

**“BETWIXT AND BETWEEN”: HOW FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANT AFRICANS  
IN PITTSBURGH USE SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRANSNATIONAL PHENOMENA TO  
CROSS CULTURES AND FIND BELONGING**

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In this thesis, I examine the notion of “betwixt and between,” or rather the concept of how first-generation African immigrants constantly travel across cultures. More first-generation African immigrants are living in the Pittsburgh community than ever before. In this emerging diaspora community, we are able to see their cross-cultural flows between their homeland and hostland cultures. I argue that being betwixt and between allows the first-generation immigrant to flow amid materials, habits, and languages to find belonging and attachment. The flow between cultures is transnational – it is an exchange of space and materials, images, ideas and values that moves across nation-state boundaries. The flow of betwixt and between is set in motion by the search for social capital, which allows the first-generation immigrant to simultaneously hold on to the old – the ways of the home country – while building attachment to the new – the host country. My work is qualitative and ethnographic, using in-depth interviews and observations and is drawn from a sample of six nationalities, both genders, and diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds that create the quilt of immigrant African society in Pittsburgh.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Winston is originally from Zambia, Africa. He was born and raised in the city of Lusaka. I would see Winston every morning as he came to my office, making his rounds as a maintenance worker. Winston was friendly and open and we struck up a conversation each morning. I learned that Winston left his homeland, where he had been an award-winning soccer player, and when the Zambia economy was slow, he came to the United States 10 years ago to seek better job opportunities. He now lives in the South Hills with his Zambian wife and two children. Winston was pleasant and friendly with everyone in the office and I began to notice and listen in on his conversations with office staff. One morning, Winston came in and said hello and announced, “I am from Zambia, you know.” He would then give an impromptu language lesson on how to make morning greetings in his native city, and how to say good-bye, “*dec zow nana myelo*,” or see you tomorrow. He left laughing, telling the staff we sounded like Zambians. The next day, Winston walked into my office and discussed Obama and U.S. politics, displaying a knowledge and an interest that escaped many natural-born Americans. On another morning, he’d bound into my office excitedly wanting me to open a YouTube video that showed the Zambia national soccer team and its progress in the World Cup tournament. Another time, he shared with me the news that his younger brother, still living in Lusaka, was not well and living with HIV. He told me how he sends money home to help his family buy medicine for his brother. The next day, he’s chatting about his dreams of becoming a soccer coach in Pittsburgh and the difficult road of



licensing and fees that he'll have to navigate to make that happen. It went like this for the year that Winston worked in our office. One day, he engaged in dialogue about this home nation -- teaching us the language, sharing the stories of his family still living there. The next day, he's talking about his observations of life in Pittsburgh, America. I begin to notice that Winston moved back and forth between two worlds. Physically present in one (America); his memories and history and culture kept him, as a first-generation immigrant African, tied to another, his homeland. He danced between the two. Daily, it seemed, he was crossing the threshold of old and new, moving between his Africanness and Americanness, displaying where he had come from, but by talking in depth about the U.S. government and local economy, Winston was also making it known that he knew he was not in Zambia anymore. I shared my observations with Rufus, a Nigerian, who heads the African Union of Pittsburgh, a coalition of about 30 immigrant African groups. Rufus is one of my informant sources and someone who I could talk to about the life of immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh. Here's how Rufus explained what I was observing about Winston. "First generation [immigrants] have a sense of belonging to Africa. They are still holding on. For first generation, we feel half here and half there."

Half here and half there? It seems that what Rufus is describing is the concept of betwixt and between. Jacqueline Copeland Carson referenced this concept in her 2004 book "Creating Africa in America: Translocal Identity in an Emerging World City." It was her idea that being betwixt and between meant "existing someplace between, a midway position, neither one thing or the other."

African people in America have long experienced this condition of betwixt and between.

DuBois (1903) called it double consciousness: a disjointed identity that was partially imposed on African peoples by racism (hegemony), and the twoness of living between Africanness and Americanness – always seeing oneself through another’s vision, never feeling quite whole. “One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,” Dubois wrote in his ground-breaking book “The Souls of Black Folks.”

With the global flow of people and ideas in the contemporary world, this feeling of disjuncture – of being betwixt and between – is increasingly common. This thesis is an attempt to describe how first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh, an emerging diaspora, negotiate social capital in this transnational experience. Negotiating the two leaves first-generation immigrant Africans betwixt and between, at the threshold of a “doorway” that leads forth into new and hybrid cultures, but also remains a platform to return them to familiar cultures, too. In this betwixt and between space, the immigrants attempt to retain “Africa” community to reduce feelings of alienation, while at the same time aiming to create integrated lifestyles, seeking to obtain social capital through various networks to find jobs, education opportunities and better lives. This thesis also describes what the first-generation immigrant African understands the “African” space to be and what is meant when they refer to “American” space. Finally, by using their own “voices” through interviews and narratives, nine first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh explain their betwixt and between experiences.

In the first part of the 1900s, W.E.B. Du Bois posited the idea that Black people in America moved “betwixt and between” two cultures. More than 100 years later, we can understand that

this “movement” can be broadened and applied to what is unfolding among many first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh as they negotiate being betwixt and between to form attachment and belonging across cultures. But being betwixt and between is a not a fixed state. Rather, it is an intermediate or middle place, a threshold to cross before moving somewhere else. For the immigrant, it is a place to recognize that they are not where they are from, but also for them to recognize that they are not at the end of the journey, either. They are betwixt and between past and present, identities and histories, networks, and values. It is also important to realize that the immigrant comes to the doorway with “baggage.” By baggage, I don’t mean burdens. But the first-generation immigrant is traveling with a set of memories, language, culture, habits, and intimacies that have been shaped by their place of origin. This “baggage” is not just discarded at the side of the road. It is used along the journey to form attachments and integrate into networks as the immigrant must respond to the changing political, economic, and social forces that they are subjected to in a new land. As they move along, they slide back and forth along a spectrum of cultures. Their lives are a fluid mix of images, ideas and identity construction. What must be emphasized is that this betwixt and between state is found at multiple social, political, identity, and cultural levels. My research sets out to answer the questions of how the immigrants negotiate betwixt and between: which set of language skills do they to deploy; which networks do they join to find a job; which group do they belong to in order to find comfort and security in rising their children; where do they live as family; how do they raise their children? Wherever they are, the first-generation immigrant Africans will have this moment of betwixt and between -- giving them the flexibility to chose how they find attachment and belonging outside of their lands of origin.

“There is a global flow of culture among African people. This flow manifests in African

immigrants when they come to America. The African immigrants here mix the constituent parts of culture, such as American dance, music, and other influences to create new practices and cultures; this creativity also occurs at the metacultural level. The very theories and models of identity such as culture, race and ethnicity are being deliberately reconstructed” (Copeland-Carson, 2004).

Being betwixt and between places the first-generation immigrant African in a state of liminality, a concept explored in the work of cultural anthropologist/ethnographer Victor Turner. His theory was situated in his ground-breaking 1960s research on initiation rites of the Ndembu people of Zambia. But still today, Turner’s implications can lay a foundation to understanding what is at play in the lives of modern-day first-generation immigrant Africans. We can also draw from Turner’s essay “Rites of Passage,” a chapter contributed to “Betwixt and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation” (1987). The initiation rites, Turner noted, placed the young Ndembu in what he called liminality, the transitional state between two phases, a place where individuals were "betwixt and between": they did not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they were not yet reincorporated into a new society.

For Turner, being betwixt and between meant moving to a threshold of change. Turner’s essay claims a person enters the threshold in one state. By “state” he means a circumstance that is equal to having a stable condition. These states can be legal status, professions, rank or degree. It can be a condition such as being married, single; it can be emotional, physical, mental – for example, a state of hunger. For Turner, the “state” implies being at a “finished” stage. However, the transition, the initiation, the place of being betwixt and between, is a process, the becoming of something new.

We must consider that this concept has relevance for the first-generation immigrant African

in Pittsburgh. The first-generation immigrant is moving from a state of Africanness, a finished condition, his first identity; and transitioning into a state of Americanness, a different and new place. Or to something in between – an African American, perhaps? From Turner’s text, he posits that the rite of passage involves three stages: separation, margin (liminal state), and the aggregation (the joining). With separation, we detach; with the margin, we are passing through, with aggregation we are joining, with no attributes of the past. Applying and modifying these concepts for transnational migrants, we have something a little different. I think the betwixt and between, the doorway, allows the first-generation immigrant African the flexibility to return to familiar homeland cultures. What we notice from the first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh is that returning to the “past” can be an aggregate experience as well. There are homeland groups, clubs, personal networks that allow the immigrant to flow into familiar practices that reconstruct home cultures. For Turner, being in the middle stage – the place of betwixt and between – means a person belongs to no place. They are secluded from what is ordered and defined. They have a physical, but not a social reality. If this is true, then the first-generation African immigrant at this threshold – at this place of being betwixt and between – has nothing: no status, no kinship. Being betwixt and between counters an individual’s social desire to belong. I argue, instead, that it is the first-generation immigrant’s desire to belong that causes the crossing, the flow from Africanness to Americanness. They don’t want to stay attached to nothingness. What we must consider here is that for the first-generation immigrant moving from Africanness to Americanness is not an “either/or” transition. The immigrant does not have to be present in one pole to be absent in another. There is a fluid scale of belonging that incorporates Africanness and Americanness. Turner’s essay dealt with this aspect of liminality, too. He described being betwixt and between as a process that is “neither/nor” but “both/and.” A process

that ties two opposite, contradictory processes together. So, for the first-generation African immigrants, being betwixt and between means they can be near/far; they can be insider/outsider; they can be old/new; they can be stranger/familiar; they can be African/American. Being betwixt and between is like arriving at a way-station; the first-generation immigrants are in some middle place—not quite where they came from, but not quite finished the journey, either. They are in a process of becoming.

In this thesis, I argue that there are three factors that bring first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh to this place of liminality. First, these are a mass of people in an emerging, growing diaspora, dispersed from their Africa homeland by the trauma of war, famine, lack of opportunity etc, but who nonetheless maintain ancestral connections and identity while building new lives in new places. Second, they are transnational, living in a new nation-state, but accessing and using the cultures and habits of their old territory. And third, they are a community, a diaspora in search of social capital, moving among diverse networks of race, ethnicity, class, religion and gender to help them find jobs, homes, food for their children, babysitters, education choices etc. Along with interrogating these concepts -- diaspora, transnational, and social capital -- I also map out the socio-economic life of African immigrants in Pittsburgh, and present narratives and interviews to give my interviewees their own “voice” in describing their experiences in Pittsburgh. In the end, this thesis shows the fluid social patterns and betwixt/between world of first-generation African immigrants in Pittsburgh.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 DIASPORA**

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the term “diaspora” has grown in usage amid the social and cultural sciences. The growth, expansion and popularity of the concept of diaspora have led to it having a loss of precise meaning and analytic power (Brubaker 2005).

Although the meaning of diaspora has been broadened and stretched, the concept of it describing the dislocation of a people who have left one place and are living somewhere else remains a useful theoretical base, particularly in terms of trying to understand first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh and their adjustment to life away from their ancestral homelands. Robin Cohen, in his 1997 book “Global Diasporas,” explored the original meaning of the term: which in Greek language means to oversow, to sow over, literally describing the process of spreading cultural and mercantile seeds through trade, migration, and colonization. Through the ages, Cohen argues, the term was “hijacked” as it related principally to the exiling or the scattering of the Jews from Babylon, a forced dispersal that shaped diaspora as meaning an unhappy dislocation and fostered a sense of living in a condition of incompleteness away from home. Cohen accepted this classical definition of a diaspora, but went on to develop four more contemporary categories that enlarge the concept of mass dispersal or diaspora:

- victim diaspora, such with the transatlantic slave trade and African dispersal
- labor and imperial, the quest for dominance that scattered the British

- trade diaspora, which underscores Chinese mass migration
- and, cultural diaspora, how culture is scattered by intellectuals, artists etc.

In his work, Cohen relied on a list developed by political science scholar William Safran in 1991 that offered the seven key characteristics of a diaspora. But Cohen, recognizing that diasporas are diverse and that the meaning has been extended by social science usage, transnational phenomena, and other matters, modified and developed his own list of nine criteria of what constitutes a diaspora. No contemporary diaspora needs to fill all that's on the list, but the concept of a diaspora can be applied when expatriate minority communities share several criteria from the following features, which are summarized here:

- a people or their ancestors have been traumatically dispersed from an original center to two or more foreign lands
- there is movement away from the homeland to search for work, pursue trade, or further colonial ambitions with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement
- the dispersed retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their homeland
- there is a sense of solidarity and empathy among diaspora members
- they believe they can not be fully accepted in the hostland; so they remain partly separate
- the ancestral home is idealized, and many of the dispersed dream of returning
- there is a belief that all of the dispersed should be committed to the maintenance, restoration of the original land
- in dispersal, they continue to relate to the homeland through an ethnic group consciousness and are, in many ways, defined by this relationship
- the possibility exists for a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.



In Pittsburgh, in my own research, I found that among the first-generation immigrant Africans, they share at least four common features: the interviewees retained a collective memory, myth about home, including remembering it as a place of their ancestors, family, achievements, fullness etc. They also seem to relate to that homeland in an ethnocommunal consciousness, or rather recognizing each other through a common language, worldview, cultural behavior or religion. It appeared that among the nine people I interviewed, ethnic identities were restored through participation in national groups, attachments to African organizations, and social activities that drew immigrants from the same nation-states. There even seem to be a diasporic consciousness, a recognition that there was a continental, almost spiritual, belonging that linked, or that should be a foundation for solidarity among the diverse first-generation African ethnic groups living in Pittsburgh. In other words, they were kindred souls from the same continental homeland, pushed together in a new place by similar experiences. Finally, for the migrant – the newcomer -- there is the expectation of a troubled relationship with the host society. First-generation African immigrants clash with the African American community over jobs and racial identity and because they become “black” in America, an identity forced on them by the larger society, they are subject to racial discrimination from the broader, white community, too. I draw upon these complex elements of relations when trying to characterize the “betwixt and between” negotiations that govern the diasporic lives of first-generation African immigrants in new American spaces. Uncovering how immigrants navigate these relationships can inform us of the fluid manner in which first-generation immigrants embrace host or home cultures or African or American lives. What we see is that the immigrant can hold onto each distinction at the same time, in succession of each other, or separately and with varying degrees

of force, conviction and enthusiasm. Kuntu will greet visitors at his North Side apartment and they will walk pass a wall of art and attributes that symbolically honor and acknowledge his African homeland. Sitting in the living room, he's rooting on the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team, while speaking on the phone -- in Rutoro, an African language -- to a friend and fellow immigrant from Uganda.

Diaspora participants engage in practices that overlap cultures, nationalities, languages and ethnicities. Cohen tells us the contemporary world is fluid. It is a world of "traveling cultures," a place where culture is never exclusively nationalistic (J. Clifford, 1994). It is a world of hybridity and cosmopolitanism. Africans in the diaspora are part of this world, too. Just as it does for other groups, their diaspora implies multiple and shifting attachments. Where, exactly, for the first-generation immigrant does Africa (Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria) end, and where does America begin? Diasporas are not fixed entities: the racial and religious elements of diasporic identity shifts (Esman, 2009). This argument is similar to Cohen's work. He, too, mentions that members of diasporas shift and are both inside and outside a particular national society. The people who inhabit diasporas are outsiders as well as participants; and as spectators are able to compare and learn from how things are done. If we imagine "inside" and "outside" to be circles of engagement and networks, then immigrants operate both within the circles and across the circles when adjusting to their new spaces.

In his article "Diaspora 'diaspora'" Rogers Brubaker (2005) offers a similar theory when describing how migrants find their way in a new land. Like Cohen, he, too, listed criteria to determine what is diaspora and what is not. One of his criteria included the idea that a diaspora

member was someone who was included in being part of a forced dispersion in space. Another is a group of outsiders oriented to a real or imagined homeland, from which they derive a source of value, identity and loyalty. He also found that diasporas engage in some sort of boundary maintenance, a mechanism used to preserve identity in a host society (such as national groups) and find ways to maintain a distinct community, usually by establishing social relationships that cut across state boundaries. Here we must also consider that those boundaries aren't just state or geographic boundaries. As evidenced by first-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh, it's also possible for diaspora members to build relationships across race, class, gender, and religion, all links that usher diaspora members into a transnational community. It is possible to see this kind of linkage in the settlement experience of immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh. Many of the newcomers are Muslim, but Catholic Charities, a Christian mission service, aids in their adjustment to Pittsburgh, finding them homes, access to health care and often planting the seeds for them to establish relationships with the Islamic community already settled in Pittsburgh. So, it is easy to see how outside people are engaging with inside people and moving across difference in order to find their way. It is in the contemporary work of Brubaker where we can also find the strongest connection to the possibility of first-generation immigrants moving across differences. Brubaker's work references Stuart Hall, who argued that the diaspora experience was not a pure or essential experience, but rather one built on fluidity, creolization and that diaspora members found a way to live with and through difference and diversity. Hall's work is a suggestion that, perhaps, it is possible to do boundary-maintenance and boundary-erosion at the same time. I am not particularly fond of the expression of boundary erosion: I prefer to think of it as boundary expansion, as I don't believe the immigrants are grinding away their culture; but rather they are enlarging it. As they encounter new networks, they engage them. Clifford referred

to the negotiation of this twoness as the “changing same,” acknowledging that diaspora members were “endlessly hybridized and in process but persistently there.” (Clifford 1994).

Likewise, in his 2007 research, which examined the contemporary discourse of diaspora studies, editor and diaspora scholar Khacing Tololyan found that members of diaspora communities “re-turn” (turn toward their homeland) again and again and again. His theory also supports the idea of expansion and not erosion of boundaries. The notion of continuous re-turn implies a re-generation, not a falling away. Tololyan argued that immigrants continue to re-turn through travel, remittances, cultural and symbolic exchange, political lobbying and maintenance of other links with their homeland. In my own research, all the immigrants I interviewed made remittances to support kin back home who were seeking education, or as a way to supply capital to encourage business development. Some financial support was lent to help pay for medical care, weddings, or just to ease the burden of daily life. More relevant to my particular study of first-generation immigrant Africans, Tololyan also argued that diaspora communities are not a fixed social form, but that their process of collective identity is marked by “ever-changing differences that chart shifting boundaries of certain communities hierarchically embedded as enclaves with porous boundaries within other, larger communities.”

The very fact that first-generation immigrants are coming into “new” communities mean they are likely to encounter difference. Language, housing, worship, transportation, urbanity, values, dress, and gender expectations are all likely to be “new” as well. To survive, the immigrant must build relations across these differences. But there are also, Tololyan argues, relations built on these differences, as immigrant Africans often use cultural and political work to sustain differences. Some scholars have found that often African immigrants will showcase their dress or language as a signifier to the wider community that they are not black American. And,

increasingly in Pittsburgh, you can see evidence that there is collective memory, identity formation and institution-building that all foster a diaspora connection. It is now possible to see in Pittsburgh the growth of immigrant African congregations, performance groups, public celebrations connected to Africa, and, of course, in the more than 30 national (ethnocommunal) groups in Pittsburgh. According to Tololyan, African immigrants navigate this diaspora in Pittsburgh as they move “betwixt and between,” by “seeking integration and citizenship without assimilation. They do this by policing their own communal boundaries and encouraging endogamy and biligualism, strict adherence to tradition, and displaying loyalty to old and new identities. In exploring the diaspora of immigrant Africans, I draw also from the 1997 collected essays of blacks in the urban diaspora, “Globalization and Survival in the Black Diaspora: The New Urban Challenge,” edited by Charles St. Clair Green. In this volume, Green and other authors examine the common struggles of African diaspora members as they are caught between the tensions of global business, technology, migration, and trade across nations. Green and the other authors argue that the majority of blacks in this population are unskilled, oppressed, possess low education and are pushed from rural areas into urban communities where they are defined by racial differences and domination.

The term diaspora has been connected to African communities around the world since 1965, first used at a conference on African history in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Ironically, it happened in the 1960s, when African nations were gaining independence and Pan-Africanism and analyses of the history of slavery were growing fields of research. Much like with Green’s work, it was time when connections among the migrants African communities were coming into focus. Indeed, it may be even possible to draw in Cohen’s “victim” diaspora and argue that modern-day

African immigrants are coming here to flee being “victims” of oppression in their homeland. As millions of contemporary Africans voluntarily migrant to the United States, more immigrant Africans are here now than were here at the time of the transatlantic slave trade. They are coming to escape victimhood: escaping spaces torn by war, disease, lack of opportunity, joblessness etc.

Once they’re here, most find themselves thrust in the urban arena. To survive the urban context, the authors found that blacks in the diaspora relied upon common patterns of building social networks to gain social capital: the newly arrived find shelter, access to jobs, info on employment, and connection to formal and informal financial institutions, such as CEED, a Christian group that provides grants to boost immigrant businesses. The authors also found that blacks in diaspora also access mutual aid groups. Looking to their ethnogroups, urban blacks in the diaspora found avenues that provided the social capital that builds trust through friendships, and sources to provide useful interest-free loans. Unfortunately, the authors also found these diasporas are challenged by persistent racism, shifts in family roles and cultural values, and competition from other immigrant groups. To manage such hypersegregation, first-generation immigrants also seek capital outside of their diaspora community: women find support with social service organizations to help with patriarchy; the youth culture that teens attach to help the young people navigate shifting culture roles where eldership, once primary and authoritative, is being supplanted by a youth-oriented culture.

Finally, it is important to draw from history when considering the diaspora and Africans. World historian Patrick Manning in “The African Diaspora: a History through Culture” (2009), informs us that the mass scattering of Africans due to the transatlantic slave trade and contact

with Europeans, shows how even in the 18th century there is evidence that the blacks who were violently dispersed did indeed come into contact with and interacted with Amerindians and Europeans. Their engagement with these groups developed new cultures based on their old. The mixing and movement among the cultures produced new foods, a racial hierarchy (which spread throughout the Atlantic nations). These were complex relations, argues Manning, and blacks in the diaspora survived by partly relying on an emphasis of a common history, interactions among black people at home and abroad, and social and cultural mixing of black and other communities. “The interconnections among social situations are known by such terms as “encounter,” “hybridity,” “creolization,” “fusion,” “borrowing,” “syncretism,” “acculturation,” “survival,” and “resistance.” These terms overlap, but each has its own distinct meaning, Manning says, but together they point to the full range of dynamics of the African diaspora. For Manning, these dynamics included race as an identity, economics, and family life. Manning’s historical look at black connections and interconnections in the diaspora, the growth of diasporas studies in contemporary scholarship that characterizes it as a shifting, porous entity, the focus on the similar challenges of urban blacks in the diaspora, all build a foundation to expect that the same “full range” of dynamic intermingling and social networking and moving “betwixt and between” is happening in diasporas today, as well.

## 2.2 TRANSNATIONAL

The idea of a doorway that opens to allow immigrant movement back and forth between cultures is not a new concept. In the early 20th century, a time of massive European immigration into America, progressive writer Randolph Bourne advanced the idea of a trans-national America.

Bourne looked at the lives of new immigrants and discovered immigrants were likely to move back and forth between the U.S. traditions and their so-called spiritual culture, the customs and cultures of their native lands. He rejected the notion of assimilation. Bourne (1916) said that immigrants came here and socialized in different, non-American societies formed with their own unique, cultural backgrounds and that it was unrealistic to expect the immigrants to wipe [their home culture away] away and replace it. His thinking opens the door on the idea that belonging is fluid – meaning that immigrants can carry habits, culture, and ideas into their new spaces.

Immigrants can root themselves in familiar customs, but are not locked there.

By 2004, a number of scholars were agreeing with him, arguing that it was a mistake to presume that immigrants from the past permanently cut their ties to their old world. There was indeed evidence of the persistence of cross-border ties with family, homeland politics, and some economic connections.

“Transnational properly designates an action or relation that involves the crossing of a national border by a nonstate entity. Transnational phenomena involve the crossing of one or more state boundaries by actors of whom at least one is not a state organization but rather an individual, a family, a corporation, a nongovernmental organization, or indeed any other nonstate organization, be it a terrorist group or a social movement” (Tololyan: 2007).

Almost a decade earlier, by the latter 1990s, Glick Schiller told us that transnationalism came to embody processes that continued to keep the modern immigrant connected to homeland even though living in new society. In 1999, sociologist Alejandro Portes drew the same conclusions. He argued that “back and forth movements” – the so-called connections to home and opportunities to integrate -- by immigrants have always existed. The door of betwixt/between swings both ways, allowing first-generation immigrants to move forward into new fields and back into familiar spaces. Later in the century, research continues to show that



contemporary immigrants are not uprooted either, but instead they maintain strong connections to homeland, while living in a new place (Schiller, Basch and Blanc, 1995). In fact, said Kivisto (2001), immigrants become transnational by the very act of navigating between two worlds – the original and the host. By the late 1990s, these ideas were shaped because scholars were beginning to realize that the conventional assimilationist “melting pot” theory did not go far enough to accommodate how race or ethnicity interface in African immigrant identity formation in North America. That it did not account for bi-national identities or other hybrids that may have been hidden under race. (Copeland-Carson, 2004).

Also in the 1990s, Glick Schiller said that today’s immigrants are transnational and that their lives are composed of networks, activities, and patterns of life that encompass both their host and home societies. Research by Kivisto (1990) and Morawska (1999) points out that even industrial-era immigrants flowed into the mainstream, but maintained interest and involvement with the homeland. Remittances were sent back, and so was other cultural information as immigrants served as sources and resources to support others considering immigration. Kivisto also discussed the possibility that there was a transnational flow predicated on socio-cultural factors. He posited that the immigrants gravitated to activities that reinforced collective enjoyment of cultural events or goods, or which preserved “symbolic ethnicity” and that these would be activities oriented toward ties to the homeland or home cultures. Faist advanced this notion in 2000, when he argued that this orientation featured not only people but could also include social spaces (i.e. home cultures, homelands) that included circulation of (familiar or sustaining) ideas, symbols, and material culture. Faist (1998) argued that migrants are continually engaged in translating languages, cultures, norms and social and symbolic ties. They forge identity and sense

of community not on something that is lost, but on something that is familiar and new. I agree and, with this idea, we must consider that for first-generation immigrants, this forging is never stagnant. First-generation immigrants leave elements of their home culture to belong to host-country networks, but they return to elements of their home culture, too.

Cultural exchange as a bridge to a threshold of liminality can also be considered in the term transcultural, an idea that has been evolving since the 1940s. Today scholars are using transculturalism to argue that national, gender, religious, racial, and other identities are dimensions that are fluid. This view is parallel with the concept of betwixt and between because it opens a door to understanding that, for immigrants, there is movement to and movement beyond these dimensions. With transculturation, we can begin to think that difference and diversity are negotiable. Transcultural processes allow individuals to liberate themselves from their dependence on native cultures. It doesn't mean they abandon native cultures; they just don't feel imprisoned by them. For the immigrant, being in a global society means being in a space where individuals are free from fixed groups and cultures (Epstein 2009). It's like being given a license to move back and forth. Transculture is the freedom of every person to live on the border of one's "inborn" culture or beyond it. To transcend one's "physical" culture does not constitute betrayal ... crossing the borders builds new, unprecedented zones of configurations" in identities, and values (Epstein, pg. 334).

Epstein argues that being transcultural means "fully recognizing [one's] roots in a certain cultural ground, though [one] does not want or need to cling to them. We can use this argument to understand that, at birth, we inherit certain symbols and habits. These habits and symbols can travel as we move about, creating new cultures, traditions, dependencies, and belonging.

Transcultural is an integration of many cultural traditions and individuals can freely choose. It is simply choosing to go “beyond.” Immigration theories open our minds to the idea that immigrants live across borders; but understanding “betwixt and between” is a reference to “how” such borders are crossed.

### 2.3 SOCIAL CAPITAL

As outsiders in a new world, first-generation African immigrants in Pittsburgh look for social capital across cultures and groups, hoping to find belonging, employment, affirmation of ancestral connections, health, baby-sitters, and status. They seek membership in networks and communities that will give them opportunity to feed their children, to clothe themselves, and to make life better for themselves and for the loved ones they left behind in Africa. Being associated with groups that are both predominately African and mostly American is like going to the bank: they are making a deposit, an investment of hope that will lead to friendship, economic gain, housing, belonging and status, both in the homeland and host nation. It is as if “to belong is to reap rewards.” To accept this theory is to accept the definition that “social capital is the sum of the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in social networks of an actor or organization.” (Anheier, Gerhards, Romo; 1995). Searching for such resources and potential rewards, first-generation African immigrants, an emerging diaspora, but still one of the smallest segments of the Pittsburgh population, must “move” betwixt and between both African and American communities to mobilize and maximize its access to social capital. First-generation African immigrants deploy and negotiate almost simultaneously across

the two worlds -- the African and the American worlds --to find social capital. The negotiation leaves them betwixt and between.

Here are two examples: A Liberian immigrant contributes to a newsletter that is shared with the local Liberian community and with people in his homeland. He asks an American writer to edit his article. The newsletter is then emailed home, to Liberia, and used to inform Liberians of the kinds of social and political activities that Pittsburgh Liberians are engaged with. The newsletter is also used to keep Pittsburgh immigrants informed of homeland activities. The task seems to put the Liberian immigrant in the midst of building social capital from both African and American circles. His newsletter allows him to build a following with Liberians who remain in the west African nation, who share their needs with him, but who also trust him as source of news for families so far away. At the same time, he's also investing social capital with the American/Pittsburgh community, pulling himself into a larger writing environment while potentially getting a better-edited story. In another example, at a Pittsburgh church, a Nigerian man meets his black American wife in a mostly white congregation. This same church provided enough social capital to help the immigrant find housing and a job when he first came to town. Joining the church, he found a wife, but he also found a trusting, caring circle of friends.

According to Bourdieu, the existence of a network of connections is not a "natural given" and it is not static, but rather it is the product of endless effort needed to produce and reproduce lasting relationships. In other words, the investment in social relationships is constantly in motion, or as Bourdieu said, "endlessly produced."

“The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed.” (Bourdieu 1986). This holds true for the first-generation African immigrants, whose social networks and familiar exchanges of capital have been disrupted. No longer home in their native land, where their language, culture, history and ways of knowing gave them chances to invest and exchange in various social capital, they must now go in search of sustaining networks in their new land.

For first-generation African immigrants, this social capital is invested by spending time and energy amid the networks of belonging across an American and African spectrum that gives them a larger opportunity for potential resources: they belong to national groups, they belong to local churches that emphasize African cultures, they join neighborhood PTAs, participate in school activities, they marry across ethnicity and race, they go back to school. All of this joining and belonging increases their social capital, offering a vast investment to draw from that can prepare and point the way toward jobs, better housing, better access to educational opportunities, which can lead to better jobs, which can lead to taking care of themselves and their families. It can also lead to an affirmation of their common history, a reduction of loss and alienation, and it can mean friendships. It is the places where the immigrants find themselves with the social capital of not just potential for economic opportunity, but also the belonging to networks where they profit by having relationships (collective and individual) of trust and sharing.

In Pittsburgh, first-generation immigrants often find this trust and sharing in their national groups, where one 10-year immigrant “confessed” he became like a community elder, trusted and revered for his social capital to walk newer Liberian immigrants through the difficult process of driver’s licensing, finding jobs etc. Another found social capital in his mostly white suburban

church, where he became a respected deacon and his relationships there lead to finding housing and jobs to help him get grounded in a new country. The Nigerian native gained direct access to economic resources.

According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a credential that entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. This credit is power and influence, two positive consequences of social capital. This power and influence shows in their new spaces – such as with the Liberian community “elder”; but it shows in their “old” spaces, too. The power to make remittances – to send money home to help siblings go to school, to help parents buy homes and get health care and better food, and to enable cousins to begin small businesses – is a positive consequence. Often the reputation of the immigrant is looked at favorably. The immigrant is viewed as being a success in America if they are able to contribute to kin back home: it attaches a status, a clout not only to the successful immigrant but also to the family who reaps the rewards of knowing such a person. It’s like being the son of a millionaire; prestige and status is attached.

For first-generation immigrants in Pittsburgh, joining national groups and belonging to community in ethnic enclaves is important. These attachments provide profit and social capital in maintaining history, language and culture. Such attachment is necessary, as often first-generation immigrants must move beyond their own communities to survive here. Though the African immigrant community is growing, it remains a small segment of the Pittsburgh community. The size of the community – and the history of struggle in their native land which brings many of them here – means they must grapple with educational and economic limitations. These can

severely limit their social capital. To have a stronger opportunity to survive, they must move betwixt and between native groups and host groups to survive.

Also, in a nation and city dominated by policies and a race structure that favors white citizens, immigrant Africans quest for social capital can be limited by race perceptions. Oftentimes the mainstream community, not familiar with ethnic and national distinctions will identify immigrant Africans as black Americans. Economist Glen Loury in his 1977 study of social capital found that the inherited poverty of black parents could be transmitted to their children and the children's social capital in a segregated, racially dominated system could be severely limited, which gave them poorer connections to jobs and labor market opportunities. He seemed to suggest that limited social capital meant limited social benefits/social profit.

If we situate immigrant Africans within the same frame, we'll see that it can be problematic for them as well. Many immigrant African ethnic enclaves number less than 1,000 people and they come to this city with limited social capital: language, economic disadvantage, scattered linkages. They cannot refuse the services provided by the large white, non-immigrant community to find them homes, and build networks for credentials to education, jobs, services etc. They need membership that moves betwixt and between. If we compare their needs to economic capital, they simply can't "afford" to invest in one community. To maximize their social capital and gain, they utilize a strategy of broader appeal. In cities across America, with large black and African immigrant populations – Boston, New York, Miami – and even Pittsburgh – the native and foreign-born Blacks find common ground, often working together to address discrimination, segregation, police issues and education. There is a history here: Stokely Carmichael, a Black Power leader in the 1960s was a native of Trinidad. He was educated at historically Black college of Howard University and few of his followers questioned his immigrant origins and he

amassed enough social capital as a legitimate “Black leader” to sway millions politically. (Cooper, 2011).

Social capital can also provide a source of family support and become a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks. (Portes, 1998). We see here that kinship and fictive kinship, though limited by community size, can provide social capital as well. The term “bounded solidarity,” all for one and one for all, comes to mind. Where an immigrant identifies with a group (be it a Ugandan national group, or the larger diaspora group of Africans) and then does what is best to support the group. “Bounded solidarity” allows us to understand that this can be a process to rebuild social capital torn asunder by immigration. “Leaving a community tends to destroy established bonds, thus depriving family and children of major sources of social capital” (Portes, 1998). Fictive kin is restorative. It is a social capital that offers support for culture, shared history, and community. In many of the immigrant communities here, they pool their resources to assist in remittances, to help pay for services and education, to support each other here in baby-sitting, having rides to work, helping with the sick etc. I think social capital through fictive kin also offers a sort of psychological pooling of resources, a reminder that the immigrant is not alone in his experience.

Social capital is acquired by belonging to networks that serve as engines to fuel not only economic, but also social, emotional, cultural integration. Networks bring us in, or keep us out. These networks can be collective (institutional) or individual: they can be schools, church, national associations, family, and jobs. They can be authority figures: police, neighbors, or clergy. Connecting to any of these can give us power, status, and influence. In Pittsburgh, in their networks, they form soccer leagues, organize politically, host national group affiliations, and



help build community. Collectively, these kinds of activities help to build identity and attachment. The soccer leagues allow for networking, especially among newcomers. There is also a budding growth of immigrant African churches, which provide social support and integration. There is now even a diasporic association, the African Union, which provides social capital in building a civic voice to battle legal/justice issues, and to advertise support for immigrant African entrepreneurs.

In America, first-generation immigrant African men tend to lose their social capital as patriarchal authority. As gender and family roles change, women and young adults tend to earn social capital by working outside the home and earning income and by a culture of youth empowerment (Arthur, 2000). But social capital is not always connected to their sense of Africanness. Some of the immigrants discover social capital as they cross into American society. For many immigrants, political participation means flexing their Americanness. Many can't vote because of their legal status. But nonetheless they find a way into local politics. They organize political events for school PTAs, city council candidates, and they join with other like-minded groups (Darfur activists, Thomas Merton Center, Obama supporters, as well as with groups that support education for children, health care). Of course, their degree of political participation gets measured by education levels, length of stay in America, and income levels (Waters, 2000).

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

I began this project wanting to know how first-generation immigrant Africans, perhaps torn from their nations by war, or pulled out in search of greater economic opportunities make their way in Pittsburgh. How do they gain a foundation when so much is different: language, racial identities, perceptions of self? How do they find each other and make a way to belong? I wanted to focus on the Pittsburgh population and interrogate the concepts of diaspora, social capital, and transnationalism to see if I could understand them any better. So, it was important for me to devise a project where the immigrants speak for themselves. I wanted their voices to reveal how they make their way. I wanted to take my research beyond just demographics, economics and numbers on a page. I wanted to convey, as much as possible, the intimate stories of immigration. I wanted to show that immigration, seeking social capital, deploying transnational phenomena is about being human. That it is really about seeking a way to feed your kids, to keep yourself alive, to provide for yourself and the generations that come behind you. That immigration is really about seeking “warmer suns.” This is research that represents my encounters with the African immigrant community and offers my attempt to create scholarship that can speak to both the academic and the public communities.

To answer my research questions I engaged the triangulation methodology of social research, or the process of using a combination of methods or sources to check insights gleaned from different sets of data. Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is a plan of action that will

help minimize biases that stem from single methodologies. ... it helps to maximize validity of field efforts. (Denzin, 1998).

Before I became a sociology student, I was a newspaper journalist with an abiding interest in African immigrant life. This research is rooted in that interest. Since the 1990s, I have been developing relationships with African immigrants. From those relationships, I was able to meet and interview two informant sources for this project. They both work to resettle immigrant Africans into life in Allegheny County. Through the informant sources, I learned the community of African immigrants was growing. It was the informants who sent me out into the immigrant community. I conducted participant observations at church meetings, funeral rites, and citizenship celebrations. I danced at worship services, had casual conversation at prayer fellowships, and listened in to conversations at outreach events. I sat on floors and shared communal meals, eating foo-foo, a West African dumpling with my hands. In addition to interviews and participant observations, I went to national club meetings. Everywhere I went, I listened to stories and collected names. Through a list I developed, I was able to conduct nine in-depth interviews with a spectrum of immigrant Africans; I began to casually read more news articles written about immigrant African lives, to begin to monitor the Pittsburgh-based African Union websites, to read-through national association correspondence, and to informally study information publicly disseminated via email. Again, I did this as an extra opportunity to “hear” the “voices” of the community as they spoke to each other. I thought it was a chance to get inside and hear their conversations on politics, partnerships, business etc. By drawing on a variety of data sources, I gained a clearer understanding of the “betwixt/between” nature of their lives and how they negotiate social capital, transnational phenomena to find attachment on homeland

cultures and host cultures simultaneously.

It is the combination of these, I believe, that informed my research and allowed me to hear the first-generation immigrant Africans voices about crossing cultures. I used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is inductive, meaning you begin first with the data, using the observations from it to generate hypothesis. With this approach, concepts, ideas, and themes are pulled from the data as it is collected; rather than “collecting data to assess preconceived theories (Litchman, 2010). With my use of in-depth interviews, I designed open-ended questions so that the interviewees would tell me in their own words about the “dual” cultures they access to adjust to life in Pittsburgh. In speaking with me, participants reveal their own subjective view of what social, political, or identity negotiations they experience as they shift among cultures.

I wasn't invisible in their communities, but I was not an insider either. I am a tall black American male who wears his hair in dreadlocks. There were not too many places I could hide. But I believe I was welcomed into their lives. I know that I welcomed participant observations, feeling it was my chance to walk into the world of the immigrant. I went in usually with one African acquaintance who introduced me as a Pitt sociology study. I purposely kept my notebook and pen hidden until given “permission” to chat with someone. I did, however, take notes on program brochures, fliers, my hand to record much of what I was seeing, hearing. It was my purpose to make myself a participant and not a man with a notebook, which I felt would further distance me from the group. Participant observations take place in the value-laden and highly political context of human associations. This method challenges the idea that scientists can and should be value free, emphasizing that the researcher should become involved subjectively and personally with the phenomenon being studied (Jorgensen, 1989). Collecting my data was a

collaboration – the interviewer asking questions, the interviewee answering questions -- we constructed knowledge that could be examined and analyzed. C. Sinding (2003, page 77) notes that interviews are neither neutral conduit nor a source of distortion, but is rather the productive site of knowledge itself. . . . “the narrative as told to an interviewer is a joint product of the teller and the told.” I am a partner with the interviewee. I often allow the interviewee to define the direction of the interview. When I first contacted interviewees, I shared the general premise of the project but informed them that the interview would be more like a “conversation.”

I did come to the interview prepared for a focused interview. I had a prepared list of questions, but I allowed for flexibility in the topics covered during the conversation. For example, in an interview with one of my subjects, I had prepared to ask questions about what makes for an “African identity.” I soon discovered that the subject was recently separated from his wife and most of the “conversation” kept returning to what he called his shame and disappointment. In this free flow of information, our conversation revealed his thoughts on African family life in the “host” nation and opened up new questions to me on how connections to family and his notions of paternalism might be challenged by crossing cultures.

### 3.1 DATA COLLECTION

Between April 2010 and May 2010, I spoke with nine first-generation African immigrants. First-generation immigrant Africans were chosen because they are recognized as a group most likely to be engaged in transnational practices and attachments. They all live in Pittsburgh or in suburban communities connected to the city. There were 6 men and 3 women. They ranged in

age from the mid-20s to age 60. Two were from Nigeria, two from Uganda, two from Zambia, and the others from Liberia, Sudan, and Ghana. Their professions were eclectic: they ranged from being owner of a cleaning services agency, to being a grant writer, a pastor, a nursing aide, to being a laid-off accountant. Four were college graduates, with three having completed graduate school. The others were engaged in various job-skills education. I met them in their homes, church offices, in restaurants and in coffee shops. One interview was done over the phone.

**Table 1: Social Characteristics of Interviewees**

Names	Homeland	US Status	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Neighborhood	Education	US Occupation	Homeland Occupation
Kuntu	Uganda	Citizen	Male	32	Single	North Side	Graduate degree	Writer	student
Jabari	Nigeria	Citizen	Male	60	Married	North Suburb	Trade School	Printer	gov't printer
Anthony	Liberia	PR	Male	48	Divorced	South Suburb	No college	Service Worker	social worker
Benjamin	Sudan	Citizen	Male	40	Married	South Suburb	Graduate degree	Accountant	project engineer
Cynthia	Zambia	PR	Female	29	Married	South Suburb	Trade School	Nurse Aid	sales clerk
Jerry	Zambia	PR	Male	46	Married	South Suburb	Bible Training	Preacher	ministry/military
Liberty	Uganda	Work Visa	Female	28	Single	Mount Oliver	College Degree	Accountant	college student
Franki	Ghana	PR	Female	31	Married	East End	College Degree	Nutritionist	college student
Rufus	Nigeria	PR	Male	29	Married	East End	College Degree	Comm. Org.	nonprofit accountant

PR = Permanent Resident

Comm. Org. = Community Organizer

The nine interviewees were largely a middle-income to working-class income group – a pastor, a couple of accountants – positions that gave them fairly high status with their communities. I spoke with two informant sources. All of the sources had been living in Pittsburgh for at least three years. They all spoke fluent English. They had come to the United States to escape political hardship, to pursue economic opportunity, educational attainment, or a combination of the above. They were a socially diverse group: they were recently laid-off workers, they were budding entrepreneurs. Their relations flowed across race and ethnicity: one man was single never-married, as was one woman; one Liberian gentleman was divorced from

his Liberian wife. Others were married with children. The interviewees were Christian and Muslim.

During the interviews, we talked casually. In fact, after I introduced them to the perimeters of the study (it was voluntary, it was confidential etc), I termed our exchange as being a conversation. We were informal. I referred to the subject by first name. I came to the interview with a list of prepared questions, to help guide me along. But I also listened. And many times the interview flowed into directions I did not anticipate. For example, in one interview, the participant was so excited about an essay he was writing for a Liberian website, that he asked me to read over the piece.

But basically I asked participants about their life. The one-on-one interviews ranged from being 40 minutes to others lasting nearly two hours. The time allowed me to probe about their adjustments to American life and the meaning they attach to the activities they engage in here. The interviews were friendly, but I did manage to ask for clarification and elaboration to make sure I was getting responses to questions. For instance, one interviewee, a Christian, kept referring to his life as a miracle. I listened, but constantly had to ask him to tell me about the decisions he was making to join associations or not, to reflect on his home life, etc.

I was acquainted with one of the interviewees because of preliminary field work done at a local church. The others I meet through a combination of snowball sampling and purposive sampling. In other words, I met other interviewees after my first interviewees passed along email contact and phone numbers of people they thought would be interested. I contacted 12 people and narrowed the list to 9 for sake of efficiency. In addition to interviews, my participant

observation took me to immigrant African-centered churches. Outside of my preliminary field work, I went to church three times between April and May; I attended a citizenship celebration, I attended a funeral celebration. Immigrant Africans organized all of these events or they were events where African immigrants directly participated. In conducting my fieldwork, I recorded my observations in a notebook. Sometimes I just took mental notes until I could get home to record notes on my computer. Sometimes, taking notes on a pad at the site became too intrusive; as many would ask, “what are you doing?”

I did not go into the field alone. I took all of my “characteristics, history, gender, class, and race” into the research setting with me (Olesen 2003: 350). As a 49-year-old African American man who’s deeply interested in African life and culture, I believe my “characteristics” helped me bond with the participants. I wasn’t an “insider” but I think they felt they could trust me with their stories. When available, I collected materials produced by the immigrants for the immigrants: church bulletins, advertisements for social events, etc. I viewed and printed pages from immigrant-produced websites. I asked to be connected to email lists to receive and monitor communications within the community.

## 3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

In explaining my data analysis, I rely on a 1998 essay by John V. Seidel and his discussion of Qualitative Data Analysis, found at [www.qualiresearch.com](http://www.qualiresearch.com). Data analysis is progressive: The process – which Seidel summarizes as Noticing, Collecting, Thinking -- is progressive. It is a cycle that keeps repeating. For example, with my own work, as I sometimes set out to collect



new data, my interviews would lead me to notice new things in the field, new field notes would lead me to gather other documentation. In principle, the process is a never-ending spiral.

Qualitative Data Analysis is recursive and on-going. I listened and learned from each interview. The processes -- transcribing, note-taking, and observing in the field -- all offered new lessons. Mostly, I transcribed each interview immediately after it was conducted. But never waiting more than a day. With each transcript, I often got new questions to carry into the next interview. Once data collection was complete, I read and re-read my field notes, reviewed newspaper articles, shared information anonymously with informant sources.

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My initial analysis was for larger themes in the immigrant lives: Africanness, Americanness. Concepts of self-identity and group identity. I re-read again, and other themes emerged: social capital and transnationalism. Diaspora and ethnicity emerged as a themes, too. I physically coded

each interview. Going line by line through my field notes and transcripts, I underlined, highlighted, and assigned “codes” or names to actions and patterns or similar experiences. Each exercise in coding allowed me to gain new information. My coding consisted of printing out my notes, transcriptions and highlighting notes on paper and in the computer as I read through the information. To help my analysis, I shared comments anonymously with informant sources and relied on the informants’ comments and feedbacks.

### 3.3 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

I began my nine in-depth interviews April 1, 2010 and ended them May 13, 2010. My participant observation concluded at the end of May 2010. The time constraints to begin and finish the writing of my master thesis limited the number of interviews that could be conducted. If given more time, I would have continued my snowball sample, combined with purposive sampling, to seek a larger, more diverse range of respondents. Immigrant Africans are a large and diverse community, more interviews would perhaps allow for better understanding of gender, ethnic, socioeconomic perspectives among the immigrants. Also, being challenged by commitments of a full-time job, limited the range of people accessible. There were times during the weekday I was not available to be in immigrants’ work or home spaces. Five of my interviews took place at night and/or on the weekends. This perhaps limited my immersion and participation into the community. I did, however, rely on informant sources, knowledgeable insiders to help guide me into immigrant African communities. My interviews were also limited to English-speaking immigrants. But the community of first-generation immigrants is so much larger. There are African peoples from Burundi, Rwanda, Mali and other places and the design of

my study did not allow for in-depth participation with these groups and others.

None of the nine first-generation immigrants I interviewed expressed a desire to completely abandon their culture of origin. I found no evidence among my interviewees of any who wanted to “pass,” or assimilate into their American world and discard all of their African origins. There were some who did express the view that by settling into this nation -- marrying an America, buying a home, owning a business – they achieved a measure of “belonging” to a new place. That belonging to something new did not prevent any of the group I interviewed from using “betwixt and between” to access their linkages to their past, which was apparent in their value system, symbolism, kinship links, material possessions and how they identified themselves. Perhaps a larger study would find a “negative” case where a first-generation African immigrant did not use “betwixt and between” to bridge home and host cultures.

### 3.4 RESEARCH ETHICS

For this research, I received “exempt” status from the University of Pittsburgh’s Institutional Review Board. To ensure that high ethical standards were maintained during data collection, I implemented consistent research techniques. I collected all data for this project and informed each voluntary participant of her/his rights to refuse answering any questions and of their right to stop the interview at any time. All interviews were conducted in English. My participant observations of activities involving immigrant Africans were conducted in public settings. My interviews were conducted in both public and private spaces per the request of the interviewee. Once participants were recruited, they were contacted by phone or email (their preference) to

chose the day and time of interview. Each participant was interviewed only once. No names or identifying codes were recorded with any identifying information in order to protect the privacy of the respondents. All data are kept in my possession and only accessible by me.

#### 4.0 THE STUDY

Once an invisible people, more African immigrants are living in Allegheny County than ever before. They are the people who drive our taxis, who nurse our wounds, who preach to our souls, who teach our children, who fix our hair, who stitch our clothes and who make our sandwiches. According to the 2000 U.S. census, their numbers in Allegheny County have doubled in the past decade, rising to 2,700. These larger numbers are bringing the Africa immigrant diaspora population out of the shadows. According to one New York Times article, a fairer immigrant law adopted in 1965 accelerated the pace of African immigrants. Since that time, 1 million Africans have immigrated to America by choice, a number of Africans in America now higher than those estimated to have been shipped here in chains during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

In the past decade, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, the African immigrant population has doubled in parts of Allegheny and surrounding counties such as Beaver, Butler, Westmoreland, Fayette and Washington. In 1990, there were 1,241 Africans -- individuals from the northern or sub-Saharan regions of the world's second largest continent -- in Western Pennsylvania. By 2000, their numbers had jumped to 2,665. More than half make their homes in Pittsburgh; 647 in 1990 and now, more than 1,000.

These rising numbers reflect the growth in African immigrant populations across the nation, more than 671,216 native Africans have come to the United States, more than twice the number 10 years ago. African immigrant organizations say there are more. They estimate there are as

many as 1.5 million to 3 million, citing huge numbers of undocumented refugees who don't get counted. Informant sources in the community say the numbers of immigrants Africans in the Pittsburgh area number about 9,000 to 10,000, accounting for huge numbers of undocumented residents who go uncounted. They say this figure, roughly 6,000 above census records, includes the documented, the undocumented, refugees, and students. Liberians are the largest group here; Zambians are the next largest. Informant sources tell me that the Zambian community has the largest group of undocumented immigrants.

In Pittsburgh, there is no central “community” for the immigrant Africans. There is no central business district, no one school, no one area for social services or worship. They are a diverse group of nationalities, ethnicities, and legal statuses that is scattered across the Steel City. They are scattered across a range of socioeconomic positions, too.

However, ethnic pockets of the African immigrant populations live close to each other -- in Whitehall, Brentwood and nearby neighborhoods in the South Hills. They are settled here by various Catholic groups, which are instrumental in their initial settlement into Pittsburgh. This “settlement community” is critical for fostering social unity and networking. In recent years, the immigrant Africans have begun to move to other areas of the city, where concentrations of various African immigrant groups are finding places to live. In Lawrenceville, there are clusters of Somali immigrants, many of whom live with-in blocks of each other. This phenomenon may be the closest resemblance to a geographic community. In the East End, the areas of Morningside, Garfield, East Liberty, and Shadyside, there are a growing number of immigrants from West and central African nations, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and the Republic of the Congo etc.

In the absence of a strong, geographically based community, the immigrants create social fields – areas to gather for recognition -- in celebrations, sports, and worship. They form soccer teams, but the teams are typically formulated based on nationalities and they organize games against each other in tournaments. The soccer games bring about shared spaces and attachments. Across culture and nationality, they worship together at many of the same churches that sponsor their re-settlement into Pittsburgh. These settlement communities allow the new immigrants to tap into existing networks for support and interpersonal bonds that previous immigrants have formed – this enables them find housing, possibilities for self-employment, and knowledge of their new city. Especially for undocumented residents, this enables them to tap into sources that don't provide the scrutiny of governmental paper work.

They also begin to build mutual aid organizations: for example in the Somali community, there is an insurance plan, where each family contributes \$10 a month to a secure bank account to help pay for funerals, health care etc. among Pittsburgh Somali.

Because they are largely a scattered community, with no central economic base, the immigrants move for jobs, better housing, social services, and worship, which helps foster their blended lives. They must move and “blend” to survive here.

(From the millionaire business owner who is never without his dark suit who maintains citizenship with Nigeria, but supports a local African American male mentoring group to the unemployed Somali account who favors wearing daishikis as symbolic of remaining connected to his homeland.) In Pittsburgh, the level of social or economic capital does not seem to be a deterrent to moving betwixt and between cultures.

Indeed, in living in America, to “rise” – to have social mobility -- “we have to blend” said

one interviewee, an immigrant from Uganda. He is speaking of the socio-economic advantages; the social capital gained from cultural crossing. His father first came to Pennsylvania from Uganda in the early 1990s and he remembers watching his father make American friendships. The interviewee followed his father's example and did the same, especially making friends through his college associations. In fact, it was his associations with friends from Columbia graduate school that led to his current job as a writer. His Columbia grad school friends interned in Pittsburgh, and they were able to alert the Ugandan to job openings in Pittsburgh. "As we climb, we can't help blending. We can't avoid our co-workers. We can't avoid changing expressions. We come here for a better life. We want to live in the suburbs. That's the ideal."

The immigrants must deal with getting documents that allow them to live and work here and many face sometimes complicated recertification and licensing to work as physicians, nurses, engineers and other professions or trades.

Outside of the refugee groups, today, it's the more affluent and educated Africans who are coming, easing into local communities as those who preach, teach and help us heal. They shape our art and our charity. Most African immigrants here are solidly middle class. According to the 2000 census, they live in neighborhoods where the average household income is about \$38,000, placing them slightly ahead of the Pittsburgh area median income. Up to 95 percent are entrepreneurs, starting businesses in consulting, restaurants, fashion and cosmetics and hairdressing. More than 25 percent of the women are nurses.

Because marriage is a strong component of the African culture, equal numbers of men and women stream ashore. Similar to nearly every other immigrant community, the immigrant Africans here have formed a variety of voluntary support organizations. These help pay for



funeral expenses to send the deceased and perhaps family members back home for funerals. There are more than 30 different immigrant African-centered groups, these include worship groups, arts and education groups, and national organizations, according to the website [www.pittsburghAfricans.org](http://www.pittsburghAfricans.org). Some groups function as charities, raising funds to send economic support back to the homeland; others are purely social, offering its participants a chance to reminisce, dance, eat food, and share stories.

This study suggests that when first-generation African immigrants come to Pittsburgh, they arrive with in-tact homeland identities. These homeland identities are shaped by patriarchy, family, kinship ties, socioeconomic status, and communal traditions. In other words, people are tied by blood or community, culture, and citizenship (Copeland-Carson, 2004).

#### 4.1 **AFRICAN LIVES/AMERICAN SPACES**

In their new countries, first-generation immigrant Africans seem to constantly be negotiating, or moving back and forth between two dimensions. Two of the larger, most visible negotiations that are at play are Africanness and Americanness. Africanness seems to be diasporic – a collection of habits, views, and values that seem bound to Africa ancestry. It is usually sensory, visual, tactile and possessing a sense of space. Americanness seemed to be tied to tolerance, a crossing or wandering into patterns, behaviors and material possessions that are symbolic of Western life in the United States.

The flow between Africanness and Americanness is seemingly never-ending. It is private, and it is public. It offers a bridge between what is foreign and what is familiar. It shows up in how the

immigrants dress, who and where they associate, and how they honor their “duties” – such as paying taxes and contributing remittances. It was “American” to pay taxes; it was “African” to make remittances.

Jacqueline Copeland Carson in her study found what she called “African ways of knowing”: the Africans believed that their ideals spoke to a more integrated, wholistic view of society. My findings among my first-generation immigrant interviewees mirror what she found. Although African and American life is complex, when my interviewees spoke of their lives being African, it seemed to unfold with the understanding that the following dimensions were equal dimensions.

Africa equal to /Europe  
Blackness equal to /whiteness  
Male equal to /female  
Mind equal to /body  
Nature equal to /technology  
Sacred equal to /secular  
Spiritual equal to /material  
Rationality equal to /intuition  
Freedom equal to /discipline  
Individual equal to /community

When they characterized themselves as American, they seemed to reach for an understanding of the following European ways of knowing.

Europe over Africa  
White over black  
Male over female  
Mind over body  
Technology over nature  
Secular over sacred  
Material over spiritual  
Rationality over irrationality (science over religion)  
Freedom over discipline

### Individual over community

The fluidity of Africa/America cultural crossing shows up one sunny Sunday April afternoon at a local YMCA in Homewood, a mostly black neighborhood in the city's East End. There, a celebration of the naturalized citizenship of five Bantu Somali is advertised as beginning at 5. It does not begin until 6 pm. There are about 80 people, a mix of community activists, social services aides and immigrant friends. The continuous negotiation of the African self and the American self is on display at this celebration. There are African signifiers: A Somali dance troop of young men and young women performs in traditional clothing as Somali music is being played on a loud speaker. Gentlemen gather in groups. Somali women, in headscarves, gather in groups, too. The women gather up empty plates, and women watch the children. This experience appropriates gender/cultural patterns of what life would be like in the home nation, where tradition dictates that women in the home serve the men and care for the children.

One immigrant I interviewed had this say about what happens with immigrants come together. "When immigrants gather, cultural traits re-emerge. Girls serve. My one friend, when I'm at his house, his fiancée will want to present me with the food and drink. We revert to cultural expectations. Even though, if we were home, we'd be fighting against this. I think we revert as a way to identify with each other. It's a way to stress our common identity."

After about an hour at the citizenship celebration, the five naturalized citizens are applauded and asked to speak. This is when they most flex their Americanness. Like a proud parent at a child's graduation, the celebration is being videotaped; it's the recording of a rite of passage, a movement forward. Here is what the "new" citizens say about being an American: You can vote, you can run for office, you get an American passport, you can change your name. "It is an honored process. I encourage you to learn English." Today, said one speaker, immediately

blending his two identities, “We are BANTU AMERICAN citizens.” The room erupts in applause.

In the room, an American flag stands against a wall. Somali food – rice dishes, stewed chicken – sit against another wall. It is a room filled with people who address each other in Arabic: *asalam alakum*, greeting each other in Islam.

Three young Somali teens come up and rap, in their low-hanging pants and colorful tennis shoes. Using the patterns and rhythms of American rap music, their lyrics speak of admiration for someone familiar: “I like you because you are an African girl.”

The interplay of being African/American is evident in how immigrants embrace the material (inventions/creations) and non-material (values, symbols, beliefs, ideas); it’s evident in that flexible identities can be attached to duties: for example, American identity is often regarding as paying taxes; with Africanness it’s making remittances. These “duties” suggest loyalty/attachment across cultures. For generations, remittances have been a link between immigrants and home – used a way to “care” for parents, dependent siblings and a community left behind. Paying taxes is used as a way to express belonging and contribution to their host nation. In settling down in the foreign western world, the first preoccupation of African immigrants is forging the survival instinct, and, when possible, providing economic support for family members left back in their homeland (Obiakor/Afolayan 2007).

Remittances for the immigrants were important and regular. They all kept in touch with home. Many call every two weeks. They email. They facebook. They regularly send money: some every month, to help with school fees, pay for medicine, to provide transportation costs to get to work. The remittances extend to family and extended family.

Generally, the interviews reveal that when the immigrants spoke of being African or flexing an Africanness they were making reference to: having close families; expressing patriarchal attitudes in men as breadwinners and as the center of household authority; as being conservative; as having a strong work ethic; as being connected by common descent to other Africans; as being a part of an emotionally and spiritually connected community (Smith, 1991). Overall, the interviews tell us that for many, when coming to America, they lose status and the migration can be a form of “social suicide.”

What I mean here is that an immigrant intentionally and purposely severs social connections and resource networks that were developed in the homeland. They do this in order to leave and rebuild a life in a new place. Suicide is often a concept that references a physical death. But I think the concept can be broadened when we consider the case of immigrant Africans, who chose to leave their home-nations because of war, conflict or better opportunities in America. For many, when they leave their home nations, it can mean the “death” of important social ties and supportive networks, too.

My use of social suicide can be comparable to Durkheim’s theory on social disintegration, or anomie, where a subject is left cultureless, in a state of temporary isolation. We can consider that this state is the opposite of social cohesion or the degree to which members of society feel united by shared values and other social bonds. In this case, “suicide” is an intentional disconnect from the earned social capital and intentional alienation from one’s social life. This concept helps explain what happens when many of the immigrant Africans leave their homeland and enter new labor markets. The “social suicide” equates to the destruction of their network of weak ties. Weak ties was a concept offered by Mark Granovetter in 1973 when he examined the social networks that enabled individuals to connect to labor markets. Weak ties afford the immigrants

networks of acquaintances that are valuable because they can “provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle.”

Strong ties connect the immigrants to people more like they are. This can be limiting because these people are more prone to move in the same circles and have access to the same information, such as what happens in kinship groups and national/political associations. But weak ties – such as friends of friends – could offer a larger circle of opportunity for mobility and job information because the associations among weak ties may move among different networks. “Weak ties often denounced as a generative of alienation, are seen here as indispensable to individuals’ opportunities and to integration into communities (Granovetter, 1973). What I suggest is that when first-generation immigrants do not have access to weak ties this situation can be a “suicide” of opportunity. For example, many immigrant Africans are highly educated, but because of the need to maintain their families in America and in their home of origin, they are often must contend with and accept doing jobs that are far below their levels of education or the status positions they may have had with the government or private industry in the home nation (Afolayan, 2002).

Their Africanness – forming strong kinship groups -- is used to replace this loss of social status. Supporting each other and the presence of a strong immigrant community can favorably influence the adjustment of members by providing symbols and signs that remind of homeland and that will not diminish their sense of self worth (Portes, McLeod Parker, 1978). These kinship groups are vital for several reasons in establishing Africanness:

-- the kinship settlements allow for elders (respected community leaders) to mediate disputes and

offer guidance on adjustments.

-- the kinship groups allow immigrant patriarchs to be strict in physical discipline. (these acts of corporal punishment in the States can conflict with their Americanness, as parents can be accused of child abuse, and collide with the U.S. social welfare system).

--- in the kinship groups, religious ties tend to be stronger than national ties. They gather in African-centered churches that build upon a variety of worship expressions and language from throughout Africa. These worship centers build diasporic community, and become a social glue for outreach and assistance and allow the first-generation immigrants to continue African practices of dance, language, fellowship. Collective celebration sustains their cultures and community. These churches approximate their close-knit family ties, giving the first-generation immigrant social and emotional security from extended family, which they then use to adjust to life in a new land (Arthur, 2000).

But being betwixt and between also means that first-generation immigrant Africans must, at sometime, cross over into the realm of “Americanness.” In their conversations with me, here’s what they considered American behavior – having a well-paying, steady job, owning a U.S. home, being able to pay U.S. taxes, being able to seek education or job training, owning a car, becoming more liberal and tolerant to gender and sexual differences, experiencing race-based discrimination, and being connected to the myths, symbols, values and traditions of America (for instance, celebrating Thanksgiving, the tooth fairy, etc). By doing these activities, the interviewees said they belonged because they were participating in the system.

The Americanness also allows them to establish mainstream connections. These connections

come through work ties, social services ties, any linkages that allow the immigrant to form relationships outside of their family, or extended kin networks. These relationships allow the immigrant to merge/blend their cultural patterns with mainstream society. Typically, the Americanness is self-engaged. The immigrant uses his agency or choice in how to build social capital in order to survive the new space. But there are times when the immigrants feel they are sometimes forced to cross over into their Americanness – an experience that can be rude and harsh. The crossing can be facilitated when social service agencies are able to meet the language, education, health care, and economic needs of the immigrants.

First-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh grapple with crossing social and cultural borders, and merging old customs in new spaces to find belonging and attachment across cultures. In their host country, the immigrants hold diverse levels of legal and participatory attachment. Through language, networking, and community building, the immigrants deploy an identity of Africanness and an emerging identity of Americanness to find jobs, find status, find emotional encouragement, and to build social and political recognition and belonging. It can be compared to a visit to a “social marketplace.” The immigrants readily visit this marketplace. It is here where they can pick up whatever is useful to negotiate across cultures as they seek attachment and belonging through groups, individuals, and organizations. Before they integrate into the larger society, the immigrants “blend” among other African diaspora immigrants. Their first networks and associations are formed for economic and emotional security, with the closest relationship being formed along ethnic and national lines. These associations give first-generation immigrants, many who may work in low-wage jobs, who may feel low in the economic hierarchy, who may not have higher education, a chance to negotiate status. If they can



negotiate status with material comfort or economic mobility as defined by American society; they can use their American wages, a steady paying job, the ability to improve life for the family back home, and be identified as someone who contributes to home. Within the African diaspora community, giving back to home provides significant positive status and thus provides fulfillment for the immigrant African (Arthur, 2000.) Social relations influence collective identity. And collective identities are formed through belonging to or being connected to any of the diverse immigrant African associations that are organized in Pittsburgh. These associations are places to reproduce, reinforce Africanness – through symbols (the flag, clothing); they belong through membership, collective ideals, feelings of obligation, solidarity, and trust.

In many cases, the fostering of such collective identity toward “Africanness” is deliberate. Note this recent e-mail, sent from the Pittsburgh African Union, an umbrella group that builds collaboration among the more than 26 African national groups in Pittsburgh. Notice in particular, how the groups, and people receiving the email are greeted as “community,” while the celebration itself is an event recognizing/restoring nationality, ethnicity among their shared “Africanness” and “Americanness.”

**Dear community members,**

**This is a night of country celebration/dance competition. Come with your country flag, T-shirts and/or costumes promoting your country.**

**Best dressed and dance country will receive gifts worth \$250.00**

**Best of all best music by Dj Neilo featuring Special Guest**

**The night is also a celebration of Cameroon National Day.**

**When: Saturday May 22, 2010**

**Where: ROYAL PLACE, 2660 LIBRARY RD, PITTSBURGH, PA 15234**

**Time: 9:00pm – 2:30am**

In Pittsburgh, as elsewhere, probably the first network that immigrant Africans connect to are informal ethnocommunal linkages to family and friends from their same homeland. Many times, this leads to a formal connection to national associations. For the newcomer, formal ties to national associations are resource rich. They can provide psychological, cultural, and political support. For newcomers, still deeply emotionally tied to homeland, the informal and formal associations are vital forms of social capital, especially when there is death or illness in the immigrant community or when a loved one is ailing back in the homeland.

Consider, for example, Mama Djema. She recently lost her father. He still lived in the Republic of the Congo and she could not afford to return for his funeral. Tradition dictates that Djema must sleep outside of her bedroom until her father is laid to rest. Weeks have passed, and to allow Mama Djema to return to her bed, friends with Afrika Yetu, a local association of mostly immigrants from the Republic of the Congo, must visit her and celebrate her father's life and rejoice that he is now an ancestor. To do that, a convoy of cars set out one Sunday afternoon after worship. Mama Djema lives on the first floor of a large house turned into an apartment building. She lives in three large rooms with her husband. In her living room, there is a poster of an African mask; behind the sofa is a stand with photos of her family and friends and small African sculptures. African drumming music plays softly on the radio. Her eyes are sad, but they brighten when friends arrive. She smiles and shakes everyone's hands. In preparation for the celebration of Mama Djema's father, the family and friends have been fasting all day. Now, with this celebration, they will engage in a feast that honors his life. It is not a mournful time. Drums and keyboards are set up in the living room. They will dance and sing and pray for six hours. Here, in the middle of Mama Djema's living room, the immigrants are re-creating a scene that is ages-old. In Africa cosmology, the dead are not dead. They have gone on to watch over

their family and to offer intercession with the spirit world. Festivals are lively because they allow for communion with the ancestors.

## 4.2 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

It is not uncommon for first-generation immigrant Africans to navigate daily between their Africanness and their Americanness. Multiple times a day, in varying situations, they must make small decisions and/or broader life-impacting decisions about which world they will inhabit. I interrogate this by discussing several variables of their life as outlined in the chart: ethnicity, U.S. citizenship status, gender, age, occupation, marital status and education. These variables often intersect each other and overlap with the concepts of diaspora, transnational and social capital.

### 4.2.1 Ethnicity

Because of the negative perception that the mainstream society has on American blacks, most immigrants must grapple with being identified as American black. In some cases, they use their language, accents and dress to stress the distinction that they are African black. Their ethnic identity gives them a sense of social capital not tied to race as they feel this removes them from the negative view of American blacks being violent, criminal, lazy and poor. The status of foreign-born black helps them believe that they have attained a higher status in society (Waters,

1994). They don't always run from race, but they have to move betwixt and between it. An immigrant from Nigeria married a black woman, but they attend an all-white church. Another, an immigrant from Uganda, when first in this country always corrected those who called him black American; asking that they call him "African." Now, 12 years later, it's a term he readily accepts as identity and marks it so on census forms.

*I've been here 12 years. When I first came, if someone called me African American, I would correct them right away and say, you're not correct. I am African. I slowly came to embrace the term. My experience in America might be different, but I recognize it now as a social term, but I'm not separate from it.*

*I know I am perceived as African American whether I like it or not. If you are a black person in United States, you are African American, whether you like it or not. To be called African American doesn't unsettle me like it did before.*

*It's a culture divide: seeing yourself as African, or black American. When you just come here, you say, I'm in America, but I'm African, it helps you hold on to an image of who you are; to maintain a strong sense of culture. You expect people to see it.*

*Holding on to being African was a way to strengthen your identity.*

*Being African means having a strong sense in self. Pride in heritage.*

*What am I today? Am I still African? Am I still African American? How do I negotiate [these identities]? We're in America, but I am still Ugandan. I remember getting the government forms, and they asked [my family members] to fill out "Black," or "White." We checked "other," or marked in African. Why? Because we are others. We blend in, but [we're] still African.*

*For the first time, this year (with 2010 census) I marked African American. I feel now it doesn't take away from my cultural background, and not let go of who I know myself to be. But I recognize now my Blackness in American society.*

Also, as people in the diaspora, they move back and forth among their ethnic groups to find belonging. There are social activities, sporting events, and even business development efforts that they support across ethnic difference. Inside the various national groups, they access capital by reaching out form partnerships with politicians still in the homeland, supporting U.S. policy decisions that benefit their native land. Particularly in immigrant churches, you see a gathering of different ethnicities. The people share a language, regions of origin (West Africa, South Africa), but identify themselves in the churches by their ethnic group.

#### **4.2.2 U.S. Status**

The multiple levels of U.S. citizenship provide social capital as well. Naturalized U.S. citizens are able to vote, they can apply for federal and state jobs, they can have a passport, they can serve on jury duty. And for the most part, many are looked at as heroes in their immigrant communities. The process to become a citizen is difficult, lengthy and expensive. To survive it, the naturalized citizen earns a heightened sense of social capital. They are regarded a leader, someone who can successfully navigate the two worlds. This capital can be accessed in the voting booth. Of course, all immigrants can be politically involved on some level: they can educate, they can canvas. But only naturalized U.S. citizens can vote. In the Obama elections it was a badge of honor to cast a vote for the nation's first African American president.

One Sudanese immigrant, a citizen since 2007, is at a citizenship celebration in Homewood.

When there is an announcement that “we are Bantu Americans” (a term signifying dual belonging) to recognize the new citizens, the room erupts in sustained applause. He says this:

*You can vote, you can run for office, you get an American passport, you can change your name. It is an honored process. I encourage you to learn English.*

#### **4.2.3 Accessing social capital**

In the interviews I obtained, it's possible to see the immigrants have multiple interactions with Americans black and white. These social activities help to bridge the cultural divide between African and black Americans and Americans in general. A Zambian pastor works with the PTA at his children's predominately white suburban school district. He uses the association to teach others about African history and culture during Black History Month. Much of the interaction

comes through religion, too. This Zambia minister holds a community event in a south suburb that provides food, winter clothes to refugees from Thailand, Cambodia and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, well-established Christian missionary services help settle many of the African immigrants into Pittsburgh communities, too, and they form friendship across denomination and faiths. The churches become places to find commonality and to build relations that lead to jobs, help getting to hospitals, and gaining information that assist them get through the maze of social assistance forms and school applications. These experiences are ways the immigrants begin to access social development and social capital. A Nigerian immigrant male describes his experiences when first coming to Pittsburgh.

*One of the things that helped me to belong was Christ. It gave me something in common with people. I found a lot of American support at the church. I met my landlady at church. Once, when I only had \$20 left in my pocket, my landlady “adopted” me; helping me find a job in the restaurant. I was so grateful for this. I started as a dishwasher and worked my way up to being a manager.*

#### **4.2.4 Marriage**

There was a great degree of choice exercised in deciding on marriage partners, too – as several of the immigrants moved across race and ethnicity to find mates: a Zambian immigrant was married to man of European descent and they had one child and was expecting another. The mother felt it was important to teach her daughter her language. She desired this so that her daughter could speak to the Zambia grandmother in the mother’s native language. Often, the mother told me, she cooked the traditional foods of her homeland for her family. A Nigerian man was married (and separated) from his black American wife; an immigrant from Sudan had met his Nigeria wife here. He attends, with her, Nigerian national group meetings, as well as finding time to be with

his Sudanese friends and their group activities. Both the husband and wife are engaged with Pittsburgh's Africa Union. Three of my interview subjects were single. The others were married to mates from the same nation and their spouses entered the United States at the same time they did.

The web of social connections among immigrants in the diaspora remains strong. Of course, they gathered first in national groups, committing themselves to the memory, political, and cultural life of their homeland. There is an African soccer league in Pittsburgh that fields teams from Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, South Africa, and others. They play on weekends in the South Hills or at Schenley Park. Within the past 10 years, there is a growth of immigrant churches, which draw immigrants together from Western Africa, Central Africa, and South African. On almost any Saturday night, there is an "African" celebration, where a mosaic of African nationalities and ethnicities gather to have a good time. Politically, under the African Union – a newly formed umbrella group, they gather to advance economic and educational opportunities, increase visibility (many worked on the Obama campaign even though they couldn't vote), and build linkages to foundations, churches, and Pittsburgh political organizations. Through its email services, the Union has job announcements. It also encourages diasporic support for immigrants in nearby communities, such as when three Zambians were shot in Ohio and sought united public organizing. The union also has announcements of children who do well in school and makes announcements for celebrations, which feature awards for "best" in country dress and dance. Not long into my interviews sessions, a representative from the Pittsburgh mayor's office recognized a regional gathering of Liberian immigrants.

The African Union is 2 years old, but one Nigerian immigrant believes the Union can become a place that provides positive social capital to immigrants.

*One of the reasons we began the union was because whenever someone thinks African, refugee comes to mind. Somali, Burundi, Sudanese. This is attached to stigma, casting the immigrant as the poorest of the poor, someone come to drain [U.S.] services. But some are here doing great things and are contributing to the region. Still, the community of Africans is disorganized. There are unmet needs. Social part is being done, but who is here to do economic growth, to push for self-sufficiency. We want to go out into the community to see the problem. Some communities have groups, some do not. But one does not know the other. Even though problems are similar. You as one person can't solve the problem. We need momentum to solve, we need to come together.*

#### **4.2.5 Education as social capital**

All but one of the interviewees used higher education to access a better life in America. All possessed high levels of English proficiency. Seven of the nine received educational training in U.S. colleges or trade schools, two even earning graduate degrees here. Only one would be characterized as a service worker, finding long-term employment as an aid in a nursing home. The combination of education and English proficiency seemed to establish for them considerable social capital in which to gather social mobility and provide opportunities to move through layers of difference. One Zambian immigrant, a woman, used to do this work too, but she saved and is now preparing to launch a business of domestic work, employing other women and immigrants. A Sudanese immigrant worked as an accountant for a utility company but was recently laid off and is looking for new employment. Overall, they are a professional class of people who pay taxes and cross many segments of society to contribute culturally, socially, and economically to their community. One Zambian immigrant, a woman, felt especially empowered by her rise



from a shoeless little girl in small town Zambia to potential American business owner. Much of her community work involved reaching back to younger black American girls, hoping to inspire them with her story.

*I am an American because I own a business; I work with Gwen's Girls [a Pittsburgh-based non-profit to assist wayward teens] to mentor to young girls; I partner with the Urban League. The things I've been through, I can help troubled kids. I own a home in Brentwood. I own a car.*

Furthermore, the achievement of racial justice and ethnic understanding pushes the African immigrant to access various forms of social capital and to rely on diasporic connections. While most of the immigrants, before they left their home nations, had a favorable view of race relations in the United States, once they get here they learn quickly of racial intolerance and deep ethnic and cultural misunderstanding. This misunderstanding can be a part of their daily lives. They have to deal with and navigate through his maze, which can involve with what one told seems to be police intimidation. To do so, they form African-based immigrant clusters, setting themselves apart to help themselves. This clustering can also become a way to educate newer immigrants on what to expect in the United States or what to avoid. Here an immigrant from Liberian explains his experiences.

*With people who are not African, I feel guarded. Nobody wants to expose their personal stuff with strangers. We can't always talk to people we don't know. If I have no food, and I didn't eat last night, I can't discuss that with anyone. I feel like I need to know you. Otherwise you feel like an outsider, you feel belittled. You don't want to feel like you're being judged for being an African.*

*Another misinterpretation of our culture: eye-to-eye contact. Especially with job interviews. Lack of eye contact is usually misinterpreted as though someone is lying because he could not look me in the face. In the Liberian context, an older person, or authority figure is shown deference by someone NOT looking them in the face. To look in the eye is an experience that's outside our culture.*

Anthony is past president of Pittsburgh's Liberian Association.

*This group is very helpful. It helps us feel at home. I am a Liberian. When people move here, they know you have knowledge, and that I can be there for them. It makes me feel like an elder, because I can help with insurance, car, home, car registration. I have a friend who was stopped by police. The friend showed an expired insurance, although his insurance was up-to-date, he could not find his new card. Because no one was able to help him correct the issue, he was asked to surrender his license; his car was threatened with being impounded. I went to the [local] police and got time before the car was towed for my friend to get the issue corrected. There are a lot of things [immigrants] need to learn. And time before we learn how things work. So having this [Liberian Association] helps them belong. It's good to interact with people you know. You feel confident in the conversation. You feel at home. This provides a sense of belongingness. With the Liberian Association: if you can't get things done, you can call your brother. If your brother can't help, you call your uncle. That's how it works.*

#### **4.2.6 Women and socialization**

The immigrant women have to navigate African tradition and American socialization differently from the men. Outside of immigrant African gatherings, professional and career immigrant women seem to have greater degrees of flexibility when crossing into the American mainstream: they can dress like their American peers, challenge patriarchal roles in the home etc. In large gatherings – where immigrant African men and women congregate for festivals, celebrations, or even returning home – the female immigrant seems to return to gender, traditional and cultural roles. By re-turning to such roles, immigrant women could also be distancing themselves from what could be the stereotypical perception of black American women. My Zambian interviewee had this to say:

*I am a Zambian African woman. I validate that. Rich, or poor, I interact with everyone. I just be who I am. They can tell from my humbleness. I'm very calm. Even in a bad situation. I maintain my serenity. I don't go blowing up. I'm always encouraging somebody. I appreciate what you have here. I am a positive person. This is how it is back home. We appreciate everything we have. You will not see a Zambia lady using so much bad language, smoking. Walking the street smoking and swearing. People recognize me because I don't do those things.*

The phenomenon of grappling with a re-turn to tradition among immigrant women was captured in comments from the two Ugandan interviewees, too. The female interviewee remembered a trip home to Kampala that stunned her, as she was admonished for practicing what did not amount to being a proper Ugandan woman. When she travels home, her family points out American “differences.”

*I get laughed at because my point of reference is different. I question the system more than before. My socialization is different. I now engage in a lot of small talk. And that's not done in Uganda, especially with strangers. I was home once, visiting. I met a girl about my age and my parents thought we'd have a lot in common. I told my sister, "that girl's not friendly." My sister had to remind me to stop acting like an American. So, at home, I do feel a little like an outsider.*

The immigrant Uganda male remembered an Easter celebration full of Uganda immigrants, where many came from Kampala. At the gatherings, they were eating the food from home: plantains, sweet potato, cassava, stew (goat, beef). There was plenty of conversation about the homeland. The immigrants were speaking in Luganda, a widely spoken Uganda language. He remarked on women's role during this time:

*When we gather, cultural traits re-emerge. Girls serve. My one friend, when I'm at his house, his fiancée will want to present me with the food and drink. We revert to cultural expectations. Even though, if we were home, we'd be fighting against this. I think we revert as a way to identify with each other. It's a way to stress our common identity.*

For the three women in my study, their access to capital seemed fairly broader. Each had high levels of education (two with at least undergraduate degrees; one with trade school training), which gave them access to people outside their homes and outside the immigrant community. They were able to come into contact with other professional women – African and American – as their occupations were high status positions. One was married to a man of European ancestry. She was establishing her own business and didn't seem connected to

traditional matriarchal roles in her home life. Although she was a mother of two, she aspired to be a businesswoman. The other two women were without children. One was single and not dating; the other was married.

#### **4.2.7 Occupations**

Eight of my respondents had solid middle-income jobs. Which allowed them to care for themselves and their families. One Liberian immigrant was divorced and earned enough to pay child support. From politics to the creative arts (one earned a living as a writer), they were able to access diverse levels of capital in their social and employment networks. One service worker, a mom who cleaned homes for a living was in the process of launching her own business. As a group, their jobs and income gave them high levels of fluidity. They owned their suburban homes or rented high-end apartments in the city. The divorced gentleman – perhaps because his finances had to be stretched across two homes -- was forced to move out of his home into a smaller apartment. He grieved his marriage and the lost social status, as he prided himself on his family and strong sense of patriarchy. He remarked to me that the parties he and his wife once hosted for newly settled Liberian immigrants could happen no more.

## **5.0 HALF HERE, HALF THERE – THE INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION**

It is about 1 p.m. on a Thursday when I arrive at Kunta's apartment on the North Shore of Pittsburgh. I push the intercom and he buzzes me in. He greets me warmly. "Hi. How are you? Welcome to my home." I walk through a short corridor and notice that prints of African scenes are on the walls: fishermen at the oceanfront, landscapes, and women at the market, with baskets on the heads. A map of pre-slave trade Africa is prominent. I take a seat and notice that Kunta is watching a Pittsburgh Pirates ball game. I pull out my notes and we chat. The conversation is interrupted by a phone call. Kunta is talking in Luganda, a language of his homeland, Uganda. He is making plans with Uganda friends for the weekend. This scene with Kunta illustrates the half-and-half world of first-generation immigrants. It displays how quickly their lives can transition – move betwixt and between – two cultures.

How do immigrants celebrate gaining U.S. citizenship without losing sense of contact with their homeland; how do families in their home of origin view them once they decide to live abroad; how do they make decisions on when to send remittances home to aging parents, or save for college here? What the interviews reveal is the fluid everyday lives of first-generation immigrant Africans. It's not a matter of being one place or the other, they are participating in both spaces simultaneously. They may not be directly/intensely involved in shaping political homeland issues, but many never say "no" to supporting a cousin or ill relative in the home

country. They may work here to help lower incidents of police harshness, but they devote time and effort to writing in the national organization newsletter about the homeland socioeconomic situation. These cases suggest lives are lived betwixt and between to cross cultures to accommodate belonging and acceptance.

## 5.1 KUNTA

**Kunta is a 32-year-old writer. His home country is Uganda. He is a naturalized U.S. citizen.**

He has lived in Pennsylvania for 12 years. I spoke to Kunta in his North Side apartment. On one wall hangs a huge map of 1590 Africa. Photos of family fill the other spaces. In many, the father and sons are dressed in white button-down shirts, wearing ties and smiling. In one of our exchanges, Kunta revealed that before coming to Pittsburgh, he derived his identity from memory and communal traditions, but, after living in America, he reached a point where he transitioned to an African American identity. He enjoys easy friendships with the American colleagues he met in graduate school at Columbia University, but maintains connections to Uganda immigrants in Pittsburgh, too.

*In Uganda, where I grew up, it's home. It's where I came into myself. I lived through two civil wars. Growing up for me was ideal. I lived in [Kampala] on a college campus, with extended family. There was my family of eight, my parents and six children. Cousins and uncles were always staying in our home.*

*There were sometimes 15 or 16 people in our three-bedroom bungalow. There was no concept of vacation. We interacted with each other all the time. For meals -- breakfast, lunch, dinner -- we ate together. We ate outside and just talked about events of the day. Growing up with family was elemental to my experience. I can't imagine growing up elsewhere. What I knew was Uganda life. I knew the hardships -- no electricity, no water in house -- were not to be taken for granted.*

*I lived on a hill in Kampala. To a certain extent, when I think of Uganda, I think of how much you work -- fetching water. I had to walk two miles down the hill to fetch water or to wash clothes. I cut the grass with a sickle. I grew up with a sense of obligation,*

*responsibility to family and home. It was like a village. They depended on us. They came to stay with our family. We all had a sense of responsibility to family, to extended family. It was who we were.*

*My identity back home was shaped by my father's ancestry. He is Batoro. As a Batoro, my father understands how to behave when you greet someone; when you enter someone's home. When we are abroad the tribal identities rescind. They take a backseat. For instance, there are a few northern Ugandans [in Pittsburgh]; at home [in Uganda], they feel as outsiders [because their culture and location is so distant and rural], but here, they blend in freely with other Ugandans. Outside of those circles, we struggle to be balanced, to figure out who am I going to be?*

Kunta continues to grapple with a moral system that is betwixt and between.

*I still have a strong sense of being an African conservative. But I am much more liberal. Africa is a conservative culture. In Uganda, they are trying to criminalize homosexuality. Ten years ago, to have the church and society condemn homosexuality. I would say, no problem. Now, I'm not so sure. I have friends who are gay. I've been dancing in gay bars. As a person in America, I know I am much more open to different ideas.*

*I am at a crossroads of where I am going to live. I like it in America, but in the long run, I see myself going back [to Uganda].*

*Even though I came here and I am making a living, back in December, I saw my [school] friends. I saw that they have settled into life in Uganda. They are working professionals. There is a lot of camaraderie. I could have been one of those guys. I long for that. This is what I miss, never having gone to university with my friends. Still, more and more, I feel I belong here. After I became an American citizen. I feel like a dual person.*

*There is no Uganda association in town, but there are about 35 of us here. We're just not organized enough to begin an association. We have no time for that. What would we do, commemorate Ugandan Independence Day? Part of American system is that you have to hustle. We are busy doing that. In Uganda community here – there is me, a couple of nurses and students. They are busy trying to break into the white-collar world. They are busy people. Working 2 or 3 jobs. In the summer, we get together a lot. For a while, I am thinking I am the only Ugandan in town. Another saw my name [attached to a writing project]. He called. Through him, I went to a party and met all these other people. We met at a doctor's house. The doctor was like our anchor. I just met a Ugandan last week. A student who's a Fulbright at Pitt. With his Ugandan friends, they assist each other. If someone needs rent to be paid, or there is a home emergency (meaning emergencies in land of origin), or somebody is in hospital, we make sure they get home. It comes from experience. It's part of our extended family.*

## 5.2 JABARI

**Jabari is 60. He works as printer. His home nation is Nigeria. He is a naturalized U.S. citizen.**

He grew up in Oyo State, in the city of Ibadan. He is Yoruba. Jabari was educated in missionary schools, and went to high school in a private Anglican academy. His family had a cook, a maid, and gardener. His uncle, an attorney, living in London, thought that Jabari, who worked as a printer, should be educated abroad. In 1976, the uncle encouraged Jabari to apply to the Manhattan School of Printing. He finished there and, in the early 1980s, came to study at La Roche College outside of Pittsburgh. When Jabari first arrived in Pittsburgh, he felt lost, but eventually found belonging through his predominately white Baptist church, where he married and is now the head usher. He became a U.S. citizen in 1996.

*When I came here, I was expecting people to know more [about Nigeria]. I was thinking people would know me. People don't think I know how to clean. They ask me "do we have roads [in Africa]?" All they know are Tarzan and monkey. At La Roche, when I got here, nobody talked to me; nobody studied with me. I was not Black. I was African. They didn't know where to put me. I didn't know where to put myself.*

*One of the things that helped me to belong was Christ. It gave me something in common with people. I found a lot of American support at the church. I met my landlady at church. Once, when I only had \$20 left in my pocket, my landlady "adopted" me; helping me find a job in the restaurant. I was so grateful for this. I started as a dishwasher and worked my way up to being a manager. This job helped me to finish school and get hired as a printer. Now, when I see my uncle, he says he is proud of me for making it on my own. Look at me: I got a house, a new car. They are so proud of me. I love this country because it is so well organized. There is opportunity for hard-working people.*

Jabari used a network of faith and crossed cultures to find belonging and friendship in America in a predominately White environment and mostly White social networks. At the same time, he maintains connections to his homeland. He remains involved with the Nigerian Association of Pittsburgh. A childhood friend from Ibadan now lives in Pittsburgh and works for



Westinghouse. They often get together and share history, memories, and listen to Nigerian music.

*My tribe is so rich in culture. I miss my family. But I can't live there anymore. Everything is too slow. You have to pay bribery for someone to do their job. When chatting with family and friends, I speak Yoruba. I read Nigerian papers online and watch Nigerian film [online]. The African lessons I pass on to my son: To respect elders. To respect the old way. That's a big cultural value. When kids speak back, in Africa, their mouth would be slapped.*

### 5.3 ANTHONY

**Anthony, 48, is from Liberia. He works in a care home with senior citizens. He is a permanent resident.**

In 1989, he smuggled his family out of civil-war ravaged Liberia into Guinea, a more stable West African nation to the south. Before long, Guinea, a former French colony, began to slide into political unrest as well, and Anthony, who worked as a sort of social worker in a refugee camp, said he was jailed and harassed as an insurgent because he spoke English. In 2001, a Catholic refugee resettlement program brought him to Pittsburgh, where two of his children were born. Now, working as a nursing assistant, he is divorced from his Liberian wife, and living in a two-bedroom apartment in the South Hills. His immigration and divorce from his wife left him “betwixt and between”: though he’s lost his sense of patriarchal authority, he’s gained respect and is compared to being a village “elder” because of his ability to help new immigrants get settled. He uses his Liberian network to maintain a sense of place.

*I have 10 children. Two of them were born in the United States. My oldest is 30. The youngest is 5. Me and my wife are separated. We live in two different homes; and some kids live with her; some with me. We were struggling. She told me she wanted to be*

*independent. So, I moved out. But her income was too lower. We lost our house, it went into foreclosure. I feel sad about this loss, because when he first came to town, I owned this home, had lots of parties for our Liberian friends and it was nice.*

On parenting in America:

*Some of the older folks here have the same ways, they were brought up like Africans. With America telling us how to raise our children that is the biggest regret I have. In Liberia, if a child does wrong, you punish the child. With the punishment, the child will not repeat. With the laws here, you belittle the parent before the child. Now, when the child's [bad] behavior comes back, the government wants to ask why? Parents struggle here with their children and with the law on how to discipline.*

Anthony remembers first coming to town and having no one to talk to. It was lonely, and it was common to be misunderstood. AJAPO (a local African immigrant resettlement nonprofit) helped with community building.

*They helped us a lot. St. Benedict the Moor church was a great help. We needed people beyond Catholic Charities. They assisted, but the assistance felt cold and distance because the people didn't understand the cultural aspects of our lives. Once for a check up, [he and his pregnant wife] were dropped off a few blocks from Mercy Hospital. They had never been there before. The volunteer just pointed to the hospital and said "you go there." It was a frightening experience. If we could not read or write, we would have been lost.*

So that others would not have this experience, Anthony now volunteers with the Allegheny Department of Human Services, as a member of an advisory board. The board tries to address language, employment issues so that immigrants feel more welcome.

#### 5.4 BENJAMIN

**Benjamin, 40, is from Torit, Sudan, a city on the border with Kenya and Uganda. He is a naturalized U.S. citizen.**

He lived with his family -- uncles, aunts, and cousins -- there were about 50 of them in one

compound. He was 10 and in boarding school when the “trouble” came. Even 30 years later, Benjamin tears up when speaking about the war that ravaged Sudan and can only call it “trouble.” He was exiled to Nigeria, where he earned a college degree and worked as a project engineer. About six years ago, the United Nations picked him for a resettlement program to the United States. He came to Pittsburgh. I am speaking to Benjamin at a celebration for African immigrants who have recently received their U.S. citizenship. He comes to the celebration with his wife, an immigrant from Nigeria. He is dressed in a green, brightly patterned shirt similar to local clothing of West Africa. His conversation reveals his belief that as a first-generation African immigrant he belongs to two worlds. “Using the term African American makes me feel whole. Part of me is American. Part of me is African.”

Benjamin became a U.S. citizen in 2007. He voted for Obama. He pays taxes. He owns a home. He serves on jury duty. He earned an MBA from Point Park University in 2006.

Why is becoming a citizen important?

*It means we are legal. And, we have legal obligations. We get involved in the community. There are many Sudanese in the South Hills. When you become a citizen, you are taking a new legal responsibility. It's the ability to be “not different.” It means we're the same now. It gives a sense of belonging.*

What happens to your Africanness when you become a U.S. citizen?

*Africa is still there. Becoming a citizen doesn't mean we abandon it. I have a culture that directs my life. I have a language, a dialect. When you come to my house, it is typical for you to see an African house: in my food, my way of life. In my dress. If you look more elderly than me, I give you respect [he further explains that in his Sudanese culture, the elders are bowed to as they enter and leave].*

How do you exercise being Sudanese in Pittsburgh?

*By sharing news of my homeland [with other Sudanese]. Participating in community get-togethers [a reference to national group meetings -- Benjamin was once president of*

*the group]. Celebrating Independence Day. Going to marriages, parties, Easter celebrations. Memorial services. These are important because they keep unity. They help us take care of each other. We [other Sudanese immigrants] need to be united. We need to keep our cultures. If someone is at the bottom, we need to help. We need to be together so that we don't forget our culture.*

## 5.5 CYNTHIA

**Cynthia, 29, is from Kitwe, Zambia. She is a permanent resident of the United States.**

Cynthia was living in Lusaka, Zambia, going to school to be in sales and marketing, and working as a salesperson for a confection company, when a friend's mother was impressed with her work habits and encouraged her to apply for a U.S. Green Card in 2003. She applied to the lottery to gain U.S. residency.

Cynthia told me: *I wanted to come to America. You hear a lot of good things. I had cousins who used to come. They looked nice, smelled good. They had very good jobs.*

She is a former nursing aid specialist, helping people with mental retardation, but now is in the process of forming a commercial cleaning business.

I spoke with Cynthia in her church, a storefront worship center that is mostly a congregation of people from southern Africa. I arrive at the church early and observe and participate in the service. I am there when Cynthia, who volunteers as church secretary, rises to give her testimony. She has done well for herself and her crisp dress suit and polished shoes bespeak of her professional success. But during her testimony, she cries. She is asking the church to donate money so that children in her homeland can get assistance with food and clothing. Her tears start to flow as she is overwhelmed by her memories of being a little girl and not having shoes and of her family being so poor and not always having money to pay for school fees. I spoke with

Cynthia, after service, in the sanctuary of the church. Even though married with family and a homeowner, she still continues to call Zambia “home.”

*I let people know I am from Zambia. That I am an African. They can tell it from my accent. I am a Zambian African woman. I validate that. Rich, or poor, I interact with everyone. I just be who I am.*

*They can tell from my humbleness I am Zambian. I'm very calm. Even in a bad situation, I maintain my serenity. I don't go blowing up. I'm always encouraging somebody. I appreciate what you have here. I am a positive person. This is how it is back home. We appreciate everything we have. You will not see a Zambia lady using so much bad language, smoking. Walking the street smoking and swearing. People recognize me because I don't do those things.*

Cynthia's American husband has Irish-Italian roots. They married in 2005. She has a daughter, 5 years old, who was born in Pittsburgh. She is expecting another child in a couple of months.

*I am living here. I pay taxes that help this country. I don't feel lost at all. I feel like a whole person, but I don't forget where I come from, I feel like I have adapted. I feel progressed. Spiritually, economically, and as a woman: I feel like I'm in a new place. Yes, Yes. I feel so empowered to speak out. I don't feel belittled. I feel people take me seriously.*

How do you stay close to Africa?

*I teach my daughter. I talk to her. She knows what I had and what I didn't have. [The daughter] talks to my mom and my sisters. She knows a few Zambia words. She picks up words from the phone. I teach her. She sees us put food on the tray and sees us kneel and serve each other. My husband learns, too. I'm keeping what I've been told and I'm keeping it real. I don't think my culture is primitive. It's our culture. It's our tradition. In my church, that's my family. My daughter knows Africans. We'll be out in the community, and she'll see someone from Africa and start pointing and say “I see one.” I don't how she knows, but she knows.*

*In my home, there is always food from Zambia – pumpkin, cassava leaves, pig feet, tripe (cow innards), inshema (corn meal that is eaten with your hands); fish head. I listen to Zambia music on youtube. I spend my time going to the African store on Route 51;*

*I miss my family. In Zambia, I didn't live with them, but I was near.*

*I try to send money home every month.*

*I pay school fees once a year. I am sending [two sisters] to school. They are in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, although they are a little older because they missed time from school [because the family couldn't always afford to fees to keep them in school]. She pays their school fees and she pays for them to take extra lessons [to catch up].*

*I used to send something every week. But now I try to help my mother get started with a small business, a tomato stand, so she can help herself. I use Western Union. We send emails and there is Facebook.*

## 5.6 JERRY

**Jerry, 46, from Chigola, Zambia. He is a permanent resident of the United States.**

Jerry's lived in Pittsburgh since 2002. An evangelical pastor, Jerry was working in the red-dust outback of Lusaka when his faith grew stronger and he began evangelizing. His passion was so strong, he was sent to Mozambique, where he revived a dying church and caught the notice of the church's bishops. The bishops sent him to Iowa for training. While in the United States, he visited a pastor friend in Pittsburgh, and Jerry decided to plant his ministry in Pittsburgh as well. Since 2006, he has been the leader of the African Christian United Fellowship – a congregation of mostly African immigrant worshippers. Jerry also works as security guard at a downtown entertainment venue. He is still discovering various layers of belonging across cultures.

*I like living in America, because it has opportunity for each and everyone, depending on how people approach life. Opportunity for education. Opportunity for employment. All spheres of life here is opportunity. That makes it a place that one would like to live in. I am a permanent resident. Some [immigrant Africans] come here as students. Some come in exchange program, [employment, education etc]; some come because they are married to an American, some because they are refugees. Some are illegals, they seek asylum. There are religious workers, such as I am, we are granted permanent residence.*

In five years, he can apply for U.S. citizenship. Do you want to be a U.S. citizen?

*There are certain things one has to consider. What is the benefit? For people who come as refugees, it is easier. There is nothing that ties them to their homeland, except relatives who are left. Most of them lose their national ties, so it's easier for them to seek*

*citizenship. For a person like myself, I have lost nothing. So for me, to be a U.S. citizen, I have to consider that there are advantages and disadvantages.*

*For myself, when I look at Zambia, I was born there. When it comes to the future of that country politically, I don't plan for vying for a political office. So losing Zambian citizenship, I don't lose nothing. Here, even when you get American citizen, you are still considered Zambian.*

*What do I gain when I become a citizen here? Leverage of doing certain things with a free mind. Zambia is considering letting folks have dual citizenship. If that happens, after five years, I will opt to be U.S. citizen.*

What is your identity in America?

*When we go looking for a job, there is a box that says race, or something like that. There is nothing for me to fill. Because I am not black. No one is black. I am an African. Period. I'm not black, I am an African. I am an African. That is my identity. The origin of myself is African. My ancestors came from there. My roots are in Africa. Zambia is a nation in Africa. Africa defines the origin. My ancestors are from Africa. Black America identifies nothing. It is a color?*

Why is it important to stay connected to your homeland?

*My father is there. My mother is there. My brothers. My sisters. My brothers-in-law. My sisters-in-law. My cousins. I talk to them. I read Zambia newspapers. I check the internet.*

*I keep connected because I don't want to be lost. To not be connected destroys family ties. It is harmful. Independence is destructive to family ties. How do you have a situation where connection is lost to a parent? How do you have a situation where the son is taking a father to court over [the son not wanting to] paying rent. It is destruction of human feelings. I don't want to be lost. I want to keep values of being human. I call my father. I don't want to be disconnected. Whether we are there physically [in Zambia] or not, we are together.*

Jerry now lives in his own home in Jefferson Hills. He once lived in Wilkinsburg, and in the Green Meadows housing project in Baldwin. For a short while, he was in Bradeton, Florida. He has a wife, Zambian, and two sons, both born in Zambia. One is 10; one is 17. As an African in America, he feels participation in the community is important. That it helps to educate the local community to the lives of immigrant Africans. In the nearby White Hall Borough, he participates with community diversity festivals, sending his children to play drums. At the Borough schools, he talks to sixth graders and tells them about Africa. He uses the schools' Black History Month

as an opportunity to go into the school and give presentations on Zambia and African history. “I participate with all my heart,” he says.

He believes adjusting to the school system has been a difficult transition.

*With the schools, some situations are better: for example, in Pittsburgh there is access to school equipment, such as computers. In Zambia, there is only one computer and the principal has access to it. In America, we got here, but it was not easy. So we had to adapt to educational system. Very different from how things are done in Zambia. PTAs here don't have the voice as PTAs back home. The power is with school administration. In Zambia, the PTAs back home, their voices are louder than the administration. We had to adapt. The community was strong. American society is a challenge for us. The way things are done here, it robs the family of the enjoyment of being family. Parents are stripped of God-given responsibilities and the responsibility has been given to the state. It breeds irresponsibility in our kids. Not all parents are abusive, so parents who are not abusive have no protection from state. Power has been given to the children, who don't know the proper direction. This causes a breakdown in society. There are challenges. Power has been taken away from teachers, they are robots. These are the challenges “we” face here.*

It is important to notice in the sentence above, Jerry used “we,” speaking collectively about the immigrant African community and not just in terms of his own struggles with the schools.

## 5.7 LIBERTY

**Liberty, 28, from Kampala, Uganda. She is here on a work visa.**

She came to Pittsburgh in 2002 to attend La Roche College. She has an H1B card, which allows her to work in this country. She has a Uganda passport. We chatted in an Oakland restaurant over lunch. Liberty had dreadlocks in her hair and was very soft-spoken. She lives in Mt. Oliver with two American roommates. She reflected a little on how living in America impacts her when she returns to Kampala to visit family and friends. She told me she feels torn: that she



feels more American in Uganda and more Ugandan in America. In between visits, she uses Facebook, emails, phone calls and Skype to stay in touch. She sometimes tweets. She travels home about once a year, visiting for two or three weeks.

She regularly makes remittances: sending money to help her brother who is in college. She sends him about a \$1,000 a year. From time to time, she sends money to help as issues arise or as people get in a bind. She has sent money home for a male cousin's marriage. She also contributes social remittances: she posts photos on facebook. She sends gifts – clothing, perfumes, ipods, pictures.

*When I visit home, one of the first things I notice is the people seem darker. I never feel whole [in America]. My heart is somewhere else. There is no sense of permanence. I feel like I'm just passing through. If I was a citizen, it might mitigate this some, as I could vote. But you don't feel like making a contribution politically. So, I tend to feel a bit removed here. I feel like part of my childhood and growing up belong somewhere else. My memory and history are somewhere else.*

## 5.8 FRANKI

**Franki, 31, from Accra, Ghana. She is a permanent resident.**

Franki, 31, is from Ghana. She lives in Beechview with her husband, Sammy, also from Ghana. She met him here in Pittsburgh, where they dated and married. They have no children. She told me she stays in the United States because her husband's job is here. She has American friends across the racial spectrum. Many of whom she met through her job and her church, a large African American Baptist church in the east end.

I first chatted with Franki via email and she made arrangements to have our conversation on the phone.

She was born and raised in Accra, where her dad is a lecturer at the University of Ghana in Legon, and her mom is a retired private secretary. Franki is the youngest of three girls and she earned her first degree in nutritional science from the University of Ghana. Then she worked for a while as a marketing executive in a media company before deciding she wanted to go back to school.

Her parents' position and their circle of acquaintances provided her with some social capital as they knew American friends in Pittsburgh and at the University of Pittsburgh, and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Franki applied to each of those schools and was accepted at both. She applied in 2004 and earned her masters in 2008 in nutrition.

Her time at Pitt and her degree provided her with a broader circle of friends, and opportunities that lead to a job at Pitt.

Franki came to Pittsburgh in 2004 on a student visa, but a year later, received permanent resident status. Our conversation revealed that she enjoyed her diverse and multiple friendships, but she desired a greater connection to her West African homeland.

Here are her thoughts on U.S. citizenship and sense of negotiating and belonging to an American and/or African world.

*I will probably seek citizenship status, but I'm in no hurry. Basically, I don't think I have anything to gain, if I should become a citizen. If anything I would like it to be dual citizenship. I'd like to remain a citizen of Ghana as well.  
... [In Ghana,] whether you are home or not, you're always from where your family has roots. So, I always say I am from Accra, because that is where my dad is.  
Here, in America. I am Black. Whenever there are forms, I always choose black.  
Whenever I see Ghanaian or can write that in, that's what I choose. That's what I do. I choose black or being of African descent.  
But I am not an African American. Technically I am not American. I always say African, or black.*

In terms of social capital, Franki is a member of at least two immigrant associations and feel that those connections reward/restore her with a feeling of place and family.

I belong to the Ghanaian Association, and the African Union. They have a lot of functions. I go to them: to party, to meet with my friends, to hear the news of home. When I first came here, I barely knew other Africans. I was not aware of the connections. Slowly, I built the connections. I had a friend of a friend at Pitt who told me about an African store in East Liberty. I went there. It was a grocery market. I met people there and they told me about other Africans, other Ghanaians.

The connections are important because they make me feel at home. I hear people who speak my local dialect. It brings a little bit of Ghana to America.

With my own family, I keep in contact through email, text message, and I call. I do this often. I miss everything about Ghana: Friends, family, food. I like Ghana.

## 5.9 RUFUS

**Rufus , 29, from Lagos, Nigeria, is a permanent resident of the U.S.**

Rufus developed much of his social capital through his Pittsburgh church and his local involvement with social service groups, and social justice initiatives. He is director of the African Union, an organizing association for the various African immigrant groups in Pittsburgh, and also active with CEED, which stands for Christian Evangelistic Economic Development, a group made of many races and nationalities. CEED's aim is to spur enterprise and small business development. I spoke with Rufus in the small offices of CEED in Highland Park. He seemed enthusiastic about the interview.

During our interview in spoke on the phone with a woman he called Madame Rachel. This is some of what I overheard:

*You have to act like an African mother. You must say, I have this Kenyan food, and you can come and get it.*

Then they chat about an event the Kenya community is having and he asks how he can support it.

Rufus came to America in 2007, first living in Providence R.I. with friends. In Lagos, he finished college with a business degree and went to work with nonprofits. He first came to U.S. to work on a World Bank Project. His reaction: “I loved it. I saw the opportunity here.”

A few years later, when his friends and family in Providence moved to Pittsburgh, he moved with them. In Pittsburgh, he joined Morningside Church of God in Christ. Though he was of the few African immigrants in the largely black American church, he volunteered with projects there and sought his church’s support when he was asked to help write the Heinz grant to provide Pittsburgh’s African immigrants with resources for microloans.

The union represents 26 different countries. African-owned businesses are part of the union. The union executives meet once a month; general meeting is once a quarter. Together, said Rufus, the union is a better advocate, providing a structure and voice for the community. There are 3,000 Africans on an email list, and the list keeps growing. The union’s mission of provide solutions to challenges and use its collective power to through website and other means to promote African immigrant businesses, mosques, churches. There is an African radio program run by a gentleman from Liberia, who lives in Pittsburgh.

www.pittsburghafricans.org <<http://www.pittsburghafricans.org>>

Rufus is excited about the union. He believes it can address stigma and image development as well as be incubator of social capital that fosters trust and care among the immigrants.

Rufus:

*Newer immigrants can connect to us via the website. And we are there for each other. For example, one couple had a sick baby – for months the baby was ill –the mother found us online. People from her home country helped with the baby. They bought food and when the baby was better, came to take the mother to the movies. We provide scholarships, provide resources. We are building alliances with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services; With the UPMC advisory council. We are building the African diversity festival. To showcase food, dress, customs. When the world cup comes to South African later this year, [the union is] holding a local “world” cup festival in Pittsburgh. With a grant from the Heinz foundation, [the union provides] microloans to begin businesses. This began in 2010. There are plans for a market space, for shopping, and to house offices to interact with embassies in Washington, DC and New York.*

Rufus also spoke about the union amassing social capital as it builds relationships through structured meetings and dialogues with the black American community, which often sees African immigrants as a population to compete with, and the social justice community to address common issues such as job training and what they see as police hostilities. Law enforcement is a particular thorny issue as many African immigrants are seen by the mainstream community as being black and as such are subject to the social problems that bedevil American blacks. Racial profiling is one.

Rufus tells me two stories:

*Our accent makes police think we don't know what we are doing. One night, a friend was given three tickets. No air in his tire. Lights not bright enough. Muffler too loud. Police stopped him. When he moved again, he was given three more tickets, in the same night.*

■ *One night on Braddock road, traveling through Swissvale, the police stopped me. I was dressed in native attire; so he could tell I was not from here. We feel targeted by our African image. To many [police] it seems we are not as smart.*

The African Union and CEED also works with black Americans in local churches and local justice groups to advocate for jobs. Rufus hopes this diffuses some of the misperceptions and tensions in some communities between black Americans and Africans.

*There is a divide between Africans and black Americans. There are preconceived notions that [Africans] are too proud. Black Americans challenge us, fearing that we're all here to take over their jobs. African Americans have problems with us, they believe Africans hate them.*

To try and strengthen connections between the two groups, the union is working with Kanmas, a tutoring program at a Centre Avenue Church (in Pittsburgh's historic black community) to provide tutoring to our children in an afterschool program. Rufus said that this will help the African immigrant children to catch up on their studies and at an early age, help the immigrant children and black American children get to know each other at an early age. There are 40 kids in the tutoring program, which reaches grades 1-6.

Rufus also believes that developing a strong and vital African Union can be key to fighting negative images and that seeing immigrant Africans working together might get the children of immigrants attached to healthier images of themselves and their family.

Here's what he says:

*There is a cause for alarm, this losing of identity. First generation [immigrants] have sense of belonging to Africa. They are still holding on. For those who are younger – 18 to 25 – less than 30, culture is not easy to hold onto. They believe our African countries doesn't meet standards of culture. They don't wear African attire because they don't want to be looked at; they say food stinks, they change [their] behavior. Many younger people have no sense of identity or where they come from. Their parents send them back to Africa hoping they get their life back by having a cultural upbringing. Without discipline, [to stay in school and stay away from drug] we go to jail here. There is no mechanism to care of that. The mass media here shows them a distortion of Africa. They see genocide, poor villages,*

*HIV, no water. Kids want to distance themselves from this. [Americans] They ask me if we brush our teeth. If there is HIV walking through the street. At the same time, [immigrant children] believe America is the best place in the world, that there is no homeless, that no one does not have a job.*

*We believe the union is an umbrella. We serve to support each other. We can solve the problems collectively; not individual. We advocate, give voice to region, help with jobs, with politics, with scholarships, business development, networks, community. This fosters belonging.*

The interviewees' brief life histories reveal – in their own words –that they live across a broad spectrum of associations and networks of gender, race, ethnicity, and economics. Still, it is possible to see several significant commonalities: how they connect with the homeland, how a few of their political and social views are broadened by living in the United States, the importance in which they view being a part of the American labor force, the lament of what some view as a loss of values, and finally, the benefit of being attached to social institutions as a bridge to settlement in a new land.

First, there are numerous ways in which they remained attached to their homeland. They all participated in some level of making remittances – sending money to assist family who remained in the homeland. They offered help for weddings, for those who were sick, to help with housing cost, to pay for schooling. They all engaged in a manner of cultural attachment: listening to music from homeland artists, using languages of the homeland when speaking with other immigrants from the same place, entertaining with traditional foods when gathered socially; and for some, wearing the clothing that would typically be seen in their local homelands.

Second, their experiences suggest that being in America had influenced their levels of tolerance for issues that would have been troublesome to embrace in their homeland. For instance, the male Ugandan immigrant mentioned dancing with friends in a gay bar. At home, he

said, he supported the view that homosexuality was immoral and illegal. Now, his views have changed.

Third, all of the interviewees embraced the idea of working and working hard. The notion of “hustling” – being persistent and energetic in business pursuits -- in America was key to having a better life. They viewed having a steady income as being important to providing for a home, being independent, and that “American provided opportunity for hard-working people,” and that part of the American system meant you “have to hustle” to take advantage of work opportunities.

Fourth, there were six of the interviewees who were concerned about passing on African traditional values and morals to their children. A Zambia preacher felt that America’s school system “breeds irresponsibility in [immigrant African] kids.” A Sudanese immigrant felt that it was necessary to “keep our culture,” mentioning elder respect as key. A male Liberian lamented that in America, African “parents struggle here with their children and with the law on how to discipline,” believing they become too permissive.

Fifth, all of the interviews suggest it is desirable to connect with institutions – faith-based, immigrant-centered and otherwise -- to enable a smoother transition into American society. Churches and mosques, whether mainstream or immigrant-focused, were important foundations of support. “In my church, that’s my family,” said one Zambia woman who worshipped at a Christian immigrant church. A Ghanaian woman offered that she had met most of her friends at a black American Baptist church in Pittsburgh’s East End. In the case of a Nigerian immigrant, it was through this small Christian church in the East End that he was able to build association and launch a social service/community group to aid immigrant African enterprise.



## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Immigrants live in a world of movement. First-generation African immigrants in Pittsburgh, in effort to find belonging and attachment, move across race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic dimensions, and religion. At the beginning of this thesis, I raised several questions: what causes this movement? How and why is it happening? What are the consequences? Who benefits? First-generation African immigrants in Pittsburgh move because they are a diaspora community, because they are transnational, and because they are in a constant search for social capital. By interrogating these three concepts of what spurs immigrant movement, we can better understand their social fluidity. I have three conclusions from my investigation.

Firstly, in Pittsburgh, first-generation immigrant Africans share at least two elements common to explaining their diaspora movement: retention of a collective memory, myth about home, including remembering it as a place of their ancestors, family, achievements, fullness etc. They also seem to relate to that homeland in an ethnocommunal consciousness, drawn to each other by common language, worldview, religion, and cultural behavior. This consciousness sparks their move toward participating in national groups and social activities that draw immigrants from the same nation-states. There is movement across ethnicities as many will join a local Africa Union, an umbrella organization that attracts immigrants from at least 20 different nations. Each of these

seems to draw the African immigrants toward each other as there seems to be a kindred recognition or belonging that they are linked by continent, and common history (Cohen, 1997)

Secondly, first generation immigrants Africans live transnationally. They are no longer within the national or geographic boundaries of their homeland, but they remained connected to their original land and the people. Their “movement” toward home occurs when they communicate through technology, when they use banking systems and commerce systems to send remittances. Culture and material flow between the homeland and the host nation, too. They teach their children the language and history of the homeland while sending them to American schools. In national groups, they remain politically involved with the homeland, using their national groups to influence U.S. policy toward their native countries. At celebrations for U.S. citizenship, they dance their homeland’s traditional dances. They are transnational. “Transnational properly designates an action or relation that involves the crossing of a national border by a nonstate entity” (Tololyan: 2007).

Thirdly, though they are a growing population in Pittsburgh, African immigrants remain one of the smallest segments of society, thrust in a constant search for social capital. To remove the cloak of invisibility, first-generation African immigrants move across a broad spectrum of the Pittsburgh African and American communities to mobilize and maximize their opportunities to find jobs, enroll in higher education, sharpen their language skills, find better housing, food to feed their families, opportunities to celebrate their ancestral traditions. They are accessing and building social capital in these different networks and groups. The reward is belonging and access to information and associations that will enable them to thrive in a new place. “Social

capital is the sum of the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in social networks of an actor or organization.” (Anheier, Gerhards, Romo; 1995).

Fourth of all, the tides of diaspora, transnationalism, and social capital push first-generation immigrant Africans back and forth between two dimensions: a world that is African and a world that is American. Africanness seems to be diasporic – a collection of habits, views, and values that seem bound to Africa ancestry. It was usually sensory, visual, tactile and possessing a sense of space. Americanness seemed to be tied to tolerance, a crossing or wandering into patterns, behaviors and material possessions that are symbolic of Western life in the United States (Copeland-Carson, 2004). The flow between Africanness and Americanness is constant. It is private, and it is public. It is a bridge between what is foreign and what is familiar. It shows up in how the immigrants dress, who and where they associate, and how they honor their “duties” – such as paying taxes and contributing remittances.

For example, an African immigrant parent will join a local Parents-Teachers Association. The PTA is a place to gain social capital in understanding school choice, educational attainment, scholarships etc for their kids. But through the PTA, the immigrant parent will also participate in Black History Month activities, using the occasion (as member of the African diaspora) to advance education about African stories and myths and life and history.

What are the consequences of all of these social negotiations? The theories I have applied allow us to understand that first-generation immigrant Africans, in their new lands, must continually negotiate, or move through, a state of liminality. They constantly enter a transitional state that places them between two phases, a place that leaves them "betwixt and between": they do not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they are incorporating into

something new (Turner, 1987). They are between cultures, between belonging, between networks.

First-generation African immigrants are passing through to transnational spaces that allow them to form kinships, and find the social capital where they can establish the emotional ties, collective identity, and community that has benefits for them and their families. What this thesis concludes is that first-generation immigrant Africans, may, at different times and simultaneously, exhibit both American and African behaviors. They live bicultural lives that are shaped by their home and host countries, and they freely access the two cultures. First-generation immigrant Africans in Pittsburgh see themselves as belonging to both, even while never severing their emotional ties to homeland. The first-generation African immigrant in Pittsburgh is a person betwixt and between.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Tell me, how would you describe who you are?**

**Are you African American now, and is that term – African American – enough to let others know who you are?**

**If I were to identify you as a Black American what would that mean for you?**

**How do you prefer to be identified and why?**

**Tell me, what local affiliations, such as churches, clubs, political activities, do you join and participate with? Tell me about these groups and why you decided to become involved.**

**Tell me about your best friend in America? How did you meet and how and where do you spend time together? (hoping to discern choices of deciding between American friendships and/or African friendships)**

**Let's talk about your worship life? Tell me about your worship participation: what is your place of worship? Tell me about who congregates there? Why did you decide that this worship site/experience was appropriate?**

**Outside of family and work, how do you spend your time? When socializing, what kind of activities are you involved with? Can we talk some about who is organizing these activities?**

**What is the attraction for you – to meet new friends, to bond with people from your same country? Why is it important to do either of these?**

**How do you stay connected to your home country – internet, telephone, letters?**

**How often do you stay connected: sending money, traveling back, reading news websites?**

**Are you a naturalized U.S. citizen? Do you want to be?**

**Have you voted in a U.S. national, state or local election? Why or why not?**

**There is a United Association of African Nations group in Pittsburgh. Do you know of this group? Why is it important to have this group and would you want to belong? Why?**

**How do members of your country of origin assist/support each other in Pittsburgh? How are you involved in support efforts? Do you think such efforts are necessary?**

**As an individual, where do you spend your leisure time? As a family member, where does your family spend its leisure time?**

**Do you feel that you and others from your country of origin are recognized in Pittsburgh by the broader community? If not, what is it, you think, that makes you/your community “invisible”?**

**Are you living the America dream? Why or why not? Do you even know what that is, how would describe the America dream?**

**Tell me, how did you come to live in America?**

**How do you make a living here, in Pittsburgh?**

**Tell me, what is the best thing about America?**

**Have you taken the test to be a citizen?**

**Tell me, what is the best thing about Pittsburgh?**

**What do you think is the worst thing about America?**

**What do you think is the worst thing about Pittsburgh?**

**What is best thing you remember about Liberia/Zambia/Congo???**

**What is the worse thing about Liberia/Zambia/Congo?**

**Describe your home in (your country of origin)? Where was it? What did you like about it?**

**Describe your home in Pittsburgh? Where is it? What do you like about it? Give me a tour of the place and your attitudes toward living there.**

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