The illusion of Home and the elusion of Peace: Framing the ‘return’ of Liberian refugee women

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By

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Abstract

Why does Home and Peace remain an elusive illusion when forcibly displaced women return ‘home’? How does the illusion of Home contribute to the Elusion of Peace? What frames exist from the literature to help us make sense of these two questions with reference to the empirical case of Liberia? This paper utilizes Cynthia Cockburn’s frame of the continuum of violence, leaning on Galtung’s theory of structural violence to unravel the above question. The analysis and conclusions are based on data collected during field work carried out in Liberia with returnee refugee women and other stakeholders and information collected from other documentary sources. While the prevalent discourse on gender and migration in Africa centres on economic implications, and predominantly focuses on migration rather than migrants, this research utilizes feminist methodologies that privilege the viewpoint of the researched. Furthermore, the paper distinguishes between the Home that the migrant-as-migrant remembers with a subjective lens, and the actual ‘home’ that s/he encounters upon going back to the country of origin, and which might not resemble Home.

Therefore, the puzzle posed above can be unravelled with reference to theoretical explanations, practical constraints, and gendered structures within which return migration takes place. With reference to the theoretical bases for return, scholars have critiqued the ‘territoriality’ mode of thinking that informs refugee policy on migration, constructing the movement of the migrant back to the country of origin as a re-turn, or re-placement. The m/paternalistic assumption is that ‘all refugees want to go home’ leaving room for little alternative. The practical reasons for returnee

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women’s inability to grasp the new ‘home’ may include the burdens of daily living in a harsh context which in fact might be more difficult than the place to which they were exiled. Apparently then, Home may remain a mirage, a phantasm, a chimera that kept Hope alive in exile, but now, in real-time, remains exactly that: a mirage. This raises further questions of how a new Home might be constructed in the return phase of migration.

Consequently, ‘return’ depends on the returnee’s ability to adapt to the emergent, or transformed gender and power relations in society. Indeed, returnee women find that pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict are useful for agencies that design reintegration programs, but for some women, ‘peace’ and ‘post-conflict’ remain as elusive as ever before; they find that violence is indeed a continuum. In-spite of all these, some women actively engage in the re-construction of ‘home’ and ‘peace’ to survive their reality.

In conclusion, the return of migrants in Africa remains an area of investigation for further theorizing especially as we begin to disaggregate the numbers into people, who in turn have different dreams, hopes, needs, backgrounds, coping strategies and will.

**Key words:** Home, Return, Returnee, Peace, Post-conflict, Gender

**Word Count:** 450

**Setting the Context: the Global Refugee Regime**

...And yes, it was visibly obvious that the overwhelming majority of the one hundred and sixty-seven returnees were children, then young girls with children, then women…. I noticed one woman alone with seven children; one girl in her twenties with three children with her; one grandmother-like person with three children with her, and so on. And I wondered where all these children came from… and where all the men had gone...³

The above quote is the observation of a neutral observer, without the benefit of official estimates and demographic data about the returnee refugee population. Among a group of one hundred and sixty-seven returnee refugees assisted by the UN refugee agency and other partners to return to Lofa county of Liberia, it seemed everywhere, there were just young children, and the women that care for them, both young and old. The conspicuous absence of men in this space raises initial questions as to the gendering of various stages and spaces in the migration trajectory, from flight, to encampment and to return. Before we proceed with this thought however, it is apposite to explore the official accounts of the composition and

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³ Researcher’s field notes, describing observations at a Transit center in Voinjama, Lofa County, Liberia at which I witnessed the arrival of a convoy of five trucks filled with returning refugees from camps in Guinea.
character of the refugee and return population globally and in relation to other migrants.

Refugees are people who flee their country of origin or of habitual residence because of perceived or real threats to their life, fear of persecution, and other related reasons, and find ‘refugee’ in a country other than their own which offers them temporary protection. It is estimated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that 15.2 million refugees currently exist worldwide (UNHCR 2010). When placed within the broader context of migration, forced migrants – refugees and internally displaced persons – account for 43.3 million of the world’s 214 million migrants (IOM 2010) – approximately 20% of all migrants.

In the past few decades, especially since the end of the cold war, repatriation has been the solution of choice by the international community for ending refugeehood. Today, however, another significant trend in forced migration is the decline in the number of repatriations in recent years. Whereas the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) declared in 2005 that this was an “era of return”, today official UNHCR figures indicate that return is on the decline. Based on reports from countries of asylum (departure) and of origin (return), the UNHCR estimates that less than half (42%) of the number that repatriated in 2008 returned in 2009. This is part of an overall decline in number of repatriates since 2004, with the 2009 figures being the lowest since 1990 (UNHCR 2010: 10). It seems though that African refugees continue to return in large numbers, even to countries where conflict has not come to a conclusive end. Except for Afghanistan and Iraq, the other four of six countries that top the list of major countries of return are in Africa4; and three of the four countries that top the list of countries of departure are on the African continent5.

All these numbers have implications for the understanding of return migration because historically, it is states that have the primary responsibility for the welfare of refugees and returnees, and the decisions concerning migration and return for forcibly displaced persons are usually concluded by authorities apart from the refugee him/herself.

It is now anecdotal to observe that 75% to 80% of refugees are women and children. However, in order to avoid what Cynthia Enloe (1990) calls the construction of ‘womenandchildren’ as a single conceptual category, we may be specific about the female and youth composition of the refugee and returnee population. The UNHCR (2010: 14) reports that 47% of refugees in 2009 were women, and 51% of returnees. Certain factors however may show up in country data as mediating the location of women. For example, the refugee agency’s report indicates that in Chad, whereas only 33% of urban refugees are women, up to 70% were enumerated in the Daha 1

4 These four countries are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda.
5 Apart from Pakistan, the three African countries are Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.
camp (UNHCR 2010: 14). With respect to children, while 41% of refugees or people in ‘refugee-like’ situations are children, 54% of returnee refugees are estimated to be children. Inevitably, then these demographics would [or should] impinge on the reintegration programs available for returning refugees. Whether they do is a separate question.

**Setting the context: the Liberian case**

After decades of relative calm under minority rule, Liberia erupted into political instability with a series of riots that culminated in the military coup of 12 April 1980. Hailed as a ‘revolution’ (Youboty 2004), the coup succeeded in wresting political power from the minority Americo-Liberians and gave the Liberian population the first taste of indigenous rule. Unfortunately, the outcome was further splintering along ethnic lines that saw the incursion of a group of Libyan-trained guerrilla fighters under the auspices of Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) on 24 December 1989. Thus began fourteen years that witnessed two civil wars (1989-1996 and 1999-2003) and a brief period of uncivil ‘civil’ rule (1996-1999) under Charles Taylor as President.

The Liberian civil war eventually ended with the exiling of President Charles Taylor to Nigeria on 11 August 2003, paving the way for warring factions to lay down their arms in respect of the Accra Comprehensive peace Agreement signed earlier that year, and for the war-weary population both at home and abroad to begin to Hope for a return to peace. After winning in presidential run-off elections in 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was sworn in as Liberia’s president on 16 January 2006, bringing with her a track record of achievement and promises to return the country to prosperity against all odds.

It is within this context that tens of thousands of Liberian refugees returned to their country. According to the UNHCR, an estimated 200,000 refugees returned to the country in the period between the end of the conflict in 2003 and the inauguration of a new government (UNHCR News Stories, 16 January 2006); 51% of these were female. However almost an equal number (approximately 190,000) of refugees remained in exile in various neighbouring countries especially, and have been returning in slower, smaller groups since then. In 2009, 8,800 Liberian refugees were repatriated from Ghana, and official estimates still indicate that Liberians still form the majority of refugees in Nigeria [UNHCR 2010].

**Central Questions and Methods**

My research carried out in and on Liberia in this period (2006 – date) has focused on investigating the particular conditions of returnee refugee women in their various communities especially with respect to their reintegration. This paper is specifically concerned with issues that seem to go under the radar for most organisations and researchers working in and on Liberia. We interrogate here the question of Home,
Peace and ‘return’ as constructs used by both the returnee women and the government and non-government agencies that work with them. Based on the evidence collected, we ask, why does Home and Peace remain elusive when refugee women return ‘home’? Could it be that there is a difference between the ‘home’ touted by the agencies involved in repatriation, the Home the refugee remembers or constructs in her memory while in exile, and the home the returnee refugee actually encounters? And what are the implications when Home remains an illusion upon return? In other words, how does the illusion of Home contribute to the elusion of Peace? What frames can we employ from the literature to help us unravel these issues? These are the essential questions we aim to address in this paper.

A combination of methods and approaches has been useful for collecting relevant data for this research. These include one hundred in-depth interviews with Liberian returnee women and other stakeholders including men, focus group discussions (FGDs), non-participant observation, peer validation and review of documents. Specifically, data was collected during fieldwork in four of Liberia’s fifteen administrative counties using interviews, FGDs and observation, while documents from relevant agencies were also collected. After fieldwork, the data thus collected was analyzed using thematic coding and grounded theory methods from which subsequent questions emerged. These were then analyzed by additional collection of documents, further review of the literature and validation by experts on the various issues.

We have privileged a feminist methodology in this research, relying on qualitative methods and a multi-vocal analysis that pays particular attention to the voices of the researched themselves in drawing conclusions. By this, women are “not objects of study, but subjects, authorities of knowledge” (Baines 2005: 145), or according to Bolanle Adetoun in reference to marginalised research subjects, “the work of a researcher in this type of project is to listen to [and present] all parties concerned” (Adetoun 2005: 50).

Return to Liberia and the Construction of Home and Peace

The UNHCR exercises primary responsibility for the international protection of refugees and is also given the mandate to find “durable solutions” to the refugee problem. The solutions favoured by UNHCR, which have today become classic are, voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement in a third country – in order of preference. UNHCR’S lead role is supported by the activities of host governments and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Repatriation is the return of refugees to their country of origin, and is expected to be followed by reintegration, that is, the process that enables former refugees [and other displaced persons] to enjoy a progressively greater degree of physical, social, legal and material security (UNHCR 1998).
Refugees return to their country of origin for various reasons. In the case of the Liberian refugee women we interviewed for this research, many reasons were given for returning to the country. The most oft cited reasons were: the desire for Home, the need to escape harsh conditions in exile, the end of the war and wish to participate in upcoming elections, the desire to locate family members, and the pressure by the United Nations (specifically UNHCR).

When asked why they returned to Liberia, several women would look at the interviewer as if to say, Isn’t it obvious, and then they would simply say, “because Liberia is my home.” Full stop. In other words, no other reason makes sense, unless you understand that this was my place, where I have citizenship. This seems for the returnee respondents the most significant reason for return. However, further interrogation reveals a layer of various reasons for longing for this Home, this place that the end of war has given them the leave to dream favourably about. I refer here to *Home*, as a proper noun to denote the idea/rememberances/subjective depictions of Liberia as country of origin explicated by the returnee refugees who participated in this research.

The presence or lack thereof of family ties is one oft cited reason for return to Liberia. Several women gave a variation of this response: “I heard that Liberians were repatriated and that things are fine in Liberia. My parents are here [in Liberia], my brothers are here, so I was encouraged to come back.” Conversely, some returned because they lost all family while in exile: “I returned because I wanted to come back home. My older sister passed away. My mother left Guinea in 1997. My father left me in the night while I was sleeping. I returned voluntarily because I will not have nobody in Guinea. [Here] is still hard time. The situation here is the same situation in Guinea.”

One significant factor that leaps at us from the information collected from the returnee refugee women is the way the women link their construction of home with the difficulties experienced in exile. For example:

[I had] a very unpleasant experience in the camp. I had a boyfriend who ruined my daughter’s life and always threatened my life because he lost his job in the camp…. I returned because of ill-treatment from my children’s pa in Guinea and the unbearable conditions. I prefer being here because of my daughters. She is no more threatened by their father because her father is a Guinean. The situation here is better because there is nowhere like home.

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6 Returnee woman in Monrovia
7 Returnee woman in Monrovia
8 Returnee woman in Monrovia
[I returned] because this country na my country. Sometimes in Guinea we no get food, nothing. So I decide to come back. UN came and said we should come back. No school again; all the work in the camp closed. Also no resettlement option...  

I was very idle in that country [Guinea] and felt that I should come home to play my part.

We returned because of the difficult time and there was no overseas support for my family. Another reason was I felt that peace was gradually returning to Liberia.... Liberia is my home, peace has been restored.

My situation here [in Liberia] is different than in exile. The difference is that here na my home; the people here they can feel sorry for you sometimes and give my children something. But not in Ivory Coast.

I returned to Liberia because the struggle [in exile] wasn’t easy.... Here is my home unlike Sierra Leone.

This indicates also that return to Liberia is driven by both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. Experts indicate that:

The most successful return and reintegration processes have been those where ‘pull’ factors have been created in areas of origin through upgrading of basic services, creation of livelihood opportunities and, most importantly, the establishment of law and order. Returnees who have left their places of displacement because of ‘push factors – such as acute discrimination or overt hostility by local authorities or populations – often require special assistance and protection in areas of displacement, during – and even after – return (Rogge and Lippman, 2004: 4).

The illusion of Home and the elusion of Peace

We find the construction of Home intimately interlinked with the construction of Peace as a condition that enhances the desirability of Home, and contributes to its

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9 All the quotes used in this work are cited verbatim, and I have chosen to leave unedited the pidgin rendition where the meaning of such statements remain clearly obvious with or without a prior knowledge of the Liberian pidgin. All seeming grammatical errors in participants’ statements are also deliberately presented as is.

10 Returnee woman in Monrovia

11 Returnee woman in Monrovia

12 Returnee woman, Nimba County

13 Returnee woman in Monrovia, Montserrado County

14 Returnee woman in Sinje, Grand Cape Mount County
pull. Indeed Peace is constructed while in exile simply as the end of hostilities, or sometimes as the possibility of reuniting with family and then upon return constructed as the availability of certain opportunities, rights and privileges.

To illustrate, several women described peace simply as the absence of war, saying simply that [for instance] “I felt that there was no more war and I wanted to be apart of the decision making and peacebuilding process, and to also help in the reconstruction of my dear country.” Another young woman told us her mother’s description of Liberia, and how her own experience did not concur with the Home she was returned to: “I came to Liberia because my mother said I should come because its my father’s home, our home, so I should come back. No war to keep us in Guinea again. It’s our home. [Now]…no father to assist; my mother not alright to help us. For me now, Guinea was better.” This young lady’s disillusionment is obvious and keen, as she had spent up to twelve years of her life in exile, and was taken into exile as a young child with little memory of the Home that her parents left over a decade before.

Another returnee woman who had returned since 1998 told us, “I don’t see anything becoming good for the next three, four years. We expect things to go [in a particular] way…but everyday things are getting harder.” This person clearly links her expectation with the keenly felt alternative reality. Home is clearly much more than where the heart is, especially when basic amenities become difficult to come by.

Thus some women began to relate their Peace to the availability of certain facilities or resources:

I am happy to be home although there was free services render to us in exile but I feel fine to be at home because I have right to my country. I am a part of the decision-making and peacebuilding. Although I don’t have money to provide wants but my needs are met…and there is no more gun sounds. We live in a peaceful environment.

And another, somewhat conflicted but relating peace to the availability of certain freedoms in spite of hardship said,

I felt that there was security back home in Liberia. I overstayed my welcome in exile, [so] I felt that I should come back home…. I am very happy to be back home. There is security. Even with the difficulty in getting money, there is peace and one is free to go anywhere. I feel that my condition now is far better than in exile where I was

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15 Returnee woman in Nimba County

16 Returnee woman in Monrovia

17 Interview with returnee woman in Ganta, Nimba County
constantly called a foreigner…. [Now] I live in my own country, live in my own house, there is peace, and I do what I want to do.  

We see from the above the returnee women’s prevarication on the nature of their existence in the aftermath of return. Whereas some no longer chase the phantasm of the Home they expected to see and experience, several continue to hold on to the idea, replacing its meaning as they go on, and constructing for themselves a measure of Peace, subjectively defined. 

**Framing the ‘return’ of Liberian refugee women**

The previous sections have demonstrated the perceptions of Liberian returnee refugee women about their country, first as emigrants/refugees with the prospect of return, and then as returnees who must now grapple with a new existence in a significantly altered context. The Home of Peace that they described may not be the actual ‘home’ they now live in, and peace, they are finding out is indeed about silence of guns on the streets, but so much more than that. But what theoretical frames help us decipher the dilemma of Liberian returnee refugee women? 

I argue first that, the bifurcation of the idea of home that shows up in the experience of returnee refugees are fundamentally constructed by the international refugee regime that has vested interests in seeing refugee numbers reduce, and camps closed. 

Sepulveda (1996) believes that the assumption which lies behind the idea that repatriation is the best possible solution is that “a singular and immutable bond exists between a ‘people’ and a particular ‘space’ ” (ibid: p. 8) - the territorialization of space and identity. While acknowledging arguments to the contrary, Kibreab (1999: p. 387) posits that the modern international political system is such that “spaces are more territorialized than ever before…. ‘Fortress Europe’ is the culmination of the territorialization process.”

This idea is further expounded by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1992) which explains that the discourse surrounding displacement and solutions 

…contains the implicit assumption that a given population has its own proper ‘place’, territory or homeland. This assumption is deeply embedded in the European political theory of nationalism, according to which there is a natural identity between people and place and the world is naturally made up of clearly bounded politico-territorial entities – sovereign states (UNRISD, 1992: p. 7). 

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18 Returnee woman in Nimba County
This is why, Ghanem (2003, p. 15) explains in support of Hammond (1999: pp. 229-230), refugees are perceived as uprooted and displaced and returnees are considered to be naturally ‘re-rooted’ and placed back in the right order of things [replaced] as soon as they are ‘back home’. It seems inescapable thus that we challenge this “static and unrealistic ‘repatriation = homecoming’ model” (emphasis in original text).

The logical consequence of the ‘territoriality’ mode of thinking is the international community’s unsubstantiated “reliance on the questionable assumptions that all refugees want to go home and the best place for refugees is home” (Sepulveda, 1996: p. 11, emphasis mine). This assumption, asserts Chimni (1999: p. 5), “was not seen as a ‘hypothesis to be tested’ (Sepulveda, 1996: pp 12-13), but as a statement of fact which presumed knowledge of refugees” – implying a certain arrogance of attitude which precluded further investigation of repatriation theory and practice.

Thus we can identify a number of scenarios in which refugees would be reluctant to go back to their country of origin, and in fact it would not be advantageous for them to do so even if they so wished. Some of these include: the situation of second generation refugees (Rogge, 1994; Chimni, 1999); a bifurcation of the idea of home for long time refugees (Graham and Khosravi, 1997); the non removal of the cause of fear or persecution for the individual even when the general situation of conflict or unrest has abated (Oyinloye, 2004); a gendered view (Lopez-Zarzosa, 1998) that acknowledges the fault in the idealization of ‘home’ which may not translate into peace for women who return to the same patriarchal social structures that governed them before exile.

The idea of peace has of course been adequately critiqued by feminists writing on peace, conflict and international relations generally. I do not aim to revisit all these arguments here, but I find compelling Cynthia Cockburn’s explication of the continuum of violence which in my opinion lends credence to Johan Galtung’s idea of structural violence and positive/negative peace.

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19 Hammond’s assertion (1999: p. 230) is very thought-provoking: “Terms to be found in the discourse of repatriation include: reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, rebuilding, readjustment, readaptation, reacculturation, reassimilation, reinsertion, reintroduction, recovery and re-establishment. (...) Among the most problematic terms of the repatriation canon are the very words return and returnee, which imply that by re-entering one’s native country a person is necessarily returning to something familiar. These terms are riddled with value judgments that reflect a segmentary, sedentary idea of how people ought to live, what their relation to their ‘homeland’ should be, and ultimately how they should go about constructing their lives once the period of exile ends.” (additional emphasis mine)
In the introductory chapter of the book, *The Aftermath: Women in Post Conflict Transformation*, the authors conclude that there is no aftermath of war for women because:

Evidence confirms that the gender violence women experience in wartime increases when the fighting dies down....; and clearly there is no one aftermath because the scenarios following war are as various as the conflicts themselves.... The post-war period is too late for women to transform patriarchal gender relations (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 2001: 4; cf. Ibeanu 2001; Turshen 2001).

The experiences of women after conflict then are just an extension of the structural violence they bear even in so-called peace-time. Johan Galtung gave us the concept of *structural violence*, explaining that “conflict is much more than what meets the naked eye as ‘trouble’, direct violence. There is also the violence frozen into structures, and the culture that legitimates violence” (in Cockburn 2004:30). However, Cynthia Cockburn explicates this idea further in her exposition of violence in the pre-war period, which she calls “an uneasy peace”. For her, “violence exists whenever the potential development of an individual or group is held back by the conditions of relationship, and in particular by the uneven distribution of power and resources” (ibid).

Thus she concludes that:

...gender links violence at different points on a scale reaching from the personal to the international...; that it is meaningless to make a sharp distinction between peace and war, prewar and postwar... [and to] consider one moment in this flux in the absence of the next is arbitrary; [and] the continuum of violence runs through the social, the economic and the political (Cockburn, ibid: 43).

The implications of the above perspective for our study are that structural violence of the kind explicated by Galtung, and framed as a continuum by Cockburn is present in those situations experienced by the returnee refugee women whose [positive] ideas of home and peace showed evidence of shifting once back in Liberia. For example, one woman told us: “I don’t feel a need to retain a place in my former place of asylum because Liberia is my home. [But] my situation now is worse because in Guinea, UN helped a whole lot but now there is no assistance.”

Thus the practical constraints of daily living indicate to us the latent violence that makes reintegration difficult for returnee Liberian women. Many of them told us that schools, healthcare facilities, and indeed food (or the financial means to access these) were still elusive even upon their return ‘Home’. One young lady told stated that, “I returned because of the peace; at least to have something doing.... While in exile we got information about the peace [that] there is peace. But things hard

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20 Returnee woman in Monrovia
Another woman displayed the ambivalence we came to expect from returnees who had spent a longer period in Liberia:

I came to Liberia because there was green light of peace, schools were re-opened, there was job opportunity available to help women and children and I also wanted to be a part of the electoral process. [But] in exile my children were attending schools that were tuition free, [now] I have to spend almost all my earning for school fees and school materials. [But] after all of the difficult times, God has finally brought peace into this land. Nowadays we sleep fine. There is nowhere like home....

When these basic human needs are not met for the women, and the many children they cater for on behalf society, then Home remains a mirage. Home was sweet as a dream, a reason to continue living during the adversities of exile and camp life, but increasingly useless as disappointment dampens Hope. Peace eludes them as they find they have only exchanged one form of hardship for another, or one location or place of privation for another. They find (as evidenced in the quotes above) that even the ‘advantages’ they might have enjoyed in exile, such as privileged access to schools or skills training, might be no longer available as the international community and its representatives on the ground insist on making them more ‘self-reliant’. This self-reliance however, is usually poorly conceived and intensely gendered to the disadvantage of women, as I have argued elsewhere (Yacob-Haliso 2010).

Further investigation may be needed thus to unravel the other socio-personal and political factors that mediate the process by which returnee refugee women in Liberia or elsewhere achieve reintegration that may be termed ‘sustainable’ – and unsustainable has been the return so far. Several agency staff told us in interviews that many of the ‘returnee’ refugees living close to borders did not remain permanently; they often criss-crossed the border frequently, maintaining bases in both Liberia and the ‘former’ host country. One Mandingo chief, who was still having problems retrieving his land and property that was occupied during the war told us in no uncertain terms, “I don’t have the means to bring back my family from Ghana. [my only problem] is my property business; I never get it.... If I don’t get my property, I’ll go back; if I get it, I’ll stay.”

**Conclusion**

This paper concludes that the home returnee refugee women return to does not correspond with the Home they expect at the moment of taking the decision to

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21 Returnee woman in Monrovia

22 Returnee woman in Nimba County

23 Interview with ‘returnee’ refugee man in Nimba County
return. Further, that the Peace they expect is partly achieved as there is no overt generalized violence to a large extent anymore. In their narratives of experiences in Liberia however, we find evidence of an elusion of Peace as they contend with the practical realities of existence in a postwar, but not post-conflict society. The implications of these are that ‘return’ may not be sustainable, or that returnee women may end up with greater disadvantages that they had while in exile given the eventual withdrawal of aid, and the dire lack of opportunities for advancement in a poor country such as their beloved Liberia.

More broadly, the metaphorical reference to refugee ‘flows’, ‘streams’, ‘waves’ and ‘trickles’, though seemingly innocently employed actually require us to think of refugees and other migrants as an undifferentiated mass, as molecules in a liquid (Turton, 2003: pp. 4, 5). Contrarily, the effects of forced migration vary in different political, socioeconomic and cultural contexts, and vary according to various factors such as gender, class, age, race or ethnicity- a theme scantily pursued in the literature on refugees (Yacob-Haliso 2008: 4).

**References**


