a country struggling to recover from a ten-year civil war. Those in support of friends and family back home are sending an estimated \$25 million through official channels alone in 2004. There is no gainsaying that transnationals exposed across the world to new questions of modernity, skill-set and experiences now possess the human resource skills desperately needed to retool the broken institutions in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Transnationals could bring new perspectives and thus helps in contributing sustainable answers to the perennial problems of the country. Essentially, the global network that transnational could bring home, including whatever capital they will be

able to repatriate, could help in stimulating the economy and thus help reduce poverty in the country. They could also assist in terms of availability of information and positive feedback that could attract those interested in economic development, governance, health, education, media reform, and tourism.

This layered history gives meaning to the debate of the diasporic connections with Sierra Leone's contemporary features and dynamics. It also showcases the complexities my home country of Sierra Leone, which is not that different from many other African countries of even small size and population. Contemporary long-distance migration may be a gradual journey of adaptation from the village to the towns and ultimately to the cosmopolitan capital city where there is usually an attempt to create ethnic-based communities in and around the city. However, because of the small size and population of Sierra Leone, once in the United States the common national origin becomes a unifying identity unlike larger countries like Nigeria that reproduce the ethnic-based settlement at the destination of the host country.

I visited Freetown, Sierra Leone for research to explore 1.5 through second-generation returnees experiences. For this research, "1.5-generation" is defined as Sierra Leonean individuals who were born in West Africa and spent most of their lives in the United States of America , while "2.0-generation" is used to connote a Sierra Leonean individual who was born in the United States of America to Sierra Leonean parents. I worked with returning 1.0 to 2.0 Sierra Leonean generational migrants that are an estimated half a million in population in Freetown, Sierra Leone (Manson 2007).

Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, is an ideal site for this research project because it attracts returnees seeking reciprocal and transnational networks of extended family, fellow Sierra-Leonean Americans, as well as city-scale networks of neighborhoods and institutions. I

observed reciprocal exchanges in daily life in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which may differ in terms of returnees' interaction with family members, other Sierra Leonean returnee populations (other Western countries such as the UK), institutions such as hometown associations (Freetown) and the States in which they return from (i.e., Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, etc.). I accompanied migrants as they moved between family gatherings, hometown association meetings, markets, community events, religious services, and film screenings and discussions. I attended to moments of migrant labeling in circumstances in which reciprocity seemed contested. For example, such labeling might include accusations of being called a JC; Just Cams/Come, BC; Blant Cams/ Normally Comes, or Homebase; Based in Sierra Leone. I monitored returnees' ongoing participation in local and national political processes including voting, interactions with government agencies, and political

Inquiry Paradigms and Field Research

Defining an inquiry paradigm proved to be an arduous task given my epistemological positioning and chosen methods of data collection. I realized that traditional notions of inquiry and knowledge acquisition involved reassessing, confronting and reframing one's ontological assumptions and values that guide research. The usage of reflexivity and intersubjectivity, local situations, and what is ethical to research participants takes precedence. Hence, to explain identity anxieties of multidimensional generational migrants, I adopted a social constructivist approach. According Cooper, this paradigm "assumes a relativist ontology, the existence of multiple identities, a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures: (Cooper 1993; L. David 2016). Constructivism states that learning is an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it (L. David 2016). Knowledge is constructed based on personal

experiences and hypotheses of the environment (L. David 2016). Learners continuously test these hypotheses through social negotiation. Each person has a different interpretation and construction of the knowledge process (L. David 2016). Social constructivism on the other hand, although similar, emphasizes further the centrality of social environment and culture. Hence, social constructivism provides a more relevant framework that accounts for the social embeddedness of generational migrants.

Utilizing this paradigm to assess anxieties of generational migrants explores how ethnic boundaries are created and transformed in political, social, and economic contexts. The identity anxieties reflected highlight not only the durable cultural properties ascribed at birth, but those identities are made and remade by political institutions, historical contexts, and material interests, and are chosen and unchosen by individuals for strategic purposes. Constructivist studies have generated significant findings, and much of this scholarship has focused on the *fluidity* boundaries.

The “boundary” metaphor popularized by Fredrik Barth (Barth 1969; Wimmer 2009), has become central to sociological research on ethnicity, race, and religion (Lamont and Virag 2002; Lichterman 2008; Ozgen 2014). Following his groundbreaking work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth became the leading voice of the “constructivist” turn in ethnic and racial studies. This approach explains the emergence of ethnic boundaries through strategic action, self-ascription, and social classification; and analyzes the diverse forms they assume as a result of dynamic, relational, and instrumental processes (Ozgen 2014). The central quality of ethnic boundaries is their variability depending on formal and informal policies, contexts, or interactions. Rather than seeing boundaries as “hard” or permanent—as products of objective traits, such as language, religion, or physical characteristics—this research paradigm takes a

subjective perspective and defines boundaries as “fluid” and transactional, resulting from social and historical circumstances, and based on chosen rather than given characteristics (Ozgen 2014).

For decades, debates about ethnicity have revolved around an either/or dichotomy: ethnic identities are either fixed or malleable; stable or changing (Ozgen 2014). Despite several attempts to transcend the divide between “objectivist” and “subjectivist” approaches, this rift still influences how ethnic boundaries are conceptualized and studied (Ozgen 2014). According to practice theory by Bourdieu, individual action results from consciously following established rules and semi-consciously implementing the practical skills one gains over time. This "practical" knowledge of the world, or disposition, is acquired through an individual's position and his position-takings (viewpoints, anticipations, judgments) vis-à-vis others' in a social space. Hence, an individual has a sense of "his place" as well as "others' place." This external knowledge, in turn, becomes internal knowledge—how to act, what to anticipate, whom to keep a distance from—resulting in socially expected behavior from within member group boundaries. Essentially, a co-construction of meaning enabled contingent and contextual interpretations to uncover the complexities and ambiguities of generational migrants.

As a result, I adopted a social process and social interaction approach to analyze identity anxieties of generational migrants to transcend and problematize the subject-object relationship that ensues from a positivist approach. On the other hand, my critical point was to recognize that the lived experience of generational migrants significantly contribute to both the definitions of problems and their solutions, although we are the beneficiaries of a porous socio-political climate that dictates identity formation.

Key Concepts

In the exploration of identity via African diaspora, one can conclude that Black identity is not separated from and does not exist outside of or at the expense of African identity. Therefore other key concepts are defined below:

Transnationalism is the theoretical framework utilized to conceptualize and analyze migration and the desire for ethnic and national consciousness.

Reflexivity is as an expression of self-consciousness.

Inter-subjectivity is the negotiation of authority between researcher and subject.

The “**African glocal context**” is the facilitation of movement of social representations and identity constructs, which traditionally have been rooted in local communities, through different cultural frameworks to reach and, in turn, influence (however subtly) global audiences.

Visual ethnography is the visual interpretation of cultures via various anthropological methods or theories.

Autoethnography a form of self-narrative writing that places the self within a social context.

Ethnography is a research method central to knowing the world from the standpoint of its social relations. It is a qualitative research method predicated on the diversity of culture at home (wherever that may be) and abroad. Ethnography involves hands-on, on-the-scene learning — and it is relevant wherever people are connected.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Participants and Challenges Locating Them

The research participants are a broad spectrum of subgroups due to the arenas in which I extracted data.

Film Tour (see Appendix for circulation)

To get audience reception of the film, I along with a small team of three other women orchestrated a film tour. We put together a media kit of the film, DVD, website, and discussion guide and created an outreach list to universities in the United States. We then set the emails and communicated back and forth until formulating a schedule. The challenge here was building a distribution a team and system that executed such tasks. The other problem was balancing a demanding academic program, raising a child, and traveling to encounter new audiences in each place. At screenings responses to the film varied. For instance, I have had audience members cry to realize that they were not crazy after seeing themselves in the film. I have had others become upset because they felt the film did not adequately represent them. The film has also generated heated discussions, especially when on the continent because race and ethnicity meant something different than American constructions of these identity markers. In Ghana, because of the influx of Pan Africanists during Nkrumah's time, they had the experience of building community with returnees and generational migrants but were not sure how they could help their brothers and sisters stuck in the United States. In Sierra Leone, the debate was about those coming from the West and taking their jobs and trying to change everything. They struggled with how to work together and also recently closed the office of Diaspora affairs which could have aided in building these tensions.

Film Festivals

I applied to over 50 festivals, and the film was recognized by five. However, I was not concerned with recognition. The best part of the festival was the film was able to travel internationally with or without me, and I was able to monitor the reception via forums and email correspondence.

Media Outlets and Social Media (See Appendix)

The film was recognized by media outlets such as Huffington Post, Blavity, Afropunk, and The Color Lines to name a few. The press and social media posts invited participants to share their honest opinions. I along with my team also created images that posed questions and themes of the film to keep the conversation going on all social media platforms. The film had Social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Most of the discussions took place on Twitter given the nature of the platform, and it was the most accessible platform to host live chat session during screenings. Lastly having Issa Rae as one of the cast members also helped in the virality of these projects and garnering participants.

Freetown Sierra Leone

I had a great plan to advance this research by working with the Institute for Government Reform (IGR), EXCEL and Power Women 232, organizations that work on developing the next generation of Sierra Leonean leaders as well as willing to provide me access to potential interviewees. I hoped to not only draw on their resources and expertise but also to contribute to their work by collaborating in developing strategies, tactics, and events to build community relations for those returning to the home country of Sierra Leone. However, elections made it super hard to connect and solidify participants given the anxiety and fear that bolsters around elections in Sierra Leone. So to pivot my research, I started mixing my ethnography with

autoethnography, and realized that I found myself in a diasporic community linked to the United States by trying to find others who were also or once located in the United States. After meeting with Nancy from Power Women 232 and Kadija, a family acquaintance, they both introduced me to other participants and who then pointed out others, and I was able to solidify participants that were willing to share information despite the political climate.

Data Collection Methods

To analyze the identity anxieties of my participants, I primarily used qualitative ethnographic and participatory learning methods. I also took extensive reflexive field notes to dissect the data further.

Content Analysis

I conducted a content analysis of field notes from appearances and panel discussions. With permission, I would photograph sessions. I would also garner approval for the recordings of screenings and transcribe them to find common themes and or questions from the audience. Other times I was utilizing social media hashtags and live Twitter chats to engage and record responses. That way I had a trail of content to compare to my notes. I would also attend cultural events and festivities that involved generational migrants. Lastly, I would take screenshots of extensive social media and media forums and store them on a drive to reference. Such information document the informality of social processes, the informal space, and unsuspected arenas for learning and information sharing.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Establishing relationships with return migrants allowed me to elicit detailed life stories through our conversations and 30-60 min interviews. I conducted eight interviews before being heavily disrupted by the anxieties of elections that led many participants to travel outside of

Sierra Leone. Those that did not leave barely moved around too much in fear of safety. However, these interviews complimented my observation sessions with the participants, as I was able to follow up or dissect our previous encounters. It also allowed for freedom of expression, deeper probing, and clear communication with participants, while minimizing the occurrence of limited responses. In conversations, migrants described changes in their roles and duties in Sierra Leone over time and across spaces, while mainly focusing on critical moments and contexts in which they had to give accounts of their lives and make claims of belonging. Over the course reciprocal interactions, I was able to let the conversations flow.

Participant Observations

I also observed reciprocal exchanges in daily life in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which may differ in terms of returnees' interaction with family members, other Sierra Leonean returnee populations (other Western countries such as the UK), institutions such as hometown associations (Freetown) and the States in which they return from (i.e., Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, etc.). I also joined migrants as they moved between family gatherings, hometown association meetings, work, markets, community events, and religious services. I also monitored returnees' ongoing participation in local and national political processes including voting, interactions with government agencies, and political discussions given the sensitive political climate in Sierra Leone.

The Feld in Context

The "field" is assumed to be a static, neutral theoretical realm but that is far from my experience. The "field" is always changing therefore never still. The field consists of so many various factors that are beyond the control of the researcher. Because I did not adhere to the orthodox route associated with research such as operating within the canon, neo-classical

economics and quantitative analytical, I experienced various uncertainties and contextual changes. I was able to overcome by welcoming flexibility and adapting my research design and methodological approach. Very few have yet to purposefully integrate auto-ethnography, ethnography, narratives of generational migrants as valid data sources.

Recognizing that methods are critical to the amount and type of data extracted from the field, I embraced my "insider perspective" to give way for generational migrants to not only articulate their experiences and but to gain and convey an intuitive and empathetic understanding of such encounters. I embraced a relational and social process in this research to maintain a dialogical and ethical stance. In retaining a dialogical position, it allowed for both researcher and participant to benefit from critical thinking and new knowledge, which bring about positive change. Analyzing anxieties set forth by generational migrants concerning structures such as family, fashion, film, and autoethnography were equally essential to assess normative and actual practices. It also led to a review and changed invalid textual accounts that are unresponsive and ineffective.

Research Process

The study, conducted in sequential phases, started with context mapping and an assessment of current and emerging issues on identity anxieties of generational migrants. It also entailed establishing relationships with various stakeholders, university networks, NGOs in Sierra Leone and on social media platforms. I conducted 34 film screenings and interviewed each participant at least twice outside of participant observation. I started some of my interviews in the pre-dissertation phase in December 2016. Lastly, I kept a personal daily journal while residing in Sierra Leone.

While residing in Sierra Leone, I rented a three bedroom flat for myself, niece and cousin in the Western area of Freetown as it was central to many of the places of interest and a short distance to participants. This process allowed for greater exposure to the daily lives of generational migrants, their struggle and prospect for survival. I also purchased a car and would drive myself wherever I needed to go.

Research Timeline

Phase 1: Pre- Dissertation Research and Film Tour Set Up

- Document review
- Establish collaborative relations
- Identification of research participants
- Assess critical and emerging issues
- Assess field sites
- Coordination and execution of film tour
- Grant submissions

Phase 2: Preparatory Phase

- Define the problem at hand
- Dissertation proposal submission
- Grant submissions
- Cornell University Human Subject approval
- Conduct Film Tour

Phase 3: Field Research

- Relocate to Sierra Leone
- Data Collection

Phase 4: Data Management

- Data transcription when necessary
- Assess data for themes and critical theories

Phase 5: Reporting

- Return to the United States
Dissemination of findings

Overall Ethos and Context Sensitivity

Having been born in Washington, DC to parents that emigrated from Sierra Leone, I was familiar with the socioeconomic and political context of both the United States and West Africa. This context is greatly facilitated my research process and allowed me to build a genuine rapport with participants. However, I did have a hard time with local Sierra Leoneans. My role as an image creator, participant, practitioner, and researcher lead to a considerable amount of pressure to extract quality data and research. Although negotiating access was easy, protecting and maintain ethical standards was something I made a conscious effort to keep. I worked hard to build trust, respect cultural norms and participant requests, disclose the purpose of my research, as well as protect participants with anonymity. To further situate the ethos of this research, participants were fully informed about the research purpose, its potential constraints, and its contributions so they could make an informed decision in regards to their participation.

Researching two "homes" provided a vantage point, a point of origin that called for intense reflexivity about the epistemological and methodological approach and greater self-awareness to deal with multiple implications of being an insider and outsider. Given my standing, the social realities of generational migrants in the United States and Sierra Leone could not be conceptualized as a universal or neutral reality, as I was against essentializing and homogenizing

experiences of generational migrants. Such realizations compelled critical reflections and the platform to showcase diverse narratives. Equally important was the recognition of different interpretive possibilities, accounting for intersections of variable social position, social interests, and aspirations amongst generational migrants.

Although I am both insider and outsider in some aspects, I knew I did not want to be solely operating from a vantage point of fulfilling an instrumental and unilateral interest. I approached this study motivated to marry research with storytelling and explore opportunities for meaningful change that would allow for multidimensional narratives of multidimensional individuals. I had an interest in research outcomes that facilitate fluid boundaries for generational to flourish, generate conversations, and derive alternative strategies that bridge research with action and policies to allow for identity development and expression. I made a conscious effort to let participants tell their personal stories in a way that they felt comfortable. In some instances, detachment and withdrawal were neither possible nor desirable, but I am satisfied with my ability to combine traditional research with digital storytelling.

I took time to reflect upon my assumptions as a practitioner and to questions by normative frameworks' generating narratives to redress identity anxieties in the African diaspora. The existential realities, plight, and resilience of the vast majority of generational migrants whom I interacted with were compelling evidence to be critical of societal norms and to search for alternative and ontological responses to their needs and capabilities. In the research process, I have become even more convinced of the necessity to search for understanding beyond the current fixed politics of identity on generational migrants in developing self. Implicit in this quest was the need to challenge the ascendancy of the dominant system of one's development of one's race and ethnic identity. It was equally important to enable a reflexive rendering of

knowledge, interposing multiple frames or reference, especially the worldview of Blackness, not only about the problem definition but also possible solutions.

CHAPTER 4

LIVING IN A “POST WESTPHALIAN ERA.” COMPLEXITIES INHERENT IN IDENTITY FORMATIONS AND CITIZENSHIP OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

The empirical studies of recent (mid 20th century onwards) African immigrants to the United States not only highlights settlement practices and patterns but also reflects the influence of American individualistic identity and community dynamics. In this chapter, I argue that the institution of family plays a dynamic role in the level of anxiety expressed by generational migrants. Anxiety management at is relates to the identity development and performance of generational migrants needs to reflect more fluidity so that the anxiety is minimized. However, this transnational migration is not fully driven by anxiety as many strides have been made in these communities.

According to Psychologists of cultural development, Adams et al.,

Studies of identity often reference Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism cultural value orientations. Individuals from individualistic contexts are more independent, and they place greater emphasis on personal values, beliefs, and goals rather than do individuals from collectivistic settings, who are more interdependent and who value group membership as a source of pride, and subscribe more to the norms and values of the collective. Emerging adults from individualistic contexts place less value on group membership than their counterparts from collectivistic settings. Individuals in sub-Saharan Africa are collectivistic, while North Americans and Western Europeans are individualistic (Adams et al., distinction in Western societies like the USA apply much

less to sub-Saharan Africa. Most sub-Saharan African countries were multi-ethnic from the onset and consisted mainly of groups of African descent, each with their language and culture. Ethnicity is strongly associated with tribal and linguistic affiliation. Emerging adults in sub-Saharan Africa encounter individuals from different ethnic groups daily, and ethnic identity is often formed in these multi-ethnic interactions (Adams et al., 2016; Phinney et al., 2001; Verkuyten, 2005).

Thus the individualism-collectivism cultural value orientations create a dominant debate of difficulties and "anxiety" associated with a burden of having to choose between an American and African identity for generational migrants. There is no single story as to how African migrants and their descendants develop their identity in the United States of America . One must look closely at the institution and influence of family to discuss the "*benefits*" and "*costs*" that are associated with the interface of various identities based on socio-geographic spaces in Africa and the United States of America. Through the lenses of the familial structures, one can situate the adjustments and adaptations in transnational political involvement, racial and ethnic identities, gender relations, and financial responsibility.

In the United States of America , the "I" is prioritized over the "We," and as migrants try to maintain the "We" / broader/extended family dynamic, the individual struggles to balance the anxieties and difficulties that may arise. While there are soothing possibilities to navigate the two spheres and benefit from both the I and We simultaneously as the badges of identity are borne and acted on or respectively. Although one person migrates literally, the migration is symbolically plural; meaning the institution of family travels with the individual. The embedded cultural assumption of responsibility for family implies that when an individual migrates and attempts to pull him/herself up by their bootstraps in the United States, one is never solely

lifting one's self. While little research exists on the effects of international migration on the social structure of homeland communities, even less research has focused on how immigrants adapt to their place of immigration while at the same time continuing to maintain connections to their place of origin (Kebede, 2012; Coe, 2014). The possibility of embracing multiple identities, multiple localities, and dual citizenship was almost unthinkable before the end of the twentieth century (Glick Schiller, 1999a and Kebede, 2012). In the 21st century, the patterns, scope, and volume of immigrants' interactions with people and organizations in the home and host countries have intensified due to new technologies that compress time and glocal. Glocal is the facilitation of the movement of social representations and identity constructs, which traditionally have been rooted in local communities, through different cultural frameworks to reach and, in turn, influence (however subtly) global audiences (Van Drom 2016). The technological advances highlight globalization and its role in the debate of transnational anxiety. These advances catalyze globalized modernity, and it causes tensions – anxiety if you may – around questions of identity and citizenship.

This notion of anxiety arises when one questions what motivates immigrants to be part of the often-demanding transnational movement. The questions become even more imperative when one considers that the actions are not just transnational but transcontinental. Immigrants are denied integration discriminated against, and often experience "social demotion" because they are forced to accept low-paying jobs (Kebede 2012). The theory is that these factors are what propel immigrants to engage in transnational activities: sending remittances, helping their families, and traveling home all which enhance their social standing (Kebede, 2012). This activity refers to the aspect of benefit which, considering the migrants as rational beings, make them decide to migrate. At the same time, some immigrants see transnational involvement as an

economic survival strategy – both for themselves and the people they have left behind (Kebede, 2012).

In most cases, immigrants are the product of the operation of the capitalist economy, which causes economic and social disruptions in the home and host country (Kebede, 2012). Immigrants are mostly committed to their old homes because they are helping families in dire economic straits. At the same time, by buying houses, starting businesses, and investing in social networks, they ensure their own economic and social security in the host country (Kebede, 2012). However valuable and useful these explanations are for understanding and appreciating why people are transnationally engaged, real analysis is very inadequate in terms of understanding why immigrants make different choices about transnational action vis-à-vis the same homeland. There is a significant gap in study, articulation, analysis, and documentation of these questions in the present moment.

One way of analyzing these explanations is via the institution of the family as a social institution it has always been at the center of the well-being of African societies over the years (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). As with all institutions, families in Africa have undergone significant transformations guiding people through centuries of adversity from slavery, foreign religious infusion, colonialism, and neocolonialism and with a new dimension of transnationalism (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). The common familial characteristics of 21st-century African migrants to the US are examined to understand what has shaped these essential elements as well as the challenges that confront these families (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). African families are not defined primarily by biological ties that members of the household may have with each other, but as a dynamic social institution with members coming and going (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). One should also note that familial variations exist

among African societies as they adapt to different ecosystems and cultural realities (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). However, the typical characteristics of the African family to be analyzed include mate selection and marriage, multiple marriage systems, childbearing and childrearing, gender roles and intergenerational relationships to aid us in an understanding of push and pull factors of African migration (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007).

Black Migration

The United States has a long history of Black migration via the transatlantic slave trade. However, free Black immigration from Africa is a relatively recent and understudied phenomenon. Black African migration to North America dates back to the earliest days of European colonization. The first recorded passage of slaves from Africa to this region occurred in 1519, to Puerto Rico — now a US territory (Capps et al., 2012). Between 1519 and 1867, when the slave trade ended, an estimated 10 million African slaves had been taken from Africa to the Western Hemisphere; 360,000 landed in what today is the United States (Capps et al., 2012). Thus, forced African migration preceded the formation and independence of the United States, and the country has always had a significant Black population (Capps et al., 2011).

The earliest recorded voluntary Black migration from Africa originated from Cape Verde in the early 1800s and was associated with commercial whaling (Capps et al., 2012). With the ending of slave trade and slavery in the late 1800s and subsequent severe restrictions on flows from Africa (along with limits from Southern Europe and Asia), there was very little immigration from Africa to the United States until the end of the 20th century (Capps et al., 2012). The 1965 reforms to US immigration law removed national origin quotas that placed shallow caps on migration from outside Northern Europe and created the current system in which most legal immigrants come through family reunification channels (Capps et al., 2012).

According to research conducted by the Migration Policy Institute, as of 2012, there were about 1.1 million Black African immigrants, comprising three percent of the total US foreign-born population making Black Africans among the fastest-growing groups of US immigrants (Capps et al., 2012). Data collected shows an increase of about 200% during the 1980s and 1990s and nearly 100% during the 2000s (Capps et al., 2012). Black Africans are much more likely than other groups to be admitted as refugees or through the diversity visa program. The diversity visa program aims to increase flows from underrepresented countries by allowing immigration from these countries of individuals without a formal job offer or strong family ties in the United States (Capps et al., 2012) to diversify the overall US population as well African populations in the US.

Despite infrastructural issues that tend to be at the forefront when discussing contemporary African communities, Black African immigrants are well educated, with college completion rates that greatly exceed those for most other immigrant groups and US natives (Capps et al., 2012). Also, Black African immigrants in the United States have relatively high employment rates (exceeding 70 percent for most countries of origin) (Capps et al., 2012). The earnings of Black African immigrants' incomes are on par with other immigrants nationwide but lag those of natives, despite their higher levels of human capital and their strong English skills (Capps et al., 2012). The underemployment of highly skilled African immigrants is a result of a recent arrival, difficulty in transferring home-country credentials, and labor market discrimination (Capps et al., 2012).

The Migration Policy Institute anticipates that African immigrant flows may rise as the wealth gaps between the United States and Africa widen (Capps et al., 2012). Under a favorable African economic development scenario, increasing levels of educational attainment may also

contribute to the number of African students at US universities in addition to skilled professionals admitted to the country through employment-based channels (Capps et al., 2012). But several possible policy changes could reduce the current stream of African immigrants, including reduced refugee admissions and the elimination of the diversity visa lottery (Capps et al., 2012) given the current political economy of the United States.

In 2010 – according to World Bank estimates – the United States was the destination for an estimated four percent of all African migrants, ranking it fifth behind France, Côte d’Ivoire, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia — and just ahead of the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy (Capps et al., 2012). Remove the Ivory Coast and South Africa from the list, and the United States ranks third among destinations outside the African continent (Capps et al. 2012). Moreover, France and Saudi Arabia primarily receive Arab migrants from North African countries, while nearly three-quarters of US African immigrants are Blacks from sub-Saharan countries. Though the World Bank data do not further disaggregate African migrants by race, it is likely that the United States has become — or will soon become — the destination for the most significant number of sub-Saharan African migrants outside the continent (Capps et al., 2012). Undoubtedly, it is a preferred destination for many African migrants.

“New-wave Black African immigrants,” a term coined by scholar Bernard Lombardi, is used to describe recent African immigrants to the United States. According to Lombardi, new wave African immigrants are found mostly in urban and suburban communities where there are high concentrations of American Blacks (Lombardi 2014). Over half of all African immigrants in the United States reside in (1) New York, (2) California, (3) Texas, (4) Maryland, (5) Virginia, (6) New Jersey, and (7) Massachusetts (Lombardi 2014). Besides, there are large amounts of Africans in non-traditional immigrant cities such as Minneapolis and St. Paul (Lombardi 2014).

In "The Impact of Intersecting Dimensions of Inequality and Identity on the Racial Status of Eastern African Immigrants," Katja M. Guenther (Guenther et al., 2011) found that these cities have large populations of East Africans who come to the United States as refugees and create exclusive ethnic enclaves (Lombardi 2014).

Settlement dynamics for African migrants are often dependent on the population of other Africans in the given state and community. Individuals tend to build relationships on a continuum of ethnicity, nationality, region, and then broader African or diasporic context. For instance, I grew up in a sizeable Sierra-Leonean community within the DC, Maryland, and Virginia region, where nationality was more critical than ethnicity or which tribe individuals were from, especially given that specific ethnic groups were not significant in numbers. On the other hand, in the same region, Nigerians were still able to settle, operate, and relate on ethnic level because there were large numbers of Yoruba's and Igbos. The reasons that support these dynamics include the complexity of racial as well as individual and familial identity and desire to be understood and joy that comes from sharing language figuratively and literally. Black identity is not separate from /does not exist outside of/or at the expense of African identity.

Transnational Motivations

Immigrant experiences often vary for different Africans based on the potential for transnational motivations and ties. Guenther et al. (2011) found that many East African refugees in the Midwest do not plan on returning home and consider it difficult to maintain communication with people in their home countries because of the pervasive civil unrest (Lombardi 2014). On the other hand, the Asanteman association, a transnational organization representing the larger Asante Kingdom based in Ghana, are economically and educationally motivated immigrants that come to the United States hoping to retire in their home countries

(Lombardi 2014). Contributing to African economies and building homes in Africa for retirement are typical motivations for new-wave African immigrants to advance economically in the United States (Lombardi 2014). Moreover, education-seeking immigrants often wish to use their degrees for the development of their home countries (Lombardi 2014). To breakdown transnational motivations and their aftermath, one must consider the historical processes of assimilation and acculturation for immigrants into the American mainstream (Lombardi 2014).

Familial Ties

Rather than merely being a product of economic 'push' and 'pull' factors, migration is also crucially a social process and, in many cases, may represent a household or family strategy that has a whole range and mix of economic, social and cultural dimensions (Tiemoko 2004). Familial ties play an essential role in the depth of the assimilation and acculturation process within the migration. Social networks built by familial ties in international movement bind migrants and non-migrants in complex social and interpersonal relationships (Adepoju 1997). The institution of marriage is symbolic for both migrants and non-migrants and thus it links them regardless of the specific geography they may inhabit. For most Africans, the family is a community of people related by blood and marriage.

In many African countries, marriage is synonymous to networking due to the management of family resources, assets, and conflicts. The secure networks and kinship bonds that Africans have brought with them to the United States ensure the vitality of the immigrant family. These bonds reinstate that the family functions more than just a unit but also as a unit of production and consumption – harnessing the contributions of its members to help raise their standard of living. Group goals and collective needs are a priority in both the immediate and

extended family over the individual (Arthur 2000). Even for the migrant who has settled in the United States, the journey is an investment in the "family's" future (Arthur 2000).

Gender Roles

In addition to marriage, traditional divisions of labor based on gender influence African households (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). Both reproductive and productive roles are present and expressed in membership through lineages and family groups (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). Although tasks may be gender specific, study shows that the African plays seven overlapping roles: individual, conjugal, parental, domestic, kin, community, and occupational (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). Local traditions and customs often prescribe these roles for both men and women with built-in mechanisms for rewards and punishments for non-conformity. However, once migration occurs the structure tends to crumble. It is up to the individuals and family units to be disciplined enough to maintain these cultural markers (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007).

There are cases in which cultural gender roles are altered and encounter the independent African woman (Kane 2013). From domestic workers and hair braiders to nurses and educated professionals, African women have been undertaking recent transnational migration as individuals, much like their counterparts in Asia and Latin America (Kane 2013). Their occupation in a new world and the eventual birth of children who represent both worlds, change how African women envision their future in a host society. The project to return home --- completing the migration cycle--- in some cases requires revision to integrate support and care for children.

While in the United States, women tend to engage more with the state through social services to ensure the wellbeing of their children (Kane 2013). It is clear, therefore, that women

have become the foundation of African communities abroad/in the United States and catalyze the emergence of diasporic identities (Kane 2013). Women also reshape migrant cultural and religious identities in host countries (Kane 2013). They reproduce critical cultural elements in the West through cuisine, hairstyles, and fashion—duplicating and reinterpreting canons of elegance from their home country in the host country (Kane 2013). They become active agents of transfer, adaptation, innovation, expansion, and popularization of African culture.

The feminization of migration flows may also prompt the renegotiation of gender roles – and the tensions implicit within such processes—as host contexts present different assumptions on equality between men and women (Kane 2013). Such anxiety can be exacerbated by the expansion of economic opportunities for women despite the multiple grounds of discrimination, even as men experience simultaneous downward mobility. Cheikh Anta Babou, historian and professor, analyzes how migrants renegotiate gender roles in a study of Senegalese women who own hair-braiding salons (Kane 2013). As these women earn far more than their husbands and provide more of the family budget, they challenge both publicly and privately, the traditional role of wives who stay at home to care for husband and children (Kane 2013). In such contexts, it is indeed the husband who will undertake most household tasks, adopting the traditionally defined role of a woman. There are significant conflicts in migrant households whenever men have difficulty accepting new roles they perceive as challenging to their authority or diminishing their masculinity (Kane 2013). This work offers an exciting insight into identity and migration anxieties.

Intergenerational Relationships

Outside of gendered and marital relationships, historically, the relationship between the generations in African societies has been developed around the value of knowledge, respect,

and experience that the younger generation receives from the older generation. It is not uncommon both in Africa and in the United States to have multiple generations living in the same household (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). A sizeable proportion of the elderly population lives with their children, in-laws, or extended family members. Such arrangements provide the elderly with plenty of opportunities to participate in family life such as assisting young couples in infant/child care and carrying on family traditions (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). Responsibility to provide support to the elderly and other family members is serious; even among those who have relocated away from their ancestral homes or those who are not living with their families (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). These traditions save money, provide support, counseling, and cultural identity to new generations.

For instance, in the initial months and years after arriving in the United States, migrants can be presented with traumatic challenges (Arthur 2000). While a strong determination to succeed coupled with a good work ethic enables many new immigrants to overcome their fear of failure, it is the intergenerational support that provides solace when hope begins to dissipate and times get rough (Arthur 2000). Repatriation to Africa is never an option because leaving to go back with nothing amounts to an admission of failure and disappointment to relatives (Arthur 2000). Lastly, the institution of the family provides the bulk of social support for old age and retirement throughout Africa especially with family members in the western world. Government-sponsored social services that support the old and young in Africa are limited or only cover a small population (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). For African immigrants, there is a revered tradition that the elderly should not go to the old peoples' home. It is deemed a failure if the young cannot take care of or adequately provide for the daily upkeep of the aging parents.

Birthing and Raising Kids

Traditionally childbearing equates to the accumulation of wealth, security in old age, labor force, marriage stability, lineage continuity, companionship, and prestige (Ohenenba-Sakyi and Takyi 2007). The traditional perspective of childbearing versus the American view of procreation creates repetitive strain across generations living in one community. Migration changes the conversation around the roles of parent and child, creating looming questions of who is responsible for whom and what point in time.

The generational disconnect regarding lineage continuity and cultural identity in the childbearing process is evident in the oral histories of women interviewed in my film, *Am I the Film*. These stories reveal how identities emerge in the context of changing locales, breaking down the boundaries of an imagined, singular other (D'Alisera, 2004). Reflecting on their lives concerning the de-territorialized realities of their world, these women are empowered by the "liminal spaces between cultures and societies that represent new imaginations about power and self" (Ong, 1996). The stories reveal the emergence of gendered identities that bridge the gap between homeland and abroad, constructing unique multi-faceted glocal identities.

"Because I grew up in little Sierra Leone itself. Your parents always made you feel that you were not American. You're African. There is more to us than being born in America. I was first and foremost Sierra Leonean." ~ Sarran

"I grew up, in an African household. My mom cooked, we ate rice, cassava leaves. When I was six years, I was on a stool in the kitchen. You will learn how to cook. Africa came alive every day at our house! We had masks in our house, paintings; it was an African embraced household. We heard music in our house all the time. Africa came

alive through music, food, and art. My parents told me I was an African woman and you embrace it." ~Yeniva

These stories are an ethnographic entrée and firsthand account into how “delocalized communities maintain and enhance a sense of social identity in conditions in which the “totality of their relations” is not “played out within a single geographic location and a single universe known to others,” but rather “is played out at a given point in time and across time” (Ortner, 1997).

"I didn't know there were Americans until I went to school... I can say I can't really relate to what African Americans go through because I felt like I was so removed from that whole lifestyle. From greetings to making certain foods, I never had that experience except maybe in school, and once you're home, you better snap back. You might as well be getting on a plane to Nigeria when you get home. Once you get home, you can smell it." ~ Oyato

Home is rarely recognized as the “site of the community [that] should be understood to be moving and moveable — even a multiplicity of “sites”—in which realities are defined by discursive practices rather than by pre-established social structures or the fixed coordinates of a semantic space” (Ortner, 1997). Michel Foucault names space as "heterotopic" - a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all other real sites are found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted." In these ways, Americans, as well as immigrant parents, have yet to fully understand Africans in their "physical, cultural and emotional movement back and forth between African homeland and American metropolitan centers," (D'Alisera, 2004). Hence, the home has multiple meanings as well as addresses.

“I didn’t want my friends to come to my house because of the smell of food, and running to lock my door and put towels so it would not get on my clothes.” ~ Yeniva

“I did everything I could do to fit in with the Americans. I shamelessly wouldn’t acknowledge you if you were Sierra Leonean.” ~ Mariama

“I was forced into embracing the culture. You may have other Africans that went to your school or lived in your apartment complex. You were probably outed, and then you just have to go with it.” ~ Sarran

For many of the subjects growing up, the "home" was so African centered in America that many of them felt as though they had to choose the more dominant culture, in this case, American culture, to acclimate themselves socially outside the home (Sasso 2014). They felt as though American culture clashed with teachings at home and would not be acceptable to parents and family (Sasso 2014). This experience is the Transnational Circuit, "in which the distance between seemingly separable worlds is brought into close juxtaposition, creating complex heterogeneities" (Rouse 1991). Thus, making many of my subjects transnationals; individuals that establish links between multiple sites (countries, cities, locals, etc.), situating themselves exclusively in neither one nor the other, and are no longer confined to a single central orientation (D’Alisera 2004). As these transnational communities grow in number (and size), the ways they organize meaning and action become embedded in both the displacement and juxtaposition of cultural forms (Sasso 2014). Hence, such communities must be understood as increasingly de-territorialized (D’Alisera 2004).

"You know when you're young, and you don't want to be identified as African, I remember not wanting to identify as African. African was nothing cool. When people say you're African, you're like my parents are African. My parents were always like, what exactly does that mean. You are African. So in my head, I always heard it but never felt it until I became myself." ~ Yeniva

In this excerpt, Yeniva is not only trying to decipher who she is but rather what her identity represents in the United States of America being the child of African immigrants (Sasso 2014). Through the recounting of her experiences, she is pushing for the discourse of transnational communities and identity politics (Sasso 2014). Through a complex process of compliance and resistance to the "melting pot" of the United States of America, community boundaries are constructed, affirmed, reinforced, and contested in a series of assertions anchored in symbolic/ritual statements of "authenticity" are constructed for the children of West African immigrants (D'Alisera 2004). The concept of "transnationalism" has had parents viewing their children as strangers, as parents struggle to make those children familiar with national and cultural identities (Sasso 2014). They lament that their children, neither fully Sierra Leonean nor any other West African nationality, nor thoroughly American, do not know who they are—or who their parents are (D'Alisera 2004). In other words, the parents fear the erasure of Sierra Leonean or any different West African cultural identity (Sasso 2014). This fear has substantiated the lack of educational diversity in the United States of America outside of the context of the home, putting a lot of onus on the parents (Sasso 2014).

"In Brooklyn, there was a lot of Nigerians, and there was a church, Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) that had a Nigerian pastor, that we called him Daddy Church.

There were a lot of small families that were coming together. It became a community that was my family. I only knew CAC, didn't even know there were other tribes." ~ Oyato

Oyato's accounts of her childhood highlight an African-centered upbringing that reinforces an African identity, which is important to parents because the West paints Africa as the "Dark Continent" (Sasso 2014). Thus, African parents have to work twice as hard to create constructive images of their home country within a western prejudice framework (Sasso 2014). There is a notion of "authenticity" formulated by parents' powerful, romanticized, and profoundly nostalgic re-telling of homeland (D'Alisera, 2004). This issue is significant because it serves as a particular national connection to African countries that they believe their child should have as well (Sasso 2014). That is why parents are careful in raising their children via the participation in rituals, ceremonies and other cultural events (Sasso 2014). In a multiplicity of ways, in particular, through ceremony and ritual, they draw a set of boundaries for their children that reflect a collective identity and so, they hope, protect their children from a variety of outside forces (Cohen 1985).

"Growing up as a first generation child in America, you live a double life. You have the way you talk to your parents, the way you talk to your friends, and the way you talk in professional settings." ~ Sarran

"Children born in the U.S. to African parents, develop accents that are not typically African American and in the process encounter difficulties, particularly, with Americans in general both Black and White. They are neither American nor African." ~ Dr. Cecil Blake

Given the constant conflicts of cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities represented by the women in the film, viewers can see the development of social consciousness and call for different meanings of Black representation (Sasso 2014). The information and insights provided by the respondents in the film argue for a new discourse on Black representation (Sasso 2014). The complexity of the firsthand accounts offered is not as much novel, but the novelty that the scholars and analysts are acknowledging the complexity and the suggestion that such data require something different of our current analytical, theoretical and conceptual terrain and approaches (Sasso 2014).

W.E.B Dubois has given a great framework of how to begin to analyze such data with the theory of double consciousness;

the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self...He would not Africanize American, for American has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American...without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. - W. E. B. Du Bois (Dubois & Farrah 2005).

However, the thesis of the film starts with double consciousness and goes beyond with multiple consciousnesses (Sasso 2014). Filmmaker and scholar, Akosua Adoma Owusu, suggests that "the African immigrant is unlike the African American who has a double consciousness because the African immigrant has a triple consciousness." Owusu believes that; 1) the African immigrant has to assimilate in White American culture in order to succeed in American society; 2) the African immigrant is grouped and identified with African Americans in the eyes of others

because of their shared skin color, although the African does not always identify with African American culture and history; 3) the African immigrant has to deal with the African world and his or her line of descent (Sasso 2014). This project shows that in addition to all those above 1.5 and 2.0 African immigrants, they have to deal with the African world and their line of descent. They also rarely settle into one cultural nationality because they were born in the United States of America, lived in America too long or struggle with the identity politics that include but are not limited to language, cultural, racial, and ethnic expectations (Sasso 2014).

As African migrants continue to move to the United States and raise children in the United States, one must acknowledge how immigrant experiences, diaspora social realities or consciousness are constructed, communicated, and contested in America (Author 2012). According to the anthropological data of the ethnographic study collected and collated by scholars such as D'Alisera and Awokoya, identity is fluid, situational, and socially constructed. Individuals have multiple identities that emerge in different social contexts (Awokoya 2009; D'Alisera 2013, Sasso 2014). The women I interviewed in the United States and Sierra Leon often have to balance these identities; Black, African, African American, American, the specific West African country in which they come from, ethnic groups of the home country, and assimilating to what is White to succeed (Sasso 2014). It is hard for 1.5 and 2.0 generation African migrants to culturally assimilate in both America and the respective African country because they are neither African nor American but represent an identity that is more fluid (Sasso 2014). Many of their identities are molded through parents, schools, media, social and cultural clubs, and peer groups that comprise of both nonimmigrant and immigrant children (Sasso 2014). Despite the identities they are socialized to perform, the women never fully feel African or American; they are always negotiating new forms of blackness from all their experiences of

either living in the United States, living in West Africa, or having had the chance of being in both areas (Sasso 2014). The negotiation of multiple identities reveals the complex and often contradictory messages that these women receive from society, from their parents, communities, peers, and institutions. Generational migrants negotiate these multiple identities as they attempt to understand who they are and where they belong.

Identity/ Racial Barriers

Although there is no significant historical and sociological evidence on the first through second- generation experience of new-wave African immigrants due to its relative newness, considerable research has been conducted on second and third generation West Indians (Lombardi 2014). Like Africans, West Indians' phenotypical blackness is often indistinguishable from that of African Americans; thus, this research provides insight for future generations of new-wave Africans immigrants (Lombardi 2014). The acculturation experiences of West Indians and new-wave Africans have proven more difficult than those of non-Black immigrants because of American social perceptions and understandings of blackness (Lombardi 2014). Research reveals that members of both [generally defined] groups attempt to distinguish themselves from African Americans (Lombardi 2014). Despite this, in the case of West Indians, the second and later generations are consistently more likely to assimilate into Black America, collective socialization into being by or in response to the effects of structural and interpersonal racism and economic segregation (Lombardi 2014).

New waves of Black immigrants in the past three decades have broadened the African diaspora in the United States (Lombardi 2014). This migration prevents any identity fixed on a single historical experience with a single story on what it means to be Black. Despite roots in Africa, several centuries stand between evolved cultures and interactions in an African past. The

United States' imperial culture socializes new-wave African immigrants with tropes specific to American blackness, and its racial history instigates their acculturation into its Black community (Lombardi 2014). New-wave African immigrants are identified as African Americans based on their perceived "blackness." This configuration has come to identify more than just race, but a history of suffering from American injustice (Lombardi 2014). This essentialization makes the immigration process much more difficult for these new groups of Africans with various histories (Lombardi 2014). New-wave African immigrants must manage assimilation, maintaining identity, and socialization with "blackness" and the stereotypes and stigmas associated with it (Lombardi 2014). One may surmise that new-wave African immigrants' sometimes critical perceptions of African Americans, are as a result of the social manipulations of a "colorblind" -- albeit subtly racist—society (Lombardi 2014).

In an attempt to include new-wave African immigrants within conversations of diaspora, editors Isidore Okpewho and Nairu Nzegwu have chosen to label them as a "new" African diaspora (Lombardi 2014). The necessity for new theorizing on the global black diaspora exposes exclusive limits in accepted understandings and dialogues based on American and Eurocentric ideas of blackness. In his introduction to *The New African Diaspora*, Okpewho suggests that we should consider the relationship between the "old" and "new" diasporas (Lombardi 2014). He writes, "We might begin to understand these relations by characterizing the older diaspora as precolonial, and the more recent one as postcolonial, or by using the demarcation Ali Mazrui has drawn between what he calls the diaspora of enslavement and the diaspora of imperialism" (Lombardi 2014). Discussing the dichotomy between old and new is useful because it recognizes the need for theoretical development. Also, by labeling the two diasporas "precolonial" and "postcolonial," Okpewho suggests that while it does not make it explicit, the

two diasporas share a common ancestry of subjugation of slavery by the West (Lombardi 2014). Okpewho, though, is skeptical about the relationship between the old and new diasporas, despite alluding to an inherent connection. His skepticism is like that of much older first-generation African immigrants who brought their families to the United States to achieve the "American Dream" (Lombardi 2014). After a close reading of Okpewho's essay, I suggest that his theorization of a new African diaspora purposefully seeks to accentuate the gap between new-wave African immigrants and native Blacks.

He writes, "I hope that in time the need for these modes of classification will cease to exist, and the U.S. government will give everyone living here two choices: you are either an American pure and simple, or you are some other nationality...But most of us, true professionals any nation would die for, are here to make an honest life for our families, not to deny anyone a chance to realize their American dream (Okpewho 2009)."

Academic research on new-wave African immigration provides endless sympathies for what seems to be Okpewho's frustration with the racial barriers that affect black immigrants in the United States. The problem with research dependent on a parent first generation is that the experiences of pre-adulthood socialization, which provide a more transparent, though not yet crystal clear, understanding of acculturation, are not fully developed (Lombardi 2014). Acknowledging apparent differences, the West Indian experience, as previously stated, suggests that later generations of African immigrants will almost inevitably become Black (Lombardi 2014).

Strained relations between new-wave Africans and native Black Americans is an expected outcome of new-wave Africans'--as well as other Black immigrants--economic and academic success (Lombardi 2014). African Americans often feel that Black immigrants steal

opportunities, which they believe are rightfully theirs such as admissions slots granted Blacks through Affirmative Action (Lombardi 2014). According to Kevin Brown and Jeannine Bell in "Demise of the Talented Tenth," Blacks that are descendants of slaves and have overcome historical racism in the United States should receive priority because their parents did not choose to emigrate to the United States (Brown and Bell 2008). In this study, Brown, and Bell also expose statistical evidence that reveals how a disproportionate number of Black students attending highly selective American universities are first- and second-generation Black immigrants (Brown and Bell 2008). They argue that the descendants of slaves have a fuller commitment to reducing the racial oppression existing in the United States, so they should have a priority in candidacy over other Black ethnic groups when it comes to filling slots allocated for Affirmative Action. They propose that colleges should use separate classification categories for native and immigrant Blacks on admission forms (Lombardi 2014).

Often, new-wave African immigrants come to the United States with stereotypes of African Americans as lazy, poor, and violent (Lombardi 2014). West Indian and African immigrants have responded to this by creating ethnic enclaves that lie on the borders of African American urban neighborhoods. New wave African immigrants make similar attempts at distinguishing themselves from other Blacks. The complexities of race and ethnicity in America have made the relationships of African immigrants in the diaspora with that of American born Blacks and Caribbean immigrants the focal point of constructed, lived or negotiated expressions (Awokoya 2009). The various Black diaspora groups, i.e. Caribbeans, African Immigrants, and Blacks represented and handled in the United States via the complexities of United States discourse have had both positive and negative attributes concerning intra and inter-relational bonds.

"I can relate to African Americans in Black professional struggle" ~ Mariama

"Hanging out with American friends wasn't really something they were too happy about. They thought Black Americans were a bad influence. American friends weren't really encouraged." ~ Sarran

"I felt as though African Americans were trying to be like me." ~ Mariama

"There are a lot of negative connotations associated with African Americans, so you want to disassociate yourself. People like to shy away from that, so I used to shy away from that because Nigerian/ West African parents, they have these negative ways that they refer to African Americans and sometimes White Americans." ~ Oyato

Participants of *Am I: The Film* find themselves relating to the discriminatory racial and ethnic experiences of their counterparts, but they like to shy away from the negative attributes associated with "blackness." In America, Blacks are criminalized and face stereotypes of being lazy and violent (Awokoya 2009).

"This is a stigma that I usually take to the socialization of children in the U.S. The image of the African American had always been derogatory in terms of the dominant culture and history. The African American has contributed a lot, and the African children don't really understand the American history. They buy the dominant negative narrative. The narrative seems pretty hard to dispel even with Barack as president. When you have such a narrative, deeply entrenched in the curriculum and media. The stereotype becomes an issue from African children because they don't want to be identified with

what they read, what they hear and at times what they see in the media. So that resentment is there." ~ Dr. Blake

Given the social pressure to perform being "Black" or "African," there is often a back and forth related to being Black versus African. In most households, growing up, the preference was the African perspective but all the while living/being in America, there is a pressure to perform Blackness (Sasso 2014). Participants are expected to have African centered identities, based on the allocation of authentic African names, and expectation to attend cultural celebrations, and religious rituals (Sasso 2014). On the other hand, the women tried hard to fit in performing both Black and American identities taught outside of their parents' rearing. They also used different names or changed the pronunciation of their names to make it easier for those in America and so that they can more easily fit in (Sasso 2014).

"My name blessing is for the American people. I am Nigerian and follow that because that was the culture I was accustomed to." ~ Oyato

Many recognized that their love/hate relationship with other Blacks in America resulted from individual discriminatory experiences, trying to fit in with them, and being teased about being different and simply being African (Sasso 2014).

On the other hand, when 1.5 and second-generation families visit or move to the African home country, they are faced with complexities of ethnicity, nationality, and class that result in identity negotiation (Sasso 2014). There is always a question of authenticity resulting in inter and intra ethnic bonds working in tension when it comes to nationality in ethnic groups in the home country of West Africa (Sasso 2014). The unique experiences of the women interviewed navigating local and transnational spaces highlight not only the establishment of new, fluid identities but also showcase the search for authenticity and purpose of being "at home" (Sasso

2014). These examples expose lack immigrants' reservations toward identifying with race and the African American community. We should understand this strained relationship as an illustration of the negotiations Black immigrants undergo as part of their immigrant experiences, and not as a universal, everlasting divide (Lombardi 2014).

As the immigrant experience continues, the difficulty of escaping racial stigmatization and oppression becomes less bearable (Lombardi 2014). According to Guenther et al. 2011, police harassment on the streets is where new-wave African immigrant men experience the most racism (Lombardi 2014). Women, on the other hand, experience the most racism in the workplace (Lombardi 2014). New-wave African immigrants experience racism in similar social settings as do African Americans. Although Africans have migrated to the United States throughout the twentieth century, it has only been in the past few decades that they have stayed and become permanent members of the American community. Most research conducted on new-wave African immigrants emphasizes the experiences of first-generation immigrants and their attempts at asserting ethnicity to remain distinct from other Black groups and to help themselves achieve economic success (Lombardi 2014). It is difficult, though, to fully understand their confrontation with American blackness because we do not have the numbers yet to perform significant multigenerational research.

Remittances & Returnees

When considering the aftermath of transnational migration outside of racial and ethnic identity one must consider the importance of remittances and returnees to the African home country. The role of the familial structure is once again vital in return migration, remittances, and aspects of human, social and financial capital acquisition and investment (Tiemoko 2004). Using Cerase's typology of return migration, the analysis seeks to discriminate between migrants whose

return decisions were affected by their families – considered as ‘return of conservatism’ – and those who made individual return decisions – considered as ‘return of innovation’ (Tiemoko 2004). The findings reveal that the relationship between the type of return (and extent of family involvement in this decision), and the extent of financial, human and social capital transfers, varies between countries and across groups of migrants (Tiemoko 2004). Although those whose return is influenced by their families might be considered to have made more ‘conservative’ return decisions, this group was found to be more likely to have transferred financial capital to their home country, and more likely to have maintained social capital gained abroad after their return. They were also as likely as ‘innovative’ returnees to have promoted changes in family life or the workplace (Tiemoko 2004).

As previously mentioned, within the West African region, many types of migration can be observed: unskilled and semi-skilled labor migrants, highly-educated professionals and students, as well as nomads, ‘undocumented’ migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (Capps et al. 2012). International migration drains developing countries of their skilled professionals and talented individuals, reinforcing these countries' position of weakness and dependency in the world economy (Black and King 2004). But how can this be the case when the countries do not have what is needed to utilize these skills or give adequate opportunities for professional development. Hence, migration should be seen as less of a brain drain and more of brain gain if home governments can strengthen diasporic affairs that aid returnees and properly manage remittances until infrastructures can support skilled professionals.

Remittances have a positive impact on West African countries. For example, in 2001, migrant workers worldwide sent a total of \$72.3 million back to their home countries in the developing world, more than the total amount of official development assistance from the north

to the south (Black and King 2004). In low-income countries, the total amount remitted was double the amount of foreign direct investment, and 20% higher than official aid, making migrants' remittances potentially the most significant source of finance for development (Black and King 2004). In new places of residence, earnings are often higher than within West Africa, providing significant potential for the investment of 'surplus' income back home (Black and King 2004). There is a shred of growing evidence and a realization that social factors – including factors relating to household and family structures – play a critical role in determining patterns of migration and development, and in influencing outcomes (Black and King 2004). For example, a major development problem in Africa is the lack of capital and investment, and migrants generate money for investment through remittances (Black and King 2004).

In turn, although much has been made in the literature elsewhere of migrants investing in primarily 'unproductive' activities, such as the building of new houses, or other displays of family wealth such as weddings or other rituals (Black and King 2004), there is an increasing recognition of the potentially direct impacts of migration on poverty (Black and King 2004). Over 80% of those who had sent remittances in a recent study of return to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire reported that they did so primarily to meet the subsistence needs of their families (Black et al., 2003b). There was also a significant group of Ghanaian returnees who had invested in small businesses either in preparation for or after, their return (Black et al., 2003a). Although Black and King also highlight the significant spending by emigrants on lavish funerals for family members back home, they also note the importance of such events as social gatherings that help to create and extend social capital between migrants and their home communities, especially amongst the young (Black and King 2004).

The analysis needed to understand return migration has been relatively ignored in the literature on immigration, especially in a West African context, even though some returns are occurring (Black and King 2004). In some cases, these returns are forced – as in the case of over 2000 Ghanaians were deported from a total of 58 different countries in 1993 (Black and King 2004) – whilst in others, this may predominantly involve the return of professionals who have completed their careers abroad and are returning in order to retire in their native land (Black and King 2004). Other gains are also occurring, in which a diversity of return movements to countries of origin documented for Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Cape Verde (Black and King 2004). The rise of academic and policy concern with transnationalism might imply that permanent return is becoming less relevant as a process, not just concerning Africa. Transnationalism itself can be arguably conceptualized as a form of restitution and as a form of integration in host societies (Black and King 2004). Thus, contrary to the perspective of northern governments, where any return that involves re-emigration is seen as indicating a failure of the sustainability of return (cf. International Organization for Migration, 2002), a sustainable alternative view suggests that returnees need to retain continued access to the broader international professional and social world in which they have worked and lived (Black and King 2004). In other words, no return is permanent. Hence in the case of higher-level professionals, the notion of brain circulation followed brain drain and brain gain. Ghanaian and Ivorian returnees highlight the value of maintaining professional contacts and other social networks they have made abroad after their return, and indeed in many cases continue to travel overseas (Black and King 2004). It is the ability to return and re-emigrate – to circulate, in other words – that underpins transnationalism (Black and King 2004).

Moreover, if it is true that more highly educated and professional groups dominate emigration from West Africa, it is also true that the highly skilled represent a significant category amongst returnees (Black and King 2004). This theory however only poses to be true if migration between African countries did not exist. Indeed, there is more population flow between African countries between Africa and the outside world, even the 'traditional' countries of destination. Reflecting on this reality, migrants can act as a catalyst for development activities (Black and King 2004). In part, such a focus responds to the criticism that migration predominantly drains Africa of its skilled professionals, since it provides concrete evidence that the flow of skills and ideas, as well as financial capital, can be in the opposite direction (Black and King 2004). However, the impact of migration depends not only on the characteristics of the migrants themselves but also on the potential of the host society to absorb new money and ideas, as well as its openness to such flows (Black and King 2004).

Conclusion

Dissecting family dynamics of recent African Immigrants to the United States highlights the need for a multiplicity and fluidity of identity (i.e.: holding multiple and sometimes contrary communities while constantly moving between continents). This chapter also advocated for the possibility of fluidity in the reflexivity as one moves between these identity markers to create epistemological questions, constitute authorship, and expand representation. This argument is explored in this chapter to problematize familial structures associated with the themes of migration and community. When migration occurs, there are benefits individually and communally for these new groups of migrants to the United States. A question of recent African immigrants is often: are they "too (we) to be (I) or too (I) to be (we)? Utilizing the hyphen on African and American situates the adjustments and adaptations in transnational political

involvement, racial and ethnic identities, gender relations, as well as financial responsibility to show the anxieties of the "we" and the "I." As one reflects on the strength of the family structure and resilience in dealing with a host of home country issues, as well as final settlement choices, this transnational migration is nothing short of a transformative experience. Whether African immigrants are working as merchants in New York City, professors at major institutions, fashion designers, textile creators, hair braiders or taxi drivers, the documentation and profiling of their collective and individual experiences provide further enrichment and enlargement of the American and African diasporic quilt (Arthur 2000). Their presence offers an opportunity to highlight the peoples and cultures of Africa. The knowledge gained by an understanding of the experiences of African immigrants in the United States can help erase the doubts and apprehensions that Americans, in general, may have about Africa, and possibly open up avenues for better relations between the peoples and governments of the United States and Africa (Arthur 2000). This analysis will transform the conceptualizations of African diasporic identities from one that is historically limited to the bicultural formation and into one that asserts the complexity of diasporic consciousness and constructed texts.

The following chapter delves into fashion as a tool of building, fostering and establishing relationships across the African diaspora. In the "The Language of West African Textiles," Lisa Aronson writes "cloth functions as language or as a facilitator of the spoken or written word. On the one hand, the cloth is an inherently flat surface, like a page in a book, upon which abstract symbols or words become a text. The cloth is also pliable and therefore able to be wrapped around the body. In that capacity, the messages one wears are likely to say something about one's identity, beliefs, or set of values" (Aronson 1992, 38). Aronson also acknowledges that human

creativity, expressions, and aesthetic judgments play an essential role in the fate of an occasional print and its success as an instrument of communication (Aronson 1992).

"African Fashion" or "Fashion from Africa" discusses trends within and throughout the African diaspora, and although often seen as lacking cohesion due to cultural, economic, and ecological contexts, yet it is still a communicative art form. Problematic as generalizations may be, the idea of "Africa" as a socio-cultural space of circulation of people, ideas, and objects helps to focus attention on the intended recipients of the messages communicated through the textiles selected for this study (Bishop 2011). In response to James Ferguson's suggestion that anthropologists consider "broader questions concerning the category that is 'Africa' and its place in the world...as a way to think about such large-scale issues as globalization, modernity, global inequality, and social justice" (Ferguson 2006, 4). Due to glocalization and modernity, African Fashion in itself is global, making what constitutes African Print complex in the scholarship of African fabric tradition.

CHAPTER 5

AFRICAN FASHION AS A MEDIUM FOR ANALYZING THE IDENTITY NARRATIVE OF GENERATIONAL MIGRANTS

Introduction

In this chapter, African fashion serves as a vehicle to further locate and understand the transnational anxieties of African cultural identities given the history and more recent state of African fashion via the cloth, the wearing of clothes, the image creator and consumer. This chapter examines the issue of African identity within the local and global context of a broader set of African cultural identities in order to understand the use and production of African fashion, its benefits, and costs, and the role of design and consumption on the continent and throughout the diaspora. The framework of social mobility is utilized to identify patterns and practices in social class stratification that creates a complex diasporic consciousness when analyzing African Fashion. African Fashion celebrates diverse narratives about Africa's cultures and customs not only within the continent of Africa but also throughout the African diaspora. African Fashion is critically reviewed as an assemblage. Jane Bennett writes about assemblages as, "ad hoc groupings of... living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within" (Bennett 2010). African Fashion is seen as an assemblage due to the nations within the African diaspora and how concepts are shared, united and rejected. African designers interpret and execute their unique ideas throughout the world which deterritorializes the continent of Africa. Hence, the analysis offered in this chapter is a pan- African approach and not intended to essentialize a homogeneous account of African fashion, but rather the purpose is to trace diasporic connections among African subregions where

this art form is in utilized for cultural preservation and identity development (Spencer 1982; Clarke 2002).

Given the transnational nature of the diaspora, one must also consider the effects of colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and global anti-blackness when analyzing African Fashion. These factors have exacerbated the potential of Western fashion to mimic African Fashion. Olori Swim is an example of a design house that creates Ankara swimsuits and not only mirrors the colonizer but also co-opts western design, thus rebranding for African markets with a capitalist objective. It also highlights a lack of creativity on the part of the swimsuit designers. African Fashion design, with its majestic sense of aesthetics, can move through mimicking to the forefront of the global stage. The problematic history of the West mimicking African Fashion dilutes the narratives. Some designers do not realize how powerful a piece of fabric can be as an educational tool. In fact, with education, these designers could use their artwork as a transformative force, especially in the Western realm. Given that history, members of the diaspora need to be intentional in their design of African Fashion, and the stories they create as image-makers.

Although Nyamnjoh is referencing African journalism in his text *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Nyamnjoh 2005), his theoretical findings apply to the fashion designers of the African diaspora. Nyamnjoh believes that there has to be an attunement to context and everyday life to be critical of the dominant discourse in the arts and media (Wasserman 2009). Hence, one has to pay close attention to the specifics of locale, the agency of ordinary people in their encounters with fashion and the politics of everyday life. If not, there is a western liberal model based on the "I/ individual" autonomy and freedom that ignores the complicated patterns of the "We/belonging" in Africa (Wasserman 2009). This created tension

cemented is in dominant normative theories of Western fashion that demands independence and detachment which results in conflicting loyalties to cultural and ethnic communities (Wasserman 2009). He describes this situation as follows:

African world-views and cultural values are hence doubly excluded: first by the ideology of hierarchies of cultures, and second by cultural industries more interested in profits than the promotion of creative diversity and cultural plurality. The consequence is an idea of democracy hardly informed by popular articulations of personhood and agency in Africa. Hence, the professional values are not in tune with the expectations of those they purport to serve. The predicament of media/art practitioners in such a situation is obvious: to be of real service to liberal democracy, they must ignore alternative ideas of personhood and agency in the cultural communities of which they are part. Similarly, attending to the interests of particular cultural groups risks contradicting the principles of liberal democracy and its emphasis on the autonomous individual. Torn between such competing and conflicting understandings of democracy, in this case, fashion designers, find it increasingly difficult to marry rhetoric with practice, and for a strategic instrumentalist, reasons may opt for a Jekyll and Hyde personality (Nyamnjoh 2005, 2-3).

Shifting the Narrative of African Fashion by Generational Migrants of African Diaspora

Mimic is the repetition or reflection of an object or textile, which includes the infiltration of colonialism. The act of mimicking is a side effect of colonization and is not a tool that empowers the creators despite its illusionary nature otherwise. Ideally mimicking will progress and develop into a critique with the goals of re-contextualizing and remixing with the goals of remixing; however, that is not always the case. Without remixing or re-contextualizing,

mimicking becoming the impetus for lack of respect for African Fashion as well as constant exploitation.

Mimic can, however, develop into a critique with the goals of re-contextualizing and remixing. Re-mixing is the process of adding one's flair/flavor, sampling from a variety of cultural influences to create a new product, whereas re-contextualizing includes a shift from a change in perception to change in definition. Professor Lessig offers introspective perspectives on remixing, as he believes it is a powerful tool that regains the culture of our past (Lessig 2008, Lee 2010). Lessig imagines this can be accomplished via amateur interactivity and creativity with artistic works, characterized as the Read-Write ("RW") culture, meaning that the individual can do more than just read the content—the person can also "write" to it (Lee 2010). In the case of African Fashion, as Lessig argues image makers can use culture and other's work to transform and design new creations, but the only way this thrives is via RW culture, and that encompasses amateur or user interactivity with content more broadly (Lessig 2008, Lee 2010). The amateur part is essential, as it not only lessens the copyright burden but also minimizes a capitalistic approach to creation.

According to Lessig, "the RW creativity does not compete with or weaken the market for the creative work that gets remixed" or sung (Lessig 2008, Lee 2010). In the music industry, both activities of singing "the songs of the day" and remixing other people's work involve acts of creativity for the person engaged in the endeavor that can complement the original work (Lee 2010). What we don't want in this industry is what Lessig calls the Read-Only ("RO") culture also known as the "couch potato," which is the passive state of receiving content like an inert receptacle (Lee 2010). This approach tends to happen when there is no engagement and image-makers are only reading the work, without substantially contributing. This lack of remixing can

be called mimicking. Mimicking does not move African Fashion to the acclaim or stage where it is needed because colonial residue continues to infiltrate African cultural production. Instead, mimicking is more comfortable to accomplish as it merely mirrors the colonizer.

African fashion cannot be defined solely by the presence of African or Black bodies. It must also include the modeling performance and especially how an individual walks, gestures, and speaks. Performance of and within African fashion lends itself to a range of added cultural dimensions (Tulloch 2005). For example, this could include but not be limited to:

1. Wearing of traditional wear
2. Fashion made of African fabric or Ankara
3. Style made on the continent
4. Fashion made by African diasporic natives

Moreover, it is dependent on the aesthetic choices made in the creation of clothing: the flow of the cloth, the intricate threading and adornments, and the ways that the clothes are styled on the body. African fashion is an art form and therefore part of the influential African arts—practiced throughout the African diaspora. African fashion often has a collective and individual impact in both its textile production and in the wearing of cloth that re-inscribes a sense of self and culture. The concept of the communal refers to the object itself and the individual references the "I" who made it as well as the "I" who wears it. However, this line between the thing and creator, or object and subject is often blurred or divided in both cases.

A deeper understanding of the communal and individual lenses through which African Fashion can best be understood and experienced emerges in Dubois' double consciousness and Stuart Hall's vision of cultural identity. Consider the notion of "one's true self" versus and "what we really are;" and an acknowledgment of an African style that explores multiple interlocking

modes of self-definition presents itself (Tulloch 2005). The debate transcends the simplest notions of identity to consider sartorial agency as an essential feature of self-respect and human dignity (Tulloch 2005). The stakes of this agency are urgent given the limited colonial and historical representations of the migration of African people; beholden as these theories are to notions of the Dark Continent, corruption; postcoloniality, civil wars, etc. Given the reported/recorded history of Africa, it may not be possible for African Fashion to be presented as a dignified outward manifestation of itself. Dignity can be hard to maintain/attain for a historically oppressed people as they are struggling to be seen as who they are. In the case of African Fashion, the struggle to be recognized in the global arena with dignity and without misinterpreted cultural appropriation remains elusive. This chapter will allow for the historical background of African Fashion as it justifies as from who and to whom African Fashion is created. This analysis is necessary as the African designer who wants to be at the top battles with the task of not creating with the white colonizer lens, which is reproduced as the only lens. The process of remixing and re-contextualizing eradicates the infiltration of the colonizer. It's essential that we look at the three stages of creation: mimicking, remixing, and re-contextualizing. Re-contextualizing is imperative as it includes thought and a new lens.

Narratives Situating Generational Migrants of African Diaspora

African aesthetics have traveled through empires, conflicts, slavery, migration, globalization, and urbanization to cater to new contexts and new markets. The earliest wearable African artifacts originate from Egypt, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Sierra Leone, with some evidence dating back to 2000 BC and beyond (Jennings 2011). West Africa has been a significant player in the Fashion industry for more than a thousand years especially when it comes to cotton, indigo and textile production. There have long been spinners, dyers, weavers,

embroiderers, and tailors supporting local production, as there have networks of trade (Picton 2005). Historically, there are two sources of imported yarns, dyes, fabrics and garments (Picton 2005). One is North Africa and the Middle East, mediated by trans-Saharan trade and by the popular spread of Islam, and the other in Europe, through coastal trade beginning in the sixteenth century (Picton 2005). As a result, successive Diasporas, initiated by transatlantic slavery, have implanted African forms and sensibilities into European and American culture (Picton 2005).

According to art curator Helen Jennings, Africans were never free from the "fetters of fashion" (Jennings 2011). Dress played a significant role in the definition of both national and ethnic identities. For example, in the 19th century Lagos, anti-colonial politics became a catalyst for a cultural revolution (Picton 2005). People started to question what to call themselves as well as what to wear highlighting the power of nomenclature and dress (Picton 2005). Many rejected European names after repatriating back as freed men and women to Freetown, Sierra Leone and instead adopted Yoruba names (Picton 2005). They also traded in their Eurocentric aesthetics and dress for wide boubous, gowns, and lapas. In the mid 20th century, Kwame Nkrumah as president of Ghana emphasized the global significance of embracing local dress (Picton 2005). Although worn daily for most citizens, countries like Sierra Leone and Ghana have dedicated Friday's to wearing traditional garb in the same spirit of Nkrumah. This revolution was not only taking place in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone but also throughout the continent to ensure the continuing rise and evolution of local dress and textile forms while informing local fashion industries (Picton 2005).

"Africa Rising," the recent upward movement of the continent is more than a headline trend printed in mediums such as Economist and the New York Times. It also more than a narrative played out in conferences and board rooms because it was also a term coined to

delineate the perceived positive futures for many African countries, which were increasingly exhibiting signs of stability and growth (Onuoha 2016, Young 2015, Waddell 2017). Global headlines also read "Made in Africa: Is Manufacturing Taking off on the Continent?" (BBC May 2014). And "Africa Emerging as Next Frontier" (Women's Wear Daily July 2014). The premise of these headlines focuses on Africa as a home to one in seven people on the planet and occupies more real estate than China, America, India and Europe combined. According to the 2014 Ventures Africa Rich List, there are 55 billionaires in the 55 countries that crisscross the continent (Young 2015). Meanwhile, New World Wealth counts 165,000 African millionaires, who together hold an incredible 28 percent of the continent's total personally held wealth (Young 2015). However, Godwin Onuoha outlines that this shift from "Afro-pessimism" to "Afro-euphoria" has overlooked the need for a better policy with regards to equitable distribution of wealth, governance and social welfare programs (Onuoha 2016). In conditions unimaginable to most of us, a third of Africa's 1 billion people live on less than \$2 per day (Young 2015). But according to the African Development Bank, there is a new upwardly mobile mass of around 350 million people earning between \$2 and \$20 per day, who are driving growth in burgeoning consumer markets like fashion (Young 2015). Hence, the disparities highlight that resource-related wealth will linger in the hands of the rich, providing little improvement for underserved populations (Young 2015, Onuoha 2016).

In addition to the economic history, the political history of African Fashion solidifies that the Cultural Revolution is still in effect making African Fashion a necessity for the global stage. African Fashion is needed by the African diaspora to strengthen its documented journey, which has been barely recognizable thus far. It is also the responsibility of the Africans on the continent and throughout the diaspora to maintain, control, and understand African Fashion to continue to

build its value and global viewpoint. The history of African Fashion is one of constant exchange and appropriation, a journey with different influences coming into play across time and place (Jennings 2011). This historical perspective is contrary to the accepted view of African traditions as monolithic and unchanging. The evolution of dress practices confirms fashion's role as a potent visual expression of a continent in constant flux (Jennings 2011).

As of late, the term Afropolitanism, which refers to a new generation, people of African descent who live in Africa and elsewhere, accustomed to moving in between cultures, languages, and homes (Rovine 2015) attempts to bridge the clean gaps described by Hendrickson. According to Hendrickson, we must acknowledge that there is a performative process critical to the creation of "tradition" and "modernity" through which national and international identities are negotiated (Hendrickson 1996). There is strong need to challenge conceptions that divide too cleanly "first" and "third" worlds; colonizer and colonized; producer and consumer; indigene and tourist; or body and spirit (Hendrickson 1996). African writer Taiye Selasi introduced the neologism Afropolitan into pop culture with her famous essay "Bye Bye Babar" (2005), which reformulates cosmopolitanism and citizenship for hypermobile Africans (Picarelli 2017). In the words of Selasi, Afropolitans "belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many." The ambassadors of "multi-dimensional thinking," they "form an identity along at least three dimensions: national, racial, cultural" (Picarelli 2017).

Professor Assié-Lumumba, introduces another perspective of Afropolitanism, by recognizing that Afropolitanism dictates the search for better opportunities for education, socioeconomic attainment, and in some cases human security, by the people of African origin navigating the global world (Assié-Lumumba 52). Hence, one cannot alienate or disregard these

individuals. In the text "32 views on Afropolitanism" Minna Salami characterizes Afropolitanism in its multi-dimensional form as:

A conceptual space in which African heritage realities are both interrogated and understood with the tools and nuances of modern-day globalization. ...[It] is a 'glocal' – global and local – space ... a social, cultural, political, philosophical, psychological, spiritual one... It encompasses existences, experiences, and expressions which are simultaneously historic, present and futuristic ... Unlike the term 'diaspora', however, which largely connotes the African experience outside of the African continent, Afropolitanism exists as much within the continent as outside it. Also unlike diaspora, but like pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism is concerned with social, political and cultural change. Afropolitanism, pan-Africanism and diaspora are therefore synergetic ... a kind of theory like ubuntu. Thus, Afropolitanism is a balancing ideology where the traumas of the African experience – slavery, colonialism, racism, sexism, religious crusades, pogroms – are restored with the marriage of symbolic, inquisitive, humanist ancestral knowledge systems with contemporary technological processes, art, and science (Salami 2015)

Thus, Afropolitans think critically about what it means to be African amid this "In-betweenness" (Rovine 2015). This status means that Afropolitans neither identify with uprooting as in the narrative of the Black diaspora nor with nationalism, nativism, or an essentialized Black pride (Picarelli 2017). Instead, one's sense of self derives from the "effective" relationship established in the places they happen to live, striving "to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures" across transnational borders (Picarelli 2017). This position emphasizes agency and self-assertion, especially the ability not

only to keep peace with but also to spearhead "a new form of African modernity" (Mbembe 2007) needed for part of the sustainability of African Fashion on the global stage.

Chris Folayan, the founder of Mall for Africa, notes: 'All my life, fashion, and style have been a lifeline for cosmopolitan African consumers whose hunger for brands like Polo Ralph Lauren or Prada is matched only by their willingness to buy'(Folayan 2015). But the products they see in international editions of InStyle or GQ are not on sale in brick-and-mortar stores on the continent (Folayan 2015). As a result of poor Internet connectivity and online merchants' hesitations about the risks of selling to Africa, they were not available online either (Folayan 2015). Beyond substantial economic disparities, Folayan amongst many others argues that fashion can generate profits, drive employment, stabilize local economies, and enhance sustainability. This hope for fashion can only occur as long as African countries invest in infrastructure and establish profitable partnerships with both African and non-African actors, thereby sanctioning their full participation in the global market (Folayan 2015). According to the World Bank, the average annual growth rate across the continent is around five percent, and the risk-to-reward ratio is much lower than it once was (Folayan 2015).

The underlying narrative is, of course, to highlight fashion's power to drive development by redistributing the wealth that is now in the hands of a handful of families and therefore encourage a more equitable culture of affluence and conspicuous consumption (Picarelli 2017). Whereas in the West fashion and lifestyle are associated with frivolity and egotism, in Africa they are being encoded as the best means to attain stability, pacification, and exploitability through apparent social, cultural, and economic democratization (Picarelli 2017).

The Production of African Fashion in West Africa and the Western World

Africa's role as both active participant and source of inspiration in global fashion markets provides insights into routes of cross-cultural influence and exchange (Rovine 2015). The cultural evidence of impact is present as we look at this history of the wax print. However, exploitation of culture is also evident, and that has confused the state of African Fashion. Although textile production happens to be the heart of West Africa with a rich variety of designs and styles, such as strip weaving and *bògòlanfini* mud cloth, the scene changed with the mass production of wax print manufactured in Holland using an Asian technique. Wax print from Holland inspired by the Masai beadwork and hand-woven kente cloth became widely popular across the west and central African households (Freeman 2017). This mass production is a prime example of mimicking. It is easy to forget that Europeans first produced many of these fabrics in Holland, and they still are with high sales on the continent. In ignoring the histories of the material, we forget how African culture has been stolen, taken, and resold back to us on the continent and throughout the diaspora.

In the 19th century, during their colonization of what is now Indonesia, the Dutch began automating the batik resistance dye methods of the region, creating wax cloth. Subsequently, the fabric sold to Africans along the Dutch East India Company's trading routes (Freeman 2017). Stalwarts of Paris Fashion Week—Viktor & Rolf and Junya Watanabe, as well as Alexis Temomanin, the British-Ivorian founder of menswear brand Dent de Man—have all collaborated with Vlisco, the Dutch company that has a monopoly on wax-print production (Freeman 2017). According to Elbert van Hunnik, "Customers weave narratives into the wax fabrics, so over the years, they have become part of the central-west-African culture, " (Freeman 2017). He also stated, "For example, Vlisco introduced a series of designs featuring handbags, which became

known as 'Le sac de Michelle Obama' (Freeman 2017). The Real Dutch Wax seal stands for quality and craftsmanship, no different from German cars and Italian leather " (Freeman 2017). Today, Africa accounts for 95 percent of Vlisco's sales (Freeman 2017).

Although the Chinese imports do not share the high quality of Dutch manufactured textiles nor the secondary local print brands, they still sell millions of yards of cloth annually in Ghana. This patronage is due to the simple fact that these Chinese clothes are up to one-half to one-third of the price of the competitors (Ryan, 2015). The fakes make up to close to 60% of all textile sold in Ghana (Yeebo 2015) Market women known as Nana Benz—Nana means mother and Benz refers to Mercedes Benz, the car that successful market women imported to Ghana and other West African countries—may copy a wax print design and commission production in China. Other Chinese companies modify authentic wax print designs from Holland. In total, these imitations cost up to US\$20 million in lost revenues according to Ghana's Ministry of Trade and Industry (Warritay 2013).

As the Chinese companies infiltrate the African textile world, questions of authenticity are still on the table. The future of African fashion lies in the answers of who has the right to explore and adopt these cultural forms? Are any of the textiles created truly authentic prints? There are local companies promoted as locally owned. For instance, Woodin is are part of the Vlisco Group and Akosombo textiles is owned by Hong Kong-based Cha Group (Yeebo 2015). Although some African governments have responded to the piracy by raiding stalls and burning counterfeit goods, unfortunately, it has not yielded significant results (Yeebo 2015). Africans of the diaspora must ask themselves if they are willing to choose a local quality product or designers versus a cheaper import? How will these lower quality designs affect the industry and future of African fashion and narratives? How long can local-based businesses compete with the

Chinese formula (little labor, supplies, and distribution)? Finally, how will the multifaceted and unique roles of wax prints as a cultural form affect women's creative expression in West Africa? (Yeebo 2015).

Cultural Appropriation and Re- Contextualization Rather Than (Re)-Appropriation in West Africa and the Western World

As previously mentioned, it is imperative that African Fashion is documented appropriately. The context of colonialism and textile trade in which Vlisco (among other European textile manufacturers) started to develop and export wax prints in the nineteenth century is crucial to understanding the complex processes of cultural appropriation not only inherent to Vlisco's wax prints but various aspects of African Fashion (Bruggeman 2017).

Christine Delhaye and Rhoda Woets both believe that "[t]he multi-layered history of wax cloth is embedded in a long and ongoing history of global trade and cultural (re)appropriation," (Delhaye and Rhoda 2015, 94; Bruggeman 2017). Before we can even break down cultural (re)appropriation and cultural appropriation we must dissect the African textile history.

'Cultural appropriation' is a complex and much-contested term, but fundamentally entails 'the taking – from a culture that is not one's own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge' (Ziff and Rao 1997, Bruggeman 2017). An important addition to this process of taking is that cultural appropriation also involves 'taking as one's own' or 'making use of' what has originated in another cultural context, integrating it into one's own culture (Young and Brunk 2012, Bruggeman 2017). Problematic colonial power relations actively produced this understanding. Herein lie the issues with cultural appropriation. Because of power dynamics, marginalized groups never afford this taking of one's culture. It should no be mistaken for cultural exchange or assimilation simply because it isn't mutual nor is

it adapted as a means of survival. In the case of African Fashion, cultural appropriation allows for explicit exploitation, which results in profit. According to Essel, the characteristics of African fabrics have become a commercial idea exploited by many non-African fabric designing and printing firms to take advantage of the African fabric consumer market (Essel 2017). Essel considers this an act of cultural appropriation because of the gross imitation and simulation of the authentic African designs for the global market (Essel 2017). He also acknowledges that many may disregard this phenomenon as cultural appropriation because such acts are normal since fashion inspiration is universal (Essel 2017). However, he argues that as a result, such products from these non-African printing firms are a non-African experience of authentic African print characteristics (Essel 2017).

Bruggeman describes "cultural re-appropriation" as the process of reclaiming or 'taking back' these cultural objects. The declining sales of wax prints forced European traders such as Vilsco to search for a new export market, and they found that market in African specifically the British colony Gold Coast (today, Ghana) (Bruggeman 2017, Verbong 1988, Picton 1995). While Bruggeman acknowledges this as cultural re-appropriation, I call it karma for now because I do not believe that what companies such Vilsco have done to survive in the business world is any different from the original term of cultural appropriation. However, the re-contextualizing of the Dutch wax prints conducted by locals into African Fashion as a tradition because of the assigning of local names, meanings and symbolic values is groundbreaking and "cultural re-appropriation." Local consumers and traders are actively participating in the production process have re-contextualized these fabrics into their local traditions, daily practices, and rituals, creating their local visual language (Sylvanus 2007, Delhaye and Woets 2015). However, I have to question is "cultural re-appropriation is the correct terminology. I would argue that it is more

so re-contextualization because there aren't any known African companies or production companies that have reached the level of success of Vilsco. So while is a part of a tradition, it has not been solely recognized by and for Africans which is significant for there to be actual "cultural re-appropriation when to take into account power dynamics.

Furthermore, Vilsco marketers culturally appropriate African culture by inviting contemporary consumers to send in their stories connected to specific designs (Delhaye and Woets 2015). As a brand, Vilsco both constructs and commodifies the idea of the 'authentically African' (Sylvanus 2007). By critically examining the simulacra of authentic African print characteristics, Akinwuni observed that the prints have little or no indigenous African fabric design characteristics to be named as such, and thus, proposed that African governments should invest in mass production of authentic African prints to the global market (Willard 2005, Akinwuni 2008, Essel 2017). Essel and Akinwumi both define African print as ethnic cloth printed and designed by Africans such as the Egyptian fabric printing culture, Adinkra, and Kente from Ghana), Korhogo Cloth from Ivory Coast, Adire from Nigeria, Bogolanfini 'mud cloth' from Mali, and Dogon Cloth from Mali and Burkina Faso (Essel 2017). On the hand, Young in his article titled Africa's Fabric is Dutch, pushes against the notions of Akinwuni and Essel when elucidates that because 95% of the customer base of wax cotton is African, then it has to be a part of the tradition.

Given a large number of African consumers, one cannot ignore Vilsco's branding strategies and the multiple layers of cultural appropriation paradox that Anneke Smelik has coined the 'performance of authenticity' (Smelik 2011). Smelik argues, particularly in the field of fashion 'authenticity is constructed and performed, and it has, therefore, become an illusion that can no longer be true or genuine' (Smelik 2011). Other theorists who also question the

authenticity or genuineness include Butler's ideas on performative identity dynamics. Butler looks at gender as being socially constructed through commonplace speech acts and nonverbal communication that are performative, in that they serve to define and maintain identities (Butler 1990). Butler's view of performativity reverses the idea that a person's identity is the source of their subsequent actions (speech, gestures) (Cavanaugh 2015). Instead, it views actions, behaviors, and gestures as both the result of an individual's identity as well as a source that contributes to the formation of one's identity which is redefined continuously through speech acts and symbolic communication (Cavanaugh 2015). Butler's understanding pertains to individual identity and embodied performances, but this notion of performing identity is also extended to a national and broader cultural level (Bruggeman 2017). Relating this to Stuart Hall's (2002) notion of national identity as a culturally shared and constructed idea of what the nation stands for, helps to understand how specific objects, symbols and representations of fashion play a discursive role in defining and performatively constituting – an inherently fluid and hybrid – national, or in this case even continental, cultural identity (Bruggeman 2017). In the case of African Fashion, Smelik is right in that fashion is constructed and performed but that does not mean that it is no longer true or genuine. All is not lost performance, as the understanding of African Fashion is both reliant upon one's identity as well as the social context in which it is created.

The performance of African – or perhaps rather Ghanaian, Togolese, etc. – identity through Dutch wax is simultaneously constituted and commoditized by the Vlisco brand and subjectively experienced and expressed through the embodied performances of the consumers (Bruggeman 2017). While African identity is performatively formed through (wearing) Vlisco's Dutch wax with its distinctive visual language, hybrid cultural dynamics are always

simultaneously present (Bruggeman 2017). Bruggeman argues that Cultural hybridity is a result of historical processes of cross-cultural fertilization (Bruggeman 2017). However, there is no such thing as cultural hybridity, in the case of Vlisco's production process Dutch wax. Vlisco's production process is synonymous for cultural appropriation. The term is problematic because the Western historical powers operate under exploitation and not equality.

However, Cultural hybridity is relevant concerning the contemporary globalized context of fashion and design by Africans (Bruggeman 2017). In the field of modern African Fashion, which has entered the globalized world of fashion (Rabine 2002), we can find many African Fashion designers who 'celebrate and transform their own cultural heritage in runway fashions emphasizing the use of local textiles and African themes' (Gott and Loughran 2010), excluding Vlisco's wax prints (Bruggeman 2017). Vlisco's change in brand strategy due to the rise in African Fashion, changing demands of the younger generations, and increased competition, was based on finding a way to continue capitalizing on a culture that is not Dutch but sold as Dutch (Bruggeman 2017).

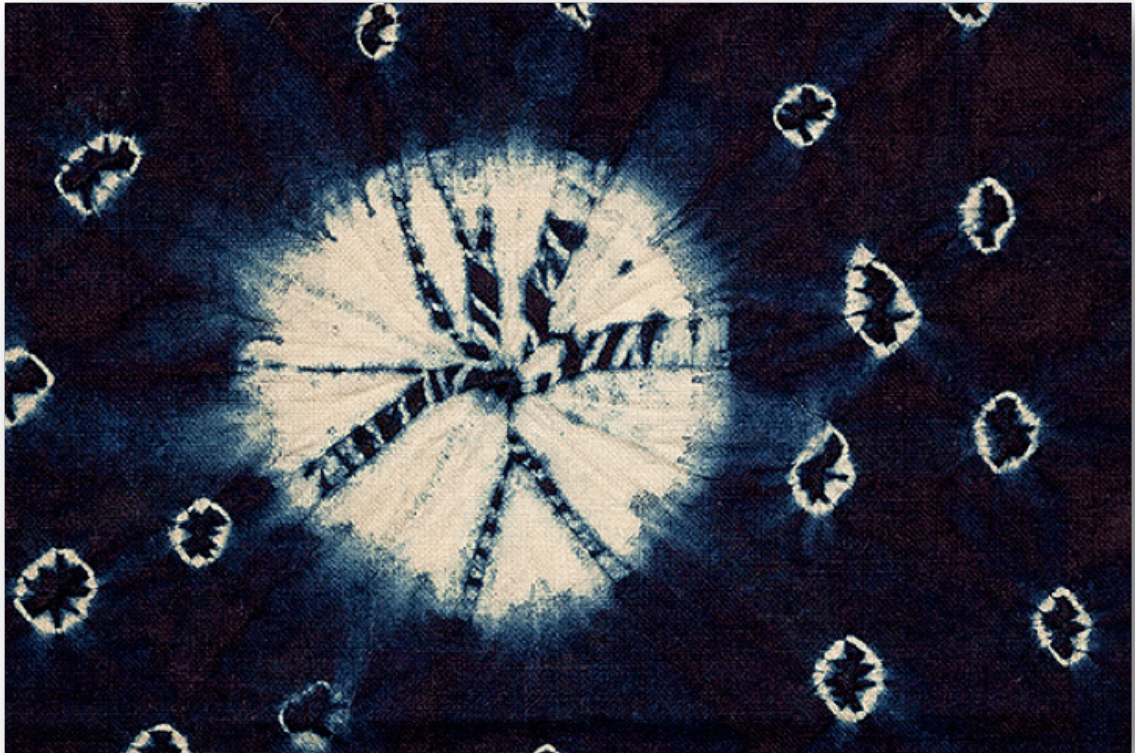
In an interview with the fashion magazine *Dezeen* about this exhibition, Roger Gerards explicitly related Vlisco to (a tradition of) Dutch design: 'People know Dutch design from the past, like Rietveld, very clean, very sober and very reflective. We [Vlisco] are very outspoken, decorative – and we're Dutch design. It's made in a Dutch environment' (Gerard 2013). In this statement, Gerard contrasts Vlisco to a so-called 'typical' minimalist Dutch style, which is a 'Dutch modernistic and conceptual design tradition in graphic design, architecture and interior design' (Teunissen 2011). At the same time, Gerard claims Vlisco as Dutch design due to the Dutch environment in which it is made. As such, this statement demonstrates how Vlisco is actively engaging in the discursive production of the Vlisco textiles as Dutch for a western

audience yet refuses to acknowledge the African influence in the design process as well as its audience. Thus, 'Dutch Design' is a myth of a 'typical Dutch design mentality' (Feitsma 2014, Bruggeman 2017). Although fashion, dress, and clothing are characterized by intercultural exchange, it is somewhat artificial to promote a brand as Dutch, especially in the complicated case of Vlisco that historically has entailed multiple layers of cultural (Bruggeman 2017). Considering Dutch colonial history, it is essential to be careful with actively appropriating and assimilating elements from other cultures, mainly when explicitly presenting it as a form of Dutchness or even Dutch pride (Bruggeman 2017). The only (re) appropriation that takes place in the context of Vlisco is the Africans from various parts of the diaspora that design and wear the wax prints, giving it a different sense of meaning as it relates to individual identity and local culture.

The Responsibility of Image- Makers of the African Diaspora

The multiplicity of identities evoked via fashion makes it a unique storyteller. The street corner boutiques to multinational brands that reach global markets all have a role in the stories told (Rovine 2015). African Fashion production, past and present, tells vivid stories about local histories and global networks of goods and images (Rovine 2015). Garments reveal profound ideas—ideas that can be worn—about changing conceptions of tradition, modernity, and the balance of these broad categories in contemporary cultures (Rovine 2015). Cloth, in particular, has always acted as currency, gift, dowry, a symbol of power, artisanal identity, method of communication and spiritual protection (Jennings 2011). Nigerian Adire, for example, is a resist-dyed indigo cloth developed by Yoruba women in the 1800s with over 400 recognizable patterns (Jennings 2011). Other West African women too were part of a broader cultural sphere of cotton

and fabric work that evolved into "cottage industry" that was decimated by colonial control of African economy to feed and sustain Europeans factories and societies.



Detail of indigo resist dyed cotton, Ibadan, Nigeria 1960s. Museum no. Circ.592-1965. ©

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

This cloth is a detail of Adire Oniko cloth in an Olosupaeleso, 'moons and fruit', pattern.

Each symbolic pattern has an accepted meaning, giving voice to the fabric and its wearer (Jennings 2011). Nigerian textile artist Nike Davies Okundaye teaches adire-making as a means of self-empowerment for women and emerging designer Maki Oh remixing it for a modern audience (Jennings 2011). These stories of Africa's engagement with fashion design manifest in

works of art that make powerful aesthetic statements and yield rich cultural insights (Rovine 2015). The use of Adire symbolic patterns is more intentional in contrast to the easy and worn out replication of the image of the African continent.

Nigerian fashion designer Maki-Oh refuses to use wax cloth because of its complex history (Freeman 2017). She is part of a growing movement among young West African designers — including French-Ivorian Laurence Chauvin-Buthaud of LaurenceAirline, and Chi Atanga, the British-Cameroonian founder of Walls of Benin — who are exploring ways of incorporating more Africa-made fabrics in their work (Freeman 2017). According to Omoyemi Akerele, the founder of Style House Files, a Lagos-based creative agency for African designers, this transition reflects the demands of consumers (Freeman 2017). “There has been a growing realization among Nigerians over the past decade that the fabrics we are buying aren’t as African as we thought they were,” she says (Freeman 2017). “It’s part of a growing global phenomenon where people are questioning the origin of their clothes and consuming more consciously (Freeman 2017).”

An example of a designer that not only mimics but also critiques by remixing and de-contextualizing colonization in the object and owns it would be Nigerian designer Amaka Osakwe with the label Maki Oh. Osakwe challenges prevailing notions of beauty by delving into African cultures to create intricately constructed conversation pieces that embody the principles of preservation, strength, and individuality (Jennings 2011). Artists and designers like Maki-Oh are not only using their heritage in a way that changes the dynamics of the use of cloth tradition but also contributing to the evolution of their culture by creating a contemporary version of their traditional crafts (Jennings 2011).

Maki Oh's Fall 17 collection, as stated on Makioh.com, "is inspired by a young lower-middle-class woman and her journey to see a lover for a casual encounter (Maki Oh 2017). The collection is situated on a late Lagos night, "where the young woman is followed through various modes of public transportation – including the iconic Lagos danfo bus, walking on dark roads, and eventually arriving at her lover's home" (Maki Oh 2017). Osakwe notes, "seduction is an important marker for the collection as it transforms from utilitarian (illustrated with denim) on this late night journey, into seductress - with silhouettes inspired by traditional Nigerian wrapper (worn as sleepwear), lingerie, and fetish wear" (Maki Oh 2017). She also explains that "embroidery pays homage to Danfo art - Lagos buses are usually covered with slogans, logos, stickers, and hand-painted art" (Maki Oh 2017). Osakwe creates hand-painted Adire OH's for this fall collection to represent the danfo bus drivers apparent love for logos seen splattered all over their buses (Maki Oh 2017).

The following Photos are Maki Oh Fall 2017 Collection. Photo Courtesy Amandla Baraka via MakiOh.com.











A collection such as this is substantial to the body of work produced by African image makers because it is not only relevant to young urban Africans who want to wear things that express their identity but also it gives the diaspora a means of connecting with their homeland in a more authentic way (Jennings 2011). Building upon past centuries of fashion development, the first generation of recognized fashion designers drew on local fabrics and styles as a means of showing pride in their African identities in the wake of the flurry of independence that swept across Africa in the 1960s (Jennings 2011). This resurgence attracted international consumers, not least African-Americans who were engaged in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements and who adopted African attire and hairstyles under the mantra "Black is Beautiful." Fashions cyclical nature has not only been the subject of much commentary in popular discourse on fashion but has also influenced campaigns and movements today such as "Black Girl Magic" and "Melanin."

These movements have inspired international designers throughout the decades, and as a result they have created fashion's fantasies of the African aesthetic, cherry picking from cultures, terrains, and peoples (Jennings, 2011). Western designers adopt the visual language of Africa making clichés inevitable (Jennings 2011). For instance, European designers have often used specific colors or materials without necessarily understanding their value (Jennings 2011). As a concerted effort is made to protect African Fashion, the benefactors and exploiters will need to change.

On the other hand, image makers like OkayAfrica that release collections titled African AF mimics the slogan tee-shirt trend with the reproduction of sayings such as "African" or "African AF." These shirts while catchy at first only mimics and partially remixes popular culture and African Fashion but does not fully critique or re-contextualize anything referencing

the diaspora. For instance, what is the symbolic or nuanced meaning of creating an image with the African continent and scripting "Addis" under it? There isn't a nuanced meaning, but there is an oversimplification of what it is to be African or from Addis. It is also an inaccurate image of Addis, Ethiopia. All it does, unfortunately, is acquire praise for a trendy project based on western sales by other companies. However, there is a partial remix as the viewer can view the mention of Addis which is one of the first civilized or developed cities on the continent; thus, highlighting the significance of that local.

It is also important to note that designers of this collection are Oyinkan Olojade and Abiola Oke of OkayAfrica, a company owned by white DC native Vanessa Wruble. The designers had this to say about the collection: "This collection came out of a need to have something that spoke about African pride on a wide scale," says OkayAfrica's Sinat Giwa (Okay Africa 2017). Starting with AFRICAN AF, the team brainstormed a series of pop culture references, adapting them for a young, pan-African audience (Okay Africa 2017). "The African Uni collegiate T-shirt is the banner piece for me," Giwa adds (Okay Africa 2017). "It encompasses what the collection is about and what it was started for—it's referential but also really inclusive" (Okay Africa 2017).

The following photos are courtesy of Okay Africa Summer 2017 Collection via Dex R. Jones on OkayAfrica.Com





Here are the ways that the collection is not referential or inclusive:

1. The selection of four countries out of all 54 leaves about 50 countries. How are these four countries chosen? Is this an expression of elitism?
2. The visual references are incorrect. Why weren't the symbols of individual countries chosen?
3. It is a great thing to have African pride, but it is necessary to show the positive diversity of the continent when given the platform. If not, what does it mean to be African? Should the image creator define these projects?
4. This collection also leads to the mis-education of African fashion to the broader global stage. Why are we still ok with Africa mistaken as a country rather than a continent?

Collections like this raise further questions of whom are you designing for? For culture or capitalism? What does it mean to wear the colonizer? Is it more relevant to blow up the canon than to define one? These questions are asked because this collection fits into the narrative of creating fashion for entertainment purposes. The African AF collection not only pushes the notion of Africa as a continent but also reinforces stereotypes and generalization to a public arena that is not educated about the continent. It also takes the post out of post-colonization given the funding source and backing of this project. Because the owner is a white woman from Washington, DC whose connection to the continent is aid work in Sierra Leone, it has white savior complex written all over it. Therefore, making this collection extremely problematic. Projects like this do not happen by accident and instead are entirely intentional. The colonizer would never empower the colonized/Africans in a certain way that benefits the African diaspora merely because they are still profiting from our willingness to work for and produce for them. It is no coincidence that Africans happen to be the people and continent with the least amount of

production and infrastructural stability to create their garments amongst other things to be able to narrate, construct and control their own stories.

Being a co-founder of Royal Dynamite, an e-commerce company that prides itself in the creation of the diversity of the African aesthetic I often fight with my business partners around the question of representation and how we can challenge the current narrative revolving around African Fashion. What is the power of symbols for example, and how can a company not echo the colonizer but instead achieve pride as a company that makes products by Sierra Leoneans? How can the African Renaissance encompass all 54 countries as well as create a sustainable foundation the race of glocal fashion?

According to Van Dyk Lewis, "fashion has developed to determine both the local and the wider formations of identity in contrast to the well-defined and permanent construction of the dominant culture" (Lewis 2003). Hence, African Fashion is needed to free individuals of the African diaspora from the dominant discourse of style within identity. Because diaspora fashion represents a "wide array of bodily objects, supplements and modifications in order to reap the benefits of African Fashion each aspect of this realm needs to be carefully selected, mannered, and monitored by Diaspora wearers to the extent that political expressions are then formed to satisfy particular social needs" (Lewis 2003). As a political entity, Diaspora fashion is usually represented by apparel and bodily ornaments that are symbolic of the enduring ethnic and at times race struggle (Lewis 2003). The discourse is broadened by a need for Africans of the diaspora to reenact the established aesthetic nuances of historical and geographic contexts (Lewis 2003). Rather than always first and foremost talking back to the West, diaspora fashion image creators and wearers could begin to practice more self-reflexivity to personal and communal experiences. To address the West isn't addressing self or what is unique to culture and identity.

The images created and portrayed can engage in African glocal societal infrastructures and social norms. This reflexivity can manifest in the production of hairstyles, jewelry, textiles and clothing items, all of which are given renewed emphasis when modified in the context of the Diaspora (Lewis 2003). To minimize costs in the development of African Fashion, "we must minimize the level of unease that Diaspora individuals are experiencing by expressing the African image as a collection of diverse metaphors rather than a monolith" (Lewis 2003).

Similarly, to aspiring journalists, fashion image-makers in Africa must be "like containers, be dewatered of the mud and dirt of culture as tradition and custom, and filled afresh with the tested sparkles of culture as modernity and civilization" (Wasserman 2009). Often times fashion image-makers have to "operate in a world where everything has been predefined for them by others, where they are meant to implement and hardly ever to think or rethink, where what is expected of them is respect for canons, not to question how or why canons are forged, or the extent to which canons are inclusive of the creative diversity of the universe that is purportedly of interest to the fashion industry" (Wasserman 2009). Therefore, Nyamnjoh suggests one should carefully avoid the trap of an idealization of Africa and the romantic essentialism of "African values" that many proponents of Afrocentric thought are prone to (Wasserman 2009). He also doesn't believe in taking it easy on African image-makers who fail to uphold ethical standards or choose to operate in a predefined world (Wasserman 2009). Although he takes into account the multiple overlapping spaces and flows in the era of globalization, he points out that one should never forget the global power imbalances and material inequalities (Wasserman 2009). Fashion although not often seen as a medium of technology, it can be utilized as a communicative tool of participatory "citizen journalism" and that in itself is a positive development for the continent of Africa.

The Best Approach for the Future of African Fashion

Mimicking while remixing at the very least can only be successful if we take into account mainstream ideologies, media, the effects of globalization, education and country infrastructure. The Diaspora image and the black body are controlled by the doctrines of the mainstream that place the Diaspora in positions of dissent, and into a near vacuum of continual retreat and diminution (Lewis 1983). Mainstream fashion's ruling authorities ability to make demands upon black images seen and the lack of access and limited success the Diaspora has enjoyed in the process of creating, vetting and marketing fashion (Lewis 2003). Out of the countless major influential mainstream lifestyle and fashion magazines, less than five have African Diaspora fashion editorial directors (Lewis 2003). None of these publications has championed the use of blacks' imagery with the positivism that proclaims an understanding of black fashion presentation, reality, and circumstance (Lewis 2003).

A few exceptions include quality African Fashion editorials like Coura, Agoos, Arise, and Elle South Africa that broadly reflects African Fashion's local, regional, and international manifestations. These publications and blogs such as BellaNaija, FashizBlack, and HauteFashion to name a few are transporting African Fashion to the world. This magazine also provided a platform for photographers, models, and all other players of color, and African heritage in particular. In addition to disseminating imagery and information about African fashion designers and their work, fashion media may shape the narratives that surround designers and their products (Rovine 2015). African Fashion designers who circulate in international markets have to assess the risks and rewards of media coverage that foregrounds their African identity (Rovine 2015).

Although media coverage may prove to be a challenge, social and economic capital of the producers and products of African Fashion has its trials as well. Dr. Van Dyk Lewis asserts that the "wearer's ability to pay is critical, as is social class, making distinctions of class are especially important to the growth of fashion" (Lewis 2003). "The wearer must always appear as if he/or she is transcending class despite other factors or race and/ethnicity" (Lewis 2003). This transcendence might be even crucial for individuals with melanin given the negative stereotypes associated with certain races and ethnic groups (Lewis 2003). Hence, seeming to be of or have acquired a great sense of economic and social capital is essential to the mobility of wearers and producers of fashion (Lewis 2003).

On another communications note, the increase in telecommunications is essential. This growth allows for e-commerce, new media, and social media to connect designers quickly, easily, and cheaply to their customers and each other (Jennings 2011). Blogs are taking African Fashion to the world as well as African periodicals (Jennings 2011). Designers need to have both the means and the channels of communication to achieve recognition (Jennings 2011). They need to be grounded in traditions but exposed to international trends and tastes, allowing them to satisfy local demand, attract international interest and shape contemporary African identities (Jennings 2011). It's the axis of influences and agendas that will make African Fashion exciting and vital (Jennings 2011).is is now attainable given the dynamics of globalization and technology, which avoids the necessity of physical movement to achieve many of these Modica. Also as a result of globalization, African Fashion is now borderless. The fashion world is going global, and the African influence has gone beyond a trend to become part of the fashion lexicon (Jennings 2011). The best design recognizes where it came from and is not defined by its

borders (Jennings 2011). It delivers desirable, inspirational pieces stemming from an open-minded environment (Jennings 2011).

The future holds joint partnerships and accountability with African governments. With an increase in trade and investment in and between Africa and the rest of the world, will result in an increase in stability for the continent (Jennings 2011). African countries need to continue building the fashion and textile industry so that it is a significant contributor to the country's GDP (Jennings 2011). For instance, in Tanzania, The Textile Development Unit (TDU) encourages trade and investment for textile and apparel design as its primary task of supporting the development of a large and internationally competitive textile and garment sub-sector (TDU, 2015). The priorities of TDU include manufacturing and curating producers and identifying talent. In 2013, there was an even stronger Tanzanian support of the textile and garment sub-sector with the formulation of the Textile and Garment Manufacturers Association of Tanzania (TEGAMAT) to represent the interests of the industry (TDU, 2015). Now the coalition of the Government in partnership with TEGAMAT and the TDU is not only working on upgrading the sector but also to improve the regulatory environment, incentives for investors, and the quality of inputs. The TDU is also willing to assist investors in identifying factories and linking investors with joint venture partners. It is important to note that there are investment committees monitored by the TDU for assistance in particular areas. Global Goods can seek advice on the availability and suitability of opportunities and resources in any part of the country.

Given this example, one must note that the very notion of an 'African market' can be misleading. Lack of formal fashion educational facilities, which creates weaknesses in all aspects of the industry from pattern-cutting and styling to marketing and PR (Jennings 2011). Unlike the European Union, the 54 distinctive countries that make up the African Union are not

economically integrated as a single common market (Young 2015.) With over 50 different trading and legal conventions, ten overlapping regional blocs, a dozen climate zones and 2,000 spoken languages, this is a highly fragmented and precarious region, whether you're sourcing, producing, selling or doing anything else along the fashion value chain (Young 2015). But it is one with scale and potential like no other (Young 2015). In other words, there is no country or continent-wide official body to unify and encourage funding for designers. Poor infrastructure in most countries means frequent power cuts, lack of equipment and unreliable transportation all of which increases costs (Young 2015).

Logistics and transportation networks also pose significant issues for African Fashion development. Logistics and transportation are so weak that it costs two to three times more to deliver merchandise to an African customer than to their counterparts in most developed countries (Young 2015). However, The Economist calculates that over the past decade, 75,000 kilometers of new road built on the continent, because of Chinese investment (Young 2015). Africa's retail sector is also overwhelmingly informal even as the small presence of new shopping malls being established all over the continent (Young 2015). Mostly, producers and participants of African Fashion have a lot of work to free itself from the perils of the West to thrive.

However, there is a lot of potential for African fashion as we see more encouragement for individual entrepreneurship and impetus for large-scale factories to give the role economic development plays in nation-building (Bishop 2011). Moreover, African participation in global industrial processes is an indication of progress and modernity despite the highly questionable redistribution of income from such activities, which mainly tends to benefit the powerful (Bishop 2011). Political emphasis on the importance of entrepreneurship and industrial-scale production

allows African leaders to participate in the discourse surrounding the global economy, a discussion that tends to subordinate other concerns regarding social and environmental justice (Bishop 2011). African government would need to shift their dependency from international institutions such as the World Bank to combat the high unemployment rates, low cash incomes, and devise and implement better policies (Bishop 2011). Nonetheless, technology via enterprise will be the best approach to strengthen development strategies (Bishop 2011).

Conclusion

Africa is fashion's new frontier (Jennings 2011) after having been sidelined by mainstream fashion for over half a century and even longer as a source of inspiration (Jennings 2011). The first encounter with African Modern Art came when Picasso had an African moment in 1907 (Jennings 2011). Today artists/fashion designers like Ralph Lauren, Marc Jacobs, John Galliano, Comme des Garçons and Jean Paul Gaultier all known to reference or appropriate African art.

Recently, there have been several design houses—both local and abroad—that have incorporated "African" prints and motifs into their fashion lines (Young 2016). The inspiration of Dutch wax print designs has been noted in the collections of Oscar de la Renta, Yves Saint Laurent, Burberry, and Diane von Furstenberg, to name a few (Young 2016). Ghanaian designers are creating dynamic fashion lines, many that interpret heritage in a new and exciting way (Young 2016). Ghanaian stylists are at the forefront of promoting a fresh "African" fashion narrative as well. However, this increase of interest in "African" prints has not resulted in a surge of business for the locally based textile companies (Young 2016). Instead, a dramatic uptick in "fakes" has flooded the Ghanaian market, with most smuggled from the South China trading area of Guangzhou to the less enforceable area through Lome, Togo (Young 2016).

Today's generation of African designers and image-makers are riding the broader wave of interest in Africa's Renaissance and attracting an international clientele. They are doing so by balancing contemporary fashion pursuits of the new with an appreciation of the ideals of beauty adornment that are deeply rooted in Africa's cultural and social consciousness (Jennings 2011).

African Fashion could and should let go of all of the projected stereotypes from the colonizer, and then they could see its value to max out its potential. Society must also recognize that African Fashion is an individual or group dialogue with community giving way to a more plural perspective of African style (Tulloch 2005). Once we can look beyond the branding systems of Europe and North America when it comes to fashion, one can see African Fashion. By branding systems, I mean moving past "the west is best" mentality so that we can stop copying how they brand fashion and come up with our unique systems to brand first and foremost the diaspora and then international circuits. As both the European and African Fashion systems begin to converge, a universal fashion system may become a reality (Loughran 2009). Though paradoxical, the allure of exoticism will continue to entice because it always survives itself (Loughran 2009). The work of fashion designers all over the world over will always display foreign aesthetic forms (Loughran 2009). This mixing of the familiar with the "other" is paving the way for a glocal aesthetic and will undoubtedly prompt questions on cultural biases that are created via circuits of the West to Africa, colonizer and the colonized, and the diasporic movement which blurs borders (Loughran 2009). Africa and the West are mutually engaged in a semiotic web whose implications are not entirely controlled by any of us, and that has to change (Hendrickson 1996).

Africans have to make their industries and art to tell our stories and remain liberated rather than appropriated and misinterpreted. There are often two simultaneous impulses in

fashion as it relates to the African continent the desire to civilize (Westernize) colonial subjects and to draw on their "primitive" practices to enrich Western culture. There needs to be a change in these paradoxical reactions, vividly embodied by clothing, continue to inform interactions between Western and African cultures. Designers and artists are captivated by the unique vitality and purity of Africa and the prominence of the free spirit, which is sadly often found missing from our day to day lives (Jennings 2011). Although Jennings believes "Today's most influential designers must have a "global appeal while retaining indigenous handwriting" (Jennings 2011) I would state that retaining the indigenous handwriting is the appeal and all that is needed. In the text "From Publish or Perish to Publish and Perish" Nyamnjoh believes that African scholars have to focus their attention so much on entering and impacting on the Western theoretical discourse that they lose sight of the imperative of speaking to people closer to home[o1] [o2] [o3] , in a deterritorialized manner that celebrates the glocal perspective (Nyamnjoh, 2004). This theory is imperative given the need for a multiplicity and fluidity of identity and reflexivity as one moves between these identity markers.

The next chapter problematizes the role and responsibility of image-makers. The framework of re-defining ethnic identity, not only examines the assimilation processes of African immigrants from an individual perspective via personal narratives but acknowledges how participants define themselves by race, ethnicity, and culturally when taking into account education, careers, cultural celebrations, upbringing, access to publications, fashion and beauty choices, dating and societal pressures. Both fashion[o4] [o5] and film are visual texts that explore the ethics of making visual ethnographic texts and reveal how these ethics are upheld or elided to generate rich, polyphonic narratives and "texts" that transcend the authorial voice to retain the dialogical nature of human interactions. In other words, is film capable of enhancing

the process of recovering and conveying the voice of collaborators' especially in the context of the gendered and racial stereotypes that widely circulate and attach to diasporic subjects?

CHAPTER 6

VISUAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: THE ROLE AND PRESENCE OF REFLEXIVITY AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Introduction

Anthropologists have often critiqued ethnographic methodologies for their emphasis on the visual as well as the researcher's gaze given ethnographies reliance on mechanical and digital media, beyond the human eye. This chapter interrogates ethnographic filmmaking as well as the advantages offered by the medium vis-à-vis the written text to give insight regarding the anxieties of generational migrants offered in *Am I: The Film*. I examine the cyclical relationship between researchers and collaborators, explore the ethics of making visual ethnographic texts, and reveal how these ethics are upheld or elided. I will look at the film's ability to generate rich, polyphonic narratives and "texts" that transcend the authorial voice to retain the dialogical nature of human interactions. In other words, is film capable of enhancing the process of recovering and conveying the voice of collaborators' especially in the context of the gendered and racial stereotypes that widely circulate and attach to diasporic subjects? Lastly, I examine the assimilation processes of African immigrants from an individual perspective via personal narratives to underscore and redefine ethnic identity.

Am I: the Film Abstract: “*Am I: Too African to be American or Too American to be African?*” is a documentary film that explores the complex identity formations of young African women living in America and West Africa who identify bi-culturally. It specifically looks at how they wrestle with concepts of race, complexion, gender, and heritage among other issues (Sasso 2014).

In my documentary: *Am I the Film*, there were moments of cultural transmission via conversations in which my grandmother stated, "Nadia, I am passing the torch to you so that you ensure your generation knows their culture" (Sasso 2014). And as the oldest grandchild, I had to oblige. There was another instance in the film where Sarran cried because she realized her children would have to grow up in an all-white neighborhood due to the changing community dynamics of Sierra Leoneans in Washington, DC. This realization goes to demonstrate that life for the African diaspora is inherently close-knit and communal. Therefore, I will use this medium to determine if the role and presence of reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and autoethnography exist in visual media. Through the reflections provided in this essay, I intend to expand upon the under-studied field of audiovisual methods.

Ethnographic Methodologies and Mechanical Digital Media

Cinema and ethnography share a common origin in the sense that both have developed out of the Euro-American intellectual tradition of the late 19th century and both, as a result, are historically linked to a colonial context (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Eraso 2006). Ethnography in the 19th century was supposed to be a reflection of society; however, due to its lack of representation and diversity, social scientists continuously criticized the merit of the field of Anthropology (Clifford & Marcus 1986). Therefore, ethnographic film was under attack as well.

Noted anthropologists Malinowski, Mead, and Bateson, directed the first critiques of ethnography towards colonialist researchers. They highlighted how anthropological knowledge could be used for imperialist purposes and revealed the ethnocentrism of colonial research (Clifford & Marcus 1986). There was a period of silence for nearly a decade following the colonial critique that identified the particular political purpose and power relations underneath

certain types of ostensibly "objective" research. This silence was broken by Geertz' work in the 1970's:

Anthropologists have not always been as aware as they might be of this fact: that although culture exists in the trading post, the hill fort, or the sheep run, anthropology exists in the book, the article, the lecture, the museum display, or sometimes nowadays, the film. To become aware of it is to realize that the line between mode of representation and substantive content is undrawable in the cultural analysis as it is in painting; and that fact in turn seems to threaten the objective status of anthropological knowledge by suggesting that its source is not social reality but scholarly artifice (Geertz 1973).

The representation mode is more abstract whereas the substantive mode is more concrete.

Anthropologists are continually trying to find a balance between the two. From the field perspective, anthropologists describe their fieldwork as a social reality. In the academy, fieldwork can and perhaps all too quickly become scholarly artifice and thus be reduced to the academic practices of 'constructive analysis.' The analysis is based on what material or ideology that the scholar borrows or develops from other academics. Fieldwork is used to codify the practices found. Despite the role of the ethnographer and professional social scientist, neither should lose sight of what it is that the people are doing and the ways in which they do it, in reality, to validate to their work.

The "science" discussion as the alleged paragon of objectivity calls "science" a product of a particular paradigm contextualized in a historical moment (Kuhn 1962, Eraso 2006). Other authors such as Bourdieu, Foucault, and Nietzsche have argued that scientific truth is dependent on a historical and social context. Others followed this work, and although there were

differences, all broadly agreed that social science's *object* of study is not precisely an object, more a subject (Geertz 1973).

Audience Response and Image Makers Responsibility

In *Am:I the Film* the lines between subject and object of study are blurred because I am both creator of the image and participant in how the said image is being represented. As both image creator who shares authorial voice and as a character who responds to that voice, I create a multiplicity of consciousness. I intentionally walked this line to not only showcase those layers but also to spearhead an authentic conversation on identity politics within my community. Doing so was an execution of reflexivity, where I'm contributing to the context of knowledge construction in my immigrant community. This consciousness affects my "eye" as the filmmaker as well as "I" as in person and transforms the plurality of eyes. This consciousness also impacts me as in the community because I am not only thinking about my personal story but those in my family, as well as the broader scope and impact of the project itself. Subjectivity is always present in varying degrees because one can never play the 'fly on the wall.' Unlike, many social scientists in various efforts to mediate ethnographic crises, i.e. trying to be neutral, objective and unambiguous in their writings (Ruby 1995, Eraso 2006), I was not afforded that opportunity. Neutrality does not exist if one is both the subject of knowledge construction and the object of knowledge constructed.

In terms of ethnographic work concerning gendered and black bodies, literature was a form of written ethnography that could not only be visualized but also managed to ignore the anthropological crisis in the 19th century. Research in this manner took a stance while focusing on cultural analysis. Through writing, Africans and African Americans sought to counter the ways they were portrayed in Western literature as savages without culture (Lombardi 2014).

According to Chinua Achebe, African writers of his generation had an obligation to challenge how they were caricatured through stereotypes and myths (Lombardi 2014). Moreover, through writing, Africans had to unearth their past whose existence had been denied by the West (Lombardi 2014). He states, "By 'writing back' to the West we were attempting to reshape the dialogue between the colonized and the colonizer." Both African American and African writers used written storytelling to declare the authenticity of their voices outside the Western colonial mindset. Writing literature granted them the opportunity to have their voices heard by a broader audience, which is the same inspiration for *Am I: The Film*. As the filmmaker of *Am I: The Film*, I am reshaping the dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized so that we can be free to discuss the effects and impact of current community events. We tend to self-police ourselves in dialogue and communication even when the colonizer is not physically present. Hence, I am excluding the colonizer from the conversation quite intentionally. As creator and participant of the film, we can talk about the effects of colonialism and post-colonialism without addressing the needs and concerns of the colonizer.

Writing as a form of protest also influenced racial unity and the establishment of collective identities that could be appreciated in the Anthropological realm. In "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes," Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes, "Accused of lacking a formal and collective history, Blacks published individual histories which, taken together, were intended to narrate in segments the larger yet fragmented history of Blacks in Africa, now dispersed throughout a cold New World...The very face of the race was contingent upon the recording of the black voice" (Gates 1985). African and African American works of literature influenced the establishment of "self-created" collective identities. Writers had the charge to create a voice that would represent the broader African or African American communities (Lombardi 2014).

It is establishing a representative voice for the oppressed population in the United States, African American, and African intellectuals alike recycled language and visual mediums to push back oppressive systems and canons dominated by Western colonizers (Lombardi 2014). African American writers thus preserved cultural differences emphasized by the Black voice in order to give credence to this tradition based on the racial disparity (Lombardi 2014). This pushback aka writeback is continued in films such as *Am I: The Film* where I explore the complex identity formations of young African women living in America and West Africa who identify bi-culturally. It specifically looks at how they wrestle with concepts of race, complexion, gender, and heritage among other issues. Consequently, it gives voice to the different generations and modes of identification displayed throughout the diaspora that is excluded from scholarship on race and ethnicity. These contributions will transform the conceptualizations of African diasporic identities.

Film as Generative of Polyphonic Narratives and Texts

Ethnographic films are not just the sum of ethnography and cinema but a new and distinct audiovisual language (Eraso 2006). The process of representation in social sciences involves a permanent tension between the absence and presence of the context of analysis (Eraso 2006). In the case of the audiovisual technique, this presence is exceptionally close and vivid, whereas in the process of writing there can be a much higher absence due to the distance in time and space (Eraso 2006). In an oversimplification, words can be linear given that they are read in the order intended by the author whereas pictures are nonlinear. When one looks at a picture, there is more than one thing in that one picture to be viewed or interpreted. The eye has the freedom to roam, to notice or ignore details, to make connections, and to interpret meanings (Heider 2007). One's reading of the picture is hardly a neat, linear act and is rather messy and vary depending on the

viewer (Heider 2007). This same non-linear rhetoric of looking at a picture can be applied to film as well because there are often several occurrences happening in the frame with or without sound (Heider 2007). Also in films, narration can attempt to make films seem linear as you listen to the directive words of the narrator set forth by the filmmaker. However, despite the leads provided by narration, one can still call into question what is happening in the frame. Therefore, to skillfully analyze and be critical of the film, one must keep in mind what is happening in the background, or at the sides of the frame, rather than only on what the camera/ narration has focused (Heider 2007).

As creator, director, and character in my film, I was very aware of filming locations, b roll footage, interview audio, music, tones and facial expressions of all of the character/subjects/respondents. For instance, when you watch footage of Mariama reflecting on the ebonics, she spoke as a child or making sure she was as European looking as possible, it is essential to not only note what she was saying, but that she was speaking at her place of work, KPMG, a corporate environment. So even if you are not fully hearing what she was saying, the viewer can understand that she operates in and out of a controlled (and colonized) environment. Pushing this analysis further, one can deduce that KPMG as a representative of the colonizer continually polices' Mariama's identity formation.

In anthropology, the researcher's relationship to the field is described as either emic and/or etic. Emic is the anthropologist from within the social group (from the perspective of the subject) and etic, from outside (from the perspective of the observer). Anthropologists, whether emic or etic, struggle with their relationship to the field and thus employ different filming strategies that provide a more, or less, full context. When writing, however, the researcher has to make an effort to evoke the presences of the context, using images, metaphors and other stylistic

tools (Crawford 1992). Therefore, the camera is not only an auxiliary tool in ethnography, but it is also a modifier that influences the interaction of participants and provides an extra dimension to the field analyses (Eraso 2006). With *Am I: The Film* I struggled with distancing myself from the field because I live in the field, and therefore in most cases/scenes I am considered an insider. For me to add an extra dimension to the field analysis, I focused on transparency, striving to visually tell the story as I heard it, saw it and read it after thoroughly transcribing each interview. In the context of my work, I am always emic, and only strive to inhabit an etic perspective to strengthen the validity and complexity of my work.

The audiovisual data contained in the ethnographic film is also different from the written material because it is already highly codified (Eraso 2006). Written content, in contrast, must be subject to a specific phase of encoding and textualizing with more external categories likely to be imposed as a result. In many ways, films allow the data more space to speak for itself—an argument advanced by Claudine De France (1989) who tells us that filming allows social behavior to keep its unity instead of separating it by using academic schemes (Ardevol 1998). The ethnographic film, in particular, can be extraordinarily useful because of its ability to capture situations or capture what symbolic interactionists term "the constitutive atoms of social life" (Eraso 2006). Nevertheless, it is not as effective in trying to reproduce abstract concepts such as those conducted in written texts (Eraso 2006).

The production of an ethnographic film is not so different from the development of written ethnography. Even though it is not always beneficial to the participant/ subject matter to use a camera, if one finds the right situation, the film can be used and the information gathered can be especially powerful. Representations of rituals, for instance, where music, rhythm, and emotional expressions are pivotal in the overall experience can benefit from the use of

audiovisual media. The representations developed through images and sound can be far more evocative, immediate and in-depth than anything one would register through writing alone. Seeing the sensorial expression is far more impactful than imaging it. Though not everyone speaks the same visual language, the printed has limits, and the major inhibitor is the general obligations of the scholar. I stand by this because I create like to create work that speaks to the communities and broader interlocutors in which I come. Audiovisual offers an additional tool that in certain circumstances is particularly powerful (Eraso 2006).

Furthermore, in ethnographic writing one attempts, within the bounds of word or page limits and the audience or venue one is writing for, to write comprehensively, and in great detail utilizing "Thick" description (Lemelson 2013). Writing is expansive and strives for completeness and holism (Lemelson 2013). Filmmaking is in some ways almost the opposite, engaging in a variety of classic Freudian concept— "condensation"—where one tries to pack as many multi-layered meanings, imagery, symbolism, frameworks, in a scene as possible (Lemelson 2013). One of the goals of a scholar is to craft meaning and understanding from material where this is not immediately apparent. In filmmaking, however, you have to do this within a much more restricted space and time than in writing, and being able to layer and pack these meanings in a visual sense is imperative.

According to visual anthropologist Karl Heider, crafting truth in the ethnographic film while in the field can be hard to produce given the following:

1. The presence of the camera, or the film crew, can make people self-conscious, altering their normal behavior.
2. The filmmakers can stage scenes, or pose people, to get more powerful or more aesthetic shots, in the process altering reality.

3. The very act of photography is exceptionally selective, pointing the lens in one direction and thus not filming all other possible directions, as well as turning the camera on for only a few moments and as a result, not capturing the rest of the moment.
4. Editing is selective in its acts of including or cutting shots.
5. Editing creates an implied unity of action that may not have existed in juxtaposing shots from different times and places (the process called montage).

I also had to account for these things while in production. My Cinematographer was a young White male, and he was not only a distraction during filming but often made me work extra hard to build a rapport on camera during interviews. While filming in Sierra Leone, we couldn't always capture "everyday" life because when people would become aware of the camera as well as the man behind the camera, they instinctively felt as if their image and likeness were being exploited. The cinematographer wasn't the only concern; I also stood out being an American, and when I spoke English. In editing, our visions and interpretations of what footage to use were also different. As a result, I ended up doing most of the edits myself until I found another editor. This experience was much more beneficial since the new editor was not only a woman but also a first-generation American with her dad having migrated from Sierra Leone. We also had the same sense of ethical obligation to the participants given that we saw them as family. Thus, inaccurately representing their images or manipulating their words through the lengthy editorial process would only do a disservice to our communities as well as to the goals of the ethnographic project. 'Shooting film,' and being 'captured on film' are not immune to ethical issues raised in anthropological work. There is inevitably an element of theft and aggression in filming (Lemelson 2013). One way to avoid the problem is to get 'informed consent' from everyone in the film. But even camera-sophisticated Americans cannot be made aware of all of

the possible consequences of appearing in a movie (Heider 2007). Also, if they view the final version of the film, they will not know how audiences will react to them. So, keeping open communication and updated feedback with participants can help to alleviate some of these ethical issues (Heider 2007).

Lastly, I had to account for the emergence of class as the nascent carrier of difference. It was irrelevant whether my identity or the identity of my cinematographer was conspired or self assigned--in a developing country, the value did not translate. In the United States, we were both from a lower class although he possessed White male privilege. In Freetown, we were both seen as a higher class but his White male privilege gave way as well.

Transcending the Authorial Voice

In Ethnographic film, the audience's reaction to the film is developed in the creative and social process of ethnographic filmmaking. This innovative process is what allows for a sensorial impact created by the filmmaker and felt by the viewer (Heider 2007). This process is not to say that anthropologists do not engage in the visual sense in fieldwork but filming while in the field requires one's attention in a different and more nuanced way. Filmmaking is naturally collaborative, including working with the cinematographer to collaborate on shooting; the work of filmmaking is also inherently visual and thus involves the sense of sight (Heider 2007). The process of collaboration is ongoing in the filmmaking process as one composes individual shots, plans shot sequences and manipulates light (Heider 2007).

In addition to the sense of sight, the sense of hearing is also slowly developed in the film whether it is present or not. A film can be won or lost based on sound quality. In the case of making *Am I: The Film*, the sound was important from the very beginning of recording the interviews. In post-production, untangling and interpreting the hour (or longer) interviews, to

produce the 45 min film, took months of interpretation, consultation, exegesis, and analysis. Other aspects of meaning would have been lost if we had not recorded it (and recorded it visually). Also, some of the analyses only made sense if we included, understood, and interpreted the gestures, gesticulations, postures, and multiple interpersonal contexts in which this conversation (and performance) took place (Lemelson 2013). On the other hand, the absence of sound in film can entirely be captivating if the filmmaker is looking to create intrigue, deeper connections and/or emotional impact.

Music is also another way in which ethnographic film can differ from traditional fieldwork as music can play many roles. Whether or not music is the sole purpose in the film or serves as background music, the creator/researcher must incorporate the use of sound into the overall production strategy. In my film, music from various Afrobeat^[1] artists was utilized to keep the viewer engaged throughout the series of "talking head" interviews. It was also used to highlight a certain peak or emotional moments. While screening the film at festivals, universities, and community centers, I have regularly been asked for the film's soundtrack – thus underscoring the audience's interest in the music. Whether it is the multiple contexts in which a film occurs, or it is the specific human, subjective and experiential aspects of the stories themselves, the audience's sense of hearing will be employed, expanded and sometimes tested.

Researchers Theoretical and Conceptual Perspective

To properly understand ethnographic filmmaking as well as its relationship to ethnography one must look at how they have evolved over the years as well as the methods used to carry out such work. The nature of ethnographic work involves the interpretation of cultures (Geertz, 1973) as well as long periods of immersion by the researcher in the field (Eraso 2006). According to Anthropologist Eraso, the primary method used in ethnography is participant

observation, and the aim in using this method is to facilitate the understanding of cultural contexts from the "inside" (Eraso 2006). The researcher generally only elaborates his theoretical and conceptual perspectives having first examined the categories and values of those being studied (Eraso 2006). It is rare that the ethnographer would approach the study with a pre-established set of theoretical or conceptual structures (Eraso 2006). This method explicitly aims to avoid ethnocentrism to develop meaningful relations between research and participant (Eraso 2006).

As a visual ethnographer, I was committed to letting my data guide my work and situate the story being told. Eraso believes that as an ethnographer seeking to equalize power relations between representer (researcher) and represented (participant), the ethnographer must also retain a degree of distance, so as not to "go native"(Eraso 2006). I find this practice to reflect the colonial nature of the field itself. It is a futile exercise to "not go to native" because one cannot play and become "native.' Unfortunately, these general ethnographic principles that tend to apply to both ethnographic writing, as well as ethnographic film, do not account for multidimensional academics that are fluid in identity and roles experienced in the field.

In-depth fieldwork should provide the basis for the ethnographic film determining structure and content in advance. According to Eraso, "it provides the broader context, or menu from which particular moments are captured" (Eraso 2006). It also allows us to locate these moments within the lives of participants. Moreover, filmmaking based on detailed ethnographic fieldwork should always tend towards intercultural representations, and in doing so allow participants space and authority to influence the film. In the context of ethnographic filmmaking, the power to represent these stories can be found in the techniques used by the filmmaker to construct his/her authority within the film. The techniques can be simply styles of narration to

the selection of whom is to be filmed (Eraso 2006). Various film types include but are not limited to expositional style and observational cinema. These types of films are built through several techniques, including objective-like commentaries; the choice of prominent people in the community to support the central argument, and the use of voice-overs to impose the filmmaker's categories and values (Eraso 2006).

The expositional style, commonly used in TV documentaries and to some extent in ethnographic films, reproduces otherness and the colonialist and post-colonialist discourses underpinning this (Eraso 2006). How films are constructed, and through which it evolves, substantiates the images and narratives chosen to support the aforementioned discourse. There is a construction of narrative authority through the systematic use of voice-overs, and these voice-overs tend to be explicit (Eraso 2006). Therefore, a moral stance tends to underlie the comments, and this stance is often based upon *us/them* divide to push the agenda of the filmmaker. Narrations can also reach a high degree of abstraction, much higher than one could achieve through images and polyphonic voice registers. Such a filming style—whether for a TV documentary or an ethnographic film—is highly codified and says as much about the cultures behind the camera as those in front (Eraso 2006). Crawford defines expositional style as a "perspicuous mode of filming "meaning that these films are "ready-made, and with a nice wrapping and detailed instructions for use" (Crawford 1992). As a filmmaker, I do not like narration or using narration in my film. I find this style to be a bit forceful, and I like to engage my audience by having them think for themselves throughout the viewing experience.

Observational cinema, or direct cinema, arrived with synchronic sound and smaller camera in film history (Eraso 2006). Fundamentally this style intended to replicate reality through filming the spontaneity of life with very little to no interference from the production

and/or research team (Eraso 2006). Advocates of observational cinema argued that the camera should be like "*a fly on the wall*" (Eraso 2006). However, this style is often criticized for its naivety in assuming that both the presence of the camera or the perspective of the ethnographer would not surface in the final product (Eraso 2006). The naivety surfaces as one is reminded of the production's team role in selecting the locations for filming, the camera angle and style, and the editing of the footage. This approach not only fails to recognize the "invisible hand" behind the camera but it also assumes that technology can be neutral and that is impossible (Eraso 2006). In short, observational cinema was criticized for not thinking through the process and presence of technologies when creating "*fly on the wall*" documentaries (Eraso 2006).

To challenge power relations within ethnographic films, there must be some degree of reflexivity (Eraso 2006). Reflexivity can be either explicit or implicit. Either way, it shows that the researcher accepts that he/ she is part of the process of data generation. Visual Anthropologist Jay Ruby asserts that reflexivity in ethnographic film addresses the long-standing criticisms of this research tool and demonstrates that the researcher is clear about epistemological issues that would have once been masked (Ruby 1995). The acknowledgment that the exposition of *truth* is mediated by scientists' language, background, subjective experience, and even by emotions and feelings was important. This reveals parallels with philosophical shifts in scientific history (Eraso 2006). Nochlin's (1971) work analyzing the realist literature notes how: "Realism is in a highly ambiguous relation to the highly problematical concept of *reality* (...), and it is selective in what chooses to describe and prescribe" (Apthorpe 1997). The question that emerged from this work was how researchers could pursue a shared cognition with the subjects being studied, and avoid being the monophonic authority? Reflexivity represents a first and pivotal step towards avoiding past attempts to be "the shaman [s] of objectivity" (Ruby 1995).

The idea of power underpins this turn to reflexivity. It relates to a concern for more research-participant relations and is based on Foucault's theoretical work. Power, according to Foucault, is best understood as a set of strategies or *power technologies* that exist both in the dominated and in the dominating and these are mobile and multi-directional (Eraso 2006). This idea rejects the notion of power as domination through the possession of authority. It is not to deny that hierarchical relationships exist, instead say that these are not the essence of power (Eraso 2006).

Reflexivity, as an expression of self-consciousness, has existed in both ethnographic filmmaking and written ethnography from their inception. It first appeared in films that were, paradoxically, close to an expositional style. The Soviet filmmaker Vertov, for example, understood the role of the filmmaker to be a communicator telling the truth; in his case during the 1920s and 1930's the truth centered on the events of the Soviet revolution. Vertov calls this *Kino Pravda* also known as truth-cinema (Eraso 2006). There is a contradiction between his propagandistic and ideological intentions and his conviction of showing the *truth* or the *reality* (Eraso 2006). Nevertheless, he was significant in the history of ethnographic filmmaking because he used reflexivity to stress the role of filmmakers as craftsmen and women who edit and select footage, and in doing so depict *a* particular reality. Vertov's insights were central in the subsequent development of ethnographic filmmaking; the 1960's "observational style" is a successor of Vertov 's reflexive approach (Eraso 2006).

The above represents the early first attempts of reflexivity in ethnographic filmmaking, and over time more in-depth, and more meaningful reflexivity developed. Anthropologist Jay Ruby, for instance, breaks ethnographic filmmaking down into producer, process, and product. The producer is effectively the researcher(s) behind the camera; the process is the fieldwork and

filming methods, means and techniques; and the product is the ethnographic film itself after various stages of editing have been completed. To be reflexive, argues Ruby, means that we must be conscious of all three of these steps, reflect upon the processes by which ethnographic films are constructed, and relay this to the audiences (Ruby 1977). Worth was another early contributor to the more reflexive approach that followed on from observational cinema (Worth 1972). He introduced a more comprehensive and critical-analytical approach to examining ethnographic film by asking *why* and *with what purpose* the film had been constructed (Eraso 2006). Worth understood cinema as a: "language and, therefore, as a mode of representation, a form of narration and means of communication that will go parallel to other cultural manifestations and that will reflect the cognitive schemes of a specific social group" (Worth 1972; Ardevol 1998). Like Worth, I saw *Am I: The Film* as a mode of representation that moves between multiple cultures in its narrative, making sure that an understanding of these different experiences isn't lost in translation. The film centers on marginalized people whose perspectives are rarely given an audience or an avenue to have those conversations and/or those moments of healing. I believe film as a medium helps audiences overcome barriers of language and culture. Everyone can read a visual story. I think it's vital that we speak in a language that everyone can understand so that we can all be a part of the conversation.

Reflexivity, today, is visible through several specific strategies: the use of meta-narratives; discussions over power position within the filmed and between the researcher and participants; emphasis on the film as discourse; and, revealing the partiality of the *reality* captured on film (Eraso 2006). These strategies have led to the development of a discernible *reflexive style* to which Min-Ha and Macdougall are essential contributors. Trinh Min-ha has experimented with new modes of representation criticizing realism as a mode of domination

(Min-ha 1989; Eraso 2006). Arguably her films lack in-depth fieldwork to inform their production as she considers herself *another* with a distinctive sensibility towards representing *otherness* (Eraso 2006). In spite of such an ambiguous relationship to ethnography, her reflections on domination, representation and the *other* in films mark significant contributions (Eraso 2006). David Macdougall is one of the most critical filmmaking theorizers, starting as an observational filmmaker he later criticized this style and started to create more reflexive films. He was intrigued by how an ethnographic film can be merged into the stories that the researcher is reporting.

Just as authoritarian constructions of *otherness* inside films were eventually eroded, today we see that *intersubjectivity* is the contemporary challenge for the ethnographic films (Eraso 2006). This challenge entails the construction of spheres of negotiated authority between researcher and subject; the constructions of polyphonic spaces of communication that explicitly or implicitly allow the practice of reflexivity. According to scholar Eraso, the first significant attempt at intersubjectivity stemmed from an engineer's filming aspirations (Eraso 2006). In his film *Nanook of the North* (1922), Flaherty constructed a fiction of the life of the Eskimo Nanook who would fight with nature and play the role of the *authentic* native (Eraso 2006). In constructing this narrative, the Eskimo had a pivotal role not only as the main character of the film but also as a decision-maker before and during its recording (Eraso 2006). Flaherty also used shots, before editing the film, to gain feedback from the Eskimo and his family (Eraso 2006). This was arguably the earliest use of what is now called the *participant camera*, something ethnographic filmmakers are "still clumsily experimenting with" (Rouch 1995).

Following on from the work of Flaherty an *interactive style* developed in an ethnographic film with Rouch and Morin at the forefront through their film *Chronique d'un Eté* (1960) (Eraso

2006). Through unplanned interactions, they asked people on the street about their personal lives effectively constructing the body of the film (Eraso 2006). This style aimed to develop a shared authority within the film by allowing moments of encounter between researcher and participant to influence the production process (Eraso 2006). Rouch took the interactive style further and more profound through what was called *ethno-fictions* in which people fictionalize their own lives (Eraso 2006). His work took place mainly in Africa and his films, as well as being participant-oriented and intersubjective, implicitly contested the tradition of colonialist and post-colonialist non-fiction cinema (Eraso 2006).

Adopting a similar perspective, Macdougall, reflected upon the fact that their subjects have, even partially, possessed very few films (Eraso 2006). This "possession" tends only to occur if the film has direct practical and symbolic relevance to the subjects, and/or the academic and aesthetic interests of the filmmaker are close to the interests of those being filmed (Eraso 2006). It is one thing for the filmmaker to be reflexive but quite another to achieve a genuinely interactive style. Moreover, no matter how hard we try to build a subject-to-subject relationship in the film, the voice of the "other" will always be second to the motives of the filmmaker (Eraso 2006). Reflexivity may be used to examine the production of reality through the film and to highlight this production to the film's audience, but its power to allow *exotic others* who star in the film to speak and to contribute for themselves and on their terms is much more problematic (Eraso 2006).

As of late, the ethnocentricity of the ethnographic film has been further challenged given the developments of ethnic media (Eraso 2006). The filmmaker has become a channel of communication for those being filmed towards their audience, and indigenous people have increasingly used audiovisual media for their own political or social purposes (Eraso 2006).

Somehow, though, this is an oxymoron as it combines original structures of thought as well as the institutional structures of TV and cinema (Shohat & Stam 2002). It is also an interesting example that goes beyond intersubjectivity between researcher and participants. In this case, they both are the same thing as the researchers are participants simultaneously. The blurring of the frontier that traditionally separates researcher and participants is something also acknowledged by Macdougall when he talks of the "very common phenomena that is barely described; the feeling that your work disintegrates and is absorbed and claimed by the lives that generated it" (Macdougall 1995; Eraso 2006). Today, then, ethnographic cinema has moved into interstitial spaces that question and deconstruct orthodox representations of *otherness*. It has abandoned languages that objectify the *other* and lead us to reflect, through audiovisual language, on the ambiguity and permeability of cultural identity (Eraso 2006).

Conclusion

In many respects, ethnographic cinema has evolved in parallel with the various stages and critical ruptures of social science (Eraso 2006). Cinema and science have, for instance, both been concerned with colonial legacies and questions over the exoticization and objectification of the *other*, concerns that have led to a critical re-evaluation of the methods used to engage with the *real world* (Eraso 2006). Like the methodological advances in social science, ethnographic cinema has adopted reflexive tools for self-critique and has challenged the fallacies of *neutral knowledge* creation (Eraso 2006). In cinematographic terms, reflexivity translates to a series of processes and techniques that are mostly dependent upon who is behind and/ or who directs the camera, as well as who edits the film that is produced. Early ethnographic cinema—arguably before social scientists had appreciated the full importance of concepts such as reflexivity—engaged with the multiple processes and techniques that create representations of *reality* (Eraso

2006). The most obvious example of this was in experimenting with interculturality: where the cultures of the researcher and the researched were negotiated and roles were to some extent reversed (Eraso 2006).

As social scientists began exploring the methodological and epistemological complexities of qualitative inquiry, ethnographic filmmakers such as Min-Ha, Rouch and Macdougall began advancing beyond the early experiments with intercultural representation (Min-Ha 1989; Rouch 1995; Macdougall 1995; Eraso 2006). Starting from the 1970s the processes and product of ethnographic film became more unpredictable as experiments with, and insights into, reflexivity advanced at a considerable pace (Eraso 2006). The decade witnessed a move away from rather formal monophonic representations, and the opening up of new filmmaking possibilities (Eraso 2006). It marked a point at which we began to rethink the effect of ethnographic films, both in terms of the use of ethnographic knowledge and in terms of the people being filmed (Eraso 2006).

The development in the methods of representation used in the ethnographic film has garnered much interest. New film genres have opened up, most intriguingly from indigenous and minority media, and questions are once again being directed at the production of *reality* and the need for more intercultural reflection. Notwithstanding the complexity surrounding the globalized Twenty-First Century ethnographic film, now ethnographers want to develop enriching techniques that move beyond the rhetoric of intercultural participation (Eraso 2006). By this we mean that they must accept that as filmmakers, they will lose authority in the film and that authority will tend to get decentralized and shared among subjects and filmic content to produce the ethnographic film at its best. I intentionally let the footage and collection of data dictate my film, which in turn empowered participants. All in all, as the creator and participant it

is my job to use my visual "eye" to represent the "we" which includes "I." It is also my job to use the "we" on the hyphen of African and American to show "We" and "I" in *Am I: the Film*.

In the next chapter, there is a focus on the "I" amongst the "We," utilizing language, religion, and politics to analyze the affiliation and knowledge produced by generational migrants throughout the assimilation process or lack thereof. My experiences from producing *Am I: the Film* and examining the cyclical relationship between researchers and collaborators, not only inspired the following chapter but furthers situates my identity anxieties in an auto-ethnographic text. According to Rothman, the "I" in the social sciences is best reflected in an autoethnographic text (Katz Rothman 2005, 2007). Although both autoethnography and ethnography require reflexivity and intersubjectivity, autoethnography is a methodological approach that focuses on the subjective experiences of the researcher. Utilizing this autoethnography, I was both "native/insider," "self/other," and "subject/object." Situated in this myriad of cultural experiences, I had to pose epistemological questions to myself such as "How do I know what I know?" in order to reveal several layers of consciousness that link my personal experiences to the overall cultural experience (Ellis and Bochner 2000).

^[1] a style of popular music incorporating elements of African music and jazz, soul, and funk.

CHAPTER 7

FREE OR NOT FREE IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

Introduction

In reflecting on my multiple experiences as a generational migrant of Sierra Leonean descent and as the "outsider/insider" ethnographer in Sierra Leone, I am not only arguing for a multiplicity and fluidity of identity construction (i.e., holding multiple and sometimes contrary communities while constantly moving between continents), but also I am advocating for the possibility of fluidity in the reflexivity as one moves between these identity markers to create epistemological questions, constitute authorship, and expand representation. Anthropologists who often interchanged the terms "native or ethno" also at times self-identified as "insider or outsider." Anthropologists utilized these identity markers because of one's familiarity with the language, the unspoken cultural codes of the community, or one's social ties with the research site (Aguilar 1981; Fahim 1982; Jones 1970; Kim 1990; Motzafi- Haller 1997). The analysis of identity markers within transnational identity formation allowed for the exploration of generational migrants concerning politics, education, and income and the effects of immigration/returnee policies or politics. Similar to anthropologist Motzafi- Haller, after my last time in Sierra Leone where I completed field research, I experienced positions of both "native" and "outsider" rather than one over the other. This led me to critique the geographical boundaries of "the field." I was able to problematize not only the strict and rigid theories of identity politics but also the theories surrounding fieldwork that legitimize the researcher/scholar as well as his/her findings.

The Deconstruction of the Field

The interactions between the ethnographer and the subjects constantly shift the field/discourse called anthropology. MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga suggest that "Fieldwork is a form of social engagement, not a withdrawal into secluded academe, and is how anthropologists connect directly with social reality and social change" (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; Kamanda 2004). Moreover, actors activate space, place, and symbols to construct the field of fieldwork, and so in a sense, the field does not exist ahead of the interaction (Kamanda 2004). In other words, the interactions and reactions of the individuals in the field are what produces the fieldwork, and in as much one can prepare for it, one still has to see what awaits.

In order to fully understand what takes place in anthropology, one must look closely at what is happening in the field rather than where things are happening. Anthropologists Gupta and Ferguson, have been looking at "the place where the distinctive work of "fieldwork" may be done and not the "what" of anthropology but the "where" in an effort to stay in meaningful conversation with contemporary global social trends (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The purpose of this was to decenter and de-fetishize the concept of "the field" (Kamanda 2004). Gupta and Ferguson (ibid) suggest that the term fieldwork was introduced into anthropology by A.C. Haddon, a zoologist and has its roots in the natural sciences (Kamanda 2004). Therefore, it was believed one should study the most natural state of an environment leaving little room for direct observation. The field essentially became a place where one collected data, wrote notes, and documented raw materials encountered. Therefore, it was believed one should study the most natural state of an environment leaving little room for direct observation.

On the contrary, "the home" was where the reflective, polished, theoretical, and writing of the ethnographic text took place (Kamanda 2004). In the evolution of anthropology, it was recognized that "the field" and "the home" did not need to be separate. In my experience, the "home" and "the field" were de-territorialized, as the two were the same for me. Therefore, my research was complicated and debunked the notion that one enters the field and exits afterwards. I did not wait to get home for me to start looking at my work reflexively. Anthropologists believe that some places are more "field like" while others are less so if not exotic, distant, or strange are not only limiting the field of anthropology but the work of anthropologists (Kamanda 2004).

According to cultural anthropologist Reed- Danahay, there were two significant developments in anthropology, the debates about representation (by whom and about whom) and the increasing trend toward self - reflexivity in all realms of writing (Reed-Danahay 1997). In 1984, Daniel Bertaux and Martin Kohli concluded that, in anthropology, "life stories are no longer fashionable due to the trend of scientism" (Reed-Danahay 1997). This observation lasted from the 1960s to 1980s when there was an interest in "native autobiography" in anthropology, but today there is a new renewed interest in personal narrative, in life history, and autobiography amongst anthropologists. Thus, acknowledging that the field is changing given the notions of a postcolonial and postmodern society. Primarily, the concept of autoethnography reflects a changing conception of both the self and society (Reed-Danahay 1997, Cohen 1994; Giddens 1991).

The term autoethnography has a double sense- referring either to the ethnography of one's group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest (Reed-Danahay 1997). The dual nature of the meaning of autoethnography makes it a useful device to question the binary conventions of a self/ society split, as well as the boundary between the objective and the

subjective (Reed-Danahay 1997). In regards to my research, I use autoethnography to understand the relationship between the "I," the individual, and the "we," the community and their relationship. The postmodern/ postcolonial conception of self and society is one of a multiplicity of identities, of cultural displacement, and of shifting axes of power (Reed-Danahay 1997) all of which call for new forms of theory and writing.

According to Reed-Danahay, Autoethnography stands at the intersection of three genres of writing which are becoming increasingly visible: (1) "native anthropology," in which people who are formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their group; (2) "ethnic autobiography," personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) "autobiographical ethnography," in which anthropologists interject personal experiences into ethnographic writing (Reed-Danahay 1997). Anthropologists are increasingly explicit in their exploration of the links between their autobiographies and their ethnographic practices (Reed-Danahay 1997, Okely and Callaway 1992). I could easily argue that this chapter falls in all three categories in the sense that I can be seen as native ethnographer being an author of studies of my group, an ethnic autobiography in that I am writing about an ethnic minority group, and an autobiographical biography in that I interject my personal experiences in writing and thus proving that as a multidimensional individual I must write in a multidimensional manner.

These developments arise to problematize the stereotypical image of the ethnographer being that of the Euro-America male leaving behind his culture, enters another culture perhaps thousands of miles away, inserts himself in that culture and attempts to enter the shared world of the shared meanings of the people (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Cole 1988; Jones 1988; Wilson 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Kamanda 2004). Cultural Anthropologists Marcus and Fischer,

for instance, have called for the "Repatriation of anthropology" by which they mean that the anthropological gaze which has traditionally been fixed on the "other" as exotic, distant, and foreign. One must also take into account Anthropology's historical ties to colonialism (Kamanda 2004). Given that my research deals with the African continent, I could not help but take in to account about how colonialism and/or colonial discourse might have affected scholarship produced about the African continent, its people and cultures. As a woman that carries several ethnic labels, I also reflected upon the absence of female and other diverse voices in the field of anthropology. One must beware of not only being glued to the anthropological canon by questioning the diversity of voices present or presented in the field.

The Role of the Ethnography and Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a form of writing wherein the ethnographer is the native. The native anthropologist is an insider, a "person who researches on the cultural, racial, or ethnic group of which he is a member" (Jones 1988:30) (Kamanda 2004). Various theorists have different perspectives as to what the role of autoethnography and the auto ethnographer. I agree with Norman Denzin who characterizes "autoethnography" as a text, which blends ethnography and autobiography. The important characteristic of Denzin is that the writer does not adopt the "outsider" convention of writing collective to traditional ethnography because it entails one's own life experiences (Reed-Danahay 1997). Literary critic Alice Deck posits that the author of an autoethnography is the indigenous ethnographer, the native expert, whose authentic first-hand knowledge of the culture is sufficient to lend authority to the text (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Anthropologist Marie Louise Pratt in the text *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, defines autoethnography as a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them (Reed-Danahay 1997). She also

describes auto ethnographies as forms of writing that address both the writer's group and a wider, more dominant one. Therefore, the audience for my research includes both generational migrants as well as the broader group of academia. However, it more essential for me to that the multidimensional generational migrants can locate themselves first before the larger audience at hand.

Moreover, Jones further complicates the notion of the auto ethnographer by concluding that the insider or native anthropologist has an advantage over the outsider not because he or she is better but because the data and insights are different (Kamanda 2004). Although he recognizes that both the insider and the outsider may have certain advantages; he states that both dualities share some practical problems including preconceptions about social reality, capable of causing distortions, rendering inaccuracies, and half-truths (Kamanda 2004). A prime example occurred when he spoke with Black people who were, for the most part, most anxious to give information because they believed that most of the available literature on Black people was by white people and therefore distorted. They want to set the record straight (Kamanda 2004). On the other hand, Motzafi- Haller had the experience of going in the field as an insider and experienced an outsider perspective at the same field site. She argues both experiences were valid and should be able to operate in its binaries in order to produce reputable scholarly work. However, Anthropologists are always made to choose. Motzafi- Haller would problematize this for there are other factors such as a class that could alter the ethnographers status. I agree with the critique of Motzafi- Haller in that trapping the work of anthropologists in binaries only promotes the reductive essentializing of identities (Reed-Danahay 1997). While Jones and Kamanda, bring a point of both sides to have advantages and disadvantages, one should not have to choose because that choice reduces the impact of the work being produced.

As a native ethnographer telling my own story, I have become an ethnographer of my own culture. Thus, I have had to be aware of the politics of representation and the power relations inherent in traditional ethnographic accounts (Behar and Gordon 1995; Fischer 1994; Moore 1994; Strathern 1987; Reed-Danahay 1997.) One concern is the questioning of identity and selfhood, associated with W.E.B Du Bois “double consciousness.” However, I argue that identity is more than a binary of identity, but a call for texts and theories that allow for multiple and shifting identities (Reed-Danahay 1997). Double identity and insider/ outsider are constructs too simplistic for an adequate understanding of the processes of representation and power (Reed-Danahay 1997).

One of the critical aspects of auto-ethnography is that it becomes a tool to explore cultural displacement or marginalization experienced by the auto-ethnographer (Reed-Danahay 1997). This perspective of displacement is linked to issues of rapid socio-cultural change, globalization, and transculturation, as well as extremes of violence occurring in many parts of the worlds (Reed-Danahay 1997). Thus, dualisms of identity as well as insider/ outsider status are to be broken down (Reed-Danahay 1997). Whether the auto ethnographer is the anthropologist studying his or her own kind, the native telling his or her life story or the native anthropologist, this figure is not entirely "at home," as the home is deterritorialized (Reed-Danahay 1997). Therefore I am exploring my ability to transcend everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life as it is related to my ability to write or do autoethnography. This postmodern condition allows for a re-writing of the self and the social (Reed-Danahay 1997).

Why Sierra Leone?

Among reasons for choosing to be an anthropologist- to step in and out of society and study it- are those connected with family background and personality. Class, religion,

and other social, (as well as personal) factors define certain experiences, and the reactions to create new ones. Hortense Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend* (1996)

Located on the outskirts of West Africa is 27,700 square miles of land filled with beautiful beaches and its natural mineral resource of diamonds. Unfortunately, this same land of beauty has been described by the CIA World Fact Book as one of the poorest, most poverty-stricken countries in the world. This land is known as Sierra Leone and it has been struggling to overcome adversity due to a tragic eleven-year civil war over politics and diamonds. Sierra Leone is plagued by much more than merely diamond wars but a marked socioeconomic rift that divides the poor from the affluent. The middle class is effectively non-existent, which provides the wealthy with much-needed medical access – while the poor are shut out.

Class is a major issue within Sierra Leone and this fact is apparent in the drastically high maternal and infant mortality rates that exist today. Women of the lower class tend to lack the health care resources necessary to carry on a full term pregnancy into a successful delivery. According to UNICEF, “Sierra Leone has the worst record for prenatal care, with one in eight women dying during pregnancy or child birth, compared to a one in 76 average in the rest of the developing world and one in 8,000 in the developed world.” UNICEF also acknowledges that there is such a high infant and maternal mortality rate because of irregular immunizations, lack of Vitamin A supplements, lack of hydration, which causes severe diarrhea, and unsanitary equipment. Fortunately, in April 2010 a law was passed that called for free health care to pregnant or breastfeeding mothers as well as children under the age of five years.

Although this initiative is in effect, a drastic outreach of pregnant women towards the free hospice care has yet to step into play because many women are unaware of the change and are settling for unprofessional care elsewhere.

Yehri Wi Cry's primary focus is to enhance the status of women in Sierra Leone. Women, as we know, particularly in developing countries often do not have a voice and birthing kits are one way to improve their future. The maternal kits will improve the livelihood of women and their babies during childbirth in villages where facilities are not available or are beyond their reach financially and literally, while the incentive packages will promote the recent transition to free hospice care and its validity. This project will also ensure that healthy communities are kept and built in Sierra Leone and that the local residents are working towards establishing all around wellness. Safe and successful births are essential, and it is potential for these kits and packages to have an impact on infant and maternal mortality rates as Sierra Leone stands second in the world in having the worst rates. Yehri Wi Cry (YWC), Non-Profit Started in 2011 (Sasso 2011)

In 2011, I was finishing up my final year at Bucknell University, and my childhood friends and I applied for the Projects for Peace grant, and we won. The aforementioned segment was our closing statement. The trip to execute this project marked my first time to Sierra Leone in July 2011. It was my first attempt at understanding self. We were super optimistic that we could change Sierra Leone given our western ties. My optimism wasn't the only problem, but because I was a native, I didn't see anything wrong with starting this project with so much American privilege and a "West is Best" mentality. I was adopting the Western understanding of what Freetown, Sierra Leone needed to be and that we would save the day. That quickly erupted when a mother outright told me that she didn't ask for us to come nor did she ask for a birthing

kit or help. She was not only right, but I had to explain what was I really doing here and what were we really doing as an organization. We don't get a pass simply because we are Sierra Leoneans by birthright. I was adopting a Western understanding of Sierra Leone rather than my own. After that, I returned to Sierra Leone and different regions every 3-6 months thereafter.

As a result of that experience, the subject of understanding self in a multidimensional manner in the social sciences became intense and personal. I kept enrolling in sociology, anthropology, and Black studies courses in order to find understanding and answers. I searched for ways of grasping the confused social reality of identity anxieties amongst transnational and generational migrants like myself.

Pluralizing and De-Territorializing “Home”

During the winter of 2016, I did pre-research in Sierra Leone, Since I knew that I would be returning with my niece. Although considered an insider due to language and birthright by way of my parents, I needed to figure out how I would survive with a seven-year-old and at the same get enough field notes to write an epic dissertation. I was excited to write an ethnographical paper that would explore the narratives of transnational and generational migrants that have spent time in both the United States and Sierra Leone. As a Sierra Leonean and American, I was born in Washington DC to parents that emigrated from Sierra Leone.

Before getting deeper into my experience in Sierra Leone, I must acknowledge the agential dimensions in the construction of my cultural identity. Obsiye and Cook argue that through a generational migrant's everyday life encounters with social processes; they actively construct their own self-image (Obsiye and Cook 2016.) This self-image is hybrid, fluid and messy (Obsiye and Cook 2016.) While social processes shape young people's cultural identity, the performativity of identity is increasingly seen as an individual project for young people

(Holland et al. 2001). The manifestations of these performances are among others enacted in the fields of education, sports, music, and lifestyle (Archer et al. 2007; Obsiye and Cook 2016.) As a young person raised by Sierra Leone immigrants in the Washington DC area of the United States, my parents created a "Sierra Leonean Home" in which we spoke a certain way, ate certain foods, and attended cultural events. All of this then would make me an insider in Sierra Leone. I thought I would be more than prepared. As part of my self-exploration, I realized that when I was living in a predominantly Black community and/or predominantly White community when attending college, I had to contest and/or embrace assigned identities which entailed a complex process of negotiation in a nexus of minority/ majority power dynamics. This an example of my insider and /or outsider status at play simultaneously. Within these instances, I started to realize that identity is also constructed through discourses like any socially constructed reality (Obsiye and Cook 2016.)

For me, I always knew my cultural identity existed in being Sierra Leonean because my parents always said you are Sierra Leonean and not American. They went to great lengths to make sure I understood certain cultural practices. Cultural identity can be described as the identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings as well as norms for conduct (Collier and Thomas 1988). Stuart Hall (1990) problematizes the idea of 'cultural identity' as a given fact. He argues that 'it is not transparent or unproblematic, but should be considered as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation' (Hall 1990, p. 222). Identity inevitably changes with development at a personal as well as at a social level along with migration and acculturation (Bhugra 2004; Obsiye and Cook 2016.) The cultural identity of members of diaspora communities involves a degree of hybridity. It is 'defined, not by essence

or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.

In addition to cultural identity formation, the notion of Diaspora identities, defined as individuals that are continually producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' intersects my argument. (Hall 1990; Obsiye and Cook 2016.). However, as Tariq Modood (2005) argues ethnic identity is not necessarily limited only to participation in cultural practices. It takes different manifestations. A case in point includes the second-generation young people of immigrant parents who despite the decline in their participation in cultural practices (i.e., language or religion) still retain 'allegiance' (Obsiye and Cook 2016.) This allegiance is what propelled my quest for a deeper understanding or my personal identity anxieties.

In 2014, I started Lehigh University to pursue my Masters in American Studies and certification in documentary film. In trying to understand what it meant for me to be American, I had to discuss my Sierra Leonean heritage and upbringing, so I created *Am I: the Film*. Unfortunately, I was unable to complete the final version of my film before graduating. In presenting my thesis and the rough cut of the film my committee felt as though it would be a significant contribution to society. However, upon graduation, my advisor warned me that as I go on to continue this academic journey at Cornell University, I may not be met with the same amount of support and/or appreciation for film as an academic manuscript. The adviser let me know that my voice may not be considered authentic and that my quest may be questioned, and what strategies did I have to make it to the finish line?

I had managed to convince myself that the task at hand would not be hard as I am a fighter. But I began questioning my self in the very first semester. My film and writings seemed

to be incomplete. My writing was too reflexive, so I interpreted it as wrong. I started asking myself what was I theorizing? Are the critical academic voices silencing me and hindering my productivity? How are they hindering me and how can I overcome? What kind of voice can I claim and what will be my added impact on academia? Although these questions seemed unique to me at the time, I realized later on that I was not alone because other native anthropologists had what they considered "their finances." I started reading more about subaltern communities and the writers themselves. I learned that the reason I was so lost in creating my own discourse was because I was stuck in portraying myself as only a native ethnographer because that seemed to more advantageous, but it was really confusing because it was not my complete experience. I was lacking perspective on being the "outsiders" not fitting in at the time and unable to communicate efficiently. I started reading the work of scholars such as Motzafi- Haller, Reed-Danahay, and Lorde to understand that there will be issues of expressing the "whole-self." Society either wants you to check a box or no one really talks about their issues in the field.

Locating Self in Black Feminist Theory

There's always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself—whether it's Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc.—because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else. But once you do that, then you've lost because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself, and you've denied yourself all of the energy that it takes to keep all those others in jail. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat (Hammond 1981: 15).

As time went on, I worked really hard to pen life histories and my experience in Freetown. However, there were moments where I was lost in what I was actually documenting and what

meaning I was trying to develop. I realized that before I could locate my relationships, I must first locate myself. I came to recognize myself as a Black and African feminist that is translocated globally and open to changes in my self-assignment. I also learned that I am situated in fluidity when looking at the borders and boundaries of the locality. Therefore, I have a transnational lens due to my constant travels and work that is established in multiple places from Washington, DC to Freetown. For me, these spaces are interconnected, and I try to navigate them with a glocal lens.

I found myself appreciating the works of Black feminist critic Bell Hooks because she captures the danger of "either/or dualistic thinking" which she describes as "the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society (Hooks 1984 and Collins 1986). I also came to understand the stance of Black feminist writer Patricia Collins who pushes the notions of Hooks to elucidate further, either or dualistic thinking. Collins references this theory as the construct of dichotomous oppositional difference, maybe a philosophical lynchpin in systems of race, class and gender oppression (Collins 1986). The danger of this construct is the categorization of people, things, and ideas in terms of their difference from one another. For example, the terms dichotomies such as black/ white, male/female, reason/emotion, fact/opinion, subject/object and I might add insider/outsider gain their meaning only in relation to their difference from their oppositional counterparts. These dichotomies are an inherently unstable relationship that is usually resolved by subordinating one half of each pair to each other. Thus, inferring that White rule blacks, males dominate females, the reason is touted as superior to emotion ascertaining truth, facts supersede opinion in evaluating knowledge, subject rule objects, and insider knowledge is more reliable than outsider. Dichotomous oppositional differences

invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical relationships that mesh with political economies of domination and subordination (Collins 1986).

However, while the Black feminist writer Patricia Hill-Collins is perceived as comprehensively presenting an explanation on the intersecting categories of oppression facing women, Audre Lorde, further clarifies and amplifies 'theory of difference,' arguing for the validation of self-assignments. Lorde once noted that "imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness (Degia 2018)." She thus argued for acceptance of all the facets of our 'selves' (Degia 2018). Indeed, there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences and to examine the distortions, which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation (Lorde 1984: 115). I appreciate that Lorde asks us to claim our differences, as they could reduce the marginalization. Reflecting on her experiences within academic spaces, she contended that academia, and feminism, in particular, was based on a white heterosexual bias. This hegemonic stance obviated the overturning of patriarchy. She asked what does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? In other words, she makes the point that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Lorde also experimented with ethnography given her text *Zami: a New Spelling of My Name* published in 1982. Lorde outlined a unique style of writing she referred to as a biomythography (as opposed to the conventional autobiography). For her biomythography allowed for self-reflection and engendered the relating of her life history in ways not hindered by conventional forms of storytelling. Hence, I was encouraged in an unconventional way to write my experience as I saw it.

On a glocal level, I came to appreciate the work of international feminist Chandra Mohanty, who argues that women of third world countries are multidimensional do not all share a singular story. She supports a political movement attentive to borders while transcending them known as "feminist without borders." This movement problematizes borders and boundaries as historical by-products of colonialism, decolonization, and nationalism (Minoo 2006). For Mohanty, the feminist practice operates at a variety level such as everyday life, collective action groups, and scholarly work. She believes her vision can be accomplished vis recognizing the politics of difference and the challenge of the politics of solidarity, demystifying power relations, politicizing knowledge through emancipatory education (Minoo 2006). Mohanty heavily critiques eurocentrism, racism, and imperialism as they are relevant to the geopolitical inequalities based on hegemony. She also argues that specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully (Mohanty 226). While Mohanty's work may need further clarification on alternatives to capitalism; however, she provides tangible methods to make room and understanding for international feminists that are often left out feminist debates and agendas.

Participant Profiles

Reflexive ethnography allows us to consider multiple stories at once, including our own, which is a benefit, particularly when researching issues of difference (Boylorn 2011). I propose reflexivity as an opportunity to introduce difficult and taboo topics, such as race, so that we can use not only our assumptions and perceptions but also our experiences and memories to be transparent in ethnographic research (Boylorn 2011). Transparency calls for transparency (Boylorn 2011). Each of the participants below are under pseudonyms.

Kadija Kamara and Mohamed Kamara

- Kadija, 35 yr old female moved to Sierra Leone from Maryland with her 6-year-old son Mohamed in February 2017. Kadija moved to Sierra Leone for the second time in hopes of starting a full-service hair salon and cosmetology school.
- Kadija was born in the US, lived in Sierra Leone as a young kid and went back to the US at the age of 12 until she was 24.
- Mohamed was born in the US, and this is the first time living in Sierra Leone.

Amina Barrie

- Amina is also in her mid 30's and moved to Sierra Leone 5 years ago in hopes of finding herself as well as prosperity in the home of her parents.
- Amina was born in the US.
- Due to her dual citizenship and ability to apply for jobs as an expat, she has had very high-profile positions in the hotel and hospitality industry although not really her background.
- Right now, she does freelance work that covers marketing and business.
- Although Amina hustles in Sierra Leone, she believes in the freedom and beauty of SL.
- Affluent fullah family

Nancy and Mahawa

- Nancy moved with her teenage daughter Mahawa 2 years ago to get into the finance sector. She believes if she can survive in Mahawa Leone, she can survive anywhere.
- Nancy born in Mahawa Leone but lived in America for 20 years after leaving SL at the age of 9.
- Nancy is currently a marketing manager for Airtel (now Orange) which is one of the major phone companies in the country.

- She struggles with her “American” work ethic in relation to the “Sierra Leonean” work ethic.
- Mahawa was preparing to move to the United States for the junior year so that she could get access to scholarships.

Mr. Kelfala

- Mr. Kelfala is a male in his mid 40's that have moved to Sierra Leone after going to school in the UK and United States and building a family in the United States to take a government position as head of a vital government sector.
- He was also adamant about his kids being raised in the States and only coming to Freetown for holidays and breaks
- He was super excited about elections as he felt like not only was his political party going to win but that he was friends with most of them running. To his unfortunate surprise, the entire party lost.
- By the time I was leaving Sierra Leone, he had been framed for government corruption and embezzlement. He was acquitted and has moved back to the states to work.

Marie

- Visited Freetown on vacation a few years ago and met what is now her husband.
- She was born and raised in the United States and resided in Atlanta until moving to Freetown
- Her husband had several businesses he inherited in Freetown, and it was the best decision in terms of the future of the family.
- She expresses that while she is happy to be there with her husband, she feels like living there is a hold on career although she has a government job

- Acutely aware of social capital and privilege
- Lost her job as soon as elections were over and political parties changed
- Marie came from a prominent Krio family, and so did her husband. She inherently believed in the myth that Krio was the superior ethnicity.
- Come to find out she was cousins with Kadija but barely wanted to hang out with her. They were both born in the US, but Kadija was seldom present at events hosted by Marie.

Christopher

- He is in his mid-30s
- Born and raised in Sierra Leone and left for the Gambia during the civil war
- Eventually moved back to Freetown in 2008 only leave for America at 18 when attending college
- Since he was living in the US and visited Sierra Leone every 2 years to help with his family business
- He struggles with wanting to be an entrepreneur in Sierra Leone and the United States. His struggles he believes stems from a deep-rooted love/hate relationship with both places
- He hates Sierra Leone because of his experiences from the war and having to leave home and his friends for that. He literally left abruptly with only a suitcase. He has never forgiven home for the war. Lastly, since the war, a lot hasn't changed, and changes that about only benefit the top 1%, and there are about so many people living below the poverty line on \$2 a day. He is disappointed in the government and civic engagement/ attitudes of the citizens.

- He despises the United States because of being judged for his race and ethnicity. It's hard trying to assimilate to succeed in life and hates the parameters set in place. It is very challenging to find the resources to get the American dream. There is no hard work; it just luck and networking. He talks extensively about the financial institution.

MaSalie

- I met her at my tailor's house, getting clothes made for the new inauguration, she was in town for 2 weeks as she supports of Sierra Leone's People Party supporter
- She wanted to make sure she had certain “looks” ready for all the events she was attending.
- We had met before of mutual friends, and once I told her what I was doing in Sierra Leone, she was asked if I was attending the inaugural festivities. I told her I was working on getting tickets from a family member but still waiting on a response.
- Late that day, we both were given access to the inaugural procession where we sat with dignitaries and the Presidential dinner later that evening.
- After spending several days together, she informed me that being Mende, she knew so many family members including her family trying to go back. She was even made several job offers in which she could make even more than what she was making in the States as Director of a government organization.
- Assessing her access, I was able to decipher if social capital was at play or for the other diasporans moving back, was it nepotism.

Timbo

- He was a family friend from the United States, who literally moved back the week elections were final.

- Seeing him at the dinner, he assured me that he would be getting an ambassador position because he grew up with the President.
- He even told me to connect with him and send my resume as with my extensive background could be utilized.
- I reached out to him several times to really tell him about my research as I wanted to know more about his new positioning.
- However, I had to cease interaction because he wanted to set meetings at inappropriate times.

Musa

- He lives in Sierra Leone for 2-3 months at a time and goes back to the United States. He is building a team of creatives for his media company.
- He worked with a young man named Tboy from “Dong Bey” which is a ghetto in Sierra Leone.
- Musa was so energetic and excited to be in Sierra Leone and doing the work he felt like was missing. He reminded me of the same energy I had when starting my non-profit.
- He would often ask my advice on events and programs he planned on producing. His ideas were brilliant but translating his ideas into execution into Sierra Leone was pretty hard. He did not have the local reference of how to not only communicate beyond sharing a language. This happened because his reference points were all in relation to the United States.
- His assistant Tboy is what I like to call heaven sent because he would often remind him if you want to do things here you have to relate to the people. He was more like a guide to him on to effectively communicate to staff and accomplish his goals.

Binta

- Born and raised in the United States. She comes from an affluent Krio family.
- Parents live in the US, her partner in the UK and she resides in Sierra Leone for a private sector company
- She took the job to not only acquire international experience in public health but also to oversee the renovations of her family home.
- Her family had abandoned the home for quite some time and wanted to revive it but needed a trustworthy person to oversee the project and make sure it was done in a timely manner.
- They had a charming home overlooking the water. The land had belonged to their family for decades.

Moiyattu

- Her husband had always lived in Sierra Leone and her in the States to raise her kids. Now that her oldest was in college and her youngest was a boy in primary school she decided to move back in August 2017.
- She was happy to be reunited with her husband and childhood friends and family.
- However, she felt lost in terms of responsibilities and keeping herself busy. She now had house help, a driver, and so many hands she never did in the US. She also was not working and felt like she had no purpose outside of recreational activities.
- By March 2018 she had moved back to the States to her old job of nursing. She decided she wanted to work some more, earn some cash and come back to start a non-profit.
- She kept to her plan and moved back in September 2018.

Ethel

- Moved to Sierra Leone in hopes of getting a job, also in public health.
- She was in her mid-twenties.
- She did some volunteer work while living with family.
- Her parents were scared that she had moved Freetown and wanted her to move back immediately.
- She too came from an affluent Krio family in which she lived in "big houses" home that was big in size and up to western standards in terms of electricity, water, and other facilities.
- She was having issues with her boyfriend who lived in the country at the time and said she needed a break and was travelling home. That break turned permanent, and she never came back.
- She often had issues living with individual family members according to her because she is used doing what she wants and that they were treating her like a little girl. Her uncle briefly told me once, that it was because her parents were so worried about her being there and he had assured her parents of her safety.

Blurred Lines In Freetown, Sierra Leone

How could I explain that I was not a gringa, not totally a gringa, anyway? (Ruth Behar 1993)

The New Mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality; she operates in pluralistic mode... (Gloria Anzaldua 1987)

I was engaging in “being there”- and during the period of “being there” attempting to live as a friend amongst strangers and as an alien amongst friends (Geertz 1973)

When I finally arrived in Sierra Leone for field research in Fall 2017, I had hoped to conduct so many interviews, life stories, and countless hours of participant observations. I just knew that I would not be a foreign anthropologist given my experience with YWC and countless trips to Sierra Leone. I realized that I am both a foreign ethnographer as a local simultaneously. The lines were blurred as "native/insider," "self/other," and "subject/object." It was actually easier to write my research proposal than the original conception of my work. I was even a Fulbright finalist. So with all the privileges of great material, an Ivy League backing, and having read many anthropological field notes, I still felt lost. I had already picked my people, organizations, and found assistants. My intentions were great, but I was lost in execution.

Upon arrival, I had my cousin Victor pick us up at the ferry grounds in Aberdeen. He led us to our new home. I was making the journey with my niece whom I am raising. Victor would also be living with us. When we arrived, the house was beautiful and spacious but given that we were paying dollars to stay there. But could not help but notice that we were the only lovely house on the block surrounded by unfinished homes and "pan bodies" also known as tin houses. How could I even relate as a native when my living conditions highlight a higher class. As Victor helped me unpack our things, he would ask so many questions about things I found to be simple such as fabric softener, and at that moment I felt as if my privilege overtly slapping me in the face. Although Victor and I strengthened our relationship as cousins, it was not always easy. He provided me with a lot of support in ways unimaginable. He provided a fatherly figure for Juju.

He was like a guide in a lot of ways because he coached me through my interactions with locals to understand their point of reference in so that I would look at everything from my point of view. For instance, I had significant issues communicating with my nanny. When she started, we went over expectations and job duties. She assured me several times that she understood, and that she had no questions. I am not the greatest micro- manager so weeks later I was confused when she wouldn't adhere to menus and schedules created. Come to find out; she didn't know how to read, but also she felt asking a question for help was a sign of weakness. I wasn't surprised that she didn't ask questions, but I was surprised that she did not know how to read. I was surprised because we were the same age and that said a lot about my privilege. I tried really hard to get her to learn how to read and teach her skills such making menus, understanding the nutritional values of food and how to create and enjoy activities with my niece and her friends. However, she was not interested, and I even tried explaining these skills could help her keep her high pay rate if she had to find another family if and when we left. That wasn't appealing to her at all. At the point, I realized that she was not only missing an education but the ability to dream for a bright future ahead. As much as I thought of the American dream as a dream deferred, for the first time I saw that maybe the point was to allow individuals to dream of something they could potentially work towards. Victor pointed out that my only option was to micromanage her and keep reiterating that she should ask questions. I also had to ask Victor to translate basic tasks for me in a more localized version of Krio, because my Krio was almost too general. I missed so many cultural cues, and Victor was there to highlight them for me and show me to do things.

Dealing with the identity of being JC (just cam) to BC (blant cam) was harder. They see money, power, and privilege only. I spent so many nights trying to paint a picture for Victor. Victor and I had issues of contention when he felt as though because I was born and raised in

America that I was privileged in class the same was I was in Sierra Leone. He assumed that I was never got spankings because he heard that Americans don't believe in that. He also assumed that my parents were financially supporting me. I had to explain to him that my class status does elevate in Sierra Leone but at home, I started working as far back as I can remember from selling candy in Elementary school, to jewelry from my locker in middle school, to learning cosmetology to support myself in high school and beyond and even have multiple jobs in college to support myself. It wasn't that my parents didn't want to help me financially at the present moment they were not in a position to, so I learned to hustle early not to stress them out. Nonetheless, as an American I was entitled to subsidies and scholarships, and that is how I survive. It wasn't until my streets smarts for survival and interacting with people kicked that he gave me the nickname "Mafia" and earned some respect amongst him and others in the compound. On the contrary, I found Victor to be privileged and spoiled because of the community dynamics he was raised in, never really called for him to pay bills or rent for that matter. At the age of 26, he had never paid rent in his life. He was only responsible for his personal expenses. For me, I thought that would have been heaven if my family took care of my bills and my expenses were only for self even after high school.

Victor wasn't the only one who assumed, as I was a trust fund baby of some sort but so did the working tenants in our compound, Abdul and Sulaiman. They said they knew we had money because our grandmother was a prominent figure in the community and our names alone guaranteed status. Because they thought of us in that manner, we were not only allowed to complain about anything or have any struggles. It was hard for me to process this given; I was new to this privileged lifestyle. I was used to being the underdog that had to be creative to maneuver. Nonetheless, I became a matriarch overnight because when they had funerals or

nothing to eat they would ask me or send Victor to ask me for help and I would do it. I would give anything little I had because I was in a lot of ways in a better position. However, I did try to uphold the mantra that it's better to teach a man to fish than to keep giving him fish. So I ended paying Juju's tutor extra money to teach Abdul, Gibo, and Zainab (the nanny) how to read and write. I knew I wouldn't be there forever, but I also knew that education was a powerful tool.

That leads me to Sulaiman who started as a night shift security guard hired by my landlord. As I got to know him, I learned that he was a college student. I later hired him to tutor Juju and the others so he could make extra money while on duty. It was a win for everyone. Later on, his aunt realized that she could no longer help him with his tuition. He had about 3 days to get his tuition of about \$300 together. I was in a financial bind and didn't have that much on me to give it. So after careful consideration, I asked him to give me copies of his school report cards and write me an essay explaining what he was studying and his future goals. Once he did that, I made a brochure and sent it all my networks via WhatsApp. In less than 24 hours a Sierra Leone women's org vowed to pay his tuition until he graduates as long he continues to prove good academic standing. The other donations I received, Victor advised that I give it to him monthly so that it would help with living expenses. I did that until we departed and each much he was excited because he never expected the donations. Sulaiman also turned to be a guide for me as he was a sociology major and we would discuss social and political events in Sierra Leone.

I really appreciated my conversations with Sulaiman, Victor, and Abdul once elections came around in the front of our compound. Victor and Abdul had party alliances with All People Coalition (APC) while one could infer that Sulaiman was with Sierra Leone's People Party (SLPP). When Victor and Abdul would speak of their support of APC, they would reference

their parents and forefather's support of the political party. They would take about the admiration of the party leaders and the wealth they had acquired. Victor even voiced his political aspirations as he believed the fastest way to get rich was to go into government. I would say as Victor why he felt that was the only way to wealth and he admitted that all the rich men he knew were politicians. Sulaiman, would never decry APC but he would ask questions like why do you think that is? Would you want to do the same thing as our current politicians or something different? Essentially asking probing questions. I would rarely speak because although I was used a different system, I found it, I found a lot of similarities.

Two major political parties ruled year after year. I also noticed that there was much conversation amongst the people and the government. One thing that I was happy with however was the emergence of a new political NGC that threatened the stability of APC and SLPP. The ironic thing about NGC emergence was that it was a political party funded by the Sierra Leonean diaspora of mostly the US and UK to highlight the influence of the diaspora. It was reported via whats app that family members of the diaspora would bribe local to vote with continued financial support. Until this day I am not sure if propaganda was at play, but there was an inherent fear amongst Sierra Leoneans in the country and abroad of civil unrest. I remember my mom calling me to warn me about going out although I was on my way to the club and I responded with an ok and went about my day. What she was seeing and what I was experiencing were polar opposites. The fear posed to be a significant issue for me because my parents and other elders in the community deemed it safer for Juju and me to leave Sierra Leone for elections for almost two months. Most of my informants left the country as well until it was deemed safe and civil to return. Before leaving the issue was the way in which they campaigned, speaking at the people and with and for the people. After returning the issue was lack of questioning of policies. I had to

realize again, that most Sierra Leoneans were socialized not to ask too many questions and it was seen as a rude matter of fact.

On the side, I made it back to Sierra Leone in time to witness the inauguration of the new President. I was able to get tickets via a friend's Uncle who had just been appointed to work with the new reigning government SLPP. Traffic was so crazy that I had to have Victor drive to the National stadium. He was able to use his work badge to bypass security and take me straight in. From there I had to call my friend to meet me at the gate to get my entry ticket. The entire stadium was packed with international dignitaries to the everyday citizen. When I finally got it was in VIP umbrellas seating as it was super hot that day. I witnessed the entire process and a procession previous Sierra Leonean Presidents. I watched around and saw a mixed generation of supporters, but it was noticeably an older crowd. I did overhear a few conversations of that had traveled from the provinces and those that travelled from their distant homes in the Western world to witness this moment. I didn't have a political party affiliation, but I wanted to see what it was about. We also received tickets to the formal dinner later that evening. That entire day I wore traditional attire made by local fashion designers. I felt it was fitting. I noticed that most people wore Africana during the day and Western attire that evening. The dinner was quite dull and started reasonably late. Most of the entertainers were of non-Sierra Leonean descent including Nigerian Afro-beat artist Davido. It was cool to meet Davido but depressing that we couldn't find a comparable Sierra Leonean artist to at least balance the field. Maybe I was expecting a historical and cultural celebration, but perhaps I could have been wrong. The last interesting aspect was that the dinner felt that I was a Mende reunion. I say that because the majority of the room was filled with those of Mende lineage with sprinkles of other ethnic groups. My friend who provided me with that access that evening was Mende. She was also considering

moving as her people had now gained power and she had already been promised job offers. The country was looking for those of us from the diaspora given the brain drain. Hence, I could see why it was rumored that they would be taking most of the power in the country.

My womanhood and personal theory were also a struggle. I had to assert power in ways I never felt I had to before. I quickly adapted localized Krio to be able to check those that would test me them to say oh wow she must be one of us. For instance, I got into a taxi, and when I got to my stop, I gave him the amount owed based on standard rates. He told me I was trying to cheat and I asked him how? I proceeded to question him and tell him the price for one way travel, and he retorted that he was joking and called me his sister. It was almost as if I had to be hazed to be accepted. I may have cried 2-3 times and complained to parents, but I was not one to not give up.

In Sierra Leone, I was free of racial policing and racial performance, but I have never felt so restricted in performing in my gender role. As a young lady with blonde hair, no wedding ring and in the latest urban fashions, it was assumed that I was a Sierra Leonean on vacation. Because I lived alone with just Victor and Juju and not in a family house or my husband's house, and I lived "nicely" because it was due to a man and that man had to be a minister or politician. As if women could not be independent or own anything by themselves. I was shocked by that perspective and which is probably why my dad was so excited Victor was coming to live with me.

In one instance, I was hanging out with cool diaspora kids, which comprised of both generational migrants from both the US and the UK. In many instances, we would go to the club or out for dinner. Apparently, a few of them would have weekly outings at the Hub to discuss the happenings of Sierra Leone whether political or social. My invite to this particular came from a

family member who had just moved to Sierra Leone. She thought it would be a great idea to meet some people, and I was shocked to learn that I ended up knowing most of the people who met on a regular basis. That day, we spoke about sexuality and gender, and I told one of the guys that in order to understand gender relations and mainly what may be unique to Sierra Leone, was for men to listen and not feel the need to respond and talk as much. I have never engaged in the same way afterwards. I also made mention of anyone with pussy in Sierra was treated as a second-class citizen. I assume my language was too vulgar and my opinions too outlandish. I thought when I was complimented on my American thought being refreshing, that it would allow for further opportunities of engagement. Although it was meant to be a compliment, it was really felt as backhanded jab because Americans are seen as rude and lacking respect of others. I realized the fastest way to become an outcast is to fall out of line. Challenge the status, and you will be told "ya na Salone" or "this is Sierra Leone" notion making anything perceived to be wrong just ok because we are in Sierra Leone, the land where you cannot question social inequalities or lack of basic human needs. This is to show how quickly one becomes an outsider when they challenge the status quo--regardless of language, or history, or address.

I had to contest or embrace assigned identities, which entailed a complex process of negotiation in a nexus of minority/ majority power dynamics. They joked that I should change my hair color because no would take me seriously. However, although it was presented as a joke, it was a joke that carried much truth of how people or "eyes" saw me. I did not look like a scholar or a responsible adult for that matter. Although, I am not sure if there is a prototype for a scholar or a responsible adult for that matter. One day, I overheard Victor telling Abdul and others that would hang out in our neighborhood was just because she looks young and dresses urban, she is about to be a doctor. She is super smart and ambitious.

In another group outing of generational migrants who lived in Sierra Leone, there was a significant argument over tribal groups, and I was lost. Most of them happened to be? Fullah or Krio. The Fullah have Fulani heritage and pride themselves in shifting from cattle herders to acquiring wealth and land via business. The Krio are descendants of slaves and pride themselves in being "old money" with generational wealth. Both groups try to marry themselves to maintain their wealth in their ethnic groups. So, most of the individuals were purely members of one group. They turned to me I had nothing to say as to which group was better and I replied because I am a must in a confused manner. My grandparents on both sides married into different ethnic groups. I also had to admit that my Dad was Lebanese and Krio and my mom was Limba and Kono making me a convoluted Sierra Leonean - American that never mentioned she had some Arab blood. Everyone was semi-confused because I was so dark-skinned and assumed that perhaps I had transcended class to be a part of the highest class because my dad happened to have a heritage in the two significant ethnicities that run the country with generational wealth. That would be the Lebanese and the Krio. So here I was with insider status from a class perspective, but I was an outsider because I could pay allegiance to one ethnic group in particular. It felt as though my Sierra Leone authenticity was questioned.

Motherhood for me in Sierra Leone was a constant game of code-switching. The code-switching came when I had to attend school events for Juju. Juju attended a small private British Montessori School where she wore a uniform. I felt as if I was one of the youngest parents, so I tried to dress conservatively or wear more traditional clothing to blend in a little more. I think I became more conscious of the way I dressed at her school because Victor pointed out that I have to look like a mom or they will judge Juju for it. I didn't really understand, but I did know that Sierra Leoneans could be very judgmental to anything different. Juju already stood out with her

American accent, and I didn't want to make a life for her any harder. She ended up having one of her best academic years ever in Sierra Leone. I believe that happened because it was the norm for the student with the highest marks in class to be the coolest kid and Juju wanted to be that kid. It was just good to know that she was challenged in a way that she wasn't when living in Ithaca NY because teachers don't really like ranking kids based on grades for the entire class.

I was able to film a commercial in Freetown, for my clothing line Royal Dynamite while in Freetown. I really enjoyed the project in the beginning. I got to work with various brands to showcase the Freetown in a positive light. One that we rarely get to see if you have not had the opportunity to visit. I worked with a local filmmaker, and when we would scout for venues, we would always go in with a game plan. Depending on the person who designated to speak with us we would let the other take lead. I would take the lead if me speaking in English seemed impressive. If speaking English would be costly, I would let him take the lead in order to acquire what we needed. We were a great team as no one turned us down, and we were given access to film for free in these establishments. I have yet to release this project, but I look forward to the reactions of the project may receive.

All in all, living in Sierra for an entire year was an adventure. I was able to discover so much about myself, Freetown, and the communities in which I engaged. Juju enjoyed her time, and my parents were happy that I survived it. My parents were nervous the entire we lived in Sierra Leone because they had to stay in the United States given my mother's health. I definitely can see myself living there again in the future developing projects that further tell our stories challenging the idea of the singular voice.

Conclusion

I need to discover for myself, to construct from my own experiences, the links between such reflexivity and the analytical insights it produces, between the personal and theoretical. (Motzafi- Haller 1997)

As I recorded my time in the field, I always asked myself "How do I write about these internal contradictions, divisions, conflicts, struggles and pride without essentializing my people?

Anthropologist Motzafi- Haller, suggests that "one's positioning within marginalized communities- of ethnic, race, religion, or gender- shapes not only one's research interest and the epistemologies one chooses in developing such research, it also sensitizes one in conscious and/or unconscious ways to look at the practices of exclusion and perhaps to write in ways that do accept the status quo (Reed-Danahay 1997)." I had interior anxiety on an external experience while living in Freetown.

As I struggled to write this chapter as to what I am contributing to the academic realm, I realized I couldn't figure it out because I was so busy attempting to operate in compliance to the rigid constraints set by dominant structures. Being a native ethnographer is not enough to substantiate my work but rather my connection and positioning in society as well as my research agenda, and understanding the impact of my background. The moments and experiences I have described are defining moments precisely because they collapse everyday experiences of the race with modes of researching (ourselves) (Boylorn 2011). According to Boylorn, these moments require analysis and critique to consider the nuances of race, and ethnic experiences and why they are important are relevant and reflexive (Boylorn 2011). Once, I accepted my moments and experiences, and I was able to write more critically once I become conscious of my social and political engagement. Mostly, I had to acknowledge as well as push for writing that is deeply

reflective and minimizing the process of writing in binaries. For scholars like bell hooks, this can be viewed as an act of resistance by "talking back" to power. This can happen in a few ways and Motzafi- Haller suggests talking back in the kind of genre adopted by the researcher and its opening for alternative understandings of the work and power in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

By presenting my lived experience as a Sierra Leonean - American woman and anthropologist, I am deflecting the critical voices under the gaze of positivist critique that argue that I may need more facts, supported theory and "truths" of this and other life stories because the lived experience should be appreciated and ranked just as high. I cannot split my personal experiences and learning from my remote analytical work in Sierra Leone to produce a disembodied text that adheres to classic realist ethnography. In an interview in 2009, Nayamnjoh states, "the problem is that we scholars are trapped in the normal hierarchies that inform how we relate to the rest of the world, whether those hierarchies are based on race, ethnicity, geography, gender or generation or whatever, we are all part and parcel of these hierarchies, and we bring them into our workplaces and into our scholarship. This results in a "tendency to be condescending towards a fellow scholar who happens to be female, younger, black, or from Africa. Even if, for the sake of political correctness, one might say the right thing in public, the tendency is to be dismissive of those we perceive to be lower down in the hierarchy that inform our worlds. But if only we could listen, could open up and know we don't have the monopoly on initiative and innovation, we might be surprised with how much those on the margins can understand" (Wasserman 2009).

Hence in my scholarly pursuits, as I research and examine others, I am simultaneously situating myself and reflecting on who I am and what experiences I bring to the room — reflecting on my master identity factors (race, ethnicity, sex, gender, etc.) and how they compare

to those of my participants (Boylorn 2011). I am also reflecting on how my studies and interests are immediately implicated by my standpoints (Boylorn 2011). Lastly, I am reflecting on who the characters and participants in my studies are, how my social identity and capital gives me access to them, and the myriad ways our stories overlap and our issues intersect (Boylorn 2011). While ethnography allows us to describe what we witness with our senses sensually, it does not intend to remove us from our lived experiences or biases (Berry 2011; Brodkey 1994; Fine 1993; Holman Jones 2005). As ethnography refers to both the project and the document (meaning researchers "do" ethnographies and you also "write" them), and reflexivity refers to the act of reflecting or being self-aware and the methodology, these conditions present a unique way for researchers to engage their research, their participants, and themselves through the process of planning, thinking through, and writing (Goodall 2008). However, the stories we tell sometimes neglect the stories of marginalized "others." The stories I share, although not traditional ethnographies, call forth questions about how and why race/ethnicity is relevant in some situations and seemingly not relevant in others (Boylorn 2011). The stories also allow me, as a researcher, to question the role that race/ ethnicity plays in the everyday situations of my life and how those experiences inevitably influence how I see and experience the world, and hence how I perceive and frame "the field."(Boylorn 2011). I hope with my stories, and I can fight for less canonized depictions of identity and social reality by merging categories native/non- native, insider/outsider, subject/object, researcher/ subject, and any other boxes of categories and traditional modes of social sciences. As a scholar, we are to challenge societal modes and practices to become better scholars and analysts. Lastly, in autoethnography, we have to locate ourselves in various realms such as the "I, eye, we, and eyes" to make a significant transnational impact.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This dissertation built on the foundation of intersectionality and transnationality problematizes identity theories and respective social fields in order to assert a multiplicity and fluidity of identity construction. This theoretical development includes holding multiple and sometimes contrary communities while constantly moving between continents, but also it advocates for the possibility of fluidity in the reflexivity as generational migrants move between these identity markers to create epistemological questions, constitute authorship, and expand representation. Audiences reading this text not only encounter the African zigzagging through places and time but a the zigzagging of multiple concepts, disciplines and forms of written text. Each chapter from African fashion, to film and ethnography serve as devices to explicate the anxieties and global tensions expressed to build better diasporic relations as well as understanding of self.

One may ask what the theoretical and practical benefits of studying generational migrants and associated communities are? The “African glocal context” is the facilitation of movement of social representations and identity constructs, which traditionally have been rooted in local communities, through different cultural frameworks to reach and, in turn, influence (however subtly) global audiences. Furthermore, this work analyzes transnational migrant identities through the following frameworks:

- *Settlement Practices*- how African immigrants created and sustained their communities and how this community building affects the assimilation process in the deterritorialized home;

- *Social Mobility*- patterns and practices in social mobility from both a historical and contemporary perspective in comparison to host and home country born racial/ethnic groups;
- *Redefining Ethnic Identity*- the assimilation processes of African immigrants;
- *The Effects of Language, Religion, and Politics*- how language, religious institutions, and political affiliation and knowledge affected the assimilation process for generational migrants;
- *Transnational Identity Formation*- the progression or lack thereof for generational migrants concerning politics, education, and income and the impact of immigration/returnee policies or politics.

Studying such communities explicates “the agency of collectivities,” (Goldring 2002) without forgetting the impact of societal structures (Kamanda 2004). Secondly, transnational communities offer new insights to topics such as identity, migration, and community. It also allows for the problematization and development of new theories and social fields since transnational communities are challenging entrenched notions such as culture, community, space, and society (Kamanda 2004). Unlike Kamanda, I address the shifts in geographical placement, however temporary or permanent and how they transform the performance of these activities, the interpretation of these symbols and processes, as well as ambiguities of the lived connections.

Throughout the chapters, African immigrants have mastered operating between various social and physical spaces. They have managed to maintain links with the homeland while at the same time actively negotiating their identities in the host countries via membership in professional groups, ethnic and alumni associations, religious and social groups (Kamanda 2004). The immigrant communities operate within borderless boundaries as they access and

maintain social networks both in the home and host countries. This transcendence is critical for the upbringing of their offspring as allows for the culture to be transported back and forth across space and time" (Baxter and Krulfeld 1997; Kamanda 2004). The knowledge gained by an understanding of the experiences of African immigrants in the United States can help erase the doubts and apprehensions that Americans, in general, may have about Africa, and possibly open up avenues for better relations between the peoples and governments of the United States and Africa (Arthur 2000).

African fashion and film can be seen as devices to aid in negotiating the relationships mentioned above as well as global tensions. They are not only tools to signify and express one's identity but also tell cultural stories. As an image creator, who shares her authorial voice, and as a character who responds to that voice, I create a multiplicity of consciousness. I intentionally walked this line to not only showcase those layers but also to spearhead an honest conversation on anxieties around identity within my community. Doing so was an execution of reflexivity, where I'm contributing to the context of knowledge construction in my immigrant community. As the filmmaker of *Am I: The Film*, I am also reshaping the dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized so that we can be free to discuss the effects and impact of current community events. We tend to self-police ourselves in dialogue and communication even when the colonizer is not physically present. Hence, I am excluding the colonizer from the conversation quite intentionally. As creator and participant of the film, we can talk about the effects of colonialism and post-colonialism without addressing the needs and concerns of the colonizer.

As I reflect on my journey with *Am I: The Film* and living in Sierra Leone, I noticed that I along with participants interviewed, conducted daily and weekly activities that shaped the field of our transnational worlds. Before entering the field, I expected to hold at least 30 more

interviews and collect data that would result in an ethnographic contextualization of the psychosocial impact of immigration and emigration on both host and home countries. I had all intention to answer questions such as why are generational migrants moving back to the home country of their parents and what is the reception? Who is moving back, why, and re-entering with what resources? How are countries like Sierra Leone adapting to this transnational migration and what tools are they providing? What are the stories of individuals and groups who have been affected by societal understandings of identity? How do these stories connect with their search for meaning and identity in their newfound homes in the West? The data collected data would have clarified the complexities of the African and American experience and its relationship to Sierra Leone with the future intention of incorporating the wider diaspora. Although I was prepared for the field and had a detailed outline explicated in my dissertation proposal, I had to accept that once in the field I needed an open mind to let the happenings of the field dictate the final text if I had remained rigid in my writings about the field I would have missed imperative content. This exploration can be unsettling as one navigates the unknown within the known, but this also inspires reflexivity.

I wrote this dissertation, not to be center of attention but to demonstrate the social impact of my personal story. I questioned what it meant to be Sierra Leonean - American. I understand that my story isn't unique, but it expresses my anxieties. I initially entered the graduate school to find neutrality in examining my research interests only to find that that doesn't exist, but also it silenced my many attempts to develop my voice and scholarship with the influence of my narrative. We are often asked to reproduce documents that structures force despite our best efforts not to conform. My goal is to develop a more nuanced understanding of the way generational migrants and Sierra Leoneans are socialized to adhere and personify particular

identities. There is a lot of subtle policing of self and others. At times the policies are invisible and therefore less explicit and hard to address. However, given the myriad of roles and theories reflected in each chapter, from researcher to fashion designer, as curators of African texts, we must not focus so much of our attention on entering and impacting on the Western theoretical discourse but rather speak to people closer to home (Nyamnjoh 2004; Wasserman 2009). The new technologies of the margins can easily sway someone, but no matter how accommodating the margins of the metropolis might be, one must remember only the elite filter through (Nyamnjoh 2004; Wasserman 2009). Thus, the possibility of other or alternative centers within Africa created for a particular type of exchange.

There is also a danger associated with only aligning self with alternatives, and creating a new form of fundamentalism that excludes everything that differs from oneself. We must create room to reach out while at the same time encouraging exchanges within the continent. This proposition is no different from the classic debate of how well do you provide for gender variation in scholarship. Do you do it by creating room for gender in the mainstream, or by creating a forum for gender in its own right without creating a ghetto? And the answer occurs in both of these options and should be pursued at the same time (Nyamnjoh 2004; Wasserman 2009). Although more research would need to be done to dissect intergenerational relationships, it is critical to observe tension between the local and the global (the glocal), between liberal individualism and patterns of belonging, and between global power relations and creative agency that forms the focus of this dissertation (Herman Wasserman 2009). Primarily, transnational communities have come to the forefront of anthropological attention and refocused theorizing about immigration as it relates to multidimensional generational migrants. The relationship of generational migrants to the country of origin vis-a-vis the country of settlement results in the

abandonment of theories that promote polarity and marginality in the African diaspora (Levitt 2001; Kamanda 2004).

APPENDICES

Conferences/ Film Festivals


<i>Presenter, Africa In The World Conference, South Africa</i>	May 2018
<i>Presenter, Pan African Connections Symposium, NY</i>	April 2017
<i>Presenter, Black Doctoral Conference, GA</i>	October 2016
<i>Presenter, South African International Film Festival, South Africa</i>	March 2016
<i>Presenter, iRepresent International Documentary Film Festival, Nigeria</i>	March 2016
<i>Screening, Missouri History Museum, MO</i>	February 2016
<i>Screening, Monmouth College, IL</i>	February 2016
<i>Screening, University of Ghana-Legon, Ghana</i>	February 2016
<i>Screening, Missouri Washington University, MO</i>	November 2015
<i>Screening, Kennesaw State University, GA</i>	November 2015
<i>Screening & Panelist, African Film Festival, NY</i>	November 2015
<i>Presenter, Undocumented And Black Convening, FL</i>	January 2015


Public Speaking

<i>Speaker, Define American Film Festival, PA</i>	May 2017
<i>Speaker, Norfolk State University, VA</i>	April 2017
<i>Speaker, Radisson Blu, Sierra Leone</i>	December 2016
<i>Speaker, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, DC</i>	September 2016
<i>Speaker, Impact Hub Accra, Ghana</i>	July 2016
<i>Speaker, Howard Community College, MD</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Viacom Networks, DC</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Impact Hub, MD</i>	April 2016


<i>Speaker, Dickinson College, PA</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Ithaca College, NY</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Middlebury College, VT</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Cornell Posse Induction, NY</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Cornell Nigerian Student Association Gala, NY</i>	April 2016
<i>Speaker, Lehigh University, PA</i>	March 2016
<i>Speaker, Cinemapolis, NY</i>	February 2016
<i>Speaker, Oberlin University,</i>	November 2015
<i>Speaker, Bucknell University, PA</i>	October 2015
<i>Speaker, True Blue Inclusion, DC</i>	October 2015
<i>Speaker, UBS, NJ</i>	October 2015
<i>Speaker, Cornell University, NY</i>	September 2015


Social Media Responses


 KeepingItReal · 8 hours ago
It is critical for black people to have a proper identity. Black people who identify with being the descendants of African American slaves are, in fact, living behind enemy lines 400+ years later and can accurately be identified as "Prisoners of war held behind enemy lines". Americans are afforded all the rights of its citizenry and...as we all know...black people never had...nor have...these "rights" of American citizenry. Therefore, black people cannot accurately be identified as Americans.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 Olayinka Kazeem · 8 hours ago
The funny thing is most first generation Africans and Caribbeans diss African Americans but are basically African American themselves. That's the culture they adopt. I'm African. Real African not born and raised in America/Europe, African. First generations only tend to rep their root country on Independence day. Any other time they're African American/Westernized. Then want to diss the African American culture they live by. Ridiculous.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share › [Show 1 new reply](#)

 Ouch → Olayinka Kazeem · 5 hours ago
Lies! We do not adopt anything African American. No keep telling yourself that. Oh and FYI, African American is NOT a race. Just an ignorant term.
^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 Courtney Banks → Olayinka Kazeem · 6 hours ago
What trips me out, is that they come over here, open up shops with BLACK clientele, listen to rap,rock, use AAVE.. and no one cares.. But then have the nerve to turn up their nose..
^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 FDB → Olayinka Kazeem · 8 hours ago
It's called jealousy.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 Ouch → FDB · 5 hours ago
Jealous of being shot down like rabid dogs? Jealous of the men and women who bred like feral pigs? Or perhaps we are jealous of the fact that we can identify with



Ouch → Wepo1 · 5 hours ago

Agreed. I am not an African American and I do not claim it. I claim being black and more importantly my nationality.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Wepo1 → Ouch · 5 hours ago

Me too.

I live in DC and I know how these Africans are. Ethiopians don't even claim to be African because they don't want people associating them with West Africans.

When you get pass which country each African is from then you have to get into tribes, then religion.

Africa is complex as fawk and they don't go by the simple black and white concept black Americans go by to unite.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Show 2 new replies



White Mike · 6 hours ago

Am I too white to be white mike or to mike to be mike white?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



MEREMORTAL → White Mike · 4 hours ago

micheal yakison said it doesnt matter?!?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Courtney Banks · 7 hours ago

Africans and Caribbeans are the first people to take offense from being called African-American or black.. They hate it. No one is saying they have to deny or ignore their own culture heritage. But don't come to America to study and to work and ignore that if it wasn't for those same Black Americans, you wouldn't have that opportunity. The cops would shoot you down just as fast,, cops aren't going to care you're from Nigeria. I know there's animosity on both sides, but Africans really kill me with that garbage.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

10 new comments below.



Regal → smdh · 8 hours ago

By definition, they are African Americans. What's more, why travel the road paved by your "Afro-American" brethren then turn around and have issue with be linked with them? We're all under the mighty African umbrella aren't we? Or is it that important that the Europeans(or whomever) know your our nationality?

I do get it, Europeans, Asians, everyone does this. Just seems to be amplified with people of African descent.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



rashad1 → Regal · 8 hours ago

"Or is it that important that the Europeans(or whomever) know your our nationality?"

a lil bit of this....

but.

to be raised all your life in a certain culture or nationality to be then lumped with a different group of people is disrespectful

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Regal → rashad1 · 8 hours ago

My point was we're all black people. Africans... When bananas are being tossed onto the pitch all over Europe is ethnicity being thought about or "race"?

I can dig it though. I make it a point to know where folks are from to have a deeper understanding about the mores and culture. This has never been an easy subject to discuss.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



DAYDREAMKILLER → Regal · 5 hours ago

Preach, very well said

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



ccurly · 5 hours ago

But no one would label you if you were not always in Black American's cultural space, benefitting when you can, and trying to diss when you can't. The relationship with Black immigrants and their children is no one of reciprocity. They get to benefit from the Black American cultural space, but Black Americans do not benefit from any one else's. If Black Americans treated black immigrants the way black immigrants disrespect Black Americans, their lives would be very different in this country.

What would be radical for Black Americans would be to cut them off, and let's really see how tribalism works. The resources that were meant for Black Americans as a result of plantation slavery in the United States (affirmative action, scholarships, etc.) should no longer be utilized by anyone other than Black Americans. Stay out of black institutions, schools, and cultural spaces-- even websites, since you do not participate on them in good faith, but instead, come to denigrate. If you notice, these same West Indians and Africans do not mind coming to HBCUs, black businesses (don't let them fool you, there are LOTS working at Black American businesses such as the ROOT, BET, etc. (but would never hire you in their businesses). They do not mind being in our movies playing our heroes (always produced by some Black American's money) or using Black American people, institutions, and resources for their own people's benefit while talking about you like a dog and smiling in your face, and giving nothing in return but degradation. I peeped this years ago, and act accordingly, no matter the phony smiles and the "my sister/brother" rhetoric when

[see more](#)

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

Show 3 new replies



MEREMORTAL → ccurly · 4 hours ago

Its illegal for nefros to gather together then and now
Contract ainy change ..!
Bro x said
Give em novacain doc ..!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



destiny34 · 5 hours ago

This is very interesting





^ | v · Reply · Share ›

 AmltheFilm Retweeted



Cin @FutureDrCin · 15 Apr 2014

#AmITheFilm pan africanism has more pragmatics & social justice. And they seem right in this context. **@DrJamesPeterson**





  2  3 

 AmltheFilm Retweeted



Sarita Olga Mizin @PosttheColony · 15 Apr 2014

#AmItheFilm shining the light on BOTH the challenges & positives of being **#thirdculturekids** "Be a chameleon" rings Anzalduic to my ears




  2  3 

 AmltheFilm Retweeted



Cin @FutureDrCin · 15 Apr 2014

The sharing of knowledge & culture across the diaspora was meant to reject feelings of self-hate **#AmITheFilm**

  2  2 



AmltheFilm @amithefilm · Sep 9

Ur story needed to be heard **@OYATO**, thanks for making **amithefilm.com** possible. **#AMI #2AF2AM**

Designs & Artistry @OYATO

"Am I Too African to be American?"

"Am I Too American to be African?"

#AmItheFilm is a great film... [instagram.com/p/7YJ1-rA3r9/](https://www.instagram.com/p/7YJ1-rA3r9/)





 AmltheFilm Retweeted

 AmiTheFilm Retweeted



The Lumpia Lady @Milliesbites · Sep 24

@Madinkah @Clasique if you moved to DC then all the kids would be at my house....#tweww

  2  1 





[View conversation](#)

 AmiTheFilm Retweeted



HFJ @Madinkah · Sep 24

@Clasique I couldn't agree with you more. We were definitely a community back in the days in New Brunswick #2AF2AM




  1  

 AmiTheFilm Retweeted



stephaniefilo @stephaniefilo · Sep 24

@lamYeniva it took me so long to come to terms with my identity. I'm still so impressed/proud when I see your prom pics!!! <3 #AmI #2af2am


  3  2 

 AmiTheFilm Retweeted



The Lumpia Lady @Milliesbites · Sep 24

@lamYeniva @amithefilm how long did yall sit there talking? 🤔 #2AF2AM

  2  1 

 AmiTheFilm Retweeted



stephaniefilo @stephaniefilo · Sep 24

Colonialism affects all of us-from hairstyles to how we're perceived in Salone, even the language, etc. #ami #2af2am



AmltheFilm @amithefilm · Sep 25

Thank you for supporting us. A film most Americans can relate to and not just Africans.

The Lumpia Lady @Milliesbites

Finally a film that outlines what it's like growing up African, while being American. best of both worlds but the struggle is real #2af2am



AmltheFilm @amithefilm · Sep 25

Yaaaay! #AMI #2AF2AM bridging generations lol love it.

HFJ @Madinkah

I enjoyed watching the documentary with my mom who got a better understanding of what I went through as a young lady #2AF2AM



AmltheFilm @amithefilm · Sep 25

The beauty of it. Once seen as a hindrance, now seen as very beneficial to be bicultural.

Eleanor T. Khonje @eleanortkhonje

There's something beautiful about being able to be all these things. African and American. We speak our very own language. #2AF2AM



HuffPost Black Voices

6 hrs · 🌐

When you're an African living in America, how do you navigate what it means to "African-American"?



New Documentary 'Am I?' Explores What It Means To Be African And American

"You've got to be able to be a chameleon sometimes."

HUFF.TO

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Danielle Hall and 1,325 others like this.

Most Relevant ▾

517 shares



Write a reply...



Georgia NeSmith I have sat on hiring committees where hiring or interviewing an African was considered meeting the affirmative action requirements. But growing up in a country where most of the people are black, including those in the top echelons of business and power, is very different from growing up in a country where you are devalued because of your black skin.

Like · Reply · 1 · 1 hr



HenRhee Higginz Annette H Evelyn Elverlean Whitaker Lee Alex Yvonne R Isaac Diane Brown ~~This is something I've discussed with my African born & bred god-mother & her children who eventually migrated to the US. ~~

Like · Reply · 2 · 2 hrs



Yvonne R Isaac Have you read "Americanah"? It's a novel that addresses this. I have it but haven't started it. My Cali born and bred college roommate lived in East Africa (this book's protagonists are West African) for years and she recommended it. It won a big fiction award a couple of years ago. ✕

Like · Reply · 1 hr · Edited



Write a reply...



Edith Ball I am a child of the Almighty, One and Only God Yahweh and I a Hebrew Israelite., that lives in America....Know who you are and you will not have to have this discussion.

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Winslow Miller Why not just what it's like to be black

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Theresa Johnson I prefer they go back to Coloured. There's so many variety of skin colors of us. Not all from Africa. Some from Haitian, Barbados..etc..

Like · Reply · 33 mins



Joaquín Robles They are americans, not africans fucking ignorants. Always mixing everything.

Like · Reply · 2 hrs · Edited



Neeama Ahyoka How are you going to come on here and define a people you are NOT!Anyway....smh.But I expect nothing less from you

Like · Reply · 1 hr



Write a reply...



Cherie Dennis While I respect anyone identifying however they see fit, I also hate to see this type of division.

Like · Reply · 3 · 2 hrs

Firstly, I so support you and your intellectual and creative inquiry. I support you 100% but I don't support the mastication of Black Americans for what I've been told about your film doesn't represent me and is a form of misrecognition and a myth for many of us. Again, I love you and I'm so about diaspora..it's my experience and my life. I just wanted to be "real" for a minute with you out of love. Still in all, I love and support you.



Like



Comment



Share

Like · Reply · 31 mins

↳ 1 Reply



Christina Sellers I can relate, I was teased for "talking white" hanging with the people because they didn't live in the same neighborhood, etc. I am black American.

Like · Reply · 2 hrs



Amy Lawson I look forward to this. I was afraid to identify as African when I was younger because some kids made "African" seem like it was a bad thing. I heard stuff like "African booty scratcher" "Did your parents live in huts?" "Your parents talk funny" etc. I remember having to order fast food because the people at the register couldn't understand my parents even though they sounded perfectly clear to me. It's also weird not being immediately identifiable as African because my name is English. Soo much disbelief that I'm African has happened over the years. But getting to college was way better. I'm proud of it now. I realize that my culture is rich and I don't see that stigma of Africans being less than as often. I think this film is going to open some eyes and hopefully garner more understanding on both sides of the fence.

Like · Reply · 1 · 1 hr



Georgia NeSmith You have to understand the history behind the hyphenate African American. Its usage was developed as a preference over "Negro," which is actually a cognate of the Spanish/Portuguese word for black. "Negro" was supposed to be the more polite term (as op... [See More](#))

Like · Reply · 2 · 1 hr · Edited

↳ 1 Reply



Tessy Redding When you're Irish living in America, how do you navigate what it means to be an Irish American? Hmmm, we are Americans. Adding an adjective to your ethnicity only make you a person with self imposed problems. I'm not sure if you all know that American Indians are the only people who were here before we took their land. You don't hear them complaining. Those who choose make their race a beast of burden, it's a choice!

Like · Reply · 1 · 2 hrs

^ Hide 19 Replies



Mikkie Oggy Typical misguided response

Like · Reply · 13 · 2 hrs



Melly Mel Identity is very important. I think the question should be asked, if I am a person of color and have no identity of my heritage, your blood line matters. So, to be called an African American, and not really know my true identity to me is a sad situatio... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · 9 · 2 hrs



Mariama Mareya I completely agree.

Like · Reply · 1 · 2 hrs

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