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Liberian Refugee Women's Personal Narratives on the Effects of War on Motherhood

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

LIBERIAN REFUGEE WOMEN’S PERSONAL NARRATIVES ON THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON MOTHERHOOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

BY
FLORENCE WANJIRU KIMONDO
CHICAGO, IL
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A proverb from my Gikuyu tribe has it that “gūtirī wīnjaga igoti” which translates as no one is able to shave the back of his or her own head. I am truly humbled and honored by the many people who have helped me “shave the back of my head.”

I would like to thank the four women who welcomed me into their homes and generously shared their stories; this study would not have been possible without their assistance. I am particularly indebted to one of them who committed herself to introducing me to other Liberian women, therefore ensuring I was able to proceed with this study.

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Catherine Ihetu, Rose Gatumbi and Patricia Igwemba we have come a long way as we pursue our dreams, thank you for being supportive throughout the years.

I am eternally grateful to my family here in the U.S. and in Kenya for believing in me, praying for me, celebrating with me, for truly, who am I without you. Special thanks go to Mbuci my twin sister who has always been by my side; you are a true picture of resilience, and Nyoro the voice of reason that kept me grounded and focused; a pillar I leaned on through many of life’s challenges.
To my mother Njeri, my father Kimondo, my family and our future generation.
The war carried everything … but I was strong.
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ABSTRACT

One major effect of displacement by war and subsequently living in a refugee camp is the disruption of the social, cultural, economic and legal institutions of communities; this affects parenting and a child’s development. Few research studies address the effects of war, political upheaval, and displacement on parenting, specifically the experience of motherhood and the cultural socialization process of children. Yet, most research points at the undeniable connection between social and cognitive competence and the social and physical context, with changes in these contexts influencing the competencies parents’ inculcate in their children. Furthermore, there is sparse literature focusing specifically on African refugees’ experiences prior to resettlement in the U.S. Moreover, available data and research often fails to separate African refugees by country of origin and subsumes their unique backgrounds and experiences necessitating further inquiry and understanding of this population.

To address these gaps, this phenomenological study utilized the narratives of four African refugee mothers from Liberia to further our understanding of how displacement by war affects mothers’ beliefs about childhood, and the social and cognitive competencies they desired and inculcated in their children raised in a refugee camp. Through narrative inquiry, this study also focused on participants’ experiences as women and mothers during this time of displacement from their respective communities.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Every year between 50,000 and 70,000 refugees, resettle in the United States because of war, oppression and fear of persecution in their home countries. Fifty percent of these numbers are women and girls, while about 34% of these numbers are children below 17 years of age, either born in refugee camps or exposed to the hardships of fleeing their home countries due to war (Martin & Yankay, 2012). War, displacement by war, and living in refugee camps affects children’s development and their family’s social, emotional, psychological and economic wellbeing in dire ways. One of the major effects of war is disrupting the social, cultural, economic and legal institutions, and subsequently affecting parenting and a child’s development. Few research studies address the effects of war, political upheaval, and displacement on parenting, specifically the experience of motherhood and the cultural socialization process of children. Thus, it is important to fill this gap in research (Igreja, 2003; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Punamaki, Qouta & El Sarraj, 1997).

Since 2000, half the numbers of refugee families resettled in the U.S. have been from African countries, a shift from the 1990s when most of the families were from Asia and Europe. However, these trends keep changing due to new conflicts in other parts of the world thus changing the demographics of refugees coming to America (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011). These demographic shifts in America’s
communities, pose opportunities and challenges for social service programs, schools, and policy makers. Therefore, as educators, practitioners and policy makers it is vital to understand the life experiences and needs of refugee families. This knowledge is essential in ensuring, the services provided to assist refugee children and families through the adjustment process are culturally sensitive, and the education of children tailored to meet their specific needs to enable them to reach their academic potential, and become productive adults.

There is sparse literature focusing specifically on African refugees’ experiences prior to resettlement in the U.S. as well as the challenges of their adjustment in the U.S., much of the available research reports on refugees from Asia and other parts of the world. Moreover, available data and research often fails to separate African refugees by country of origin and subsumes their unique backgrounds and experiences necessitating further inquiry and understanding of this population. How critical social roles and tasks such as, parenting and child rearing of young children are shaped by the refugee and immigrant experiences is little understood. However, most research points at the undeniable connection between social and cognitive competencies and the social and physical context, with changes in these contexts influencing the competencies parents’ inculcate in their children (Gaskins, 1996; Harkness & Super, 1996; Lewis, 2000; Rosenthal & Roer-Stier, 2001; Tudge et al., 2006). To address these gaps, this phenomenological study utilizes the narratives of African refugee mothers from Liberia to further our understanding of how displacement by war affects mothers’ beliefs about childhood, and the social and cognitive competencies they desire and inculcate in their children raised
during the displacement period. This study also focuses on participants’ experiences as women and mothers living in a refugee camp. In using narrative inquiry, this study recognizes these mothers as the experts of their lives. I hope that this research allows women of Africa to be heard and that their narratives will fill a critical void in research on Africans and minority populations.

Currently there are over 42.5 million refugees and internally displaced people living in different parts of the world, many in refugee camps awaiting either resettlement to countries that offer asylum or repatriation to their homes once the warring sides forge peace. About 46% of this number is under 18 years of age, while seven million refugees have lived in refugee camps for about seventeen years. Sadly, only about 80,000 people are eligible annually for political asylum to either Europe or North America (UNHCR, 2011). These high numbers of children and families living in such dire conditions, demonstrates the magnitude of the problem. Nonetheless, for decades the U.S. has been accepting the highest number of refugees eligible for political asylum to Europe or North America. These resettlement trends, often pose challenges in existing programs, and public policies, and this necessitates research that provides a deeper understanding of the life experiences and needs of refugee children and families.

An Overview of the Civil War and Displacement in Liberia

The participants in this study are from Liberia. They were forced by the civil war in their country to flee to neighboring countries to seek refuge, thus began their journey of living in displacement, and henceforth, referred to as refugees. A label often used by the media and in literature on this population; yet participants expressed their discomfort
with this term due to the negative image it conjures. The following section gives a brief
description of Liberia, the civil war and the countries of flight. It is essential to have an
understanding of the history and political upheaval that changed the life trajectories of the
women and children in this study.

**Definition of Who Constitutes as a Refugee**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2010) is one of
the main international organizations involved in and mandated to protect refugees,
safeguard their rights and well-being as well as resolve refugee problems worldwide. The
United Nations established the UNHCR in 1950 after the Second World War, specifically
to cater to the needs of displaced people in Europe. An amendment made in the articles
governing its activities in 1967 gave the organization universal coverage, and thus a
responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced people in
countries experiencing conflict worldwide. The UNHCR defines a refugee as:

> any person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for
reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social
group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is
unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the
protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being
outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such
events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

This definition agreed upon at the United Nations Geneva Refugee Convention held in
1951 is the definition used by the UNHCR and majority of countries in determining who
receives assistance and eventually asylum. However, this definition does not apply to
those who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity or serious non-
political crimes. People who fall in these categories do not qualify for the assistance
provided to refugees, nor are they eligible to apply for asylum. The definition does not
apply to refugees who have a status equivalent to the nationals in the country where they
have sought asylum. At the 1969 Organization of African Unity convention, the member
states agreed to adhere to this definition, and hence safeguard refugee rights. Currently,
over 140 countries worldwide have incorporated this definition of refugees in their
respective national legislation (UNHCR, 2010).

**Brief History of Liberia’s Civil Wars**

Located along Africa’s western coastline, Liberia was founded as a republic in 1847. Little is written about the earliest inhabitants of the country, and Liberia’s story
often begins with the repatriation in the 1800s of African Americans and people from the
West Indies, descendants of Africans who had previously been sold as slaves. The
indigenous inhabitants referred to the newcomers as Americo-Liberians. During the early
period of the Americo-Liberian settlement in the country, there were numerous conflicts
between the two groups due to competition for the local resources. The Americo-
Liberians became the dominant group and maintained political control of the country
from its founding in 1847 until 1980, when the incumbent president was overthrown in a
bloody coup led by Samuel Doe a member of the Krahn ethnic group leading to political
power shifting to the indigenous population. The Americo-Liberians constituted about
3% of the population but owned over 60% of the country’s wealth. Coupled with this
they had established a social system that was rife with ethnic, class, and gender
inequalities thus leading to grave injustices against the indigenous people.
The new president, Samuel Doe reportedly committed the same injustices attributed to the previous government, accumulating excessive wealth, corruption, nepotism, human rights abuses, and military repression. A failed coup attempt against Doe in 1985 led to extensive killings of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups thought to be loyal to the Gio general who had attempted to overthrow the president. On December 24, 1989, Charles Taylor, a former minister in Doe’s government invaded Liberia from Ivory Coast and thus heralded the beginning of the fourteen years of civil war in Liberia, and the beginning of the first civil war. The civil war that eventually engulfed the whole country involved numerous factions fighting for control over Liberia’s natural resources that included diamonds, iron ore, rubber and timber. The factions were also divided along tribal lines and thus some of the ethnic groups in the country became targets. The war continued until 1997 when Charles Taylor largely through fear and intimidation was elected president; people were afraid that if they did not elect him, he was likely to continue the war. Like his predecessors, Taylor’s rule was checkered with injustices, which included aiding the Revolutionary United Front, a rebel group in Sierra Leone. This sustained the war that had started in Sierra Leone in 1991 triggered by the political events in Liberia. In 1999 opponents of Taylor’s government entered the country through Guinea sinking the country into a war that spread from the countryside into Monrovia, Liberia’s capital city, thus the second civil war in the country began. The war ended in 2003 after peace agreements were signed by the warring factions. Taylor was forced to resign and hand over power to his vice president as a United Nations justice tribunal charged him with war crimes. Taylor left for exile in Nigeria and a National Transitional
Government took over the country until the 2005 general elections. A United Nations Mission peacekeeping force was commissioned with maintaining peace and order as well as disarming the combatants in Liberia (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005; Global Security, 1989). Taylor was later arrested and convicted at the International Criminal Court at the Hague in 2012, and sentenced to fifty years imprisonment.

Over the 14 years Liberia was engulfed in war, the government troops, pro-government militias and the rebel forces are reported to have committed gross abuses against civilians. Some of the atrocities committed included torture, killings, raping girls and women, looting, burning and pillaging homes, abducting boys and men to fight, and women for labor and sex slavery. At checkpoints around the country, government soldiers’ extorted money and goods from civilians fleeing the conflict, and reportedly blocked civilians from leaving the area and moving to safety. Over 200,000 people are reported to have been killed (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

**Displacement and Countries of Refuge**

The first and the second civil wars lasted for several years and forced people to flee to safety. While some people moved to other towns that were not under attack at the specific time they fled their homes, others fled to neighboring countries. Some of the countries that Liberians fled to are Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ivory Coast (currently Cote de Ivoire), and Ghana (see Appendix A for a map of Liberia and countries of refuge during the civil war). In the mid-1990s, and at the peak of the first civil war and from a population estimated at three million people, the number of Liberian refugees was 750,000, while other reports state that between one and two million people were
displaced. From these numbers about 320,000 were internally displaced persons (IDPs). In addition, about 400,000 fled to Guinea, another 400,000 people were in Ivory Coast and 125,000 fled to Sierra Leone and smaller numbers went to Ghana, Nigeria, Mali and Gambia. Sierra Leone was the initial destination of a large number when the civil war began; however, Liberians and the local civilians were forced to flee in the early 1990s as the war spread to that country. With time, civil war spread to Guinea and Ivory Coast as well. Each country was said to harbor the others enemies and to support cross border incursions, subsequently forcing civilians from each one of these countries to flee. Liberians who had sought refuge in these particular countries had to seek refuge in a second and for some even a third country. A majority of the people ended up in refugee camps set up by the UNHCR, with various international relief agencies providing different humanitarian services. However, in Ivory Coast which at the time hosted about 400,000 Liberians, the Ivorian president at the time appealed to his country to assist their “kin” as Liberians who lived in the area bordering Ivory Coast had ethnic ties to the Ivorians in the area (as is common in numerous African countries). The government established what they referred to as “zone d’acceuil des refugies”, these were refugee zones where the refugees lived freely among the local populations and were free to access land, own businesses and seek employment. In 2002 when the war in the region spread to Ivory Coast, hostilities arose against Liberians forcing some to flee to the capital city and others to neighboring countries (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Nmoma, 1997; Global Security, 1989; UNHCR, 2002).
At the end of the first and the second civil war respectively, many Liberians returned home, some by their own means and others with UNHCR assistance. After the elections in 2005 when relative peace was restored in the country, many more people returned to their respective homes, but there were still over 200,000 internally displaced persons and about 200,000 Liberians still living in camps and other areas in neighboring countries. Over the fourteen years civil war raged on in the country, many were granted political asylum and resettled in countries such as the U.S., Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland and France. However, even as majority of these resettlement programs closed people remained and are still currently living in some of the refugee camps afraid to return home and hoping for political asylum (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005; UNHCR, 2002; 2005).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The variations in the skills and behaviors parents’ consider essential are attributed to a complex network of processes and no single factor can sufficiently explain parents’ beliefs and practices, and the behaviors and values they consider desirable. Some of the factors that are posited to influence parents’ practices are parental ethnotheories or cultural belief systems, ethnicity, social economic status, and parents’ level of education. However, of these factors parental ethnotheories or cultural belief systems appear to be at the core of parents’ practices. These ethnotheories reflect parents’ understanding about childhood, competence, methods of instruction and discipline, and inform and guide parents’ day-to-day activities and interactions with their children. Ethnotheories also mold parents’ developmental goals, as well as their perception of the role society expects them to play in preparing children to participate in the existing contexts (Bornstein, 1991; Brooker, 2003; Gaskins, 1996; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994; Rosenthal & Roer-Stier, 2001). Anthropological studies of parental beliefs about child development state that parental ethnotheories are an important facet of development and are the main pathway that cultural values are instilled across generations. Thus, parents’ perception of what is adaptive in their social, cultural, and physical context influences their childrearing practices and developmental goals and hence the cross-cultural variability in the social

Research suggests that the physical and social contexts of the caregiving environment impacts parental practices and subsequently, the competencies children acquire. According to Lewis (2000), physical environment and historical circumstances are determinants of a societal maintenance system, which includes the social structure, economy, and household type (p. 92). An event such as war, migration, natural disasters, and other social, political and economic discontinuities, often lead to adaptation in parental practices. Garcia Coll et al. (1996) point out that parents not only respond to discontinuities, but also respond to the current social, political and economic structures by raising their children in ways intended to enable them to thrive in spite of the odds against them. These authors give examples of how racial minority parents living in the U.S. often teach their children the values, behaviors and attitudes they need to succeed in a society where prejudice, discrimination, racism and differential access to resources is prevalent. These authors describe this as a cultural adaption, which is a product of the social context the families inhabit. They and others (LeVine et al., 1996; Rosenthal & Roer-Stier, 2001) identify adaptation as a fundamental aspect of cultural actors, such as parents, in responding to ecological changes that challenge or threaten the optimal development of children.

The fact that the physical context impacts parents’ beliefs is indisputable. The question that arises is what changes if any, occur in parents’ beliefs and do the values they desire and instill in their children change in response and as an adaptation to
discontinuities in the physical and social context such as displacement by war and living in refugee camps (Gaskins, 1996; Lewis, 2000; Rosenthal & Roer-Stier, 2001)? Few research studies address this question, although numerous studies on the impact of war and displacement by war often focus on the emotional and psychological effects of the stressful events on parents and children (Igreja, 2003; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Punamaki et al., 1997). To address the above question and to address the gap in research, this review will use the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and the developmental niche (Harkness & Super, 1996) as the organizing frameworks. With reference to the developmental niche, and specifically psychology of the caregiver, this review will look at parental ethnotheories and specifically explore the cross-cultural differences and/or similarities in parents’ conceptions of childhood, and competence as shaped by their respective social and physical contexts of development. These two factors have a direct impact on children’s social and cognitive development, and will thus shed light on how parents’ beliefs and practices influence the skills, behaviors and knowledge children acquire. This will serve the purpose of elucidating some of the processes at play as parents’ strive to inculcate their respective cultural values passed on across generations in times of peace and stability and at a time when their cultural and historical structures are intact. However, when discontinuities such as displacement by war occur in the physical and social context, this cultural transmission process is probably altered as the cultural and historical institutions that are the main custodians of cultural values, customs and practices are disrupted; and as parents’ strive to adapt to the changes challenging their parental roles. Hence, this review will also look at research carried out on the impact of
war and violence on the mother-child relationship as it touches on some of the effects of war and displacement by war on some aspects of parenting and the cultural transmission process.

**Conceptual Framework**

To understand and explore the aforementioned question, an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1994) and the conceptual model of the developmental niche (Harkness & Super 1996) are used to review literature relevant to the question explored in this study. Specifically, this study will focus on one of the aspects of the developmental niche – that is parental ethnotheories, and findings from cross-cultural studies will be reviewed to highlight the differences or similarities in parents’ beliefs about childhood and child competence/intelligence across cultures and the ways in which these competencies are inculcated. This aspect of the developmental niche as well as the processes involved mirror and encompass several of Bronfenbrenner’s interconnected systems that explain the parent-child interactions and the social, cultural, and physical contexts of development. The literature that used in this review is from several disciplines of study: cultural psychology, developmental psychology, cultural anthropology, education, and child development.

**Ecological Model**

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model posits that the context of development is a of complex multilayered and multifaceted systems, and conceptualizes the child's experience as occurring in widening circles of transactions that directly and indirectly influence the child. This model consists of five levels namely: *microsystem, mesosystem,*
**exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.** Parents primarily mediate the child’s interactions with these different systems and often through their actions either minimize or exacerbate the effects of these systems on the child’s development. The microsystem is at the center and includes the child’s direct interactions with people in his immediate environment such as home, school or childcare. These interactions with parents, peers or teachers define the roles, possibilities and values of his culture. In particular, the child’s interactions with his or her parents include aspects such as the family dynamics, parenting styles as well as the historical and psychological resources of parents. In addition, the quality of links between the family and the wider environments embedded in the microsystem provides a sense of continuity for a child and thus serves to support or fails to support development.

The mesosystem includes the processes that take place between two micro settings, and the way they relate can be either complementary or conflictual. The exosystem consists of institutions and environments such as extended family, neighbors, friends and parents’ workplace. These do not directly affect the child rather they indirectly influence development. The macrosystem involves the customs, laws, values and institutions such as schools and hospitals that are present in the child’s cultural context. Parents also acquire their cultural values and beliefs from this system, which dictates to its members the values, customs and laws to uphold and pass on to successive generations. The chronosystem includes the broader societal events such as social and economic conditions, national and state government policies and calamities such as war and famine. Changes at this level may reverberate through the lives of families and
influence development. For example, when war breaks out families suffer many losses such as, social networks, material goods, and often times end up as refugees in neighboring countries (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1994). This study will specifically focus on the microsystem – that is parents’ notions of childhood and perceptions of child competence and whether their perceptions were impacted by discontinuities in the chronosystem, particularly the effects of displacement by war and subsequently living in refugee camps.

**Developmental Niche**

Super and Harkness (1986) provide an ecologically derived approach, which they refer to as the developmental niche. These authors point out that the developmental niche is fundamental in a child’s development, enables cultural transmission across generations, and thus supports child competence, childrearing and the cohesion of the community. This theoretical model describes the three primary areas or levels of the caregiving environment as:

- The *psychology of the caregivers*, particularly parental ethnotheories which includes the values, goals, and beliefs of the parent. All of these factors may play a directive role and are often shared within the community. Some of the ethnotheories parents’ hold may be about sleeping arrangements, independence and autonomy, discipline, feeding practices, appropriate responses to a child’s needs and optimal attachment behavior of a developing child.

- The *historically and culturally constituted customs of child care and child rearing*, refers to the social practices used in dealing with various behaviors. In addition, it
includes the methods of transmission of cultural values and traditions that solidify the distinctive existence of the group. For example, the manner in which caregivers instruct, or teach children the skills valued in their respective culture.

- **The physical and social settings** includes institutions such as schools, churches, hospitals, neighborhoods and communities as well as the quality of these settings. Other also described as part of the physical setting are war, community violence, environmental toxins and waste. The social setting refers to the social roles of the different participants in the settings as well as the family’s adaptation to the specific ecological and economic conditions of their environment.

In the Figures 1 and 2 below, the three areas of the developmental niche constitute the cultural context of parent-child relationships, these interact and affect each other, and subsequently influence developmental outcomes. In Figure 1, the unbroken lines suggest undisturbed interaction in the developmental niche, while in Figure 2, the broken lines suggest significant discontinuities in the developmental niche, such as changes in the social and physical settings caused by displacement by war. These changes probably affect parents’ ethnotheories both directly due to changes in their day-to-day lives and routines, and indirectly due to possible changes in the social and cultural institutions that inform and guide parenting. Of particular importance to this study are two aspects of parental ethnotheories, specifically parents’ conception of childhood and child competence. These aspects have a direct impact on children’s social and cognitive development and the ensuing skills they acquire, and are likely to be influenced by the
changes that occur in the physical and social settings when families are displaced by war and as parents strive to adapt to the prevailing context.

Figure 1. Developmental niche with no significant discontinuities

Figure 2. Developmental niche with significant discontinuities in the physical and social context

Super and Harkness (2002) further identify three organizational aspects of the niche that affect the child’s development. The first is contemporary redundancy, which is repeated instances of specific training, support, or induction of emerging capabilities. This involves parents’ interweaving their beliefs with their practices in their day-to-day interactions with their child in an effort to teach different valued skills. The second aspect is thematic elaboration, which is the cultivation over time of core symbols and systems of meaning whereby children learn the discourse style as well as the appropriate affective expressions of their cultural group. They are able to detect and internalize the cultural
rules of performance and understand what certain phrases, words and gestures mean. The third aspect is the integrative properties of culture whereby no single element of the environment can produce a particular outcome; it is through the chaining of various elements that leads to different outcomes, and sustained disruption in any of these links destroys the chain. For example, in a community where a child is expected to help in taking care of younger siblings, a parent may repeatedly talk about the different tasks involved, model to the child how to hold and soothe the younger sibling, while adhering to the group’s belief about what caregiving tasks the child should do or not do. Thus, through these organizational aspects of the developmental niche, parents’ are able to instill and sustain the transmission of the desirable competencies of their respective communities. However, stressful experiences such as exposure to chronic violence, displacement by war, natural disasters, marital conflict, divorce, or chronic illness often affect the transmission process, and probably place different demands on the parent-child relationship.

**Parental Ethnotheories or Cultural Belief Systems**

Throughout the literature, different concepts are used to describe parents’ social and cognitive models or ideas about child development, socialization and family interactions. Some authors prefer the concept of folk theories or ethnotheories while others prefer - parental ideas. The latter group questions how parental thinking about everyday life is referred to as a “theory” (Edwards et al., 2003). Nsamenang (2000) uses the concept of cultural curriculum in reference to the development agenda cultures set up
for parents. However, in this review the term parental ethnotheories or cultural belief systems will be used interchangeably to refer to parental social and cognitive models.

Harkness and Super (1996) describe parental ethnotheories or cultural belief systems as parents’ understanding about aspects such as, concepts of childhood, competence, intelligence, health, methods of instruction and discipline as well as parenthood. Ethnotheories are belief systems that are socially shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup and are often derived or inherited from the accumulated cultural experience of a community. They reflect the models of child rearing valued by the group and include expectations about children’s cognitive, emotional, and social development. Additionally, culturally appointed “experts” also play a role in the construction of parental ethnotheories. For instance, in some communities pediatricians are recognized as a resource on children’s development and through the media and in person provide information about children’s behavior and development.

These cultural belief systems relate in systematic ways to action, for example, the methods of discipline parents’ use, the methods of instruction and communication, or the act of seeking advice from experts. Ethnotheories also shape parents’ understanding of development and the roles other people play in these processes. However, there is not one particular way in which these beliefs and practices play out as parents’ hold individual constructions and understanding of cultural beliefs and these often mediate their childrearing goals and aspirations for their children (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Harkness & Super, 1996). LeVine et al. (1996) emphasize that despite the individual interpretations
parents may hold, the dominant cultural scripts for social interaction, behavior and other psychologically significant aspects often take precedence.

Parental ethnotheories encompass numerous beliefs about a child’s development, however this study will specifically look at parent’s conception of childhood and competence and the ways these competencies are transmitted to children:

Parents’ Conceptualization of Childhood

According to Kağitçibaşi (1996), childhood is a socially defined concept that shows cross-cultural variations that may change with time and context. Parents’ derive their concept of childhood from their cultural conceptualization and hence this exerts significant and differential influences over, the mental, emotional, and social development of children. Variability in the ecologies and social systems cultural groups inhabit impacts the skills and knowledge children need to possess (McGillcuddy-De Lisi & Subramanian, 1996). For example, in socio-cultural domains where children have heavy responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, childhood is not likely to be seen as a special distinctive period. Additionally, when children are seen as having material value for the family, they are groomed from an early age to contribute to their family’s wellbeing. This serves a twofold purpose of instructing and preparing children for their adult roles as caregivers and providers, as well as may lead to some material gain for the family. These cultural conceptualizations impact children’s socialization, that is the values and skills they are taught, what is expected of them, and how they are treated by their parents. However, with time, and across socioeconomic and rural versus urban contexts shifts in the conception of children occur (Kağitçibaşi, 1996).
Historical variations in parents’ ideas about children exist hence suggesting that parents’ ideas are not only influenced by their direct experiences with their children or changes in the actual nature of children; rather external conditions such as economic and cultural factors also have an impact (Greenfield et al., 2003; Kağıtçibaşi, 1996). For instance, in Japan and in Europe it is reported that images of children have seesawed between describing them as angels in need of nurturance and freedom, and as strong willed creatures in need of guidance (Kojima, 1986, as cited in Goodnow & Collins, 1990). When the economic conditions demand a smaller work force, images are constructed depicting children as vulnerable and needing total care. This justifies restricting women from working in paid labor and away from home. However, when mothers are needed in the workforce children are seen as able to benefit from spending some time in non-familial day care programs (Goodnow & Collins, 1990). Rogoff (2003) similarly points out those child-focused institutions came about because of industrialization and efforts to systematize services such as education and medical care.

In their longitudinal comparative study of the Gusii and White American mothers, LeVine et al. (1996) point out how the social, economic and cultural conditions of the environments a group inhabits shapes the early child care model. These authors describe the Gusii child care model as pediatric and the American model as pedagogical. The pediatric model, more commonly found in areas of high infant mortality, is primarily concerned with the infant survival, health, and physical growth, while the pedagogical model more commonly found in areas where environmental risks to infant mortality have been lessened, is concerned with the behavioral development of the infant and its
preparation for educational interactions. The Gusii mothers are described as viewing infancy as a time of great danger to the child’s life and hence requiring constant protection to avert life-threatening illness and other environmental hazards. The American mothers focus on active engagement and social exchange with their infants and hence respond to the child’s alertness, curiosity, exploration and positive vocal and visual interactions with other persons. Due to the environment they inhabit and access to medical care, higher infant survival and health are not major concerns of the American mothers compared to the Gusii. Furthermore, the white middle class mothers participating in this study saw themselves as teachers and the infant as a pupil whose readiness for early education was important.

Parental goals related to what parents’ want from and for their children often influence their concept of their child, how they raise their children and the qualities they consider desirable. Other distinctions of parental goals that have an effect on parenting are for example the short term and long term goals, as well as individual versus family related goals. In different societies, resources mainly flow from children to parents or from parents to children and this also impacts the qualities parents instill in their children (Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

A cross-national study (Hoffman, 1988) on the value of children conducted in Turkey, Philippines, Indonesia, United States, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore looked at the relationship between the needs children satisfy for parents and parental goals. Between 1,000 and 3,000 married women, under 40 years of age were interviewed as well as one-quarter of their husbands. The three main needs children seemed to satisfy were
economic-utility, the need for primary ties and affection, and the need for achievement, competence and creativity. Parents who saw children as having an economic or utilitarian purpose desired to rear their children to be obedient and were less likely to want them to be independent. Their rationale was that obedient children were likely to help their parents both as children and as adults. For example, these parents anticipated that children would help in the household or fields as well as provide financial support in their old age. This category of parents indicated that the most important quality for a school-age child was to mind others, and were reported as less likely to select independence. Parents from Korea, Taiwan and Turkey mentioned this need. Parents’ expectations of their children were similar across gender even in countries where tasks and roles were assigned according to gender; for example, in communities where males provide economic support and females help around the house and/or fields.

Furthermore, Kağıtçibaşi (1996) elaborates that in countries with agrarian economies where children’s work and material contribution is substantial and essential to the family, a utilitarian value is held about children. A study conducted on Yoruba children by UNICEF Nigeria (Zeitlin, 1996), shows that seven-year-olds were expected to assist in the home and to contribute economically either by working on the farm or by helping with trading activities. Children were seen as old enough to participate more actively in their communities and hence were expected to be obedient and respectful. Other qualities that mothers described as important were following directions, getting along with others and successfully completing errands. Parents instilled these values in their children from an early age as they prepared them to start contributing to the family.
This is an example of the organizational aspects of the developmental niche that Super and Harkness (1986, 2002) refer to and which involves a parent repeatedly and deliberately instilling the skills and reinforcing the behaviors that will lead to the desired outcome.

With reference to primary ties and affection needs, parents who perceived their children as satisfying the need for love as well as providing companionship and strengthening their marriage indicated they desired children who were loving and companionable. Participants from United States, Singapore and Turkey cited this as one of the needs children satisfied. Some of the qualities these groups of parents wanted their children both their sons and daughters to possess were; outgoing, warm, loving, good-natured, and cheerful. These qualities were related to the need for love and companionship, whereas to meet the need of enhancing the marriage, parents’ wanted children who were independent and thus who did not intrude too much on the marriage. Parents’ in this category when asked the quality they desired in school-age children mentioned independence (Hoffman, 1988).

Parents’ who responded that children satisfied their achievement needs garnered their satisfaction from the quality of the child. This was measured in terms of the child having the qualities parents esteem and hence parents feeling content that they had done a good job raising their children. A quality and goal desired in school-age children was “doing well in school.” However, most of the parents who mentioned school performance were more educated with a majority having a college degree, and this was mentioned more often in the United States. Other virtues preferred by this category of parents’ as
well as those who sought achievement satisfaction from parenthood, included honesty, respect and God-fearing (Hoffman, 1988).

Similarly, in a qualitative study conducted by Nsamenang (1992) findings indicate that amongst most Cameroonians, children satisfy the need for achievement and are raised to have good character. The main concerns of most parents are that their children acquire the cultural affective and behavioral characteristics, especially appropriate gender roles, social competence, and to communicate appropriately with their elders. Parents’ emphasize social skills as this satisfies their achievement need. Specifically, they value having well-behaved, respectful and helpful children; this indicates that they performed their sacred parental duty well.

Amongst the Nso of Cameroon (Nsamenang, 1992), parenthood is a coveted goal and confers a sense of fulfillment because procreation is regarded as the first and most sacred duty in marriage. In this cultural group, infertility is a great personal tragedy and humiliation. Having children elevates the social position of a married man and woman as they receive more respect and gain a greater sense of importance and dignity. Moreover, the West African conception of children is theocentric and children serve the spiritual function of communicating God’s approval of the couple and fulfill the couple’s spiritual role of propagating the human race.

Furthermore, some children are seen as ordinary and reincarnations of ancestors, while others are seen as special emissaries from God. This latter group of children and their parents’ are revered by the community and this often has an effect on the developmental outcomes of the children. Over half of the Nso parents interviewed in
Nsamenang’s study reported that some human attributes are innate and not an outcome of parenting. Similarly, the Yoruba of Nigeria believe that God assigns a child’s character, while other aspects are acquired through the reincarnation of ancestral or lineage traits and hence not learned behaviors (Zeitlin, 1996). However, most Nso parents like most West African parents seek to instill good character in their children. Other desirable qualities mentioned by the participants in this study were filial work, obedience and good progress in school. Nonetheless, parents’ desire for their children to do well in school is an indicator of the adaptation to the establishment of formal schooling by colonialists (Nsamenang, 1992).

Similarly, amongst the Hindu of India and Nepal (Cole, Tamang & Shrestha, 2006; Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002), parental ideas, beliefs and childrearing practices are determined by their religion, which is considered a way of life that pervades all aspects of their daily life. Parents believe that children are divine and near perfect and are born with innate predispositions that cannot be altered in a major way by socialization; thus culture provides the context for development and a platform to refine one’s predispositions. Children are not “reared” or “brought up” as their past life cycle (karma) is intertwined with their present life cycle. Additionally, having a child or having a child with desirable qualities is viewed as a result of the parents’ own karma, which buffers the pain when children are disabled or socially deviant and evokes moderate pride when children excel. Most Indian Hindu parents are reported to desire children who are respectful, obedient to parents and other elders, truthful, modest, trustworthy, compassionate and tolerant (Saraswathi & Ganapathy, 2002).
Societies have varying cultural agendas and understanding about childhood, and every culture superimposes its own imprint on development (Nsamenang, 1992). Parents’ are influenced by the cultural agenda and context as is evident in their childrearing patterns. However, some of the individual values and expectations parents uphold impact their perspective of childhood and consequently the skills and behavior they desire in their children (Hoffman, 1988).

**Parents’ Conceptualization of Competence/Intelligence**

The universal model of human development postulates that the origins of human competence lay in the parent-child interactions or in early childhood experiences, and therefore to understand human competence, one needs to focus on micro-level analysis of the child’s early experiences within the family (Ogbu, 1981, p. 414). Nonetheless, Ogbu further states that this model is inadequate as it is premised on the assumption that there are universal laws of optimal development. On the contrary, Ogbu proposes a cultural-ecological model that takes into consideration that competence is defined differently in different populations. Parents’ often inculcate in their children the social and cognitive competencies or skills required to be a competent man or woman in their specific social and cultural milieu. These competencies, (or desired behaviors, attitudes and values) enable children to perform the culturally defined tasks that place them on a path to being successful members as defined within their cultural group (Greenfield et al., 2003). For example, amongst the Luo of Kenya, intelligence is expressed in the Dholuo vocabulary by four concepts that encompass social-emotional competence and cognitive competence. The concepts are namely *luoro* which corresponds to social qualities, such as respect and
care of others, obedience, diligence, and readiness to share; *rieko* which is translated as intelligence, smartness, knowledge, and ability. This term is used to refer to both knowledge acquired in school as well as competence in performing household tasks and being versed in traditional customs and rules. The other two terms used *paro* and *winjo* overlap with both *luoro* and *rieko* and refer to thinking and comprehending respectively. Hence, amongst the Luo a ‘good child’ or a good community member needs a balanced mixture of all these qualities for the greater good of the society (Grigorenko et al., 2001).

Ogbu (1981) also contests the universal model’s focus on the events in the micro setting of the family unit. He states that families inhabit social, economic and political systems and these have an impact on the competencies children are expected to display to thrive (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Nsamenang, 2000). Physical environments influence the emphasis parents place on either social or cognitive competence, which is in response to the forms of subsistence (making a living) prevailing in their society. This is consistent with the aforementioned ideas propounded by the ecological model and the developmental niche. In addition, what parents’ consider essential is also related to their belief of how an individual can succeed based on their image of the successful people in their society (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994; Ogbu, 1981). In information and technological based societies, the conceptions of competence emphasize individual ability, cultivation of the individual mind, exploration, discovery, and personal achievement. These cognitive competencies are a requirement for effective integration and success. Whereas in agrarian societies with large close-knit families, competence is more socially oriented and emphasis is on moral self-cultivation and social contribution,
while individual celebration of achievement is discouraged. Social harmony and social
skills such as respect, politeness, obedience, responsibility and obligation to the family
are encouraged. These skills and behaviors are required to maintain cohesiveness, and for
the benefit of the society (Greenfield et al., 2003; Keller, 2003).

Although Keller (2003) states that in most societies social and cognitive
competence are on a continuum and not necessarily dichotomous, children’s competence
in the culturally marked areas is often accelerated, while development in other domains
often lags behind (Harkness & Super, 1986). However, when children raised in different
cultural groups participate in institutions such as schools, which often reflect the majority
culture or middle-class values, their competencies come into question (Brooker, 2003;
Kağıtçibaşi, 1996). For instance, in a comparative study of Bangladeshi and Anglo
children in England, Brooker (2003) reported that the children displayed different skills
and behaviors in their preschool class. The Bangladeshi children had been taught to be
quiet, obedient and not play in school, whereas the Anglo children displayed curiosity,
independence, and communication competence. The latter group was able to benefit from
the free play sessions, while the Bangladeshi children moved from one area to another
without engaging in any activity, and had difficulty expressing themselves during show
and tell sessions. Thus, the Bangladeshi children were unable to reap the benefits to be
gained from participating in free play, and while the qualities they displayed were
positive, they fell short of the behaviors schools consider necessary for academic success.

According to Ogbu (1981) when ideas about competence in a given culture are
shared by the family and other institutions where children spend time such as school, the
society establishes a structure that ensures the child attains the required competencies. Thus, the child’s acquisition of the skills is supported both at home and by the social institutions the child participates in. However, in a diverse society this is not always possible especially when the existing institutions reflect the cultural competencies upheld by the majority group. This may create a cultural gap between home and school for minority groups. However, in some contexts and circumstances parents either make adjustments in their parenting goals or seek out ways the institutions can redress the cultural gaps to ensure their children continue on a path to becoming competent members of the community (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Valdēs, 1996).

**Ways of Acquiring Social and Cognitive Competencies**

With regard to the organizational aspects of the developmental niche (Super & Harkness, 2002) there are specific ways in which parents inculcate the desired competencies in their children. These aspects are the vehicle parents use to transmit and teach their children the skills they need to become competent members of their community. In addition, parents’ beliefs about childhood and their social and physical context influences the activities children participate in, the extent to which they can choose what to participate in, and their segregation from adult activities. However, this socialization process is not a one way endeavor as children also contribute by engaging their parents’ in various ways (Kağıtçibaşi, 1996; Rogoff, 2003).

Nonetheless, there exist cultural variations in how parents interact with and teach their children the social and cognitive competencies upheld in their communities. Differences in the use of language, speech patterns, interaction and the role of the speaker
and listener influence the communication styles children acquire and the role children
expect adults to play. These differences influence how children are taught and
subsequently how they learn. Kağıtçibaşi (1996) describes an anthropological study
conducted in an agrarian Turkish village whereby the researchers noted that parents
 taught their children by demonstration, imitation and motor learning with minimal use of
verbal explanations or reasoning. Through close observation children were expected to
carry out tasks in the same manner their parents did.

Similar models of teaching and learning can be found in numerous cultures
around the world. Mexican immigrants are an example of a cultural group in the United
States where nonverbal teaching with less praise is used by parents (Kağıtçibaşi, 1996).
Amongst many West African communities, children acquire knowledge and skills by
observing and imitating adults, their elder siblings, and mentors with minimal instruction
(Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994). An active apprenticeship experience for children is used to
enable children to learn and to graduate from one role position to another until they are
ready to assume their adult role, which is the main goal parents’ uphold. Children observe
the roles and tasks they are expected to perform and often enact these in play as a form of
rehearsal usually under the corrective eyes of older siblings or peers rather than adults.
Emphasis is not on “I will tell you how to do it” but on “watch,” “listen,” “participate”
and “try” (p. 141). Parents also teach through proverbs and folktales containing moral
themes and virtuous acts presented for children to emulate. Some of the tales are mythical
and are used to convey a sense of fearfulness aimed at deterring children from
wrongdoing. In the presence of adults or older siblings, the child’s direct responsibility
and activities are limited and stereotyped because of the child’s low-status rank. Thus, the child is expected to just watch and listen while the adults or older siblings communicate on behalf of the child or perform the tasks (Nsamenang, 1992).

In her ethnographic study of ten Mexican families, Valdés (1996) observed that the tasks parents selected for learning depended on the age of the child and personality type. Children learned by doing and the expectations were that at a certain age they were ready to learn different tasks, however there was no stigma associated with failing to learn the task. The belief was that certain people could not do certain things. If the task was done at an unacceptable level, the older siblings or adults pointed out what was done incorrectly and made suggestions about how the child could tackle the task the next time. The child was free to ask questions about the process and their ability to perform the task was evaluated based on meeting the specific standards of the activity.

In both the Mexican families and West African families, mothers do not deliberately and directly teach their children; it is assumed children learn as they grow. Furthermore, the tasks parents seem to focus on teaching are often household chores and other tasks children are expected to perform. In contrast, middle-class mothers in the United States reportedly see themselves as responsible for instructing their children on how to walk, talk, and help around the house. Some parents push academic training and high expectations for learning in infancy (Rogoff, 2003). Rogoff gives an example of a U.S. mother who devised an extensive curriculum of games aimed at teaching her 17-month-old to read letters and to count. This mother evaluated her child’s progress in terms of Piaget’s stages of cognitive development (p. 160).
McGillcuddy-De Lisi and Subramanian (1996) conducted a quantitative study comparing Tanzanian and White-American mothers’ beliefs about children’s cognitive development. The participants comprised 75 White-American mothers and 71 Tanzanian mothers from Dar es Salaam, with children between 5 and 12 years of age. The mothers were asked questions representing seven developmental processes, namely biological processes, absorption, didactic instruction, reinforcement, cognitive processing, experimentation/discovery, and observation. Findings from the study showed the Tanzanian mothers ranked biological processes, absorption, and direct instruction as the three major processes followed by observation, cognitive processing and lastly reinforcement. Similarly, the American mothers ranked biological processes as the most important and reinforcement as the least important. However, the other processes followed a different pattern as follows: experimentation, observation, cognitive processing, absorption and direct instruction. The study further highlighted that Tanzanian mothers view children as recipients of knowledge from the external environment (absorption) and hence are passive learners and that knowledge is instilled. While American mothers view was that children acquire knowledge through their own activities (experimentation) and hence are active learners and knowledge is creative not static. These authors further emphasize that different teaching strategies emanate from these cultural beliefs. In addition, they refer to a study conducted by Schaefer and Edgerton (1985) that indicates that children whose parents believed that children are active learners and creative often had higher performance scores in schools compared to children whose parents held different beliefs about learning.
Vygotsky’s social learning theory posits that individual development and learning processes are best understood in the context of a child’s social world. Knowledge is actively constructed by learners and mediated via the symbols and tools of the specific cultural milieu, with language being one of the most important of these tools. Some of the other socially generated symbolic tools are deliberate memory aids, various systems of counting, and writing. In addition, cognition is a social phenomenon dependent on the environment whereby an individual’s mind is inseparably joined with other minds. Hence, children’s higher mental functions originate from their activities and their social interaction, and in the acquisition of certain skills the inherent variations in activities and social interactions result in fundamental individual and group differences. These social experiences shape the way people think, act and interpret the world around them and subsequently what children know, how they learn and how they are taught (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). Vygotsky’s idea that a child’s cognitive and social competencies are a product of the social and cultural context resonates with the ecological model and the developmental niche. Furthermore, people and cultural processes mutually influence each other (Greenfield et al., 2003; Rogoff, 2003). Additionally, Vygotsky’s theory emphasizes that development proceeds most effectively through interactive teaching, therefore in instances of stressful situations children need to be taught how to redefine the world in moral and structural terms (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).
Discontinuities in the Physical and Social Context

With reference to the ecological model and the developmental niche, cultural environments evolve continuously over time to enable adaptation to the discontinuities occurring in the social and physical environment (Edwards et al., 2003). These discontinuities influence parental ethnotheories and subsequently the values parents’ instill in a child as well as the child’s day-to-day interactions and experiences with the parent. Thus, socialization and development are not fixed, but change according to the prevailing ecological conditions (Weisner & Gallimore, 1994). Discontinuities range from disruptions in the micro setting such as domestic violence and divorce, which affects individual families; to changes in the chronosystem such as community violence, war and displacement, which affects the whole community. These occurrences impact the psychology of the caregiver (induce stress and coping), the social, physical and cultural structures, the resources available to support parents and children, and subsequently the competencies children acquire. This review is focused on the extreme effects of displacement by war and the subsequent influence of this phenomenon on the competencies parents’ inculcate in their children.

Statistics provided by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), specifically looking at refugee families being resettled in the U.S. indicate that in the past five years about 74,000 people have been resettled annually in different states around the country. Some of these annual numbers include people from African countries (origins of refugees have been changing over the years due to changing zones of conflict around the world) and a large number are children and women, as often men are either in the frontline,
persecuted or killed. Although these numbers have declined from about 100,000 people being resettled annually in the 1990s, the U.S. remains one of the leading resettlement countries in the west (Jeffreys & Martin, 2008). Unlike immigrants most refugees are forced to leave their homelands with little planning, without their belongings and many suffer forms of persecution, degradation and a violation of their rights.

**Stress and Coping with Discontinuities**

Studies of major and minor stressors (Davies, 1999; Power 2004) point out that various factors may protect and enhance the developmental process or, may increase the risk of compromised developmental outcomes. Factors such as the individual qualities of the child, parental and familial as well as social and environmental factors either protect or place the child at risk. Child characteristics such as temperament, positive self-esteem, internal locus of control, intelligence, age and developmental level often buffer the child’s resilience as these factors increase the child’s ability to appraise, interpret and cope with distressing events. Parental support, responsiveness, appropriate expectations of the child’s behavior and an authoritative parenting style help children cope with the potentially stressful event. While the community can serve as a protective factor by providing children and parents the support they need, it can also hamper parents’ ability to protect their children. For instance, if violence is prevalent, parents are unable to ensure their children’s safety and may be overwhelmed, distressed, and hence unable to take care of their children adequately.

According to the transactional stress theory (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004) the way adults and children respond to stress is determined by their appraisal of the situation.
The main idea of this theory is that stress is not inherent in the environment or in the person; rather it is as a result of the ongoing transaction. An individual’s appraisal of the situation and the coping processes determine the outcome of the stress process. People often undertake a primary and secondary appraisal of the situation. In the primary appraisal, the individual assesses the events as harmful, threatening or challenging, while in the secondary appraisal he or she considers the available resources and options for coping with the situation. Examples of resources are social support, self-efficacy beliefs, secure attachment, problem solving abilities and locus of control. Thus, if the individual sees the situation as changeable and believes in their own resources to change it, problem focused coping is used. However, in some instances, individuals use emotion focused coping to regulate the accompanying emotions. The coping activities are sometimes directed in changing the self, as a self-protective measure, and at other times changing the outer world. This theory also suggests that age determines the coping process, as there is an increase in resources as one grows older, and hence an increase in outward-directed activities to improve one’s situation especially in childhood and adolescences, with a plateau in middle adulthood and a tendency to strive to change the self in late adulthood.

**Psychology of the Caregiver and Discontinuities**

In stressful situations, parents’ beliefs about their children and about child competence as well as other attributes are probably altered due to the stress and losses parents experience, whereby their main focus becomes protecting themselves and their children (Igreja, 2003; Super & Harkness, 1986). Similarly, according to Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny and Pardo (1992), stressful events often pose a threat to development
both directly, for instance causing trauma, and indirectly, through how parents and caregivers mediate the effects of the stressful event as they help children cope. For a child to develop and become a competent person in her respective community, she needs to be rooted in the basic skills of life necessary in that community. Thus for a child to fit into the prescribed roles such as student, friend, or family member, she has to become socially competent. This demands that children know who they are, possess a secure and positive sense of identity, learn, and understand how people in their community communicate with one another. Besides social competence, children need experiences that promote their cognitive development (Davies, 1999; Garbarino et al., 1992; Power, 2004).

However, exposure to war or violence makes it increasingly difficult for children to acquire social and cognitive competencies. This is due to their community being significantly altered, and hence parents’ being challenged or unable to transmit their respective cultural values and practices within a social and cultural context in which these values and practices are functional and reinforced. War and displacement by war brings social economic and political disruption that can threaten optimal child development, parenting and childrearing. War also leads to a shift in the range of roles children take on, for instance displacing the role of student with soldier, or assuming parental roles (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996). On the contrary, Macksoud, Aber and Cohn, (1996) point out that little attention has been given to some of the positive adaptations some children make during war. These are prosocial behaviors such as helping family members, friends, and other members of the community as well as developing the ability to regulate the self over time to pursue important but difficult goals. These authors posit that in their study of
Kuwaiti children after the Iraqi invasion of their country in 1990, it was vital to focus on both negative and positive psychosocial outcomes, as this was beneficial in assessing children and in the intervention process.

Research (Davies, 1999; Garbarino et al., 1992; Groves, 2002; Power, 2004; Macksoud et al., 1996) has shown that in communities or countries plagued by chronic violence, parents and other adults are crucial in determining how children cope with the stress associated with war, displacement, civil disturbance, or endemic community violence. Parents are the first resource for children when they are afraid thus, when parents are able to offer a model of calm, love and positive determination, successful adaptation and resilience in children is cultivated. Resilient children are also able to seek help from other adults in the community. This resilience carries over to when children and families face the challenges of resettlement in a foreign country (Kaplan, 2009; Shaw, 2003). However, when parents decompensate and panic, children suffer and are placed at increased psychological risk. This may be due to impairment in the parents’ ability to provide care and buffer the experience for them and in some instances due to children modeling their parent’s distress. Groves (2002) also points out that children handle stressful situations better when they are with their parents, however when exposed to violence many parents underestimate the effectiveness of their relationships with their children, feel guilty, and have a sense of hopelessness as they doubt their ability to help their children. For example, in a study of Iraqi children after the Gulf War in 1991, many children reported that they could not talk to their parents because their parents got upset
and often told them to forget and put what they had experienced behind them, thus leaving the children alone with their grief (Dyregrov, Gjestad & Raundalen, 2002).

Furthermore, when parents are exposed to violence, or war and displacement their functioning and family relationships may be negatively impacted if they develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or become depressed. Studies of adult refugees (Almqvist & Broberg, 2003; Kaplan, 2009; Westermeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996), point out the high incidence of major depression amongst adults who have been exposed to violence and war. Consequently, parents are unable to care for, nurture and be emotionally supportive to their children. Depressed mothers are generally described as exhibiting anger, sadness, hopelessness, and are focused on their own sorrow. These psychological challenges experienced by refugee mothers negatively impact their children’s emotional competence. A child who grows up with a depressed mother or caregiver often absorbs the explicit and implicit coaching about emotions and models the negative affect expressed. The child often exhibits similar emotions and tends to express more anger and aggression, and have difficulty with peer interactions compared to their peers reared by non-depressed mothers (Denham, 1998).

According to Kaplan, (2009) symptoms of stress, depression and PTSD in refugee parents are often correlated with similar symptoms in children, which often disrupt the attachment process. Attachment is fundamental in a child’s development as it enables the acquisition of competencies such as self-regulation of emotions and behavior, expressive and receptive communication, and the formation of stable schemas of self, others and the world. Thus, when a parent or caregiver lacks attunement, is unable to protect and nurture
a child, they may also be more likely to be unpredictable, and hence may constitute a
danger to their child, these are special risks for refugee children (Cichetti & Lynch, 1995,
as cited in Kaplan, 2009). For instance, some of the tendencies seen in parents who
became refugees during World War II, and that impacted their children’s emotional
development were: distrust of the outside world, expecting the children to compensate
them for their losses, and assigning names and roles of lost relatives to their children
(Westermeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996). Additionally, a secure early attachment with the
primary caregiver leads to positive early experiences, because it promotes ego resilience
and enables a child to recover from and cope with stress and trauma. Secure attachment
helps the child endure extreme pressure and master the stress rather than retreat from it
(Davies, 1999; Garbarino et al., 1992). Macksoud et al. (1996) further emphasize that
children who had secure attachment relationships prior to their war-related experiences
are less likely to develop depression, anxiety, aggression and other psychological
difficulties or negative behaviors.

**Parental Ethnotheories and Discontinuities**

According to Igreja (2003), traumatic events like war disrupt people’s cultural and
historical institutions, and systems of values and norms. Igreja gives an example of how
in some African societies children’s development is often regulated by ancestral
knowledge, which is attentively policed and monitored by a community’s elders.
However, due to the disruption of communities by war, discontinuities occur in the
community’s cultural practices and institutions that knit the social fabric, and
subsequently in the values, skills and abilities children acquire. Igreja further adds that this area of study has received little attention by researchers.

In his study, Igreja (2003) focuses on the practice of *madzawde*, a practice that is rooted in a deep cultural knowledge and understanding of a child’s development, and comprises knowledge that has been accumulated and transmitted over many generations. Madzawde was a ceremony practiced in western Mozambique held when a child was two years old. It involved a midwife replaying the birthing process, giving oral testimony of the important events that had occurred in the child’s life, and describing certain obligations parents are expected to fulfill. After the ceremony, the child was weaned and another age period began. This practice regulated the infant-mother relationship in the first two years of a child’s life, and was also a mechanism for normalizing relationships between the child, family and the community and served different functions respectively. For the child the function was to determine the role and place of the child within society, to establish a strong relationship with the mother and to protect the child against early weaning, disease and malnutrition. For the mother, the practice protected against short birth intervals, the subsequent risk of physical and emotional saturation and aging, and ensured the mother was respected in the community. For the community *madzawde* promoted the community’s cohesion by providing a common way of living and expression of social responsibility.

The civil war in Mozambique disrupted this practice and circumstances forced people to abandon it, a few continued to practice but had to change some of the rules, as it was not possible to fulfill all the obligations. For instance, some of the women
performed *madzawde* three to seven months after the child was born compared with the previous duration of two years. Even after the war, the changes made were maintained with differences from one family to another, as well as differences in how the traditional healers described its structure. This led to community members questioning the validity and effectiveness of the practice.

A study of Kosovar mothers with children between two and three years of age (Almqvist & Broberg, 2003) highlights a shift in mothers’ concepts of their children and concepts of their children’s competence. The mothers were exposed to brutal violence and consequently traumatized and suffered PTSD, leading to negative changes in the parent-child relationship. The mothers described how they made themselves unavailable to their children both emotionally and behaviorally, spent most of their time in bed and left the care of their children to other relatives. The mothers described their children as having developed normally prior to the war and felt that their children’s psychological wellbeing and development had changed for the worse after their escape from Kosovar. The mothers’ internal representations of self were damaged as they saw themselves as destroyed and bereaved of all emotional assets with nothing to offer their children. One mother saw her child as injured or dead and as a dangerous tormentor, thus indicating a negative internal representation of the child. The mothers also reported their children as hostile and violent towards children and adults, and often displayed clinging behavior – that is heightened attachment behavior aroused by the traumatic events. The mothers were unable to respond to their children due to losing their ability to see themselves as protective parents and due to the children’s behavior triggering their posttraumatic
symptoms such as flashback memories of their trauma. Thus, the war affected the mothers’ functioning, as a result affected their relationship with their children, and impaired their ability to parent.

In a study of family relationships in post-war Lebanon, Suad (2003) points out how under conditions of turmoil, social rules are destabilized, the expected is less certain possibilities that were not as visible become visible, and often gendered and aged relationships within patriarchal families change (p. 271). Suad emphasizes that exposure to long-term violence leads to shifts that weaken, strengthen or changes family relationships. In looking at the mother-child relationships, Suad noted that the war influenced mother’s concept of the possibility and acceptability of adoption as children became more precious. Previously adoption was considered unacceptable because of the belief that God had to give a mother a child of her own blood. Due to the dangers around them mothers talked to their children more and taught them the social dangers prevalent in their community. Mothers also seemed to lose patience with their children quicker and yelled and hit the children more often when they disobeyed. Children are reported to have become rebellious, failed to respect their parents and became independent of their parents who often could not provide for them. Mothers are also described as desiring fewer children as children became too demanding.

A study of 108 Palestinian children between 11 and 12 years of age living in the Gaza strip during the political conflict of the 1993 Intifada (Punamaki et al., 1997) found a disruption of the traditional parent-child relations and family hierarchy. The influence of political parties increased as children perceived the extended family as unable to offer
protection. The political situation led to children becoming leaders of political strikes, underground cells and consequently, military targets. This led to a decline in children obeying their elders and challenging their parents’ authority. Furthermore, there was an increase of the risk of poor and negative parenting. The more families were exposed to traumatic events; the more parents were strict, disciplining, rejecting, and hostile. However, parents disciplined or restricted girls more and rejected or expressed hostility towards boys. Fathers were more rejecting and hostile towards boys who were politically passive compared to boys who were politically active. Parents’ responses were attributed to being exhausted by the conditions of war and the possibility that they applied more strict discipline because of their worry about their children’s safety. Nonetheless, despite the level of traumatic events affectionate parenting, intimacy and love remained intact, did not vary according to the child’s gender or political activity, which according to this study revealed the strong family ties and affiliations in Palestinian Arab society.

Weine et al. (2004) posit that violence, loss, displacement and migration often lead to adverse changes in multiple dimensions of family life. However, in a bid to cope with their current circumstances families adapt different ways of managing the changes. Their study of displaced Bosnian refugee families living in Chicago, reported that changes occurred in several realms of family life, including; family roles and obligations, memories and communications, relationships with other family members and connections with their ethnic community and country of origin. In trying to cope with these changes, families altered some of their prior practices in each of the above realms. For instance, grandparents played a parenting role, parents talked to their children more and children
were allowed to express their feelings. Parents taught the children their history and ensured they did not lose their identity.

**Summary**

Development occurs within a cultural context, with culture playing the vital role of being an “organizer” or source of meaning. Thus, culture – that is “the mass of learned behavior passing through generations” is transmitted to every successive generation mainly through parents (Kağıtçibaşı, 1996, p.10). This view is reflected in several theories, which emphasize that families are situated in different cultural environments and often adapt the social and psychological mechanisms required to function in their specific cultural context, which often leads to variability across cultures (Rogoff, 2003).

Nonetheless, “culture is not static; it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 51). This mirrors some of the ideas propounded in this review that different cultural communities practice and transmit across generations the values, beliefs and tools upheld by their people. However, individuals are not just passive receptacles of culture; they impact the practices and values through interaction with other people in the different systems and are also impacted by events occurring in social and physical contexts. Thus, in any community parents’ conception of childhood, conception of the competencies required to be successful, and the ways in which they inculcate these competencies will definitely be informed by their culture and the collective wisdom inherited from their predecessors (Rosenthal & Roer-Stier, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These ideas are not static and
go through some transformations as parents’ strive to adapt to the demands of the prevailing social, economic and political conditions. This notion is reflected in the theoretical frameworks propounded by the ecological model and the developmental niche. Both argue that children and families do not live in a social vacuum, but live in, and are influenced by the prevalent different systems that comprise their physical, economic, political, social and cultural environments. They both also emphasize that the family is fundamental in socializing and guiding children towards becoming competent and productive members of their community. Furthermore, in most cultures, the mother is often the primary caregiver and even in communities where other relatives are involved in caregiving, they are often women. This study is therefore focusing on the mother-child relationship. Besides, when families experience displacement due to war, it is women and children who often have to flee as the men are often involved in the conflict.

The aforementioned quote further indicates the likelihood that discontinuities such as displacement by war impact parenting and consequently leads to adaptation and the need to transform some of the inherited competencies used to navigate the social and physical context. Although the literature hints at the impact of the social and physical context, few studies address the question of what happens to the transmission of values, beliefs and practices across generations when war and displacement by war disrupts social and cultural institutions.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology of this study and consists of a description of narrative inquiry, research questions, and description of participants, data collection, data analysis procedures and ethical issues.

Narrative Methodology

Narrative research is a phenomenological approach that emphasizes that storytelling is integral to the understanding of lives and that it is ubiquitous, thus making narratives worthy of inquiry. Through storytelling, people are able to explain and narrate in their own words and through language, their personal and social experiences, which are their “internal and external” lived experience. Although this methodology may not conclusively explain the existence of social phenomena, it sheds light on how the social world affects people’s lives and the meanings they construct to make sense of their worlds. Storytelling is used daily to communicate, describe, and explain events, actions, motivations and feelings and is therefore a natural part of life that allows narrative research to capture a normal form of data familiar to most individuals. For participants in a study, telling their stories may make them feel heard and that their stories are important, it also enables participants to process and understand some of their life experiences often providing healing and emancipation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2005; Moen, 2006; Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, & Tipping, 2002; Riessman, 1993;
Narrative studies provide a greater understanding of how the social world functions even amid discontinuities and leads to a vivid and privileged reconstruction of the participants experience. These aspects point to the strength of using this methodology in this study as it relies on the words of the refugee mothers and provides a forum for them to narrate their experiences in a familiar manner.

Through using specified themes or topics of interest, these can be specific experiences connected to historical or social events or a period of time in life, a researcher provides a framework for the study, and guides the narrator or interviewee in their storytelling. Although the narrator may tell the story in a manner judged to be of interest to the interviewer, often an interviewee determines if they keep to the topic suggested; and how they interpret it or whether they are inclined to narrating what they presume to be of interest to themselves. This aspect enabled the Liberian mothers to have ownership over the story shared for it was what they considered important about their experience of dislocation and as mothers.Narrated life stories are a construction of experiences that encompass past events, future expectations, and simultaneously are a product of the narrator’s present circumstances. It also represents how the narrator perceives his or her experiences today, that is events often cannot be explained except in retrospect (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Moen, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Sandelowski, 1991). Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasize that these three structures of time, namely past, present and future are critical dimensions of human experience. An event has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future, and thus a person’s
past often informs their present and guides their future, hence an indication of the continuity of life across time. This narrative approach is therefore suitable in this study as the refugee mothers’ past experiences cannot be separated from their present and their future, as well as their children’s present and future experiences. The refugee mothers past experiences are important, meaningful and part of their evolving identity as mothers living in changing social and physical contexts.

A recurrent critique of the narrative approach is the question about the truthfulness of the narratives participants share; especially due to the likelihood that the story may change depending on who is being told the story and at what point in the participant’s life it is being told. Due to its retrospective nature, narratives are also likely to be interpretations as opposed to a narration of facts. Nonetheless, a fundamental assertion of narrative research is that there is no static and everlasting truth, rather there are varying subjective positions from which we experience and interpret our lives. Furthermore, the narrative standards of truth differ from empirical standards as the focus in narrative studies is how experience is given meaning (Becker, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Moen, 2006; Riessman, 1993; Sandelowski, 1991).

**Research Focus**

This study used a narrative approach, specifically, personal accounts, which provides a method for understanding and eliciting the experiences of refugee, mothers from Liberia as they raised their children during a period of displacement from their homes and communities. This approach provided the mothers an opportunity to tell their stories and narrate their experiences. Most studies carried out on refugees often fail to
give African refugees a voice and an opportunity to tell their story from their own perspective. Hence, their input is often missing in the process of designing and tailoring programs serving them and their children.

**Research Questions**

The broad questions this study addressed are:

- What were the mothers’ beliefs about childhood prior to the war?
- What were the mothers’ beliefs about the qualities of a competent child before the war?
- What were the mothers’ beliefs about childhood when they were displaced by war?
- What were the mothers’ beliefs about the qualities of a competent child when they were displaced by the war?
- How did the prevailing sociocultural and physical contexts (living in a refugee camp) impact the mothers’ beliefs and practices and subsequently their childrearing goals?
- What were women’s’ experience of being mothers while living in a refugee camp?
- How did displacement by war influence the women as mothers?

**Research Setting**

**Proposed Setting**

This study took place in a Midwestern state in the United States, which each year according to an annual flow report on refugees and asylees released by the Department of
Homeland Security, is one of the top ten states in the country that receives a significant number of the refugees resettling in the U.S. Between 2005 and 2008, this state received 3% to 4% of the total number of refugees that arrived in the country – that is, between 1,500 to 2,500 people each year. In line with the national refugee trends during this period, majority of the people were from Africa, and a large number were school age children (Martin & Hoefer, 2009).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 12.8 million people residing in the respective state with about 80,000 listed as having Sub-Saharan Africa ancestry. The statistics do not indicate how many people have come to the U.S. as refugees; neither does the report specifically indicate the countries of origin of the foreign-born population. However, with regard to children between birth and five years old, the report shows that 22.7% speak a language other than English, with over half of this number speaking Spanish and the rest speaking other languages.

All four participants were initially resettled in two of the gateway neighborhoods in a large Midwestern city. However, two participants moved to different neighborhoods in search of affordable housing. These neighborhoods described as the most diverse in the country with over 80 languages spoken has residents from all over the world. Both neighborhoods have been receiving immigrants since the mid1800s, with one of the neighborhoods reportedly having the highest percentage of foreign-born people in the city – 48% of the residents are foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).
Study Participants

Creswell (2005) and Rossman and Rallis (2003) emphasize that in order for qualitative researchers to get rich in-depth data it is necessary to limit the number of research participants. A large number of participants can become unwieldy and diminish the ability of the researcher to present the complexity of the information shared by participants. These authors also point out that the nature of narrative studies is such that it requires a limited number of participants because of the need to give detailed accounts of the individuals’ experiences. Furthermore, considerable time is often required to collect and analyze qualitative data, and every added individual to the study lengthens the time and cost required to conduct the research study.

Therefore, this study included four Liberian refugee mothers from West Africa, displaced by war and who subsequently lived and raised their children in refugee camps. Due to the in-depth nature of phenomenological interviews, and the fact that life stories can independently reveal significant information about their lives and provide insight into the human experience of war and displacement, a small number of participants were sufficient for this study. Through intensive interviews, a rich understanding and insight into the experiences of four Liberian refugee mothers raising their children in refugee camps and subsequently moving to the U.S. was captured (Creswell, 2005; Pavlish, 2007; Seidman, 1998).

This study used a purposeful sampling method to recruit participants, that is participants were intentionally selected who fit the criterion of this study and who could provide an understanding of their experience. A critical sampling strategy was used to
identify Liberian mothers who were representative of their group and whose experiences can illustrate the experience of being mothers raising children during a period of displacement and living in a refugee camp. Critical sampling is one of the strategies of the purposeful sampling method that researchers use before they begin data collection. The goal of critical sampling is to select participants who represent the central phenomenon of interest, and from whom the researcher can learn more about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Therefore, this study included Liberian women who: (1) were displaced by war and lived in a refugee camp for at least three years; (2) were between the age of 20 and 30 years during the time they lived in a refugee camp; (3) were either married or unmarried; (4) spoke English sufficiently to participate in the study interview; and (5) had at least one child of either gender between the age of five and eight years of age, who lived with the mother at the time the family was living in the refugee camp, lived with her throughout the period of time she was living in the camp, immigrated with the mother to the U.S and lives with the mother in the U.S. Although the study does not assess child outcomes, but rather women’s experiences of motherhood, it was necessary that the child, who is the point of reference in the narrative interviews, currently live with the mother here in the U.S. The aim was to decrease the likelihood of emotional distress that may occur if the child was deceased or was not resettled with the mother. This study recruited only Liberian mothers as amongst the African refugee communities resettled in the U.S. they fit the criteria of the study (see Appendix B for screening protocol).
Description of Participants

Due to confidentiality, pseudonyms are used. All the pseudonyms are in the Kissi language, one of the languages spoken by two participants. The names are words that mean the following:

Bendo - Sister
Nde - Mother
Ndelefu - Sister-in-law
Chuando - Daughter

This researcher selected these names for a number of reasons; firstly, each participant emphasized how losing their families and the supportive relationships was the biggest loss she had to cope with, a loss the four women are still mourning even now. Secondly, each individual narrative seemed to lean towards a relationship that was central to their experience of loss. Bendo and Chuando spoke about the lack of nurturing relationships they previously enjoyed, Nde’s narrative centers on being a mother, while Ndelefu’s story addresses the suffering she experienced due to abuse from her in-laws. Thirdly, in most African cultures it is common to use these names as terms of endearment and respect with friends and neighbors with whom one has a close relationship. Lastly, these women’s experiences are probably similar to what numerous other women displaced by war have gone through and are going through as conflict continues to erupt in different parts of the world. Thus, the use of universal names is deliberate as these women could be anyone’s sister, mother, daughter or sister-in-law.
The following are brief demographic descriptions of the participants (see Table 1). All four women explained they were not certain about their birth dates as well as the precise years or months when some of the events in their lives occurred. Chapter Four of this study has detailed narrative descriptions of each participant.

Table 1: Participants’ Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Bendo</th>
<th>Nde</th>
<th>Ndelefu</th>
<th>Chuando</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic group</td>
<td>Kissi</td>
<td>Vai</td>
<td>Kissi &amp; Gbandi</td>
<td>Gio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at time of interview</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age when departed Liberia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of target child when departed Liberia</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Pregnant</td>
<td>Born in Ivory Coast/2.5 when go to camp</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of target child</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Boy &amp; Girl</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple displacement</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Sierra Leone &amp; Guinea</td>
<td>Sierra Leone-Guinea-Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Ghana &amp; Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years lived in Refugee Camp(s)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14 displaced (2.5 of these in a camp)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of Departure from Liberia to country of refuge</td>
<td>Walked</td>
<td>Gun boat &amp; bus</td>
<td>Bus/truck</td>
<td>Boat &amp; bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status (during displacement)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married/Separated</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status at time of interview</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year arrived in U.S.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Bendo** is a Kissi, in her mid-thirties and have two sons and a daughter. She was about 20 years of age when she had to flee from Liberia with her three young children. Bendo was not married at the time but betrothed to the father of her children who lived in the city, while she still lived at home with her parents in a rural town. She is the most educated of all the participants as she was able to complete her high school education when living in the camp in Sierra Leone. She has also been taking classes at a community college here in the U.S. Bendo lived in the same camp in Sierra Leone for nine years until 2009 when she was resettled in the U.S. along with her three children and her siblings.

**Nde** is a Vai and Muslim in her early forties who has four children, two girls and two boys all born in the refugee camps. She was 18 years old when she fled to Sierra Leone with her husband where they lived for seven years, and where two of their older children were born. When civil war erupted in Sierra Leone, they fled to Guinea, where two of their younger children were born. They lived in Guinea for five years until 2005 when the whole family resettled in the U.S. Nde attended elementary school for a few years, and was the only participant who had her husband with her throughout the time she lived in the camps.

**Ndelefu** is in her early forties and her mother is Kissi and her father was Gbandi, she attended elementary school for a few years, and was 17 years old when she fled to Sierra Leone with the sisters of the man she was betrothed to at the time. She has four children, three sons and a daughter. One was born before the war and lives with her mother in Liberia, two were born in Ivory Coast, and one was born in the U.S. Ndelefu got married during the wartime. She and her husband had a tumultuous relationship with
during the time they lived in the camps and she was often alone fending for herself and her children. The family resettled in 2004. At the time of this study, Ndelefu was separated from her husband and had joint custody of their children.

**Chuando** is Gio and the youngest of the participants, about 30 years old, and was about 17 when she fled to Ghana with her young child. She was still attending elementary school when the war started. She has three children, two girls and a boy. The son was born at home before the war and Chuando was betrothed to his father. The other two children were born in Ghana and Guinea respectively. Both men left even before the children were born and Chuando took care of all her children by herself. They resettled in the U.S. in 2009, and at the time of this study, Chuando was taking classes at a community college.

**Criteria for Exclusion**

This researcher is interested in how mothers experienced their caregiving role and thus excluded fathers. Although different family members in different communities participate in and play different roles in the caregiving and socialization process of children, mothers across cultures are often the primary caregiver entrusted with the responsibility of socializing her offspring especially in the early years (Nsamenang, 1992; Rogoff, 2003; Super & Harkness, 1986). In the majority of African communities, young children spend most of their time with their mothers or other female caregivers and rarely with their fathers until they are ready to start learning gender specific roles (Nsamenang, 1992; Nwoye, 2006). Furthermore, war disrupts families and often results in women
fleeing with the younger children and being the sole caregivers during this displacement period (UNHCR, 2001-2009).

This researcher only recruited women who were mothers, either married or unmarried, and were living with and raising a child or children during the period of time they lived in a refugee camp. However, only women who had at least one child between the ages of five and eight years at the time they were living in the refugee camp were included. This study also excluded any mothers who did not speak English due to the costs this researcher would incur in paying for interpretation and translation of the interview materials. Furthermore, conducting the interviews through an interpreter may have resulted in some of the information being altered due to the involvement of a third party translating the interview questions and participants responses.

**Data Collection**

In narrative inquiry, different sources of data can be used such as: interviews, journal records, newsletters, photographs, letters written by the participant, stories about the individual from family members, or field notes from informal conversations with participants. However, this research approach emphasizes the importance of the first-person account, gained through the oral narration of the participants’ experience. Thus, this researcher conducted unstructured interviews with the recruited participants. This approach elicited their stories and provided access to the context of their experiences, which in turn provided a way to understand the meaning of those experiences. In line with the nature of narrative research, the interview protocol followed a chronology of events to guide the participants’ narration and to enable the researcher to document the
participants’ stories sequentially. It began with their childhood, continued on to their stories of motherhood, and their descriptions of the circumstances that made their experience of motherhood different from their own mothers’ experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2005; Seidman, 1998). However, given that people narrate stories in a personal and culturally coherent and plausible manner, the interview protocol served as a framework to ensure that all the significant areas of the topic were addressed and was not a rigid format interviewees had to follow (Riessman, 1987; Sandelowski, 1991).

In phenomenological studies, the purpose is to study and honor the life experiences of participants and this is reportedly difficult to do in one interview; thus, a series of in-depth, intensive and iterative interviews is required. Phenomenological interviewing serves the purpose of exploring and gathering narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and is a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with the interviewee about the meaning of his or her experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

This study used an open-ended model of in-depth interviewing that involves conducting three interviews with each participant. This model also recommends the researcher interview between three and five participants due to the amount of data that the multiple interviews yield. According to Seidman (1998) this interviewing process requires the researcher to remain true to the structure and goals of each interview and maintain a balance between providing enough openness for the participant to tell their
story and enough focus to ensure the participant stays within the topic of interest. The three iterative interview series are described as follows:

**Interview One: Focused Life History**

The first interview is the focused life history in which the researcher asks the participant to put her experience in context by narrating as much as possible about her life up to the present time in light of the topic. Hence, this interview served the purpose of providing background information about the mothers’ pre-war life experiences. It focused on their childhood, including; how they were raised and the competencies, values and behaviors that were considered important as they were growing up. The social networks and structures that existed in their ethnic group, how their mothers taught and instructed them, the qualities of a well brought up child in their ethnic group and any gender differences in childrearing. In this interview, the women were also asked about becoming mothers and their descriptions of motherhood prior to the displacement period.

This interview served to provide a description of the participants’ developmental niche this is the social, cultural belief system, practices, and physical context of development of their respective ethnic groups.

**Interview Two: The Details of Experience**

The second interview focuses on the specific details of the participants’ experience in the topic area of the study. Participants are asked to reconstruct the details of their experience and may be asked to give specific examples. This second interview is meant to link the past experience to the present experience; in this study, it served the purpose of linking the mothers’ socialization process to their experience of being mothers.
raising children in a refugee camp. Since the topic of this study is on mothers’ beliefs about childhood and the competencies they desired in their children, mothers were asked to narrate how they raised their children, the behaviors, skills and values they instilled in them, the tasks they expected them to perform and the qualities of a well brought up child. Mothers were also asked to describe some of the ways they taught their children these values, and if there were any gender differences in the values, skills and behaviors they instilled in their children. This interview in essence provided a glimpse of the developmental niche of the participants’ children.

**Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning of their Experience**

In the third interview, participants are asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience and to integrate the previous two interviews. Participants are asked to look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to where they are. In the third interview, the focus is on the participants’ understanding of their experience. However, throughout the interview process participants make meaning of their experience as they both reconstruct the details of their experience and select which events from their past to share.

In this interview, the participants’ were asked to reflect on how they were raised and how they raised their children and their experience of motherhood given the social, physical and cultural structure in the refugee camp. This enabled the researcher to elicit the similarities or differences between how the mothers were raised and how they raised their children, some of the ways their displacement impacted how they raised their children, as well as some of their experiences of being mothers whilst living in a refugee
camp. This interview also served to elicit how the war might have influenced the mothers’ practices and views about motherhood (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

To accomplish the purpose of each of the interviews, a 90-minute format is suggested. A shorter interview is considered inadequate for eliciting rich data and an open-ended time period can produce undue anxiety. In addition, it is recommended that the interviewer space the three interviews at least three days to a week apart as this allows sufficient time for the participant to mull over the previous interview but not too long as to lose the connection between them. This time period also enables the researcher to work with participants for a two-three week period and reduces the possibility of other factors affecting the quality of the interviews, for instance, the participant may be sick, distracted or having a bad day (Seidman, 1998).

Protocol

Stage One: Recruitment

Screening and recruitment of participants began after applying for and receiving approval from the Loyola University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. This researcher observed the appropriate process of informed consent.

The first two participants were recruited through social circles, as the resettlement agency that was supposed to assist with recruitment was unable to follow through with their commitment. While the other two participants were recruited through a snowballing approach whereby this researcher, at the end of the third interview with the first participant, requested she identify other Liberian mothers in the community who might be interested in participating in the study. The first participant was free to explain to them
in as much detail as she wanted about the study and about the interviewing process (see Appendix D for recruitment flyer). She also explained to them that they had the option to contact this researcher directly or could choose to have this researcher contact them. Thus, this researcher contacted only the women who consented and gave the first participant (referring them) the go ahead to provide this researcher with their names and contact information (see Appendix E for recruitment phone call script).

The initial phone call served to set a date to meet with the mothers personally for the purpose of screening the participants and ensuring that they fit the criteria of the study. At the initial meeting, a verbal description of the study was provided and the women asked if they are comfortable and available to participate in the one to three hour, three part series of interviews conducted in English. The women were also told that they would receive a $20.00 gift card honorarium at the beginning of each of the three interviews in recognition of the value of their time and willingness to share their experiences with this researcher. Participants were told that all the interviews would be audio recorded. The women were given the option to either take a few days to think about it before scheduling the first interview or if they are certain about participating the first interview was conducted. All four participants expressed they were ready to be interviewed at the first meeting as they explained it was their day off from work and they were free the whole day. They also reiterated that the participant who had referred them had explained everything about the study to them and they felt comfortable proceeding. Initially, the plan was to schedule the first interview for a later date after the screening, and these steps were followed with the first participant. However, it took three months to
screen and conduct all three interviews with the first participant due to limited availability. Scheduling was challenging because participants worked in jobs where their shifts changed weekly.

Seidman (1998) explains that several variations to the spacing have been used with reasonable results, including conducting all three interviews on the same day. Seidman argues that there are no absolutes in the world of interviewing and the effects of following one procedure over another have not been studied, and thus the vital thing is to strive for a rational process that can be replicated and documented. He further states that it is preferable to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not to conduct one at all. Thus, this researcher made adjustments with the other three participants and conducted the screening and the first interview on the same day with participants’ consent, and conducted the second and third interview on the same day, thus reducing participants’ time commitment to the study.

Although the goal was to have five participants who complete all three interviews, the fifth participant opted out of the study during the first meeting. This researcher carried out the screening process, but after explaining the purpose of the study and content of the first interview, the participant expressed discomfort with disclosing personal information and explained she could not participate in the study. This participant was not contacted again. Due to time constraints and difficulty recruiting Liberian women willing to participate in the study, this researcher ended recruitment and used data collected from four participants.
Stage Two: Interviews

After screening and before beginning the first interview, participants were asked for their informed consent and informed of the length of the interview. As part of the consent process, participants provided written consent for this researcher to contact them two days after the interview to check on their wellbeing (see Appendix F for consent form). This researcher also requested to screen the participants using a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) checklist recommended by the National Center for PTSD, as an efficient self-reporting PTSD assessment tool. All participants agreed to be screened and only one had a few symptoms indicating her sadness. None of the participants met the criteria for PTSD, therefore, no one was excluded from the study based on their responses to the questionnaire (see Appendix G for PTSD checklist).

This researcher proceeded to explain the format of the interviews, that is, the three interview series and the focus of each interview. At the end of the first interview, the focus of the second and third interview was explained, and a second interview date tentatively scheduled based on the participant’s availability.

At the beginning of the second and third interview, this researcher briefly explained the focus and purpose of the study went through the informed consent process again to reiterate the participant’s rights. Each participant was informed about the focus of the two interviews and about the length of time, the process might take.

All four participants requested to meet in their homes as they explained they would be comfortable and would have privacy. Each interview lasted between one hour and two and a half hours. The researcher asked questions to guide each of the interviews,
not to impose a structure participants were expected to follow, but rather as a guideline for this researcher to ensure most of the aspects of their experiences were covered.

As part of ensuring their wellbeing this researcher called participants two days after each interview, and no distress was reported.

**Incentives**

At the beginning of screening and each interview respectively, this researcher gave participants a $20 dollar visa gift card for participating in the research study. This came to a total of an honorarium of $80.00 by the end of the third interview. Participants were asked to sign a receipt to confirm they had received the gift card. In addition, the fifth participant who requested to stop the first interview and drop out of the study also received a $20.00 gift card.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher transcribed all the digitally recorded interviews. The files are dated and labeled with the assigned pseudonyms for each participant; time and place was also logged.

In qualitative studies, data analysis is often shaped by both the genre guiding the study and the purpose of the study. As this is a phenomenological narrative study intent on describing Liberian mothers’ ethnotheories, experience of motherhood, and childrearing in contexts of displacement including refugee camps, this researcher used a thematic analysis approach to analyze and organize the participants’ narratives, by themes and vignettes. According to Riessman (1993), thematic analysis is a typical representational strategy in narrative analysis whereby a researcher looks for the common
thematic elements across the participants’ narratives and uses vignettes to describe each individual participant and their respective physical and social context. The vignettes serve to provide rich and thick descriptions of the participants and their settings and thus readers are able to draw parallels with other similar stories and to determine whether the findings are applicable to other similar experiences (Moen, 2006; Sandelowski, 1991). Seidman (1998) describes a similar method of sharing interview material, as he believes it is an effective way of opening up the interview material to analysis and interpretation. He recommends crafting a vignette or profile of the participant’s experience, and differentiates the two by describing a vignette as a shorter narrative that covers a limited aspect of the experience, while a profile is a more detailed and descriptive narrative of the experience. Seidman further explains that a profile in the words of the participant is the research product most consistent with the process of interviewing and allows the words to convey the person’s consciousness. Thus to give voice to the participants stories and to respect their individuality, each participants’ vignette is shared and written in the first person account in Chapter Four of this study.

Although Seidman (1998) and Creswell, (2005) emphasize the importance of respecting the participants’ narratives in order to preserve the meaning conveyed, both these authors feel the stories often lack a chronological order and a researcher should seek to reorganize the narratives. Creswell describes an approach he refers to as – “...restorying which is the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story, and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence...” (p. 480). Restorying involves the researcher coding the raw data by
identifying the key elements such as characters, settings, time, place, scene or plot, and he notes that this sequence is often missing or not logically developed when individuals are telling their story. Similarly, Seidman (1998) proposes that the profile needs to have a beginning, middle and an end, as well as some sense of conflict and resolution. However, Riessman (1987) points out the cultural differences in the way women and people generally tell their stories. In a study looking at how an Anglo and Puerto Rican woman describe their experiences with marital separation, Riessman highlights how the Anglo woman told her story in a linear and chronological order, whilst the Puerto Rican woman used an episodic structure (Sandelowski, 1991). Thus, in presenting the data in this study, the researcher has sought to uphold the manner and order in which the Liberian women told their stories. This was done in order to avoid misrepresentation and to capture the meaning inherent in the sequence the women use in narrating their stories (Becker, 1996).

With reference to themes, these mainly emerged from the interviews; although in Chapter Five, this researcher used the research questions to organize the data chronologically, beginning with a section on participants’ childhood, motherhood, experiences in the camp and ending with their reflections on their motherhood. Coding was done manually. This researcher read the transcripts and using different color highlighters marked the text and phrases that expressed an aspect of the participants’ childhood, motherhood, and experiences in the refugee camp that illustrated their challenges and strengths. These segments were collapsed into broad themes under the respective titles, which provided evidence for the analyst generated themes. Under these broad categories, subthemes emerged from the data based on the words participants used
to describe their experiences. In presenting these themes and sub-themes, this researcher sought to remain as descriptive as possible and included text from the participants’ narratives to support the themes.

Some of the researcher constructed themes were based on this study’s research questions and were initially used to code the data. However, due to the critique that a researcher’s view is a kind of imperialism through which the researcher’s meanings are privileged over the participants’ meanings (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), this researcher sought to provide a balanced analysis. Through letting the data guide the sub-themes and the sub-titles of each section because these are more salient in comparison to the researcher-constructed themes.

**Validating Findings**

According to Becker (1996), in qualitative research it is pertinent to address whether data is accurate, precise and the analysis broad in range as opposed to applying standards better suited to quantitative research, such as assessing for reliability and objectivity. Becker explains that, accuracy refers to how close data is to what is being talked about, being precise entails taking account of unanticipated matters that come up in the data, while broad analysis involves including knowledge about a wide range of matters relevant to the question of the study rather than a relatively few variables. Thus, this researcher used qualitative research standards to assess whether the data collected was accurate, precise, and the analysis broad. This process involved one of the dissertation committee members, Dr. Judith Wittner, with expertise in qualitative research reading one participants interview transcripts, to find the common emerging
themes as a way to check against this researcher’s themes. The purpose was to check how close the themes were to what was discussed in the interviews and the scope of the study. There was no specific criterion of selecting which participants’ transcripts to read, this researcher selected the interviewee with the longest interviews. This researcher and the committee member compared the themes they coded separately to ascertain the differences and similarities in the themes. There was agreement on the emerging themes, and the breadth of the themes thus there was no need to recode the data, and this researcher proceeded to code the rest of the interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

**Ethical and Validity Considerations**

In line with conforming to ethical standards and practice, this researcher conducted a process of informed consent from the participants prior to beginning the interview. The purpose of the study and the intended use of the information the participant shared was thoroughly explained to the women during recruitment and at the beginning of every interview. Participants were also informed of their right to participate in the study voluntarily and their right to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview process or thereafter without penalty.

The participants’ privacy and identity is protected by using pseudonyms that ensure they cannot be identified in any way. Names of the camps they lived in have also been omitted. The digital recordings, transcripts and any other interview material that could potentially identify the participants is not accessible to anyone and is locked in a filing cabinet in this researcher’s apartment.
Due to the participants being political refugees and the likelihood, some of the participants may have experienced psychological and emotional trauma, every effort was made not to ask questions that might be uncomfortable. However, due to this study using narrative inquiry with open-ended questions about motherhood, it allowed participants to share the information they felt comfortable talking about. Participants were informed that they had a choice to opt out of the study at any point in the interviewing process. A plan of care was also established at the beginning of the study, which included making appropriate referrals (see Appendix H for a list of counseling centers), and consulting with one of the dissertation committee member, Dr. Tracy Moran a clinical psychologist.

As a clinician with a Masters in Social Work and experience working with refugee children and families, including African refugee women, this researcher used her training and experience to remain vigilant throughout the interview to ensure the questions and process did not upset or distress the participants. When any participant exhibited physical or emotional responses that indicated distress and discomfort, this researcher stopped the interview and asked the participant if they wished to continue with the interview. Only one participant requested to stop during the first interview and the researcher stopped and talked with the participant about the plan of care. In doing so, the participant was given the following suggestions, with assistance from this researcher to: (1) call any of the agencies on the referral list to schedule an appointment and seek professional help at that time or later; (2) to contact any family member, friend or church community that she depends on for emotional support; or (3) opt out of the study without penalty. The participant chose to talk through her feelings with this researcher and
expressed that she would call one of her friends that she prays with later in the evening. This researcher had written consent from all the participants to call after two days, to check on their wellbeing. This researcher called the participant and she reassured this researcher she was fine and did not need any professional help. She also asked about continuing in the study and scheduled the next interview. None of the participants reported being upset by the memories of their experience.

This study used the three-interview structure, which enabled this researcher to attain rigor and validity as the interviews took place over a period of time and on different days. This gave participants’ time to reflect on previous interviews and subsequently they substantiated what they had previously shared, and thus met the interviewing goal of providing participants with an opportunity to understand and make meaning of their experience. Seidman (1998) points out that this not only ensures the authenticity of the participants’ stories but also goes a long way toward validity.

Data is reported without changing or altering the meaning of the information shared by participants. This researcher gave “voice” to the participants’ experiences by generating the themes that emerged from their stories and by presenting their narratives in a manner that maintains their authenticity.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Narrative Descriptions of Participants

One of the goals of this study is to give a voice to the participants; thus, this chapter consists of participants’ vignettes in the first person account. These vignettes are an introduction to the participants, presented in their own words to let the women speak for themselves as they describe their individual experiences as mothers and as women during a time of displacement from home and living in refugee camps. Their narratives illustrate various ways displacement by war affected their lives and are guided by two major themes, firstly loss of family and community, and secondly resilience. The first vignette focuses on the sub-theme of being alone due to loss of family and community. In telling their stories, each woman repeatedly talked about being alone, and how this greatly affected her life as a mother and a woman. However, the participants gave different accounts of the circumstances and time when they felt most alone, which are evident in their respective vignettes. These vignettes begin with a glimpse of their lives before the war, their flight from Liberia and subsequently life in a refugee camp in different neighboring countries. The second vignette focuses on the theme of resilience as the participants also talked about the multiple times they had to be strong, and had to act to protect themselves and their children thus showing their hardiness. All four vignettes revolve around the time the participants are living in refugee camps.
The next chapter focuses on thematic analysis of the interview data, and the above aforementioned themes that is being alone and resilience are described in detail and connected to other sub-themes.

Ndelefu’s Vignette on her Experience of Being Alone and her Resilience

Ndelefu was about 17 years old when the war started in 1990 and she had to flee to Sierra Leone, where she lived less than a year until the civil war started. In 1991, she fled to Guinea and when civil unrest broke out there, she fled to Ivory Coast in 1992. For ten years she lived with her husband and his family in a rural town in Ivory Coast in one of the “zone d’accueil des refugies”, (these were refugee zones established by the government). In 2002, the civil war engulfing the region spilled over into parts of Ivory Coast, and she had to flee to Abidjan with her two children. Ndelefu and her children sought refuge in a camp established by the UNHCR, and lived in the camp for two and a half years until they were granted asylum and resettled in the U.S.A in 2004.

Alone: “I had no family no one to talk for me”

I thought the war was going to only last for two weeks then it finish . . . . We were in Monrovia when they captured everywhere around us it was so hard you can’t get food, you can’t get anything. The last convoy that was leaving from Monrovia it was all we had, to get on a truck . . . going to Sierra Leone. We went to Sierra Leone for us to enter Lofa; they captured Lofa it was in June 1990, and we decided to stay in Sierra Leone. It was so hard because of the war, it was so hard we could not go down interior (of the country) so everybody said maybe they will just stay in Sierra Leone.
No contact because when the war came it destroyed everything that was in Liberia . . . it destroyed everything all communication everything, you don’t know where your family at and everybody fighting for their life. My father lost his life in the war, my father’s brother and all his grown children. They left because it was the last convoy everybody getting out on the truck going to Bo Mines they fall into an ambush, we lost a lot, a lot, a lot of people tch. So I didn’t want to go back to Liberia. So we were in Sierra Leone trying to build life, new life, . . . the Sierra Leone they are really, really nice people, I don’t know why war had to come there. They were really nice to us.

We lived by the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia, the people opened their doors for us we were living with different families, we were not paying rent our first time going over there, we were not paying rent, and they were giving us food. The people were really really nice to us the Sierra Leoneans. But when Charles Taylor (former president) enter, we had to leave, we left and we came to Guinea. It was 1991 we left because I don’t want to go through the war because when the war coming they are capturing a place it is not for fun, it is killing it is do or die. So the Sierra Leoneans were mad, they said they hosted us and we brought war to them so it was bad we had to leave.

I never had a family on that side (Sierra Leone). When the war came to Sierra Leone, we run from Sierra Leone and came to Guinea and how come I met my husband (now separated). When the Sierra Leone war cooled down some of the people I had left Liberia with said they going back to Sierra Leone because Guinea was so hard it’s a French country. When we were in Liberia we used to say this is our land, we born here die here, so we would call (each other) born here die here (laughs). You can’t wear
trouser, *(smiling)* most of our friends there they were wearing trouser . . . the Guinean president came over and said Liberian people they don’t have anything to wear they from war so they should leave us to wear pants and stuff. But we were not wearing pants. If you wear pants they beat you *(laughing)* they beat you *(laughing)* because of the law we were not supposed to wear pants *(laughing)* you can only wear dress and lappa. You tie lappa it drags *(laughing)* and we Liberians we used to wear skirts and pants. If there had not been a war I was not going to go out of Liberia. Most of the Liberians don’t usually travel but Ghanaians used to come into Liberia like the way you come to America, Nigerians, Sierra Leoneans, Guineans they come they make money. But we don’t care because we say it’s our country we born here we die here.

It’s like the problem was beginning with the Mandingo and another tribe they started fighting between them and my husband said they are leaving. He leaving *(Guinea)* with his family. So I said I can’t stay here I want to leave with you I can’t be here because my family and my friends that I came with *(to Guinea)* all of them had gone back to Sierra Leone. I can’t go back to Sierra Leone, because I don’t even know where they go at. So I said I want to follow you and he said okay, so I went with him.

It was the worst nightmare in Ivory Coast we lived there from 1992, and we were there till 2002, 10 years. We were having our own place because they never had a camp for us *(refugees)*, we were among the citizens, it was like you can start your own business. When I went there I was pregnant, and we had a little money we used to buy rice and sell it. But his family didn’t want to see me because I was a different person, he and myself we were holding on together doing better but I didn’t know this grudge his
father had, this grudge for me. His mother and father were not together he was like little when his father and mother separated and she left. But I didn’t know he had this deep grudge for me because I was not from Guinea and I was not Muslim and pregnant for that matter. He used to come and bring all kind of bad stuff (*witchcraft*) and I am not used to these thing ... I’m not used to this African stuff but my husband he know them so some time he can say “you don’t know what is going on” and I say “what’s that” he say “nothing”. He said one night his father came to him and said when your wife is ready to deliver you should call me so we can take her (to hospital) and he said okay.

I went to give birth my husband didn’t call his father, he didn’t call nobody we call one of my friend’s a different person we went together ... I didn’t take long before I deliver. In the morning, when my husband went home he told his father that I already deliver. He don’t believe it he said my husband was telling story he said I didn’t deliver. My husband said I take her to the hospital she gave birth to a boy he said, “Na Allah, it’s false”. He run, he don’t have slipper (shoes) he run from his house to the hospital to come and see. When he arrived he said to me “you made it” I said, “Ya I did it,” he said “where the baby then” I said “the baby there” ... “I said the baby there”. So he stand over the baby like I think an hour and 30 minutes or 30 minutes. When he get up my baby start jerking, he born healthy he born everything but he start jerking, he jerk, he jerk, he jerk, he jerk, and he said “I not satisfied with the baby here, what’s wrong, I not satisfied with the baby” he get up from there. I told the woman you know (my friend), my father-in-law say he not satisfied with the baby we took the baby and we rush the baby to the doctor before we reach the baby die, my baby die. When he bend down he get up he say
he not satisfied with the baby then the baby start jerking, he started jerking the baby start jerking . . . . We took the baby we run the baby to the doctor before we reach there the baby passed on tch. Before I reach (the doctor), my baby was dead.

I cried and cried and cried, and cried it was on a Friday I gave birth, Saturday he came I was sitting outside, I was home, I was sitting outside I was crying he said to me I want to say something to you. I thought because when somebody lose somebody and then you can say better thing to them. I was sitting, he said I want to say something to you I want you to stop crying, so I stopped . . . . Then he started making problem but I didn’t say anything because I was in pain. Then the next day he came and he said the clothes I bought for my baby I shouldn’t give them to anybody he will buy them, he wants to buy the baby clothes from me. I never had nobody that wanted to say anything for me, I never had no-o-o family, nobody it was like too much he started doing all kinds of things I told him I’m not giving you my baby clothes for you to buy, it was my own money I will keep it he started making problem, every day, every day. He will come and curse, and curse and curse, I just gave birth; he will curse and curse and curse and curse. When I went to church, the pastor got wind I gave birth and the child died. The pastor said to me that I should stay with them, his wife and children until I feel better. But that man, my father-in-law used to go over there (pastor’s house) and say . . . they should put me outside. He will be making problem cursing in the church, why are they taking care of me; I should go back to the house.

I don’t know where my family is, so my husband say my mother is in Guinea you want to go there, so I say yeah because I don’t know where my family at. So he asked his
brother to take me there, his younger brother, his brother took me there. I went there for nine months it’s like the village we went in, you can’t see a car unless you walk for 6 hours, that’s the village I spend nine months where my husband’s mother lives. She was nice to me. I make farm where I don’t make farm for my parents, I split wood, I did the things I don’t do for my people before because I had to do it. That nine months reached and then later he (husband) came for me and we came back to Ivory Coast. My husband had changed.

He and myself were doing the rice business (before I left to live with his mother in Guinea) we buy a sack of rice from the refugees and sell it and then we would have a little bit money that we can establish better life with . . . . When I went everything just change, he got together with his family and when I came back they were all caught up, his pa now you know. His brother married a Mandingo woman, and me I am not Mandingo that was my only nightmare. So (when I came back) I said so we can get something better I want you to give me some money so I can sell my own stuff. Something little so I can’t give you a hard time he said, “Since other people told you to ask me for money I don’t have no money”, and when he passed by me he said “Liberian children can steal o don’t keep anything inside, don’t keep any money in the house”. He took all the money and give it to his brother, money or rice everything you can think about because his brother marry a Mandingo. So they gave everything to her if I want to cook I have to ask her, I want anything I have to ask her, . . . that’s the life I was living, everything for that matter. By then I was already pregnant now with my oldest son. Giving birth to him was hard for me too; I was so slim I went to my pastor, just for
breakfast. My husband never used to give me any money he said he don’t get money. When he comes from the market, he will take the money to his brother before he come into the house. Then he bought a freezer for us to sell water you know we tie the water and sell it. So I used to tie the water and go sell it when I come from selling that’s the money I will use to buy soup (stew) because the rice already there. I buy soup I come and cook it for everybody to eat for the whole family so I have to cook, she (brother-in-law’s wife) the one that measure the rice. She was not selling she say she not able to do nothing. His father (father-in-law) say the doctor say, she already have six children and he say the doctor say she shouldn’t do no work, mmh na what she say O. I didn’t see the belly (pregnancy) just for me to suffer. She didn’t do no work. I had to wash their clothes, I had to cook and send their food there (to their house) for all of them . . . over there (community they lived in) people used to call me my husband’s and them (his family) slave. That’s what I can ask myself na why I have to be stupid like this (hisses) I was very stupid. When I say I’m tired even when I’m sick, I need to do it, I felt too used, he used me. When I say, I am washing clothes it’s not like America you can put it in the Laundromat, washing like 12 person clothes. So hard and the children (tearfully) I would start from in the morning from six o clock to eight o clock (at night). I am still washing, it’s just bending and bending and bending and bending it was so hard for me but I had to do it. If I don’t do it, it is a problem for me, a big problem.

He used to hit me, that man (father-in-law) he used to hit me, sometimes he will tell my husband because I speak Mandingo through them, he would say “Abola don’t take it from her, flog her”. Then my husband will beat me, anything I used to say his
father will come and say beat her, and then he (husband) will come beat me, every time he say “Abola” in Mandingo you say “Abola” then he will come there and beat me, his father used to beat me too. He used to say my only work I supposed to do is sleep beside my husband but not make decision in the house, that I get no decision in the house, I sleep, I cook, and I do the work, but not personal decisions for his family. The last fight him (father-in-law) and myself fight the last time it happened, my older son can still remember it, the last time it happened he say “eh, who food here?” (whose food is this?), I say “my husband knows don’t ask me any question give me chance I dish (serve) when I finish dishing (serving) if your food not plenty I will add some but I just started dishing don’t ask me”. It got him vexed o (angry), he started kicking the bowl, so he and myself started fighting on the corridor, the soldier men (police officers) came. He did not ask any question because he (father-in-law) was like old, then the soldier man started hitting me with the gun. So the other French people (Ivory Coast people) in the yard said that what you’re doing is not good you are supposed to ask questions. The French people in the yard explained to him the soldier (what had happened). They collected him and take him to the station (police); they collected my husband’s father and took him to the station. It was a piece of hell for me and I can ask myself question why did I allow this thing to happen to me, why, why.

I remember one Christmas, I said to my husband you and myself struggle a lot, I never have clothes to wear, you got something this Christmas to buy me clothes. He said (starts crying) “I told you once the clothes you want to wear you are not going to wear o, you better go and sell so you can come cook”, I never have clothes to wear I suffer. I ask
why this war came, when his parents finished using all the money, all his money they
spoil it, they spoil all his money and he came back to me. I was the suffering one now he
just left everything with me and I got the two children too. My only children are my only
family. I think the way he treating me I can’t run away and leave my children, my
children will be slave for them because I know how they can treat people, I know how the
Mandingo people can treat people, I didn’t want my children to suffer. Every day I used
to be praying, I want for this war to finish so I can go back to Liberia and look for my
family, I wish I can run away with my children.

Resilience: “I was strong and I’m always proud of myself”

The war broke up January 1; it was on New Year’s Day the war broke up in Ivory
Coast New Year’s Day 2002. We fled from the town we were living. I saved his brother’s
life (husband’s brother). I saved his life to go to Abidjan. When the war came to the town
they said no Liberians should travel we were just there, they were killing Liberians like
nobody’s business in Ivory Coast. I went to go to Abidjan (to buy a bus ticket for
Abidjan), a man saw me at the parking (bus station) he said, “Where are you going?” I
say, “I’m going to Abidjan” he said na one (only one), I said I got my two brothers, I
made my husband to be my brother, he never said nothing about it. He said “where your
brother?” I said, “my brother is here”, he said “I only able to carry one”. The man had a
big plantation na all the soldier people know him and when the war broke up he went on
the farm to get people out of his farm that were taking care of the farm so they can’t get
killed, so na the people he was taking to Abidjan when he met me. I went to the house
and I said to my husband “there is something we got to do to be safe because now it is not
easy we have to save one another life” and he say “what?” I said “one man met me to the parking (bus station) and then he said he want to take me but I said I got two brothers and I can’t go without them. So he say he want to take you, but behave like my brother”, he said, “okay” he pack his stuff. The man and the conductor (bus conductor) took him to safety he just say the man was on my farm he was working for me until the war came.

That’s what the man say to the army people that were killing the refugees (Liberian refugees) na how he managed to go through to Abidjan. Because Liberians not supposed to leave to go to Abidjan if you go, if you get on the bus you risk your life they going to kill you at San Pedro. But this man save him all the way to Abidjan nobody touch him he never pay anything. I who I supposed to leave; now I left behind with my two children.

Then his brother too we have to talk to another person for his brother to go, only me and my two children were still in that war everybody gone, people say you you stupid.

It was very difficult; it was like life and death. You had to choose between your life and your death and just move on. It was very difficult; you have to get on the bus . . . to Abidjan it is far it is like a whole day drive (from the town where they lived). They say the Liberians brought the war they were killing the Liberians on the road so even the drivers (bus) don’t want to take the Liberians because they fear if they take the Liberians they are going to take them out (of the bus) and kill them. So they used to refuse to take the Liberians. When I first tried to go to Abidjan they refused (bus driver) because I was Liberian they said they can’t carry me because if they carry me, they will kill my children and myself. So I went back, changed everything, and put my name and my husband name (on her identification papers). When they say “where you coming from?” I say, “I come
from Guinea”, “which tribe are you?” I say, “Mandingo”, and I could speak it, my husband’s language. That’s how I went and they (office where I got the identification papers) fix everything.

Nobody defend me I go with God the trust of God. I believe that God will carry me and He will walk me through. I got on the bus . . . When I was going people stopped me that I should not go, and I say that God na one that brought me to Ivory Coast. He took me out of the war and he brought me here. He knows what He brought me for I know I will go through it just like this na how come I got on the bus. Everybody say you will die with your two children, and I say no I am not gonna die God there. They were killing people from that town to Abidjan, torturing people, I see and my children saw it, I put my children in front of me. I just had a faith I believed that God gonna save me and God saved me because they never ask me any question people were paying 100,000 cfa, 30,000 cfa, just to cross the border, just to cross the gate because they had a lot of gates over 10, over maybe 20 gates. But people were just paying money, paying money but I believe that God is there by my side and I just go through. Only the last place I went Sassandra they ask me to pay 2000 cfa, 2000 I pay to pass but they never ask my children, they never ask myself anything, they don’t even touch my paper to say ya we going to come for your paper, no, I show my paper they say pass. We reached Abidjan that night after a whole day; we had left six o clock in the morning on the bus. When I got to Abidjan, I met my husband at the parking station (bus station). We got there in the night and in the morning we went straight to the UN and we said where we had just arrived from, but they didn’t believe it, and they said where is your temporary card
(refugee identification papers), we show our temporary card and they knew it’s true. Then they carry us to some building . . . we spent a few months there before they took us to a refugee camp.

My two children, my husband and his brother we all went to the camp. My brother-in-law was a man, he was strong and he could do contract work, but it’s like they met the Mandingo people they start talking to them, again all of them changed. My brother-in-law who is supposed to work and bring something for us, he used to carry (take) it to a different family because they say the Mandingo people eat together; he started working for other people. My husband became friends with them too, they used to make problem with me. Those people made my husband to hate me; he made one of the women and myself to have problems because he joined the woman. My husband beat me on the camp because of those people, and they were not his family they were just Mandingo people who had come there. When that happened, I moved to another tent with my children and he stayed in another tent.

Sometimes when we are going the children will see him eating, they say mama, papa what they eating? He will see us pass by, he will not call them, and everything was on me. I used to cook for people for my children to eat, one girl used to bring her food and I’m older than her she can say please cook my food because I want to eat, I want my children to eat, I will cook. People say a big woman like you work for a small child; I say I don’t care, because when I cook I take some of the food for my children and myself to eat. She don’t pay me that’s the only thing not pay business just for me to eat, just for my children to eat.
I experienced a lot of stuff hard, this hard life, hard living, where my people wasn’t and I was there. Places I never even dreamed about going there, I went there I pulled it out from there. Especially when I went on the farm in Guinea, the jungle part of Guinea you can’t even see car, you can’t see anything, and the only thing you see is bicycle, a car you have to walk like 4 hours before you can see a car. I was there for 9 months with people competing, one person would say, I’m stronger than you, the other person say I’m stronger than you it’s not anything but voodoo (laughs) voodoo (laughs).

I see a lot of stuff that really made me to change my way of life. I changed, things made me to depend on myself. Sometimes I used to feel like I can’t make it on my own; I always liked to stay with people. I was big even from Monrovia I was big (had my child) but still I was living with people. Coming to Sierra Leone too I was living with people (relatives), because I feel I can’t make it on my own. When I went to Ivory Coast, I started having my two children I feel I can’t make it. But I was strong and I always proud of myself, sometimes when I sit, I’m proud of myself

**Nde’s Vignette on her Experience of Being Alone and her Resilience**

Nde and her husband fled to Sierra Leone in 1990 when the war broke out. She was 18 years old at the time. The UNHCR had established a refugee camp in Freetown the capital city, where they lived for 7 years until the civil unrest in the country spread to the city and they had to flee the country. Together with her children and husband, they sought refuge in Guinea in 1997. They lived in different refugee camps located in the rural areas until 2005, when they were granted asylum and resettled in the U.S.
Alone: “Nobody with me no mum, no sister, just myself”

At 18, I got married and moved out of my uncle’s house. When I got married the same month, I got pregnant “oh my God” and then the war broke up. I didn’t even know I was pregnant, I didn’t even know at the time. At the time we run away so I can have my child in the camp I didn’t even know I was pregnant. I was there (in matrimonial home) one year and in 1990, the war came. The war started all the way in Kaka town and when it reached the city in Monrovia, we left. We moved with the gunboat, the gunboat took us from there to Sierra Leone. There were a lot, a lot of refugees. It took two days, we got off I cannot remember they gave us food, they register us and then we got off again when we reached Sierra Leone. It was a government boat not the regular ship, like the one they use for training in the navy but they call it a gunboat, that’s how we left.

We went to Freetown, when we got there they gave us a place some kind of school compound that is where they put all the refugees. They gave us supplies like blankets, gave us food, and some emergency bread. People from around came there, the citizens coming to see the refugees and they were bringing food and things for us. The first group that got there with the gun boat we were like 200 and something people, I cannot remember but we were over 200 hundred refugees that had been taken to Freetown at that time. There were other ships that were bringing people over. The UNHCR got us from the port, around the border area they registered us, gave us a paper with our names on it and put our names on a list and then their (UNHCR) bus took us to the school. We stayed there like two days before they took us to the refugee camp where we lived for 7 years.
When we got to the camp, it was a plain field. The UNHCR gave us food, they gave us blankets, they gave us a tent first, and we all lived there for about a month. Later they started giving us a space to build to build a house. That’s how we (people) started building houses from A to Z (sections). They gave you nails, tarpaulin, and some rope and then you made your own bricks and you build your own house. You could make it the way you want inside like two bedrooms, some people made extension but they already gave you the space according to family size. If you only like two people like the way we were two they gave us space for two bedrooms. They gave you the way you were large since some people used to be ten, some people six, seven according to that. That time we were only two so they give you the plot for two and then we got somebody else (to live with us) we make our own three bedrooms. Whatever you do with your tarpaulin they don’t care the one they gave you that’s the one you use.

It took two to three months before we finish it; it was just the two of us. He (husband) had to get the bricks done. Dirt bricks you have to make them if you want it that way, some people were building with sticks but he decided he wanted to use bricks. They gave us the tarpaulin for the roof, but the walls and floor it is up to you how you want to finish it. You can have your own bed there how you want to furnish it, you’re sitting place, how you want to cement it, they just gave you nothing. You have to do your own how you want your place to be, the way you want to live, some people don’t even care they can sell their tarpaulin and continue to live in the tent (communal tent). That’s what happened if you were not strong enough you could not do it, but we were so strong and my husband he was there, and he loved business too.
They (UNHCR) made the toilets the first construction they dig, and then they put the water. When we first got there, we were getting food by week every week. Then we settled down between two, three months then it was every month food supplies. The food they gave you was supposed to last for one month they gave you for a month a half bucket for bulgur (wheat) they used to bring different different things they used to bring dried fish, sometimes luncheon meat, one to one, one person you get one, that’s what they used to give.

The hospital was a tent before they start building a hospital and everything else. It was just a tent people used to come give treatment and leave. We used to go there for checkups and everything. When I went there (for a checkup) “oh my God”, they said I was pregnant I think I was two months and nobody with me no mum, no sister nothing except friends around me and my husband. At that time, I didn’t have a job, nothing. You just wake up you walk around or you go to the market or you walk on the street or the supply ground. Or it is time to go to the clinic you go there, we exercise in the clinic walk around or run around the building. Every day at the clinic at the Marie Stopes, we had to do that. It was a Friday or Saturday morning the pain I woke up. I just feel my back pain when walking. My friend, the one we build a house together was in the other room, and I was in another room and I called her “oh come I am feeling a little pain in my back”. She took me to the hospital, and they had beds there everything was there.

I had my first child and I had no experience taking care of a child. I thought about my mum how back home when you have kids your mum is always with you. She cook for you, wash your child clothes, everything maybe for a month or more before you can
be able to stand for yourself. I slept in the hospital. The next morning my friend came and get me water from the pump, in the hospital your parent has to bring water or your friend. She made hot water she brought it to me when I was in the hospital, she bring food too since I spent a night. The next morning they give the vaccine to the baby then we go back to our house. The next day I made my own fire, put the water on, take it to the washroom to take shower. Come back bathe my baby because in Africa we take water with hand we use the hand to clean their stomach good, bathe them clean then the child go to sleep. Then I had to go find something to eat.

I never get experience of having child in my country. Except those that I see, when they give birth people used to be around them. That is the experience I was thinking about like when I have my child my mum is supposed to be there or my sister helping me but I am by myself. Except friends they come and say hi to me then walk out. I don’t get much help because it was my first time. If I was going to get a child back home with my mum maybe, it was going to be different. Like the way my uncle’s wife used to have her children the mother used to come stay with us there for one month, two months before she go back (leaves) and we were all there helping. But in the camp no one with you, no sister, no mother and father (in a lower tone) you just there with your husband and with your child.

My husband would help me and we can get friend who help with food, but taking care of them (children) mh mh it was not easy. When you born in the hospital you stay one day the next day you are in your house. Thank God for the strength God gave me there I am fine, no stomach pain, no stomachache, because some people when they
deliver sometime they are weak. Like my first cousin when she deliver I used to go stay with her in Liberia those days she can get a lot of cramps but it never happened to me once I wake up I’m fine. I take care of my children bathe them, take them to hospital for vaccine, I used to do all that.

**Resilience: “I’m brave in things; I just cannot sit and wait for things”**

In Sierra Leone the camp was in Freetown we could go to the city, it was not like Ghana where they said they (refugees) had a uniform and they could not go to the city. After a while, we started selling. We used to go to Freetown to buy whatever we need and people could come and buy from us goods because we had space in the camp where there was a market for refugees. The Sierra Leoneans did not have a problem we were living in their country. The UN buy this place for the refugees they put us there and they used to come and buy from us. We can sell some of the bulgur and some cornmeal because they (UNHCR) give us cornmeal, bulgur wheat so we sell half of everything in order to survive. The citizens could come to our market and bring their fish and we buy from them, some of the refugee could go to the wharf, sleep there, dry fish, come and sell in the morning. We used to do that. Sometimes we can change the bulgur for palm oil so we have oil to cook greens, or we buy greens from them (citizens). Because by then they (UNHCR) don’t used to give us fish, salt or pepper and we eat spicy food and meat. Things were a little easier there (Sierra Leone) doing business taking care of our kids they were healthy and there were schools but that time my kids not start going to school because they were still little, they were small. They had school for the grownups they
used to have different things like tailoring but I never do anything like tailoring because I had my child, my first child and no experience taking care of child.

We lived in Sierra Leone for 7 years and then the war started. The RUF soldiers came to the camp in the morning and they were shooting. We run back into the city everybody all the refugees we took everything we had our blankets and clothes. When we went, there (into the city) the UN came and put us in some kind of big building we were there everybody. People start coming too, the citizen, the refugee everybody start moving into the new camp. They (UN) gave us space again like a hall again; we lived there for a week everybody live there, getting food.

We were like 10 families we were thinking about how to leave the city how people are going to Guinea to the border. We had never travel there before because once we got to Sierra Leone we were just there we didn’t travel back to Liberia, Guinea, or anywhere else we were just in Freetown. So somebody bring the idea, I know the border and how to get there. Since we were refugees, we got our cards with us. We sell some of the things we had like blankets, mats, chairs to the citizens we sold everything we put our money together and paid the owner of the car he was going to Pamalap. I had my two children and my husband. My children were about 6 and 7 years old at the time, two of my children were born in the camp in Sierra Leone, and the other two were born in Guinea in refugee camp too.

When we got to Guinea, the border there was a police station. They keep us there for three days at the police station, before the UN car come and pick us. You cannot go into the camp by yourself, whenever you reach a border the UN car takes you to the
camp. At that time, the UN had just opened a new camp because whenever they go and rescue us they go right away and find a place to keep us. Once something happens they know right away because people move to the border. Sierra Leone has a border with Guinea they call it Pamalap. People were crossing the border (Liberians and Sierra Leoneans) and they (UN) put us in a schoolhouse they had built for the first people who arrived in Guinea. We stayed at the school for a week, no it was like two or 3 days until they finished our tent they built it with the same tarpaulin. They put tarpaulin on the floor and give everybody a space again. The same life we start in Sierra Leone in 1990, when we went to Guinea we start again the same thing up to 2005.

It was the end of 1997 when we moved there (Guinea) and in 1998 my third child was born. Guinea was okay because we have the grinding machine we buy in Sierra Leone, we crossed with it. Only that machine we came with and a little food we had nothing, no clothes, no nothing because we sell all the mats, blankets, we sell everything. The grinding machine was for grinding bulgur wheat that is all they (UN) supply us, we used to grind it because if it is smaller its better because when its big and you cook, it gets full in your mouth you cannot swallow it, it is not like rice. So we brought the machine we used to grind for people and they pay us with one cup, if you have 5 cups you pay with one cup. We collect the bulgur wheat (people pay with) we used to get a lot we were selling it and we buy rice just to help our kids.

We were there in that camp I think for two years then we moved to another camp. The rebels were coming there (to the camp) from Sierra Leone and crossing into Guinea, the first camp was near the border and it was Sierra Leoneans and Liberians together in
that camp. The Sierra Leonean rebels crossed into the camp coming to attack and steal. We walked to a destination where they (UN) will be able to pick us up and we went to a second camp (in Guinea) where we stayed for one year. At this camp, they gave us bracelets and took our pictures (asylum processing). The same thing happened the rebels were coming there and we walked to Forecariah their little city and the UN car pick us and took us to a third camp. Here the people (U.S. immigration) came and interviewed us. We were almost 300 refugees and we went to different different states.

When I was in Guinea no communication with my family they don’t know whether I am alive, it was a lot we were just there in the camp coping and hoping one day we will be here (U.S.) because we were hoping they will be able to give us asylum. I was not able to communicate with my family until we do everything and we were on departure and we came to the city. We were in Conakry waiting for departure (to the U.S.) I went and saw my mum, my father, they were in Liberia in the village, and I went and saw them before I travelled. We were in Conakry because the people (UN) take us from the camp to the city for the interview, Medicaid everything (immigration process). When we came to Conakry, my husband said it will be easy for us to find the family. We were living with my uncle; my mum’s brother and he find money for me to go see my parents. I went for three days to go see my mother and pa where they were because I know how to get there and come back. There were cars moving, I move because I brave in things I just cannot sit and wait for things. All my family were there they just traveled to different place (in Liberia) only me left when the war broke out. They went and rebuilt because people moved (during the war) and they went back, rebuilt their little houses and
do farming and they stayed there. So when I went my parents prayed for me they made a sacrifice everything. My father died the first year we came here. I went and saw him that was a good thing God helped me. My mum there now taking care of the home, my sister and my two brothers. Only me here (in the U.S.) with my husband and children.

**Bendo’s Vignette on her Experience of Being Alone and her Resilience**

Bendo grew up in a rural town and although the first civil war that started in 1990 destabilized most of the country leading to loss of life, school closures and constrained economic activity she did not flee Liberia until 2001. This was during the second civil war, which spread to some of the rural areas due to violence directed at specific ethnic groups living in those areas. She was in her early twenties when she left for Sierra Leone with a group of people from the community, and for about six months they sought shelter in different villages in Sierra Leone before they came to a decision to seek assistance in the refugee camp set up by the UNHCR in that region. Bendo and her three children lived in the camp until 2009 when they were resettled in the U.S.

*Alone: “When I left for Sierra Leone I was by myself . . . . For the first time I was alone”*

I left school in the 90s because the war entered, I was promoted to the 7th grade in 1989 and 1990 I was to be in 8th grade but the war broke up. I could not go to school for almost 10 years until I came to Sierra Leone as a refugee. In the beginning (in Sierra Leone), there was no way for me to go back to school as I was living alone later I started learning again.
When I became a mother I was around 15 to 16 years, it wasn’t really easy. I had my first baby in 1995, and the other one I have her 2000 and the youngest I have him 2001 there was just months between the last two children. I had those children during the war time. My sister know them, she knows their ages better than I because I never used to feed him, I only breast-feed him when he cry. She (sister) used to do everything for them. I only used to take them to the hospital when they are sick. When I am in this room because she was in the other room at night, when he cry, when they are sick I would take them to her, and she would take care of him for the rest of the night and I come back and sleep. My sister and my mum they do nearly everything, I just used to breastfeed but for other feeding I would not because I don’t know how to (laughs).

We left (Liberia) as a group we were about 21 people, some people were friends, different people in the community and some were family members but not really immediate because we are from the same place they were like extended family. Some had children and some were elderly people who couldn’t walk like how we were walking so we had to break on the highway and wait for them. We walked for three days (lower tone of voice), we have to rest and we have to sleep. We would walk a distance and then we would have to sleep. The next day we would start the journey again and then we rest. Sometimes people helped and sometimes they don’t if you had to drink when you get to a creek in the bush you put water in a container and we would start walking to make it to the next village or next town if you get water there, you can change it at the next place. The third day we reached the town and even that it was difficult to get to the town and when you get to the town where are you going to sleep. It is another country and they too
are just from war. It was not the appropriate place for us to go because they too were in the war, but they were having a little peace than us. But it was not really good for us to go down there.

When I was crossing (to Sierra Leone), I didn’t have my children with me because I was sick and people helped me to cross. My aunt and I were living in the same place (in Liberia) after the war broke up and I left the children with her when I left for Sierra Leone. It took like two weeks before she could trace where I was then she brought the children to me. I had left the children with her because I was not well. I was not well. When she came she didn’t stay with me because she has her own children that she left, she had I think seven children some were her grand children. She couldn’t take care of all the children so she brought the children to me and later she left.

My parents passed away during the war time that was in the 90s (slight pause) it was in the 90s. I left for Sierra Leone in 2001 I was by myself and I had to figure out how best to take care of them (her children). When we got to Sierra Leone we were together (the group) and we settled somewhere in a village for almost half a year, like 6 months. When we got there, the community allowed us to build on their land. We built a kitchen, how the old people used to make like a booth, everything is from the bush, everything is absolutely from the bush. You have to find the sticks, cut the sticks, find the palm trees for the roofing and do everything and you build your own house because they don’t have a house. After you build (a house and kitchen), you may spend three days or one week and they tell you to leave and you have to leave. By now, my two younger brothers were also with me, they had left in different direction when we left Liberia we didn’t cross
together, but all of us met at this place. Six months we were moving from one community
to another. Like if you were in this community right now and if they say you have to
leave then we would move to the next community (in the same area) and they say you
have to move we leave. Finally I said I don’t have to stay here let me go to the camp
(refugee camp), that is what happened.

The UN had already started camps. One morning the community we were living
in made an announcement that the refugees should leave the community. They said you
have to leave. I encouraged the people we had left (Liberia) with to go to the camp. That
is how we left. We walked for three days, it wasn’t close. We were walking to the place
where the UNHCR can put us in the trucks to take us to the camps. This is the place
where they do the registration for refugees and then they allow you to go in the camp.
There were eight camps at the time, but you don’t really know where you are going. They
(UNHCR) will only register you and take you where they want to take you.

It took three days before they took us to one of the camps in Bo district, this was a
village. When you get to the camp, they put everybody in the transit booth. After two or
three days, they will take you in the morning and give you a portion, a plot to build a
house for you and your family. They will give you sticks and the tarpaulin but some
things you have to get for yourself from the bush. You have to dig the foundation; you
have to do that. It was a big area, it was by phases they have phase I up to phase 5. When
we got there (camp) maybe we were 3000 people but after they took more refugees
maybe we were up to 6000 people (in the camp). We stayed there for 9 years in the camp
my children, my two brothers and my sister’s daughter lived with me, she was a baby then.

The total I was responsible for was 11 persons to find food. I was the oldest of all of them and it was difficult to live alone. For the first time I was alone, before they used to do everything, my sister and my mother. The most challenging thing was how really to bring them up because when I was back home I used to care for them, if I don’t get to do something for them, they get that from my immediate family. When I was in the camp I had to do it I had to look after the children by myself, it was a little difficult for me, difficult for me.

**Resilience: “You had to be strong for yourself and also for the children”**

We were in Bo district; I don’t know how many thousands miles it was from Liberia. It was very far, and far from the city, it was a rural area. When I was crossing from Liberia to Sierra Leone, I had only 250 Liberian dollars. I was able to cross with it because I tie it on the cloth I use to tie my baby with because I had a baby on my back and they couldn’t know I had money. I had more money but everything was taken away from me. Even the clothes that I had was the one I use to tie my baby with, those were the only clothes I enter with. When I went there (Sierra Leone) in the first place we settled I started buying pepper from people, tomatoes and other stuff and I started selling them in the market. Later on I started selling cooking oil, red oil, and country oil. I bought some oil and kept it for some time because a certain time in the year the price can rise up. You can buy it for 500 or 600 and the price can go up to 1000 (Liberian) dollars during the dry season. So I kept the oil and I stopped the business during the rainy season and I waited
for the dry season. Then I sell the oil, I made 1200 dollars. I was able to sell a lot (expand) of business. I buy corn meal that was the only food we eat, the yellow corn meal, I would buy and sell, what we eat I would bring home and the profit I would go back and buy more stuff.

In the refugee camp, they (UNHCR) used to give us bulgur wheat and oil. But we are not used to the wheat. We used to exchange like a barter system with the host community, we would give them the bulgur wheat and they would give us cassava or greens. There was no money to do business. So if we want greens they would give us and we would give them wheat or if we want any other thing like corn we would value what they have and we would give them what we have. That is how we used to get food from them (local community). Because they (UNHCR) would give us oil and the wheat like 32 or 35 cups sometimes, they give 40 for the month and they gave you one pound of oil sometimes two of oil per person for the month. They gave you a little salt; five pieces of maggi cube (spice) and cornmeal two cups for each person for the month. You know what to eat it with; you just cook it like that, unless you grow something else that is all they have, that is all they have. Sometimes if you want to eat, you have to go and work for people and they gave you little money and you get good food, but the food from the UNHCR was not enough for everybody, it was just a little bit.

One way I managed to take care of them (children) was through making garden. But for the first two years when we went to the camp we were not farming, we only had gardens we grew peppers and greens. We never had access (to land) for the first year, and the second year passed and then the third year, we started farming. The farm had to be
big, if it is not big you will not have enough food because you have to give something (to the owner of the land). We would go to the farm or I go and I can live there, I make a bed, I can plant, I can brush (clear the land for planting), I can transplant rice from the land to the swamp, I can weed. We do everything because when you work for yourself, you have to do everything yourself.

Sometimes it was difficult to plant because sometimes when you go in the bush they (local community) were hunting for refugees and they would be running behind them and some of them (refugees) would leave their cutlasses in the bush as they run away. They (local community) speak different languages and we speak different from them, even our ways of doing things is kind of different. So when they meet us in the bush it is like meeting your enemies so they would be chasing you even if you talk they don’t understand. We could not understand why they were doing that because before they (UNHCR) could take us there they announced and said they were bringing refugees and they accepted us. But sometimes when people go in the bush they start disturbing them and tell them not to take anything from the bush. They will ask them to leave the place and they will take their cutlasses from them. That is what used to happen not that they don’t know they know we there and we different from them.

To take care of children, of people it’s kind of difficult and I was someone who although you depend on other people you have to depend on yourself. You have to take care of the children, go in the bush to fetch stuff for them, selling in the market. I would also make soap. I would get the palm kernel from the palm trees the one that has some kind of oil. You crack it, after that you put in the sun for a day, then you put it in the fire
and then fix it, that’s how you make the oil and the soap, we would use some and some I
would sell.

Where we were you had to be strong for yourself and also for the children. The
biggest thing was how to feed them and how you look after them. It came a time there
was no food at all you had to do everything by yourself. That was the time we had to
make swamp to grow rice. We had to grow rice ourselves; if you want to eat anything we
have to grow it. That was how I was able to take care of them. So we depend on the
garden, and also burning wood for charcoal. There was no other way for almost 2 years;
it was a long way before we came to the U.S.

Chuando’s Vignette on her Experience of Being Alone and her Resilience

Chuando was about 16 years old when she was forced by the civil war in Liberia
to flee to Ghana in 1996. She was alone with her young child when she fled and made her
way to a refugee camp run by the UNHCR in Ghana. She lived there for several years
until 1999 when she traveled to Guinea in search of her mother, whom she thought was
living in a refugee camp in Guinea. She lived in the refugee camp in Guinea until 2009
when she was resettled in the U.S.

Alone: “I was all alone by myself I was by myself throughout . . . .”

I grew up with my mum and my daddy. We were three children and I was the last
born, my daddy used to like me, take care of me until the war broke up. Before the war I
had a baby this was, I can’t remember my age now I think maybe I was 15 years when
my son was born in 1995, I think I was about 15 years when I had my son. When my
child was born, I planned that my child was going to go to school because I the mother
didn’t go to school. I was going to send my son to school, he was going to finish high school, go to college and become a doctor that’s the dream I have for my son, and the war broke out. My son’s father wanted to marry me but the war separated us.

On that day my mother was not there she was out of town for her business, she was not home. It was me, my daddy, my brother, my sister we were there but everybody was in their room, so when the people started to fight everybody just run outside on their way (pause).

My son was not quite one year when the war broke out. I left with my son he alone and myself flee from there we were only two of us, we left April 6 went to a refugee camp lived there throughout until we came on this side (U.S.) in 2009. From when the war broke out I didn’t see my sister and brother I flee to the refugee camp and I didn’t see them and since then I didn’t see them, I didn’t hear from them nothing till now. They killed my father and I lost my parents during the April 6 war in 1996. I was all alone by myself; I was by myself throughout until I came to the refugee camp, no parents so I do everything for myself. I don’t have my daddy and my mummy.

When the war broke out, I left from Monrovia and went to Ghana first. I spent like a week before I got to the refugee camp in Ghana. That week before we left we were just moving from place to place. People were fighting and you can’t stay in one place, we were walking all over and can’t settle in one place. We left one town then we walked all the way to another town, going so, going so for one week. People were going to the Free Port, they put them on a ship, and they go to Ghana. People helped me and we go to the Free Port, I found other people leaving Liberia and we all left and went to the camp in
Ghana. I don’t remember how long it took, I was all disturbed, and I don’t remember how long it take on the ship.

When I got to Ghana, there was a camp there already. There was no food because the refugee camp was new. At first, we were not in our own place, the UN before they find you a place they take a long time. We were all in one area where people just put their mats and sleep. They built a big something a tent, a thousand people live in it together for a long time before they gave us an area to build our own place. We stayed there I think for three months, we were in the tent for three months before they gave us space and materials to build a one bedroom. I build a place for me and my kids, it was a one bedroom, and we would put a mat on the floor and sleep on it. You built your own place but they could get people to build for you. But, other people that have money they didn’t go to the camp they lived in Accra, some went to Awutu and some to Kaswa and they lived there. I never had money to go to Accra and live because you have to rent an apartment, pay rent.

Most of the people in the camp were just Liberians because war was in our country, some people came by ship and some people other ways. There were more than a thousand people there from all over the country, we were many in the camp, and we were plenty on the camp. When I got there newly I was “ah how I am going to live with my children among people like this!” because everyone na together. It was hard, it was very hard for me the first one month I spent it was hard. Before they (UN) could go around register people, put people on a list, before they could start giving us stuff, clothes, and things. It was hard at the beginning; it was hard for the first one month. I started to think,
I want to go back home, but how will I go home, war in the country; it was very hard for me for the first one month I was there.

*Resilience: “I did it by myself”*

Mmh it was not easy, it was not easy a single mother, no husband, it was not easy to take care of my son, and then I had a second child, the same thing no daddy. The man I born her by was a Liberian too and he and myself were there in the camp. When I got pregnant, he left me and went to Ivory Coast. I was all by myself, I give birth all by myself, he was not there, I didn’t see him again. I didn’t see him at all. I felt bad living as a single mother in the camp, I had nobody to help me you just wait for somebody to come early in the morning and give food. It was hard for me I used to look at my kids and feel very bad, it was hard it was not easy with three children in the refugee camp as a single mother it was very hard.

When we first went on the camp the UN used to give us bulgur wheat, they give us comforters, a mat, mosquito net that’s what they used to give us. It take time before they build the other things. Within the first year, they started building things for you to be able to do something for yourself. They had refugee schools for children, they only had school for little kids in the beginning but none for adults but later on they had a camp school for adults and because I had 2 kids and I have to take care of them, I had to go to night school it was not easy for me. Later they have adult school for when you are above 18 years where you go to learn how to braid hair, how to bake, how to sew, how to make soap it was for everybody if men want to do it they can do it. They also had the classes for grownups for reading and writing I was not going there because I don’t have the
chance; I only have the chance to go to the braiding hair and baking because these are going to be fast for me they were six months and you graduate. What time I’m I going to sit down to learn a, b, c, all the way, I feel it’s going to be a long time for me and I have to take care of my kids.

I didn’t want to always say, “I don’t have this, or I need this, I need this, I need that, I always go and look for it. If I see my friend doing something, she will give me some ideas if I say, “I don’t have this O”. They say, “Do this you be able to get this”. Before I went to the braiding school people encouraged me to go to braiding school. They said you got kids you need to do something so it can help you take care of them; you just can’t stay home all day by the kids you got to go do hair. We used to leave the camp and go to Accra to do people hair. I used to braid, you have a bowl you draw the hairstyle (on a piece of paper) and put it in the bowl and you go around (market and other public places) people call you, you braid their hair. Sometimes I used to leave my children with friends, I would ask “let my children stay here with you I will be back within an hour, you know Africa not looking like here (U.S.) they would sit there and play. I would go for one-hour do hair and come back. Sometimes I used to go for a week, when I was still in the camp, I used to leave them for a week, and go braid hair in Accra. We would go together everybody that do hair; we sleep together in one place. We get money and could buy food in the camp.

In the beginning when I start doing hair, I would go to Accra my children with me, I can’t leave them behind, and they would go with me. We would go around usually around the market, I have a bowl in my hand with a hair picture on it carry it around the
market; do their (customers) hair. I felt good doing it because there was nothing to do, so some days I braid hair some days I would sell food. When the market is going slow, I would braid hair. I had started selling, frying donuts, cooking foo foo place the tray on my head and carrying it around the refugee camp. When we first went on the camp I spent some time and see how when people getting the food they have to sell the food to buy something to buy the soup (vegetables and meat) for the bulgur wheat. We were two of us, later three by that time they give us like 18 cups of bulgur wheat. Some people in Accra would buy the bulgur wheat from us, so you sell it a 1000 (cedis) for a big cup. I would sell like 10 cups and I would get 10,000 (cedis), so the 10,000 I would go to the market they had a shop I would buy flour by cup for the donuts, I would buy cassava; I would buy fish in the market. I would cook foo foo, people used to buy it from me. I never had cash no, I sell the food the UN gave me, and I sell some to be able to get cash that is how I started selling.

The food the UN gave us was not enough. They gave us once a month before they come and give you again. So whether you cook it for 5 days or 6 days or you cook it two or three times a day all, they know it will be a month before they come and give you food again. They gave us just the bulgur wheat and a cup of oil that’s it. Sometimes they gave you a little salt in a plastic bag. But you got to look for soup (stew); you got to look for vegetables. So when the UN gave us the food, I used to sell half of it. So I sell in the market, I braid hair if I get a little money I buy food. Some of the money I would buy a cup of rice for us to eat because my son did not eat the bulgur wheat at all. If he eat it it hurt his stomach and he run his stomach so he not used to eat bulgur wheat at all.
Because I know the food is supposed to last for one month I would do it in a way it can’t finish for us because when it get finished you can’t get food from nobody. Everybody depending on the same food from the UN to come, so I used to sell, the braiding hair it can help us so we can’t go out of food.

I used to say to myself “you still be strong”. I ask God for direction, “God help me I shouldn’t get sick”. Anything I used to do really God used to help me. The UN gave you a place to build a house and a place to make a garden. I had a little garden by my house in Guinea; I plant cassava, potato greens, corn for my children. I had to do it myself O. I brush (clearing the land and tilling) the place, I plant everything. I did it by myself. But in Ghana, I did not make a garden, I don’t have space there was no land as the camp was near the city. The water level is very high in Ghana no water. In Ghana the sun shines 24 hours when you pour water on the ground, it dries up immediately. It was not easy. Even in Ghana, they (UN) just give us the bulgur wheat, you have to find what to eat it with yourself, yourself, and they (UN) don’t give it to you mnh.

After several years in Ghana, I left and went to Guinea. Somebody told me my mum was in Guinea so I went to find my mother. My friend she was there (in Guinea), she and I were in Monrovia together before the war, she told me that my mum was there. I left with my son and daughter, I got on a bus in Ghana and went all the way I passed through Ivory Coast and I went to Guinea. It took like a week to get there because the bus break down on the way. I took two buses one from Ghana to Abidjan (Ivory Coast) and from Abidjan I took a bus to the town where the refugee camp was. I went to the camp, check, and check again, I go to the refugee people (UN) and asked them, they checked
the paper, and they couldn’t find her name. They said she was not there. I don’t have money to go back to where I came from so I decided to stay in Guinea in the camp. I went to the refugee people, I said I could not find my mum, I’m stranded, I don’t have money to go back to where I came from. I had my refugee card, I showed it to them, they registered me and I started living at the camp as a refugee too. I stayed with my friend until they gave me a place to build my house a one bedroom again; I start all over again mmh. I stayed there until I came here (U.S.) in 2009.

I came here like one year before I found her (mother). When I was in Guinea, I didn’t. She was there, she was in Guinea she said she was living in the village. It was not near the camp it was far away. She was not close to the camp. When I left, somebody told her “your daughter was here” because when I left she came on the camp too. I talked to my friend on the camp, she is the one that called me and said, “oh your mother is here, she is looking for you”. I talked to my mother, she told me my dad died, and she does not know about my sister and brother. She is still on the camp. I tried to send for her (to come to the U.S.), I was told there is no program for Liberians (resettlement) now because we have a president and people are expected to go back to Liberia. So I can’t send for her as refugee, there is no refugee program but I said there is people still on the camp they keep saying no. They said the program has been closed now. My mum said she cannot go back to Liberia because she have nothing there now, so she cannot go back. The camp in Guinea it is still open people are still there on the camp waiting to be resettled, refugee life not easy tch.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Thematic Analysis of the Data

This chapter addresses the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interview data. The themes reflect this study’s research questions and data are presented in three main sections focusing on the following experiences: childhood, motherhood and the effects of war and displacement on participants’ experience of motherhood. The last section discusses discontinuities and will include both themes of losses the women experienced and their resilience and coping. There are several sub-themes under each major theme; these emerged from the participants’ narratives, and will provide detailed descriptions of how they were raised as children, their experiences as mothers raising children in refugee camps, as women displaced from their country by war, and the numerous instances of their strengths prevailing. These sub-themes are supported with text from the interview data. This study focuses on mothers and thus the first section below on childhood will primarily discuss the role the participants’ mothers played in their upbringing, while the other two sections address the participants’ experiences of motherhood.
Mothers’ Childhood: Growing up in Liberia

“Born here die here”

In describing their childhood all participants mentioned their mothers were the primary caregivers. This was partly because in Liberia young children are often found in the care of their mother, and girls are specifically expected to be by their mother’s side learning the skills, roles and values needed to be a wife and mother. Bendo and Ndelefu explained that their mothers were the main caregivers and decision makers. Ndelefu explained she lived with her mother in their own house separate from the house where her father lived with his other two wives. This is similar to Bendo who also grew up in a polygamous family; her mother was also responsible for their care due to her father working in a different town away from home.

Nde and Chuando mentioned that while their mothers were the main caregivers, their fathers were the decision makers. Both reported that their fathers would discuss everything with their mothers and agreed on what was to be done. However, when it came to discipline their fathers were the disciplinarians and if they misbehaved when he was not at home, their mothers would inform their fathers about it.

Cultural beliefs about childhood and competence

Although the participants were not all from the same ethnic group, their descriptions of the desirable competencies were similar, these are the behaviors, values and skills they were taught while growing up. All four women talked about respect and obedience as the most important attributes when growing up and taking on
responsibilities at home and in the community. In explaining some of the ways children displayed these qualities, Ndelefu stated:

As a child you have to respect older people . . . you don’t look into an older person’s eyes and talk, it is a disgrace, it is a curse. Because the (older person) can say “she looked into my eyes and talked to me, she cursed me”. Then again, if you see a group of older people sitting together and then you walk like this (with the back straight) it is not good you have to bend when you pass.

This is similar to Chuando’s example of respectful behavior she explained that:

The things that were important in our culture were respect other people . . . before you greet an older person you go on your knee and greet them . . . we used to do that, when my father was living that’s what we used to do.

Nde’s example was about not talking “free free words” she explained that her mother was strict about the way they spoke to each other as children and in front of adults, they could not use language that was considered rude or disrespectful. She also explained that:

She (mother) always wanted us to be respectful to whosoever, friends, family friends . . . we don’t call them by their name once somebody older than you even one month or one year you have to say sister you don’t call them by name, that’s how she wanted us to grow.

In learning these behaviors, all four mothers explained that they were expected to obey their parents’ and demonstrate these behaviors. Although the participants provided different examples of respectful behavior, they explained that respect was at the core of all aspects of their social behavior.

**Qualities of a competent child in their respective ethnic groups**

Bendo and Ndelefu were from the same ethnic group and shared similar descriptions of a well brought up child that is a well-trained child in behavior, behaves
well towards parents and is able to sell in the market. For instance, Bendo pointed out
that amongst the Kissi farming, business and education were the mainstays of the
community, thus a well brought up child was described as follows:

In our culture 8 years old should be able to sweep the house, and should be
able to do a little business. In terms of business if you give the child 4
dollars, the child will bring exactly what they should, not to go and sit
down and play and forget about what they are doing . . . . If you give the
child of 8 years you say go and sell this and if they don’t come back with
the exact item or the money then you will say something is wrong with
this child. But if the child is able to bring back what you gave her then you
can say this child is a good child or this child will be a good child in the
future. That is how we predict in our culture that is how we predict their
life . . . . If you come with the money short that simply means your
attention is not on what your mother told you to do, that tomorrow if you
are in school you will have problem with your teacher because that is the
first step. One thing we believe is that mothers are the teachers to us in the
Kissi culture. They will tell you what is right; if you cannot listen to them
it is hard to pick up with the teacher that you will be meeting in school . . .
even if he does not have a problem (in school) it will take them time like a
slow learner.

In describing the behavior of a well brought up girl Bendo gave the following
example, which also reflected that some of the qualities desired in girls were intended to
prepare them for their future adult role in marriage:

... the important thing is like how (a guest) enter the house and then you
are sitting at the table they will offer you food and after you eat they will
take away the plate, clean the table and take the dishes in the kitchen. In
the morning when that child wakes up . . . she will make sure to put hot
water on the fire for older people to take shower. The two good things to
take care of the house and the money, especially for girl children if you
don’t have those qualifications it will be difficult even in your marriage
home.

One of the main differences between Nde and the other participants was the
influence of Islam on the way children were raised in her community; one of the essential
attributes that was instilled in children was to learn and practice their faith, and this was emphasized both at home and by the community. Nde reiterated that:

Majority of the Vai are Muslim, they go to the mosque, our prayers are in the mosque and it has to be five times a day. . . . All the children, they want all of you to learn they were not thinking too much about education to be something, they sent children to Arabic school just for you to know you are Muslim and to know Arabic to pray, and they force you they even beat you in the morning to wake up and pray. That is the whole community, everybody see you (they ask you) “you already pray?” . . . their concern on the children more important thing was to pray, their religion you should know, you should pray. So not only my mum would tell me alone, sometimes my uncle or somebody else will see me and it is time to pray they would tell me you have to go pray, move.

Nde explained other attributes of a well brought up child as the way you talk. For example, if an older person calls you, one was expected to respond appropriately and respectfully. You were also expected to know how to take care of yourself and the home, and how to behave towards your family in terms of obeying and adhering to their expectations of you. These behavioral attributes are similar to the aforementioned participants’ descriptions of the desirable attributes. Chuando’s description of a well brought up child amongst the Gio people was also similar, she stated:

. . . before you see a child and say this is a good child from a good family for example if you enter a house and the child is well trained they will come and greet you and go and sit down . . . and do something and not come and bother you (adults). Or . . . the way you behave in the house will make someone to know you are a good child or not. Outside if the children are playing together some of them will just get up and hit somebody and the person will act right away, they will not lay complaint that oh I will tell your mother, or I will tell your dad they just decide to fight amongst themselves that’s how bad children behave. A good-trained child if somebody hit you; you go right away and lodge a complaint to an adult. . . . In the home a good child is supposed to help the mother do the cooking, cleaning up, sometimes do the laundry for the mum, make sure you clean your mum room, the bathroom everything make the house look neat.
Gender based competencies

While all children were expected to be respectful and obedient across gender, other competencies were inculcated in children based on gender. All the mothers in this study explained that there were differences in the tasks and roles girls and boys were expected to perform in the home and thus differences in what they were taught. These differences were because of the adult roles they will have in future. As girls, they were expected to learn how to take care of the home and as they grew older, they were expected to assist their mothers with household chores, and caring for younger siblings. Bendo described that amongst the Kissi ethnic group:

We believe that the girl children they should be perfect in the home . . . to do things the right way especially taking care of the home . . . they should be able to take care of children, because our mothers have children we take care of them they (mothers) tell you what to do when they go to work. We believe that girl children should be people that are very caring for family . . . that is how our culture look like because boys will come in and will go out . . . .

In describing some of the tasks boys were expected to perform this mother further explained:

sometimes they go to the bush to fetch wood . . . we had a garden sometimes they brush the area, sometimes they do work in the home but not that much like the girl children.

These descriptions of the different tasks girls and boys were assigned and taught are similar to Chuando’s description of her Gio ethnic group, which she described as follows:

My culture my brother used to clean the yard, brush the yard and then draw water because we don’t have a pump in the house we have a well so he make sure he fills the drums in the house. Us girls used to wash the
dishes, sweep the house, make our daddy and mummy bed. Boys and girls
are not raised the same way but . . . some people brought up their boys by
doing the same thing their daughters do . . .

Nde noted that amongst their Vai ethnic group, gender socialization was
emphasized and there were stricter gender roles with girls mainly expected to become
housewives. In addition, majority of the Vai people were Muslim and the community
identified itself as Muslim, and this influenced some of the values and skills girls and
boys were expected to learn, and which parent they spent time with and taught them their
gender roles. This mother recalled that:

. . . girls they stay with the mother too much even when the father there.
. . . All I can remember I was always with my mum . . . until I get a bit
bigger . . . Because the girls have to be housewives, the thing they
pressure on for you to learn how to cook in the house, how to clean, to
take care of things and to take care of yourself. But boys sometimes they
hang out with their father they go out to the market . . . or sometimes they
go to the farm, boys always with the father. If he is from school right away
he take his cutlass he follow (the father) and go . . . that’s how they learn
everything, how to set trap to catch meat, they have arrows they catch
birds . . . . It was boys who collect kola nuts when they are ready, they
don’t ask girls to climb trees, no. The boys always like their father in
everything . . . like splitting wood. We can farm, everybody can farm, lady
can farm, but there are some things men have to do that. Like to kill
chicken they made the boys to do it, woman never killed chicken in our
culture any meat no, is men or boys even if it’s a little boy . . . if the father
not there he have to do it, but not girl and not the mother.

Ndelefu slightly differed with the other participants. She stated that although her
mother taught her how to cook, clean, take care of the home and the family and expected
her as a girl to learn all the tasks involved in caring for the home, her mother did not
differentiate too much between the girls and boys and taught her brothers how to cook
and clean.
Parental beliefs about a competent child and parental goals

It is apparent the specific competencies the participants’ mothers considered important were derived from some of the cultural beliefs of their respective ethnic communities and the larger Liberian community. Thus, there were some similarities in what their respective mothers considered essential when the participants were growing up and being socialized to become productive and competent members of their respective communities. However, there were some differences in some of the skills and values their mothers prioritized probably due to their individual life circumstances and experiences as women, and their respective parental goals. A competency all the participants reiterated as vital when they were growing up, and inculcated by all their respective mothers, was learning how to take care of the home and to take care of the family. Thus starting from a young age, they were taught the skills their respective mothers felt were needed in caring for the home, based on whether they were growing up in a town or in a rural area.

However, Nde explained that this was the focus in her upbringing as a child and as a young Muslim girl. Learning the skills and values that would ensure she would be a good housewife, and maintaining her faith were her mother’s priorities. Her mother’s desire and goal was for her to be good as she stated her mother would say:

. . . I want you to be somebody good tomorrow and I will be happy . . . .

Being good entailed practicing their religion, not having children out of wedlock, getting married, having grandchildren and being a good housewife. Nde recalled her mother constantly talked to her about their faith and would reiterate:
you should know you are a Muslim even when you go anywhere you should remember you are Muslim, the five daily prayer you have to do it.

In terms of what her mother wanted her to be, she stated:

The more thing was to be a housewife, you have to learn how to cook, learn how to clean . . . to be respectful and she would say . . . cleanliness, wash your clothes mostly (because of) our religion you have to be clean. My mum used to say not only for today but for your tomorrow because if you grow up and I didn’t say do this . . . tomorrow you will be somebody for yourself and you have to be able to be clean, respectful. Cooking too she would always want us to cook and when you are cooking you have to be clean . . . she wanted us tomorrow when you are by yourself you are able to take care of yourself, she always had this dream for us to be somebody good.

This participant believed that going to school or getting an education was not important to her mother because of their Muslim culture whereby women are expected to be housewives. She explained that even with the Koran she was just able to read a little because she did not attend Arabic school either, and neither did she attend the English school. She pointed out that:

I didn’t learn the Koran nothing but the little one I am able to read I pray. I can’t do it (read) because I didn’t go to Arabic school either, the English school too I was supposed to go I didn’t continue because of their religion because they say they don’t want girls to go to school only the boys. They even sell their land to pay the boys school fees but not the girls, that’s how the Muslim, our people are and that’s my religion I have to do that.

Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando talked about additional skills and values their mothers instilled in them. These three participants were raised by mothers who were business women and relatively independent, thus they wanted their children to acquire values that would enable them to run a business and to become self-sufficient as adults.
Bendo expressed that the qualities her mother emphasized were learning how to do business, take care of money, how to make a garden, be responsible, and to bring things home without depending on somebody. This mother explained that the education she got from her mother was cultural; this is she learned skills that one can live on without school education. She mentioned that she used to do everything with her mother and explained:

I lived with my mother . . . we used to do everything together . . . . What we used to do, we used to make garden and then from that garden we used to sell what we harvest. We take it to the market do business after selling those things at the end of the day she would be able to pay our school fees.

This participant’s father lived and worked in a different town away from home and these circumstances forced her mother to become more independent and subsequently desire to instill this value in her daughter. This participant further pointed out that:

. . . our father used to send money but . . . the person he would give it to would misuse the money, do whatever he wants, the person can’t bring the money (to her mother) at the end my mother would have to do something, we would plant some crops in order for us to get our school fees for that.

Going to school and getting an education was also an important goal this participant’s mother had for her, she explained that this was the first thing her mother wanted for her future. This was especially important because only one of this participant’s siblings had gone to high school. Her mother had been told he had died during the war thus; her mother emphasized education as something she wanted her to attain and is reported to have said:
... what will become of the family if everybody is not educated, what will become of you guys at the end of the day?

Bendo also explained that due to the future her mother desired for her, she did not want her to marry young or have children early; thus as she was growing up, her mother wanted her to stay home and not go out a lot or spend a lot of time with her peers. Her mother would warn her that if she behaved like her sister who married young against her wishes, she would not be able to help her mother in any way (just as her sister had been unable) and neither would she achieve what her mother wanted her to achieve in life.

Ndelefu’s description of the skills and values her mother instilled in her is similar to Bendo’s. She noted that for her mother it was important that she learn how to work and do business, to strive to do better in life, depend on herself, and not depend on any man or welfare. Some of the other values her mother wanted her to have were to learn to be careful in everything, to be strong, and never lose hope but to keep trying in life. This mother further explained that her aunt, whom she lived with when she was a teen, also taught her how to do business and to be independent.

This participant described her mother as a businesswoman who was independent and strong in everything. She was a second wife and often had to provide for herself and her children and this seems to have influenced her desires for her children, which also included getting an education, which she saw as a way for them to do better in life.

Ndelefu stated:

You know he (her father) never had time for us and my mother really wanted for me to be a better person, she wanted for us to be better person because we were six children for my mother.
Ndelefu explained that her mother’s desire for them to get an education and do better led her mother to decide to send her to live with her aunty, while her other siblings were sent to live with different family members. She recounted:

. . . our father had three wives so between the three wives he took his other wife kids and sent them to Monrovia to go to better schools. My mother wanted me to go to school . . . she saw this future on me and said I want you to go to my sister, how come when my aunty came (visited them in the rural area) she gave me to my aunty for me to go to Monrovia . . . .

Chuando recalled what her mother wanted was for her to be well behaved and would tell her not to be a rude child, not to have bad friends, not to fight or make problems with anyone or go out a lot. It was also important to her mother that she learn how to do business, go to school learn and become somebody good in the future, and to also have values that would help her as an adult. She stated that her mother would call her, sit her down and tell her:

. . . I want you to be like me, to make market, and to know how to save money, when you have kids you take care of your kids at home. She used to tell me about what my daddy do and she tell me to go to school to become somebody like somebody like a doctor or a nurse.

**Inculcating the desired competencies**

Participants talked about observation, instruction, imitation, modeling, reinforcement, and learning by doing, as some of the ways they were taught the competencies they were expected to learn by their mothers, fathers and in some instances the community. The manner in which they were taught depended on the age of the child, the roles they were expected to play at that age, and the respective parental roles.
All the participants recalled that when they were younger than seven and eight years of age, they were taught mainly by observation and as they grew a little older, they would begin to carry out small tasks in the household or sent on errands. By the time they were eight years old they were expected to be able to perform household tasks like sweeping, and washing dishes and thus their mothers would instruct them on the chores they were expected to do. As they grew older, they were required to help their mothers more and to take the initiative in performing different tasks, hence learning by doing. Nde’s examples of how she learned the values, skills and behaviors her mother wanted her to have, are similar to the descriptions given by all the other participants. For instance, she describes how she learned some of the tasks girls were expected to perform as follows:

... I was always with my mum ... girls all the time whenever the mother go fishing they there, laundry their together, cooking you are always with her, and not that you are cooking but for you to learn, for her to teach you. ... boys always with the father ... That’s how they learn everything. ...

This illustrates that most of her learning of the gender-based roles was from her mother, and this was evidently done through observation, instruction and modeling. This was the same for boys; they were expected to learn from the father in the same manner. Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando narrate similar experiences of being by their mothers’ side and learning from them. For example, Bendo similarly states:

... girl children you will be with your mother and you will see mostly what your mother do you will see her and you will take the behavior, the attitudes and the way she do things you will be able to copy from her.
All the participants also explained that with some tasks they started out learning systematically. As they grew older, they were expected to take on more responsibilities and with time be ready to perform the tasks with minimal supervision and instruction.

Ndé gave a detailed description of how she started learning about farming and cooking:

...we can spend the whole day there (at the farm) they do the palms, cleaning the rice, brush the farm...we don’t work that time we don’t do anything. Sometimes we go down to the creek and fetch water if my mum is cooking, we help her make the peppers or pick onions, but mostly our mum used to do everything she do the cooking, do our laundry up to when we were 10.

Ndé further described how she was taught how to cook:

...like the cassava she teach me how to cook that, I never used to cook soup (stew) she would show me how to do it in the pot but I never cook it I only cooked rice. I would only help her like fetch the pepper, bring the water and you put it by her side, and get the dry fish, fetch everything and she do the cooking...She start making me to cook the rice before 10 years like 8 years 9 years she let me wash the pot, make the fire, cook the rice but for the greens (vegetables) no.

The ages mentioned by Ndé in terms of when she starts taking on more responsibilities is similar to the ages mentioned by all the other participants. For instance, Chuando states that from when she was about 8 years old she, “used to stay home and wash dishes and take care of the home” and Bendo stated “... 8 years old should be able to sweep the house, and should be able to do a little business”

With reference to learning how to sell, only Bendo, Ndéléfu and Chuando mentioned being taught this skill by their mothers. Ndé only learned the skill and started selling in the market when she was an adolescent and after she moved to Monrovia to live with her uncle. Learning how to sell was not a skill her mother taught her or necessarily
wanted her to have. It seems her uncle was less strict about some of the Muslim beliefs that girls should only be trained to be housewives.

In describing how they were taught how to sell, the other three participants seem to have been taught in the same manner they were taught how to farm and take care of the home. Chuando’s description illustrates how they started out learning:

. . . sometimes she used to take me to the market I sit by her, she tell me to sell when somebody coming to buy, tell me how much for this, how much for that, how to give change to people, she taught me all of that. . . . Sometimes when she go out of town I would go to market by myself, she leave me by the market, I sell and when she come I give her the money. I was like 14 years old when I started going to the market by myself.

This is similar to Ndelefu’s experience; she explains that she started selling at about eight or nine years old and started learning by accompanying her aunt to the market and by the time she was 14 years she would go and sell by herself. Bendo also shares a similar story:

What she (mother) used to do after we make a garden (and grow) tomatoes, potato leaf, cassava leaf . . . she used to pick the leaf tie them in a bunch like 6 or 7 because one was like a dollar, she would put them in a pan and she would give them to me to go and sell.

This mother explained further that as she grew older she would pick the produce from the garden to go sell, thus taking on more responsibilities. She used to go and sell after school and on Saturdays, or whenever her mother and her two-step mothers asked her to go to the market and sell.

In referring to other ways behavior was inculcated, all the participants mentioned that their mothers would talk to them about the behaviors and values they wanted them to have, and would also point out what they were doing that was not right. Their mothers
would also refer to the mistakes their older siblings had made or other people in the community and the consequences they had suffered. If they misbehaved, or were disobedient, they would be spanked. Nde and Chuando mentioned their fathers were the disciplinarians in the family and therefore their mothers would inform their fathers about their errant behavior and they would be spanked by their father.

Nde was the only participant who spoke directly about community involvement in monitoring and reinforcing children’s behavior when they were out in public; with the other participants it was inferred when they mentioned the ways they were expected to interact with adults in the community. Thus, community involvement was important in the positive development of children. Bendo and Chuando referred to the practice of sending children to “secret societies” which they described as a place community members sent their children to when they were in their teenage years to learn about their traditional culture. However, due to the secret nature of these societies, the participants did not provide any details. Nde recalled that the community was united in ensuring children were respectful and practiced and adhered to their Muslim faith. If a child was outside during prayer time, they would be reprimanded and told to go and pray. This mother mentioned that:

. . . somebody else will see me and it is the time to pray they would tell me you have to go pray, move. All the community they help people even the kids, if they are doing something bad they let your parents know, if you are hiding there and your parents don’t know they let them know you are doing something.

In terms of behavior, she stated that:
. . . sometimes the older people will call you to know your behavior and sometimes like boys will say, “oh don’t call me” so the person will go to their family or go to their family meeting and say I saw that your child. They will always be there to share with someone how the behavior of the child looking and say this child’s behavior is not good you have to talk to the child . . . .

Thus for this mother, they were not only learning from their parents, they were learning from other community members as it was their belief that they had a responsibility towards the children growing up in their midst.

**Motherhood: Raising Children in a Refugee Camp**

*“You are a mother even with nothing”*

The previous theme addressed the mothers’ childhood and the behaviors, values and skills that were upheld in their respective communities while they were growing up in Liberia. This provided a glimpse of the communities’ ethnotheories including beliefs about childhood and the traits of a competent child, expected to grow into a productive community member. The mothers’ descriptions of their childhood also provided insight into what motherhood entailed, the role of a mother within their culture, and the respective parental goals they had. This section addresses the theme on the women’s experiences of motherhood after the civil war started, disrupted their lives in their respective communities and forced them to flee Liberia and seek refuge in camps in neighboring countries; thus, beginning life in a different environment as women and mothers raising young children.

In narrating about their experience of raising their children in the refugee camps, a distinctly different environment from their respective ethnic communities, all four
participants noted that there were similarities in the way they were raised and the way they were raising their children. This was in reference to the competencies they wanted their children to have, their goals and desires for their children, and how they were teaching and guiding them towards leading a better life. However, all the participants pointed out the numerous challenges they faced as they tried to inculcate the competencies they desired in their children, and how these challenges influenced the behaviors they prioritized leading to some differences between the way they were raised and the way they were raising their children.

Competencies Participants were Instilling in their Children

Each participant mentioned some of the same behaviors, skills and values they were taught when they described what they were teaching their children. For instance, Nde, Ndelefu and Chuando noted they wanted their children to be respectful. Nde’s example of respectful behavior was not using bad language or cursing, Ndelefu and Chuando explained respect towards older people, these were the same examples they gave when talking about the behavior and values their mothers wanted them to have.

Other behaviors that were important for Ndelefu were that she wanted her children to learn to be patient, and to learn how to take care of themselves, values her mother taught her, but values that were also important due to her individual life experiences and their life circumstances. She stated:

. . . the most important thing I wanted him to learn was patience, he should not run through life, he should be patient, and when he do something I can tell him how I was patient what I pass through . . . I want him to be respectful, I don’t want him to be a bad boy. I just wish my children to be like me to be very very respectful and patient. One of my main thing is
patience because in this world when we patient nothing will be very hard.

... I teach him how to take care of himself, I don’t want him to be like his father... he don’t even boil rice, he not even able to take care of his clothes, to clean up he don’t know, he don’t know how to do anything...

Similarly, what Chuando taught her children was partly what she was taught as a child, and partly in response to living in a camp with different communities, where resources were limited and children would sometimes reportedly steal food or other items she stated:

... I tell them when you go out there to become a good child you don’t have to go out there and start being rude to your friend, if somebody do something to you lodge complaint to your teacher, don’t fight, don’t do anything, don’t steal peoples stuff, don’t take it. If you see something that does not belong to you don’t take it, don’t touch it. I used to tell them all the time don’t be rude, respect other person when the person older than you, respect the person.

Nde constantly talked to her children about the behaviors she did not want to see them engage in at home or when they were outside. This mother explained that:

... at home no swearing in the house, no cursing, whenever your friend do something lodge a complaint to me or their father nobody beat their friend, so they were growing up that way. ... At that time... I taught them that even if they hear from somebody say no, say no you don’t talk like that, you say that you have to be a good girl, you don’t curse.

Contrary to the other three participants, in explaining what was essential for her children to learn, Bendo emphasized the skills she was teaching them and not behavior. The skills she mentioned were similar to the skills the other participants expected their children to acquire such as helping with household work mentioned by all the mothers: Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando mentioned selling in the market, and only Bendo mentioned helping with farming. Children were involved in these activities on a day-to-
day basis as part of their training and as part of acquiring the value of helping and being responsible.

Bendo stated as follows:

I taught them, like the little one (younger son) . . . he was 9 years in Sierra Leone I used to buy gari and I used to buy oil, hot pepper and buy food when I bring it outside and put things on the table he would do business, he would sell. . . . he used to sell when he was 8 (years) though he sometimes would not sell exactly because when things finish on the table and you have to put more things he would not put the right way we have to make profit.

In talking about housework and farming, this mother explained:

In the house we teach them how to cook . . . he would be along with me in the kitchen and he would cook. . . . Farming work because they don’t have Saturday classes . . . . He would go to school from Monday to Friday, when he come back home (from school) I would send the boy to go with us he would go uproot the rice and help us transplant the rice. Like you take two bunches, put it on his head and he will help to transfer to the nearby place and then the other people (adults) would take it and plant it.

The values this participant wanted her children to have were:

I wanted him to have the value of to grow up and be someone responsible in terms of taking care of himself, to take care of himself when I am not around . . . .

In talking about selling, Ndelefu explained that when they were in Ivory Coast and her son was between five and eight years old he used to help her with selling.

He do the same thing I was doing because we were selling cold water, I was selling little stuff for us to make a living he was doing the same thing.

In regards to teaching her son housework, Ndelefu explained that she was living with her husband’s Mandingo community and they did not approve of her teaching her son household work as it was against their cultural practices. She compared this with the
way her mother raised them as children and explained her mother did not differentiate between boys and girls everybody learned how to cook and clean and this is what she wanted her son to learn. Moreover, because of all the tasks she had to do in caring for her husband’s family she reiterates she had no one to help her complete the tasks except her son. She recounted that:

When he was little the only thing I used to teach him how to cook, and when I doing it the Mandingo people they say I already turn him into a woman. When I say go put the pot on the fire, go blow the fire, or go do this, they say you already turned him into a woman, na a woman, na your girl child. You girls, so I say not your business, sometimes I say go wash dishes; I used to hide it because the Mandingo tribe don’t like for boys to wash dishes. So I say go wash dishes, because I don’t have nobody to help me only he, so he has to do it. Go wash dishes, go bring water, go do this, go do that and he will do it.

Conversely, Chuando and Nde spoke about gender differences in teaching household tasks in line with their respective upbringing. Although, Chuando points out that it was more important for her girl to learn how to take care of the home, she taught her son some of the tasks, as he was the oldest child and needed to learn so he could help her especially when her daughter was too young to help. She explained:

In the home I used to teach mostly my girl, my daughter. To tell her to learn how to cook, learn how to clean up, learn how to do laundry, learn how to sweep. That’s what I used to tell her to do because in our culture we usually teach the girl children how to do cooking, do this, do that but both children learned even my son he used to sweep, help his little sister to wash dishes sometimes he do the laundry because he is older than her. When he was about 8 years old at that time he was not cooking only bringing water, he don’t cook, he don’t wash dishes right you know boy children don’t wash dishes right at that time, he only bring me water or I say come beat the pepper for me (for cooking). As he grew older then he started to cook sometimes or do laundry for me.
For Nde, gender-based socialization was fundamental to their identity as Muslims and their Vai cultural practices as she described:

. . . the cooking, cleaning we force the girl more for that to do that. In the morning, I would tell my daughter you sweep and I send my son to get water and bring it or sit and play with his little brother at home. I would do other things but my daughter used to do most of the things because she was the biggest one (oldest). So I make sure she cleans, sweep, wash dishes, we cook together. That’s what I wanted my girl just like how they make me to be, that you have to be housewife . . . you will go to school and be something but you have to know how to cook, you have to clean, so that’s good for a woman. So that was the difference between the boys I was not pressing too much for the home jobs but the girls yes and she was the biggest (oldest) one too. For the boys to learn, their education was more important . . . 

Participants’ Beliefs about a Well Brought-up Child and their Parental Goals

During Displacement

In response to how they described a well brought-up child at this time they were living in a refugee camp, all participants stated a good child was one who listened and obeyed his or her parents due to the challenges they faced in instilling the competencies they desired in their children, and keeping them safe. Bendo, Nde and Ndelefu also mentioned a child whom no one complained about, who stayed at home and close to the mother most of the time, because it enabled the mothers to keep the child safe. In addition, the mothers’ description of a good child or well brought-up child reflected their parental goals; these were their desires and hopes for their children. One of the goals mentioned by all the participants was education; they reiterated that it was very important for their children to get an education, as this would enable them to have a better life in future. For instance, Bendo recounted:
I described it like a child who is able to go to school every morning and comes back home on time . . . Is able to take a shower in the morning because if you can’t do much for your mother but be able to take a shower in the morning and especially you try and learn a little bit English because it was difficult for them. Children in their classroom speaking dialect (Sierra Leonean ethnic language) so if this child is able to speak English a little bit then we would determine this child is trying, this child will learn something . . . . Those were the only thing we focus on the child speak English, pay attention in school, growing up no problem with him, people don’t lodge complaint about him. Those were the only thing because the other thing like business and other areas were negative for the parent because you don’t have much, you don’t go out and make money. So the parents would say if you will only go to school that will be right for me.

For this participant school seems to have become a priority since there were limited business opportunities. Thus, her description of a good child points to what she felt were essential characteristics that would enable her children to attain her goal of being educated and doing good as she explained,

Education will help him to live a better life, to be able to help his community and to help his friends. That is what my hope is because I am still hoping.

Other goals this mother had for her children were; she wanted them to be business people, learn to take care of their home, and to be like her. That is, to grow up like her whereby they can live anywhere, whether they have money or not; she attributed this to the way her mother raised her and taught her how to work for herself and take care of herself.

Similarly, Ndelefu stated that at the time, a well brought up child was one who listened and was trying to do better; which mirrored her goals for her child as she narrated:
I never want him to live like me, to be like me. My mother’s decision made me not go to school so I never wanted to make that decision for him. I want him to go to school . . . . I want him to be good. I just want him to be a better person na all, a better person and all the time to wipe the tears from my eyes because I go through a lot . . . I need him to go to school because with education you can have everything. Because they say, education is the key to the whole world, if you have that key the only thing that will stop you is God. When you have that key it can open any door, education I want him educated.

Chuando’s description of a good child resonated with the other participants, while her goal for her child to be a doctor was similar to what her mother desired for her. She recounted:

. . . what made me say they were good children that time because when I told them to do something they do, and nobody come lodge complaint to me and say oh you see your child insulted me today or your child took something from my house today nobody tell me all the time we were in refugee camp nobody tell me. Even in school teachers never lodge complaint to me even one day oh your son shout at somebody today, or your son did this mmh no until I left the camp.

In reference to her goals for her son, and similar to Ndelefu and Nde this participant mentioned that she wanted her son to be educated so he could do better in life and be able to take care of her in future.

I wanted my son to go to school to become a doctor. I used to talk to him and say remember I told you that when you grow up you are going to become a doctor so you can take care of me, you know I didn’t go to school . . . .

This mother emphasized what she wanted most for her children was for them to become somebody and hence wanted them to go to school, and even though her son helped her sell in the market, she did not desire that for him. In response to whether doing business was one of the goals she had for her children she explained:
No mmh I don’t want it that way mmh . . . I say me I don’t go to school so I don’t want them to be like me. I want them to become somebody so they can be able to help me, I always tell them. So I tell them to go to school.

For this participant it was also important for her children to know and understand they were in a refugee camp, a place that was not representative of who they were historically and culturally, and a place that held many pitfalls for them as children. She stated:

At that time for me the thing that was supposed to be good for your children is to make them to know that you are in a refugee camp where you are is not your home, make them to know the things they are not supposed to do like bad behavior, going around in the night . . . .

Although there were similarities between Nde and the other participants with regard to the traits of a well brought-up child and her goal that her children be educated and take care of her in future, it was additionally important for her that they attend Arabic classes to learn about their religion. This mother reported:

If you talk to your child and he or she listens to you then you say this child is going to be okay. When they were growing up I wanted just long life, good health a child should grow to become somebody good in future and take care of me. You know we always say oh ma you will be my ma you will do this for me so when you grow up be well. That’s how being a mother you feel, that’s how I used to feel.

Those days when my eyes open in Liberia I see how those children were a good child if you educated you can become anybody you can be president of a country, ambassador, police whatsoever because education is the key of life. So all the time that what my plan and my prayer for my kids is for them to learn. So I make sure I encourage them and force them to go to school because for me I am already old and I am not even thinking about school again for future . . . . the father could say I want my son to be a good ambassador tomorrow and I will be there resting and my son will be supporting me, he will send me to Mecca. I can pray every day for my children they can get education so tomorrow they will be someone better
to help back home where we are coming from. That was my thinking for my children.

In talking about the goal for their children to be educated, this mother pointed out that they emphasized more on their sons because they would be the ones to carry on the family name for generations, unlike girls who would marry and thus belong to another family. She explained that:

(For the boys) their education was more important because their father used to say these people (girls) this name will change on them (family name will change once they are married) but for you it will never change wherever you go you will keep the family name. So they may say doctor X (family name) or minister X coming today this or that so this is the reason you have to study, you have to learn and put your attention to education.

However, despite this gender difference in expectations and contrary to her upbringing whereby her community did not send their girls to school, she also wanted her daughters to be educated too, and wanted all their children to master English well.

(For the girls) it was the same thing we used to encourage it then . . . . We even say way back those days they used to say women don’t learn and we know it is false and before we can get it, it was too late for us. But both women and men learn, so that was our plan for them to learn, education is the key for them. But for the girl I used to tell her you can be a minister, you can be a lawyer, doctor but you still have to know how to cook for yourself or when you marry you have to cook for your man, that’s how we train her.

In discussing their religion, she mentioned that:

. . . he (father) always tell them I only want you to learn Arabic for your religion so you can know who you are, to pray and to say the words. When we were in Africa in the camp they have mosques they have a teacher for the kids for Koran, every one of them they go to Arabic school.
Bendo and Chuando were the only two participants who had children before displacement from Liberia. In describing their initial desires for their children at this time, their goals were similar to what their own mothers wanted for them, while their goals when they were living in the camp prioritized education.

Inculcating the Desired Competencies

All the participants taught their children the competencies they desired using the same approaches their own mothers used such as learning by observing and by doing, modeling behavior, imitation, reinforcement and demonstration. However, while all participants shared the parental goal that their children go to school and be educated, Bendo, Nde and Chuando talked about studying and doing homework with their children, thus indicating a difference between them and their mothers. Another difference was the amount of time they reported having spent with their children, this was because of unsafe conditions in the camp and limited adult activities, which nonetheless availed more time to teach and keep an eye on their children.

Some of the ways these mothers taught their children was talking to them during meal times, or when they were helping with household chores. Having their children assist with cooking by preparing vegetables or fetching water or washing dishes enabled children to be part of the activity and to learn by observing when they were younger and by doing, as they grew older. Chuando’s descriptions provide details of how she inculcated desired competencies. In talking about behavior and ensuring her children were aware of the environment and the importance of obedience and listening to her, she stated:
. . . I tell them not to walk about to go to bed early, don’t make problem, don’t make bad friends I used to tell them because we live among different different people we don’t know their ways we don’t know them from anywhere we only meet in the refugee camp. Don’t follow friends don’t insult older person, even when you go to school play by yourself.

This participant’s approach of teaching values and household work was similar to the way her mother taught her:

I just sit them down to talk to them that’s all. We sit down as a family I talk to them I say oh you the older person you the little sister respect the older one, respect your sister so she can be able to respect you too. Stay home if I not here take care of her, take care of the house, clean up, cook do stuff in the house. Sometimes like how we going to draw water we all go talking. Cleaning I teach them, when I cooking I call her to come stand by me and see what I doing, how many things I put in the soup, how many salt I put in the soup.

She further described other ways she taught her children and kept them safe:

What I do is, the only thing I can do for my child ren so they can listen to me, in the morning I make sure they eat in the morning I make them eat, I make them happy, I play with them, sit with them when they are home, talk to them we were always together. In the morning we come together first we pray together . . . I make sure they eat because when the children hungry that’s when the children go all around (the camp) but when they eat they always by the mother, but when you keep the children hungry they always moving around looking for food around. When I get little money I buy them something I come surprise them, this is a shirt or this is a t-shirt, a clothe for you. I make them feel happy so they can’t go around and cause problems.

In terms of learning how to cook and other household work, all participants described a similar pattern to Chuando; that is, talking to their children about it and sometimes buying treats for them from the market. However, Ndelefu and Nde also mention using corporal punishment. Ndelefu noted she was fearful her older son was
going to turn out bad due to peer influences and she was forced to use corporal punishment to regulate his behavior, she explained:

. . . when we went to the camp he was trying to become a bad child but I tried to make him a better person because I spank him. I put hot sauce on him, I won’t lie I put hot sauce on him. I spank him a lot, when he do anything (wrong) I spank him, when he do anything I spank him because he was a big boy and I don’t want him to just be loose, a loose child.

Nde clarified that she only used corporal punishment with her son and never hit her daughter as the latter listened, and thus she would talk to them about how she wanted them to behave and what she wanted for them and from them in the future. She mentioned that:

I always used to be with my children so that’s how I would talk to them . . . whenever someone do bad I say something I can say you know what I am telling you this for yourself not for myself but I am trying to encourage you. Like my daughter she is slow in doing things when you send her to do something . . . I never hit her because she quiet, but my son yes because he don’t listen. Like sometimes you will give him a bucket and the pump not too far and you sitting here you tell him go get some water there and bring it and you are here to teach him something but when he goes he put it down and he playing. When I go he come quick and I say okay when you finish I need the water now and when you come let me know why I send you for water and it take 30 minutes I waiting for you and you are not there . . . .

Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando taught their children how to sell in the market a skill that enabled them to help their mothers, as they grew older. Bendo gave details of how she taught her sons:

. . . because I never have time to sit myself to attend to do the business because I have to go to school, I have to work and I have to take care of the home. I used to go buy the goods and bring it in the camp. In the morning I pack everything and put it on the table and I will ask one of them to sit by it and I would show him the prices, this is one dollar, this is
25 cents, this is 1000 and show them how to give change. After 3 or 4 hours I will come back and see how the business is . . .

A distinct difference between the participants and their own mothers was they prioritized education. It was important for them that their children succeed in school and this led to an additional task some of the mothers took on at home. Bendo, Nde and Chuando mentioned teaching their children how to read and write and helping them with schoolwork. Bendo and Nde started teaching their children at a young age even before they started learning letters and numbers in school, and provided detailed illustrations of what they did. Bendo explained:

. . . I help him to study that was my desire because maybe he might not understand the teacher well. I decided to help him more in the home to do his work and to do different things . . . not different from school but to teach him what he can’t get in school. Because they speak Mende, (a different language from what they spoke). So I teach him in the house some things like a, b, c s and 1, 2, 3 and spelling words. The most important thing I used to do since he was 6 years was to help him with his schoolwork. Help him to go out to be social, we used to take them to the Save the Children center, they have a place, they had caregivers who were Liberian women and we would leave children there for like 5 hours they teach them.

Nde shared a similar example whereby she and her husband started teaching their children letters and writing before they started going to school. She explained that her husband was the one who mainly taught the children, and when they started going to school he would read and help them with their homework.

. . . he would help them like the letters they were learning he would draw all the letters for them and make a card he would draw the letters on and draw like a flower so they could be able to learn . . . they start before they started school that was our move . . . their father used to help them a lot to study even the handwriting because he has good writing . . . reading he used to sit down and help them. My older son used to be so clever
... because he used to work with them with books, magazines every day before they go to sleep, they have to read. Education was the main point we were thinking of that was our future.

Although these participants desired their children to have behaviors, skills and values similar to those they were raised with, their explanations for some of the reasons these competencies were essential highlight that these competencies took on a different meaning and dimension because of the physical and social environment in the refugee camps.

**Discontinuities: Effects of the War and Displacement on Motherhood**

*“The war carried everything”*

The war and displacement by war disrupted the social, cultural and economic structures that existed in the communities these participants were growing up in, and thus took away the systems and institutions that had assisted and supported their mothers in inculcating the desired competencies meant to guide children towards attaining parental and community goals. Consequently, these participants expressed the difficulties they faced trying to instill the competencies they wanted their children to acquire so that they could attain the goals they had for them. They pointed out the multiple losses they suffered due to displacement and living in refugee camps and stated this affected their motherhood experience and distinguished it from their own upbringing, and their own mothers’ experience of motherhood.

In Chapter Four, the first vignette provides an account given by each mother about their motherhood experience, and about being alone due to the loss of their families and their respective communities and the challenges this presented. The second vignette
is a description of their strength and resilience as they coped with the challenges they faced and provided for their children as best as they could, given the circumstances they were in. The sections below address these aforementioned themes and sub-themes in more detail; these are the particular challenges the mothers faced raising their children alone in the refugee camps due to loss of family, community, power as women and power as displaced people. In addition, their resilience and coping strategies are described in more detail.

The refugee camps

Some of the camps were located in the capital cities, while others were in rural areas and others close to the border. In some of the camps, the local communities were friendly, interacted, and traded with the Liberian refugees. In some places, the communities were hostile and resented their presence. The number of people in the camps the participants lived varied somewhat from hundreds to thousands of individuals. All the participants mentioned that majority of the people in the camps were women and children, as some of the men had been killed in the war and others were involved in the conflict and so still living in Liberia. Two participants remarked that in the camps they lived in there were a lot of children many of whom were alone because their parents had been either killed or separated from them in the turmoil of fleeing the violence. In some of the camps, there were only Liberians but as the civil war spread to Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, the camps in Guinea had people from the three countries.
Alone: Loss of Family, Community and Power

All four participants lamented about feeling alone and being alone as mothers raising their children far away from home, and away from the support of their families and communities. The mothers’ expressed that their main concern was how their children were going to turn out because of growing up in the refugee camps. An environment that was not conducive to instilling desired competencies and meeting parental goals due to lacking the social, cultural and economic resources and structures essential in assisting them as parents and guiding their children. These circumstances further disempowered them as women and as displaced people as it was difficult to find the means to be self-sufficient thus exposing them to exploitation by men, and sometimes living in camps that were not safe for anyone.

Loss of Family

In narrating about their flight from Liberia when the war started each participant described how they were separated from their immediate families. Bendo and Chuando already had children and their children were at the time the only family members with them as they sought refuge in neighboring countries. Nde was able to flee with her husband, but did not know the fate of her parents and siblings. Her experience was similar to that of Ndelefu who did not know the whereabouts of her immediate family and who left behind the man she was betrothed to as he urged her to leave for safety with his sisters. Although with time these participants were able to learn the fate and the whereabouts of some of their family members and reconnected with some of them, they were alone for the duration of their stay in the refugee camps. The participants described
different moments in mothering when they would have been supported by their families if they were back home just as they had witnessed their mothers and other women in their communities being assisted by other family members.

Nde’s example of when she felt most alone was during and after giving birth. She explained she found out she was pregnant when she got to the camp and although her husband was with her and a friend helped her get to hospital and checked on her in hospital, she was by herself and it was not easy giving birth away from home. She described that the practice in her culture when a woman gave birth was her mother, or a close female relative would be with her and stayed for at least a month and helped take care of the newborn child and the mother until she was strong enough to be on her own. She stated:

I never get experience of having child in my country. Except those that have I see when they give birth people used to be around them . . . that is what I was thinking about like when I have my child my mum is supposed to be there or my sister helping me. But I am by myself except friends come and say hi to me then walk out. But I don’t get too much help. Because it was my first time if I was going to get a child back home with my mum (there.) It was going to be different. Like the way my uncle’s wife used to have her children, the mother used to come with us there, she take one month, two months helping take care before she go back, and we all there helping. But in the camp no one with you, no sister, no mother and father, you just there with your husband with your child.

For this participant becoming a mother away from her family and community meant not only losing the support of being nurtured back to health, but the chance to learn from her mother and other women about motherhood and ways to care for and raise children. Women normally played these roles, and hence the reason she felt alone even though her husband was with her. People in the camp did not fill the void as she mentions
they may come and say “hi and then walk out” but they did not help or provide support the way family would have done.

Similarly, Chuando expressed how difficult it was raising children by herself. When she got to the camp in Ghana, she had one child and over the years had two more children. She commented how the children’s’ fathers didn’t help and left her even before she gave birth. Friends would occasionally assist her by giving her some food for her child, but it was not the kind of support a mother would have received from family.

I was by myself I have refugee friends sometimes they might help me cooking or giving us food sometimes, but to hold him I do everything, washing clothes, look for food . . . when I got pregnant with the second child he (father) left me and went to Ivory Coast. I was by myself, I give birth all by myself, he was not there, I didn’t see him again. He was from Liberia too; I didn’t see him at all.

In reference to lack of family, she stated:

. . . no parents I do everything for myself. I don’t have my daddy and my mummy mmh. . . it was not easy because you are alone everything na ma, everything na ma, everything na ma, no aunty, no uncle nobody with you tch . . .

As the children grew older, it was difficult to discipline them, as they did not fear her as much as they would have feared a father as an authority figure and disciplinarian in the home just as her father had been when she was growing up. She explained:

. . . you know these small children they got some ways in them during my time if my ma said this na what I would do. Do this I would do this but the children you say do this they take time before they can do it right away. Especially as a single mum you get no man so they can be afraid of the man a little bit. Only mother you just say to them maybe they do it, but it will take time. But during that time with my parents when they say do this because I scared of my daddy I would do it right away . . . But now I alone sometime when I tell them to do something they do it, but it takes like 5 minutes to 15 minutes before they do it.
This mother noted that she would constantly remind her children to behave well because she was alone, and if any problems arose between her and other people in the camp she had no one to stand up for her. She stated:

. . . I don’t want people to come and say oh your child this your child that, I am a single mother I got nobody to talk for me so I used to tell them all the time.

Bendo and Ndelefu described similar difficulties with disciplining their children due to being alone with no family structure in place that would have ensured that their children’s behavior was monitored and desirable traits reinforced. Bendo had all three children in Liberia and at that time, her mother and sister were helping to raise them. She expressed how difficult it was to take care of them alone especially when she first got to Sierra Leone, and how without her family there was no one to reinforce what she was teaching the children or to fill in and teach them what she was unable to. Family was also the frame of reference for children as it mirrored what was appropriate and confirmed what their parents were teaching them. She lamented that:

The most challenging thing was how really to bring them up because when I was back home I used to care for them, if I don’t get to do something they get that from my immediate family. When I was in the camp I had to do it . . . I would wonder how they will be able to understand me, they might feel like I am misleading them . . . .

However, Chuando and Ndelefu expressed that due to being alone with their children; they became close because their children were their only family. The loss and separation from their surviving family members led these mothers to define family as comprising them and their children as Ndelefu explained:
(I took care of my children) Myself, myself I never had any family, no family (sighs) so my children and myself were very close, very very close because they are my only family I know about because I didn’t know where all my other family was. So they were my only family . . . .

Besides being separated from their immediate families, Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando referred to the fact that they were betrothed to the respective fathers of the children they had before the war, and would probably have married them, but the war separated them. Chuando stated: “my son’s father wanted to marry me but the war separate us.” Before the war, Ndelefu lived with the father of her child, but because she was going to school, her mother was taking care of her son and lived in a different part of Liberia. When the war started, she was not able to leave with either her son or her fiancé. Thus, these mothers experienced the loss of having a partner who would have helped in raising their children.

Although Ndelefu got married to a Guinean man, she narrated how being alone without any family when she had to flee from Guinea led her to marry him. She explained:

When the war came to Sierra Leone we run to Guinea and how come I met my husband. When the Sierra Leone war cooled down some of my son’s father family said they going back to Sierra Leone because Guinea was so hard it’s a French country. When the war started in Guinea, my husband said they are leaving with his family, so I said I couldn’t stay here I want to leave with you. My family and my friends that I came with all of them had gone to Sierra Leone . . . I don’t even know where they go at. So I said I want to follow you he say okay so I went with him. It was the worst nightmare in Ivory Coast . . . I suffer. I ask why this war came.

This participant described in details (see her vignette in Chapter Four) her suffering because of abuse and mistreatment from her husband and his family, especially
her father in law. She expressed that she was alone, and had no voice in the family because she was not from the same ethnic group, nationality, and was not a Muslim. This participant felt that she suffered so much because she was not in Liberia and had no family or community to intercede on her behalf. She recalled:

. . . I never had nobody that wanted to say anything for me, I never had nooo family, nobody it was like too much . . . I want for this war to finish so I can go back to Liberia and look for my family. I wish I can run away with my children.

Additionally, being displaced and away from her community forced her to do work she had never done before just to survive and stay safe from the harassment from her father-in-law. His abuse led her husband to take her to stay with his mother in Guinea for nine months. She explained:

I don’t know where my family is so my husband say my mother in Guinea you want to go there, so I say yeah because I don’t know where my family at. I never even dreamed of going there, where my people weren’t, and I was there. I went on the farm in Guinea, the jungle part of Guinea that you can’t even see car, you can’t see anything . . . I make farm where I don’t make farm for my parents, I split wood, I did things I don’t do for my people before because I had to do it.

Loss of Community

The community in the camps was not culturally homogeneous. There were Liberians from different ethnic groups, and in some camps, there were also people from Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. Although there were similarities in some of the desirable competencies amongst a majority of the people, the different ethnic communities were scattered in the camp and did not have a shared ethnic identity, history, common practices and rituals that would have united them and thus provided a vital aspect of the
developmental niche. Moreover the physical context had limited resources and comprised of people forced by war to live together in the camp and thus could not provide the necessary social, cultural and economic structures that would ascertain family well-being.

Participants expressed a fear of losing control of their children not only because of lacking family support as previously stated, but also because of the negative influences in the camps. All the mothers also lamented the lack of resources to teach their children necessary values and skills. All the participants mentioned they were afraid of the bad influence of other children in the camp, those who did not obey and listen to their parents, were often fighting other children, engaged in smoking or other inappropriate and criminal behavior and roaming the camp instead of going to school. These mothers felt the social structure presented several challenges for them and their children.

Chuando explained that there were different types of people living together and subsequently children had different behaviors and she was concerned her children might get involved in some of the bad behaviors. She described it as follows:

... some boys don't go to school, some girls don't want to go to school, they want to be behind girlfriend, boyfriend, some people were smoking, some people were drinking because they had club in the camp ... some people fighting so different different behavior in the camp. Some people go in your house when you are sleeping take your things from you, different different behavior you know because different different kind of people come together so always different different behavior. Some children the way they dress they wear short pants and a top the stomach showing, the way they do their hair they cut their hair funny there were differences some people don't do that but some people have their children fighting ...

Nde had similar worries:
... some children in the camp the mother can tie their waist when two kids fight and they want to go fight making confusion ... some children don’t listen to their parents ... So I used to worry about that because they are going to school together, they are playing together and you don’t know the attitude that child get. Your child can think it is something good but it is not good for them. Like there was this boy he used to like my son and would take him on the bike he was smoking cigarettes and he gave it to my son when we were in Guinea and he (son) was like 6, 7 years, small boy ... .

These challenges were reiterated by Ndelefu who said it was difficult to control her children’s behavior because all the children in the camp played together. It was difficult to differentiate between the good and bad children especially with some of the children coming from the war zone unaccompanied by any adult.

Bendo also shared similar sentiments and explained that as her children grew a bit older her worry was:

My worry for him (older son) was the children, some of the children would go out because they liked dancing and they would leave school, they would not focus on education and they would go dancing all night. It would be outside in the village and some children would go out to dance, and would go different places their friends would carry them ... those were my concerns friends that would lead him into it because where we were living they were having a jail for children. If you do something like rape they take you to jail. Because of pleasure they want everything, they want new things every now and then. So they would do things they don’t want to do just for them to make money ... because if he does not do it or whether you do it or not if you are part of that group you will be part of the problem and that problem will take you somewhere. That was the most thing that worried me. The fear was for them to follow other not good children. Children used to leave their parents and go different areas away to live the way they want to live. It was not really easy ... .

This mother also noted that the lure to make their own money, and buy their own food made it challenging for parents to keep children at home and under their control.
Some children would do odd jobs in the camp, make money for themselves, and not contribute towards the upkeep of other family members. She stated:

... at the time we were living in the refugee camp the community where we live boy children and girl children want to get money for themselves that was the most difficult thing the problem parents were fixing. The child even 12 years old wants to get money for themselves not for the parents. When they get the money they only coming home sometimes when they are hungry but if they get money and they buy food and eat, they don’t come home, they won’t come home on time. ... You are in the home maybe you have 5 dollars and maybe they make 10 dollars so your own (money) will feed 10 people the food is not that rich, and they are having their own money and their food is better than what is at home. ...  

This participant further explained that even as she was facing these challenges, it was difficult to discipline her children through corporal punishment, a method that her parents and community used, because she worked as a volunteer for the UNHCR and later Save the Children and Christian Children’s Fund as a child protection worker. Their rules prohibited parents from spanking their children, thus she could not hit her children even when they did not listen to her.

... based on all of those organizations I cannot do the way I was brought up, I cannot hit them, I just have to beg them and know what to do. If they are doing things the wrong way I have to apply a different method that my parents didn’t apply.

Another challenge was because as a parent she was not the primary provider the UNHCR provided the necessities; hence, these circumstances usurped some of her control and authority as a parent. The older children would not respond to being disciplined by being told they will miss a meal or they will not take to school the kind of food they want for their lunch. While the younger children listened and were easier to discipline, the older children would state that they specifically had a rations card in their
name and would threaten to report to the child protection offices that they were being deprived of food. She explained:

. . . everybody that have refugee status have a rations card that you are entitled to food. If a child does not do what you want him or her to do and then you say you are not going to eat three times because you did not do this work, you are only going to eat in the morning and in the afternoon . . . or I will not give you what you really want to take to school. The child knows that this food is for them and she will ask, give me what I am supposed to take to school or she will pass by the office (to complain) . . . because they don’t want to do what you want them to do at the time. . . .

Bendo also pointed out that when she was growing up, raising children was not an individual endeavor schools participated in disciplining children and reinforcing some of the behaviors and values, they were being taught at home. However, in the camp, the school did not play a similar role and as a mother, she was on her own. She recounted:

. . . like in the school there is no special punishment for you like where I grew up there was a special group that make sure the children are clean. They have those branches, but where they started school in that community there was no discipline that much. To really make sure that they are clean, they are perfectly dressed there was nothing like that. We tried to, that was one of the values I wanted that the child is clean and if I don’t do it and I make mistake somebody else is there to correct it, but there was nothing like that. The other people they are meeting in school look like they are just from the farm they are dirty and you know child sometimes copy from their friends. It used to be very difficult to take care of their uniform, to take care of them and make sure they are clean it was hard. Telling them every day do this, do this, do this, and they would tell you we are meeting the children in school and they look like this even if we don’t do this, this is fine. They would copy from the children that is a different community from us.

Besides the school not reinforcing behavior, it also culturally reflected and met the local needs, which were different from what she wanted for her children. The school was in the local community had big class sizes and for the most part conducted in the
local language, a language they did not speak or understand. This participant expressed it was therefore difficult for her children to learn in school and to learn English. In addition, children attending the school were required to take a class on how to read the Koran. She commented:

When they go to school the sound in their ears is the dialect (local language) . . . it is really difficult to get what they want. . . . they used to take some classes for Koran. The other boy (older son) can read the prayer (laughs lightly), the younger boy he used to read the Koran. You know things that don’t even belong to you, but you do.

Ndelefu also expressed that the school in the camp was not well structured and children were not learning much as she said laughing, “what they call school it was like they just go there and run around all day and then they finish. No good education, they said they were teaching the children but nothing better they were learning there.” Thus the school was neither reinforcing her goals nor fulfilling the expected academic and social roles and knowledge related to life success.

In addition to this, the camp environment made it difficult to teach their children other values and skills they wanted them to have. Bendo explained the main difference between the community she grew up in, and the camp environment was that the camp environment was “tight”. This participant reiterated how her context enabled her to play a role in her education and to focus on what her mother wanted and said:

For me I worked for my own fees, my tuition and for them they don’t. For me I have to work in the business to get money and I make sure I do what my mother asked me to do that is the only way she will meet my needs.

She described how, for example, in the camp she couldn’t send her children out to sell as she used to when growing up. This was because the camp was not safe and people
would rob them or rip them off. Also, the environment lacked people to model behavior and learn from, as well as people to affirm what she was teaching her children. She further explained:

. . . you don’t see new things that you will learn from . . . it (camp) was just in the bush (rural area). Sometimes child learns from experience you tell them if you do this, this will happen, if you do this, see what happened to this person (in the community). They are just seeing the same people all the time in the community so they won’t learn, they can’t believe you.

Similarly Nde and Ndelefu also described being unable to instill valuable lessons because of the limitations of the camp environment. Nde mentioned her children were unable to learn farming and selling when they were younger. She stated:

we were not having much thing in the camp like making garden . . . so some of the things I let them know (taught them) but they were not doing a garden and by the time we were in one of the camps in Guinea a lot of the women were not selling . . .

Ndelefu stated that the camp in Abidjan was like a prison and life revolved around preparing and eating two meals a day. Later, when a television was brought into the camp people sat and watched television all day. She mentioned how majority of the children previously would spend most of the day just running around the perimeter of the camp:

When we were on the camp (smiles) the camp was like a prison the only time say you got a little money or somebody gave you a little money you just go to the market and come back . . . sometimes weeks pass we inside there because I don’t got anything to do outside. All the people stay in the camp until they brought a TV but it was almost time for us to come now (to the US) that’s when they brought TV at least for entertainment because all the day in the camp you just standing around nothing to do. So in the morning you find something to eat, and then you go sit down in front of the TV, and be in front of that TV all day the grownups, children everybody in front of the TV (smiles).
Chuando reiterated how people in the camp were from different ethnic communities with different values thus indicating a lack of cultural cohesiveness and attributed this to her children not learning Gio her ethnic language. This also led her to be persistent in teaching her children their cultural ways and consistently reminding them that they were in a refugee camp. Teaching them about their identity and their roots was important to her. She narrated:

In the refugee camp . . . there are different different people group of people come together and everybody had their own ways of living, they have their own ways of doing things I tell my children not to follow other people’s children . . . . I used to tell them because we live among different people we don’t know their ways we don’t know them from anywhere we only meet in the refugee camp . . . . At that time for me the thing that was supposed to be good for your children is to make them to know that you are in a refugee camp. Where you are is not your home.

Concerning the loss of language, she lamented:

I spoke to them in English all the time we were in the camps. Many people too (in the camps) they don’t speak their own dialects (smiles) only English they spoke all the time, they speak English a lot. Na the mistake I made tch. I didn’t speak it to them at all I don’t know why and now I feeling bad they don’t understand it and now it’s hard when I speaking to my son in Gio he answers me in English all the time I talking to him. My son understands a little bit, they don’t speak it at all.

Another loss participants experienced due to a disruption of their traditional communities were the cultural rites of passage that were available to them, but were unavailable to their children, thus creating gaps in the wealth of knowledge garnered during the process. Bendo and Chuando mentioned a rite of passage they referred to as “society”. They explained these were secret societies and were places children of a certain age went for a prolonged time; girls and boys were separated and were taught the
fundamentals of their respective traditional culture. Boys were sometimes taught life
skills such as weaving mats.

While the other three participants expressed how challenging it was to raise their
children without the usual supports from family and community, but felt they were able
to inculcate some of the desired competencies, Bendo expressed that her children did not
acquire the skills that were important to her. She stated:

What I wanted them to be like changed because of the environment
because I wanted them to come out with a good education because we
were in the camp the education was free for them and they don’t have
much work. I wanted them to come out with an attitude like to be business
people; I wanted them to come out as people who can take care of their
house, their room. But all of those things were not, didn’t work out for
them, they are different.

Loss of Power as Women and Displaced People

Displacement by war and living in refugee camps affected the participants’ ability
to provide for their children due to limited economic opportunities to make a comfortable
living, and denied them as individuals some control over their own lives and their
children’s lives. The experience of being refugees endangered the whole family due to
lack of safety in some of the camps, and hostility from some of the local communities
that resented the presence of refugees on their land. Additionally, the experience made
them as women susceptible to exploitation by men.

Participants narrated how difficult life was when they first arrived in the refugee
camps; they had to wait for food and other basic supplies from the UNHCR and other
humanitarian organizations. All the participants described their struggles at the
beginning, being wholly dependent on the UNHCR because there was nothing to do, no
work and no means to supplement the insufficient food supplies. The participants lamented at how difficult it was for them as adults and mothers to have their lives reduced to doing nothing and not being able to provide for their children. Nde and Ndelefu’s accounts illustrate this experience: Nde narrated:

It was different from the way I was raised. Those days in Liberia the father working, the mother doing business things were okay. It was different because what we need like no job for nobody, for the father. I didn’t have a job, nothing I was not selling. You just wake up, you eat you walk around or you go to the market or walk on the street or supply ground you go home and sleep, take shower, you pray that’s all. We were just there depending on the food (from UNHCR) and its every month. That’s the food we have to get before we can sell so we can buy other things it was not easy for us. You can get it in your mind that you want this for your child but it is not easy to get, you have to wait for that food, eat the same food and you have to sell some . . . .

Ndelefu also recounted:

. . .  first when I entered the camp because just sitting in one place or standing and turning around at the end of the day you go to bed. You turn around; turn around at the end of the day you go to bed, after a few times we got used to it.

Although over time, each woman was able to find ways to eke a living they mentioned being hungry, and their children being hungry most of the time. All the mothers described their greatest worry was food and having something to eat for their children, this lasted for the duration of their stay in the refugee camps. In addition, all four mothers were constantly worried about their children’s health and always hoping they would not get sick from the poor diet and harsh living conditions. Their fears were compounded by the fact that they did not have access to adequate health care.
Bendo became emotional when describing this sense of despair over being unable to provide her children with food, a necessity especially after the UNHCR left the camp.

Food distribution stopped, and people had to fend for themselves for a while:

How long would that last for because sometimes we were without food, how are we going to make it uh, tch (clicks her mouth) I don’t know how to describe those days (voice breaking). We were without food sometime we spend a week without food and our daughter the little one would ask me after I prepare cassava she would ask me when I will eat. When I tell her I will eat later, she would be crying (low tone) Life was not difficult when I was back home. When we get in the camp especially at the end of the time we were leaving things were a little bit fine. But after the UNHCR left there was not much support again and I was sick at the same time I started wondering and worrying how long we could be without food . . .

Nde described the situation as follows:

It was really difficult in Africa in the refugee camp the food. You have to go out there; you have to do things for your children not to stay hungry because hunger killed some people during the war. They die no bullet, no sickness they be laying in the camp no food. So when you see that and you got little child and you the mother you struggle inside, what will happen to my child, one day, two days, we don’t have food to eat?

This participant further reiterated that worrying about food was constantly on their minds almost all their waking moments, this participant’s description illustrates the concern and worry expressed by all the other mothers. She recalled:

. . . in the night you are what my child is going to eat tomorrow morning. You are thinking the more important thing that time that was in us, what tomorrow morning you will get to eat. Thinking about the future, what I am going to get this that, that thinking too much was not there. While you sleep you are thinking what the next day you are going to eat, what your child going to eat that was the more important thing. I used to think more for my child because there was no other way to just get money at that time.
Nde also pointed out that none of her children drank milk or ate other foodstuff that children were fed as they were growing up in her community in Liberia. Thus indicating that the lack of food had other health and growth implications for children as there was no means of providing a wholesome diet. She stated:

My kids never drink no milk except breast milk. We never had enough money for milk. They drink water like my daughter and my son too he drink water for four months. Just hot water you just boil it put it down low temperature and the breast milk four months. No milk, nothing like how you beat rice over there (Liberia) you can beat rice and put palm oil and give it to the baby, my son he get nothing like that for four months. It’s quite different, quite different mh mh its hard (low tone).

In narrating about the challenge of providing for their children, Ndelefu and Chuando described their sense of isolation in living in camps in foreign countries. They pointed out that there were Liberians and other refugees who had money or knew people in the countries they were living in and did not have to live in the camps, an option they did not have. Ndelefu explained:

I have never been to Abidjan and when the war came I went to Abidjan. Who will I go to, who I know, it was hard. I used to be hungry, my children used to be hungry. Taking care of them, the difficulty was food, food to get food . . . .

This participant further explained that facing the challenge of providing for her children alone forced her to beg for money from people. She decried how the dire conditions forced other women into prostitution, while men would taunt those who refused their advances.

I have to beg for money because living in the camp nobody giving me money. So at night when we watching TV, we watching, we talking, I ask oh please help me with some franc just for me to put it out in the morning (spend it on food) so if I get 20 cents or 40 cents, I can go sound to bed. I
had to survive that was better than go prostitute out there. You have to sleep with somebody before they give you good money and I don’t want to do it. They (men) say I be big man, I said I not big man they say you be big man, we are going to get you. I say you are not going to get me, God will provide for me. I always used to say keep me away from the army people over there. In the morning they (women) dress up they go to the barracks, to the Ivorian army not too far from the camp.

Chuando also reiterated how being a single parent was difficult because she had no one to help her. She stated:

Mmh I feel bad living as a single mother in the camp, I had nobody to help me. You just wait for somebody (UNHCR) to come early in the morning and give food it was hard for me. I used to look at my kids and feel very bad, it was hard, it was not easy with three children in the refugee camp as a single mother it was very hard. When we got there, there was no food you know when we get to the refugee camp it’s new . . . .

Chuando further provided details of their living conditions when she first arrived at the camp when for a few months they lived in large communal tents and this added to the difficulties she was facing. She recalled:

The UN before they find you a place they take a long time we all would just go to the C area portion where people just put their beds (mats). They just have an area in one big tent like for example me and my kids we were just like this (demonstrates people so close together). Things was difficult when I got newly (arrived at the camp) I was ah how I am going to live with the children among people like this because everyone na together. So it was hard, it was very hard for me the first month I spent there it was hard. Before they can go around and register people, before they put people on the list before they start giving us clothes and things, it was hard in the beginning. I started to think I want to go back home, but how will I go back home war in the country; it was very hard for me for the first one month I was there.

All other participants described similar living conditions when they first arrived at the refugee camps whereby they lived in communal temporary shelters for about three months. Later they were given space and building materials to construct their own
shelter. However, Ndelefu explained that in the camp in Abidjan they lived in a communal tent comprising about 65 people for two and a half years. The camp comprised of another three other tents with the same number of people living in each tent.

In describing their experience of building their own shelters after the UNHCR started providing people with the tarpaulin and other supplies to build, Chuando explained that in the camp she lived the UN would find people to assist the single mothers. Bendo and Nde mentioned that this was not the case in the camps in which they lived, and it was difficult for women who were alone and those who were not strong enough.

**Lack of Safety and Hostility in the Camps**

In relating their accounts of their flight from Liberia, it was evident that few people were able to choose where to go because they were fleeing for their lives, headed for the nearest border, and used any available means of transport to leave Liberia. When they reached the transit points set up by the UNHCR people would be registered and later transported to the refugee camps the UNHCR had set up. People did not have a choice about which camp they would be taken to as there were camps in different locations in the countries they sought refuge. Bendo explained:

> We walked to this place then the UNHCR register us. When you register here, you will be able to get in a truck because we have eight camps at the time. But you don’t really know where you are going (which camp), they will only register you and they take you where they want to take you.

Except for Bendo who lived in the same camp in Sierra Leone until she was resettled in the U.S., the other three mothers lived in at least two different camps in two
different countries. The participants described some of their experiences in some of the
countries as positive because the local communities would be welcoming and would try
to help the Liberian refugees. However, some of the camps they lived in were unsafe, and
the local community was hostile towards them and treated them in ways that made them
feel powerless and dehumanized. Some of the dangers in the camp also necessitated
always having their children with them and close by and thus limiting where children
could play.

Nde lamented the camp in Guinea was close to the forest and some of the people
in the local community were hostile towards them. She said:

   Like Guinea, when we went to Guinea they take us almost in the forest
   because they think when they say refugee, I don’t know how they used to
   take them like animal or something different.

   This participant further explained that because of being close to the forest people
were afraid of a poisonous lizard that reportedly had bitten someone when they first
arrived at the camp and he had died the same day. The lizard was said to be extremely
poisonous and thus everyone was cautioned to be on the lookout for it for safety reasons.
Nde explained this made it stressful for them the first year in that camp, as she constantly
had to ensure her children were close by all the time.

   In Guinea we were a little afraid when we went there because the place
they put us it was not so good. Because they take us all the way by the
forest, it was where they used to make their farms they give them
(UNHCR) land to build for the refugees. There was this thing that used to
walk the ground they call it “tirikiri” in Mandingo it was a lizard if it bite
you 24 hours you would die. It was looking very different in Guinea so we
used to be very scared and we make our children they can’t go anywhere
especially in the grass, you check every time where is that person. I make
sure I check you are still here. They all saw it, we make sure they showed
it to all the kids so they know what it looked like and not to play with it they might think it is a normal lizard. Later they sprayed the camp and it was okay. But, the first year when we first went there and my children oh my God (pauses and hits the table) everyday where are you come here. Maybe tomorrow I will take you guys from out of here and we will go back. I will find a way maybe I will ask the UN let them transfer me to Liberia, I want to go back. That thing made people leave the camp.

This mother also mentioned that some of the camps they lived in were unsafe because of being close to the borders and there were occasions when the violence spilled over with attacks being made on people in the camps by the warring factions, thus necessitating people to be moved further inland to other camps for safety. This occurred several times as she recalled moving to at least three different camps in Guinea to escape the violence.

Chuando also described being concerned about safety and thus always being with her children. She noted that in the camp in Ghana some people from the local community would walk around the camp and stab the refugees, adults and children and people would be killed too.

The danger that was on the camp the Ghanaians they used to juk people. Because Ghana is very hot you open your windows the people get a sharp thing they pass it through the window and they would juk the person, they juk one Liberian man on his side. I don’t know why they would do that. Ghanaians used to come to the camp to us, they get something against us, they used to do all kind of things to Liberians in the camp. That’s why I used to keep my children; we don’t open the window whether it’s hot. They were attacking children too, oh you leave your children to go anywhere m mh, it’s not easy in that camp. They used to kill people in that camp.

Ndelefu mentioned that prior to going to the camp in Ivory Coast, she lived in Guinea for about a year and she described how the Guinean police would whip the
Liberian women because of wearing pants, which was against their laws. She further stated that the camp in Ivory Coast was like a prison, for example, movement outside the camp was restricted, and they could not go out freely and had to be back in the camp before 6 p.m. She recounted:

When we moved in Abidjan it was like (sniffs) I don’t know (pauses) like a nightmare because its (camp) like a big heavy concrete fence, you eat in the morning and in the night only. From morning to in the night you don’t go out, they don’t let us go out there is a gate you have to pass through the security before you go out. After six o clock in the evening the gate is closed . . . you can’t get outside again till the next day. Outside (if) you go you just go outside the gate to see cars running, that’s the only thing for the time we were there, we never used to go out it was like a prison.

Bendo narrated how the local community did not want them to farm on their land and reportedly would claim that the refugees had made them suffer. The refugees had been told they can clear some land and plant food for their individual consumption, but the local community would chase them away and take their tools. This participant also described an incident involving high school students who were in a boarding school near the camp. The school was on a hill overlooking the camp and on one occasion, the students started throwing rocks into the camp, continued the whole day, and injured several people. However, when the police commander went to the camp he blamed and threatened the refugees that if that occurred again, he was going to kill everybody in the camp. This mother explained how afraid and scared everyone was. They didn’t understand the hostility from the community because people knew the reasons they were living on their land. The community had also allowed the UNHCR to set up and operate a camp in that location.
The above section addressed some of the challenges participants faced as women and as mothers raising their children in a refugee camp. They suffered losses that made it difficult for them to inculcate desired competencies in their children and to teach them the values and practices of their respective ethnic groups. However, these challenges did not define the women as they struggled to adapt to the circumstances by using the resources they had access to in striving to care, guide, and protect their children.

Resilience and Coping

“I was strong. . .”

Despite the numerous challenges participants experienced as women and as mothers during their flight from Liberia, and their prolonged stay in the refugee camps, all four participants described some of the ways they coped with and understood the events unfolding in their lives thus reflecting their resilience. Participants noted there were moments when despair set in as they pondered their future and their children’s future because of the uncertainty of how long they would continue to live in the refugee camp. However, the themes that emerged from their descriptions of the coping strategies they used indicated a problem-focused approach to coping whereby as women and as mothers they did not succumb to the challenges they faced, rather they sought ways to manage their stress and practical ways to overcome the social, cultural and economic discontinuities they experienced. Four themes emerged including: (1) religion; (2) helping each other; (3) self-empowerment through engaging in economic activities and accessing the resources provided by the UNHCR and other relief organizations; and (4) self-efficacy beliefs.
Religion

Religion was fundamental for all participants in dealing with challenges and in understanding the meaning of their experiences. Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando were Christians and Nde was Muslim, their religious beliefs were the main source of comfort and hope as they described their belief that God had saved their lives, would see them through everything and would bless their children with a better future. All participants further explained that praying and belonging to a religious group relieved their stress and sustained them through everything they experienced. In addition, the prayer groups and churches they established became the community that played some of the roles previously performed by the respective ethnic communities in which they grew up.

For instance, Chuando expressed being happy that the camp in Guinea had a Gio community church, and they were able to worship in her ethnic language, thus providing a sense of belonging unlike the church in the camp in Ghana where they worshipped in a local dialect and English. In reference to coping with her fears about getting sick, or her children getting sick, not having food to eat or getting involved in bad things she recounted that she prayed every morning with her children, and for her children. She stated:

. . . I used to ask God for direction, God help me I shouldn’t get sick and anything I used to do really God used to help me . . .

Concerning her children’s wellbeing, she explained:

. . . because when a child is sick you get nobody to help you it’s not easy and when the children are growing they might be a big problem to you the mum. I used to pray to God all the time, tell them, ring bell in their ear when you go out there don’t put yourself in any mess, don’t join bad
friends. I pray to God my children might not get sick, they get food to eat and be a good child. I always ask God to do for me to take care of them; I put them in God’s hands all the time.

Similarly, Bendo explained that despite disciplining her children, the other ways she tried to guide her children away from the negative influences of the camp was by regularly attending prayer meetings with them and being diligent about going to church. Her children were also in the church choir and along with other parents; they formed a prayer group for children. Nde and Ndelefu also described praying with their children regularly, especially praying about their future, for food, their health, and that they may be good children. All participants explained that through persistently praying they never lost hope and God took care of them throughout their flight, and in the refugee camp, and enabled them and their children to get political asylum and hence a better future. For instance, Nde mentioned:

. . . I pray for them for their education because we have to protect them from bad things, help us our survival, food, help us be able to help our children. I pray every day I can do that.

Bendo and Ndelefu also recounted that God was their source of strength in their moments of despair, and He saved their lives. Bendo talked about a time when the UNHCR left the camp and people had no food supplies and the crops they had planted were not ready to be harvested, this she said was one of the lowest points of their lives in the camp. She noted:

. . . we were without food, how are we going to make it. I don’t know how to describe those days anyway (with a tremor in her voice). But it was just by the grace of God we were able to handle things . . . .
In narrating about her flight from Tabou to Abidjan in Ivory Coast, Ndelefu stated that God saved her and her children as they reached the refugee camp in Abidjan without having to pay bribes at the checkpoints, and without being asked to show her identification papers. They had witnessed Liberians being killed on the way and others paying bribes for safe passage. She recounted:

Nobody defend me I go with God the trust of God I believe God will carry me and He will walk me through . . . . they were killing people from Tabou to Abidjan, torturing people, I see and my children saw it . . . people stopped me that I should not go, and I say that God na one that brought me to Ivory Coast, He took me out of the war and He brought me here and He knows what He brought me for. I know I will go through . . . . Everybody say you will die with your two children, and I say no I am not gonna die God there. Then you know I just had faith, I believed God gonna save me and God saved me because they never ask any question. People were paying 100,000 cfa just to cross the gates (checkpoints) because they had a lot of gates . . . people were just paying money. But I believed God is there by my side and I just go through . . . it’s like God can just say the people shouldn’t see you . . . they never ask my children they never ask myself anything they don’t even touch my papers to say we going to come for your paper, no, I show my paper they say pass.

This participant also stated that God gave her the strength to live through the abuse from her father-in-law and her husband, and that He also saved her life because her father-in-law tried to harm her numerous times with witchcraft. Furthermore, her faith and trust in God protected her as a woman from sexual exploitation and prostitution as it guided her actions and the choices she made. For instance, her faith kept her humble, and thus willing to work for people younger than her so her children would have food to eat. She explained:

I was strong and I always proud of myself sometimes when I sit, I’m proud of myself. I was going through all that hardship, not to say I not beautiful, not to say I never have clothes because I run away I carry
clothes . . . I could put myself in my pants, go out there, and get a boyfriend who do everything for me. But I feel it wasn’t right because when you waiting for something, asking God for something you don’t have to engage yourself in stupidity God will not watch. But when you kneel down and pray every day you want this, pray and fast you want this, at the end of the day God will give it to you because you focusing on Him you are not focusing on two things. You can’t serve the devil and serve God. God will not agree. . . .

This participant’s explanation of her understanding of the meaning of her experiences illustrated the other participants’ perspective about the events occurring in their lives. She explained:

. . . our country people used to say any kind of luck, or blessing that coming, before that blessing come you will catch hardship. So now you will shed tears . . . at the end of the day you will say God was trying me. God can always test people whether you will go through it. I Know God tested me in Ivory Coast.

Although there were similarities between Nde and the other participants’ descriptions of the role faith played in coping, for Nde, Islam was a way of life and her identity and thus permeated all aspects of the family’s life. For instance, it was essential for her children to attend the Koran classes and to learn everything about Islam not only to help them cope but because it was part of learning their way of life and acquiring foundational values. Subsequently, this participant recounted that all the Muslims in the camp in Guinea lived closed together and formed a community that played some of the roles her community had performed when she was growing up. From her description, it was evident that sharing similar religious beliefs was the unifying factor. In addition, they would sometimes worship at the same mosque with the local Guinean community, and
hence these were some of the Guineans who were not hostile towards them as refugees.

She narrated:

It used to be almost similar like how I grow up how we lived in the community because we were all Liberian and Muslim. Some people were there they are not Muslim but we were not together. We even built a mosque in the camp in the community right there because there was a lot of Muslims, men and women we were put together being Muslim. We used to pray there with our children. That’s the only togetherness, we who were there the Liberian (Muslim) community we were family everyone of us we look after our kids we talk to them, everybody cared for each other’s kids, we talked to each other, we shared food it was like the same thing back home.

**People Helping Others**

Besides the Muslim community coming together to help care for each other, there were other ways that individuals in the refugee camps came together to protect and provide each other guidance and support through some of the challenges they were experiencing. Some of the assistance was material, social, emotional, and financial support. Thus, in the face of discontinuities people made adaptations and attempted to establish some order, stability and strength as a community by looking out for each other.

Nde reiterated that although the support and help from the community was different from the support she would have received from her family as a mother, the Liberian community did provide some help. For instance, they would call a mother’s attention to the whereabouts of her children if they were playing outside because of the threat from the poisonous lizards in the camp. She commented:

It can’t be the same the way some things were (back home) but it was almost similar . . . It can’t be the same because out mother when she do everything it’s more a hundred percent help. Like how when my sister had kids my aunt take care of everything, but when I was having my own
(kids) I was by myself (In the camp). We only talk oh your daughter here outside just call my attention because that a kind of help too.

This participant also explained that when she gave birth to her first child a friend helped take her to the hospital to deliver and assisted her with bringing the necessary supplies while she was in hospital. She also mentioned that if a child or adult were sick, people would come to check on you to see how you were faring and to provide encouragement.

Bendo, Ndelefu and Chuando described similar experiences to Nde whereby people occasionally shared food with them especially when their food supplies got finished and they had nothing to feed their children, and assisted in other ways to help supplement their food supplies. Ndelefu explained that some people had a little bit of money sent to them by relatives who had previously been granted asylum and were already in the U.S. and they would in turn help others. She narrated:

I have my friend, the father used to be in America here he never used to send a lot of money, but at least he used to send a little bit of money. Sometimes she would cook and give my children food and give me. I eat. Sometimes she buy the bulgur and rice for me when she buy I will manage it for one month, sometimes she give me money.

Bendo explained that people would also form groups to help each other clear land and plant food and thus ensure everyone in the group had a garden that could provide them with food to supplement their supplies.

Besides being given food for her children, Chuando explained that people gave her advice about ways of earning an income and provided support by caring for her children when she went to Accra to braid hair. She stated:
If I see my friend do something, my friend will give me some idea, if I say I don’t get this, they say do this you be able to get it. Even before I go to that braiding school people encourage me to go. They say you got kids; you need something so it can help you. You just can’t stay home all day by the kids you got to do hair. We used to leave the camp and go to Accra and do people hair . . . Sometimes I used to leave my children in the tent with my friends. I say let my children stay here with you I will be back within one hour . . sometimes I used to go for a week I used to leave them (children) for a week and go braid hair in Accra. We get some money, and could buy food in the camp.

Participants were not just recipients of assistance from others, they also were involved in caring for other family members and unaccompanied children. According to these mothers, many children would get to the camps alone after separation from their families while fleeing the violence. Bendo and Ndelefu talked about “adopting” children who had no parents and family in the camp. Ndelefu recounted how she came to “adopt” a young boy:

. . . there was this girl it was so hard on the camp, so she run away and leave her son. Her son was about 3 or 4 years old like my younger son’s age and he was hanging on anybody who eating. He will go there. So I felt sorry for him, I took him and I was taking care of him . . for almost 2 years because his mother left the camp and went to do prostitute outside (the camp) because she couldn’t make it on the camp, no food nothing and she had her son that won’t eat a thing so she just run away . . . People used to be hitting him I felt so bad, I took him because I feel that I got children and for this little boy to be going up and down like this, I took him in.

Bendo was the oldest amongst her family members with whom she was reunited in the camp, hence in addition to her own children, her family members well-being fell on her shoulders, as well as that of a young girl she adopted. She commented:

I was responsible for 11 people, my younger brothers, my sister’s daughter and her children, my children and I even had my adopted daughter . . . .
**Self-Empowerment**

As is evident in their individual vignettes in Chapter Four, all the participants responded to the challenges of limited food supplies and other basic needs by using their trading and farming skills to provide for their children. They also sought other ways of self-improvement by making use of the resources provided by the UNHCR. All four mothers described selling some of their bulgur wheat rations in order to buy rice, cooking oil, vegetables or fish. They also mentioned that they were unaccustomed to the bulgur wheat and corn they were given by the UNHCR, as these were not their staple food in Liberia. Participants were also involved in other economic activities such as cooking and selling in the market; Chuando also braided hair; Nde had a grinding machine and people would pay with some of their food rations to grind their bulgur wheat; and Bendo made soap and charcoal to use and sell. Bendo and Chuando were in camps where they were able to farm and hence able to grow some of their food.

In the refugee camps where Bendo, Nde and Chuando lived, the UNHCR set up schools for adults where they could continue with their education or learn an occupational skill. While Nde explained that, she was unable to attend school due to the immediate demands of taking care of her children and selling in the market to provide for them, Bendo explained she was able to continue with her education and attended school in the camp for six years. Subsequently, this mother would teach her children how to read and write even before they started attending school in the camp. Chuando took braiding and baking classes as these were skills that enabled her to start earning an income.
Ndelefufu was the only one in a camp that did not have similar occupational training resources for adults.

Bendo and Chuando explained they participated in parenting classes provided by some of the organizations providing services in the camp. Bendo explained that the training on parenting helped equip her with more skills to be a good mother. Chuando noted that women in the camp would get together to give advice on raising children. She recounted:

They have women there that used to advice people how to take care of their children. We used to have groups like the single parent meeting, we go in the meeting women they talk to us how to take care of our children how to take care of ourselves, sometimes two times in a week all women meet together. The leader will get up and talk . . . what your children need if you tell them they tell the UN people, they come and help. They used to teach us how to tell our girl child when they about 13 years old, how to talk to them about it, and stuff to use. I can remember one meeting they told us to become a mother, a single mother is not easy but we have to try our best for our children life to be right to set example like a mother . . . .

Bendo received training from the different organizations that she volunteered with and went around the whole camp teaching others on the respective topics. These experiences empowered her, as she was able to care for her children and help other parents and children in the community through her work. She described some of the work she did as follows:

I worked for Save the Children that was the first job I had during the war, we used to teach the young children how to recognize letters and words, and we used to teach them how to sing, dancing. After they left, Christian Children’s Fund came in and I worked with them I worked with those branches like those working with children to develop children to also see they are not abused. I was trained for all the phases (in the camp) other people were trained for their communities to look after children. Like child abuse, rape cases, some people kept children in the house and didn’t
send them to school. Some time you go in the community and you see them hitting the child, you would ask the person what the problem is and you try to talk to the person . . . . At the same time I also used to love going around like an animator talking to people about having AIDS. I did that for two years but everything (the different volunteer work) was just together. All of them were volunteer work, they did not pay us, everything was on a voluntary basis.

**Self-efficacy Beliefs**

All four participants talked about being strong as women and as mothers, because they stayed focused on what they needed to do for their own survival and their children’s wellbeing, and did not give up.

For instance, Ndelefu stated:

I was strong and I always proud of myself . . . . I always looking back especially when I going through hardship, I always looking back, it makes me strong. When I look back I become strong.

Nde described:

. . . the stress is straining thinking alone gives people stress. God made everybody, some people get strong resistance I can say one is me because I feel things but I forget I let go. That’s how I take things, everything I don’t keep nothing much in heart to get stressed over. I think, I remember but I don’t take things serious like how people take it one thing over and over no. If something happens I talk about it if I don’t talk about it, its fine.

All four mothers were young women when the war broke out in Liberia and despite the uncertainty and fear they felt during their flight to safety they protected themselves and their children. When faced by the hardships of living in the camp, they fell back on the skills they had acquired growing up and provided for themselves and their children. Bendo’s words exemplified participants’ experiences as she stated “. . . you have to depend on yourself . . . you had to be strong for yourself and your children.”
Patience was another quality each participant mentioned that helped them through their experiences as women and mothers. Being patient helped them take time to learn their children’s traits, thus responding to them accordingly as they guided them away from undesirable behaviors and other negative influences in the camp.

The participants described moments when despair set in and they were fearful about their children’s future, but in their personal accounts, their resilience is evident. These mothers reiterated that their strength came from their faith in God, their abilities and their hope that the future held better opportunities for them and their children.

**Summary: Participants’ Reflections of Motherhood**

Chapter Four marks the beginning of the Findings section of this study and starts out with an introduction of each participant in her own words through vignettes describing their flight and displacement experiences. Similarly, this section marks the end of the chapter and presents participants reflection of what being a mother meant to them, the similarities and differences they saw between them and their own mothers respectively. Thus, some of what is reported may seem repetitive, as it has been addressed in the preceding chapters. However, because the thematic analysis is partially influenced by this researcher’s perspective, it is essential to present short excerpts of the women’s views of motherhood in their own words.

In comparing their motherhood with their own mothers respective experiences, all participants mentioned that they wanted their children to have the same values, behaviors and skills they were taught, however they noted that there were differences in what they prioritized, what they were able to teach their children and some of the goals they had for
their children. Each participant also reiterated how being a mother was different for them because of living in a refugee camp, being alone and not having the same family support and community resources that their mothers had.

Nde noted she wanted her children to have the same values, behaviors and skills she was taught, but more importantly she wanted her children to be educated even her girls. She commented:

The things that were the same was talking to me how you have to be like. But for them (parents) they were not too much about education. The education they wanted you to have was to be a good wife, to be a cook, to be clean, how to hold your home, how to talk to your oldest, how you have to be. These were some of the things when I think back is the same as what I wanted my children to do. In addition to that education more. Our parents the problem especially for girls they only know how you should take care of yourself, how to respect your oldest, cooking, cleaning that’s the more thing they raise you up and talked about the future how you are going to be. The difference for our own kids the education more (emphasized on education).

Bendo described wanting her children to grow up the same way she grew up listening to her mother and striving to meet her mother’s goals. However, the environment made this difficult to attain, thus marking the difference between her experience of motherhood and her mother’s experience as well as the values and skills her children acquired. She stated:

The way I was raised was different from the way I am taking care of them. I was with my mother throughout and she tell me what to do and whenever she tell me to do something I don’t really hesitate but I do what she want me to do. But for they (children) when I say do this it will take them time to do it and they won’t complete it. The community where we found ourselves in, where we were its like you don’t have much discipline on the child. Those are some of the things that was kind of difficult to take care of them the way you want them to be and the way you was brought up. Mine was okay, I do exactly what my mother told me to do theirs was
different because of the environment we were living in. Because for they I don’t take them in the bush (farm) like how my mother used to (because) we make garden before we have our fees, tuition and other things. They have their tuition from the UNHCR, so they don’t really take part in their education in terms of looking for money, so that what makes a difference.

Chuando explained that some things stayed the same, but there were differences in how she was raised and there were differences in her experiences of motherhood. She recounted:

Some stayed the same and some are not the same because during that time my mother and my father were raising me up they had things. My mum making business, my pa working they have money so things were easy for me a little bit (growing up). But me as a mother during that time I don’t have money, I got to wait for the UN to come and give me bulgur wheat, sell it before I can take care of my children. So during my time it was a little bit better than the time I become a mother. It was not easy to take care of my children sell, before I can take care of them, so the difference na there. My mum, my daddy have a little bit of money during that time. When I left Liberia came to the refugee camp, I got to wait for people to come and give me things for my kids na the difference over there.

This participant also said:

I different from her now (her mother), I’m very very different from her now because when I left home during that time I came to the refugee camp some things I not supposed to do, I do it by myself without a man. I take care of my children, send my children to school do things that can help my children, I do it.

Ndelefu desired the same values she was raised with for her children and wanted to be strong and independent like her mother and to love her children just as her mother loved her. Nonetheless, she explained that her mother’s decision to send her to live with her aunt, while well intentioned led her not to go to school, thus it was important that her son go to school and she was never going to send her children away to live with any family member.
the same is to be patient... she always used to teach us to be patient to be strong, very strong. In training them (her children) I want them to respect people... My mother used to love me is still the same way I love my children... my mother’s decision made me not to go to school so I never wanted to make that decision for him, I want him (son) to go to school...

In reflecting on their personal experiences of motherhood, participants summarized some of their parental beliefs about children, what was important in their child rearing approaches, and what it meant to be a mother.

Nde and Chuando held a theocentric belief about children that is, that God had given them the children they had, for Nde this meant she had a responsibility to prepare them for the future when they shall also become mothers, thus indicating continuity. Chuando pointed out that children were a gift from God, therefore being a mother was a good thing and very important to her. Nde stated:

... we really working hard because we already have them (children), God already give us the child you just have to take care, because in their life tomorrow (future) your child will be somebody too like the way you become a mother too...

While Chuando explained:

It’s good to become a mother, it’s very important to me so you can know what a mother can go through it is good. Children are a gift from God that God gave you. You can’t make a child yourself, you can’t say you will find a man and then get a child, no way. I consider it na gift from God you don’t sit down and make child yourself. Na God get the idea, God created us; I consider it to be a gift from God.

In reference to their beliefs about how they were raising their children, Nde, Ndelefu and Chuando emphasized that the camp environment and community did not influence what was important to them, they held on to what they respectively believed
was important. However, Bendo and Ndelefu emphasized it influenced some of the
sacrifices they made for their children, and led to them “adopting” some of the
unaccompanied children in the camp.

Nde reiterated her parental beliefs as follows:

The influence on me or my thinking should be the same way as how we
start (how she was raised) in the home. Not that the community was
different. I’m not thinking about other people I’m thinking about my
children’s future and how they are supposed to grow and how they are
supposed to be careful and respectful. It is the same . . . . to be a mother is
to understand the experience and then you think what your parents were
telling you before because they were a mother telling you their experience,
you add to it your own way. This my mum used to tell me, I am going to
add this and this will be mine, you add to it that’s all the experience I
know as a mother.

Similarly, Chuando pointed out:

I don’t know about other people, I don’t know. But the skills the thing you
feel is good for your child to do, you make them do it because I don’t
know what you plan for your child to do in the future I don’t know. You
don’t know what I plan for my child to do. I only know for my child what
I want him to do. So everybody got different different way of thinking, I
can’t tell about other people I only know my own.

Ndelefu explained she upheld her cultural belief that, as a mother you provided
for your children unconditionally, just as children were also expected to care for their
parents when they became adults and as their parents aged. She elucidated:

I want to be there for my children 100 per cent . . . in Africa the only
future is our children, we put our future in our children. We don’t say oh
let me take care of myself because my child will not take care of me.
Africa it’s not like that because as you get older your body (energy and
life) is going to your children.

With regard to the sacrifices Bendo and Ndelefu made, both explained they would
not eat and were hungry all the time because as mothers their children’s wellbeing came
first. While Nde and Chuando explained that they would have wanted to continue with
their education since adult classes were available in the camps they lived in, but working
to provide for their children was their priority. Ndelefu further noted she was overly
protective of her children because of all the sacrifices she had made and the suffering she
had undergone in the camp. She recalled:

. . . because I am suffering for my children I don’t want anybody to beat
(spank) my children, my younger son he used to be hell fire every day is a
problem between people and myself because if you beat him I make
problem with you. I finish making the problem before I ask question,
when I ask question and then I wrong he the one who first beat the
person’s child. He was little but he used to beat all the people children
over there. Because I don’t want anybody to touch him, he can beat people
children but you beat him, he come to me straight, if he come to me I am
going to you, I am not going to ask question, I beat the other child.

Nonetheless, Bendo expressed that being a mother had not been easy because of
the expectations she had and things not turning out the way she hoped:

. . . the feeling if you are a mother everything is like you expect things and
things happen to you that you don’t want. Your child go out sometimes
they do things that are not good, or they talk to you the way they want. But
everything is to be patient if you want to be a mother. Being a mother is
not easy, everything you are going through a lot of things . . . it is not easy
if you are a mother, all your life time its stress and things are not straight
the way you want. It’s like throughout your lifetime it is not really the way
you want it to be.

Conversely, Chuando expressed that it was not easy being a mother but she was
happy about her children, and happy to have experienced being a mother just like her
own mother. She stated:

My life what is important is to be a mother. To become a mother is not
easy and again it is good so you can experience life for yourself so you
can know the feeling that your mother went through. I feel good because
I’m a mother, I got kids and I start to imagine my mother how she took
care of me too, so I take care of my own kids. Yes I’m a mother now my ma used to do this, do that I used to feel good just that it wasn’t easy. So now I experience life for myself I take care of my kids and everything is fine because if I was not going to become a mother I was not going to know how important it is. I see my kids around me, I feel so happy . . . but during that time it was hard . . . .

Nde also mentioned that it was not easy being a mother, she explained that it was difficult to see herself as a mother due to her inability to provide for her children and her physical appearance because she was small and skinny.

For you to be a mother you can just sit down and imagine sometimes I can’t even know how I was when I see all my kids and then thinking of all the things I have to do. Thinking about their food, about their clean clothes, thinking about how they will find new clothes, I just pray and say one day God will help us we will be fine and I just get up. If my heart there (worries too much) it will just kill me. I was a little strong, I didn’t give up. . . But that time I cannot even see myself to be mother no, it’s just I don’t know, I take pregnancy nine months, I have a baby, I take care of them.

In reference to her physical appearance, she stated:

Most people never used to believe my daughter that’s my child, even my son . . . because I was so skinny when we were together nobody can believe that my kids. I looked young and small . . . . I was skinny just like my daughter, I didn’t have a body they see me, they see her, they see skinny who the mother?

However, this participant reiterated that even though there were moments it was difficult to see herself as a mother; she believed that even with nothing to give her children, she was still a mother. She explained:

. . . (as a mother) you have to be very strong, you have to be very strict, you have to be patient, kind, respectful, show the children that you the mother even without nothing. Even if I don’t have money to give them, I don’t have clothes to give them or maybe feed them on time or to get something they need right away because I don’t have it. I’m still their mother; they are supposed to know that I am a mother that’s how I feel.
Always when you are a mother you just show that child I got nothing, I am just a mother even you don’t have nothing. That’s what I told them (her children) I love my respect as mother, and I will respect you as child. I make sure I tell you what’s right for you and what’s not right I tell you because I love you . . . you the mother I don’t care what happen whether you have it, whether you are giving your child or your child giving whether. That’s what I tell them even if you got millions, I am the mother, that mother name should be on me forever.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Main Findings

This study focused on seven broad research questions all of which were addressed in the analysis and interpretation chapter under three main sections. A summary of the main themes and the respective research questions addressed by each section follows below.

Mothers’ Childhood: Growing up in Liberia

In this section, participants recalled the way they were raised by their own mothers and the skills, behaviors and values they were taught when they were growing up. This captured the goals their mothers had for them, the competencies that were valued in their respective ethnic groups, all of which highlighted some of their social structures and cultural beliefs. The research questions addressed by this section are:

- What were the mothers’ beliefs about childhood prior to the war?
- What were the mothers’ beliefs about the qualities of a competent child before the war?

The main findings are as follows:
**Competencies:**

- Emphasis was on good behavior such as respect, obedience, patience, being responsible, and interacting appropriately with their parents and other adults in the community.

- Learning how to sell in the market, for three participants this was taught at a young age.

- Learning how to farm, and thus participating in providing food for the family and surplus produce to sell in the market.

- For one participant, learning about Islam and practicing her faith was essential.

**Gender based competencies:**

- Three participants reported gender differentiation in the socialization process and expectations: girls were taught and expected to take care of the home by performing all the household tasks, and helping care for younger siblings.

- For the participant who was Muslim, gender differentiation was fundamental because girls were expected to be housewives. It was also important for girls not to have children out of wedlock, and to marry and have children.

- Boys were expected to learn how to clear land for farming, climb trees to harvest, hunt for meat, slaughter animals they ate, and assist with the heavier tasks such as fetching firewood and water.
Parental goals these are what their mothers wanted for them and from them:

- Learn the values and skills necessary to care for their families in future. However, children from the age of 8 years performed some of the tasks like cleaning or selling in the market and thus contributed towards the family’s wellbeing.

- For three participants, being able to sell, save money and being independent, thus providing for their families and having the means to care for their parents in their old age.

- For three participants, their mothers wanted them to have an education. While for the mother who was Muslim, education was mainly for boys.

How they were taught the desired competencies:

- As they grew older, children were expected to spend most of their time with the same gender parent so they could learn their respective adult roles through a form of apprenticeship.

- Learning was through observation, direct instruction, imitation, modeling, positive and negative reinforcement.

- The community was involved in monitoring and reinforcing desired behavior, for example, extended family, neighbors, school or Muslim community.

Motherhood: Raising Children in the Refugee Camp

This section detailed the way participants raised their children, the competencies they desired in their children, their beliefs about the qualities of a well brought-up child, their goals for their children and the manner in which they taught their children the essential qualities. Thus responding to the following research questions:
• What were the mothers’ beliefs about childhood when they were displaced by war?

• What were the mothers’ beliefs about the qualities of a competent child when they were displaced by the war?

• How did the prevailing sociocultural and physical context affect the mothers’ beliefs, practices and subsequently their parental goals?

There are similarities in some of the qualities all four participants desired in their children, and some of the ways they taught them the competencies. What their mothers taught them was foundational and they added other aspects based on the demands of their lives. However, there were other behaviors and values they emphasized due to the prevailing social context.

**Competencies**

• Some of the similar qualities they desired were respect, patience, obedience, and being responsible. However, mothers emphasized that they taught their children not to be rude, fight, steal or touch anything that did not belong to them, as these behaviors were more common in children due to scarce resources in the camp. This entails the description of a good child, one who listens, obeys the mother, avoids getting involved in the bad influences in the camp, and one who nobody complains about.

• There was less gender-based socialization; only one participant due to her Muslim background and previous socialization mentioned emphasizing household work with her girls. Two mothers mentioned their sons helped with some of the household work.
For one participant, the son was the only person who could help, and for the other mother her son was the oldest child.

- Selling was a skill three participants taught their children and as they grew older they were expected to help sell in the market.
- Only one participant mentions her children learning and helping with farming. The other participants were unable to farm in the camps in which they were living. One participant laments the loss of the inability to teach her children how to farm.
- Three participants reported teaching their children how to count, read and write.

**Parental goals these are what they wanted for their children and from them.**

- Education for a better future and this was for both girls and boys.
- Succeed in life so they will also be able to take care of their mothers in their old age.
- For one participant, she wanted her children to succeed in business.
- For another, it was important her children understand they were in a refugee camp and that it was not their home or their origins.
- For the participant who was Muslim, she wanted her children to learn Arabic so they could read the Koran, learn, and practice their faith.

**Teaching their children the desired competencies**

- Participants used similar approaches to their mothers whereby children started out as apprentices and learned through observation, by doing, imitating and modeling what was demonstrated by their mothers, positive and negative reinforcement, and through direct instruction.


**Discontinuities: Effects of the War and Displacement on Motherhood**

This section described the challenges the women faced as mothers, and subsequently their resilience. Participants pointed out that these challenges, raising their children on their own, depending on relief agencies and their own initiative contrasted their experience of motherhood with their own respective mothers. Their experiences speak to the following research questions:

- What were the women’s experiences of being mothers while living in a refugee camp?
- How did displacement by war influence the women as mothers?

In describing their experience of being mothers in a refugee camp the main theme was how alone they felt due to the multiple losses they had experienced. The losses mentioned are as follows:

- Loss of family through separation by war and death.
- Loss of their ethnic communities and access to the social, cultural, economic and legal institutions that existed in their respective communities.
- Loss of power as women and as displaced people.
- Lack of safety in the camps and hostility from the local populations in the countries they fled.

Participants’ narration of their adaptation and coping with the circumstances and challenges they experienced illuminated their strengths and resilience. The main themes on their resilience and coping strategies are as follows:

- Religion was one of the main protective factors.
• People helping each other materially, emotionally, socially, and financially.

• Self-empowerment through selling in the market, and accessing the resources provided by the UNHCR and other relief organizations such as learning an occupational skill.

• Self-efficacy beliefs, this is each woman described herself as being strong and rising up to the hardships they experienced by never giving up.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Mothers’ Childhood: Growing up in Liberia**

In line with the developmental niche (Super & Harkness 1986, 2002) and the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994), the participants’ narratives of their childhood describe the physical and social settings, the customs of care or proximal processes and the psychology of their caregiver in this case their mothers. Participants provide a general description of the cultural beliefs held in their ethnic groups and the respective parental ethnotheories or understanding their mothers had regarding childhood, competence, and the appropriate ways of teaching and guiding children as they grew, developed and matured into productive members of their communities. The aforementioned models provide a structure through which we get a glimpse of the participants’ childhood experiences and influences. These are some of the specific behaviors, skills and values inculcated by their mothers, as well as the extent the community is involved in modeling and safeguarding the desired social competencies.

In describing a well-brought up child, participants point out the cultural expectations such as learning how to take care of the home, farming, selling in the
market, attending school, being respectful and obedient. These influence the individual constructions their respective mothers had about the desirable competencies and subsequently their parental goals (Levine et al., 1996; Super & Harkness, 1986). For instance, Nde’s mother who is Vai and Muslim wanted her daughter to be a good Muslim, and a good housewife which entailed knowing how to care for the home, children and to farm. Education is not a parental goal she had because in their Vai culture girls did not go to school. In addition, their mothers’ experiences as women informed some of their individual beliefs about what it took to succeed as a mother and wife and hence for Bendo and Ndelefu their mothers taught them and wanted them to be strong and independent.

Additionally, the existing physical and social settings participants were growing up in shaped the competencies that were necessary to thrive in their respective communities, and their mothers’ parental goals. For example, because the main occupation in their communities was farming and selling some of the produce in the market, all participants mention being taught these skills and being involved in these activities from an early age. Their involvement played the dual role of inculcating the desirable competencies, and contributing towards their family’s wellbeing. This was a cultural practice in all the participants’ respective ethnic groups, whereby children from the age of seven or eight years could perform some household tasks as well as go and sell in their local market with minimal supervision. Parents believed they were responsible enough and had the required intelligence to perform the tasks or errands (Harkness & Super, 1985; Nsamenang & Lamb, 1994; Ogbu, 1981, Rogoff, 2003). According to
Kağıtçibaşi (1996), this is a common practice in countries with agrarian economies, children’s work and material contribution is substantial and essential to the family. In Africa, where majority of countries have agrarian economies, children acquire skills that enable them to assist their parents in various tasks and occupations (Harkness & Super, 1985; Nsamenang, 1992; Nwoye, 2006; Rogoff, 2003; Zeitlin 1996). However, Bendo explained that when children learned a skill like selling, they also acquired other cognitive competencies like numeracy. Thus in her culture when a child had a difficult time with selling by making a loss due to bad calculations, parents recognized the child was a “slow” learner in trading and anticipated that the child might be a slow learner in school too. According to Super et al. (2011) studies conducted on unschooled children selling in the market in Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe and Ghana showed they did as well as their school peers on number conservation, and conservation of quantity, weight, and volume.

According to Nsamenang (1992) and Nwoye (2006) amongst West Africans children are valued for various reasons, one of which is to help their parents in their day-to-day activities, and secondly to support them in their old age. These are the common short-term and long-term parental goals. Similarly, all the participants mention their respective mothers expected them to help, and taught them livelihood skills, which would eventually enable them to provide for their families including their parents during old age (Hoffman, 1988). Furthermore, due to the interdependent nature of most African cultures, children are raised to fit into the traditional social fabric and have good character, hence emphases on social competencies like obedience and respect. These attributes guarantee
cooperation from children when they are young and in adulthood. In addition, these social competencies are considered an indicator of intelligence, which in many African communities is social in nature and referred to by some authors as “socially responsible intelligence” distinct from the American idea of intelligence (Greenfield et al., 2003; Grigorenko et al., 2001; Harkness & Super, 1985; Keller, 2003; Nsamenang, 1992; Nwoye, 2006; Serpell, 2011; Super et al., 2011). From a young age, children begin to be involved in numerous social and economic activities and interact with peers and adults, in line with the apprenticeship model of raising children. This model also sheds light on the main mode of teaching children the desired competencies. These aspects are evident in the participants’ description of the social competencies they learned, and the ways in which instruction took place, beginning with observation, demonstration, doing, and modeling (Nsamenang, 1992).

**Motherhood: Raising Children in a Refugee Camp**

In narrating about their desires and parental goals for their children, it was evident participants held the same cultural beliefs and practices as their mothers about childrearing and had similar expectations about their social, emotional and cognitive development. These are the beliefs and practices inherited from the accumulated cultural experience of their communities, and thus marking continuity of belief systems over time. Hence, participants explain they added onto what they had learned from their mothers, for example, Nde clearly stated what influenced her was the way she was raised by her mother and not the community they were living in (Ghosh Ippen, 2009; Super & Harkness, 1986). However, due to raising their children in a very different physical,
social and cultural environment that the one in which they were reared, the social competencies appear to have served other purposes and taken on different meanings. For instance, because they were rearing children in an environment they perceived as problematic and dangerous the mothers stated they wanted their children to be obedient and to stay at home when they were not in school, avoid the company of bad children and roaming in the camp, not to fight, steal or touch anything that did not belong to them. Whereas when participants were growing up obedience served the main purposes of enabling them to fit into the traditional fabric and learning their roles, but in the camp obedience was vital for their children’s safety and survival by avoiding the prevailing environmental risks (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; LeVine et al., 1996; Rosenthal & Roer-Stier, 2001).

Additionally, participants had the same parental goals and expectations as their mothers, that their children help them in the day-to-day tasks and take care of them when they age (Super & Harkness, 1986). However, their expectations and goals took on certain urgency because of the hardships in the camp and minimal social support, children’s material contribution was essential for survival. For instance, Ndelefu stated, “I had no one else to help me except my son.” Furthermore, gender socialization was not a focus for three participants as Chuando explained how her son helped with most of the housework because he was the oldest child. In contrast, Nde who is the only participant who had her husband with her, still observed gender socialization as informed by her culture and Islamic faith. With reference to the future goal of their children caring for them in old age participants explained that culturally children have a responsibility
toward their parents when they age. Besides their children were the only family they had because war and dislocation had removed the support provided by other family members and the community. Moreover, participants expressed they had suffered a lot raising their children in the camp and therefore expected more from their children. Ndelefu’s words sum it up when she expressed her future expectations of her son. She said: “... I want you to wipe away the tears from my eyes... you saw the tears running from my eyes and you know how tears run from my eyes.”

Contrary to their mothers, all four participants emphasized they wanted their children to be educated, regardless of gender. Education was one of their main goals and each participant pointed out that “education is the key to success in life it will open any door,” they expressed that it would provide their children a better life than what they had gone through. Despite the limited resources and the poor structure of some of the schools in the camps, participants still believed and hoped their children would be educated and become “somebody” in life. Subsequently, three of the participants reported teaching their children how to read and write a clear departure from what their respective mothers did. With reference to Levine et al.’s (1996), point that the environment influences whether mothers follow a pediatric or pedagogical early care model, participants adhered to a pedagogical model to meet their parental goal of education, while the limited resources in the camp forced them to follow a pediatric model of care.

**Discontinuities: Effects of the War and Displacement on Motherhood**

Participants pointed out that the losses they experienced distinguished their motherhood from their own mothers, especially the loss of family and community and
hence being alone. Displacement by war robbed them of the cultural, social, economic, religious and legal institutions that existed in their respective communities. Therefore, they lacked the essential traditional structures to support them as women and mothers. In addition, their children lacked all the benefits garnered from growing up in a context that provided the tools and lessons necessary to become competent and productive members of their community. This included the lack of extended family, neighbors, clan and the larger community, a foundational component of childrearing in West Africa without which it is difficult for parents to attain their parental goals (Nsamenang, 1992; Nwoye, 2006; Rogoff, 2003). For instance, Bendo and Chuando described having children before the war, and the involvement of their mothers and in Bendo’s case her older sister too. When they fled from the conflict, they were alone and had no one to help raise the children, and guide them in their maternal role. Bendo expressed it was difficult teaching her children the social competencies she desired all alone with no one to reinforce and model what she was teaching, something her children would have received from her mother and community. Similarly, Nde who delivers her first child in the camp laments at not having her mother with her, as was the customary practice when a woman delivered amongst the Vai. Mothers would live with their daughters for about two months and help with the newborn, care for their daughter, while teaching her about motherhood and the roles of a wife. Thus, participants lost important cultural processes and guidance from older women as they matured from young women into mothers and/or wives.

These mothers’ experiences resonate with what Igreja (2003) states about the effects of war, specifically the disruption of cultural beliefs and practices and historical
institutions. Igreja states that people lose cultural practices that are essential in maintaining a community’s cohesion, and fulfilling certain purposes for the members such as customary celebrations when a child is born or weaned. Three participants talked about the loss of the rites of passage children underwent as they transitioned from childhood to adolescence. This included attending “society” a place where children learned about gender specific roles, obligations, and expectations, as they became adults.

Additionally, the lack of social and cultural institutions made it challenging to instill desired skills. For example, Ndelefu laments the camp was like a prison, this encapsulates the social and cultural barrenness of the environment in which her children were growing up. The camps Nde and Ndelefu lived in lacked the resources to teach desired skills such as farming. Although Bendo, Chuando and Ndelefu teach their children how to sell, they did not learn as much as they would have done in Liberia because the mothers were afraid to have them selling on their own because of being conned or robbed. The camp also lacked supportive social structures and institutions such as schools, Bendo described when she was growing up, schools were involved in teaching, reinforcing good behavior and disciplining children, she lamented this was lacking in the camp. This participant expressed that her children did not turn out the way she had pictured them (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Ogbu, 1981).

Living in refugee camps made it difficult for the mothers to provide for their children and hence they felt this made it challenging to have parental control and authority over their children. In addition, disciplining them using corporal punishment a common practice in their cultures was not allowed by agencies regulating the forms of
discipline parents used in the camp. Furthermore, with the UNHCR being the main provider participants struggled with losing the ability to be self-sufficient and the breadwinners. The lack of opportunities to provide for themselves and their children also made them susceptible to sexual exploitation by men. Displacement also denied participants the protection a community provides its women and girls through customs, male kin or legal institutions. For instance, Ndelefu talked about the abuse and violence she experienced in her marital home due to being of a different nationality, tribe and religion. She felt powerless, and had nobody to intervene for her because she had no family in the camp.

Life in the camps stripped participants of their power as women and as mothers, and placed them in a powerless role, that of a displaced person. They had no control over which camp they would be taken to, and little control over how long they would live in the camps. Some of the camps were located in harsh environments and some of the local communities were hostile towards them making it an unsafe place to live. Participants expressed discomfort with the label refugees due to the negative association of the word and as one participant explained: “... I don’t know how they take us when they hear the word refugee they think it’s an animal or something ...”

Resilience and Coping

Faced with uncertainty about the future and the multiple challenges due to war and displacement, participants accessed all the available resources to cope. The women commented that their children were all they had left and they were their future therefore, they had to be strong for them. According to Pahud et al. (2009) and Pinquart and
Silbereisen (2004) people use problem-focused coping when they appraise a threatening situation, see it as changeable, and believe they have the resources to change it. Hence all the participants used any available means to solve the myriad of problems they were facing a reflection of their strength and resilience. The main coping strategy was the use of religion to endure the suffering and as a source of hope for a better future. This is a common coping strategy for African refugees of different nationalities based on studies conducted on Sudanese, Somali and Ethiopian refugees (Khawaja et al., 2008; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012).

The other coping strategies used such as getting material or emotional support from other people, pursuing occupational training where available, and self efficacy beliefs were approaches used by other refugee populations, both while living in the camp and in the countries of resettlement. Thus, these pro-active coping strategies are protective factors in the face of any adversity (Khawaja et al., 2008; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012). Furthermore, the mothers describe the ways they strive to protect their children for example, overprotection, vigilance, teaching them to read, religious practices; and the children of others through informal adoption of children separated from their families.

**Implications of the Study**

This study contributes toward the literature on refugees and provides an understanding of the experiences of Liberian mothers raising children in a refugee camp. It provides thick description of their lives prior to the war, flight and the lives they curved out for themselves and their children in the refugee camps. Few research studies focus on
the social, cultural and developmental experiences of refugee children and families. Most of the existing literature addresses their psychological experiences, related mental health issues and the challenges families face in their countries of resettlement (Igreja, 2003; Khawaja et al., 2008; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Miller et al., 2002; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012). This leads to a gap in knowledge about the history, social, cultural and developmental experiences of these families; often leading to ineffective services and programs (Fong, 2007; Miller et al., 2002). In addition, the research that exists on refugee families rarely allows them to describe in their own words their thoughts, desires, hopes and struggles, that is their life experiences.

Subsequently, this study specifically provides a glimpse into the social and cultural beliefs and practices of Liberian mothers and their resilience in the face of extreme adversity. Through using a narrative approach, participants were able to express in their own words and in their own voice, the sequence of events that mattered most to them starting from childhood. By presenting, some of the data in vignettes and as first person accounts all the women tell their individual story on the effects of war on their lives, thus respecting their individuality, uniqueness and giving each one a voice.

In our efforts to provide culturally appropriate services as social workers, developmentalists, child welfare workers, educators, and policy makers working with refugee and immigrant children and families the first step in the process should be knowledge acquisition. This involves learning about the families we are working with, their cultural belief systems and practices, their past, immigration experiences and their strengths (Ghosh Ippen, 2009; Miller et al., 2002; Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Thus,
contextually congruent interventions or policies should integrate information about family’s history, culture, current situation and future goals (Ghosh Ippen, 2009; Kaplan 2009). Therefore, although this study focused on four Liberian mothers, their stories not only shed light on their respective lives, but also indicate the experiences of other refugee women and children worldwide. Hence, it provides a window through which practitioners, educators, researchers and policy makers can peer into the cultural belief systems and life experiences of these families, with the intent and aim of assessing the appropriateness of the services provided and the programs they are designing. In addition, participants’ descriptions of their resilience and coping strategies highlights the central role spirituality plays in their lives and the appropriateness of incorporating spirituality in interventions. Their pro-active coping also points at the weakness of studies that pathologize refugees, which in turn depicts them as victims or “damaged”. Refugees’ resilience is evidence of the importance of strengths-based treatment approaches that build upon their individual and cultural strengths (Ghosh Ippen, 2009; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012) in order to support them and address challenges they may experience.

There are gaps in research on African women, children and families and their diverse cultural and developmental contexts. Additionally, some of the existing literature does not accurately present and describe the complexity and variety of African cultural approaches of childrearing. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research by African scholars, and an underrepresentation of knowledge contribution in the field of child development, not because of a lack of scholars, but due to the power dynamics between
rich and poor nations and differential access to research resources. Consequently, rather than grounding international child agendas in locally developed “best practices” tailored to their respective culture and context, best practices are typically imported from Western sources, often through the support of Western donors, leading to ineffective programs (Marfo, Pence, LeVine & LeVine, 2011; Nsamenang, 2008; Pence 2011; Super, Harkness, Barry, & Zeitlin, 2011). Thus, this study strives to contribute towards research on African children and families living in one of the diverse cultural and developmental contexts.

**Limitations of the Study**

As described in the data collection section, this study used a narrative approach and focused on four mothers from Liberia. Thus the small sample size and the need to seek participants, who are proficient in English, may limit generalizability of the findings to other Liberian and African refugee mothers and refugee mothers from other countries. Due to specifically focusing on mothers’ experiences raising children in a refugee camp, this study does not provide insight into the experience of fathers raising children in a refugee camp.

The participants’ age and duration of stay in the refugee camp probably influenced the data collected. Therefore, data may not be representative of the experiences of mothers who were older, or women who were raising children older than eight years of age. The participants’ experiences may also probably differ from women who were born and raised in the refugee camp and became mothers while still living in the camp.
Future Research

Similar studies with other displaced populations from Africa and other parts of the world would contribute towards the dearth of research providing the cultural and social experiences of refugee children and families. Research on the experience of fathers and grandparents raising children in refugee camps is also essential. Other studies looking at the experiences of mothers and fathers born and raised in refugee camps and have become parents while still living in the camp or resettled in another country, would add to the literature, and further our understanding of people who have lived their entire lives in displacement. Additionally, research focusing solely on resilience and the coping strategies of refugee families would inform clinical work with this population. The use of qualitative methods in these studies would provide thick description and an emic view of the experiences of these women and men, a perspective that is absent in most research.
APPENDIX A

MAP OF LIBERIA AND THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES THAT HOSTED THE
LARGEST NUMBER OF REFUGEES DURING THE CIVIL WAR
APPENDIX B

SCREENING PROTOCOL
This researcher recruited participants who fit the following criteria:

1. Liberian and Sierra Leonean women who were displaced by war and lived in a refugee camp for at least three years.

2. Women who were either married or unmarried, and between the age of twenty and thirty years of age during the time they lived in a refugee camp.

3. Women who were mothers at the time of their displacement and subsequently lived in a refugee camp and with any number of children.

4. Women at the time they were displaced by war had a child of either gender between the age of five and eight years of age, and who lived with the mother during the time she was living in the refugee camp.

5. It will be necessary that the child who is the point of reference in the narrative be living with the mother here in the U.S. so as to decrease the likelihood of the emotional distress that may occur if the child is deceased or was not resettled with the mother.

6. Participants will speak and understand English sufficiently and be able to read at least at an 8th grade level.

7. During the screening process all potential participants will verbally rate if they are, not comfortable, fairly comfortable or comfortable understanding, speaking and reading in English. Only participants who are fairly comfortable or comfortable in speaking and reading English will be included in the study.
Interview One: Focused life history

Background information: family makeup, who was involved and who made the care giving decisions, relationship with your parents, cultural identity and social structure

When you were growing up:

1. What skills, values and behaviors were you taught and that your parents desired you to have?
2. How were you taught these skills, values and behaviors?
3. How was a well brought up child of about 5 to 8 years of age described?
4. What skills, values and behaviors were desired in girls and boys?

Becoming mothers- prior to displacement by the war:

5. How old were you when you gave birth to your first child? And the child we are talking about?
6. What did you desire and want for your child?
7. What skills, values, and behaviors did you teach your child and how did you instruct your child?
8. How did you describe a well brought-up child at the time and how did your community describe a well brought-up child?
9. How did you see yourself as a mother at that time?

Interview Two: The details of being a mother during the displacement period

Background information: tell me the story of what happened to you and your child when you were displaced from your home

1. Where were you living and who was living with you? How did you get there?
2. How long did you live in the refugee camp(s)?

3. How old was the target child when you arrived at the camp the first time?

4. Could you describe the social and physical structure of the camp?

5. Were there other family members such as the father of your children, your siblings and other relatives or community members who lived with you in the camp?

6. Which other groups or nationalities of people lived in the camp you were in?

*Raising a child in the refugee camp:*

7. What skills, values and behaviors did you teach your child?

8. How did you teach them these skills, values and behaviors?

9. What tasks did you require your child to perform?

10. How did you describe a well brought-up child at the time you lived in the camp? And how was a well brought up child described at that time?

11. What were the differences/similarities between the descriptions of a well brought up girl/boy and were the desired skills, values and behaviors similar or different? Explain

12. Who helped you take care of your children or whom did you rely on to help with caring for your children?

13. What did you desire and want for your child?

14. What were some of the worries and concerns you had about your children growing up in the refugee camp?

15. As a mother how did you manage to care for your child when you lived in the camp?

16. What were some of the difficulties you faced raising your child in a refugee camp?
17. How did you see yourself as a mother during this period of time you lived in the camp?

**Interview Three: Reflecting on the meaning of their experiences**

1. How would you describe the way you were raised and the way you raised your child when you lived in the refugee camp? Differences/similarities?

2. How did life in the refugee camp influence what you taught your child and what you desired for your child?

3. What were some of the important skills, behaviors, or values you wanted your child to possess during the period of time you lived in the refugee camp?

4. How would you describe the social support you had when you lived in the refugee camp compared to the time before displacement?

5. How did life in the refugee camp influence how you described yourself as a woman and as a mother?
APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER
ARE YOU A WOMAN FROM LIBERIA OR SIERRA LEONE?

- I am a Ph.D. student at Loyola University, Chicago, looking for women volunteers from Liberia or Sierra Leone to participate in a research study of their experiences of raising a child in a refugee camp.

- Participants have to be fluent in English and be willing to participate in three interviews conducted at a time and place of their choice.

- Each participant will receive a gift card of $20.00 at the beginning of each interview.

- Your contribution towards this study will be greatly appreciated, and will lead to a deeper understanding of the experiences of mothers raising their children during a time of displacement.

- If you are willing to participate in this interview by sharing your story, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT-PHONE CALL SCRIPT
Hi! My name is Florence Kimondo; can I please speak with the participant? (Ask for the participant by name).

Hi, (participant’s name) my name is Florence Kimondo and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University/Erikson Institute here in Chicago. I am doing a research study on the experiences of being a mother. I was given your name and phone number by (person’s name) and he/she informed me you would be expecting my call. If you have a couple of minutes, I can tell you more about my study.

(If the participant is not able to talk, ask for a good time to call back, thank them and end the call)

If the participant has time to talk:

I am doing a research study as part of completing my doctoral degree. I am interested in learning more from you and other women from Liberia/Sierra Leone about the experience of being a mother and raising children at a time you were displaced from your home. If you would like to share your story with me, you will participate in three face-to-face interviews with me and they will all be about being a mother and how you raised one of your children during the time you were displaced by war.

But, before you decide if you would like to participate, I would like the opportunity to meet with you so I can explain all the details of the interviews, how they will be recorded, all your rights and what I will do with the information you share with me. After we have the chance to talk you can take some time to decide if you will be interested in being part of the study.

If the participant is not interested in participating, thank them for their time and end the call.

If the participant is interested in meeting and hearing more about the study, schedule a meeting at a time and place convenient for them.
APPENDIX F

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM
Project Title: Liberian refugee women’s personal narratives on the effects of war on motherhood

Researcher: Florence W. Kimondo, MSW

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Aisha Ray

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a research study. In order to decide whether or not you want to be a part of this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to make an informed judgment. This process is known as informed consent. This consent form gives detailed information about the research study. Also as you read through it we will discuss the study with you and answer any questions you may have. Once you understand the study, you will be invited to participate. If you volunteer to be in the study you will be asked to sign this form.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Florence W. Kimondo for her dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Aisha Ray in the Erikson Institute/Loyola University of Chicago, Child Development program.

You are being asked to participate because you are a Liberian woman and because of your previous experience as a mother raising children during a period you were displaced and living in a refugee camp.

Purpose and Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews. The focus of the interviews will be your story of being a mother and raising a young child in a refugee camp. The interviews will seek to understand your experiences of motherhood and the values, skills and behaviors you instilled in your child during this period of time. The interviews will be audio taped and this interviewer may take notes as the interview is in progress. The audiotapes will be transcribed, and the tapes will be destroyed after one year. Each interview will take between one to three hours and it will be held at a time and place of your choice. During the interview you do not have to answer any question that may make you uncomfortable, and you can stop the interview at any time without consequences of any kind.

Risks and Benefits:
It is possible that during the interviews you may view some questions as personal or sensitive, and you may find them upsetting to talk about. If you find that this is the case, you may stop the interview or choose not to answer the question(s). This interviewer will
be available to talk with you after the interview or make referrals for additional support if you want. This researcher will also ask you if they can call after two days after the interview, to check on your wellbeing. If you report being upset by the memories of your experience, this researcher will discuss with you about creating a plan of care that can assist in decreasing your sad feelings.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the information you share will help us learn more about Liberian mothers’ experiences of motherhood and raising children in a refugee camp. This information will help us understand some of the ways events such as displacement by war impacts motherhood and the way children are raised. This will assist social service providers and teachers to understand some of the experiences refugee mothers and children have gone through and may help them improve the services they provide refugee families in their adjustment process when they are resettled in the U.S.

**Compensation:**
Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Your decision to leave will not affect your access to services normally available to you at the agency where you were recruited for this study. You will receive a gift card worth $20.00 at the beginning of each of the three interviews as compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**
I will keep all the information gathered in this study confidential. Your name, address, or any other identifying information will not be used in reporting the results of the interviews. All the information I gather will be kept in a locked cabinet in an office in my apartment, I will be the only one with access to the audiotapes, field notes and transcripts. However, as a social worker I am a mandated reporter, and if any of the information you share indicates the possibility of child abuse or neglect I am required to report to the Department of Children and Family Services.

**Voluntary participation:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not in any way affect your current relationship or restrict your access to services normally available to you at the agency you were recruited from.

**Contacts and Questions:**
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Florence Kimondo at xxx-xxx-xxxx or the faculty sponsor Dr. Aisha Ray at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you
have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at -xxx- xxx-xxxx.

**Statement of Consent:**
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_________________________________   Date: ____________________________
Participant’s Signature

_________________________________   Date: ____________________________
Researcher’s Signature

*Can this researcher contact you after two days to check on your wellbeing? (check the applicable response)*
Yes ______________  No ______________
APPENDIX G
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER CHECKLIST
1. Do you have upsetting memories, thoughts, or images about your displacement by war experiences?
   1. Not at all  
   2. A little bit  
   3. Frequently  
   4. Quite a bit  
   5. Very Frequently  

2. Do you have upsetting dreams about your displacement by war experiences?
   1. Not at all  
   2. A little bit  
   3. Frequently  
   4. Quite a bit  
   5. Very Frequently  

3. Do you suddenly act or feel as if an experience or event from your past were happening again – as if you were reliving it?
   1. Not at all  
   2. A little bit  
   3. Frequently  
   4. Quite a bit  
   5. Very Frequently  

4. Do you feel very upset when something reminds you of your experience of being displaced by war?
   1. Not at all  
   2. A little bit  
   3. Frequently  
   4. Quite a bit  
   5. Very Frequently  

5. Do you have physical reactions such as your heart beating fast, sweating and trouble breathing when something reminds you of your past experiences?
   1. Not at all  
   2. A little bit  
   3. Frequently  
   4. Quite a bit  
   5. Very Frequently  

6. Do you avoid thinking about or talking about or expressing feelings about your displacement by war experiences?
   1. Not at all  
   2. A little bit  
   3. Frequently
4. Quite a bit  5. Very Frequently

7. Do you have trouble remembering important parts of your past?
   1. Not at all  2. A little bit  3. Frequently
   4. Quite a bit  5. Very Frequently

8. Do you feel unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?
   1. Not at all  2. A little bit  3. Frequently
   4. Quite a bit  5. Very Frequently

9. Do you have trouble falling or staying asleep?
   1. Not at all  2. A little bit  3. Frequently
   4. Quite a bit  5. Very Frequently

10. Do you get easily upset or have angry outbursts?
    1. Not at all  2. A little bit  3. Frequently
      4. Quite a bit  5. Very Frequently

11. Do you have physical pains and aches such as headaches, backaches or stomachaches?
    1. Not at all  2. A little bit  3. Frequently
      4. Quite a bit  5. Very Frequently
APPENDIX H
REFERRAL LIST – COUNSELING CENTERS
These agencies have been selected based on their experience working with and providing services to refugee families and offering free services and/or having sliding scale fees based on income.

1. **International Family, Adolescent and Children’s Services (IFACES)**

   Intake phone number: 1-773-751-4188  
   Address: 4750 North Sheridan Rd., Suite 500  
   Chicago, Illinois, 60640  
   Hours: 8.30 am-5 pm  
   Fees: Sliding scale based on income  

2. **Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago**

   **Holbrook counseling center**

   Intake phone number: 1-312-655-7700  
   Address: 641 W. Lake Street  
   Chicago, Illinois, 60661  
   Hours: 12.00 pm – 8 pm (Monday-Friday)  
   Fees: Sliding scale based on income  

3. **Heartland Health Center**

   Intake phone number: 773-751-1875  
   Address: 2200 W. Touhy Ave.  
   Chicago, Illinois, 60645  
   Hours: 8.30 am - 5 pm (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday)  
   8.30 am - 8 pm (Tuesdays)  
   8.30 am – 12.30 pm (Saturdays)  
   Fees: Sliding scale based on income and accepts Medicaid cards
REFERENCES


VITA

Florence W. Kimondo was born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya. She received her Bachelor’s degree in Commerce Business Administration from Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, in 1998. Later she obtained a Masters in Social Work from Loyola University Chicago in 2003.

While in the Erikson Institute/Loyola University doctoral program, she worked on a number of research projects focusing on the after school experiences, and academic needs of minority children, and was a graduate student’s advisor. In 2011, she received Loyola’s Advanced Doctoral Fellowship merit award.

Florence has also worked with refugee children and families here in the U.S. as a Clinical Social Worker. The stories shared by the children and families about their lives prior to the war and their resettlement experiences in the U.S. were the inspiration of her dissertation study.