

Migration and Adaptation of Sierra Leonean Refugees and Immigrants in Memphis, TN

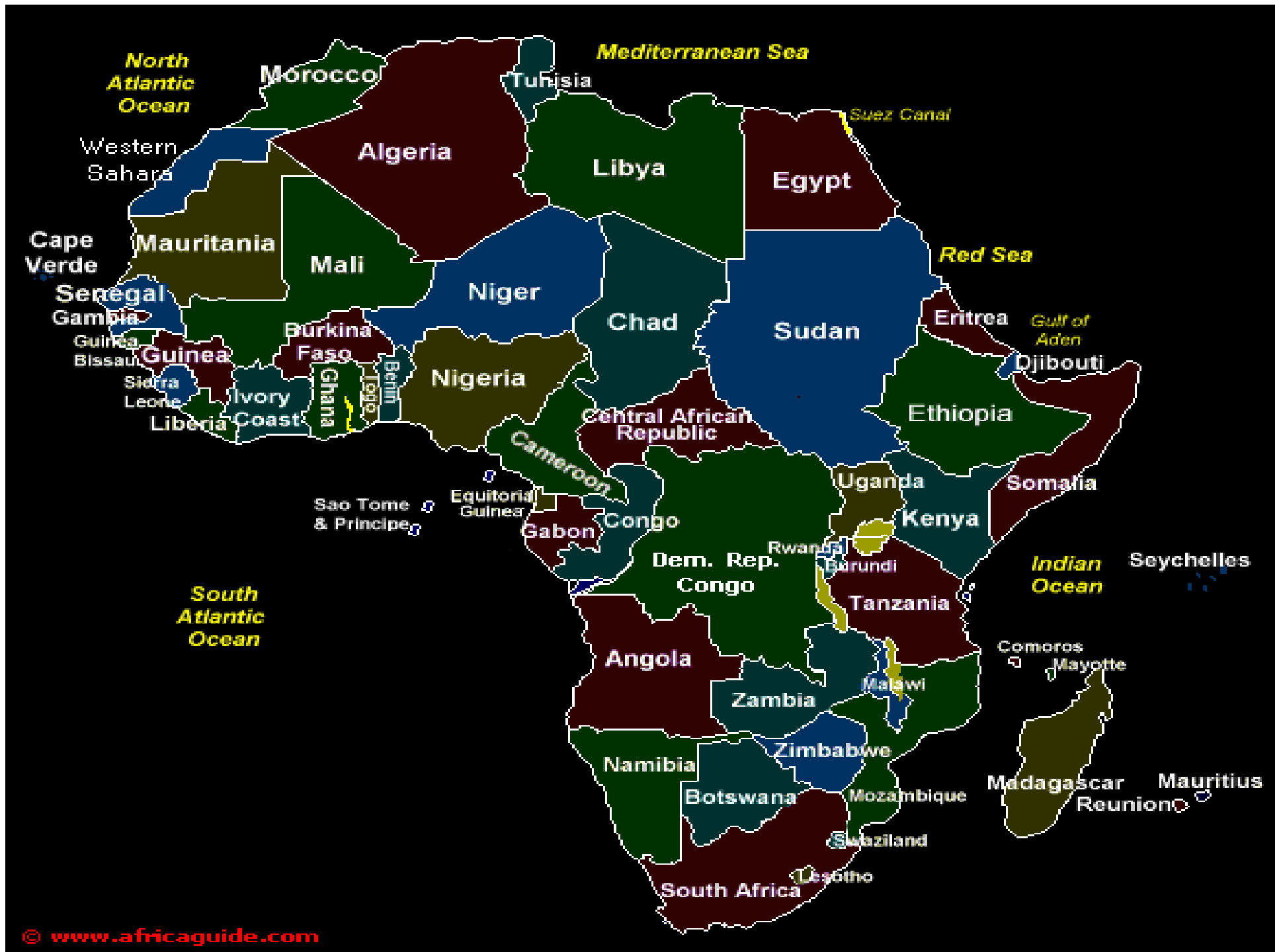
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Presentation Outline

- Setting the scene
- Migration
- Current study
- Findings/experiences/issues
- Solutions – social capital
- Lessons learned



End of the Sierra Leone War

- Strong military & diplomatic action by the British government
- UN Mission in Sierra Leone
- Defeat of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)
- International pressure on diamond smuggling

- (Dallaire, 2001)

Purpose of study

- Investigate how Sierra Leonean immigrants/refugees use social capital to address challenges faced after relocation in the United States

Migration

- Migration is an adaptive strategy for survival, hence voluntary and involuntary migration
- Survival and sanctuary
- Harris (1993)

Immigrants & Refugees

- Immigrants are individuals who voluntarily leave country of origin and admitted to reside in the US permanently (DV, asylum, marriage, employer etc.)
- Refugees are individuals persecuted in their homelands or have well-founded fear of persecution (UNHCR, 2002)

Immigration in Tennessee

- 169% increase in foreign-born population between 1990 and 2000
- State ranks sixth in the nation
- In Nashville, one-in-seven of 570,000 residents is foreign born
- (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2005)

Methods

- 15 families at time of study
- Random selection of 5 each of refugee and non-refugee immigrant families
- Semi-structured questionnaire



Methods Cont.

- 10 questions included
- Topics ranged from relocation process to acclimating in new environment
- Participation was voluntary

Characteristics of Participants

- Participants ranged from 25 – 42 yrs of age
- Have lived in Memphis for a period between 1.5 – 5 years
- Heads of families were interviewed
- Two interviewees were females

Findings – Excerpt

- “Here, [in the USA] I am nobody. The respect that I use to have back home from my entire family and community is no longer with me, I am mentally sick everyday.”

Findings – Excerpt

- “I miss everything back home. I use to be a wealthy man, with many friends and people around me. Here, I have nobody by me and that is very stressful”

Findings – Excerpt

- “Since I came to the US, I have been through all sorts of trauma, stress, and financial difficulties.”
- “As long as you are here, stress is part of your life.”
There is the cultural difference of being lonely, not being able to visit people at will, and sometimes limited food choices.”

Social Capital

- Defined as the functional content of relationships – social networks (House, 1981)
- Benefits and resources people get from memberships to groups (Baron et al., 2000)
- Resource of individuals that emerges from their social ties (Coleman, 1994)

Social Capital Cont.

- Complex web of relationships, connections, contacts that individuals or groups of people rely on for support, survival and integration into a different community or environment

For this Study ...

- Broadly defined to encompass acculturation, integration, assimilation, and adjustment to new conditions, circumstances, and environments

Strategies and Solutions

- Organizations
- Social meetings
- “Osusu” – donating money in turns

Strategies and Solutions

- Loans from group members
- Social support (various kinds)
- Church
- Mosque “jamats”

Lessons Learned

- Ethnic affiliations within the bigger social group
- Immigrants and refugees search for ways to articulate and interpret their values
- Social support systems transcend city and State boundaries



Conclusions & Recommendations

- Faith-based initiatives in health promotion must be inclusive of all religions
- Ethnic organizations must be used as channels to serve immigrant and refugees
- Even immigrants and refugees from the same country may not be homogeneous



End of Presentation

Questions?