

Presidential Apologies, the Liberian TRC and the Role of Postconflict Reparations in the Reintegration of Returnees in Liberia

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The twentieth century witnessed a staggering amount of deadly conflicts that redefined the study of international and internal warfare, conflict and peace. African conflicts especially have been of such character and consequence that the entire nation reels at the end of them from economic, social, political and psychological repercussions. It is within this scenario that both academic discourse and political practice on reparations and restitutions to victims of such wars have gained momentum. The specific application of the burgeoning international practice of reparations to the situation of returning refugees has however witnessed limited application. Therefore this paper assesses the efforts made so far to address reparations to returnee refugees and the likely effects on their reintegration, specifically with reference to the Liberian case.

This paper draws on the literature and on fieldwork carried out in Liberia involving interviews with one hundred persons including returnees, government and non-government sources in Liberia, as well as the collection and review of pertinent documents. The paper argues that beyond the physical and economic aspects of the reintegration of refugees, great attention must be given to the psychosocial and psychological position of those returnees, as these are usually the factors that determine whether returnees remain in the country or leave again. The necessary reparations that may accrue to returnees may involve the five internationally recognised aspects of post war reparation namely, restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. With the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work already done, the question must necessarily arise as to the potentials of the entire process to contribute to returnee reintegration since it is held generally in the literature that the return and successful reintegration of returnees is a significant milestone for the consolidation of a post war political order.

In light of the fact that up to 75% of the Liberian population was displaced at one time or the other during the two- decades- long political crisis, then the recommendations from this research can be seen as critical to national healing, justice, reconciliation, reintegration, and in the final analysis, sustainable peace.

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