

# African Minorities in the New World

Edited by Toyin Falola  
Niyi Afolabi



Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

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HISTORY, POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND CULTURE

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Routledge  
New York & London

First published 2008  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Simultaneously published in the UK  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to [www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk).”

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*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

African minorities in the New World / edited by Toyin Falola and Niyi Afolabi.

p. cm. —(African studies : history, politics, economics, and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-96092-4

1. Africans—America—Social conditions. 2. Blacks—America—Social conditions. 3. Immigrants—America—Social conditions. 4. Africans—America—Ethnic identity. 5. Citizenship—America. 6. Refugees—Government policy—America. 7. African diaspora. 8. America—Emigration and immigration. 9. Africa—Emigration and immigration. 10. America—Ethnic relations. I. Falola, Toyin. II. Afolabi, Niyi.

E29.N3A525 2007

970'.00496—dc22

2007018149

ISBN 0-203-93251-X Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-96092-4 (hbk)

ISBN10: 0-203-93251-X (ebk)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-96092-2 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-93251-3 (ebk)

*For Professor Akin Ogundiran,  
A successful symbol of migration and transnationalism*



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# Preface

*African Minorities in the New World* is based upon a major international conference held at the University of Texas-Austin (March 24–26, 2006), on the subject of “Movements, Migrations, and Displacements in Africa.” The book brings together twelve incisive chapters on the dynamics of migration and policy-cum-developmental implications on both sides of the Atlantic. In the last five decades (1950–2000), the subject of migration and immigration has shifted from the internal to the international frame due to the new wave of African immigrants and issues concerning their integration into American social, economic and political life. This “new” wave is both interesting and challenging in the sense that it falls within what has been termed “voluntary trans-Atlantic migration” as opposed to involuntary migration during slavery. While the Civil Rights Movement in the United States contributed to the attainment of independence by former African colonies, the era of independence also served as a catalyst for professional training that was becoming indispensable for élites in the new African states.

Yet, following the return of these Western-trained Africans to their newly independent nations, the post-colonial African states suffered from poor leadership, corruption, and economic mismanagement. Some of these former students in the West, and even locally trained professionals such as medical doctors, nurses, engineers, and professors, often facing redundancy and frustration due to lack of facilities and opportunities in their own countries, felt compelled to seek “greener pastures” in Europe and America. This economically-motivated wave resulted in the debate between “brain drain” and “brain gain”. The situation is further complicated by cases of drought and civil war in some African countries, such as Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, etc., leading to cases of refugee and asylum-seeking status. In essence, the question of migration has become so complex and transnational that it deserves attention as an area of academic

inquiry that is only being broached currently. Since it has been suggested that “more Africans enter the U.S. than in the days of slavery” (50,000 annually since the '90s), it is becoming even more urgent to address the policy implications of this for both the U.S.A. and Africa, especially from the viewpoints of labor economics' exigency and charges of un-patriotism, respectively. This book sets out to fill the gap in the literature on some of these issues. While this book has focused primarily on new trans-Atlantic African migration, its constructive-dialogic model also serves the comparative interests of other “new migrant minorities” in the United States in the era of globalization and transnational capitalism.

The contributors range in interdisciplinary backgrounds from medical practitioners to professors, as well as ministers, pastors, case-workers, and international development agents. They bring together a unique dynamism that reflects dedication and commitment to change in attitudes, policies, research focus, and dissemination. We expect that the book will become an immediate success as a reader on migration, immigration, public policy issues, African studies, African American studies, and New Diaspora studies. It will equally appeal to scholars of history, international law, international relations, health care, and social work. Its accessible language and illustrative graphics make it suitable for the general reader interested in migration patterns and the African contribution to global politics and economics.

We want to thank all the contributors who, despite security and financial concerns, traveled long distances to be with us in Texas. Presenters and participants engaged in lively discussion throughout the three-day period. Such an undertaking does not come without copious debts. We are grateful to a host of graduate students (Roy Doron, Tyler Fleming, Matthew Heaton, Ann Genova, Adam Paddock, and Saheed Aderinto); the technical personnel (Sam Saverance); and many staff of the University of Texas (Gail Davis, Laura Flack and Martha Gail Moore). The organizations and departments that supported us financially include the Departments of History, Government, and English, the Center for African and African American Studies, the Office of the Vice President, College of Liberal Arts, Office of the Dean of Students, the Texas Cowboys Fund, The Louann and Larry Temple Fund, The Frances Higgenbotham Nalle Fund, and Dedman College, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. We are also grateful to Dr. Vik Bahl of Green River Community College in Auburn, Ms. Ronke Obadina of Austin, and Dr. Segun Fayemi of New York for their commitment to the conference.

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## Chapter One

# Introduction: Voluntarily Singing the Lord's Song . . .

Toyin Falola and Niyi Afolabi

### OVERVIEW

This book confronts the reality that new African immigrants now represent a significant force in the configuration of American polity and identity, especially in the last forty years. Despite their minority status, African immigrants are making their mark in various areas of human endeavor and accomplishment—from the academy, to business, to scientific innovation. The demographic shift is welcome news as well as a matter for concern, given the consequences of displacement and the paradoxes of exile in the new location. By its very connection to the “Old African Diaspora,” the notion of a “New African Diaspora”<sup>1</sup> marks a clear indication of a historical progression reconnecting continental Africa with the New World without the stigma of slavery. However, the notion of trans-Atlantic slavery is never erased when the African diaspora is mentioned, whether in the old world or the new. Within this paradoxical dispensation, the new African diaspora must be conceived as the aftermath of a global migration crisis.<sup>2</sup> While studies<sup>3</sup> addressing new international migration patterns of ethnic groups into the United States, such as the cases of Asian-Americans, Latinos, Sino-Americans, etc. are on the rise, only a few<sup>4</sup> address African immigrants. This is the context in which this book is significant.

While a few studies have attempted to expose the emerging trans-migrational trends in the 80s and 90s, such as John Arthur's *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (2000), Toyin Falola's focus on African intellectuals in a changing world order—as in *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (2001)—and Lawrence Okafor's *Recent African Immigrants to the USA* (2003) in which he proposes recipes for survival and success in the United States, no other study has come close to the diversity and comprehensiveness *African Minorities in the New*

*World*, especially in its intellectual scope, cogency, and interdisciplinary orientation. Broadly framed as a dialogue between the implied antithesis of the diaspora of slavery, the diaspora of colonialism, and the voluntary diaspora to the United States, Canada, and Latin America, the main arguments of *African Minorities in the New World* may be summed up as follows:

- i. That the exigency of migration has significant unintended consequences.
- ii. That any displacement from a 'comfort zone' triggers survival mechanisms.
- iii. That there is a correlation between economic gain and brain drain.
- iv. That voluntary migration implies hopes, dreams, and a sense of peace among African immigrants.
- v. That there is a subtle relationship between the dynamics of Atlantic slavery and the unintended consequences faced by African immigrants in terms of reverse patterns of postmodern migration from Africa.
- vi. That migrant African professionals in the United States see their 'displacement' more as an opportunity for professional development than loss of patriotism.
- vii. That the implications for US African policy can lead to an improved partnership between the United States and Africa, through productive dialogue between local and international development agencies.
- viii. That the processes of adaptation and integration for African immigrants must be studied and analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective to highlight the journey to citizenship not necessarily as the attainment of the 'American dream' alone, but also as the possibility to contribute to an Africa that from which the migrants voluntarily departed due to economic or political exigency.
- ix. That such a study must involve the entire African community, located in major American cities (New York, Chicago, Washington, Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, etc.) as well as in the traditional American South.

- x. That the refugee situation as well as the economic and political crises in Africa have a direct bearing on African immigration to the USA, and must also be factored into the discussion of how the first generation of “new African Americans” (“new minorities”) will be received or is being received, such as the election of Barack Obama (Kenya) to the US Senate in 2004.

The edited volume has been prepared as both a scholarly book and as a reader in undergraduate and graduate courses. In its three-part division, it groups under thematic clusters the main issues of African immigration in the New World, especially in the United States and Canada. The first part brings together four chapters addressing “Negotiating Citizenship and Cultural Identities.” Combining issues of nation-building, nationalism, religion, dislocation, resettlement, and new identity formations, this part emphasizes the imperative of negotiation in a new setting where family and kinship networks are disrupted, re-defined, and re-imagined. The second part, “African Refugees and Policy Implications,” brings together five chapters that address policy issues regarding refugees, migrant health-care workers, and the relationship between migrancy and the American educational system. In essence, this section raises issues of adaptation, human, and economic costs of migration for the hosting communities, countries, as well as African immigrants. The last part, “Paradoxes of (Im)migration and Exile” highlights the tensions and contradictions faced by African immigrants in their process of integration within American society. The three chapters passionately discuss how stereotypical images in the media, perceived discrimination and a sense of being marooned in a shifting and floating state of citizenship and alienation can be a matter of concern leading to some forms of activism and discourses of self-recuperation. While this book has focused primarily on new trans-Atlantic African migration, its constructive-dialogic model also serves the comparative interests of other “new migrant minorities” in the United States in the era of globalization and transnational capitalism.

## **NEW AFRICAN MIGRATION: HISTORY, PATTERNS, AND THEORY**

A new cadre of African immigrants are finding themselves in the New World—mostly well educated, high-income earning professionals, and belonging to the category termed “African brain drain,” they constitute the antinomy of those Africans who were forcibly removed from Africa during slavery. Along with this sense of freedom and voluntary migration

comes a paradox: that of living in two worlds and negotiating the pleasures and agonies that come with living in exile. In order to understand fully the nature of this complexity, we must draw from multidisciplinary frameworks and variables. While there is no agreement on the best approach to understand or explain migration and its consequences, a number of questions<sup>5</sup> and methodologies do facilitate the possibility of a theoretical framing. These questions are:

1. What is the impact of migration on cultural change and ethnic identity?
2. What is the impact of migration on population change?
3. What explanation can be provided for the wish to migrate, and its consequences?
4. What approaches are best to understand the experience of the immigrant?
5. What is the impact of immigration laws on the immigrant?
6. Why is it difficult for the state to control immigration?
7. What is meant by immigrant incorporation?

While not exhaustive, these questions provide a starting point for theories and hypotheses on the new African immigration. Some of the questions not addressed here are the impact of education for children and women as part of the decision to stay on, the role of perceived or real discrimination, the push-pull dynamics that often compel some immigrants to consider returning to Africa, and finally, the wave of implantation of religious entities and communities as a form of coping strategies for those who have considered the United States as a home in exile. These other questions, which are fully addressed in this book, make for a more comprehensive analysis of the state of new African migration.

Migration brings about the hyphenated self, that is, the old self *versus* the newly formed or emerging self. Such a state of flux and of trauma brings about a psychological crisis of identity and of consciousness. On the one hand, the immigrant is still clinging on to the old identity; in this case, the African, while at the same time, he/she is obliged to assimilate cultural values and social conditionings of the United States that make integration more feasible. Ultimately, the levels of flexibility, conformism, and resistance determine whether assimilation will happen or if a compromise will be reached. The impact of migration on cultural change and ethnic

identity may then be theorized as a permanent state of crisis, negotiation if not confusion. In order to maintain some level of psychological balance, the immigrant is obliged to immerse himself or herself in those African rituals and ceremonies that help to maintain connections with Africa. On the other hand, in order for the new African immigrant to function properly in the United States, a coping strategy is necessitated—that is, an awareness of American cultural values, an embrace of it when convenient, and total indifference when immaterial to survival. A problematic example is the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. It is not impossible, for example, for an African immigrant to attend a rally in honor of the Civil Rights leader and later rush to an African naming ceremony or an African wedding event the same day without any feeling of contradiction or betrayal. The holiday is significant to all Americans, more so African Americans, and even to the African immigrant. Yet, because “charity begins at home,” the African immigrant will also ensure his or her rituals or ceremonies are maintained even as a form of resistance and survival.

The impact of migration on population change is both a demographic and historical question. Since the 1500s, Africans have been uprooted from their homelands to the Americas to work on plantations as slaves. As James Arthur points out in *Invisible Sojourners*, the slave trade brought “between ten and twenty million Africans”. Between 1891 and 1900, there were only three hundred and fifty, due to abolition of slavery. Between 1900 and 1950, over thirty one thousand African immigrants migrated. Arthur surmises that regardless of the period when they came to the United States, “Africans have contributed immensely to shaping America” (2). In the new African immigration wave, thousands of Africans have migrated to the United States in search of a better life. In recent migration patterns, African immigrants are coming primarily from Nigeria, South Africa, Liberia, Ghana, Egypt, Kenya, Cape Verde, and the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea). According to April Gordon’s data (1998), Nigerians alone constitute 17 percent of the African immigration population followed by Ethiopia with 13 percent. Since most new African immigrants settle in urban areas such as New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta and Houston, they are driven to succeed and compete to the extent that they may be said to have become more economically successful than when they were in Africa. Numerically, the number of Africans living in the United States has grown consistently and exponentially over the last forty years. In 1970, there were about 61,463 African immigrants, in 1980, there were 193,723, and by 1990 census, there were 363,819. In addition to increasing the population and economic vibrancy of the major American cities where they live, new African immigrants have also been considered



of “negative impact” to the economic security of African Americans. As Steven Shulman<sup>6</sup> observes:

The debate about the impact of immigration on African Americans is fundamentally empirical, but it has broad political ramifications. Immigration advocates often say that “we are a nation of immigrants.” However, African Americans are descendants of slaves, not immigrants.” Immigration may increase ethnic diversity, but if it does so at the expense African Americans it is hard to see how it can be justified in terms of historical or social justice. (x)

Although Schulman has focused primarily on African Americans, the natural tension caused by population change and ethnic diversity may apply across the board—that is, speaking equally for the Hispanic-Americans and Asian-Americans.

For the new African immigrant, the primary factor motivating migration is the desire for a better life, whether fleeing political persecution, economic disaster, refugee crisis, or a combination thereof. The overall consequences include displacement, alienation, and the not so enchanting reality of exile. In order to gain a better understanding of the migrant’s experiences, opportunities for experiential narratives must be provided. While interviewing victims of traumatic experiences is often difficult, depending on the migrant’s comfort in narrating the tale, the level of trauma caused by such experiences, and the question of whether the migrant has ultimately “overcome” the memories of their past negative circumstances, it is very useful to devise instruments of fact-gathering and analysis in order to improve the conditions of future African immigrants. To the extent that immigration laws continue to be a political issue, the fate of many prospective immigrants will continue to hang in the balance. The 1965 Immigration Act, the 1980 immigration changes pertaining to refugees, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and the 1990 Immigration Act have all facilitated African immigration. The recent introduction of the Diversity Lottery Visa have also given many the opportunity to immigrate without having to go through the pains and agonies of waiting for the national origins quota allocation or working their way up to citizenship. In this sense, immigration laws have been a blessing and a curse depending on who they benefit. Many lives have been twisted through bureaucratic or inadvertent errors such as expiration, renewal, delays, missing documents, or omissions. Furthermore, it has been difficult for the state to control immigration due to constantly shifting laws and the readiness of the aspiring migrants to take advantage of opportunities or loop holes. In the final analysis, when

every migrant can count on immigrant incorporation, that is, becoming fully integrated as a citizen with all the benefits thereof, and without any feeling of discrimination, alienation, or double standards, then the arduous road to citizenship will have been worthwhile. The irony is that some new African immigrants are yet to feel so well incorporated, hence the constant echo of their “minority” status.

## PART I: NEGOTIATING CITIZENSHIP AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

This section addresses issues of citizenship as they affect the shifting cultural identities of the African immigrant. In providing broad contextual parameters for the study of African minorities in the New World, the four chapters share some commonalities: dislocation, identities, and coping strategies. Distributing their geographical foci between the United States, Latin America<sup>7</sup> and Canada, the experiences narrated and analyzed in this section also present some divergences. While Latin America and the United States differ on the issue of race (miscegenation *versus* one blood rule), there may be some agreement on the issue of class, that the mythology of “equality” and denial of racism often obscure realities, especially in Latin America. In addition, the discussion of religion as a coping strategy among African immigrants, naming ceremonies of an African immigrant baby as a forum of preservation of African tradition and celebration of cultural values, as well as the trauma of being “illegal” African refugee women in Canada once their “refugee status” expires, provide cogent case-studies from which to reach some hypothetical conclusions on the impact of the desire for citizenship on the general well-being and on the cultural identities of African immigrants.

In the first chapter, “Nationalist Myth-Making, Cultural Identity and Nation Building: African Minorities in the U.S. and Latin America,” Shadrack Nasong’o questions the national myth of miscegenation (race mixture) in Latin America as well as the myth of equality in the United States. Using the case of the Hurricane Katrina disaster that hit the U.S. Gulf Coast in September 2005, she argues that this unfortunate event brought America’s shocking poverty bubbling to the surface. This is because most people in Mississippi and New Orleans who stayed back were too poor to leave. Statistics from the 2000 census show that close to 40 per cent of the New Orleans population, which is overwhelmingly black, lived in poverty, with 27 percent having no access to a vehicle. For Nasong’o, not only does this reality constitute a major contradiction of the nationalist construction of the U.S. as an egalitarian society wherein virtually all citizens belong to

the middle class and are afforded the opportunity to realize and live “the American dream”. She contends that similarly in Latin America, through the adoption of the nationalist myth of *mestizaje*, historians, philosophers, writers, and anthropologists have consistently claimed that the issue of race does not exist in Latin America; that all ethnic groups have blended together in a harmonious and indistinguishable new entity called the *Mestizo*. However, day-to-day realities challenge this nationalist myth. People of African descent are so marginalized that in Colombia, for instance, they are not counted in national censuses. This chapter critically examines the process of nationalist myth making in the U.S. and Latin America from a comparative perspective with a view to analyzing the impact and implications of this dominant-group elite project on ethnic and racial minorities, with particular focus on people of African descent. The central argument of the study lies in the author’s position that the conception of nations as egalitarian communities, characterized by deep horizontal comradeship, camouflages the reality of glaring inequalities and ruthless exploitation in order to promote collective loyalty, especially of dominant groups, to the nationalist project.

While Nasong’o’s incursions into the United States and Latin America provide inter-continental and comparative perspectives of migration and identity, the case-studies by Anthony Agbali are focused on urban America. In the second chapter, “African Immigrants’ Experiences in Urban America: Religion and the Construction of Social Identity in St. Louis,” Agbali presents a fascinating study of how Africans living in St. Louis, Missouri, create religion-derived social identities as one of their coping strategies of integration and survival in their new locale. Agbali argues that African immigrants are featuring significantly among the new immigrants to the United States of America. According to the author, today’s African immigrants represent a historical continuum with previous African immigrants who came to the shores of the United States as slaves. In contrast, however, contemporary African immigrants are constituted differently, as they came of their own volition.

Thus, among the most recent immigrants to the United States are those affected by interethnic civil wars, such as many Eritreans, Somalians, Sudanese and Liberians, among others, as well as those affected by political persecution and ethnic cleansing such as the Ogonis of Nigeria, members of Nigeria’s democratic opposition, civil society, and intellectuals (mainly during the Abacha dictatorship), the Somali Bantu, the Rwandan Tutsis and their sympathizers, and many others. Others, especially skilled professionals, are pushed by factors of economics and existential satisfaction to emigrate to other social spaces and nations. Some of these immigrants’ destinations

occur within Africa, whereas others target the West, and specifically urban America. The case-study of St. Louis, Missouri, is particularly illuminating, given the mix of immigrant populations from Somalis, to Bosnians, to Nigerians. Although Agbali has focused generally on African immigrants in St. Louis, it would be interesting to see how each nationality negotiates cultural identities within the United States.

Beyond the collective social identity of Africans as examined in the second chapter, in the third chapter, "Religion and Spirituality Among St. Louisan African Immigrants," Agbali probes further into the roles of religion and spirituality not only in the formation of identities but in the strategies deployed to cope with the challenges of migration. Agbali contends that African religious values, identities, and institutions offer immigrants a vital source of social anchoring, emotional solace, and help with social adjustments. Thus, religious centers are vital spaces of heightened social interaction, mnemonic recall and reordering, thus also featuring as spaces of interpenetrations in hybridizing the purely material (mundane) and the purely spiritual. This chapter examines the nature of this phenomenon, focusing on St. Louis, Missouri, a major immigration destination in the past (1880–1920). While immigration to the St. Louis area has lessened, immigrants and refugees have found a home in St. Louis. In addition, the presence of African immigrants has helped St. Louis project a colorful multicultural spatial contour. The religious values, norms, institutions, and practices have also structured America differently. In sum, as African immigrants acculturate, they also offer to America an African "soul." In this sense, Agbali may be agreeing with John Arthur who states: "Acculturated but not assimilated, the Africans engage the host society selectively, confining their activities to carefully constructed zones, mainly educational and economic, that are vital for their survival in this country."<sup>8</sup> African immigrants, in essence, have a sense of control of their own destinies even when faced perhaps with the next worst of adversities after death: dislocation.

Moving beyond national mythologies and social identities, Sheri Canon, in chapter four, "'Born in the USA': Dislocation, Disrupted Kinship Networks, and the Transformative Power of Music and Dance in African Immigration Baby Naming Ceremonies," provides a stimulating case-study of cultural retentions among Senegalese and Ghanaian immigrants in Los Angeles. Through the specific case studies of naming ceremonies, identity formations, and resistance among African women, the author succeeds in theorizing that these rituals and ceremonies function as one of the effective modes of resistance that African immigrants adopt in order to negotiate between their traditional African values (religion, spirituality, cultural traditions) and American cultural values, especially in the specific instance

of a naming ceremony. In essence, Canon argues that African immigrants, regardless of their religious orientation (Christians or Muslims) simultaneously retain their traditional values—seizing opportunities such as naming ceremonies to celebrate, showcase, and revive their cultural values as they pass them on to their children in the New World.

In her description of the ceremony, Canon observes that for most African societies, the naming ceremony consists of two segments—a religious ritual in the early morning one week after a baby’s birth, followed by a cultural celebration featuring music, dance, food, and gift exchange. In Los Angeles, immigrant families, who are restricted by long-distance travel, long working hours, and noise ordinances, adapt their rituals to the limitations of the host society. In the process of this adaptation, they also transform the foreign surroundings to reproduce the naming ceremony in a style that will ensure the newborn’s spiritual protection and introduction into the community. Canon successfully compares two immigrant communities—Ghanaians and Senegalese—who have very different cultures, languages, religious histories, and migration patterns, in a global city such as Los Angeles. While their music and dance performance practices differ, they share many aspects of ritual performance and cultural aims during baptisms. Canon’s presentation, description of the ceremony, and analysis show how Ghanaian and Senegalese immigrants use music and dance at life-cycle rituals to re-inscribe ethnic and national identities, reinforce social relationships, and accentuate the kinship ties between extended families across the Atlantic. Through the use of varying musical genres, song texts, dance styles, praise singing performances and drumming, African immigrants articulate family ties in which Africans at home and abroad are enmeshed.

While Canon’s chapter on the African naming ceremony provides a cultural and celebratory interlude to the negotiation of citizenship and cultural identities, chapter five is not as celebratory. In “*A Viagem da Minha Vida/The Voyage of My Life: Identity Formation and Resettlement among Angolan Women of Color in Toronto*,” Robert A. Kenedy presents a rather melancholic portrayal of the situation of Angolan women of color they interviewed. The chapter explores identity and resettlement issues among Angolan women of color in Toronto. Adopting an ethnographic, anthropologic and sociologic approach, it chronicles the various methodological realities of interviewing eleven women in Portuguese and English. The variables that were explored include identity, resettlement, gender, race, religiosity, and other related aspects. Participants identified the process of immigration and settlement as the “voyage of their lives” and reported having to confront a variety of issues in the mainstream Canadian and Portuguese-Canadian communities of Toronto, Canada. Racism was particularly noteworthy for

these women, who were coping with many other challenges of resettlement. Generally, these women felt they experienced different treatment than other Portuguese-speaking women (namely Portuguese and Brazilian women), and coped with resettlement and identity issues in unique ways that challenged their Angolan and newly acquired Canadian identities. The reluctance of the eleven Angolan women interviewed by a white Portuguese to provide information of their experiences is well understood, given the fact that these women are now considered illegal immigrants since they have lost their refugee status. The argument of the Canadian authorities was that the legal basis of their refugee status is no longer tenable as Angola is now a peaceful country. As the authors note, "Many potential participants on learning about the focus of the study suspected the researcher to be employed by the Ministry of Immigration and therefore refused to participate, as they were illegal refugees in Canada." Such a hindrance to information-gathering for the study may have affected the size of the population studies as well as the results, but it also offers pertinent insights about African immigration issues in Canada.

## PART II: AFRICAN REFUGEES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This section discusses the state of African refugee problems and their global policy implications. The five chapters focus on the situations, attitudes, challenges, and adaptations of African immigrants, their families, women, children, and overall strategies of integration. Given the fact that of the world's total refugees, about fifty percent come from Africa,<sup>9</sup> it is important to examine the economic and political conditions that have brought about refugees in the first place. In a seminal study, "Nigeria in the Global Context of Refugees: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,"<sup>10</sup> Toyin Falola provided cogent reflections on the future of refugees that are as relevant now as they were a decade ago, in the African and global contexts:

Nigeria and the world can anticipate an increasing number of refugees in the future. (. . .) the conditions to produce refugees are present. Future trends can also be predicted along the following lines. Internal displacement will continue as people seek solutions to economic and environmental problems and respond to political instability and violence. External ones will take a variety of forms: the West will continue to attract more and more people, partly because there are opportunities to work, but largely because of the illusion in Nigeria that migrants make fast money and succeed within a short time. The false image in Nigeria about Nigerians in the United States, for instance, is that

they are wealthy. People will move to those countries where they think they can live a better life or make money that can be re-invested in Nigeria. (14)

Other factors advanced by Falola include the fact that African countries have not developed a functional manner to deal with their refugees internally. In the final prognosis, Falola predicts that, “As Western economies decline, refugees become the first casualty, with new ones prevented from entering. To those already within, successful integration is never easy. Those with skills and experience are unable to use them in appropriate ways (15). In view of Falola’s summation, we can only expect the worst from refugee crisis in Africa and their implications globally.

In the sixth chapter, “The Making of a Modern Diapora: The Resettlement Process of the Somali Bantu Refugees in the United States” Omar Eno and Mohamed Eno expose one of the challenges of fitting into a new diaspora after a displacement from a diaspora within the continent, as in the case the resettlement processes of the Somali Bantu in the United States. Eno and Eno’s thesis is at least double fold: Firstly, the authors succinctly expose the atrocities committed against the Somali Bantu by the Somali nomads and dominant rulers in a country projected to be egalitarian and homogenous. The authors argue convincingly to the contrary, suggesting that the consequences of domination, the subsequent rebellion, and what he calls “regional versus civil war” are inevitable and may only be reconcilable in the new diaspora if at all—especially given the background history of ethnic rivalry and resentment on both sides. Secondly, the authors theorize on the resettlement process of both groups in the United States as well as the efforts at reconciling the ambiguous relationship (given past history, injustices, and conflict . . .) between the two groups. In the final analysis, the authors hint at the possibility for reconciliation and perhaps for unspoken reparations or remedy.

As Eno and Eno posit, the Bantu were actively seeking protection through third-country resettlement from 1993. Roughly 20,000 Somali Bantu refugees are scattered all over Africa and Yemen, some 5,000 found refuge in Tanzania, their country of origin. In 1999, the United States government offered a resettlement opportunity to 14,000 Somali Bantu refugees from Kenyan camps for protection. The first batch of settlers began arriving in the United States in mid 2003, and their process continues today. Eno and Eno analyze the underpinning causes of the Bantu movement from Somalia to the refugee camps in Kenya, and the impact of being destitute in a foreign country. In addition, Eno and Eno further argue that the resettlement process of the Bantu people into the United States was not without its

difficulties in the process of assimilation, access to employment, housing, and education. The authors conclude that despite the challenges of adjustment and settlement, Somali Bantu refugees are better situated now than before.

While refugees enjoy special privileges such as automatic settlement and immediate benefits of permanent residency, most immigrants go through a gradual process of attaining that status. Yet, African immigrants have something in common: the fact that they are seeking some kind of “refuge” in the United States—whether it is economic or political. In this regard, in the seventh chapter, “Voluntary Trans-Atlantic Migration: Nigerians’ Attitudes to American Visa Lottery,” Elizabeth and Preston Augustus provide a well-researched chapter on the attitudes of Nigerians (case-study of Oyo state) towards the American Visa Lottery. In addition to a quantitative research approach (one hundred surveys), the authors historicize human migration while elaborating and analyzing the varying factors affecting voluntary trans-Atlantic migration, as well the implications for the host and the originating country. The authors argue that migration is not a novel concept but an ancient one. Tracing different instances of migration across the globe, they insist that current migration is only a continuum of an age-old process. The study further traces the origin of the America Visa Lottery and states the objectives of the host country. It also identifies the implications of migration on the host society and its effects on the country of origin. This chapter further identifies and explains different factors responsible for Nigerians’ clamoring for the American Visa Lottery, and concludes that the privilege should be used to benefit both the host and originating country, that is, the United States and Nigeria respectively.

As the American Visa Lottery offers hope to many African immigrants, some of these highly trained professionals experience a sense of stagnancy and nostalgia, and have to decide whether to remain or to leave. Perhaps this captures the push-pull dynamics of wanting to stay and having to go in some instances. Oladapo Augustus, in the eighth chapter, “Managing the Migration of Health-Care Workers: Toward the Transfer of Knowledge, Skill and Professionalism,” discusses this dilemma quite extensively. This chapter informs as well as provides first-hand insights from the viewpoint of a passionate practitioner and experienced immigrant who has now returned to Africa. As a case-study of an immigrant who actually returned, the author is able to look critically at the benefits of returning after accomplishing one’s migration goals. Through objective and illuminating analysis, the author strikes a balance between the advantages of migration for the health worker as well as the constraints for the country of origin. Augustus analyzes the challenges faced by both the source country and the destination



country especially in the specific cases of “highly skilled” health-care workforce including physicians, dentists, pharmacists and nurses. On the one hand, given the high demand in the West for such professionals in the Third World, including Africa, Augustus argues that the destination country consider such workforce as pertinent to the well being of their citizens.

On the other hand, the quest in many developing nations for strategies to fully enjoy the impact of the currently experienced rapid innovation and diffusion of health technologies from developed countries is equally attractive. Such a situation brings about a win-win solution. The continuing disparities in working conditions, management of health systems and professional development between richer and poorer nations offers a great deal of “pull” towards the more developed nations. This chapter further examines the factors challenging the migration of health-care workers with reference to both the giving and the receiving countries. Through the proper management of the migration of healthcare workers on both sides, Augustus argues that the exchange can be mutually beneficial to both the country of origin and the country of destination. To this end, the chapter identifies some strategies that can be adopted to ensure that migration contributes to the development of a well-managed health system in the immigrants’ countries of origin. The role of international organizations, in delivering adequate technical support to developing countries, in overseeing the management of international migration flows and in promoting intergovernmental cooperation to achieve the set goal, are highlighted. Conclusively, the chapter draws attention to the proposition that International migration of health professionals has a proven ability of facilitating the transfer of knowledge, skill and professionalism for the enhancement of the quality of health care delivery systems in the affected developing nations.

Of all the theoretical questions raised about migration and how it affects African immigrants, one of the areas that does not usually get adequate attention is that of the education of the children, as well as the role of the immigrants’ families in the success of these children. In chapter nine, “African Immigrants’ Families and the Educational System,” Cecilia S. Obeng studies the impact of the American educational system on the lives of African immigrant children and their families as a whole. In addition to providing excerpts of interviews conducted with these families, the study goes on to analyze specific themes and topics such as the roles of supervision, cultural alienation, cultural misunderstanding due to living in two “worlds apart,” and the exigency of survival and integration despite the challenges. Using qualitative and impressionistic methods, the chapter demonstrates that African immigrants face considerable challenges relating to adaptation into the school system and in the acquisition of the necessary

professional competence needed to gain access to high paying jobs. The chapter concludes that cultural differences and the fact of being considered “foreign” put the immigrants at risk and contribute to their suffering from assimilation issues.

In its encompassing structure and multivalent perspectives, *African Minorities in the New World* sets in motion the shifting theoretical and pragmatic verity that the new African diaspora and transatlantic migrations are paths laden with paradoxes that only time, negotiation, compromise, and changing senses of identity can ultimately resolve. Regardless of the euphemism used, exile, whether voluntary or involuntary, is an act of separation from one’s comforting or discomforting zone, with tangible and intangible consequences.

## NOTES

1. Although this term is only gaining currency recently, it has been in use for quite a while especially in the description of “new diasporas” as in the description of migration crises in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Central America. For a more detailed study, see the seminal work of Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998) and April Gordon, “The New Diaspora: African Immigration to the United States,” *Journal of Third World Studies* 15 (1998): 79–110. The notion of voluntary trans-Atlantic migration captures the same idea more cogently as opposed to the all-encompassing “New diaspora” term which inadvertently still invokes the reality of trans-Atlantic slavery.
2. See Myron Weiner, *The Global Migration Crisis: Challenge to States and to Human Rights* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995) where the dialectics of post-modern migrations are laid out, that is, the relationship between the diaspora of slavery and the diaspora of colonialism and the aftermath.
3. See for example, Franklin D. Scott, ed., *World Migration in Modern Times* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), Doris Meissner et al. eds., *International Migration: Challenges in a New Era* (New York: The Trilateral Commission, 1993), Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), Thomas Hammar et al. eds., *International Migration, Immobility and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, (New York: Berg, 1997), and Gilbert H. Muller, *New Strangers in Paradise* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), among others.
4. Indeed, in addition to the Conference on “Movements, Migrations, and Displacements in Africa” organized by Professor Toyin Falola (University of Texas-Austin, March, 2006), upon which this book is based, another Conference on the theme of “The New African Diaspora: Assessing the Pains and Gains of Exile” was convened by the Department of Africana Studies at Binghamton University (April, 2006), suggesting that it is only

- through such academic gatherings that the issue of new African immigrants can be addressed. For a detailed study of the few works on new African immigrants, see for example, Kofi K. Akpraku, *African Émigrés in the United States: A Missing Link in Africa's Social and Economic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1991), John A. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), Lawrence A. Okafor, *Recent African Immigrants to the USA: Their Concerns and How Everyone Can Succeed in the USA* (New York: Rose-dog Press, 2003), Geneviève Fabre and Klaus Benesch, *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination* (Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi, 2004) and David M. Reimers, *Other Immigrants: The Global Origins of the American People* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
5. Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield provide a seven-point migration theories across disciplines, namely from Anthropology, Demography, Economics, History, law, Political Science, and Sociology. See Brettell and Hollifield eds., *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
  6. See Steven Schulman, ed., *The Impact of Immigration on African Americans* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2005).
  7. With the exception of Japanese migration (post WW II) and European migration (post emancipation of slavery) to Brazil which are well documented and studied, migration to Latin America is not sufficiently researched. Studies in this area are now being revitalized. See for example, Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) and Samuel L. Bailey and Eduardo José Míguez eds., *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003).
  8. See Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners* 3.
  9. Studies on African refugees are numerous but only a few propose the possibilities of return to their locations of displacement. See for example, Gaim Kibreab, *African Refugees: Reflections on the African Refugee Problem* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1985), Tim Allen and Hubert Morsink eds., *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994) and Tim Allen, ed., *In Search of a Cool Ground: War, Flight & Homecoming in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996).
  10. See Toyin Falola, "Nigeria in the Global Context of Refugees: Historical and Comparative Perspectives," Paul Lovejoy and Pat Williams, eds., *Displacement and The Politics of Violence in Nigeria* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997), pp. 5–21.

Two essays are quite relevant here in terms of their in-depth discussion of the challenges of the African intellectual in exile and in Africa. See Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The African Academic Diaspora in the United States and

Africa: The Challenges of Productive Engagement,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.1 (2004): 261–275 and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa,” *Research in African Literatures* 36.3 (2005): 1–22. See also Toyin Falola, “Intellectuals and Africa in a Changing World Order” (Chapter 7), *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001), pp. 262–293.

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Part I

# Negotiating Citizenship and Cultural Identities





## Chapter Two

# Nationalist Myth-Making, Cultural Identity and Nation Building: African Minorities in the U.S. and Latin America

Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o

## INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which hit the American gulf coast in September 2005, the shock among most Americans, and the world generally, was not the devastation, the amount of human and property loss, or the economic cost of the destruction. The most shocking thing, as John Mwendwa rightly notes, was that Katrina brought America's shocking poverty bubbling to the surface.<sup>1</sup> This is because most people in Mississippi and New Orleans who stayed back were too poor to leave. Statistics from the 2000 census show that close to 40 per cent of New Orleans' population lived in poverty, with 27 percent having no access to a vehicle. A victim only identified as J.R. in an Associated Press story presented it more accurately: "Let me tell you about abandoned people. Those people who were abandoned in New Orleans, they were abandoned long before that hurricane hit. We all were," (Mwendwa, 2005). Another American noted that unlike in Africa, poverty was hidden. "You don't see our poor because we don't let them sleep on park benches or homeless shelters. We just squeeze in, and everyone is overcrowded and underfed," (Mwendwa, 2005). This reality constitutes a major contradiction of the nationalist construction of the U.S. as an egalitarian society wherein virtually all citizens belong to the middle class and are afforded the opportunity to realize and live "the American dream." It calls for a reexamination of the American nationalist myth in the nation-building process and the role of minority groups therein. This essay critically examines the process of nationalist myth making in the U.S. and Latin America from a comparative perspective with a view to analyzing the impact and implications of this dominant-group elite project on ethnic and racial minorities. The main thesis of the essay is that, in conceiving

of nations as egalitarian communities characterized by deep horizontal comradeship, nationalist myths camouflage the realities of glaring inequalities and ruthless exploitation in order to promote collective loyalty to the nationalist project. It is this reality that Hurricane Katrina brought home in regard to the U.S. As one individual argued, “[p]overty didn’t happen overnight, but now it’s as if someone lifted up a rock and wow, there they are, all those poor people!”<sup>2</sup>

## **NATIONS AS ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCTS: A CONCEPTUALIZATION**

According to Walker Connor, the essence of a nation is intangible. It is a psychological bond that joins a national group and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all other groups in a most vital way.<sup>3</sup> Connor argues that when analyzing socio-political situations, what ultimately matters is not what is, but what people believe. As such, a subconscious belief in the group’s separate origin and evolution is an important ingredient of national psychology. He argues that since the nation is a self-defined rather than an “other-defined” grouping, the broadly held conviction concerning the group’s singular origin needs not and seldom will accord with factual data. Benedict Anderson goes so far as to argue that nations are, in fact, imagined political communities, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.<sup>4</sup> To him, a nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion. To Anderson, the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them has finite albeit elastic boundaries beyond which lay other nations. No nation imagines itself to be coterminous with mankind. A nation is imagined as sovereign in the sense that each one of them imagines itself to be free from all the others. Finally, a nation is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

The contention that modern nations are artificially crafted and are largely populated by disparate peoples raises the question as to how nationalist identities are created and sustained. According to nationalist scholarship, national identities are as artificial as the nations to which they cement people’s loyalties and convictions. The basic argument is that national identities are cultural artifacts borne of deliberate social engineering on the part of the dominant classes including the political, economic, and intellectual elite. Arguably, however, one of the most important attributes that inform

loyalty to an assumed nation is a natural phenomenon, the medium of communication called language. Nonetheless, though language in itself is natural, its artificial aspects include standardization and its printed form. As Benedict Anderson points out, print-languages laid the basis for national consciousness in three ways. First, they created unified fields of exchange and communication, making people gradually aware of the hundreds of thousands of people in their particular language field and at the same time informing them that only those hundreds of thousands so belonged. In this way, Anderson posits, the embryo of the nationally imagined community was formed. Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, helping to build the image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of a nation. And third, print-capitalism created languages of power with certain dialects closer to each print-language dominating their final forms and their related cousins being assimilated, (Anderson, 2003). Language is thus central to national identity and there is no nation that does not have a standardized national language understood by all its constituent groups. It is the centrality of language in this regard that leads Hugh Trevor-Roper to argue that from the start, the nation was conceived in language, not in blood.<sup>5</sup>

The second method for the crafting of nationalist identities is the invention of national traditions. Eric Hobsbawm defines tradition as a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules that are of a ritual or symbolic nature. Invented traditions, according to Hobsbawm, fall into three overlapping categories. In the first category are those traditions establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or membership of groups, real or artificial communities. Second are those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status, or relations of authority. Third are those traditions whose main purpose is socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behavior perceived to be of imperative significance to the continuity of a nation. Traditions, according to Hobsbawm, seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies formalization and ritualization of continuity with the past.<sup>6</sup> For example, traditional folksongs supplemented by new songs in the same idiom whose content is patriotic serve to promote and sustain a people's patriotism and sense of national belonging. Such songs are passed on from generation to generation through the medium of education. Benedict Anderson further reinforces the importance of traditions in creating national identities. He says that there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests, above all in the form of poetry and songs. He provides the example of national anthems sung on national holidays, and posits that no matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely

such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody creating an image of unison, which, according to him, constitutes the echoed physical realization of the imagined community, (Anderson, 1983).

Third, and concomitant with the invention of traditions is the invention of symbols such as the national flag, national anthem, and national emblem. These three sets of national paraphernalia are the three symbols through which an independent country proclaims its identity and sovereignty, and as such they command spontaneous respect and loyalty among members of that sovereign country. In themselves, they reflect the entire background, thought, and culture of a nation. Hobsbawm argues that the times when people become conscious of citizenship remain mostly associated with symbols and semi-ritual practices such as elections, most of which are historically novel and largely invented. So far as possible, he says, these inventions use history as a legitimator of action and cement for group cohesion and national communion, (Hobsbawm, 1983). The idea of invented traditions is central to Hobsbawm's postulation. He argues that the history that normally becomes part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of a nation, state, or movement is not actually what has been preserved in popular memory. It usually is what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so, (Hobsbawm, 1983).

This argument dovetails with the fourth way in which national identities are created. This is the invention of a national ideology and its propagation through the mass media, educational system, and administrative regulations. Apart from the ideology of shared ancestry and shared religion, there usually is also a national ideology that reflects the specificity and centrality of a national people's fundamental beliefs. The idea of ideology denotes an inflexible image of political life that serves as a specific explanation and code of political conduct for most situations. It is national ideology for instance, that creates the national myth depicting the emergence and development of a nation and its place and mission in the community of other nations in ways that coincide with the self-image of its founders and leaders. By logically inter-linking the origins, development, and destiny of a nation, a national ideology serves as an effective axiomatic grip on the minds of national groups in ways that galvanize their loyalty and commitment to, as well as identity with, the national collectivity.

Deliberate public policy is the fifth way in which nationalist identities are created. Trevor-Roper provides a succinct example of this method with regard to the Highland tradition of Scotland. Herein, after the defeat of the rebellion of 1745, various acts of parliament were passed through which

the Highlanders were disarmed, their chiefs deprived of their hereditary jurisdictions and, most importantly, the wearing of the Highland costume was banned throughout Scotland. This eventuality led to the crumbling of the entire Highland way of life. This was done ostensibly for purposes of integrating the “barbaric” and “backward” Highlanders into the “civilized” Scottish national way of life. As Trevor-Roper points out, in terms of dress, the Celtic peasantry (Highlanders) now permanently took to the Saxon trousers, (Trevor-Roper, 1983).

Sixth, nationalist identities are also created simply by copying and adapting what already exists elsewhere. Anderson refers to this notion of copying national referents as pirating. He writes that out of the experience of the establishment of the American republic emerged the imagined realities of nation-state, republican institutions, common citizenship, popular sovereignty, national flags and anthems. By the second decade of the nineteenth century therefore, a “model” of the independent nation-state was available for pirating and precisely because it was by then a known model, it imposed certain “standards” from which too marked deviations were impermissible, (Anderson, 1983). Anderson illustrates his concept of pirated nation-states by referring to the anti-colonial nationalism of post-colonial African states. Arguably, however, the modular form of the nation-state did not travel very well in time and space, especially with regard to the former colonies in Africa and elsewhere, where political independence created “nation-states” the essence of whose integrity remains precarious. The arbitrariness of boundaries and the use of borrowed language as the medium of national communication, as Anderson argues, make these nations more into projects the realization of which is still in progress, (Anderson, 1983). Indeed, the ideology of nation-building so central to the national life of these countries is intended to deflect loyalty to the ethnic group towards enlarged empathy with the state as a way of creating nationhood out of the existing statehood. It reflects a basic acknowledgment of the tenuous nature of loyalty to and identity with the state in these newly emergent countries.

Nonetheless, central to the differentiation of national groups once they have been created in whatever form, is the notion of group boundaries. Thomas Eriksen discusses this issue and points out that the first fact of a national group, or ethnicity as he calls it, is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between “us and them.” If no such principle exists, he asserts, there can be no ethnicity, since ethnicity presupposes an institutionalized relationship between delineated categories whose members consider each other to be culturally distinctive.<sup>7</sup> It is to this reality that Michelle Lee refers to as the dialectical language of nationalism that commences fundamentally with the dichotomization of “us” and

“them,” “we” and “they,” continually positioning and privileging the location of one in terms of the abstract “other.”<sup>8</sup> For his part, Frederick Barth (1969) contends that when defined as an inscriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of an ethnic unit or national group is clear. It depends on the maintenance of a social boundary, which may at times have a territorial counterpart. The cultural features that signal such a boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members as well as the group’s organizational form may likewise be transformed. But the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders remains a permanent feature.<sup>9</sup> It is this fact of perpetuity of dichotomization, in Barth’s view, that allows us to specify a national group’s nature of continuity, and to investigate its changing cultural form and content. Barth writes that if a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion. According to him, ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories, but also the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once-and-for-all recruitment, but also by continual expression and validation. He posits that ethnic boundary canalizes social life as it entails complex organization of behavior and social relations, (Frederick Barth, 1969).

Barth elaborates further that the identification of a person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally “playing the same game,” and this means that there is between them a potential for diversification and expansion of their social relationships to cover eventually all sectors and domains of activity. On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic or national group, implies the recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest, (Frederick Barth, 1969). Entailed in ethnic boundary maintenance according to Barth, are also situations of social contact between persons of different cultures. In this regard, ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behavior and persisting cultural differences. Group differentiation is also attained by application of social sanctions against errant members in order to keep them in line with what is expected of them as national group members. There thus exist sanctions within national groups for producing adherence to group-specific values. It is argued that where social identities are organized and allocated by such principles, there will consequently be a tendency toward canalization and standardization of interaction, and the emergence of boundaries which

maintain and generate ethnic diversity even within multiethnic social systems, (Frederick Barth, 1969). For instance, the boundaries of an Indian caste system are defined by such effective criteria that individual failures in performance lead to out-casting rather than down-casting.

Eriksen identifies another effective mechanism by which national groups are differentiated. This involves use of stereotyping. He defines stereotyping as the creation and consistent application of standardized notions of the cultural distinctiveness of a given group, (Eriksen, 1993). The essential role of this process is that it makes it possible to divide the social world into kinds of people, and provides simple criteria for such a classification. It gives the individual the impression that she or he understands society. Stereotypes also justify privileges and differences in access to society's resources. They are crucial in defining the boundaries of one's group as they inform the individual of the virtues of his own group and the vices of other groups. It is important to note that self-applied stereotyping always emphasizes the superiority of one's group vis-à-vis the others. Group stereotyping, and the articulation of competition or conflict, according to Eriksen, confirm and strengthen group membership. Stereotyping is a manifestation of the subjective form of nationalism, (Eriksen, 1993). Whereas the objective form of nationalism merely stops at the practice, defense and promotion of national values and beliefs, this subjective form aims at denigrating other national groups as a way of boosting the loyalty of members to their own "superior" group.<sup>10</sup> It is largely attitudinal in form and perceptual in content but quite effective in galvanizing people's loyalties to their own groups by creating social boundaries between them and others.

## **NATIONAL MYTH-MAKING AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE U.S.**

The modern nations of Europe and North America were created towards the end of the eighteenth century through a process of spontaneous distillation of a complex "crossing" of discrete historical forces. Once created, Anderson (1983) posits, they became modular, that is, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge, and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations, (Anderson, 1983). Hence Eriksen's argument to the effect that every society is a more or less successful melting pot where diverse populations are merged, acculturated and eventually assimilated at different rates and in different ways, depending on their place in the economic and political hierarchy, (Eriksen's, 1993). However, unlike the Canadian, British, German, and French societies,



among others, which are rooted in history as a basis of legitimacy, American society is said to be defined by ideology. According to Seymour Martin Lipset (1990), in Europe and Canada, nationality is related to community but being an American is an ideological commitment rather than a matter of birth.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, the American society is objectified as one that is organized around an ideology, embracing a set of dogmas about the nature of a good society. The American creed is summed up in four words: anti-statism, individualism, populism, and egalitarianism. Lipset thus writes that Americanism is regarded as a highly attenuated, conceptualized, platonic, impersonal attraction toward a system of ideas. It is a solemn assent to a handful of final notions including democracy, liberty, and opportunity; to all of which the American is said to adhere rationalistically much as a socialist adheres to socialism, (Lipset, 1990).

Anti-statism is the first key value objectified as representing Americanism. It is argued herein, that the American Revolution weakened the social values of an organic community and strengthened individualistic and anti-statist ones. The country is thus said to be dominated by pure bourgeois, individualistic values. America, Lipset asserts, is essentially a middle-class, which has become a community and so its essential problems are the problems of a modern individualistic society, stark and clear. The U.S. is posited as having been born in the spirit of revolution against a government perceived to be tyrannical. Its anti-tyrannical bias was written into its constitution as the separation of powers to ensure that no executive would ever again become too powerful. The weakness of the state and emphasis on constitutionally mandated division of powers give lawyers a uniquely powerful role in America and make its people exceptionally litigious.

Meritocracy or egalitarianism is the second value that is said to define Americanism. American egalitarianism is defined in terms of equality of respect and equality of opportunity. Equality of respect is defined as emphasis on egalitarian social relations and absence of a demand that those lower in the social order give overt deference to their betters. Equality of opportunity on the other hand is defined as stress on meritocracy, on equal opportunity for all to rise economically and socially. Thirdly, Americanism is also said to be based on individualism. Lipset argues here that even the American radical is more sympathetic to anarchism, libertarianism, and syndicalism, than to state collectivism. Fourth and finally, populism as an American value is elaborated as the belief that the will of the people should dominate elites, that the public choice is superior to professionalism. This is said to be institutionally reflected in the early extension of the suffrage to all white males. Subsequently, it was reflected in the passage of the sixteenth amendment providing for the popular election of senators, in the direct election

of judges in state and local jurisdictions, in the emergence of the primary system of nominating candidates for public office, and in the diffusion of the use of referendum and public opinion surveys. Overall, Lipset (1990) argues that the U.S. is still more religious, more patriotic, more populist and anti-elitist, more committed to higher education for the majority and hence to meritocracy, and more socially egalitarian than Canada and other developed countries. It remains the least statist Western nation in terms of public effort, benefits and employment, (Lipset, 1990).

However, this objectification of the American society as one based on the ideology of equality of opportunity, democracy, populism and egalitarianism, and that the society is one large middle class can be said to be a grand exercise in nationalist myth-making given the realities on the ground as laid bare to the world by the ravages of Hurricane Katrina in the fall of 2005. In the first place, the emergence of the Workingmen's party in the nineteenth century debunks the myth that the entire American society is a middle class founded on egalitarianism. The party's New York wing, for instance, proposed to "nationalize children." It suggested that children of the rich and poor alike should be required by law, from age six on, to attend state-supported boarding schools, so that regardless of family background, all would have a common environment for twenty-four hours a day. The workingmen felt that this was the only way to guarantee equality of opportunity in the race for success. This, in itself, is a pointer to the inherently inegalitarian nature of American society. Although the Workingmen's Party's suggestions were never adopted, the fact that the party received 15 percent of the vote in New York indicates the seriousness of the problem of inequality of opportunity.

Furthermore, Lipset's objectification of the American society glosses over the role that ethnicity and race have played in American society and the tensions and conflicts that have been wrought therefrom. As Stephen Steinberg notes, ethnic pluralism in America has its first origins in conquest, in the case of native Americans who were systematically uprooted, decimated, and finally banished to reservation wastelands, and in the case of Mexicans in the Southwest who were conquered and annexed by an expansionist nation.<sup>12</sup> The second source of ethnic pluralism was slavery, embodied by the millions of Africans who were abducted from their homelands and forced into perpetual servitude on another continent. The third source was exploitation of foreign labor, in the form of tens of millions of immigrants who were initially imported to populate the American landmass, and later to provide cheap labor for industrial development. Steinberg observes that the history of race and ethnicity has been fraught with tension, rivalry, and conflict, (Steinberg, 1989). The peopling of the continent with colonials

began with the English. However, they did not come as immigrants entering an alien society that would be forced to acquire a new national identity. Instead, the English immigrants arrived as a colonial vanguard that would create a New England in the image of the one they had left behind. This meant that they were numerically predominant. They enjoyed a political and cultural hegemony over the life of the fledgling nation. Non-English colonials were regarded as aliens who were obliged to adapt to English rule in terms of both politics and culture. Hence the argument that the establishment of the English language as the *lingua franca* was a critical first step in the gradual assimilation of the various ethnic stocks of the colonial period.

The warfare against the American Indians, broken treaties, expropriation of their land, rebellion, and ultimate defeat was based on the stereotype of Indians as nomadic hunters and “uncivilized savages.” As one early seventeenth century document put it: “savages have no particular propertie in any part or parcell of that country, but only a general residence there, as wild beasts have in the forests (sic),” (Steinberg, 14–15). Their land was thus taken and they were herded to reservations, which were equivalents of concentration camps according to some scholars. From this perspective stems the argument that, if the Indian was the nation’s first minority, his treatment did not bode well for the many minorities to come. Even as of now, Steinberg notes, “we are still killing the Indians. Not with bullets but with more shameful and crippling weapons of destruction—poverty, hunger, disease, and neglect,” (Steinberg, 14–15). It is in regard to this trend that Lipset’s portrayal of an egalitarian society does not hold. Similar to the White view of the Indians, Mexicans were also seen as a degenerate and backward people who wasted land and resources. On the eve of the Mexican-American war in 1848, Sam Houston reasoned that since Americans had always cheated Indians, and since Mexicans were no better than Indians, “I see no reason why we should not go on the same course now and take their land,” (Steinberg, 14–15). Mexicans were further seen as Aboriginal Indians who did not possess the elements of an independent national existence. The Aborigines of the continent, it was reasoned, had not attempted and could not attempt to exist independently alongside Whites. White nationalists saw this as the ordination of providence and that it was folly not to recognize the fact. As Aboriginal Indians, it was inevitable that Mexicans share the destiny of their race.

In addition to the conquest of American Indians and Mexicans is the question of slavery. Long before chattel slavery was introduced, southern planters had experimented with a system of white servitude by importing indentured servants from Europe. These were, however, both scarce and expensive. Furthermore, as contract laborers, they could bargain for

acceptable terms, and once their contracts expired, they entered the ranks of free labor. In the end, a system of chattel slavery, which reduced Africans to perpetual servitude, was more expedient and more profitable. For whereas the indentured servant expected land at the end of his contract, the African slave, in a strange environment, conspicuous by his color, and ignorant of the White man's language and ways, could be kept permanently divorced from the land. As Steinberg posits, racial differences made it easier to justify and rationalize African slavery, to exact the mechanical obedience of a plough-ox or a cart-horse, to demand that resignation and that complete moral and intellectual subjugation which alone make slave labor possible. Hence the forced importation and enslavement of over half a million Africans.

The very existence of slavery as an economic institution was an abomination of American ideals. Yet its economic necessity led to its rationalization, first on the basis of religion, later on the foundations of a pseudoscience. The economic necessity of slavery lay in the importance of cotton production. Cotton was the sine qua non of early industrial development both in the United States and Britain. Karl Marx summed up the relationship between slavery, cotton, and industrial development in a single epigrammatic sentence, thus: "Without slavery there is no cotton; without cotton there is no modern industry," (Steinberg, 29). The enslavement of the African, like the earlier conquest of the Indian, required a rationalizing ideology. In this regard, Africans were enslaved not because they were seen as inferior, but they were defined as inferior so that they could be enslaved. Thereafter, racist allegations functioned as an ideological smoke screen designed to give moral legitimacy to a brutal and inhumane system of labor exploitation. The importance of slavery to the economic development of the U.S. is exemplified in the long period that it was practiced. As Steinberg points out, if the benefits of slavery had been limited to a small class of slave-holders, or even to the regional economy of the south, it is hardly conceivable that the peculiar institution would have persisted for so long. The benefits ramified to the nation as a whole, which helps to explain why Africans were kept in quasi-servitude even after slavery itself was abolished. In these various forms of racial domination and exploitation, the United States, under the guise of a racist mythology, had established a precedent not only for tolerating extremes of inequality, but for imparting them with political and moral legitimacy as well.

Similar to European overseas colonialism, therefore, America has used African, Asian, Mexican, and, to a lesser extent, Indian workers for the cheapest labor, concentrating so-called people of color in the most unskilled jobs, the least advanced sectors of the economy, and the most industrially

backward regions of the nation. "People of color" provided much of the hard labor and technical skills that built up the agricultural base and the mineral-transport-communication infrastructure necessary for industrialization and modernization, whereas the European worked primarily within the industrialized, modern sectors. The initial position of the European ethnics, while low, was strategic for movement up the economic and social ladder. The placement of non-white groups, however, imposed barrier after barrier on such mobility, freezing them for long periods of time in the least favorable segments of the economy. Overall, immigrants were disparaged for their cultural peculiarities, and the implied message, as Steinberg puts it, was, "You will become like us whether you want to or not." When it came to racial minorities, however, the unspoken dictum was, "No matter how like us you are, you will remain apart," (Steinberg, 29). Thus at the same time that the nation pursued a policy aimed at the rapid assimilation of recent arrivals from Europe, it segregated racial minorities who, by virtue of their much longer history in American society, had already come to share much of the dominant culture.

It is for the above reasons that Eric Kaufmann (2000) argues against the conventional view held in the annals of ethnicity and nationalism studies by the likes of Lipset and Tocqueville that the U.S. is exceptional in the sense that it never had an ethnic component to its national identity. He posits that in fact, an American *ethnie* (ethnicity) based on an Anglo-Saxon myth of descent whose boundaries were symbolically guarded by several key cultural markers, had crystallized by 1820.<sup>13</sup> The Anglo-Americans sought to incorporate new immigrants into their ethnic group, and when the inflow appeared to pose a challenge to the congruence of the American *ethnie* and its nation, a defensive response occurred. According to Kaufmann, American ethnicity emerged out of ethnic fission from an English Protestant parent stock, and, like most *ethnies*, followed the Barthian model and employed methods of dominant-conformity to accrete diverse immigrant populations to its ethnic core while maintaining its ethnic boundaries. What complicates this otherwise simple picture, according to Kaufmann, is the reflexivity of American society, represented by its high standard of record keeping, and the nature of American liberalism, which occasionally presented itself in the form of cosmopolitan rhetoric. He argues that this does not mean that Americans presented themselves as liberal cosmopolitans. On the contrary, for Americans, liberalism was a symbolic border guard that actually reinforced their sense of particularity, (Kaufmann, 2000). In this sense, the American *ethnie*'s liberalism was a universalist idea that distinguished it from the illiberal *ethnies* to its southern and northern borders and in Europe. Arguably therefore, American liberalism, at least at

this point in time, was a mere claim by American whites to distinguish their emerging nation-state from England, Canada, and the Mexicans, but had nothing to do with its practice vis-à-vis the numerous ethnicities present in the United States.

Indeed, the segregation of races and ethnic groups in the U.S. has spawned conditions under which whites can pick and choose their ethnic groups while non-whites are denied such opportunity. As Mary Waters argues, the degree of intermarriage and geographic and social mobility among whites of European extraction in the U.S. means that they enjoy a great deal of choice and numerous options when it comes to ethnic identification. This population can increasingly choose how much and which parts of their ethnic identity to make a part of their lives. On the other hand, until mid-twentieth century and even much later, many state governments had specific laws defining one as black if one quarter or more of one's ancestry was black, or if one out of four of one's grandparents was!<sup>14</sup> This is an exemplification of the fact that some groups are socially constrained to accept an ethnic identity, even as others pick and choose. Omi and Winant's example of Louisiana's Susie Guillory Phipps' loss of a 1982–83 petition to be re-designated white further elaborates this issue. Susie was defined as black on the basis of a state law declaring anyone with at least 1/32nd "Negro blood" to be black. This was upheld by the court even in the face of unequivocal evidence that most Louisiana whites have at least 1/20th Negro ancestry.<sup>15</sup>

Given the realities of the Susie case, one is wont to concur with Omi and Winant that efforts must be made to understand race as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. As Anthony Marx contends, race is not found, but "made" and used. Being so, Marx argues that we must therefore shift from describing race "as a tool of analysis" to considering it "as the object of analysis."<sup>16</sup> For their part, Omi and Winant argue that race is a concept, which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification, they contend, is always and necessarily a social and historical process. They submit that in contrast to the other major distinction of this type, that of gender, there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups along lines of race, (Omi and Winant, 1994). Indeed, the categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise and at worst completely arbitrary as the Susie case mentioned above illustrates.

Despite its uncertainties and contradictions, the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in cultural identity in the U.S. Its chief function lies in structuring and representing the social world. Omi and Winant define racial formation as the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. It is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. The two scholars link racial formation to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled, (Omi and Winant, 1994). From a racial formation perspective therefore, race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation. It is in this regard that they argue that racial formation processes occur through a linkage between structure and representation. Racial projects do the ideological work of making these links. A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. For instance, “New Right” projects in the U.S. claim to hold “color-blind” views, but covertly manipulate racial fears in order to achieve political gains. On the left, “Radical Democratic” projects invoke notions of racial difference in combination with egalitarian politics and policy, (Omi and Winant, 1994). Overall, the expectation is that differences in skin color or other racially coded characteristics explain social differences. Temperament, sexuality, intelligence, athletic ability, and aesthetic preferences, among others are presumed to be fixed and discernible from the palpable mark of race. Such diverse questions as people’s confidence and trust in others, their sexual preferences and romantic images, their tastes in music, films, dance, or sports, and people’s very ways of talking, walking, eating, and dreaming become racially coded simply because they happen to live in a society where racial awareness is so pervasive.

In many respects, therefore, racial dictatorship is the norm against which all U.S. politics must be measured. First, the centuries of racial dictatorship defined American identity as white, as the negation of racialized “otherness”—at first largely African and indigenous, later Latin American and Asian as well. This negation took shape in both law and custom, in public institutions and in forms of cultural representation. It became the archetype of hegemonic rule in the U.S. and successor to the conquest as the master racial project. Second, racial dictatorship organized the “color line” rendering it the fundamental division in U.S. society. The dictatorship elaborated, articulated, and drove racial divisions not only through institutions, but also through psyches. Thirdly, racial dictatorship consolidated the oppositional racial consciousness and organization, (Omi and Winant, 1994). Just as the conquest created the “native” where once there had been

Pequot, Iroquois, or Tutelo, in the same vein, it created the “black” where once there had been Asante or Ovimbundu, Tachoni or Bakongo.

Against the foregoing, Omi and Winant argue that prejudice was an almost unavoidable outcome of patterns of socialization which were “bred in the bone” affecting not only whites but even minorities themselves, (Omi and Winant, 1994). Discrimination, far from manifesting itself only through individual actions or conscious policies, was a structural feature of American society, the result of centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities. It was this combination of relationships—prejudice, discrimination, and institutional inequality—which defined the concept of racism at the end of the 1960s, and that largely explains the consignment of the black minority to the fringes of the U.S. political economy. It took minority ethnic groups, especially Afro-Americans’ possession of the oppressor’s tools—religion and philosophy—and their deployment against the oppressor to emancipate themselves. This conflictual and bloody process in the U.S. culminated in the attainment of hegemony, what Omi and Winant refer to as movement from dictatorship to democracy, from domination to hegemony, (Omi and Winant, 1994). Nevertheless, the realities of economic marginalization for the majority of the minority populations remain in place, albeit submerged under the nationalist rhetoric of American “cosmopolitanism,” “egalitarianism,” and “equality of opportunity” in the pursuit of the “American dream.”

### **“DISAPPEARING BLACKS”: THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICA**

Blacks in Latin America comprise an estimated African minority of 90 million and an additional 60 million of mixed African ancestry. They constitute one third of Latin America’s population of 450 million. Significant African groupings are found in Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Honduras, Nicaragua, Argentina, and Mexico. Black populations range in size from one percent in Mexico to as high as 30 percent in Colombia and 46 percent in Brazil.<sup>17</sup> Afro-Descendants have extremely limited political power and lack cohesive organizations to represent their interests. Their situation also receives far less international attention and academic research. In Brazil, illiteracy rates are 2.5 times higher among Afro-Descendants than among other racial groups and the White population is 2.5 times wealthier than the black population. In Colombia, 80 percent of Afro-Descendants live in extreme poverty, (Cevallos, 2005). Elbio Trentini observes that cities in Brazil resemble the South Africa of apartheid fame: White elite areas protected by buffer poor zones of brown working class from huge black and



“colored” shantytowns, the “cities of the negroes” as they are called in Brazil. Trentini argues that Latin American countries are some of the most racist and racially divided societies in the world. They are organized in a divided totality reminiscent of South Africa’s apartheid era.<sup>18</sup> “Racism festers throughout Latin America, where discussion of racial issues is taboo . . . all the more virulent because governments refuse to deal with it,” (Trentini, 2). The apartheid system is insidious and pervasive all throughout the continent, with segregated neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, public services and amenities, and more so in the private realm. “It is more intractable because, unlike the Afrikaner-designed model, it is not framed by a legal code but imposed as a de facto reality . . . Latin America’s permanent norm of illegitimacy,” (Trentini, 2).

The most significant thing about African minorities in some Latin American countries is their “disappearing acts.” For instance, according to Hisham Aidi, Argentina is considered Latin America’s whitest nation yet African slaves and their mulatto descendants once outnumbered whites five to one and were, for 250 years, an important element in the total population, which is now 97 percent white.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in Mexico, at least 200,000 slaves were imported into the country by the end of the 18th century. Indeed, Mexican music has deep roots in West Africa. For example, “La Bamba,” the famous Mexican folk song has been traced to the Bamba district of Angola. By 1810, Afro-descendants in Mexico numbered roughly 500,000, slightly over 10 percent of the population, yet by 1895 they had more or less vanished from Mexico. As of now, no more than one percent of the Mexican population is said to be identifiably African.<sup>20</sup> Trentini (2005) notes further that walking the streets of major Latin American cities you cannot escape the billboards, the ads, newspapers and magazines portraying a surreal continent that is strangely white, middle class, North American, and European, (Trentini, 2005). This raises the question as to whether the Afro-Argentine and Afro-Mexican communities were annihilated by disease, war, or absorbed into the larger white population. An explanation to this conjuncture lies in the dynamics of the conquest of Latin America and the subsequent nationalist crafting of contemporary Latin American states and the nationalist myth that has attended this course of nation-building.

Trentini writes that following the conquest by Spain and Portugal, Indians, not considered full human beings by the conquistadores, were brutally exploited and massacred in an unprecedented genocidal frenzy. Native American populations fell by almost 95 percent within years following European arrival, (Trentini, 2005). To continue the economic exploitation of the continent, millions of African slaves were imported. Even after the official abolition of slavery in 1813, many blacks remained slaves and were

granted manumission only by fighting in Latin America's wars of independence against Spain and Portugal, as well as serving disproportionately in border wars, for instance between Argentina and Paraguay. To get their freedom, Africans were required to join the army. Once in the army, they were deliberately placed on the frontline and used as cannon fodder. As many of them as possible were placed in dangerous military service and were sent into battle where they got killed in the process of fighting Indians—another race that was earmarked for extermination. Accordingly, as Gino Germani rightly notes, there was a deliberate policy on the part of Latin American countries, especially Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela, to modify the composition of the population, to Europeanize the population, to produce a regeneration of races.<sup>21</sup> Marvin Lewis concurs that there was an official, concerted effort to eliminate blacks from Argentine society. This was achieved not only by extermination as discussed above, but also via a deliberate policy of racial miscegenation under the rubric of the “Spanish Experiment.”<sup>22</sup>

After “discovery” and conquest, Latin America was conceived from racist apartheid and theories of racist supremacy—the inquisition—established the concept of “purity of blood” and racial exploitation when for the first time, religion and racism fused into one. Accordingly, as Pianke Nubiyang notes, the application of racial integration and miscegenation with the objective of blending out the Black is part of the system of Latin American/Spanish genocidal racism called “the Spanish experiment,” (Nubiyang, 2002). It was applied to destroy the cultural and racial identity of Blacks, Arabs, and Jews in Spain after the takeover by the Spanish Crown. This system is now applied in Latin America where the nationalist mythology of “racial harmony” and “integration” is promoted. According to Carlos Moore (2003), there existed in Latin America “a racial philosophy of eugenics” that encourages “unilateral . . . sexual commingling between white [or light skinned] males and the females of the physically conquered and socially inferior race . . . the sexual enslavement of black women by the conquering white males.” Whereas the mixed race children from white fathers and dark [African/Indian] mothers were totally accepted in society, the possibility of a black or American Indian man having sex with a white woman would have been destabilizing to the state because “. . . the black or American Indian penetrating the [white] female would have been viewed as flipping the established racial hierarchy on its head.”<sup>23</sup>

It is from this racial philosophy of eugenics that is derived the official ideology in Mexico, for instance, that Mexicans are simply a *Mestizo*<sup>24</sup> people—a mixture of Spaniards and Indians—officially referred to as “La Raza” (The Race). On October 12 1946, Mexican leader José Vasconcelos

famously declared *Mestizo* to be the cosmic race. Since then, October 12 is celebrated in Mexico as “The day of the Race.” Issues of race in Mexico have been so colored by Mexico’s preoccupation with “the Indian question” that the Afro-Mexican experience tends to blend almost invisibly into the background, even to Afro-Mexicans themselves, according to Steve Sailer (2002). Mexico’s official nationalist narratives leave Afro-Mexicans out of the national consciousness. This is a consequence of Mexico’s nationalist myth that centers on the belief that contemporary Mexico is a sort of “perfect blend” of Spanish and Indian heritages; and that this synthesis is at the heart of what it means to be Mexican. The ironic twist to this racial amnesia is that in the first century of Mexico’s independence, quite a few of its political leaders were visibly part black. For instance, Emilio Zapata, arguably the noblest figure of 20th century Mexican politics, a peasant revolutionary still revered as a martyred man of the people, had clear African features including hair. His village was home to many descendants of freed African slaves. Secondly, Vicente Guerrero, a leading general in the Mexican war of independence, and the new nation’s second president (1829–1830), appears from his portraits and his nickname—El Negro Guerrero—to have been part black, (Sailer, 2002).

Mexico’s racial amnesia is replicated in Venezuela where official nationalist ideology engages in a resolute denial of any color at all. In what David Guss calls the myth of *mestizaje*<sup>25</sup>, Venezuelan historians, philosophers, writers, and anthropologists have consistently claimed that in Venezuela the issue of race does not exist. That all ethnic groups have blended together in a harmonious and indistinguishable new entity called the *Mestizo*.<sup>26</sup> Nationalist anthropologists posit that racial differences were absorbed in the “cruel” process of Venezuela’s national formation, and that today there is no “black problem” as there is in the United States, with its unforgivable discrimination. What exists in Venezuela, according to this line of reasoning, is a class problem, just as there is everywhere, (Guss, 2000). Guss argues, however, that if blacks were able to emerge from both racial and economic oppression in Venezuela, they were able to do so not through acceptance but through miscegenation. The myth of racial democracy’s basic premise was that blacks achieved great things in Venezuela only as they whitened themselves and their offspring. Racial democracy then, was not the absence of prejudice, but was simply the license to transform one’s ethnic identity.

The *mestizaje* myth, the privileging of the Spanish and Indian heritages in Venezuela, Mexico, and Argentina among other Latin American countries has forced Afro-Latinos to reinvent their own identities in order to find a footing in these nations. Consequently, cultural identity on the

part of African minorities has taken the form of selective uses of the past. As David Guss (2000) argues, the acknowledgment of history, or its denial, is not about the accuracy of memory, it is about the relationship to power. Accordingly, Afro-Venezuelans of Curiepe, near Caracas have appropriated the San Juan (Saint John) festival and Africanized the Saint. This appropriation has a historic relation to the experience of slavery and liberation. The performance of the festival, according to Guss, is a sacred recreation of a past, not of docile submission, but rather, of proud, resolute resistance: it is a magical return to a moment of origin. In the process, the locus of power is transferred from that of a Catholic Saint's day to one of historical remembrance. Guss notes that San Juan, though celebrated as black, was not black. The blackness represented was one of poverty and oppression. Hence, the argument that, like all dominant symbols, the color of San Juan is loaded with contradiction and ambiguity.

The reinvention of Afro-Latino identity is taken to an even a higher level in Mexico. Laura Lewis notes that in Mexico, just like in Venezuela, Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America, national ideologies, anthropologies, and histories have traditionally worked to exclude or ignore blackness. Instead, the Spanish and Indian Mestizo has been constituted as the quintessential Mexican, even as the Mexican past is tied to a romanticized and ideologically powerful Indian foundation.<sup>27</sup> Focusing her analysis on a community in Mexico's San Nicolás village described by outsiders as black, Lewis finds ethnographic evidence that San Nicolás' "black" residents in fact see themselves as *Morenos*,<sup>28</sup> a term that signifies their common descent with Indians, whom they consider to be central to Mexicanness. Lewis shows that as *Morenos* interweave their cultural identities, experiences, and descent with Indians, they also anchor themselves through Indians to the nation. They thus adopt a strategy that forces them to become Indians in order to nationalize themselves as this is the only possible route to gaining identity as Mexicans and status as citizens. This began after independence when the terms mulatto and black disappeared from the official record as post-independence legal and administrative codes largely ceased identifying people by ancestry. Whatever the genealogical facts, Lewis argues that claims to common descent with Indians clearly have cultural and ideological importance. Just like possession of the oppressor's tools of religion and philosophy and their deployment for emancipatory purposes led to the hegemonic incorporation of blacks into the American nation-state, Moreno claims to being black Indians lead to kinship discourses replicated on another level in the stories about San Nicolás (Saint Nicholas), the patron saint of the village, through whom Blacks and Indians are also linked and the former find their national footing, (Lewis, 2000).

Overall, if the official position in Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela is to be believed *prima facie*, people of African descent “disappeared” by mingling into the wave of thousands of European immigrants. Aidi cites Argentine historian Mariano Bosch who wrote in 1941 that Italian men had “perhaps an atavistic preference for black women: body odor led them to matrimony and the blacks accepted them as whites . . . or rather almost whites, because the Italian has much African in him, and his color is a dull pale.”<sup>29</sup> Blacks in Latin America who know better do not accept this genocidal utopia that is pushed by Latino whites in these nations. It simply amounts to a nationalist myth on the part of the dominant classes to white wash and gloss over the racist pyramid of white, brown, and black—European, *Mestizo*, Indian, and African—in Latin America. Consequently, Blacks, Indians, and people of color, over one third of the Latin American population, are almost invisible and do not exist in that world, except for the soccer player and sports figure, the odd musician and token political star. They are a servant class, marginal and invisible, that provides almost slave labor as a subsidy for the middle class and elites of European descent.

### THE U.S. LATIN AMERICA SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

A number of contrasts and similarities obtain in regard to race and nation building in the U.S. and Latin America. In the first place, as Anthony Marx (1996) notes, racial discrimination was pervasive in the early history of the U.S. and Latin America but post-abolition state policies encoded very different racial orders in the two regions. Both regions faced extended periods of relative indeterminacy and an unhappy repertoire of possible racial configurations in the aftermath of slavery at the time of emerging state consolidation. The U.S. went so far as to toy with the possibility of deporting Blacks, which proved impractical. The result in the U.S. was official racial ideology, imposed categories of segregation and conflict, and only recent dismantling of legal discrimination. In contrast, post-abolition Brazil, Venezuela, and to some extent, Mexico, avoided legal distinctions based on race and instead projected an image of “racial democracy.” Despite the commonality of early racism and continued inequality, Brazil and Venezuela for instance, did not enact anything equivalent to apartheid in South Africa or Jim Crow in the U.S. Some scholars posit that legacies of differences, of slavery, culture, colonialism, miscegenation, and economic development account for the difference between the U.S. and Latin America with regard to the issue of race and nation building. Arguably, however, these historical legacies did not preordain a more tolerant racial order in much

of Latin America as is commonly held. As Marx (1996) asserts, Brazilians, and Venezuelans for that matter, retrospectively interpreted their past to reinforce an image of racial tolerance, but in fact racism was evident early on in Brazil as it was in the U.S. and the inequality in Brazil continued. By contrast, in the U.S., past discrimination was embraced and used to justify segregation and exclusion.

Second, whereas a civil war threatened the process of nation-building in the U.S., in Latin America in general, and Brazil and Mexico in particular, there was no violent ethnic or regional conflict that impeded nation-state consolidation. Unity did not require a racial crutch of formal discrimination. Rather, "racial democracy" emerged there as an ideological project of a state anxious to unify popular support without formal exclusion. As a result, explicit categories of racial domination were not officially constructed and images of past tolerance were encouraged. Indeed, as David Guss (2000) shows in the case of Venezuela, reference to Mulatto and Black as categories of ancestry was stopped after independence. In the U.S. on the other hand, racial domination unifying whites proved double edged, having the unintended consequence of inciting black protest. Efforts to resolve one conflict exacerbated another. Jim Crow was thus ended as black protest replaced intra-white conflict as the most pressing threat to the nation-state. In Brazil and Venezuela, with no clear target of state ideology and segregation to organize against, no apartheid or Jim Crow, little Afro-Brazilian protest emerged, and racial conflict was largely avoided despite considerable socio-economic inequality.

The third point of comparison and contrast is the role of the Church in the nation-building process in the two regions. The absence of ethnic and racial conflict in the nation-building process in Latin America is attributed to the Catholic doctrine of the equality of all men before God. This doctrine, it is argued, produced better treatment of slaves in the region and generally greater racial tolerance than did the more exclusive British Protestantism in the U.S. It is held further that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church also militated against an exclusively biracial divide. Marx (1996) concurs with the argument that the peaceful nature of the nation-building process in Latin America was a consequence of the fact that the Portuguese colonialists did establish a somewhat less strict divide between slaves and free men than was enforced in the U.S. He is, however, skeptical about this argument given the rapacious nature of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism and the support of the Church; as well as the fact that the Church also enacted its own internal policies of racial discrimination in Brazil. Indeed, the fact of greater racial tolerance in Latin America in no way suggests a more benign form of slavery. Both the Portuguese and Spaniards in this

region established a particularly deadly form of bondage; hence the image of a Brazilian “benign master” is a nationalist myth. Marx points to the fact that Brazil remained longer and more fully dependent on continued importation of new slaves because the harsh conditions under which slaves lived did not allow for reproduction of their numbers. To Marx, therefore, though slavery took different forms in Brazil and the U.S., in both cases it fostered attitudes of a primordial black inferiority and established patterns of domination and inequality.

Marx thus argues that Brazil’s early racism was distinctive but still comparable to that of the U.S. While the latter justified its explicit racial domination on the basis of early beliefs and patterns of slavery and discrimination, after abolition, Brazil abandoned the official discourse of racism, and embraced historical interpretations consistent with “racial democracy.” The historical legacy of inequality in much of Latin America was thus largely camouflaged and acquiescence among African minorities in Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela thereby encouraged. In this event, earlier racism was not wiped away as images of inferiority were beneficial to whites. But unlike in the U.S., the past was re-conceptualized into a benign image, one that did not reflect historical fact. Instead, varying interpretations and outcomes were shaped by subsequent processes building upon the past, in what Marx calls a conjunctural process, (Marx, 1996). In essence, this was a retrospective interpretation of historical realities.

Miscegenation is the fourth point of difference in the nation building project of the U.S. and Latin America. Because of the high level of mixing between races, Brazil for example, could not develop a biracial ideology or formalize rigid racial classification and domination, as did the U.S. In any case, it is argued, Portuguese colonists came to Brazil more for trade than to settle, compared to the British who came to the U.S. Furthermore, Portuguese colonists included few women. As a result, there were significantly high levels of miscegenation engaged in by Portuguese men. By 1872 for instance, the Brazilian census registered 42 percent of the population as Mulatto. Whereas miscegenation was celebrated and Mulattoes assimilated into Brazilian society, in the U.S., social mobility for non-whites was officially blocked provoking non-white unity and resistance. Authorities in the U.S. resolved physical ambiguities by drawing strict racial boundaries, limiting mobility, and stirring up antagonism in the process. Marx points out that Brazil’s higher level of miscegenation made it more difficult to impose strict categories of domination over Mulattoes and without such domination conflict was avoided. Marx gives an economic explanation of racial discrimination in the U.S., according to which the principal function of segregationist ideology was to soften class and ethnic antagonism among

whites, subordinating internal conflicts to the unifying conception of race. Capital benefited from this segregation, employing cheap black labor to increase profits and to break strikes by white workers. In this way, racial domination encouraged cross-class white unity, rather than exclusive loyalty to one's class interests. Intra-white conflict was thus diminished, and growth proceeded. It is in this sense that it is pointed out, with regard to the U.S., that the Negro paid a heavy price so that whites could be reunited in a common nationality.

Fifth, and a corollary to the fourth point, the long history of extensive miscegenation among Iberians (Portuguese and Spaniards), Indians, and Africans in Latin America has resulted in a far more elastic definition of "White" in this region than is the case in the U.S. For centuries, Whites in the U.S. defined anyone with visible black ancestry as Black and ineligible to marry a White. This remained the case until 1967 when the Supreme Court overturned the "anti-miscegenation" laws that were still in existence in 19 states, (Sailer, 2002). Consequently, extensive mixture between Caucasians and Africans in the U.S. is just beginning to blossom and has not been a significant factor in the life of whites in the U.S. In contrast to the sharp-edged racial categories in the U.S. that categorize one with "one drop" of African blood as Black, in much of Latin America, what exists is a color continuum rather than a color line. For instance, the Dominican dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina (Assassinated in 1961) was African on both sides of his family. However, because of the elastic definition of white, he was considered white in the Dominican Republic, though listed as Mulatto in many U.S. historical accounts. In this regard, the case of a U.S. judge ruling that a woman who was 63/64 European was black, would be unheard of in Latin America, especially in Brazil. Many Brazilians, Mexicans, and Venezuelans who call themselves white have African or near African grandparents. Indeed, when some of these individuals enter the U.S., they find out, to their horror, that they are regarded as Latinos, Hispanics, or vaguely Spanish, not white!

It should be noted, nevertheless, that in spite of the color continuum and the lack of sharp-edged racial categories in much of Latin America, the rule for social prestige and mobility is "the whiter the better." For example, stars of Mexican television are almost completely European. Actresses on Mexican telenovelas tend to be blonder than the ones on American soap operas. Similarly, Mexico's elites are much whiter than its working class. Conversely, there remain in dire poverty in Mexico millions of purebred Indian peasants who speak the same Indian languages as their ancestors did before 1492. So much for Mexico's political orthodoxy of White-Indian racial blending, (Sailer, 2002).



Sixth, and finally, it may be observed that whereas racism exists in both the U.S. and Latin America, in the latter case, racism entails far greater hypocrisy than in the former. William Nelson (1996) argues that Brazilians, as well as Mexicans, Argentines, and Venezuelans for that matter, are far more dishonest about race than Americans.<sup>30</sup> The whites who are racial villains in Brazil, he argues, are the first cousins, grandparents, grandsons, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles of these blacks. The Anglo-American racist, though he has no love for blacks, has implemented a civil rights program which has resulted in a great deal of progress for black Americans. Although the Anglo racist's behavior is inexcusable, he at least is not discriminating against his cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and brothers. Objectionable as it is, the U.S. model of dealing with race, Moore rightly notes, enables groups to make demands on society to work for change, (Moore, 2003). In contrast, the Latin American denial of race as an issue creates a false sense of color blindness that makes it socially disreputable to raise demands for change in Latin America around issues of race.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the contested Black presence around the world represents a distinct phase in the historical process of globalization—in this case, globalization of labor in which Africa was forced to export, not primary products, but primary producers. In the final analysis, there seems to be greater acceptance of black belonging to Latin America than there is of black belonging to the U.S. As one resident of San Nicolás in Mexico observes, the people there refer to blacks as Mexicans. It is outsiders who talk of “Afro-Mexicans.” According to this resident, though whites in Mexico do not call themselves Spaniards but say they are Mexicans, some of them keep pointing out that blacks are not from Mexico. “Well,” he realistically avers, “they are not from here either,” (Laura A. Lewis, 2000, 914). This reality speaks not only to the whites of Latin America, but, even more so, to those of the U.S. From the foregoing analysis, it may be posited that the process of objectification and the corollary invention of hegemonic beliefs constitute a national story as told by the dominant classes in society. Although this story is invaluable in shaping and cementing the loyalties of members to the national collectivity, it is devoid of input from the majority of the dominated members of society. At best, stories from below are obfuscated, peripheralized, and rendered meaningless. At worst, they simply remain untold. This is an interesting exemplification of an African saying, to the effect that until lions have their own historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.

Nonetheless, Trentini (2005) observes that in the midst of the violence, poverty, and corruption in Latin America, there are signs of hope and small but significant victories. New democratically elected governments in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, together with the first non-white presidents of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, and Bolivia, Evo Morales, are being forced to try to organize together in a common front against poverty and social exclusion and, at least tangentially, racism. Most importantly, the persistent and ridiculous propaganda myth of color blind “racial democracies” so ingrained in Latin America and so advantageous to the local elite, is being denounced and challenged effectively by *indigenista* organizations in Bolivia, Central America, Ecuador, and Peru; and by Mexican Zapatistas and African rights coalitions in Colombia and Brazil. Brazil now has a number of black government ministers and high court magistrates, (Cevallos, 2005). Remarkably, Colombia has begun electing to congress politicians who emphasize their African heritage rather than deny it.

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## Chapter Three

# African Immigrants' Experiences in Urban America: Religion and the Construction of Social Identity in St. Louis

Attah Anthony Agbali

African Immigration is not a novel phenomenon. African ancestors had in the past thousands of years moved into different global spaces. Contemporary African immigration to the West is not novel and neither is it an isolated phenomenon. African immigration to Great Britain has been well documented,<sup>1</sup> as well as to France, and other colonial metropolis. The African presence in Arabia, the Indian Ocean, and the former Soviet spaces are well documented, precluding the African diaspora to Europe, Caribbean, and the Americas due to the transatlantic slave trades since the 1500s.

Certain accounts bespeak of the presence of Africans in pre-Colombian North America, specifically within the vicissitude of modern Mexico, speculated as imagined designation of African mariners from the area of Mali, West Africa.<sup>2</sup> Such views remain inconclusive as their veracity has yet to be adequately authenticated. Nonetheless, people of African descent were with Columbus on his voyages. An example is the Pinzons brothers (one is Martin Alonzo Pinzon), known more frequently as the “Negro Pinzons” of Afro-Spanish descent, and possibly middle class status, who were with Columbus’ on the voyage of August 3, 1492. Other blacks at different times were fervently involved in the affairs that shaped the early period of the Spanish intrusion into the New World, such as Estevan the Soldier, whose March 1539 frontier exploration from Culiacan, Mexico brought him and his cohorts into the area now New Mexico, where he was killed by the Hawikuh Indians, (Carew, 51–65).

The first recorded immigration of Africans into the United States occurred in August 1619, in Jamestown, Virginia, when a Dutch Man O’ War ship exchanged for food their cargo of twenty Africans for service as indentured servants, (Bennett, Jr., 29). Therefore, these blacks were not

slaves but immigrants to America in the real sense of the term, (Bennett, Jr., 34). Some of these Africans, after their indentured servitude, later accumulated property and owned both whites and black servants. These Africans integrated within their society enjoyed social respectability and great economic prosperity. During this period, these blacks, also known as *Blackamoors* were never enslaved and seemingly enjoyed the same social prestige and advantages whites once they ended the terms of their indenture services, (Bennett, Jr., 37–40).

The precursors of American Blacks, both enslaved and latter immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa came to the America as immigrants who enjoyed considerable freedom and the opportunities present here. Racial discrimination and subjugated chattel slavery developed later. Within the evolution of the slave trade many Africans were forcefully uprooted from their aboriginal African homelands and transplanted on the American shores, especially enslaved within the plantation estates of the southern United States, a situation that would continue until emancipation and arduous movements against slavery by the Abolitionists and black frantic resistances.

Urban America presents a fascinating but also complex phenomenon interweaving varying trajectories that modulate social and economic dynamics and processes. Therefore, engaging in urban anthropology and ethnographic research within the vast domain of the urban complex can be tasking and demanding.

## **NOMADS IN NEW FRONTIERS: AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS AND URBAN AMERICA**

The phenomenon of African immigration to the West, and specifically to urban America, represents an expanding frontier outside of Africa in elongating and disabling the lineal purview of the African spatial sphere and temporal consciousness. Within such imaginations, African immigrants represents nomads of fortunes who have left home in search of better existential, material, and even spiritual opportunities. Therefore, the realities of the African immigration experiences have shown the salience of African immigrations following the political and economic crises that besets many African nations, in recent years.

The politics of the belly,<sup>3</sup> failed democratization, national eruptions of wars and genocides, among other realities have led to the outflow of Africans from their aboriginal countries. Therefore, while most contemporary African immigrants quest for economic opportunities, a significant population of these immigrants are displaced due to the realities of war, ethnic

persecution, genocide, and other humanitarian crises that led to their being admitted as refugees and asylum seekers. The various political eruptions led to vast humanitarian refugee crises that affected and displaced citizens of Ethiopian, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somali, and Liberia. Many among these displaced persons eventually were resettled in significant numbers in American urban domains than had obtained in the past.

America has offered so many Africans haven to escape from direct political and religious persecutions. Many examples abound. Katherine Sawaki, a Tanzanian woman and a former diplomat, who worked at various times with the Tanzania High Commission and with the United Nation's Children and Educational Fund (UNICEF) now lives in Austin, Texas, after being incarcerated on April 7, 1983, by the Marxist government of the late President Julius Nyerere. Though influential, and was a friend of the late President Nyerere, she was arrested and clamped into detention for two years, eleven days, and five hours without trials, without anyone being aware of whether she was alive or dead. Her social status as a rich business, Christian and educated was responsible for her fate, as she was accused of being a spy for the American Central Intelligence Agency (C.I. A). Upon her miraculous release three days after an epiphany event, which she noted as Jesus' visit to her in prison, she surreptitiously escaped her country on the advise of family and friends en route Kenya, London, and eventually settling in Austin, where her daughter was then in college.<sup>4</sup>

Getu (pseudonym) a female Ethiopian refugee residing in the Detroit Freedom House, escaped to the United States in 1998, while seeking asylum in Canada. In her sad sordid tale of religious bigotry and violence, she narrated her ordeal of imprisonment and severe bestial torture at age 15, after her village Church was burnt down, and in spite of restriction regarding her faith practice, she was caught engaging in bible study, an event that led to the death of her religious instructor, who was shot by government troops while attempting to escape. While she still in jail, her family who were then also in hiding, painfully secured traveling papers to enable her escape.<sup>5</sup>

Others claim cultural practices, considered as noxious, such as forced genital sexual mutilation practices (GSM), as their reasons for seeking asylum. A Nigerian woman, Mrs. Oluroro in a 1994 Immigrations hearing claimed as her reasons for avoiding deportation as the forced gendered sexual mutilations that her two teenage daughters would be forced to undergo in Nigeria, should she be deported.<sup>6</sup> Her claims were upheld. However, her case drew consternation from among Nigerians resident in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

A Ghanaian woman, Regina Norman Danson, who advanced fears of genital mutilation as her pretext over her inability to return to her



native country, Ghana, was arrested in New York on charges that she lied under oath and entered the United States with a fraudulent passport in 1997. Though the then Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) had opposed her initial requests, the appeals court granted her request in 1999.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from these sad political circumstances, different levels of economic underdevelopment manifested in various degrees in different nations, often reflected within the wasted economic opportunities given the preponderance of bad governance is among the core and influential drivers enhancing emigration of skilled and talented professional, especially the flight of the Middle Class flight from the African continent, diffusing into different spatial polities and national spaces, with developed countries of the west as prime destinations.<sup>9</sup>

To buttress this sad tale depicting Africa as a continent of wasted opportunities was the western media pronounced case. In 1999, two friends, fourteen year olds Guinean stowaways, Yaguine Koita and Fode Tounkara died in the womb of a plane en route to Brussels, Belgium from Conakry, Guinea in their desperate attempt to reach Europe. A letter found in their pockets was addressed to the European and western leaders drawing attention to the abysmal plight of poverty on the African continent. In this mail, they imprinted upon the western conscience with a plea toward positive and urgent interventional resolution of the African problem of extensive poverty. Military dictatorship and political maladministration in many African countries conspires to drain opportunities in many nations creating a meaningless mirage regarding the future. As a result many African youths are fleeing the continent for the West often times through enduring travails and en route dangerous paths.

The consequences of the “politics of the belly.”<sup>10</sup> breeds mismanagement and bleeds economic resources. Stunted economic contexts equally affect the vital projects of spatial and social developments of many nations. Economic failures subsequently affects the existential search for social and personal relevance among the Middle Class thus inducing the pull-push dynamics, in which professionals from these poor nations are drawn to the more lucrative markets and economies, especially in the west.<sup>11</sup> Massive and uncontrolled emigration from such nations further affects their economies at two levels; one positive and the other negative. On the positive side, income remittances to families in immigrants’ homeland can help boost wealth accumulation and economic development. On the other hand, the effect of massive out-migration of the middle class can have dire consequences for economic development given the vacuum such migrations create. Such loss of manpower and economic role models can

exacerbate economic productions and social conditions in some countries, as a result.

The non-competitive milieu coupled with the deliberate destruction of the middle class by past despotic regimes jettisoned many members of this class. The ecology of despotic terrorism and hegemonic violence stagnate the economies of most African nations, hence, pro-actively vilifying merit, intelligent and professional productions, thus in the process underutilizing and undervaluing their skills and talents. The loss of relevance and lack of resourcefulness often create conditions of anxiety and frustrations that induces the ripe prospects of immigration. Economic dispossession of the elites, especially the middle class, often invokes feelings of resentment and antagonism that decreases national loyalty, validating the thoughts of personal survival. Under such siege, many educated Africans fled their aboriginal homelands to nations in the west, seeking better occupational opportunities for the optimal utilization of their attained skills and educational competence, toward constructing their existential dreams of fulfilling existence, unlike in their aboriginal homelands. The present condition of globalization enables such processes more easily.

The widening intersects between the local and global since the 1965 immigration reforms have helped in making the demand for the United States as a choice of destination of many immigrants radically increased. The dismantling of the quota system and the installation of new preferences that emphasizes family reunion and employment based immigration has helped to increase the diversity of America's immigrants. First, the 1965 immigration reform was less restrictive and more liberal in orientation. Signed into law, by President Lyndon B. Johnson, this immigration reform eliminated the quota system that previously allocated certain numbers of countries to citizens of different nations, especially within the western hemisphere, thus granting more access to immigrants pouring into the United States from other regions of the world, than hitherto experienced.

This post-1965 immigration reform granted diversified cohorts of non-European immigrants' greater incentives toward immigrating, mainly for family reunifications and employment purposes. As a result, together with subsequent later immigration changes, such as those relating to the Diversity Visa Lottery in 1990, it is now assumed that there are more African immigrants now flocking into the United States than during the periods of the transatlantic triangular trade (slavery).<sup>12</sup> Also, while the US liberalized its immigrations laws, the European immigration policies became more restrictive, through the tightening of existing laws, and introduction of more exclusionary policies, that aimed to streamline the flooding of unwarranted immigrants into most European nations. Thus, while, as

the result of the civil rights movement, the US was becoming more multi-cultural in terms of the diversity of that affected its cultural mosaic many European nations were afraid of the long-term implications of diversity and multiculturalism toward the shaping of discrete cultural and national identities, with foreseen dire consequences for their societal racial compositions. Thus, many European nations implicitly upheld certain racial tenets that privileges whiteness as the normative canon for citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

Within such veiled articulations of racial privileging that endorses whiteness, immigrants deriving from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are considered as polluting and diluting American cultural values and cherished norms. However, such views however, fails to connect the dots in establishing that the ancestors of such groups, like the Irish, Italians, Southern and Eastern Europeans, and to an extent certain groups of Germans, that now lay claim to whiteness, were despised by claimants to “whiteness”<sup>14</sup> when their ancestors first arrived in the United States, perceived as agents of cultural dilution and mutilation.

This 1965 immigration reforms gave birth to the notion of the “New immigration.” This designation was intended to contrasts the recent post-1965 immigrants from the earlier massive stream of immigrants that arrived on the shores of the US between the 1880 and 1924. Most African immigrants to the United States belong to this new stream. Specifically, the demographic increase in the number of African immigrants in the United States accreted exponentially between the late 1980s and current times. The year rate of African immigration and the totals of African immigrants in America remain insignificant, when weighted against other immigrant cohorts from Asia and Latin America. However, growth rate of African immigrants to America is phenomenal. Further, the 1996 Immigration Reforms also have helped toward the demographic increase in the number of African immigrants that have arrived in the United States in the last ten years. The annual diversity visa lottery has become, alongside family reunification, the greatest source of African immigration to the United States.

African immigrants residing in the United States according to the U.S. Census 2000, are estimated at 881, 300, representing about 3 per cent of the total foreign born population.<sup>15</sup> Yet some estimates the African foreign-born population to be around 2.5 million. Thus, one report stated that in the eight years between 1991 and 1999, the African immigrant demographic profile increased from 1.7 million to about 2.4 million, marking this population as the fastest growing segment of the United States’ immigrant population.<sup>16</sup> This discrepancy could be the result of the difference in the official census data that dichotomizes between immigrants and non-immigrants and the population assumption that does not discriminate

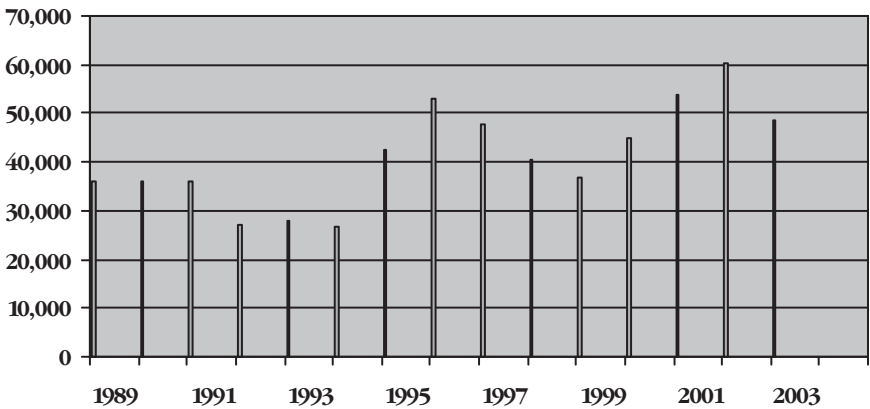


Chart 3-1. Numbers of African Immigrants Yearly Entry to the United States 1989–2003 (Source: INS [USCIS])

between these two distinctive categories. Further, the incidences of illegal immigrants, who might avoid the census for fear of reprisal might equally be responsible for this discrepancy. At best, this is as a result of pure erroneous imagination.

In spite of this, there is still an enormous gap toward explaining the divergence between the official census and immigration figures. One fundamental reason could be that African immigrants who might have overstayed their visas, and have become illegal aliens, are less likely to be represented within the official demographic data for fear of recrimination and deportation. On the other hand, inflated demographic data, especially from the immigrants' perspectives enhances certain myths that offer certain social and political advantages, especially with regards to distribution of material resources and benefits, and political clout. Whatever the nature of such inconsistency is, the African immigrants in America are clearly over a million.

Comparatively, African immigrants like others past immigrants and other waves among the contemporary stream of African immigrants reside predominantly within American urban areas.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, African immigrants are found within different spaces of Metro-areas. Significantly, unlike other new immigrants groups are African immigrants are often more mobile and dispersed across and between diverse spaces nationwide, regionally, and within metro-areas.<sup>18</sup> African immigrants to America are also noted, according to Census data to possess the highest level of educational attainment of any group, including Asians and Native-born whites.<sup>19</sup> The African immigrants' arriving in the United States represents the best and brightest from the continent.<sup>20</sup>

However, it is instructive to note that, in spite of such level of educational attainments, many highly educated and qualified African immigrants continue to dominate in low paying income jobs as cab drivers, waiters, and similar other jobs. However, engagement in such jobs does fully indicate the full picture. First, some of the African immigrants that occupy such occupational niches do so, predicating it as transient. They perceive it as temporary and are ambitious in their upward mobile aspirations. Secondly, such jobs are sometimes second ones, to help with the bills, transnational remittances, mortgage, and may not be the primary source of incomes for some of the immigrants. Thirdly, the flexibility that some of these kinds of jobs offer, allows these immigrants to engage in other spheres of functioning, without the constriction of the eight-hours a day job. Therefore, such jobs offer certain latitude for other personal operations.

In spite of certain seeming cognitive perspectives that allocate a low paying niche to African immigrants many among this population are found across diverse occupations as professionals, small business entrepreneurs, university professors, physicians, nurses, lawyers, clergy, newspapers publishers, and other areas. African immigrants desire to be relevant and be somebody, therefore, they are driven to be dynamic and upwardly mobile to some extent. Equally, they desire the successes of their children, and so invest enormously in their education. African immigrants' children are among the successful black graduates of various Ivory league and excellent private colleges, sometimes disproportionately more in numbers than native-born African Americans at such institutions.<sup>21</sup> In spite of such considerations African immigrants' income has transcended those of native-born African-Americans. Since 1980, the income of African immigrants has been noted to be incrementing, though still unequal to those of native-born whites.<sup>22</sup>

African immigrants and their children have also featured prominently in sports. Akeem Olajuwon, the Nigerian-born retired basketball star and Houston Rockets player until his retirement from sporting. Other prominent African sports personalities are the Congo-born Dikembe Motumbo; Second generation African immigrant descents like Kenechi Udeze, Emeka Okafor, and others are also excellent iconic representatives of the resilience and contributions of African immigrants in America. A second generation American-born, Nigerian-American, Rick Famuyiwa, has also left his imprints in Hollywood, as the co-writer and producer of the movie, "The Wood."<sup>23</sup> Many African immigrants and their children are also making veritable contribution to the development of America, and their various home polities.

Africans are enlarging the business purview of many cities and are excelling as entrepreneurs.<sup>24</sup> A Nigerian entrepreneur, Anthony E.

Onianwah, the proprietor of the Largo, Maryland based, Apex Petroleum was noted as one of the fastest growing businesses in the state of Maryland, posting a 41.4 per cent growth rate over a three year period among diverse businesses within the private and public sectors in the state. Apex Petroleum in its 11 years of existence has an accumulated business volume of over \$17 million. As a result, of his acumen and business success, Onianwah was honored with an award by the Governor of the State of Maryland, together with other ten other area business leaders. Onianwah has received various business and recognition awards, among which is the National Leadership Award of the National Republican Congressional Committee. Additionally, his firm represents the only privately owned black business listed among the top and fastest growing businesses within the tri-cycle area of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia.<sup>25</sup>

African immigrants are also very transnational in their operations. Many send remittances home and make considerable investments in their aboriginal countries of origin.<sup>26</sup> For instance, following the Nigerian government drive toward heightened investments, and the participation of Nigerians resident abroad in the development of their homeland, a private oil refinery construction license was issued on December 19th, 2000 to the first private crude oil refinery company, in Nigeria, Amakpe International Refineries Nigeria Limited. The \$65 million venture is a brain child of the two Nigerian-Americans and California based entrepreneurs, namely Chief Usua Amanam, President and Chief Executive and Dr. Nsidibe Ikpe, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of such recorded successes such efforts are not always trouble free or painless. African immigrants experience all kinds of difficulties on their way, some of which are easy to overcome, while others are not too easy. Some of these difficulties are rooted within historical and systemic conditioning that define social relations, prejudices, stereotypes, and aggressively privilege opportunities along racial and class lines. Institutional red-linings by financial institutions, validation of intellectual acumens, and other structural devices, attempt to undermine the creativity and determined aspirations of many African immigrants to succeed.

African immigrants in Houston, especially those in the medical supply business, were reported to be experiencing different levels of hostility from financial houses, the media, and visits from agents of the secret service that targets and profiles them, questioning the sources of their income and denouncing them as either fraudulent and as national security risks. Such hostility, it was reported stemmed from the efficiency and competitive of these African immigrants' owned businesses.<sup>28</sup> In every sphere many of these African immigrants are found in American society, and in spite of the

vagaries of life in the United States many are excelling while others continue to struggle with the aspirations toward achieving material and existential holistic successes.

African immigrants have also made jump-started their political careers, as participants within the American political arena, running for elected offices. In some cases, Africans have been elected as Mayors of certain inner-city, and predominantly black and poor cities. The first African-born to have won an election into public office in America is the Nigerian-born, Rev. Emmanuel Onunwor, elected Mayor of East Cleveland, Ohio in 1997, under the platform of the Democratic Party, and later re-elected in 2000, but shortly afterward he switched alliances, joining the Republican Party (GOP). Unfortunately he was found guilty of administrative mismanagement, corruption, and racketeering by a Federal Court and convicted in 2004.<sup>29</sup>

Another Nigerian, Babatunde Deinbo, became the second African to become a Mayor. He was elected in 1999 as the Mayor of Berkeley, Missouri, a city, within the Metro-St. Louis area. He narrowly lost reelection on a very slim margin in 2004. He too was at a time a subject of Federal Investigations.<sup>30</sup> In Houston, a Nigerian, Amadi, ran unsuccessfully for a council seat. He also tried his hands as a Democratic Party's Candidates for the Texas Legislature represented Texas State District 133, but equally failed, unable to raise enough fund to sustain his campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Different Africans have been honored by the various political organizations. The Republican Party awarded some of their Africans members their annual advisory awards from year to year.<sup>32</sup>

A newspaper report has also observed the tendency of affluent African immigrants, especially Nigerians, to join the Republican Party (GOP), the longer they are resident in America.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the Nigerian-born former, Mayor Emmanuel Onunwor who was elected on the platform of the Democratic Party in 1997, denounced the party shortly after his reelection in 2002 switching to the Republicans Party.<sup>35</sup> In fact, some observers alleged this switch as a political miscalculation that contributed to his later framing, ordeals, and eventual disgrace from the office of Mayor following a Federal conviction on charges of racketeering. While, the empirical veracity of this observation remains vague, the reality is that African immigrants are no longer opaque within the American democratic and partisan processes. Another, assumption out there is that most African immigrants have democratic sympathies. Given the numerical demographic marginality of the African immigrants' population in the United States, and their recent immigration history, that also defines the level of their participation within

the political process such conjectural assumptions cannot be taken at their face value.

As African immigration continues to forge their social identity in America and grow toward becoming American citizens, their political evolutionary tendencies would soon become evident and would delineate the nature of their political participations within the established American political institutions and electoral process. Then, their relative voting behaviors and identity as a political bloc could be lucidly verified. Such manifestations would offer vital data as to their political proclivities and voting behavioral inclinations, as well as the valuable interests and concerns pertinent to this group, especially within large urban area like Houston, Texas, Washington D.C. area, St. Paul, Minnesota, and others where African immigrants clusters in significant numbers. It would then be seen whether there would be variations or uniformity within their political behaviors. Until then given the sprinkling easily ascertained given the vastness and plurality of the African immigrants' populations, across the continental United States, it represents the salient entrance of African immigrants into the mainstream of American society.

African immigrants in America also have had to deal with negative images associated mainly with criminal activities. African immigrants have been fingered in different criminal activities and violence acts, with some convicted. Nigerian Immigrants have been figured as prominent among cases of criminal acts involving African immigrants.<sup>36</sup> The incessant featuring of Nigerian involvement in crimes might be presumably due to the incidence of their large population among African immigrants. Nigerian immigrants react angrily to such embarrassing insinuations, especially given that a few persons are involved. Thus, in 1994 Nigerian immigrants, including prominent personalities, like Professor Chinua Achebe reacted sharply with consternation regarding the U.S. State Department report labeling Nigeria as the heartland from which heroin is trafficked into the United States.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Ghanaian immigrants have also been similarly pinpointed as criminals.<sup>38</sup>

Prominent Nigerian immigrants or Nigerian-Americans have also had problems with the law. The ugly conviction of Rev. Emmanuel Onunwor, the mayor of East Cleveland, Ohio on charges of racketeering and corruption, marks a celebrated case. His removal from office and disgraceful conviction was bitter and injurious to the psyche of many African immigrants. His election few years before engendered elation among African immigrants, as he made history as the first African-born elected to be mayor of any American city, and into any major elected political office in the United



States.<sup>39</sup> Another case given intense media coverage was that of Peter Odighizuwa, a Nigerian-American Law Student, at a Virginia Law school who went on a shooting rampage in 2002 killing the dean of the school, a law professor, and a student, and injuring others. He was later subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>40</sup> Also, Ikenna Iffih, a Nigerian-born student at the Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, made headlines when he, was charged and later sentenced in 2000 for hacking into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Pentagon computers.<sup>41</sup>

Other incidences involving Africans in the United States in crimes abound. In March 2003, a young American-Nigerian, 13 year old, Prince Nnadozie Umegbolu, convicted in December 2002, for possession of controlled substance was sentenced to a minimum one year at a boy's ranch in Georgia. He arrived in New York from Nigeria with eighty-seven packets of heroin embedded in his stomach in April 2002. <sup>42</sup> In 2004, a Nigerian immigrant Tampa, Florida police officer was indicted with threatening to shoot President George W. Bush, Jr.<sup>43</sup>

Many Africans have entered into troubles accused of child slavery, for bringing their fellow citizens here and subjecting them to forced labors without remunerations. This was the case of Joseph and Evelyn Djoumesi, who were charged on nine counts of kidnapping, conspiring to kidnap, raping, and child abuse of Pridine Fru whom they brought from Cameroon. A Nigerian young woman, Ejine Franscisca Uzonwanne resident in Rochester, Minnesota claimed that a physician and distant cousin, Dr. Julie Berny Akabogu George, enslaved her immensely subjecting her to physical and emotional hardship, and curtailment of her freedom. Parishioners of an area Catholic Church she attended helped her away from her predicament granting her temporary refuge.<sup>44</sup>

Even, some African immigrant religious establishments and leaders have also found themselves in trouble against the law. In 1986, a New York Celestial Church of Christ was alleged to be the center of Nigerian immigrants' fraudulent and criminal activities. <sup>45</sup> In 2002, in the face of mounting accusations against the Archdiocese of Detroit, especially by two brothers, who alleged that a priest of the aforesaid Archdiocese of Detroit, sexually abused them as minors, an African priest, Rev. Komlan Dem Houndjame a political refugee from Togo, then serving in a Assumption Grotto Parish in the Detroit area was served up, to stem the negative publicity and detract from the seriousness regarding the mounting and debilitating accusations of cover-up and reckless irresponsibility against the Detroit Catholic hierarchy. Rev. Houndjame was allegedly accused of raping a parishioner at her home. Rev. Houndjame was denounced and left

to his device, however, luckily for him an area business man, Mr. Joseph Maher, offered his support and provided legal services that led to his eventual acquittal.<sup>46</sup> Incidentally, this case gave birth of a tax exempt charitable organization, *Opus Bono Sacerdoti* (Work for the Good of the Priesthood) Foundations, directed by Mr. Maher, to support in offering legal services to accused priests. Fr. Felicien, in spite of the court's verdict remained interdicted by the Detroit archdiocese; hindered from being reabsorbed into priestly duties. A Catholic missionary priest, Rev. Peter Kiare a Kenyan was arrested in 2002, while serving in a New York parish as a guest preacher over charges of sexually abusing a 12 year old boy, facing charges of forcible touching and endangering the welfare of a child while on an excursion to an area beach.<sup>47</sup>

In 2002, a Nigerian priest from Ihioma-Orlu, Fr. Cyriacus Udegbulem, was arrested in Laredo, Texas in connection with an alleged rape of a female parishioner in a Brooklyn, New York church rectory, which occurred two years earlier. Though ordered out of the United States by the New York archdiocese he left for Laredo, Texas, where he was employed at a hospital chaplain and was attending graduate school. Following his arrest, he was repatriated to New York, indicted by a grand jury, and was promptly charged.<sup>48</sup>

Again, his case is instructive. Though this was a serious case, and was not in fact related to the central issue of the sexual abuse scandal as pertaining mainly to minors, until the media and popular frenzy that incensed reactions against the Catholic hierarchy, the New York archdiocese did not on its own initiative report such a serious crime for prosecution. Another, Nigerian Catholic priest, Rev. Basil Onyia, originally from Aba diocese in Nigeria was alleged of sexually abusing a mentally retarded girl, and emotionally disturbed incest victim from Pharr Texas while serving in the Brownsville diocese in Texas. After series of allegations of sexual molestations and possibilities of scandal emerged he eloped to sanctuary in Nigeria.<sup>49</sup> A Nigerian-born former priest and hospital chaplain, Paschal Atomori was sentenced in a Chicago court on charges relating to forgery of a bogus letter written in 2003 that misrepresents him as a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago.<sup>50</sup>

Some of these incidences also raise vital concerns regarding the scapegoat treatment selectively melted to African immigrant church personnel within the American Catholic ecclesiastical structure by church officials, in comparisons with Anglo-Americans clergy similarly accused often traditionally shielded and sheltered, even with the unfolding of the recent cases of priests' sex abuse scandals, the issue of parity remains saliently significant. The American Catholic Church would easily attempt to circumvent

the law by covering-up and protecting native-born, and especially criminal white Catholic priests, while ironically too eager to denounce and criminalize their foreign counterparts.

Such facts, though not intended toward minimizing the impact of the purported criminal acts associated with these priests, or be overtly critical of the Catholic establishment, however, portend as a troubling trend. Therefore, the fact that these priests' assumed criminal acts are introduced within the timing of intense heat of pejorative media publicity and public criticisms of church officials seems to indicate a recurrent and noxious pattern that conveniently attempts to circumvent the core issues, critically aimed at detracting attentions by attempting to mitigate the effect of the intense popular and media sentiments. Within such context, we can assume the emergent mode that credence the temptation toward making scapegoats of foreign priests and other church personnel.

Recently an African physician, Dr. Charles Momah, who ran the Federal Way and Burien Clinics in the Seattle area was convicted on charges of sexually assaulting and raping his vulnerable female patients. Such charges also amount to a fundamental violation of medical ethics bothering upon issues of abuse of power and trust and inappropriate boundary behaviors.<sup>51</sup> Various Nigerians have been charged and convicted with regards to mail, credit card, and wire frauds.<sup>52</sup> The spate of domestic violence against spouses of African immigrants around the United States is also noted to be on the increase.<sup>53</sup>

## **ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI: IMMIGRATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE GATEWAY TO THE WEST**

St. Louis, in the past (1880–1924) was a major immigration destination for the diverse immigration streams of Irish, German, Italian, Magyars (Hungarian), and even Czechs immigrants, that also spectacularly nuanced the ethnic area's diversity within the area. Such salience realizations also possess resilient comparative advantages within the opportunities availed by such settings. Such advantages vitally permit perspectives that examine the comparative views and contrasts between the earlier and novel waves of immigrants into the area. Since the phenomenon of the post-1965 immigration waves, tagged as the "New Immigration," into the area is not as demographically intense as previous waves, comparisons would help us to understand the nature of social integration, building of institutional capacity, and modes of acculturation and assimilation between these dual streams.

St. Louis has often been an immigrant destination especially in the period between 1880 and 1920s when the earlier immigrants' waves from

Germany, Ireland, Italy, and other Southern and Eastern European countries made their ways into the area, hence ensuring its ethnic diversity. Blacks have also been among the early settlers of Missouri and St. Louis. While, some were presumably born in Africa prior to their enslavements, the history of St. Louis blacks is more associated with those who accompanied the French explorers and officials from Haiti to find settlement in Missouri.

Of recent, St. Louis has also become an immigrant destination and residence for some African immigrants, who now consider here as their adopted home. St. Louis' African immigrants, are few in comparison with those of other urban domains such as New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, Chicago, Washington, DC, St. Paul, Minnesota, and others with an affluent African immigrants' population. Though subdued numerically, St. Louis and its metropolitan area is a site of a growing African immigrants' population. Their population is assumed to be growing at an exponential rate. African immigrants in this area are also positively contributing, in different ways toward the growth and development of their host through taxes, economic, and social activities. Nonetheless, the economic and professional impact of these African immigrants has yet to be fully evaluated.

Though the US Census 2000 data counted, less than 5,000 African immigrants within the St. Louis metro-area, a number not likely to be considered as remarkably significant, census statistics indicate African immigrants into the area are growing at an exponential growth rate having increased by about 270.4 per cent between 1990 and 2000. Such growth rate, though St. Louis African immigrants are widely diffused within the metro-area, they are still notably shaping the structural contours of their host community. Such facts are at the heart of my motivated seminal attempt toward researching this population, with the intention of delineating the scope and nature of this specific phenomenon.

In the light of such observations, this chapter seeks to validate the ontological role of religious, spiritual values, and existential institutions as creative resources for the teleological framing of group and personal identities and spiritualities within the texture of their influence upon group existential realities, especially regarding the consolidation of pre-immigration identities, and efforts at constructing novel, integrative networks, and adaptable institutions among African immigrants in the United States, and specifically within St. Louis.

The use of religion and especially its spaces and institutions, are noted as elongation of former immigrant niches but transcending that as cogent arena for the entrenchment of new roots, as well as validation of certain spiritual values that are rooted within religious and spiritual ecologies and

cosmologies that are familiar and grounded within certain cultural consciousness and spiritual spatial frameworks. Therefore, religion and their allied spiritualities as relevant signifiers and idioms act toward ensuring offering anchors necessary within the immigrants' adaptation process, especially toward accessing the available resource. Earlier immigrant religious institutions also offered a channel for immigrants to pool their resources and as a community in communion avail themselves of different opportunities within the wider secular domain.<sup>54</sup> Further, such spaces are also relevant for the building of community and network that have rooted this-worldly values, even more so than has hitherto been ascribed to certain religious orders.

African immigrants' religious communities have been noted as saliently active in structuring the adjustment processes of immigrants. Controlling for how religion helps the adjustment process, I intend to see what essentials variables are involved within the construction of social identity by African immigrants in urban America, specifically within St. Louis. Predicated upon such scholarly interest, this chapter attempts to examine the different modalities that shape the African immigrants' experiences, given the realities of urban American location and daily living, in fathoming the role of religion plays within the construction of their social identity, specifically St. Louis. It seeks to explore the different symbiotic modalities and levels of dialectic interactions within the conditions of urbanity and its relative influence in shaping the African immigrant's conception of self and society. Further, it also ascribes toward exploring the modes in which African immigrants contribute toward American transformation relative to economic variables and transcend to it, in terms of cognitive consciousness, understanding of culture, and society.

Methodologically, this research is predicated upon the experiences of participant observation, archival research, and ethnographic embedding within two Christian churches, and individual African immigrants encountered in diverse contexts, in St. Louis. Additionally, following different interactions formal and informal that arises from talking about my research and observations of African immigrants in St. Louis, Missouri, to add interjectory interventions and insights derived from such discursive contexts with African immigrants and Americans related to African immigrants through inter-marriages, friendship, and other forms of associations.

The ethnographic materials contained in this chapter relatively is a derived outcome of the preliminary research work I carried out in St. Louis, between September, 2003 to January, 2006, relative to my dissertation interests in the field of Cultural Anthropology. These materials, partially is related to the overall dissertation research and possess crass implications

for the eventual product. As preparatory work, I take full responsibility for my work, interpretations and analyses. I have the verbal and mutual agreement of those involved to conduct research at the sites noted here, as well as the individuals whose views I shall present.

In this chapter, I attempted utilizing a diverse array of research tools such as census data, selective participant observation within multi-sited and predominantly African immigrants' frequented religious spaces, mainly Churches and spiritual activities for participant observation and ethnographic research study, informal and formal face-to-face and at times phone conversations with African immigrants in the St. Louis area, employ archival, media (especially printed features), ethnic literatures like events brochures, and internet resources. Overall, and expectedly, historical grounding within the different events that structures the perceptive urban, social, cultural, religious, and economic realities of St. Louis entailed immersion into different layers of historical trajectories and literatures.

## **FORAGERS OF FORTUNE: AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN URBAN ST. LOUIS**

The deficiency of the political economy of most African nations is at the root of African immigration to the West, and to the United States specifically. The increasing salient of the African immigration became nuanced following the political crises and economic downturn of many countries on the continent. Likewise, global events also affect the flow and direction of African immigration. Thus, while in the past most African immigrants that came to the United States came, with the exception of Cape Verdeans, mainly came from formerly colonized English speaking countries. However, the restriction in immigration policies in European countries redirected, non-English speakers, to seek their fortunes in America. The stream of African foragers of fortune helped to diversify the African immigration wave into America. Another diversifying element is the refugee resettlement programs that found home for displaced refugees and asylum seekers in certain urban areas.

The origin of the phenomenon of African immigration into urban St. Louis cannot be accurately dated. However, by 1970 there were some African immigrants already resident and working here, forming a nuclei of a small African immigrants' community, most of them were Nigerians.<sup>55</sup> Details of such early pioneers remain fragmentary and sketchy. Put differently, the historical imagination is unable to reference the first African immigrant or group to have arrived in St. Louis. Nonetheless, there are vague references to some Africans in St. Louis as far back as the late 1800s.

In 1891, a “Zulu Prince,” actually an African-American from South Carolina, under false pretences preached in a St. Louis Church, claiming to be an African and solicited funds and material aids for African Christian missions. In his preaching he falsely described Africans as cannibals who ate infants and worshipped crocodiles. Unfortunately, he was later discovered to be a fake and a native of South Carolina rather than African as claimed.<sup>56</sup> Mentioned is made regarding Mark Christian Hayfold, a Christian minister, and member of the influential Cassey Hayfold family, as having obtained his Bachelors of Arts and Bachelors of Divinity from the University of Missouri, St. Louis (UMSL), at least prior to 1893 when he became a minister.<sup>57</sup> Details of Hayfold’s time in St. Louis remain fuzzy.

Culturally, the St. Louis area was home to many enterprising groups of Native Americans, whose rich Indian cultural legacy is represented by the still subsisting pyramidal mounds within the region around Cahokia, across the Mississippi River, on the Illinois side, not far from St. Louis. European traders and missionaries interacted with some of these Indian groups, setting missionary residences and churches within the vicinity, and proselytized the Native Americans since 1675 when Fr. Marquette established the Immaculate Conception mission, as the first in the Mississippi Valley. Later missionaries, and specifically the Jesuits, would nurture the faith community of the Indians. In fact, the activities of the priests within St. Louis attracted a group of Indians to venture into St. Louis by 1831 seeking a priest for their spiritual welfare.<sup>58</sup>

The area of St. Louis was the most distinguished sites from which the Lewis and Clark expeditions began, helping in opening up the western frontiers of the United States following the 1804 purchase from France of the Louisiana territories by the United States during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. In the aftermath of the 1804 Louisiana purchase, Lewis and Clark were mandated to use their expeditions on the Mississippi river to gather cogent ethnographic data and cultural intelligence toward the consolidation of these newly territories by the United States Government. Instructively, the territory of St. Louis was prior to becoming a territory of the United States, at different times was under the suzerainty of both the French, who transferred to the Spaniards following a secret treaty between both powers in 1762. However, following its purchase by the United States the territory was symbolically reverted first to France, by Spain, and then later to the United States, the new territorial owner.

This symbolic event regarding the transference of the territory took place in St. Louis. Three flags of three different nations were hoisted flying elegantly over St. Louis. The Spaniards whom the French entrusted the governance of St. Louis returned the territory to the France’s sovereignty;

hoisting the French flag. Then France formally transferred the deed of owner of the territory to the United States, the new owners, whose flags had since flown over the area. Within three days, the flags of three different nations have being hoisted and flown over St. Louis, hence, the reference to the “day of the three flags.” Such measures underline the transnational processes and global dynamics that since have played; and continues to define the historical directions and transnational processes that has formed the unique identity of St. Louis and enriched her historical development.

Salient dynamics, such as this continues to act a mnemonic referential reminder in shaping the cultural landscape and global consciousness that has engaged St. Louis since then. While, in the past, the Mississippi river was the route through which America asserted her economic vitality and commercial prowess, using St. Louis as a gateway to European markets through New Orleans, today, the monumental architectural edifice of the Arch (The Jefferson National Expansion Project) continues to remind St. Louisan of their openness to the world as the gateway to the West. “The gateway to the west the Arch honors was eighteenth and early nineteenth-century St. Louis, a town located exactly where you now see the pleasant greensward of the Jefferson National Expansion memorial. Here stood the venerable buildings where explorers, missionaries, voyageurs, trappers, traders, and pioneers outfitted to go west.” In this sense, symbolically, “the Arch is where everything comes together. The improbable stainless steel flourish unites not only earth and sky, land and water, east and west, but also St. Louis’ past and present, its challenges and responses. Here is where the city begins. . . .”<sup>59</sup>

St. Louis is known as the “Gateway to the West,” given its strategic prominence on the Mississippi river, within the westward expansion that saw many Americans migrating West to places like in search of greater commercial activities and quest for fortune, especially the Californian gold rush of the 19th century. Such reminders also point to acutely to St. Louis, not merely as the gateway to the American western frontiers, but as the gateway of still a greater outreach to the world.

More, fundamentally, St. Louis, the “city of flight,”<sup>60</sup> featured prominently, when through the creative imagination and goodwill of some enlightened business men, they invested and instrumentally sponsored Charles Lindbergh’s feat of transatlantic flight from New York to Paris, “the City of Light,” aboard the “Spirit of St. Louis;” a plane that attests to St. Louis’ spirit of innovative nobility, courageous openness to the world, exploratory outreach, and support for human pursuits. St. Louis, in this sense was fundamentally involved in shaping the global processes that would open wider



the gates of the West to the world. This feat ushered the world into an enhanced global interconnectivity and network by connecting the “City of Flight” not only to the “City of Light” but would elongate and connect the gateway to the west identity of St. Louis to other global realities.

Unbeknown to these businessmen, their action would mark the autonomous widening of the gateway to the West, broadly inflated within the help of aviation, making the west easily accessible to non-westerners, and diverse people across the globe. St. Louis too would be impacted by such developments. In this way, St. Louis’ significance in opening its gateway more globally has also autonomously have ramifications for the present state of global immigration to the west, especially the United States. The faith of these St. Louis businessmen pointed to the promise and possibilities aviation held, not only for human travels, but also in impacting the different processes that would transform global and discrete spaces and epochs. Through such activities, St. Louis’ identity became synonymous with novel progress and autonomously aligned with enhanced global interconnectivity. Similar faith would be part of the conscious repertoire of future African immigrants to St. Louis, a fact that would become spectacularly evident beginning from the late 1980s, through 1990s to the present.

Almost forty years later, aviation, the efforts of St. Louisans would adopt some autonomous character of its own. The transcontinental and global connections they helped initiate would also affect dynamics like immigration to the United States. Unlike previous immigrants, airlines and airports rather than steam boats and seaports would become the most pronounced channels through which diverse pools of immigrants would enter into the American national space. Among these diverse immigrants would be African immigrants who with ease who find their way to reside in St. Louis, after passing through airports as their gateway to the global West;<sup>61</sup> and specifically into the United States.

As a result of such processes, global events mark St. Louis’ consciousness in significant ways. St. Louis has also helped to reconfigure the global landscape by decisions and events that occur within its space. The defeat of Napoleon by the Haitian revolting slave forces was instrumental in the eventual purchase of the entire Upper Louisiana by the United States from France. Global critical events and schemes have impacted St. Louis also in other different ways as was the case of the historical wave of 19th century immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Germany into the area. To a lesser degree, some of the 20th century contemporary crises in places like Somali, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and even the Ogoni of Nigeria, that led to displacement have influenced the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers within the area, with the salient effect of affecting the spatial ecology

and demographics. Thus, today with the large concentration of Bosnians and Somalis the area Islamic population and visibility has increased.

African-Americans had also resided in the Missouri area since 1719, when they were first brought to the region to work on the lead mines. Though they were encamped in the Illinois area, they foraged into Missouri for their explorations.<sup>62</sup> St. Louis, Missouri is also an important historical site relative to race relations, and Black social identity in American history. It was here that the Missouri Supreme Court in 1852 first denied Dred Scott of freedom from slavery, in spite of having reached free territory in Illinois. Later, this judgment would be upheld in 1857 in the famous U. S. Supreme Court ruling on the Dred Scott case with dire consequences for the definition of the status of African-Americans (then Negro), whether free or enslaved. This judgment denied American Blacks the rights of citizenship considered as aliens. This defined the citizenship status of Black people against the criteria of racial taxonomy. Citizenship was notably aligned with race. Therefore, only whites were allotted the rights, benefits, and significations associated with citizenship.

Inexorably blacks were denied and excluded blacks from enjoying the rights and privileges associated with citizenship, in a society that their labor was significant in establishing the foundations of its capitalist tenements. Therefore, St. Louis is synonymous with the space where US citizenship was ruled to be underlined by membership within a privileged and hegemonic dominant racial group. In spite of this monumental rulings and privations, St. Louis blacks struggled through various past ordeals to become relevant and attain racial self-recognition.

Many St. Louisan blacks were very enterprising and dynamic. St. Louisan blacks were reckoned among successful business entrepreneurs, owners of property, and members of society. Therefore, some blacks within the St. Louis area advanced to economic and social prominence, with some even owning large estates and black slaves, (Greene, 57). In an era when blacks were deprived of education, Rev. Meachum adopted creative ways to educate black children on the Mississippi river, where he housed his school on a ship to avoid prosecution.<sup>63</sup> St. Louis also played a vital part in the events that led to the civil war between the Union and Confederates, and the question of slavery played a significant role in shaping the events. In fact, within its strategic location as a Midwestern city and cultural relationship and spatial interception with the South, St. Louisan's ambivalent attitude toward the freedom of slaves, played a vital part on which side of the crises Missourians, especially St. Louisans found themselves. This issue was highly divisive affecting the texture of social relations among St. Louisans, (Greene, 17-19).

St. Louis survived the civil and became a part of the Union. Immigrants swelled the ranks of St. Louis in the 1800s through around 1924. Irish, Germans, Italians, and different European immigrants found their ways into St. Louis in search of lucrative economic opportunities. As they relocated they also came with different vestiges of their material and spiritual cultures, including their religious faith, and its various practices. These immigrants, like those before them and those after them, would struggle to put down roots within the area. Iconic urban landmarks such as neighborhood communities like Carondelet, The Hill, South St. Louis, schools, area Churches, statues, and street names of these immigrants evidently marks the identity of St. Louis, as these extant iconic idioms also dot its spatial landscape all illustratively asserting the varied historical and cultural imaginations that shaped, and even continues to significantly map the destiny of St. Louis, and its outlying metro areas.

In spite of the cultural plurality and diversities these various groups putting their ethnic animosities and antagonisms aside were able to forge common ground, fundamentally invested in creating the crucible that has forged St. Louis into a modern city. Different immigrant modalities treasures contributed by different immigrant groups and streams have preciously helped to construct the realities of St. Louis. For instance, in South St. Louis, there are in places like Carondelet, whose street names and cultural historic landmarks such as churches continue to attest to the legacy of its earliest settlers, especially the French, and mostly the “Scrubby Dutch;” the Germans. Street names still reflect the memories and enormous contributions of these St. Louis immigrant groups toward constructing the structural features of St. Louis.<sup>64</sup>

Other aspects still visible are different neighborhoods like South St. Louis, a formerly German stronghold; The Hills, an Italian neighborhood, arrayed with its exquisite restaurants and delicious cuisines, and other architectural landmarks that bore the stamp of the ethnic identities and national origins of different immigrant groups. By so doing these immigrants actively stamped their cultural legacy upon the existential contours that represents the area’s spatial and social configurations. St. Louis is one of the areas affected by urban decadence and blight as a result of the decline in manufacturing industries, incorporating her into the Rust Belt, much in tandem with other Midwestern manufacturing towns since the 1960s, as a result of economic and social restructurings.

Geopolitically, St. Louis-Illinois metro-area (STL-IL MSA) consists on the independent City of St. Louis and four counties on the Missouri side, and of three counties on the Illinois (Southern). The City of St. Louis is referenced as the concentric hub and core central area with the counties

mainly constituted with outlying suburbs. Within its bi-State structure the southern Illinois cities like Belleville, East St. Louis, Swansea, and Edwardsville and other adjoining areas are part of the entire metro-area. In short, the metro-area consists on the Missouri side of the St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, Jefferson County, and Franklin County, and on the Illinois side three counties namely, St. Clair, Madison, and Monroe.

These area used to prosperous and sometimes in the past contested vigorously with the city of Chicago for relevance. At one time St. Louis was the fourth largest city in the United States, and was a promising center of commerce and manufacturing. Today, the area has undergone some radical changes continually struggling to rebound through new revitalizing and creative economic initiatives. The central city has since the 1950s steadily declined in population, mainly losing her inhabitants to the outlying suburban areas. Additionally, unlike in the past the area has not maintained its position as a major immigration gateway since the immigration downturn in the 1920s, a phenomenon that once contributed in the past to her stellar national economic and social stature.

In spite of these economic scenarios some immigrants continue to tickle into St. Louis with a few initial immigrants coming directly from abroad, while a majority are likely to have made St. Louis their secondary destination. Our research integrates a regional approach, panoramically integrating a cross-spatial view of St. Louis within the perspective of a unified metropolitan area, as our unit of analysis, especially relative to the phenomenon of African immigrants within its Metro-area. Such approach is consistent with certain trends within American urban studies that preferences a metro-regional perspective favoring the unification of the inner city with their surrounding inner and outer suburban territories into a concentric analytic field.<sup>65</sup>

However, in spite of this pro-regional approach, the core of African immigrants and other immigrants within the region are located more within the regional center of St. Louis City and its immediate suburbs in St. Louis County. Though, St. Louis might not be the first destination of many immigrants, some immigrants still desire the area for its affordability. African immigrants are no exception to this trend. During the course of my participation at the Jesus House of all Nations (RCCG) church and the United African Presbyterian Church, I have met some Africans who had resided within other metro-areas prior to relocating to St. Louis. Often the reason they give relates to the affordability of the cost of living in St. Louis that is low compared to the advantages the area offers.

One example is a Nigerian entrepreneur, Zukky, who first arrived in the United States around 1980 to pursue high school and college education

in California. Zukky, claims to possess three academic degrees including a Master's degree in Business Administration, and the others in Engineering. He has been living in the St. Louis area since about 1990 having relocated to St. Louis from California. A vivacious and effacing personally, Zukky related his personal story, especially about his relocation to St. Louis. Specifically, he was enthused by the relative low cost of living here and the business opportunities available within the St. Louis area.

During a trip to St. Louis, while browsing through a local area newspaper he spotted an advertisement for a Laundry business that priced for only about \$160,000, which compared to his California experience seemed as a give-away price and seemed more to him as a scam. Dazed, out of curiosity he called the buyer to ascertain the veracity of the adverts' claim. Nostalgic shock made him drove to this advertised business site, and was further surprised to observe a thriving business. Next, captivated by the low housing rent rates, a stark contrast in comparison to California he decided to relocate to St. Louis. Comparatively, at the time, the cost of a one bedroom apartment in St. Louis ranged between \$395–480, whereas the cheapest in California cost anywhere from \$1,000 and above.

Given this realization, after returning to California he resigned from his employment at the car rental company. Almost immediately, a month afterwards, he headed for St. Louis to mine its potential opportunities. Ironically, Zukky was returning to a city that played a leading role in shaping the development of the United States' western frontiers, which includes California. Unlike, the migrants of that era, in a new era, Zukky was heading in the opposite direction. For immigrants, like Zukky, St. Louis marks a gateway city to the West, in another but valid sense. St. Louisans initiative that helped to propel the success of Charles Lindberg's flight had opened wide the gateway to the West for many non-western immigrants. St. Louis, too would continue to hold as a gateway to the prospective aspirations of immigrants for success and survival during their peregrinations and stay. It is therefore, no accidents of history that the arch which represents a commemorative monument to Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana purchase, is located at the precise site where explorers and trappers took off on their voyage to the western frontiers, and similarly that its architectural designer, Eero Saarinen, was a Finnish immigrant to the United States.

St. Louis area used to be distinguished as been among the most segregated Metro-areas in the United States. However, since the 1970s through the 2000 census, the index measuring segregation has been consistently noted to be declining.<sup>66</sup> The phenomenon of the new immigration seems to offer positive salience for accessing the significance of such declines, as well as helping toward to enrich the declining population of the City of St.

Louis, especially its core areas, and also toward ensuring that demographic growth within the area offers economic opportunities and outcomes in areas such as housing, wages, and other services.

Certain regional (Metro-area) development efforts are also putting the area back into economic relevance. Major capital development efforts, like the Jefferson National Project referenced by its towering and glittering arch architectural masterpiece, the Edward Center, the new Busch Cardinal Baseball Stadium represents the renewed imageries of St. Louis as an epicenter of urban tourism and a resurgent global business heartland.<sup>67</sup> Another major tourist attraction in St. Louis, apart from the Arch is the exquisite Missouri Botanical Gardens, with its different global plants and floral collections. The Missouri Museum of Arts, Missouri History Museums, the Old Missouri Supreme Court House, all resonates as tourist sites and cultural resource centers. Other traditional tourist attractions in the area are the Old Cathedral building by the Arch at the Riverfront, the Cathedral Basilica, the Cahokia Mounds, among several other attractions in this area. Business such as Boeings, the Edwards Investments, American Airlines, and other big area businesses also positions her economically.

Educationally, the St. Louis area possesses highly renowned and qualitative tertiary and research institutions, such as the Washington University in St. Louis and the Jesuit's St. Louis University, and several others. The Washington University Medical School continues to be rated by the US World and News as the Second best after the Harvard's Medical School.

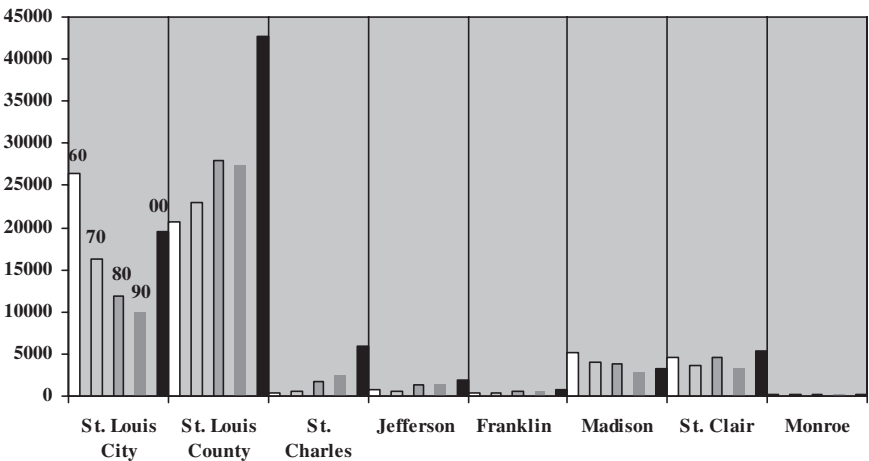


Chart 3-2. Total Foreign-Born Population St. Louis-II MSA Centennial Data-1960 Through 2000 (U.S Census Bureau, 2000)

The Barnes-Jewish Hospital, the Teaching Hospital of the Washington University Medical School, is also highly rated by the US World and News as the seventh best medical center and research institutions nationally.

New American immigrants' are filtering into St. Louis, including Africans, changing its demographic compositions.<sup>68</sup> The different refugee resettlement programs have brought in new immigrants from different parts of the world into St. Louis, notably, Bosnians, from the Balkans region, and from Africa, Somali, Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, and the Nigerian Ogoni refugees due to different simmering political crises in the 1990s. The Bosnians refugees have shown resilience in their business acumen and determination to achieve the American dream.<sup>69</sup> Next to the Bosnians, are the Somali who were resettled here in some significant numbers, since the outbreak and disintegration of the Somali nation beginning from the early 1990s.

Among the Somali group resettled here are some Bantu Somali, who were granted political asylum and refugee status following the war and their history of hitherto state discrimination. The first of this group were airlifted to the United States on humanitarian grounds.<sup>70</sup> A significant number of these Bantu Somali were resettled in the St. Louis area, especially in South St. Louis, due to the efforts of the International Institutes of Metropolitan St. Louis; an organization nationally recognized for its excellent refugee resettlement programs. These two groups formed the highest numbers of refugees to the area. The refugees of the 1990s were Sierra Leoneans fleeing from the onslaught of a brutal civil war, and the Ogoni refugees

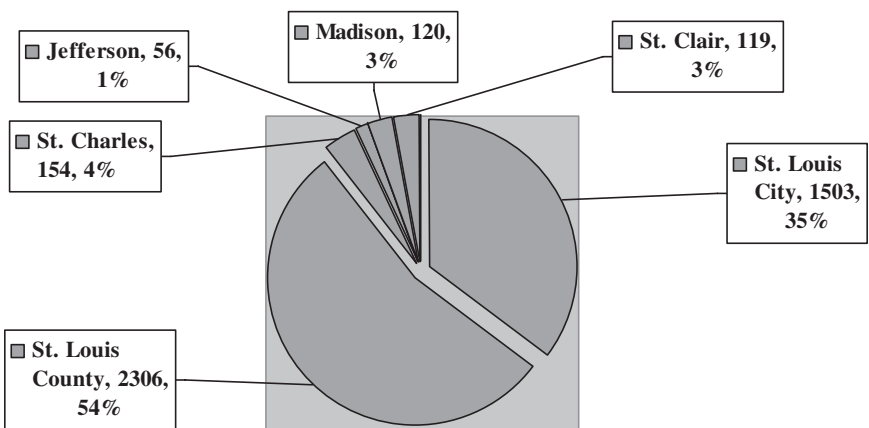


Chart 3-3. Spatial Distribution of African Immigrants (Foreign-Born) St. Louis-II MSA (US Census Bureau 2000)

from Nigeria, who fled from despotic persecution under the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha following the 1995 “judicial murder” of eight Ogoni pro-environmental activists together with Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer and leader of the ecological movement: Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). As a result, St. Louis was among the hotbed of pro-democratic activism against the Nigerian Abacha military dictatorship.<sup>71</sup>

The New Immigrants into St. Louis are considered as an “invisible population,” nonetheless these immigrants are considered to be creative agents in shaping the area’s ethnic, religious, and social diversity. Further, it seems that apart from the refugees that are resettled here as they come directly from overseas, other immigrants come to St. Louis, after settling in another urban area or region mainly in search of better educational and greater career opportunities.<sup>72</sup> African immigrants to the St. Louis area are considered to be attaining success and possess positive community values.<sup>73</sup>

## **RELIGION AND AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS’ CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN AMERICA**

Africans have been noted to possess a heightened consciousness of their religiosity and its effects upon their existential situations and coping. Therefore, many scholars of African religious have noted the central role of religion in shaping the African existential imagination and self-awareness. This religious consciousness also defines the nature of African social relations, identity, consciousness, and the ordering of their institutional paradigms. This centrality of religion in framing social identity and spiritual consciousness among most Africans, is embedded in Professor John Mbiti’s statement that. “Africans are notoriously religious.”<sup>74</sup> This religiosity is also given a vent and allowed to nourish within the American social ambient that has been noted as equally religious, in spite of the separation of Church and State, a fact that Alexis De Tocqueville notes as significant for this trait of American religiosity.<sup>75</sup> This environment is also one that is plural allowing for freedom of diverse religious and spiritual forms of expressions.<sup>76</sup>

## **AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS RELIGION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY**

Social identity is defined through social distinctions that construct existential schemes of differentiations.<sup>77</sup> Further more, such modality of differentiation resolves around the self who engaging in reflexive monitoring focally



become an object that can categorize, classify, and compare itself against other social categories and relational idioms. Therefore, social identity formation is contained within the process of nominalization of reality, and it is fundamentally embedded within this process of self-categorization or identification emerges the formation of identity. Therefore, "having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective."<sup>78</sup>

Hence, the group of our principal concern reflects the foreign-born Africans sharing a common experience of post-slavery immigration, especially the post-1965 cohort of the African "new" immigration streams who validates certain forms of identifiable religiosity, faith orientations and varying expressive spiritualities, especially those that privilege religion as a relevant tool in defining their sense of self, framing, and transformation of their unique social identities within the United States. Thus, while formally, they are often absorbed into the category of African-American, with whom they share some common genetic and historical traits of aborigine they are still culturally differentiated as a result of the diverse and ambivalent historical trajectories that condition their experiences.<sup>79</sup> Sometimes this had led to the development of palpable ambivalence and tenuous relationship between both groups.

Today, some Africans are casting away the mimetic label of "African-American," as a term of distinction based upon their differential values.<sup>80</sup> Some African-Americans consider the term "African" within their racial or ethnic representation as offensive, demarcating themselves from Africa.<sup>81</sup> Further, it is not all African immigrants that are blacks, since there are white and Asian Africans mainly from some Eastern and Southern African countries, due to the colonial and imperial histories that engendered the establishment of European and Asian settlements in different countries of these regions. There are also people of Arab heritage who are Africans mainly from countries of North Africa, many of which do not subscribe nor define themselves racially as blacks. Therefore, while the basic idea since to correlates especially sub-Saharan Africans with the racial notion of blackness, as a matter of fact, the term "African" while vehemently denoting the racial typology of blackness, actually transcends the idiom of blackness, and is therefore racially inclusive. In fact, it is noted that among all the African immigrants to the United States, Whites Africans constitute a majority of about 46 per cent in contrast to the 41 per cent for blacks.<sup>82</sup>

However, it is not certain whether this figure is accurate or skewed, in delineating the level of its racial inclusiveness. What the term "white" versus "black" remains unclear. It is questionable what layers constitutes the reality of African whiteness, since in some circles North Africans with

a fairer skin are integrated under the racial term of white, in figures that attempts bifurcating the continents into bi-racial paradigms that are often contestable. Further, like the North Africans, especially those of Arab origin considered as whites, Asians from such countries as Kenya, Uganda, South Africa who like whites were descendants of immigrant are also at times incorporated into the referential frame that designates racial whiteness. There is also the case of the settler descendants of white colonialists originating in Eastern and Southern Africa. Hence, it is not also clear what specifically constitutes whiteness and blackness among African immigrants to the United States.

Thus, the renowned African immigrant scholar, Professor Ali A. Mazrui in attempting to distinguish between the earlier enslaved Black Diaspora as the "Diaspora of Enslavement" and the voluntary African immigrants to the West as "Diaspora of Colonialism" proffered a distinctive neologism of casting members of the later "Diaspora of Colonialism" as "American-Africans" in contrast to their confreres of the "Diaspora of Enslavement" who have retained the defining designation of "African-American." In reality, as Mazrui, himself delineated even such dichotomized labels intended to achieve bifurcations are fraught with analytical inconsistencies and existential problems. In spite of these differing approaches in defining the African immigrants within the American experience, it is instructive to note that the reality of the immigration space and context constitutes the framework that thrust the universalistic referent of "Africa" and "African" as a necessary identity upon the African immigrants,<sup>83</sup> and also in most cases the term of "blackness."

In spite of the fervent attempt to cast a differing label still leaves the issue unresolved as it pertained to the in-between identity of the second generation American-born offspring of African immigrants' parentage, whose birthright grants them American citizenship, while also simultaneously dually acquiring the citizenship of such countries like Nigeria or Ghana, given the benefits conferred upon them as a result of their African immigrants' parentage and national affinities.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, given the recent origins of the contemporary African immigrants to America, they indulge in frantic efforts to differentiate themselves, by creating their own cultural arenas.

Within this arena they transpose and reproduce certain of their cultural habitus, in the cogent attempts to ascribe their social and cultural differences from the native-born, whether whites or blacks. Among the many ways this is achieved is through the innovative religious trajectories that they implant from their homelands, recreate or totally invent within their new adopted immigrant destinations. It is within the salience in which

religion functions at the private level of specific cultivation and sustenance of certain forms of spiritualities and practices, and at the public level of religious and rituals practices that we focus our attention, attempting to delineate the nature of such processes and their transformations.

As Africans journey and diffuses outside of their aboriginal continent, mainly as a result of immigration, either forced or voluntary, they carry with them their religious heritages and spiritualities, including rituals, symbols, and other material accoutrements transmitting these, and elongating these historically and spatially. Past African immigrants, in spite of the circumstances of their dislocations, have stamped the Americas and Caribbean with different configurations and hybrid forms of religious identities and imaginations with historic and ritual roots in Africa. In Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, Southern United States (New Orleans Voodoo and South Carolina Gullah, Yoruba Villages in Oyotunji, South Carolina and South Florida), and other spaces in the Caribbean and America.<sup>85</sup> In addition to purely religious purposes contemporary African immigrants also utilize the religious arena toward engaging in transnational politics and identity formation in American society.<sup>86</sup>

African Immigrants also engender immigrant Churches in different Western metropolises. The salience of African immigrants' churches in the West, especially in Europe has been given prominent attentions. Thus, Aladura Churches, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Matthew Ashimolowo's founded and led, Kingsway International Church in London, Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in the Netherlands, and other religious entities are prominently noted as providing a significant niche and space of cultural and faith expressions to African immigrants. Further, these religious establishments like the London-based Kingsway International are tremendously shaping the religious ambience of their urban cline, providing relevant spiritual and social services, thus enormously affirming the spiritual identity, existential relevance, and social renown.<sup>87</sup>

Social science research and observations indicate the centrality of religion within the African consciousness, especially as it helps as a significant aspect of their existences and source of adjustment and coping within American societies.<sup>88</sup> Further, religion also holds a vital place within the social and self-consciousness of Americans as it constructs social identity and community.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the American social space offers African immigrants the optimal space and advantage for expressing their religious faith and spirituality while resident here. Additionally, the democratic heritage expressed in the notion of the separation of church and state also functions to grant freedom toward the free exercise of different forms of religions and spiritualities, and this has been noted to be at the source of its popular

attraction, durable power and influence of religion in American society, (De Tocqueville, 294–301).

The immigration processes can be enormously stressful, creating traumatic stressors due to rapid somatic and psychological changes experienced by individuals. In fact, immigrants in America, including adolescents are noted to experience bodily changes, becoming more obese within ten years of immigration. The same prevalent obesity trend has been noted to be heightened among second-born children of immigrants, specifically those who are native-born, than those in sending countries, especially among Hispanics and Asian-Americans.<sup>90</sup> In spite of the variations between immigrant groups such changes adversely impact negatively upon the self-perception of most immigrants and offspring, especially within a society that values bodily appearances, and specifically slim body type.

In fact, an analysis by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis suggests that good looks, often defined relatively cultural aesthetics that is significantly racially predicated upon such notions as race and ethnicity has been linked to better income. According to the examination of surveys by Research Analyst, Kristie Engermann and economist, Michael Owyang certain stereotypes regarding employees such as being tall, slender, and attractive possess significant positive effect on income earnings.<sup>91</sup> Perceived thus, such considerations can negatively affect the earning chances of many non-whites and those persons that fall outside the stereotypical parameters that define such bodily aesthetics. Given that the body type of many Africans do not often fit into such stereotypical categories and favored aesthetics<sup>92</sup> such canons can potentially hamper and minimize the employment chances and high earning potentials of many African immigrants, disadvantageously deprived and eclipsed in competing fairly within the labor markets.

Such situation further exacerbates the conditions of African immigrants within the labor market. Black African immigrants are observed as disadvantaged in terms of earning returns in comparison to their high level of educational attainment within the United States. Further in comparison with their black African-Americans and Caribbean immigrants' peers they earn the least when controlled for level of educational attainment.<sup>93</sup> Previous studies regarding income earnings also show that the within group category relative to African immigrants show the disadvantageous income earning handicap of black-African immigrants, in comparison to their fellow white-African immigrants, even when controlled relative to same gender membership.<sup>94</sup>

This earning disparity also reveals a further gulf within this in-group's level of educational attainment. Kollehon and Eule, argues that whites, especially South African immigrants are more likely to have higher and

comparably American favored educational attainments than their continental black immigrant peers. This viewpoint attempts to saliently locate the structuring predictors for such disparity as a factor of racial and ethnicity variables, (Kollehon and Eule, 1163–1190). Therefore, against such backdrops the further introduction of stereotypical taxonomic differences relative to body-types and differences is likely to negatively impact on African immigrants, whose body types differs essentially from the preferred normative standards of bodily aesthetics from the socially constructed American criteria, specifically those privileged by white and corporate America. Such stressors, especially those provoked by racism and discrimination can negatively affect the health and overall wellbeing of African immigrants, described as having the best health in a self-rated study measuring Black and white health disparity.<sup>95</sup>

Powerlessness has been inextricably tied to the black experience, so much that “the closer one is to Africa, the more like one would be victim of racism.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, racial discrimination functions to attribute social deficiency to African immigrants on many levels, among which is their foreign accents and presumed lower English language skills, which has been used to affects their earnings and promotions,<sup>97</sup> contributing to their market value diminishment and capable to crassly affect their physical and mental health statuses. Their emotional wellbeing can be seriously endangered especially given their ardent efforts and determination to succeed within the labor place. As a result, many African immigrants appeal and subscribe to religion and various forms of spiritualities toward satisfying and nurturing their emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing in the midst of such existential challenges.

Within such contexts, appeal to spirituality and higher transcendental powers prescribed by religion can become an attractive option. Religious entities and spiritual values can become a helpful resource in dealing with stress issues. It can also offer a convenient milieu where immigrants can enhance their self-identity, achieve feeling of self-worth, engender community, and offer positive space for the affirmation of cultural identities and expressions that are meaningfully congruent with immigrants’ social identities and sense of selves. Religious arena can also provide enriched ways toward which immigrants form and expand their social networks in improving their wellbeing qualitatively. Religious spaces, especially Christian churches, have been observed to be helpful in this sense among Samoan immigrants in urban California.<sup>98</sup>

A study of Samoan immigrants in San Francisco reveals the mode of such stresses and its effects on healthcare.<sup>99</sup> In fact, among African immigrants, it has been noted that relatively young Nigerian immigrants between

the ages of 40 and 55 are dying, mainly due to factors of stress, (Ndubuike, 91). These processes of transplantations of religious consciousness and rituals helps to bridge the dynamics of hiatus dislocating, that contiguously shreds the linearity of their spatial and historical experiences. Therefore, they attempt to recreate the broken linearity of their existential, spatial, and temporal trajectories toward creative re-creation of new modalities of survival. Engaged in the processes that engenders the realignment of their hiatus conditions, contemporary African immigrants, like their past and forcefully enslaved forebears in the Americans, attempt toward reframing the broken sheds of their past historicity and existential experiences through the processes of revitalization and disjointed copulation of the past orders and novel formations into certain cognitive and coping trajectories.

Such creative attempts critically credence their intelligent and perforce constructive ways of shaping identities, toward ensuring social integrations into their new ecological and social niches. Thus, the diverse modalities they engage and institutions that they found become positive channels for coping, navigating, and negotiating the parameters of their novel territorial and past mnemonic spaces. These dynamics act to reproduce and reconfigure old and new formations. It also functions toward as a coalescing tool nurturing the transformation of such formations into hybridized translations and idioms of transcendental intersections between the purely spiritual and the purely material spheres of the existential order. In this mode, therefore, African immigrants' religious communities, especially institutions, constitute an arena of spiritual exchange, spatial interstices as the crossroad between the purely divine and the mundane human affairs of the African immigrants.

In this manner, African immigrants' religious spaces, are arena of meta-economic exchanges and form a unique ecology, where within the cybernetic exchange between the spiritual and material, certain resolute outcomes are produced. Therefore, essentially like all religions, the African immigrants' religious spaces are embedded within the reciprocity of social exchanges and spiritual productions help individuals to maintain certain equilibrium within the recurrent reproductive and sometimes unstable features of the social order. African immigrants' religious formations are to a certain level resilient constituted as positive structures and systems that perforce the creation of social homeostasis within the social order that affects their adherents. Therefore, African immigrants' religious establishment attempt to maintain close links with their members, and cogently partaking in the diurnally stressful anxieties, vicissitudes, and even celebratory joys of in the lives of their members. It is in this way that the sermons and rituals performed by many of such establishment become

relevant, not just as abstract theological constructs, but texts of existential meaning. Thus, sermons become more than sermons for its own sake but as ethical constructs and sources of spiritual encouragements and existential blueprints.

The significant role of religion relative to the adjustment processes of immigrants are rife in the academic literatures dealing with both the older and newer immigration waves to America.<sup>100</sup> Robert Anthony Orsi's study of the Madonna on 115th Street among Harlem's New York Italians reflects the mode in which immigrants' religious and ritual constructs continue to consolidate and reinforce group identity and bestow a source of deep personal and community devotional spirituality. Though Orsi's *Madonna of 115th Street* buttress ritual idioms that though derived from earlier immigrants' continually serve toward crystallizing the relevant social and ethnic identities of the contemporary Italian-American within Harlem New York, even long after most of the transformation of the immigrants' identity and population through such means as changed legal status as settlers and citizens, and even death.<sup>101</sup>

The Senegalese transplantation and transformation of the Murid Moslems in New York, also images the dynamics within which African immigrants also stamp their cultural identity upon their ecological cline. Apart from the Murid Moslems, different Christian churches, sects, and congregations initiated, administered, and controlled by African immigrants are agents of identity shaping social dynamics. Other African immigrants are also agents of the perpetuation of African traditional religions in the United States. These actors help toward interpreting certain religious idioms present, but vaguely understood by the American and New World adherents. They also learn new trajectories for their own spiritual enrichment. In fact, among the Yoruba derived religions of the New World, there is a transnational network between the American adherents and the aboriginal sources in West Africa, in which African immigrants play major roles.

Controlling for variable of religion constitutes a veritable way of evaluating the modes of the construction of social identity among African immigrants, and specifically those in St. Louis. Therefore, religion is hypothesized as a significant variable within the referential dynamics that shapes the production of social identity among immigrant populations in general, and specifically within American urban domains. Different events and stresses help to reinforce the place and role of religions and spirituality in the lives of African immigrants in the United States. African immigrants are noted to experience heightened stress level as a result of the salience of racism, in either overt or subtle forms, especially in their workplaces. Further, black African immigrants experience lots of stress raising their

children within the inherent cultural divide they found themselves, given the sometimes contradictory demands placed upon them by the differing cultural value-orientations for raising children as defined by the canonical requirements of their dual cultural referents, namely their aboriginal African cultural norms and those cultural requirements sanctioned by American society. Such dynamics equally reflects transformations and the interplay between agency, structures, social systems, and culture.<sup>102</sup>

The issue of children rearing sometimes necessitates subscription for new cultural prescriptions and requirements for success. Therefore, most African immigrants upon having children move from the inner city to suburbs, especially in search of crime free environment and good schools, with zero-tolerance for crimes. Such processes also introduce its stressors.<sup>103</sup> Some African immigrants as a result make enormous sacrifices, and at times reach breaking points, stressed financially and mentally, as they are pressured to engage in longer work hours and additional jobs, in making ends meet.

Religion and various spiritual practices offer succor and solace in the face of such circumstances. Religious arena organizes adherents as a community of faith, but also of persons who share their deepest issues with their ministers and fellow adherents. Thus, within these spaces adherents networking spaces where African immigrants parents share information on parentage, seek spiritual and pastoral counseling from their spiritual and religious leaders, and also offer opportunities such as formal and informal support groups. Equally, the internalization of values and complexities of social relationships within a complex society also led to high rates of divorces among some African immigrants leaving many financially, ethically, spiritually, and emotionally depleted, broken, and devastated, (Ndu-buikwe, 93).

Many at such times find it easier to communicate with their religious ministers, especially those who understand their physical and cultural predicaments. As Handlin notes of the Irish and German immigrants of the 19th centuries to America, immigrant religious establishments offers succor in the midst of debilitating stress and anxiety, (Handlin, 105–06; Nwadiora, 58–71). African immigrants have documented their identity struggles and shock following immigration. In one study of professional African immigrant beneficiaries of the Diversity Visa Lottery resident post-immigration in the United States for about two year poignantly indicated their frustration, despair, anxiety, and difficulties, primarily as a result of the mismatch between their pre-immigration expectations and the experience of their lived existential realities.<sup>104</sup> Such experiences heighten the religious consciousness among African immigrants.



Further, the arid welcome and maltreatments melted to African immigrants, by both officials and lay persons in such institutions especially referenced along discriminations and attitudes often interpreted as underpinned by racism within American mainstream denominations of their pre-immigration affiliation in their aboriginal homelands dislocate and disenchant many sadly dislodging them and often leading to severance of faith ties. Such persons through questing for meaningful religious communities and spaces capable of affirming their humanity and sanctioning their unique personhood, as well as validating their cultural heritages and offering avenues for nurturing their spiritual faith seek more familiar faith grounds often populated by people of their own kind, defined mainly either by race, continental or national criteria. Many African immigrants feel that such arena allow for more somatic and spiritual forms of self-expressions, freedom, and emotional solace. Within such ambience African immigrant's religious institutions, denominations, or congregations in turn, dialectically attempt to foster among their members the sense of community and milieu for self-affirmation.

Further, America privileges the Anglo-culture as its dominant cultural paradigm. Within such assignment of signification, American society privileges racism and discriminations. Urban America continues to reflect the different realities of years of racial and ethnic discrimination, victimization, and marginalization of non-whites through direct and subtle means, at both the private, public, and systemic levels. These diverse forms of subjugation and human denigration, based upon racial profiling attempt to achieve permanent emotional and personality damages. African immigrants within these circumstances draw upon all kind of resources that included their spirituality and religious practices, placing their hope and faith in God. Foreign-born African Americans have notably outlined the interplaying impact of American racism upon their personal and professionals.<sup>105</sup>

## **AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS RELIGIOUS VALUES, PRACTICES, AND INSTITUTIONAL PARADIGMS**

African immigrants to America have been noted to appropriate religious idioms, values, and institutions in framing their adaptation, coping, and integration within urban America, (Kamya, 154–65). African immigrants have constituted toward the sustenance of different forms of religious spiritualities and established institutions in the West. Among Christians, Africans like the three African Popes, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and St. Augustine of Hippo played significant roles and underlined the texture of early Western Christianity. However, they belonged mainly

to the citizenship consciousness that defines them as Romans. In any case, they are Africans.

Many African immigrants who privilege the religious idiom in furthering spirituality and building institutions follow the path set by many African forebears of the Christian faith like Sts. Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, St. Cyprian, and many other Africans who attested to the vitality of the faith in its earlier eras. In this context it is significant that at least three African Popes in the Roman Catholic Church originated from North African territories within the delineations of the Roman Empire. Specifically Abbot Hadrian, an African monk from the area of modern Sudan who left his African Christian Community as a monk in the West. Living first in Italy, he was appointed as the Bishop of the Church in England, but declined. However, he recommended instead his student and colleague, Theodore as Bishop in his place, merely assisting him by committing himself toward the active work of evangelization and vivification of the primitive form of English Christianity, task that made him to found the Catechetical School which became the driving force in crystallizing the growth of English Christianity.<sup>106</sup>

In contemporary times, African religious institutions and spiritual entities are emerging within the globalizing flow of Africans into other polities outside of the continent, and specifically to the West. The salience of African immigrants' patronized or established institutions have been observed among African immigrants Christians belonging to Pentecostal and immigrant initiated Churches in Germany, Netherland, and Israel.<sup>107</sup> Yoruba immigrants in London have founded African Indigenous and newer Pentecostal or Interdenominational Churches, including Islamic prayer centers, (Oyetade, 77–80). The Senegalese in New York perpetuated their uniquely Islamic and African Murid tradition by organizing a Mosque and center there.<sup>108</sup> Social and religious rituals are appropriated by African immigrants in defining their social identity in America. Thus Ghanaian-African immigrants in the United States utilize the Asante Kingship or Chieftaincy enthronement rituals as idioms of social identity definition that constitutes them both as Ghanaians and Americans.

African Immigrants are also the sources of immigrant Churches in different Western cities. The salience of African immigrants' churches in the West, especially in Europe has been given prominent attentions. Thus, Aladura Churches, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Kingsway International Church in London, Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in the Netherlands, and other religious entities prominently provide significant niches and spaces for validating cultural identity and expressing faith among African immigrants. Further, these religious establishments like the

London-based Kingsway International are tremendously shaping the religious ambience of the urban spaces they occupy, providing relevant spiritual and social services, thus enormously affirming their existential renown and social influences<sup>109</sup> Social science research and observations indicate the centrality of religion within the African consciousness, especially as it helps as a significant aspect of their existences and source of adjustment and coping within American societies, (Kamya, 154–65; Ogbaa; Ndubuike, 94–95).

Long before the post-1965 immigration stream, African immigrants to the United States were actively associated with the pursuit of religious studies, teaching, and pastoral ministry. This was the case of Orishatukeh Faduma, whose rescued parents off a slave boat by the British Naval boats were taken to British Guyana, where he was born William J. Davis. However, he returned at an early age to Sierra Leone, studied there and in London, and later returned to Sierra Leone. From here he departed for the United States in 1890 traveling first to Philadelphia to the headquarters of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, went on to teach at Kitrell Normal Institute, an AME seminary in North Carolina.

Orishatukeh later went to the Yale Divinity School in 1891 where he obtained his Bachelors of Divinity (B.D) in 1894, and thereafter continued his studies in Philosophy of Religion. He was ordained a Congregational minister on May 9th, 1895. He worked in the Southern United States and with the American Missionary Association he promoted African education. Briefly he returned to Africa, departing for America on September 19, 1923, becoming a dean of the Virginia Theological Seminary, and he died in High Point, North Carolina on January 25, 1946.<sup>110</sup>

James Kwegyir Aggrey came to study in the United States in 1898 after been inspired by religious ministers and ideals, especially those manifested through the agency of colonial European missionaries and even African-American religious authorities, such as Bishop John Bryan Small of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ). The idea was that Aggrey would return to consolidate the AMEZ in Ghana. However, Aggrey's held a contrary vision. Upon his graduation, he decided to remain in America, where he married an African-American woman and begun teaching at Livingstone College while equally engage din ministry to AMEZ African American congregants in North Carolina to the consternation of Bishop John Bryan Small whose initial ideas it was to send him to study in the United States, under the auspices of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ).<sup>111</sup> Azikiwe utilized religious colleges for his learning, studying theology and at times preached in some African-American Churches. Nkrumah did the same. Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Kwameh Nkrumah utilized

religion in various way toward enhancing their ability to cope and adapt in America.<sup>112</sup>

The contemporary post-1965 immigrants draw significantly upon religious idioms and rituals in constructing their immigration processes, from pre-immigration decision making to their eventual successful settlements. Rituals such as prayers are drawn upon by immigrants, including Africans, in ensuring the success of their immigration process. Religious establishments and their affiliates involved within such dynamics are also equally frequented by these immigrants as significant elements in the constructing of their lives and structural adaptation within their new host nations.<sup>113</sup> Rituals serve to richly help them cope with existential stress and to ensure the building of social identity and community within their new host societies, and in some cases their novel homeland. In this way, Ghanaian immigrants in New England find the enthronement rituals of a new Ashantene, performed every four years, significant in establishing and buttressing their cultural and religious identity. This ritual helps to reinforce their Asante identity and establish continuity, in spite of the geospatial dissonance that attempts to relativize their cultural identity as Asante and Ghanaians. Such linkages while engaged as a cultural referential of linearity, in spite of spatial dissonance, affirms the continuity of culture within discrete transnational spaces.

Further, it buttresses the significance of how these linkages with their cultural pasts revivifies their lives within the scheme of cultural continuity and perpetuation. Additionally, within this same ritual realm and practice such activities also reveal the discontinuity evident within their ancestral consciousness and spatial order, as they reinvent new cultural idioms differing from the Ghanaian aboriginal as defined by the conditions of their varying spatial and configurative contexts.<sup>114</sup> As Obeng depict, African immigrants are both retainers and creative inventors of novel religious forms and ritual praxes by hermeneutically assigning new significations to their rituals and practices. In processing their existential purviews and social conditions through the mediation of ritual but exegetically modulated through symbolic re-readings and reformulations of older cultural and ritual referents engenders new cultural texts, that are authentic within the heuristic consciousness of certain generations, especially second generations and their descents, within the diasporic community.

By reshaping rituals and religious practices in this way, the new cultural variants introduced by the contingencies of immigrant social realities can radically and substantially differentiate these from their aboriginal forms.<sup>115</sup> At times such dynamics become the source of heightened conflicts and even schisms, (Bodnar, 144). On the one hand, through such

mediations they maintain continuity with their cultural past, distinguishing themselves from their new immigrant existential ambience, while equally assertively differentiating and contrasting their novel modalities with those of their aboriginal past, together with its existential pervading hold and cultural significations. Through such innovative prescriptions novel symbols and signs emerge that equally reframes the social praxis and spatial context of social relations modifying the structural configurations of previous cultural markers and significations that were maintained as existential frames of reference. In publicly projecting the discrete fields of religious and social rituals, African immigrants are aided, in ongoing and concurrent ways, with constructing multiple sets of valuable social and cultural identities necessary for their existential convenience.

Bifocal referencing of varying cultural idioms offers African immigrants the unique opportunities to selectively adopt and distill which expressive forms of cultural identities to privilege in constructing their identities, within the markets of competing cultural ideologies and idiosyncratic values. Religious practices and rituals offer cogent resources and provide means of distinctive exchange for creating cultural distinctions. While rituals embody these distinctions as it marks the historical realities and cultural anomie faced by the immigrants, it serves as a tool of resolution by making the two cultural realities co-present within the perceptive mirror that the immigrants view themselves.

The profound meaning of rituals such as the Ghanaian chieftaincy enthronement rituals transcend the immediate purview where it is performed resiliently functioning within the private and other public spaces that allows Ghanaians, like other African immigrants, to attempt to suture the broken linearity of their cultural pathways. Hiatus agency as fractured consciousness regarding one's historical and existential conditions—as self and group—provokes a consciousness that engenders attempts at self-rediscovery that aspires to realign the broken linearity caused by temporal dissonance and historical hiatus.<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, controlling for variable of religion constitutes a veritable way of evaluating the modes of the construction of social identity among African immigrants, and specifically those in St. Louis. Therefore, religion is hypothesized as a significant variable within the referential dynamics that shapes the production of social identity among immigrant populations in general, and specifically within American urban domains. Different events and stresses help to reinforce the place and role of religions and spirituality in the lives of African immigrants in the United States. African immigrants are noted to experience heightened stress level as a result of the salience of racism, in either overt or subtle forms, especially in their workplaces.

Further, black African immigrants experience lots of stress raising their children, as a result of differing value orientations between their aboriginal cultural references and the cultural markers evident within American society for raising children. The issue of children rearing also necessitates new cultural prescriptions and requirements for success. Therefore, most African immigrants upon having children move from the inner city to suburbs, especially in search of crime free environment and good schools, with zero-tolerance for crimes. Such processes also introduce its stressors.

Some African immigrants as a result make enormous sacrifices, and at times reach breaking points, stressed financially and mentally, as they are pressured to engage in longer work hours and additional jobs toward making ends meet. Religion and various spiritual practices offer succor and solace in the face of such circumstances. Religious arena organizes adherents as a community of faith, but also of persons who share their deepest issues with their ministers and fellow adherents. Thus, within these spaces adherents networking spaces where African immigrants parents share information on parentage, seek spiritual and pastoral counseling from their spiritual and religious leaders, and also offer opportunities such as formal and informal support groups.

Equally, the internalization of values and complexities of social relationships within a complex society also led to high rates of divorces among some African immigrants leaving many financially, ethically, spiritually, and emotionally depleted, broken, and devastated, (Ndubuike, 93; Nwadiora, 1996). Many at such times find it easier to communicate with their religious ministers, especially those who understand their physical and cultural predicaments. As Handlin notes of the 19th century Irish and German immigrants to America, the contemporary African immigrants' religious purviews and establishments offer succor in the face of debilitating stress and anxiety, (Handlin, 1973; Nwadiora, 1995).

African immigrants' experiences of shock, anxiety, and struggles with constructing identities in the immediate post-immigration period can be intense. Often, this constitutes the features of discussions among and between African immigrants, their relatives, and friends. Phone-talks, emails, and surface letter writing transmit these feelings expressively. One study regarding the post-immigration experiences of professional African immigrants who had been beneficiaries of the Diversity Lottery Visa and resident in the United States for at least two years, poignantly revealed their initial level of diurnal frustration, despair, anxiety, and difficulties in the immediate post-immigration period. Basically, the intensity between mismatching pre-immigration expectations and the lived realities of American diurnal living constituted a significant factor relating to such highly felt emotions.<sup>117</sup>

These kinds of experiences give vent to heightened religious sensitivities among African immigrants. Furthermore, African immigrants are often the subject of unwelcoming attitude and despise, mainly as a result of the preeminent realities of racism in their new environments. Talks about maltreatments and condescending behaviors directed at African immigrants both within private and public space, either overt or covert are also the subject of discussions among African immigrants. The realities of racism often affect and define the world of African immigrants' experiences, especially since majority are blacks, and are easily discernible by their dark skin color and readily differentiated more by their linguistic accents. Racism and discriminations are sometimes unfortunately experienced within the religious milieu, especially those shared by African black immigrants with whites, in mainstream religious institutions. Given that most Africans are affiliated with such religious entities back in their aboriginal homelands, the feelings of rejection and condescending patronizations of cause intense pain and crises that often generate disenchantment and dislocation.

This has led quite a good numbers of African immigrants to abandon these denominations in search of new ambiances that would meet their quests for existential meaningful and a fulfilling religious communities and spaces affirming of their humanity; in sanctioning their personhood, validating their cultural heritages, and nurturing their spirituality and faith. Often times, such experiences drive African immigrants to religious spaces where they would meet with other Africans in finding meaning, sharing their unique and familiar experiences, worship, and experience solace within an in-group milieu. Therefore, African immigrants seek out religious institutions, denominations, or congregations that foster their sense of community, validate their social identity, and affirm their sense of selves, especially those either founded or populated by other African immigrants, or people of similar backgrounds.

Further, America privileges the Anglo culture as its dominant cultural paradigm. Within such assignment of signification, American society privileges racism and discriminations. Urban America continues to reflect the different realities of years of racial and ethnic discrimination, victimization, and marginalization of non-whites through direct and subtle means, at both the private, public, and systemic levels. These diverse derisive forms of subjugation and human denigration, based upon racial profiling dismissively cause permanent emotional pain and crises that can damage a positive sense of self. African immigrants at various levels of society have documented experiences of demeaning racism and destabilizing discriminations that has left trails of emotional scarifications, (Obiakor and Grant, 2000).

## CONCLUSION

African immigrants draw upon all vast arrays of resources, including their spirituality and religious traditions and practices, as repertoires from which they draw strength and hope, as they place access this arena nurtured and support by their faith in either a divine entity or transcendental inner force. Through rituals, African immigrants are enabled in expressing themselves and creatively formatting spaces that can fortify their existential efforts with meaning, and offer cogent hope. Also, these religious spaces, apart from their primary roles of fostering certain forms of spiritualities also provide communities for sharing and mutual support. In this way, African immigrants residing across America, and specifically St. Louis, resiliently through their social and spiritual agencies create and aspires for viable institutions, idioms, and rituals, as tools and resources that suit their existential needs in offering fulfillment and meaning. In seeking relieve they also relive and reenact the different structural dimensions of their diurnal existence. Further, while in some respects, African immigrants' religious institutions can be accused of minimizing acculturation and full assimilation into American, as vestige of religious ethnic enclaves, it must be buttressed that African immigrants diurnal interactions occurs not in such spaces alone, nor in a religious and spiritual vacuum, that mitigates against integration and interpenetrations into the different segments of American lives. St. Louis African immigrants help us to visualize how African immigrants actually live out their religious and spiritual trajectories meaningfully and expressively.

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100. Handlin, 1979; Bodnar, 144–168; Feggang Yagan and Helen Rose Ebaugh, "Transformation in New Immigrant Religions and their Global Implications," *American Sociological Review* 66 no. 2 (2001): 269–288.
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112. Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, (London, 1970), 40–42; Azikiwe, 1970.
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114. Pashington Obeng, “Remembering Through Oath: Installation of African Kings and Queens,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28 no. 3 (1998): 334–56.
115. Such existential transformations of religious institutions, practices, rituals, and idioms have been greatly and variedly underlined in past and current scholarships. See Handlin, 1973, Bodnar, 1985; Fenggang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh, “Transformation in New Immigrants Religion and their Global Implications,” *American Sociological Review* 66 no. 2 (2001): 269–288; Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, “Agents for Cultural Reproduction and Structural Change: The Ironic Role of Women in Immigrant Religious Institutions,” *Social Forces* 78 no. 2 (1999): 585–612.

116. I have advanced this theory of hiatus and its reformulation as a psycho-social dynamics that reference and locate dislocations which through dialectical working actually sprint the drivers of its own transformation through discomfort posture of the alienation this consciousness produces. Novel transcendental consciousness occurs, that propels the generation of reversion to the exotic or nostalgic past, or creating a desire to return that would fundamentally create either a synthesis of both the past and present, or nurture a virulent attempt at reinventing its structural or cognitive qualities, by inducing some connective tissues intended to ensure social suturing. Such processes, I refer to as either the realignment or reformulation of hiatus consciousness in my different writings. See Anthony A. Agbali, "Politics, Rhetoric, and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement," book chapter in Toyin Falola (ed.). *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century*. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002); A recent book by a Ghanaian-Briton, who was returning to Ghana in the attempts at self-discovery reflect such nostalgic consciousness and yearnings among certain second generation descent of African immigrants in their search of Africa. See Ekow Eshun, *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in England and Africa*, (London, UK: Hamish Hamilton [Imprint of Penguin Books], 2005), 1–2. Even immigrants and exiles nurture the nostalgia of such return as in the case of Manthia Diawara return to Guinea. His account is published in Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Among African descent in the diaspora, the salience of this idea of return has been amply underlined by certain sentiments in the past that antedates from the time of slavery, when at the death of a slave surviving peers attach material objects to their corpses praying that the demised by returning to Africa should carry the news of their welfare to their ancestors and kin in Africa, their aboriginal home. This nostalgia of re-alignment that references an aboriginal source underlines the writings of African-Americans such as Alex Harley, *The Roots*, Marita Golden, *Migration of the Heart* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press [Doubleday], 1983), 65; Eddy L. Harris *Native Son: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa*, (New York: Vintage Book [Random], 1992; Richburg, 1998). These last two books copiously resonate each other's sentiments.
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## Chapter Four

# Ethnography of Religion and Spirituality among St. Louisan African Immigrants

Anthony Attah Agbali

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses the modes and impacts of St. Louisan African immigrants' religiosity and various forms of expressive spiritualities, including the valuable role of their institutional trajectories and specific ritual modalities that frame the construction of their social identities. It also focuses upon the functional idioms and trajectories that serve as coping strategies in mitigating the stress of the immigration process and their diurnal existence within urban America. The African immigrants to St. Louis are vital contributors toward the development of their host communities. Many among them are entrepreneurs and professionals, such as physicians, lawyers, computer scientists, engineers, and small business owners. In their diverse operational engagements, they vivify different aspects of human development and the social ecology of the St. Louis metro area.<sup>1</sup>

Fundamentally, affiliations with and participation in different religious establishments constitute in some sense the mode by which St. Louis' African immigrants positively affect the ecology and advancement of the area. America's African immigrants' spiritual well-being has been found to interact with other social and demographic variables in enhancing their overall existential well-being.<sup>2</sup> Equally, religious entities that are the initiatives and those privileged by African immigrants affect the ecology of the religious market and commercial exchanges. African immigrants' religious establishments build or rent physical infrastructures, employ personnel, and purchase related items. Conferences, religious gatherings and other activities organized by these religious entities bring people into the area and help to aid its economic prospects. Businesses that deal with marketing religious materials and spiritual objects are also boosted by the presence and patronization of such entities. By themselves, these African immigrants'

religious organizations also add to the diversity of religious markets and spiritual alternatives available to Americans, given the certain novel appeal and forms of religious expression.<sup>3</sup>

African immigrants' varying forms of religious expression also offer special spiritual idioms for their utilization. Apart from purely religious events, other forms of private and public spirituality such as coronation rites, wake keeping, naming ceremonies, traditional and contemporary forms of marriage engagement and cultural rites, new yam festivals, house blessings, shower parties for pregnant mothers, churching rites, funeral rites and other communal ritualistic events that are not strictly religious in form reflect the diverse nature of spiritual ceremonies employed by African immigrants within their immigrant space. These activities help to enhance their culture and abet their mutual coping and integration with the different vagaries of American urban life.

African immigrants in the St. Louis area participate in many religious institutions and entities. African immigrants also establish their own religious institutions in the area, or form part of a congregation within extant mainstream religious entities or denominations. Sometimes, these newly formed religious institutions transmit religious practices peculiar to their aboriginal African context, giving vent to "reverse colonialism" within the process of religious globalization.<sup>4</sup> At other times, these are totally novel initiatives as *ex creatio nihilo* processes, without a priori religious sources, founded by African immigrants in America and ordered universally and inclusively. African immigrants are also ministers, pastors, priests, imams, and sheiks of established religious orders like the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist and Islamic faiths, and other denominational entities. African immigrants are also found as qualified Professional Chaplains within different local-area hospitals and healthcare facilities.

In this chapter, I shall focus on three main religious trajectories that shape the spiritualities and religious values of African immigrants within the St. Louis area. These are selected sites that I have attempted to engage, and to conduct ethnographic research relative to my doctoral dissertation. Two of these religious entities are Christian, which I will discuss more specifically, and the third relates to African immigrant Islamic adherents in St. Louis. Of the Islamic adherents, I shall discuss more broadly, because I have not done any specific site-related studies relative to this group. However, in meeting with individual African immigrants resident in the area who practice this religion I have acquired a much broader perspective regarding their modes of religious practices and spiritualities.

More specifically, my research focuses upon multiple religious sites and entities where African immigrants worship. Of these, two main religious

sites, the Jesus House of All Nations, Kirkwood, Missouri, an affiliate of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), and the United African Presbyterian Church, Rock Hill, Missouri. Other sites of interest include the Islamic Foundation of Greater St. Louis another religious and spiritual establishment involving or catering to the physical, spiritual, and psychosocial needs of African immigrants.

## A. AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS' CHRISTIANITY

Those who have moved to St. Louis from Africa appear to feel most welcome in religious institutions led by fellow immigrants, The Jesus House of all Nations in St. Louis, located in Kirkwood, is led by Pastors Olufemi Omotayo as head pastor and assisted by Pastor "Prof" Olufemi Akawo (assistant pastor). The United African Presbyterian Church is located in the Rock Hill area of St. Louis and administered by Rev. Dr. Jemimah Ngatiah. The United African Presbyterian Church has a current membership of about 35 members and growing. The congregation has close ties with the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery of the Presbyterian-USA, who provides oversight over its activities.<sup>5</sup>

However, the fact that these religious sites have a predominant worshipping African immigrant populations, or that these entities are led by African immigrants, does not limit their membership solely to this population. In Jesus House, there are some non-Africans and non-Nigerian members, including area natives. Racially, the memberships within both churches are mainly black. Jesus House has one active white member who is actively involved in the ministry of the church. The reason for the choice of these two is predicated upon their significant African immigrant population. The RCCG, in spite of its global posture and widespread global evangelistic efforts, still remains essentially composed of Nigerian immigrants. Its essential immigrant feature contrasts with its global ideology, within its identity portraiture as the Jesus House for all Nations.<sup>6</sup>

The United African Presbyterian church is equally constituted of majority blacks, and though operating within the matrix of a mainstream and universally recognized denomination, the congregation fundamentally attempts to privilege African culture, such as the use of Swahili in its liturgy and within its spaces. This environment is equally reinforced by the East African cuisine that is served after their liturgical service in the hall. The flyer of the United African Presbyterian church notably portrays its vision as specifically slanted toward African immigrant issues, "The vision of UAPC is to gather people from Africa and help them to process their cultural shocks, to provide spiritual, physical, and material care to those

who are already here, and to help those who are coming to America. It will also be helpful for them to have a place to fellowship and worship God in their original languages.” African immigrants’ churches show an intriguing clustering along national lines, and even specifically within each church along certain predominant ethnic delineations. In Jesus House and the United African Presbyterian churches, most of the membership derived from the ethnic area of their leaders. Nigerians and specifically Yoruba predominate within Jesus’ House. In the United African Presbyterian Church, Kenyans and Gikuyu are in the majority. Nigerians and Kenyans, alongside Ethiopians (including Eritreans) and Somalis constitute the highest African immigrant populations in St. Louis. Therefore, it is not surprising that they would be the majority in these churches. Further, different historical trajectories defined religious histories and cultural sentiments differently, among and between African national and ethnic groups. The religious arena as the site for communal and sentimental sharing specifically structures and reifies these trajectories in ordering membership.

The choice of RCCG church is intentional, as it allows for measuring of how much of some of the thesis associated with this phenomenon in African is true of new situations, specifically in America. Simply put, there are many transformations between the church’s African sources and their realities presented by the new locations. Fundamentally, given that the RCCG is purely an African initiative, as a Church founded in Africa and now in the reversal of missionary roles and consciousness, now proselytizing in the west, it offers an opportunity at examining the salient cultural trajectories related to the how race and class can impact the diffusion of Christianity trans-spatially.

The members are about a hundred and fifty families, it is young, and it shows all the signs of a religious organization attempting to entrench itself within its ecological niche. Secondly, observations of African religiosity have also pointed to the salience of Pentecostal and evangelical Christian modalities among younger Africans on the continent. The United African Presbyterian Church offers a significant case of how African congregations function within predominantly white American denominations. How does the specificity of their institutional label and heritage help to enhance or stymie their ability at social reproduction and reconstitution of the different spiritual and theological trajectories that demarcate and nuance their African social identity? Further, their recent historical formation also offers an opportunity to evaluate different dimensions of their structuring over time. In this way, one is able to measure against certain changes as conditioned by different factors within their denominational and faith experience.

Crucially, I intend to assess how African immigrants, through their spiritualities and the idioms of specific institutional trajectories, help to frame the construction of social identity among African immigrants. I also attempt to focus upon the modes in which these values and trajectories function toward helping the coping and adjustment processes of African immigrants in urban America. In spite of the general nature of this presentation, I shall focus also on two religious institutional entities with which I have been engaged, to reflect the roles of such entities in helping African immigrants in the area. The choice of these two is mainly for referential purposes and selectively privileged because of their relatively recent origins in the area, and the relative size of their African immigrant populations.

Further, African immigrants tend to shun any overture that attempts to engage their time individually outside of a unified institutional forum. I came to this realization in 2004, when I started mapping ways of engaging in my research. Using the opportunity of the Nigerian Day Celebration, I produced and distributed more than two hundred and fifty flyers on two different occasions. Of these I received only one reply. Again, in 2005 at a church reception I tried again as I had the opportunity of introducing my research to the adherents, while requesting any of them interested in voluntary participation to contact me. On this later occasion, not a single person did. This litmus test was instructive as I gained first hand experience that communal settings and organizational spaces are better sites for engaging, accessing, and researching this population through participation in their activities and rapport establishment. I found this the surest way to interact intensely and to gain the confidence of the adherents. I realized the significant opportunities that this arena offers, and thus I tried to gain access to different African immigrants' religious communities, based upon my limited knowledge, personal contacts, and sometimes newspaper features and adverts in published materials, such as newspapers, brochures, flyers, and other useful sources.

Based upon such knowledge, I attempted gaining access to religious sites and institutions catering to the needs of African immigrants. I focused on this site utilizing participant observation methods and ethnography. This formed the major basis for my observations. I also utilized different resources such as newspapers articles, organizational publications—brochures, pamphlets, bulletins, leaflets, and flyers, as well as internet publications, multimedia, audio-visual materials, such as video clips of events, recorded audio CDs and cassettes. I found these multimedia tools very resourceful in the task of mnemonic recalls.

Given the multi-sited nature of this study, ethnographic methods and participant observations offered useful instruments for capturing discrete



events through field notes. The vastness of the urban area defined the level of selectivity regarding sites and data to be studied. Such considerations hinged upon ability to access the site, convenient location, demographics, and proximity, though the latter did not count as much. All sites were located within about half hour driving range from my residence using the highway. My fervent intention is to be very inclusive of the multiplex variations that define the social landscape of the St. Louis' African immigrants' community, religious institutions, and social or ethnic organizations and associations.

These sites offer me a specific albeit nuanced view of the differing modes of African immigrants' religious and spiritual operations and functioning. Further, the relatively small churchgoing population for these establishments also offered credibility toward building rapport and enhancing better interactions toward my research goals. Active participation allows me to monitor ongoing changes over time in terms of demographics, physical and ritual ecology, and structures. Observation regarding the modes of agency and structure interacts dialectically in building institutions. The structural properties that affect African immigrants, especially their spiritualities and religious experiences, were among the items I sought to understand, as well as these immigrants as creative agents, whose activities act upon structure to build and alter social relations and constitute a certain social ecology. Fundamentally, I was interested in issues regarding the phenomenon of how African immigrants' religious establishments affect the phenomenon of "reverse colonialism"—the process which enables non-western elements influence developments in the west (Giddens, 34) within the texture of religious globalization.

### *1. The Jesus House for all Nations*

Among the African-founded religious entities in St. Louis is the Jesus House for All Nations, an affiliate branch of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The RCCG was founded in Nigeria with twelve members in 1951, headed by the late Pastor Josiah Akindayomi, initially as a schismatic branch of the indigenous Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, Christian prayer-oriented Aladura Churches. The RCCG has since transformed greatly under the leadership of its current General Overseer, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, into an evangelical church with over 5,000 classical and model parishes globally.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus House of all Nations, in St. Louis, is a member of the RCCG. The RCCG follows an organic reproductive scheme. Its diverse branches carry out the work of evangelization through reproductive fission by opening and nurturing the existence of new branches. The goal in Nigeria is to

open a Church within five minutes of walking distance for any worshipper. In spite of such a diffusive agenda these branches maintain a central organization with the parent branch and hierarchy. The new formation evolves out of specific church families that constitute a kind of extensive kinship clan network, in shaping social and ecclesiastical relationships. Therefore, a branch is a member of a family, out of which it has its origin. This reproductive structure in organically breeding new church formations propagates the movement.

The Jesus House of all Nations was established in St. Louis around 2000 under the leadership of Pastor Olufemi Omotayo, its current head pastor. Pastor Omotayo was previously a resident Missionary Pastor in Austria prior to migrating to the United States as a missionary for the RCCG. He briefly resided in Florida, before relocating to St. Louis following his appointment as the founding pastor of Jesus House, St. Louis. According to Pastor Omotayo, the driving force behind the establishment of the Jesus House Church is the current assistant pastor, Olufemi Akawo. The formation of Jesus House is predicated upon the forceful nature of Akawo's persistent appeal to the RCCG to start a St. Louis branch.

Prior to the establishment of the St. Louis RCCG Jesus House church, Pastor Omotayo noted that there was a negotiation with different other



Figure 4-1. Worship Space, Jesus House of All Nations, RCCG, St. Louis, Missouri

branches of the RCCG, regarding the sustenance of the budding church. These negotiations involved four branches of the RCCG, mainly deriving from the Ikoyi Family of the Four model parishes that evolved when the restructuring of the RCCG occurred after the ascension of the incumbent General Overseer, Pastor Adeboye. The four branches involved in the negotiation toward sustaining the new Jesus House Church St. Louis were, Jesus House, London, United Kingdom; Jesus House Chicago, Illinois; Jesus House, Baltimore, Maryland; and Boston, Massachusetts. This negotiated agreement was seen as fundamental toward nurturing the foundations of the new church in St. Louis.

This agreement was to cover the major seed expenditures of the baby-branch by providing monthly funds for about six months, while the new St. Louis branch found its bearings. Some of the affiliated churches either partially met their obligations or reneged upon their commitments, not meeting the terms of the negotiated deal. Pastor Omotayo noted that this period was personally and spiritually trying. Like most new beginnings of a major venture, the initial attempts were not easy. The nature of this difficulty was discerned from a sermon regarding this early formative period, enunciating the difficulties of its initial affairs and the commitment of Pastor Omotayo toward achieving success.

In this sermon, Pastor Omotayo noted the complexity of the negotiated arrangement with the other churches that committed themselves toward ensuring the foundational success of Jesus House St. Louis. Some of these affiliates unfortunately either partly or totally reneged upon their agreed commitments. At this early stage, survival was difficult. Pastor Omotayo averred that even his father called, offering the church financial support until the church's fortunes improved. Since this involved paying his own salary he felt ashamed and humiliated; "as a man with a wife, with two children, at this time my old man was still giving me pocket money!" In spite of his dented ego, he nonetheless had to agree when through divine revelation God scolded him for being proud and arrogant.<sup>8</sup>

This origin-related vignette reveals multiple realities regarding the immigrant context. First, it portrays the mold in which immigrants' agency can engender autonomous institutions and produce social change. In the case of Jesus House, such agency was the product of Assistant Pastor Aka-wo's instrumentality and desire. Following an increase in the immigrants' population, he tried to pressure the Redeemed Christian Church authorities to open a St. Louis branch. This also was an attempt at reproducing familiar dispositions helpful in translating the immigrants' spatial and spiritual

experiences through the familiar prisms of their cultural and religious constructs. Agencies such as noted can richly contribute toward the valuable role of building and maintaining the modalities of communal interactions and social institutions. Therefore, the creative and proactive agency of immigrants serve as a source of institutional growth, ecological change, and elongation of value-orientations. Secondly, this affirms the noted salience of religiosity and its assumed significance in the lives and functioning of Nigerians, and Nigerian immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

The Jesus House church is a predominantly Nigerian immigrant Church, though it has few non-African members. It reflects an instance on the religious evolution within African Christianity, radically transforming its engendered structures toward the appropriation of novel spiritual dispositions and dogmatic emphases. For instance, the Pentecostal explosion has blurred the barriers between Pentecostal and evangelical dogma, as well as between independency and Pentecostal-charismatic churches.<sup>10</sup> Scholars would easily classify among charismatic or neo-Pentecostal Christian movements, especially given its emphasis on, and integration of, local and global evangelistic outlooks.<sup>11</sup> The Pentecostal idiom helps to mediate the structuring of immigrants' differentiation and social identity constructions. Thus, its idioms and spaces provide immigrants with a channel toward validating their social identity and difference, especially in an amply hostile and prejudicial milieu.<sup>12</sup>

The prevalence of American racism that devalues blacks makes such idioms appealing. It has been helpful to immigrants' sense of identity and social differentiation in the sense that the Charismatic-Pentecostal paradigm describes the RCCG, although not exclusively. The RCCG vibrantly embraces this paradigm but uniquely remains unbound, by limiting categories and any labeling within the religious field. Pastor Omotayo affirms that the RCCG has "none—other—kind—of—expression but itself." Jesus House embodies different forms of Christian faith expressions and praxes. The United African Presbyterian church is a predominantly East African (mainly Kenyan) congregation within the Presbyterian-USA church. In these two sites, I have actively engaged in participant observation and conducted ethnography.

Immigrants are significant agents of social transformations that affect the spiritual and natural ecology. Also, the phenomenon of immigration does not merely affect demographic transformations solely but possess ramifications for other social arenas, thus within its salience and potency capably functioning to enhance the transformation of social and physical spaces and the capability toward engendering positive and credible institutions necessary for constructing social identity, validating *a priori* identities

and helping the navigation and adjustments to new forms of existential experiences.

In Jesus House in St. Louis, different events constitute modes of operations on a weekly level. These events are the service held every morning, consisting in general of praise worship (songs), the Pastors' or visiting Pastors' sermon, offerings, testimonies, announcements, and dismissal. This order is often the norm, interspaced and interlaced with songs at different points. Occasionally, this order is altered slightly. The worship is not rigidly formal and a sense of the informal cordiality is depicted by the Pastor's jokes, congregational refrains and occasional interjectory comments.

The testimonies are not held throughout the month. Mainly, the testimonies are allocated in their own time on the first Sunday of each month. At times, when the demand is high, allowances are made to ensure its continuity in other Sunday services. Also, special situations that warrant immediate testimonies are discerned on an *ad hoc* basis. For instance, on Sunday, October 22nd, 2005, following news of a plane crash in Nigeria, with over a hundred persons on board, and the death of the Nigerian First Lady, Mrs. Obasanjo, in the aftermath of a cosmetic surgery in Spain, the Pastor after informing the congregation with this news and leading them in prayers, allowed a member of the congregation to give testimony.

The congregant's wife, a resident in Nigeria, was to have traveled to Lagos from Abuja, and intended to return that same evening on the last plane out of Lagos, which happened to be the ill-fated plane. However, as the testimony presenter avers, he had by some circumstances made a phone call to his wife, and they both decided that she put off the trip. Therefore, he was celebrating God's soteriological intervention in his situation. His sentiment of thanksgiving is focally underlined by his statement: "to go home and meet a corpse! What will I do? I thank God this is not my portion."

Transnationalism, defined as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlements,"<sup>13</sup> is reflected within the African immigrants' religious linkages and transnational networks. This is true for both Jesus House and the United African Presbyterian congregation. Jesus House, while autonomous without tight hierarchical control, is not acephalous: it maintains organizational linkages with the RCCG-Nigeria headquarters—especially as mediated through its RCCG-USA, the coordinating and clearinghouse framework that oversees all RCCG churches in the United States. Jesus House is also engaged in transnationalism in another way, through linkages with other RCCG churches outside of both Nigeria and the United States. I have witnessed the visits and preaching of RCCG pastors resident

in Nigeria and the United Kingdom on at least three occasions, since beginning to participate in its activities.

The United African Presbyterian congregation has a much looser and smaller set of direct linkages to similar ecclesiastical structures in Kenya. Nonetheless, such linkages exist through the mediation of Rev. Ngatia, whenever she travels. Other kinds of linkages are much more cultural practices and faith currents that are transmitted from the Kenyan ecclesiastical cultural space, through travel, visitors from Kenya, and new immigrants. The United African Presbyterian Church is linked to the Presbyterian-USA, in a way that while existing within the United States, their cultural diversity adds value to the transnational claims of universality by the Presbyterian-USA.

Immigrant church spaces also offer opportunities for transnational networking through news sharing, support, prayers, and even subjective narratives that through the spatial arena of their rendition become public, as testimonies of faith. For instance, on the two recent occasions when plane crashes occurred in Nigeria, the Pastor broke this news to the congregation. It was obvious through the verbal sentimental expressions emitted by the adherents that many heard this news for the first time through their pastor.<sup>14</sup> Such dynamics have been affirmed of Immigrants to Houston, as well as among African immigrant churches in Israel and London.<sup>15</sup>

Testimonies are unique formats, utilized mainly by Pentecostal and Charismatic churches or fellowships to render divine interventions in the ordinary events of life, interpreted as extraordinary, miraculous, and even mysterious. It is not just rendition in the normal recounting or recalling, but it is one that is defined by faith, and often invites the auditors toward thanksgiving and to affirm and enhance the qualitative and productive dimensions of faith. Therefore, such subjective testimonies are transfigured within the communal space that privileges and endorse it through affirmation and laudatory thanksgiving to God.

Such testimonials and personal thanksgivings are channels through subjective narratives that affirm the objective delineations of the possibilities of faith; and through these subjective narratives will evolve a strand of the voiced and unvoiced narratives and aspirations of the community, within the shared commonality. Their expressed faith and participative experience of God's working through the material domain and ordinary human processes help to shape the personal fortune and fate of the teller and the community of worshippers. This medium also serves as a means through which adherents immerse themselves profoundly within their faith and the promise of the possibilities offered through the ministry and channel of the church. Therefore, every testimony is a weaving of individual narrators

into the teleological and ontological tapestry which the Church offers and represents.

Further, the space of the presentation of thanksgiving allows for the sharing and internalization of sentiments that enhance bonding. One person's testimony can be representative of the experiences of others within their shared identity of immigration, spiritual journey, and the attempts at constituting meaning out of their variegated experiences and even social positions. Therefore, the space offered by worship, testimony, and the institutional idiom to which they are affiliated provides a vital and powerful arena in which their shared material and spiritual journeys enhance the realization of their commonalities as humans and believers, each sharing a peculiar faith ethos invested with a mission, and reflects the identity of faith as a constituted community of faith and existential meaning. More than a community of faith, their shared identity also shapes them as a bonded human community tied by their common spiritual kinship marked by the blood of Christ that defines them as a living community of grace, called upon uniquely to experience their humanization through the divinizing power of communitarian worship, bible-study sharing, holy communion, and its operations beyond the space and time of these events.

Thus, all testimonies are tools for the ingratiation and internalization of faith both within the public and private domains of operation. Often in his sermons, Pastor Omotola insists that it is not enough to act like a Christian only while inside Church, but that the dimensions of faith must resiliently resonate within the private boundaries of one's ethical and ordinary functioning. (possibly cite Jeremiah, or other relevant scriptures?)

This signification of a spiritual kinship is relevant to the establishment of a perceptive grounding of how Pentecostal movements nurture community, and how they function socially, in ensuring the adaptable integration of their members within society, especially in alien lands. It is noteworthy that while the RCCG integrates the Pentecostal paradigm, Pastor Omotayo remarked that the RCCG transcends the different labels with which the Church has been designated or associated. Therefore, he notes that while there are diverse areas of shared correlations within the theological field, spiritual practices, and organizational paradigms within the cognitive consciousness, the RCCG defines itself differently by a set of its own ideology and idiosyncratic modalities that are nuanced by its theology and ethical stances.

Such unified fields of shared dogma with other Christians' expressive forms does not in fact preclude the fact that the RCCG is neither any of these labels but rather uniquely and radically its own entity. In a sense, it is somewhat all of these labels but actually none of them. In this way, the

RCCG constructs its social identity through certain distinctive characters. Given that social identity is defined by differences, the RCCG is a unique phenomenon. Therefore, the distinctive arena that defines the RCCG dichotomizes it with other cross-referencing Christian congregations and denominations, as its identity is underpinned by the perspectives of its historical development, values and orientations, which are amply stressed in the RCCG form of spirituality and theology.

According to Pastor Omotayo, the RCCG, “is neither Catholic, Anglican, Aladura, nor Pentecostal, but is rather what it is: the Redeemed Christian Church of God.”<sup>16</sup> The identity of the RCCG is found within itself rather than any forced associative set of correlations or categorizations. Such a perspective is spectacular, given that hitherto many scholars have arbitrarily insinuated and superimposed the Pentecostal label upon the RCCG. Nonetheless, Pastor Omotayo affirms that while the RCCG integrates certain unified fields of Pentecostal practices and forms of expressions, it is richer by such facts but remains uniquely its own peculiar religious expressions.

Such statements are significant, given the fact that some members of the RCCG had hitherto belonged to other religious affiliations prior to their conversion experience through the agency of the RCCG, especially its renewing and reinvigorating moralistic ideologies. For instance, Pastor Omotayo often alludes jokingly, though indicating a truism and a significant fact, to his self-transformation made possible by the message and vision of Christian beliefs since becoming a member of the RCCG, in spite and in contrast of his being an “Ijebu man who comes from Mushin,” an area in Lagos, Nigeria, prior to his spiritual and moral regeneration.

Once, Pastor Omotayo noted in a sermon that he was dually a Catholic and a Muslim prior to his conversion to the RCCG and from the worldly ethos that sanctioned profane and amoral norms within his past. His father was a Catholic and he used to attend and even enjoy the Latin Mass, while with his mother, a Muslim, he used to attend the Mosque. Therefore, given his ecumenical existential position and experiences, he seems more likely to understand the distinction between these religious entities and their peculiar religious ethos. Within this sermon, he noted that while the Latin Mass was outwardly beautiful and the Moslem rites endearing they were not inter- orly far-reaching. “They were not enough” he noted.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the RCCG from this perspective is paradoxically all and yet none of the *a priori* labels transposed upon it for the purpose of forced definition and classification. Fundamentally, what is inherently at stake here is the contrast between the meta-hermeneutics of the forced identity that scholars impose upon the RCCG, and what at least from the perspective



of Pastor Omotayo, represents the self-identification of the RCCG as a distinct form of Christian expressions in its own right. However, it is doubtful whether all RCCG functionaries would subscribe to such views as Pastor Omotayo.

However, there is much to be said regarding some of the paradigm and idioms of Pentecostal spirituality that inherently subsist within the RCCG, that is substantially also rooted within the formidable spirituality that is identified within the tradition of its initial origin within the African Independent Church, the so-called Nigerian Aladura framework. Within this consideration, we note the preeminence of the power of prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit in ensuring transformations of situations. It was such emphasis as applied to Pastor Adeboye, prior to his conversion to the Church, that led to his fervent conversion and eventual membership, following the fact that the prayer guild members of the original RCCG prayed upon him to surrender to Christ, in times of personal difficulties. Initially, as a university professor of Mathematics, he found such orientations laughable, but once he felt the power of the prayers of the “illiterates and poor people” who ensured his conversion, there was no going back.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis on prayer and having a relationship with Christ is an important element of the RCCG, and it resonates within the sermons at the Jesus House of all Nations, St. Louis.

The role of prayer in the RCCG defines its spirituality. Prayer is privileged and both the pastor and membership have through sermons and testimonies attested to the active way God works in their lives, in answering their prayers. As is normally the practice, the General Overseer, Pastor Adeboye, disseminates his annual message and prophecy for each year. On January 1st, 2006, the message of the General Overseer was read to the congregation by the Pastor. In his message, he urged all RCCG members worldwide fervently to dedicate the month of February to prayer and fasting, so as to enable them have overflowing abundance of divine outpouring of blessings.

This emphasis on prayer is also nuanced, predicating the outcome of the prayer on certain dialectical norms. Namely, prayer is not supposed to be one-dimensional, just requesting from God, it also entails receiving God’s own list for oneself, and to take care of the areas of our lives that he commanded us to work upon. Therefore, within this symbiotic relationship and dialectics, prayer is tied to subjective ethical adherence based upon the prescription of faith. Herein, such cognizant emphasis on the moral order has salience for the production of good citizenship, and is thus potentially valuable for helping immigrants through the internalization of the values of their faith and spiritual practice, to live according to the moral requirements

of their host community and to perform their civil duties as is required of good citizens.

This fact is buttressed by Pastor Omotayo, while talking about members' financial contributions for the previous year, as the information regarding these contributions were being handed-out. Noting that some people complain that they do not need to be refunded what they give to God, through tax returns, and are tempted not to fill out information on the donation envelopes, he noted that it is the requirements of the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) that parishioners note all of their tax exemptions.

In any case, the point here is that such opportunities enable the pastor to attune the congregations to the demands of American legal norms and social requirements. In this manner, the Pastor is invested with not just religious authority, but also becomes a civic instructor that helps the congregation toward understanding the sanctity of the secular order and its legal requirements. Thus, the religious authorities can direct the congregation toward their own social and civic responsibilities.

Such simple constructs like this have significant relevance in the way social identity is shaped. Therefore, giving to Caesar what is material and required, and to the divine what is spiritual and absolute, perforce we witness the subtle but powerful modes in which religious institutions and leadership shape social identity, civic values and responsibilities, and in this way act to create good citizens. Within such modes of acting, the Church in furthering the interests of the state enhances its American credentials, as through its reinforcement and endorsement of the ideals of the states, it legitimates the state. In this way, civil society, including religious order functions, in spite of the rules of separation of Church and State, engage in ideological reinforcement of the existence of each other.

In furthering obligations toward respecting the laws of the land, the church also enroots itself within the fundamental realities that define it not as alien but as an integrated, albeit American institution. Within such salience, the Church, as represented by the Pastor, becomes a model of performance of civic duties, as required by law. In this way, therefore, the Church, despite being made up of many Nigerian immigrants, helps to sanction loyalty to their host nation and community. Another way this was done, was shortly prior to Christmas, the food bank of St. Louis had written to the Church for help toward enlarging its stocks, especially for the poor and for use during times of crisis and emergency. The pastor once again educated the congregation on their need to be pro-active in contributing toward the food bank, beckoning them to ensure their participation in the event.

Concomitantly, while educating the congregation, the pastor was also noting that a church rooted within a community, while fundamentally

spiritual and transcendental, must also be socially rooted as part of their habitat-community, helping it as best as is possible within their resources by aligning with the interests of the community in which it exists. In this way, such a pro-active stance and drive has enormous and far reaching implications in the mode in which it engenders members' consciousness in also aligning with their community and ensuring its interests.

Therefore, through various devices, cogent and subtle, the Jesus House St. Louis helps to nurture the construction of social identity among its membership, especially its immigrant component, as well as helping them to ensure their existential integration within the spatial matrix and cognitive dimensions of their host communities. In one recent sermon, Pastor Omotayo noted the qualitative contours and necessity of the membership to entrench themselves within their host society, encouraging them to transcend the limiting boundaries cast by past negative racial and residential stereotypes and other modes of hindering their conditioning. He encouraged the adherents to aspire toward a high standard of existential and material attainment and success in becoming whatever they can become, especially within this year that is marked by the Church as one for the outpouring of superabundant goodness.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, he urged that those who had to buy houses should not give in to the human stereotypes that defines a certain imaginary line of residential divide, and mainly confining people of color, especially blacks, to the St. Louis North Country. Further, he urged his adherents to seek opportunities according to their talents in different business arenas, and even holding political office. He noted that he sees his adherents being successful in different areas of human endeavor, being their own bosses. In the process, he also pointed out some who already are excelling in their areas of business and occupational niches. In this way, through sermons and admonishment, the pastor becomes a source of motivation and encouragement for the adherents in the furtherance of their existential and material pursuit and aspiration toward success and attainment of excellence.

Further, by pointing out successful members, the Pastor also offers the image of real community models whose successes offer iconic references on the possibility of what other adherents are capable of achieving in their American odyssey, with the enhancement and empowerment of their faith in God and believing in their own personal abilities to succeed, by working hard. Thus, he noted that it would be a mistake for a student to prepare for an exam by engaging in prayer without reading the material, believing that God would provide a good grade rather than his own efforts. In this way, the Pastor presents to the congregation the ideals of the "Protestant Work Ethic," which privileges excellence through determined and conscientious

hard work. In such ways, the seed of excellence is embedded within the consciousness of adherents in their quest for material and spiritual success in America. Such sermonic admonitions are cast within the overall theme designating the year 2006 as one of “superabundant goodness or blessing.”

This point is also validated by a visiting preacher, an RCCG Pastor, and physician, Dr. Sola Fola-Alade, from Sanford in the United Kingdom. Pastor Fola-Alade, in a sermon entitled “Break out of Containment”, noted that there are certain material retrogressions embedded within the spiritual realm, where spiritual curses and other forms of demonic machinations collaborate to affect human chances and upward mobility. Thus he noted that from that day that through prayers and deliverance that the bonds of containment, especially those veiled and bound by demonic actions and agents, are unleashed. Therefore, he affirmed that his mission that day was to break any such holds over all the adherents delivering them from the powers of demonic curses that hold them in bondage, impeding their material and existential pursuits. Speaking in graphic terms regarding the realities of most black immigrants, who feel constrained and overwhelmed by economic and material forces, he related that in most cases such conditions are a direct result of demonic curses, that represses people.

Drawing upon the passage of Judges 3:16, he related the case of Joshua threshing wheat in a wine press to the circumstances of many African immigrants and people of African descent whom he noted to be denigrated materially and politically oppressed for the greater part of modern human history. Thus, he referenced the state of unhappiness that defines the real experiences of many immigrants, including Africans who work two jobs, who are underemployed, and who are traumatized between the non-fulfillment of their pre-immigration expectations and their lived existence. Under such conditions, many find themselves stressed and burdened by enormous economic straits. Such biblical passages interlink the diurnal experience of many African immigrants, most of whom constitute over half of the congregation’s membership. Further, such referencing to these existential circumstances are not fixatedly pejorative, but rather projects hope, offering a vision of contextual resolution that privilege liberation and deliverance from bondage and are predicated upon divine providence and benevolence.

The other part is the sermon by the Pastor, his assistant, or invited guest pastors. Most often I have heard Pastor Omotayo preach, but I have also been in attendance at services when a guest female Pastor, a sister-in-law to Pastor Omotayo, also preached. On another occasion, a Nigerian physician and Pastor of the RCCG church in Sanford, United Kingdom, preached and conducted prayer sessions for healing and deliverance during

the worship service. During this event, people were prayed over and brought before the altar. At times, the manifestation of spiritual power made some people tremble, others dizzy, and some even fell. This was not a usual occurrence in the weekly services; I often attend but yet it forms a core value of the RCCG. Such prayer sessions are part of the evangelical and Aladura heritages that configure the identity of the RCCG.<sup>20</sup>

The Assistant Pastor, “Prof” Akawo, preaches occasionally. He was the preacher and officiator on my first visit during the church’s Sunday service in September 2005, while attempting to gain access to the site. I had turned up in the church, after having previously discussed my intentions with Pastor Omotayo on the phone. On this occasion, Pastor Omotayo, the head pastor, was absent away on a trip to Florida. The church has other ministries for children and young adults, women and men. These different initiatives converge at different times and places. For instance, the Joshua Initiative Men’s Meeting on one occasion passed out flyers regarding its fellowship at a member’s apartment. Other ministries include conducting prayers and fasting sessions during assigned periods of the year. Between November 18th and 20th, 2005, the church invited a couple specialized on marriage issues to lead a marriage seminar organized by the church. Finally, like most kinds of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, including those of African origin, Jesus House invests in a multimedia ministry to record the weekly Sunday sermons into audio-CDs.<sup>21</sup> These provide a meaningful way in which those absent can be a part of its worship community, given that sometimes some members work Sunday shifts.

## ***2. The United African Presbyterian Church***

This church is relatively young. It evolved out of the Giddings-Lovejoy presbytery of the Presbyterian-USA, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Jemimah Ngatiah. Its majority adherents are East African, with a significant Kenyan majority population among its membership of about thirty-five, though more are expected to join. Some Ugandans, Nigerians, and even Americans are found sprinkled among its large East African membership. The congregation, from its earliest formation, attempted to crystallize certain residuals of their cultural root metaphor, evidently African and specifically Kenyan, along the spatial and cognitive consciousness that defines their unique identity within the American space.

As W.E. B. Dubois pointed out regarding the role of American Black Churches as the social centre that defines the African-American identity,<sup>22</sup> the African immigrant church somewhat approximates a similar feature within the modes of its functioning. Therefore, while the prescribed concentric identity is predicated upon a cognitive spiritual consciousness, the

space constructed for religious and spiritual functions also serves as a cogent resource and cultural center, whose meaningful impact transcends the immediate limits of its religious embodiment.

The story of the emergence of this congregation is defined by the diverse trajectories that characteristically alter social relations and interactions leading to demographic shifts within American urban metropolitan areas. This context equally affects the stability and even existence of some religious institutions within these areas. Such facts of history and faith are reflected in the sermon by Rev. Dr. Linda Shugert, Moderator of the Giddens-Lovejoy Presbytery, entitled, "The Village", delivered during the ordination rites of Dr. Jemimah Ngatiah. She outlined the different historical factors that helped shaped the conditions that eventually induced the formation of the United African Presbyterian Church in 2005. These factors were embedded in historical processes, especially those urban dynamics that affected shifting population demographics.

Focal to these changes with their interactive effect is the outward migration from the inner-central-city core toward outer ring suburbs. In addition to these changing contexts affecting urban areas evolved another phenomenon: the international immigration from non-western countries. The in-migration of immigrants into abandoned central and older inner ring suburbs produced new modes of thinking. The palpable effect of such movements radically altered the local demographic landscape within metropolitan areas of St. Louis. The convenience of the phenomenon of immigration also favored the establishment of immigrant churches to serve their needs, thus finding use for older church facilities.

Occasionally, we would see a different group arrive in our village, like Taiwanese people or Korean. So we would start another village for this group, but that didn't happen that often. While we kept on maintaining our village, the outside world completely changed. Neighborhoods became integrated, not only with African-American people, but people from the continent of Africa, Bosnians, [and] Latinos. Non-denominational churches sprang up everywhere without staples and pews. Many churches without organs to be seen were changing the lives of people in various communities. The "scrubby Dutch" and Germans in South St. Louis had to move over to make room for people that were moving into their neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup>

The Giddings-Lovejoy parish was in the process of discerning whether to remain open or close, with the latter option more viable as a result of a decline in worshippers, following suburban shift of its vast membership

over the years. It was at this time that Rev. Jemimah Ngatiah, who was already a member of the Giddings-Lovejoy parish, and his fellow East Africans came up with the option of using the church property for their African services, and as a religious center serving the immigrant African populations around St. Louis.<sup>24</sup>

The congregation was brought to my awareness in about the sixth month of its existence. I accidentally became aware of its existence through a colleague at work, Margaret Kihoro, a Kenyan Chaplain Resident then training at the Barnes-Jewish Spiritual Care department, after her invitation to preach at the budding congregation. Discussion revolving her preaching incidentally brought this congregation and the pastor, Dr. Jemimah Ngatiah to my attention. Luckily, I met Rev. Jemimah Ngatiah later at a hospital farewell function for Margaret and her resident colleagues. Incidentally, I sat at the same table with Dr. Ngatiah, during which period we discoursed regarding the new congregation.

## **I. FAITH AND ITS BEGINNINGS: THE NOW IS THE BEGINNING OF THE FUTURE**

A dynamic and heuristic visionary, and never one to miss an opportunity, she promptly invited me to attend her church, on the symbolic launching of their new service time, which changed from 12:30pm to 10:30am on September 18th, 2005 Taking my address, she sent me a letter of invitation in record time. Thus, I obliged and attended the service on September



**Figure 4-2.** Rev. Dr. Jemimah Ngatia, Pastor United African Presbyterian Church

18th, 2005. This event marked a monumental landmark in the history of the congregation. It formally presented the congregation to the public. Accordingly, the service was rich in symbolic meaning as a new congregation of African immigrants was publicly born. As the congregants swayed and chanted, songs intoned in Swahili and the rhythmical swing and intermittent jumping in between stanzas marked a spirited display of an African spirit of worship.

To the tone of the music all present shared their joys marking a sense of community. More significantly, Dr. Ngatiah invited Kenyans, religious and political leaders, and others from within the St. Louis area. The Mayor of Rockhill, Missouri, Julie Morgan and her spouse were present and introduced to the congregation. Mayor Morgan glowingly congratulated the congregation and denoted her intention to partner with the church in bringing about development in the area. Promising to do her best in partnering with the church's leadership, she affirmed the roles of immigrants as agents of social progress. She offered the immigrant population a true home in Rockhill. Finally, she enjoined the membership to be good steward of opportunities and resources, while urging them to observe the laws.

Other invitees attended from the neighboring state of Illinois, from Bloomington, Peoria, and Chicago. Therefore, like at African celebrations, those invited formed an extended family network, upon which Dr. Ngatiah could draw upon for support for herself and members of her church family. During the event Dr. Ngatiah outlined once again her vision for the church, mainly centering upon the mission of evangelization and outreach to many, especially among the African immigrant community in St. Louis.

The colorful service included songs, scriptural readings, presentations of dignitaries, blessings of the church and new grounds, the commissioning of the new board members, communion service, and preaching. Although a lengthy service, it was fulfilling.

Rev. Linda Shugert's sermon focused upon the theme of the village. The village was a communal space where responsibility and accountability was the norm, each person was responsible for another's welfare. The village was also a place of rest, as urbanites escaping from the vicissitudes of the city, work, and life in general tend to seek solace. For Dr. Shugert, the Giddings-Lovejoy presbytery, and the United African Presbyterian Church, Rockhill reflected that spirit as a serene spot for all, aboriginal as well as new African members. It was such a spirit that allowed Kenyan immigrants to be able to rush in. Therefore, while the Kenyan immigrants are expected to change some of its characteristics, the mission ought to remain unchangeable.



This metaphor is powerful but equally contradictory, as it relates to the experience of most African immigrants. Broadly speaking, most African immigrants are discarding village lives and violating its serenity with modernity. The village is hardly the spatial dream of most African immigrants rushing into different global metropolitan spaces to partake in the dividends of globalization, especially in the West. Returning home is not uppermost on the agenda of most, for now. Some will never return to the village. Regardless of this fact, there is often a nostalgic yearning for a serene space within the consciousness of many African immigrants. They seek for some sense of village life, a home within the city where they can enjoy community and experience serenity. Partaking in the processes of globalizations they sometimes experience dire frustration and hardship, and feel the need to rest, supported by the community. Located within global centers and embedded within its technologically advanced processes, they look forward to transform their aboriginal villages, in both subtle and significant ways, to adopt certain semblances with their experience of the global polity.

In spite of the above, the iconoclasm of the village is alluring, reflecting a significant reality as the scenery of retreat from the maze of urban activities, crises, and conflicts. It is in this sense that the sermonic theme of village finds its appropriate analogical fit. In this sense, the church represents an arena of peaceful and serene existence. It contrasts with the diurnal existential experience of most immigrants, engaged in the bustling of urban American life. The Church's space offers rest and serenity from the bustling and fast-paced life as experienced in many western societies. Herein, they can hear familiar tones, hear the tone of long-sung chants and speak Swahili and Gikuyu. The local presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy represents such a village as a religious sanctuary.

Within the specific opportunities of the social relationship offered by such faith encounters, Dr. Ngatiah delineated her faith community as a village, a reclusive space for loving and sharing, outside of the rowdy urban space. By such symbolizations, the village is cast as a sanctuary, shielding one from the diurnal vicissitudes that pervade human lives within the existential experience of the city. This village of faith provides an arena where one person knows about the other, and reaches out to them in love and with joy. Therefore, the pastor notes the significance of faith as offering succor and as a spring of revitalization from hard daily struggles, especially within the social and economic spheres.

It is a village also in another sense, within the segmented subdivision of the vast Presbyterian-USA denomination. In this sense, it is appropriate that the older inhabitants welcome the newer members into their village community; as a community of faith and where they seek fulfillment and

rest from the vast operations of everyday life. This sermon, within its polysemous form, coalesces varying idioms, making sense of the efforts toward fostering the sense of ecclesial community. Further, it offers ways of shaping and enriching the mutually shared but diverse experiences of faith among adherents, builds community, and helps them to share immigration stories. On another level, it begins to re-story and reinvent ways toward integrating and understanding elements of the spatial and political landscape, as these dynamically frame the American urban landscape and reference the construction of social identity.

Sermons like this bring faith into the open sphere, relating it to historical and existential issues. In this sense, faith is relieved of its mythical power and ahistorical qualities, toward grounding people within the conditions of historicity. Sermons predicated upon real issues and historical conditions serve as referential texts for real people living in a concrete grounding of cultures and religious consciousness, packaging them in a set of understandable concepts. Faith then becomes dispossessed of its abstract appeal and is more concretely attuned toward anchoring and integrating people within society. It is within that sense that the village becomes a powerful paradigmatic metaphor. Specifically, the modalities of faith and religion among adherents of this congregation must assert and affirm differences as the condition for reifying their sense of social identity. They must concretely aspire to integrate differences, but also to uplift their own differences.

The village, as a responsible and accountable arena, offers contexts not only for validating one's cultural difference, but also of accepting and respecting those of others. Within the crucible of the urban conflicts and crises that tend to accentuate difference as pejorative, this understanding of the village offers a rare way of critical self-understanding for the church. In this way, the church can become the privileged space within which African immigrants, by referencing their religious heritage, can become agents of cultural appreciation and instruments of social change. In appreciating their unique African pathways, the church can help them toward appreciating American culture and thus incensing the conditions for true integration, acculturation, and even assimilation.

The historical conditions that gave birth to the emergence of this congregation, in which a predominantly white congregation offered to African immigrants the facilities and structures for operation, represents a powerful testimony to the power of co-operation, Christian generosity and a spirit of true charity. By affirming such values, the congregation can be concomitantly equipped to not only support their congregation but also to be alert to helping less privileged members within society. Therefore, through

outreach programs that invest in social justice and community issues, the understanding of the village as a place of responsibility and accountability is likely to enrich the worldviews of these African immigrants. The vision of responsibility and accountability also must be underlined by efforts to be faithful to the multiple heritages constitutive of the history of the congregation. The congregation's ability to engender new forms of ministry, liturgy, rituals, music, and other aspects of church life, must equally be alive to helping society's development.

African immigrants have a repertoire of transitional experiences that at times must be brought alive toward vivifying the church and society. In this sense, the installation of lay leadership affords these parishioners opportunities to lead and organize within an American setting. In this manner, African immigrants' religious scenes provide opportunities for acquiring leadership experience, which are capable of being utilized within other social and public scenes. The memories and histories of institutions are of some significance in this case. During the Women's Guild Day celebration, congregants drew upon religious and specifically ethnic memories that sanctioned this practice. In this way, the United African Presbyterian Church can be a veritable instrument in preserving the group's cultural memories and histories in bringing about social changes.

At the end of the service there was a reception with traditional Kenyan cuisine, conversations and interactions among the participants. Settling down to eat and interact, it was evident that the reception offered a communal space for interaction. Religion, nationalism, and an extensive network of friends and well wishers featured an invented community with people gracefully engaging themselves in conversations and trying to get acquainted. Faith offers a unique community, not only for the outreach of grace, but as a community of encounter, care, and concern for each other's welfare. Faith offers a spectacular space where all are engaged through interactions, sharing of different perspectives regarding human realities, and offers of support on the journey toward the discovery of meaning.

Such powerful articulations regarding the meaning of faith and its reflection regarding the spatial configurations shape cognitive consciousness as nuanced aesthetics, spirituality and religiosity succinctly offer immigrants that opportunity for creating relevant meaning within the perceptive locale that creates adaptive meaning and supports the constructive site for the formation of unique self- and social identities.

The Mayor stayed through the duration of the events, spending time with the people. This quality reinforced the functional attraction of America's democratic values and the norms of democratic politics for

African immigrants. Some members were impressed, noting that such act was rare “back home”. Such actions depict the value of American democracy unlike “back home” where occupants at any level of elected office act arrogantly and oppressively, demeaning the people they are meant to serve. American civic leadership and leadership act in partnership with other aspects of civil society and institutions, to ensure people’s participatory commitment to the progress of American society, and has already endeared itself to some of the members.

The partnership between the fields of politics and religion in constructing civil society represents a focal expression of a true American ideal. Power is not for its own sake but instrumental toward generating social advancement. The visible presence and interests in this event also served to show how a representative of American government validates the relevance of the African immigrants, as well as their trust in their competence to be creative agents of social transformation.

The next event was the ordination of Dr. Jemimah Ngatiah, as an Evangelist within the Presbyterian-USA. Dr. Ngatiah’s ordination marked a significant event. It was held at the end of a busy day, in the evening, after members of the regional Presbyterian-USA from all over the Midwest had finished their business meeting. Dr. Ngatiah’s ordination also marked an epic historical event, as she represented the First African woman to be ordained into any position within the Presbyterian-USA.



**Figure 4-3.** Ordination Rites (Laying on of Hands Rev. Jemimah Ngatiah)

## **II. ORDINATION OF REV. DR. JEMIMAH NGATIAH FIRST AFRICAN WOMAN ORDAINED IN PRESBYTERIAN-USA**

Rev. Ngatiah's ordination was performed in the evening of November 12, 2005, in the presence of family members, her church and Kenyan families and friends. This event marked the first time an African woman would be ordained into ministry within the Presbyterian-USA. Family and friends traveled from as far as Texas to witness this event. The ceremony was colorful, interlaced with Swahili, Kikuyu, and English scriptural readings and songs. Many speakers attested to the personal integrity and evangelical zeal of Rev. Ngatiah, as a people-oriented and outreaching personality, emphasized as qualitatively essential for her evangelizing mission. Following the ordination, through the laying on of hands by all the ordained ministers present, Rev. Ngatiah was vested with the authority of ministry, supported by members of her church family, her immediate family, Kenyans, and other well wishers who participated in this historic ceremony. After Rev. Ngatiah had been vested in the clerical gown, collar, and stole donated by her family, the Giddings-Lovejoy presbytery made a presentation of a brand new communion set to the new congregation to enhance their worship.

These two presentations gave symbolic meaning to the conjoined spheres of different but mutual networks of real and fictional kinship, one defined biologically, the others socially and spiritually. The signification of the presents reveals the mutual supportive roles each play in validating the ministry of Rev. Ngatiah and those of the United African Presbyterian church she represents as leader. From these different levels, Rev. Ngatiah derives strength. In these symbolic presentations of the clerical vestments, the immediate family members of Rev. Ngatiah offered their veritable endorsement of her ministry and spiritual functioning. In the presentation by the presbytery, her church family offered to the congregation the ties of spiritual kinship defined by faith and community within the Presbyterian-USA.

## **III. WOMEN'S GUILD DAY CELEBRATION**

In late November, during a phone conversation with Rev. Ngatiah, she invited me to the "Women's Guild worship day" celebration the following Sunday, December 4th, 2005. I obliged and attended. This event represents the affirmation of the role of the feminine genius in sustaining faith. It is predicated upon the real, practical, and significant roles that women play in nurturing the Christian faith in Kenya. It also offered a space for mnemonic recalling of the past and the role of women in their past pre-immigration

ecclesial functioning in the Kenyan Church. Therefore, this event is more derived from the Kenyan and East African experiences of the congregants as an annual event that sanctions and privileges women's place and as their roles as relevant agents within the mission of the church. At the Sunday worship, the worship was led by the women adorned with a blue hat, or "tambaya." They entered the church in unison procession, singing, and dancing in African, especially Swahili and Kikuyu lyrics.

In welcoming and congratulating the women and the entire congregation, the president of the church committee noted the relevance of this celebration with reference to its occurrence in Kenya. Further, he noted that women were creative agents and drivers of change, hence in Kenya the establishment of the women's guild also led to the emergence of the Men's Guild. Therefore, he noted women as the pacesetters, not only in the events of the Kenyan Church, but equally in society. Such points are vital toward understanding certain cognitive processes that shaped traditional social identity in Kenya, especially among the Kikuyu, who form the majority membership of the congregation. According to Jomo Kenyatta, the Kikuyu were an efficiently ruled matrilineal society prior to the existential but forceful transformation of the leadership along patrilineal constructs.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, within the context of the statement made by the president of the church committee, a vital cultural link interfaced with spiritual realities within a social framework that while surfacing within a Christian context is transcendent to it, grounded within a cognitive consciousness that is submerged within the processes of Kenyan historical or mythical matrices. Mrs. Esther Moya, a Christian woman leader in Kenya and St. Louis resident, preached. Marking this event, she called upon the women to be proactive as previously in Kenya, especially toward furthering the evangelical ministry they crafted for themselves, such as visiting the sick, the aged, and pursuing other charitable ministries.

Memory plays a great function in the immigrant experience and its religious imagination. Thus, Mrs. Moya nostalgically reminisces about the role of the Kenyan Christian Women's Guild in shaping society and spiritual consciousness in Kenya, affirming their leading roles in the ministries they carry out. She recalled how in the past ten years of her residency in the US, she had nurtured a dream for this celebration of the women guild's day. In spite of her inability formally to participate in such events, wearing her women's guild headgear often commemorated the passage of such a day each year. Memory and representation are focal to the sustenance of immigrants' culture and identity. Therefore, she expressed excitement that with the establishment of the United African Presbyterian Church, the possibility of fulfilling a long-held desire had finally become a reality. She urged all the

female members of the church to enroll in the women's guild. In this way, she noted that they would find satisfaction and become agents of evangelization within their homes, church, and society: "We shall have something to do, even if we are in America."<sup>26</sup>

During the event, an African-American woman with her three children, who had come to the church, was warmly welcomed and introduced to the congregation. This woman had earlier on come to Rev. Ngatiah in search of material support, and willingly decided to come to the Sunday worship. The leader of the women's guild welcomed her after he introduction and offered her their support, urging that she should see herself as belonging to them, in spite of cultural differences. Here too, while the members of this congregation were defining themselves through peculiar forms of worship unique to their experiences, they also exhibited the reality of openness to others within the wider American society, imbibing a democratic and spiritual value of openness to all people.

After the service, two events were celebrated, namely the Thanksgiving meal and the reception for the women's guild. The meal was prepared, though using the symbolic thanksgiving turkey and salads, as a typical East African cuisine. The meal itself offers a rich symbol, within which the very celebration of a typical American feast—Thanksgiving—is radically approximated and appropriated through East African cuisine.

### *3. Catholic Church, Institutions, and African Immigration*

American Catholicism has often played a significant role in immigrants' adjustment.<sup>27</sup> The Catholic Church was central to the lives of many immigrants into the St. Louis area, especially the Germans, Irish, and later Italians.<sup>28</sup> The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops' (USCCB) office for migration and refugee services provides pastoral care for new African immigrants and helps them adjust to the realities of American life. Additionally, they advocate for favorable immigration related public policies, and coordinate national resettlement services for refugees and forced migrants.<sup>29</sup> African Catholic communities, representatives of religious communities, and other allied groups have also been pro-active. Many of these have held various meetings toward helping with the pastoral care issues of new African immigrants.<sup>30</sup>

Officially, the hierarchy of the St. Louis Catholic Church has continued to favor immigration, given that its foundational features were tied to previous immigrant groups to the area. Recently, Archbishop Raymond Burke joined protesters to disavow the proposed congressional immigration reforms.<sup>31</sup> The St. Louis Catholic Church has certain institutions dealing with immigration issues such as the Catholic Charity and its affiliated

Catholic Legal Assistance Services. The Catholic Legal Assistance Services, in a phone interview I held with Jasminska, an official in charge of immigration matters, noted that their case loads for African immigrants in the area is negligible. Personal experience has also proved to me that the quality of the work of that agency is poor. In 2004, following a request for evidence regarding a personal immigration matter then with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), while referred there to enable me to understand what was required, one of the attorneys then almost complicated matters beyond imagination and was very rude. The processes she advised were more detrimental than useful.

The St. Pius V Catholic Parish is one Catholic facility that caters delightfully and meaningfully to the needs of diverse immigrants, including African immigrants, in the St. Louis area. Their liturgy is equally inclusive of diversity and multiethnic worship expressions, in creating a relevant cultural and reverential space, enabling worshippers' authentic encounter with God, community, and among themselves in worship. Other than these purely religious-ethos enforcing orders, there are also other social institutions related to religious organizations that serve the African immigrants' causes and needs. While, St. Pius V is not a designated a "national" or "ethnic" parish or congregation, it nonetheless serves African Catholic immigrants' spiritual and religious needs.

There is no single African immigrant Catholic congregation in the St. Louis area, like it obtains in Washington, DC, and the Baltimore, Maryland, area, Detroit, Michigan, Austin, Texas (here both Africans and African-Americans have patronized the Holy Cross Church, whose three last pastors have been African priests from Uganda and Nigeria respectively), and in Southern California,<sup>32</sup> among several other places. Significantly, in dioceses in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, African Catholic priests have been specifically assigned to focused and specialized ministries with African refugees and immigrants. However, as the area is enriched by the presence of African immigrants it is anticipated that the Archdiocese of St. Louis would pay greater attention to their pastoral and spiritual care issues.<sup>33</sup> Such paths have been recently threaded following the consolidation of parishes. The Archdiocese of St. Louis set aside parishes for Hispanic and Vietnamese minority ethnic groups for their liturgical services and spiritual activities.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike other dioceses across the United States, though St. Louis has a sizeable African-American populations and even parishes, there is no office of "Black Catholics," "Black Evangelization," or "African-American Ministry" within the Archdiocese of St. Louis. It is instructive to note that there is a Lwanga Center, with a Dominican African-American priest, Fr. Arthur



Opitts, O.P. African priests working in the archdiocese are few, mostly on the fringe of parish life, as most are either temporary, coming as graduate students to study, mostly at the Jesuit's St. Louis University and the Dominican Aquinas Institute of Theology, or work as Catholic Priests in the professional role of hospital chaplaincy.<sup>35</sup> Historically, the Archdiocese of St. Louis, under the leadership of Cardinal Joseph E. Ritter in 1947, seriously pursued the process of desegregation of its school systems and other institutions, in spite of intense public opposition.<sup>36</sup>

At the moment, the only foreign-born African priest assigned as a pastor to a Catholic parish in the St. Louis Catholic Archdiocese is the Congolese-born priest, Fr. George Kintiba, SVD, a member of the Society of the Divine Words Missionary (*Societas Verbi Divini*). He is the pastor of a predominantly African-American parish; St. Nicholas Catholic Church located on 18th Street within a blighted area of Downtown St. Louis. African-American or Black priests within the St. Louis Metro-area are equally few. In the Archdiocese of St. Louis there are less than fifteen. Of these, about seven are African priests who are mainly engaged in graduate programs within the area's universities and research institutions. There are no known congregations or members of communities of religious African women (nuns) serving in the area at this time. An African priest from the Congo is serving in the vicinity of Granite City, Illinois. Other than this, it is not known how many African priests or religious women are serving or studying within the jurisdiction of the neighboring diocese of Belleville, just across the River from St. Louis. It seems doubtful if there are any apart from the aforementioned priest.

Therefore, the direct and intentional ministry at St. Pius V is momentous, symbolic, and significant for most of the participating faithful. Therefore through incorporating and existentially expressing the ideals of social justice St. Pius V parish is cryptically marked as a progressive church dually: ideologically and factually. Ideologically, social justice is a faith stance that is theoretically interlinked with the gospel and the overall Catholic Church's ministry in the world. Factually, faith is lived as praxis, as in practice real people are helped on a daily basis based upon an interventionist stance that though an offshoot of faith and dogma is existentially pragmatic.

The two idiosyncrasies merge as faith lived in action. Within this realm, the parish also offers non-liturgical or religious community outreach that includes fervent concerns for immigrants, including Africans. Many African immigrants regardless of their faith affiliations have benefited immensely from this program, directed by a religious nun, Sr. Pauline Windell, CPPS. The Catholic Charity of St. Louis, and its associated office of Immigrant concerns, at various times have also offered distinguished

services to different immigrants in the area, including African immigrants, helping them toward resolving immigration issues, and offering free legal services and immigration representations on behalf of their clients.

The Lutheran Immigrant Services of St. Louis provides similar services for different immigrant groups, inclusive of African immigrants. At the Concordia Seminary in Richmond Heights, located in the inner suburb of St. Louis, is a seminary of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. There is a Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology that engages in outreach to African outreach under the leadership of Rev. Yohannes Mengsteab, as mission facilitator for the New African Immigrant Missions.<sup>37</sup>

#### *4. Islamic Adherents and African Immigrants*

African Moslems are contributing toward the social development and economic vitality of St. Louis, in different occupations. The upsurge in the African Moslem population in the area, it must be noted, is primarily a factor of the resettlement exercise of a large population of Somali nationals in the area, through the International Institutes of St. Louis, and other area immigration agencies, following the political crises that erupted and decimated the Somali state in the 1990s. Further, the Somali Bantu are among those who resettled in the area. It is noteworthy to recall that about 12,000 Somali Bantu of predominantly sub-Saharan African ancestry, in Kenyan refugee camps, were offered refugee status in the United States given the manifest ethnic discrimination and antagonism they faced in their native Somalia.<sup>38</sup>

Many of these Somalis and other African immigrant Moslems are conscientious about their faith and its practices, and in spite of their dislodged dislocations, especially from war torn countries of the Horn of Africa, they have credibly adjusted and made St. Louis home, partaking in its affairs while defining themselves. Some of these Somalis have attained citizenship and are proud to be American, and many are grateful for the opportunities availed them by the American government and people in their times of existential needs. In spite of being Moslems, different religious agencies that cater to the needs of immigrants such as Catholic Charities and the Lutheran Social Services of Missouri have helped many among this population to settle and adjust to lives in St. Louis.

African immigrants in the St. Louis area are not only ethnically and nationally diverse; they are equally varied in their religious and spiritual orientations. There is a significant African immigrant Islamic community in the St. Louis area. Most of these African Moslems come from Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan, and Eritrea.

In attempting to enrich my research with the diverse religious experiences and spiritualities of St. Louis African immigrants, I decided to include

the adherents of Islam. In this vein, I contacted Imam Sheik Nur Abdullah of the Islamic Foundation of Greater St. Louis. After some phone calls placed to his office, we eventually connected following his return of these calls. Our dialogue on the phone was very refreshing. My brief conversations with Sheik Nur Abdullah led me to conceptually visualize his qualitative assets and personal charm as a spiritual leader. He seemed to me an energetic, charismatic and charming personality, who commands enormous presence. These qualities I imagined ensure his status as an Islamic and community leader within the diverse St. Louis Islamic and wider community. Sheik Nur Abdullah represents and embodies the notable role and impact created by African immigrants in the St. Louis area. During this brief discussion, Sheik Abdullah chronicled his journey to the United States. Since 1990, sixteen years ago, he has been an area resident of St. Louis.

In response to my questions, Sheik Nur Abdullah, a soft spoken and erudite scholar, sketched his story. Further internet research would support his assertions. He recounted being a native of Sudan and immigrated to the United State in 1978, after his Islamic studies in Saudi Arabia. He has been a St. Louis resident over the last sixteen years. Prior to St. Louis, he led the Main Masjid, Mosque Number Two in Chicago. Apart from his studies in Saudi Arabia, he holds a Master's degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Chicago, where he is also currently a Ph.D. candidate.<sup>39</sup> Sheik Nur Abdullah is a busy person. Concurrently with his St. Louis duties, he serves as the President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and is actively involved with different local and national interfaith initiatives. A highly sought speaker within the Islamic national and international lecture circuit, he was until his recent resignation as Imam, also the principal of the Al-Salam Islamic School, attached to the mosque. He was also a sponsored delegate representing the ISNA on a peace mission to Sudan toward finding peaceful resolutions to the Darfur crisis.<sup>40</sup>

This representation attests to the potent social validation of the civic responsibility and social influence imputed into the leadership of the St. Louis Islamic community toward participatory involvement in American and international affairs, thus deservedly signified as a relevant agency toward effecting social changes locally, nationally, and internationally. Apart from such transnational involvement St. Louis African immigrants both as individuals and as a group continue to utilize the idioms of their faith toward sanctioning the ideals of their faith and American society.

Sheik Nur Abdullah is an ardent supporter of ecumenical dialogue with different religious and civic groups. Through his stellar efforts and deep insights he has furthered collaborations and ecumenical dialogues with different religious groups and institutions. As a result of his social standing,

he was among the area's religious leaders who met with the late Pope John Paul II during his 1999 visit to St. Louis. As the President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and other Islamic and non-Islamic religious leaders he condemned the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States as uncharacteristic of the Islamic faith as expressed within its laws (Sharia), traditions (Hadith), and practices.

In spite of such efforts, in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, Sheik Nur Abdullah had suspicions of having been under surveillance by state security agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). In view of these events in 2005, the American Civil Liberties Union of Eastern Missouri (ACLU) on behalf of requestors that included Sheik Nur Abadullah, wrote a letter to the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act.<sup>41</sup> Yet, while pursuing his rights as a citizen entitled to freedom, he disclaims such efforts as a waste of time and prefers not to buckle under any kind of unwarranted pressure. During my phone conversations, following my joke that I was a research and not a state agent, he responded waving aside such thoughts: "I do not bother about that. Anyone who has nothing to hide need not bother about such things. I have no skeleton in my closet."

It is instructive to note that the first mosque that Sheik Nur Abdullah ministered in Chicago and the St. Louis mosque, the Islamic Foundations, were originally linked to the Black Muslim group, the Nation of Islam. The quest of African Americans for religious and social identity had been behind the saga of the Nation of Islam. The fissiparous occurrences within the Nations of Islam, shortly prior to and after the death of the leader, Muhammed Elijah, elicited efforts among some elements to align themselves closely with mainstream Islamic current associated with global Islam, especially its Sunni and Saudi Arabian variant.<sup>42</sup>

Aspirations like this, that attempted to interlink local expressions to global currents, is at the root of the historical conditions that favored an African immigrant and a Saudi Arabian-trained scholar into leading the mosque into its heuristic vision of membership of the Islamic Ummah (Community), first beginning in Chicago and afterwards in sustaining a mosque in St. Louis, that is representational of the Ummah, given its international character. The choice of an African immigrant for the position of Imam symbolically references continuity with the historical fact that enslaved African immigrants were the first agents of the Islamic faith in the Americans, including the United States. Unfortunately, the realities of slavery eclipsed their ability to leave any lasting iconic Islamic legacy.<sup>43</sup>

During our phone conversations, I introduced my research objectives. The soft spoken, low toned, but evanescent Sheik Nur Abdullah cordially expressed his willingness to assist my project. We set up an appointment to

meet at the mosque for a Saturday afternoon. I felt gratified with intense happiness. I expected to utilize his assistance and extensive knowledge of his faith community to carry out my research, to build substantial rapport, gain access, and tap into the insights and experiences of African immigrant adherents of his faith community. Unfortunately, our appointment did not hold. We were unable to meet; ever so busy with pastoral and spiritual care, he was away performing one of the fundamental and noblest Islamic duties, the burial of the dead, who was a member of his *Musjid-al Duur* (Mosque).

As I drove to meet my appointment, I was captivated by the natural ecology of the area locating the Islamic Center. Located within a choice and priced locations within the West County area of St. Louis, I felt a sense of cosmic harmony within the serenity of the scenic view. It was such an experience of a natural experience of Rudolf Otto's idea of "*mysterium tremendum*"<sup>44</sup> It struck me too that it was by no accident that another spiritual edifice, the Hindu Temple and the Mahatma Gandhi Center, was also located within the vicinity. Here affluence melted with nature, as this area too bespoke the caliber of adherents of these faiths, and significantly of their ability to support their faith through enormous financial contributions, in building and boosting its outreach.

As I veered off from the main road, heading for the mosque and center, I could not but experience awe at the magnificent architectural edifice, with its luxuriant aesthetics coated in luminous white paint presumably emblematic of the ideal of purity that is richly stressed in Islamic dogma. The impressive tower rising from the building upward toward the sky (heaven) reflects the merger of the earthly with the celestial. Together with the Islamic emblems of the crescent moon and the star on the tower's topmost end I felt a sense of celestial aura. Informed that Sheik Nur Abdullah would return to the Mosque, I waited in the lobby's rotunda. Spending my time creatively I rummaged and browsed through some of the free books on Islamic topics placed on a table in the lobby area. I equally glimpsed at various fliers, brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets regarding various themes of Islamic events, topics, and community resources, placed on event boards on the adjoining walls. Different fliers announced different events.

The people moving in and out provided a constant traffic and were unceasing companions with whom I intermittently struck up some conversations. While waiting, I imagined all that time about what a vivifying spiritual presence this African Immigrant from the Sudan commands. My mind made mental maps and finally settled on comparisons that sutured the present to different historical trajectories of the past involving previous African immigrants to the West, and especially to the United States. My

first thoughts regarded the forcefully enslaved Muslims who came here but became dispossessed of their religion and its practices. Detouring from my thought, I next recast a mental contour that juxtaposes the image of Sheik Nur Abdullah with Abbot Hadrian, the Christian monk, originally from the area of modern Sudan. Hadrian was greatly instrumental in fortifying the structures of English Christianity in the 8th century. Juxtaposed thus, Sheik Abdullah and his ministrations in the West made sense regarding the contributions of African immigrants to different forms of organized global religions over human history.

The parallel between the mostly forgotten exploits of Abbot Hadrian, Sheik Nur Abdullah's forebear to the West, became more lucidly crystallized within this comparative portraiture, albeit along parallel religious paths. Hadrian was sent as a missionary to Britain from his Italian monastery to secure the Christian faith in 8th century England, and strove to build an enduring legacy of the Christian faith through pedagogical means. The Catechetical School he built helped to root Britain's Christian faith. Similarly, Sheik Abdullah's religious work among the St. Louis Islamic adherents included educational work and different didactic functions such as organized lectures, seminars, and symposia. Until his resignation in June 2006, he was the Principal of the Islamic *Al Salaam* day school in St. Louis.<sup>45</sup> As I toured the lobby, it became apparent that the center was big on didactic methods, as different posters and fliers marked the presentations to be given on different insightful themes by either Sheik Nur Abdullah himself, or other invited Islamic guest lecturers, often renowned Islamic scholars from within the United States and abroad.

As members trooped in and out, I realized the diversities of languages they uttered, denoting in some relative sense the different nationalities of which the Mosque is composed. This realization brought into mind that the Islamic center is both a religious and cultural expression that is representative of diversity and that reflects the universality characteristic of the Islamic Umma; the faith community. Therefore, the center plays a globalizing role, serving to unify diverse groups without diminishing the essentiality of differences. The Islamic center functions in this respect both as sacred and unifying grounds. In spite of the expressions of diversity the essence of the Islamic faith and spirituality bonds the community toward fostering a sense of bonding and belongingness which uniquely marks the ideal of the Islamic Umma. This intuitive awareness brought me to realize the globalizing instrumentality that the Islamic religion represents.

On an individual level, I have met and discoursed about the faith and spiritualities of African immigrants' Islamic adherents, with a focus on my dissertation. Most of those that I met are from Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt,

Ethiopia, and Somalia. Many take their faith seriously. I have equally met fervent African Islamic immigrant women. In the last year, I had met at least three from Somali and one from Egypt who wear the Hijab<sup>46</sup> as a distinctive marker of their social, ethnic, and religious identity. Many young and adult Somali women in the St. Louis area are noted to wear the Hijab here, though not as popularly used as in Somalia. Many contend with the derogatory attitudes such dispositions generate.<sup>47</sup> Islamic spirituality supports the daily aspirations of African Islamic immigrants. In my workplace, I have met at various times some Moslem immigrants from Nigeria, Egypt, Somalia and other African nationalities who utilize the chapel for prayers either individually or collectively, especially for the Friday prayers (Salat).

This globalizing salience reflects the Islamic Umma expressed visibly through its spiritual leadership as represented by an African immigrant. I felt an inward sense of pride that an African immigrant can represent the spiritual matters of such an organization. The fact that an African immigrant headed this organization is a testament to the capability of African immigrants to excel. Religious spaces and the spiritual arena offer a critical opportunity for African immigrants to prove their worth in urban America. The pursuit of the ideal of commitment and service to the community, especially to the diverse Moslem community, epitomizes the leadership capability of African immigrants in building community and institutions. I instantly realized that Sheik Nur Abdullah stood not for himself alone but was a significant role model within and outside of the Islamic community for other African immigrants regardless of their beliefs. Reinforced by this thought, I expended myself plotting on the ways in which Sheik Nur Abdullah would be useful in my exploration and incorporating of the unique perspectives and experiences of African immigrants' Islamic adherences into my ethnographic schema. I had begun mentally to map the different structural and imaginary contours of my research. Even as Sheik Nur Abdullah recently resigned from his position of Imam at the Islamic Foundation, and was replaced with a younger Imam, Minhaj Uddin Ahmed, my mind's eye still has his place secure, while also interested in securing the help and insights of the new Imam, Ahmed, an American-born Moslem who completed eight years advanced Islamic studies in South Africa,<sup>48</sup> in carrying out my research project.

## **THE PROBLEMS OF URBANITY AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS**

The ethnographic study of African immigrant communities in urban areas comes with a lot of problems. In general, the difficulty associated with

engaging in urban anthropological research due to its large purview is well known: "As every urban anthropologist knows, research work in an urban area is very frustrating, simply because it is large and the population considerable, even though in some cases it might be possible to demarcate a nice little compact unit for observation."<sup>49</sup> Such realities also handicap the study of diverse and spatially diffused immigrant groups spread within large urban areas, such as is the case with African immigrants in urban America.

African immigrants in St. Louis do not have an enclave, and neither are they clustered within a given region of the metro-area. Therefore, like the St. Louis Chinese, the concept of cultural community aptly references the African immigrants, given their diffusion throughout the metro area while still uniquely engaging diverse cultural institutions such as churches, mosques, and other cultural centers catering to African immigrants.<sup>50</sup> However, to fully engage African immigrants issues multi-sited research<sup>51</sup> is the best measure for success, given their diffusion within the metropolitan area. But in fact, this is difficult to do: it involves time, finances, commitments, and other resources. Ethnographers' site-switching and occupation of between spaces leaves a transitional identity that sometimes affects the research embedment within the flow of discourse and the current of events. Researching each site within a designated time independently, before switching to another site, offers better advantages. However, it means that issues of access and rapport building can intrusively slow one's pace. In any case, urban research with discrete and vacillating populations is a hard venture.

First, many members of these communities are leery of any focus upon them, significantly, because some are suspicious regarding the ends to which such studies would be utilized. Within the consciousness of anti-immigrant backlash and profiling of immigrants in the aftermath of September 11th, such fears cannot simply be ignored as irrelevant.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the mode of coping with such phenomena also shapes the cultural repertoire of African immigrants' consciousness. Further, the vast urban ambiance of many American metro-areas makes the locating of African immigrants problematic. Immigrants' institutions such as religious entities and businesses, like grocery stores, restaurants, and immigrants' associations within the urban area, become the real spaces for locating African immigrants to engage for any meaningful studies.

Therefore, the ethnographical method, while relevant for studying African immigrant populations within Western metro-areas, especially American cities, needs to incorporate other forms such as internet sites, web logs (blogs), internet chat rooms, and other multimedia resources in which African immigrants are located and which they utilize toward constructing



their social and cultural identities. Therefore, the utilization of such tools as archival resources, as spheres of textual ethnography, within which cognitive epistemological archaeology could be done, would help to enunciate the world of African immigrants. Autobiographies, biographies, ethnic newspapers, church brochures and bulletins, calendars and almanacs, home movies, photographs, and other printed and audio-visual materials can yield resourceful information regarding the mode of African immigrants' engagement and participation within their host environment.

In carrying out my research, one such item, an advertisement placed in an ethnic event brochure of the Nigerian Day Celebration in St. Louis, was helpful in directing me toward the Jesus House of all Nations, as their contact information and time of services provided me with cogent information. Hitherto, some of the Nigerians I had met and inquired from were not aware of the existence of this church in St. Louis. One informant told me that Jesus House Church once existed in St. Louis, but had relocated to Kansas City, Missouri. In addition to participant observation and other forms of ethnographic methods, the utilization of such sources has positive salience toward locating and researching immigrant populations in general, and African immigrants specifically. I have also found internet resources and sites operated by African immigrant groups and individuals to be very helpful and informative.

Further, multi-sited research such as this presents its own problems, especially of time. For instance, the two Churches in this study meet about the same time each Sunday; therefore, I have had to try to make appropriate choices as to which and when I would attend any one of them to engage in participant observations. In one Church, the use of multimedia, such as CD recordings of sermons, has helped me to be able to catch up with the text of the sermons for any particular Sunday. However, the subtle nuances that actual participation offers is often lost, in spite of the usefulness of such media.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter attempted to present an overview profile of the African immigrants in the urban centers of the United States, with specific emphasis on looking at the modes of their construction of social identity, particularly through the utility of religious values, idioms, and institutions. We attempted to present the mode of such engagements in a Midwestern urban area, the metro-area of St. Louis, Missouri, that also overlaps with some counties in the Southern Illinois area of what is purposefully designated as the Bi-State area.

Such enunciations flowed mainly from participant observation and ethnography within two religious communities, with two variant populations of African immigrants in St. Louis. The Jesus House of all Nations RCCG is made up mainly of Nigerians, and particularly Yoruba immigrants. The second, the United African Presbyterian Church, a congregation within the predominantly Anglo-American Presbyterian-USA, is constituted mainly of East African immigrants, and particularly Kenyans. In spite of such nuanced demographics, these two religious entities are a diverse mix, with the pool of their membership drawn from African immigrant nationals of different nations, the Caribbean, and native-born Americans.

Within this mapping, specific emphasis was placed on the role of religion and spiritual resources in discerning the modes by which African immigrants construct their social identities in urban America. This emphasis derives from the noted salience of religious values and institutional frameworks in reinforcing certain normative and spiritual values that help immigrants toward navigating and engaging different trajectories that modulate their experiences and integration processes.

The African immigrants' utilization of religion varies across many levels. While some utilize African immigrant-initiated or indigenous churches, others are members of mainstream traditional religious denominations and sects. Thus, African immigrants are found as clergies in different Christian denominations and congregations. Thus, an African Catholic or Episcopalian priest can be serving at a predominantly Anglo or Hispanic Church, whose demographic constitutions might be composed of very few, if any, African immigrant parishioners.

At other times, an African priest might be serving at an ethnic Catholic or Episcopalian Church constituted of mainly native-born African-American adherents. The same can apply to an African Pastor of Evangelical or Pentecostal Churches. Therefore, the lines of delineation are blurred, and that makes any scholarship of discrete and non-territorially fixated populations within American urban areas tasking. In spite of all these, religion is fundamental toward the shaping of African immigrants' identity, as it also was instrumental in the lives of previous European immigrants, whose spiritual and religious legacy still dots the landscape of many American cities.

African immigrants in St. Louis are active agents who utilize religion as a source of spiritual, moral, and existential relevance for their daily living, in coping with diurnal stress, and establishing communities that are vitally significant in ensuring their material and spiritual wellbeing. In this way, African immigrants, whether in an African-initiated and predominantly immigrant church like the Jesus House of all Nations, RCCG, or as discrete congregations within mainline Churches like Roman Catholicism,

Episcopalism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, and others, creatively utilize the religious idioms, values, and institutional opportunities privileged by their memberships of such entities. In this way, the United African Presbyterian Church serves a predominantly East African group, specifically Kenyans.

There is still a lot to be known about the realities of African immigration to American urban areas, and specifically into St. Louis. There is a need for an on-going research, or body of researches that needs to chronicle this population, especially the cultural formations they produce and reproduce, that invariable structure that forms uniquely the social and material ecologies of St. Louis. The relatively fewer number and lower diversity among the pool of African immigrants in St. Louis offers enormous advantages for micro-level immigrant studies as representational samples concerned with issues of African immigrants and their cultural potential.

Building upon this research, I intend to continue to explore these issues in depth relative to furthering understanding the modal processes responsible, and which situate the construction and sustenance of the St. Louis African immigrants' identity. This would also enable us to delineate whether the notion of identity can be monolithic or multiplex, within the subjective modes of individual actions and activities. I also envisage the heuristic emergence of other scholarship relative to this population targeting discrete aspects of their cultures.

Overall, while some might argue that the African immigrants' religious space might limit the level of their integration in urban America, I argue otherwise, that religious institutions, while significant in shaping values, also attempt to root themselves within their ecological and social niche. Thus, while enhancing certain past cosmological perspectives, they are also defining their domains using the cultural markers of American societies' tax exempt status, and these institutions also experience transformation in establishing their own unique American character, even when bonded within a transnational matrix.

Secondly, religious spaces represent just a singular purview among other competing spaces that shape immigrants' awareness, transverse, navigate, and negotiate. Therefore, compared to the time spent in their workplaces, for example, the religious arena would be less potent in radically altering the processes of their acculturation, and even assimilation, already formed within their interactions within these non-religious social spheres of diurnal activities and participations.

Thirdly, the cultural and religious institutions of previous immigrant streams from Europe, such as the Irish and Germans, while offering services to these immigrants, did not stop the process of the immigrants and their

children's integration into mainstream American society. Yet at the time of their immigration these immigrants were denigrated and classified less than "whites." Rather, these religious entities actually helped to ensure the immigrants' social and structural integration into American society. Hence, the new immigrants' religious entities are also less likely to impede the process of their adherents' integration into mainstream America.

African immigrants' religious establishments resonate with the earlier 18th and 19th century immigrants in the kind of roles they play regarding the adjustment process. Nonetheless, there are noticeable differences and tensions in the focus, emphases and spiritual expressions between African and African-American religious establishments.<sup>53</sup> African immigrants' spirituality is focally religion-based, though expressed in other forms such as naming ceremonies and other rituals that are not purely religious. Nonetheless, different life events are expressed through the idioms of religion. For instance, the Nigerian Ogoni refugees resettled in the St. Louis area engaged the forum of prayers to pray for their survival from tyranny and bestial death during the military dictatorship that dislodged them.<sup>54</sup>

These religious entities and the values they reinforce represent a positive force in the adjustment, adaptation, and integration processes of African immigrants, especially through their emphasis upon the performance of their civic responsibilities and religious duties. In this way, African immigrant churches attempt to integrate their immigrant adherents within a double or hybridized consciousness that sanctions and enriches both their faith practices and ideals of citizenship. Therefore, while some refer to the African immigrants as sojourners, and while it is true that many among these immigrants due to modern technology are engaged in transnational homeland activities, for these same reasons the blurring caused by distance also enhances their propensity toward naturalizing and permanently residing in America.

African immigrants are easily adaptable. In fact, most African immigrants were urbanites in Africa before coming to the United States. Others possessed experiences living in other Western countries previous to their American immigration. Many had experienced long absences from their rural homeland and agrarian practices, and were hence highly detached. Given this scenario, there is little difference between a Nigerian living in the United States and those living in Lagos, Nigeria, except for distance and the frequency of visits back home. Such processes have made decisions to adapt permanently to American life easy. In fact, the growing incidence and frequency of the internment of many African immigrants in American cemeteries in recent years offers a certain proof in this direction. The direction of African immigration remains to be seen. Whatever be the case,

African religious communities such as St. Louis' remain valuable in helping us to discern the heuristic dimension of African immigrations to the United States.<sup>55</sup>

## NOTES

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5. Most of my materials regarding this congregation derive from my site participant observations and fieldnotes of events witnessed, including some audio-video recordings of Rev. Ngatiah's ordinations rites, including the sermon by Pastor Linda Schubert and others. Mrs. Esther Moya during the Women Guild's day was recorded as audio. A recent newspaper feature article regarding this congregation was published while I was at the verge of finishing this paper. See Tim Townsend, "Native of Kenya helps Presbyterians reach out," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 23, 2006.
6. Stephen Hunt, "The "New" Black Pentecostal Churches in Britain [1]," a paper present at the Center for Studies on New Religion (CESNUR) 14th International Conference, Riga, Latvia, August 29–31, 2000.
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- From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 447–74; Cephas N. Omeno, “from the Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostalization of the Mainline Churches in Ghana,” *Exchange* 34 no. 1 (2005): 39–60.
11. Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 no. 3 (1998): 278–315.
  12. See Paul Brodwin, “Pentecostalism in Translation: Religion and the Production of Community in the Haitian Diaspora,” *American Ethnologist* 30 no. 1 (2003): 85–101.
  13. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation States*, (Pennsylvania: Gordon and Breach Science, 1994), 7.
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22. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1989 [1903]), 136
23. Transcription of Sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Linda Shugert, Moderator of Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, at the Ordination Ceremony of Rev. Dr. Jemimah Ngatiah as First African Woman Ordained in the Presbyterian-USA, November 12, 2005.
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25. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, (New York: Vintage Books [Random House], 1965), 8–10.
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27. James T. Fisher, *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America*, (Oxford: University Press, 2002); Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York’s Irish and German Catholics 1815–1865*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).
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30. “African Representatives Meeting Summary,” Office of Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB, November 16, 1995; Rev. Aniedi Okure, O.P, “ ‘Let’s Look at It Together,’ Invitation Letter Regarding Joint Meeting of African Priests and Sisters Resident in the United States, Jacksonville, Florida, August 23–26, 2001; Sr. MaryPaul Asoegwu, DDL, Letter: “Making it Here Together,” Regarding Third Annual Joint Meeting of African Women Religious Conference (AWRC) and African Catholic Clergy Association (ACCA), Palm Beach, Florida, August 1–4, 2002. The 1999 Pan African Roman Catholic Clergy Conference also dealt with similar theme “Who’s

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31. Matthew Murphy, “Immigration Nation,” *Arch City Chronicle*, (April 18–May 8, 2006): 1, 15.
  32. See Michelle Gahee, “Celebrating Strength and Community: Nigerian Catholics Plan Milestone Celebration July 19–20 with Shrine Dedication, Cathedral Mass, *The Tidings* (Los Angeles Catholic Newspaper) July 11, 2003: 4.
  33. This kind of outreach has been stressed by the Roman Catholic Church and specifically during the Extraordinary Synod for the Americas. The late Pope John Paul II, emphasized similar sentiments in the document—John Paul, 11, 1999, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America*, January 22nd 1999, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana): no.65.
  34. Amanda C. Tinnin, “Archdiocese Sets Aside Parishes for Minorities,” *Suburban Journals*, Nov. 30, 2004.
  35. About five African-born priests are currently resident within the Archdiocese of St. Louis. About two are studying at either the St. Louis University or Aquinas Institute of Theology. About one or two are in Professional Hospital Chaplaincy after a professional course of accredited education of the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) (see [www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu)) after which they are certified with any of the recognized certifying chaplaincy organizations—National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC), Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), and the National Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC). For Catholics, including priest, the preferred is the NACC. However, it is sometimes the case that Catholics and priests have been certified by the APC. The professional competency requirements toward certification exercise for almost all the certifying bodies are similar. It is also sometimes the case that due to paucity of Catholic priest, and the general apathy of most priests to engage in a nine months to a year-long CPE residency program (often divided into four units sometimes three) within a clinical, but appropriately a hospital setting, priests with some CPE (1 unit), often required for most Catholic seminarians on their way toward becoming priests, may be employed for sacramental ministry. Though it is an expectation to possess the CPE (4 units), it is seemingly the case that more immigrant priests, especially the growing African immigrant Catholic priests, are more likely to be made to meet the CPE requirements standards for employment than their fellow American confreres, who are often employed without the demanded burden of satisfying these requirements, and are often better paid than the immigrant priests with comparable ministerial experience and often better educated including meeting the CPE requirements.
  36. R. Bentley Anderson, “Prelates, Protest, and Public Opinion: Catholic Opposition to Desegregation, 1947–1955,” *Journal of Church and State* 46 (2004): 617–44.
  37. “LCMS Mission Focus: African Immigrant Mission,” April 2003; available at [www.lcmsworldmission.org](http://www.lcmsworldmission.org).



38. Rachel L. Swarns, "African Lost Tribe Discovers American Way," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2003: A1, A6.
39. Phone conversation with Sheik Nur Abdullah. April 14, 2006. More data emerged from a Tape recorded and transcribed project of the American Culture Studies Program of the Washington University, in St. Louis—Owais Ahmed, "Interview with Muhammed Nur Abdullah," October 30, 2003, American Culture Studies Program, Washington University in St. Louis, American Lives Project available at [http://amlives.artsci.wustl.edu/details\\_streaming.php](http://amlives.artsci.wustl.edu/details_streaming.php).
40. George Jackson, "Local Delegates to Sudan Gain Insight on Crisis," *The St. Louis Argus* [Newspaper Vol. 92, No. 35], Aug. 26–Sept. 1, 2004: A1, A4.
41. American Civil Liberties Union of Eastern Missouri (signed by Denise D. Lieberman [Legal Director] and James G. Felakos [Staff Attorney]), letter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), May 18, 2005, "Re: Request Under Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act/Expedited Processing Requested"
42. Malcolm X and Alex Harley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990 [1964]).
43. Terry Alford, *Prince among Slaves: The True Story of an African Prince Sold into Slavery in the American South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Michael Gomez, "Muslims in Early America," *The Journal of Southern History* 60 no. 4 (1994): 671–710.
44. This is the sense in which one's emotionality is engrossed when experiencing an enlightening and enlivening object—numinous—that floods the mind and holds it spellbound. Such state of captivation ensures the intense alignment of the person with the essence of the object of attention. It represents a kind of epiphany, that manifestly inspire awesome rather than awful experience. Some have also referred to it as "*mysterium et fascinans*." See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, (Oxford: University Press, 1958).
45. See Caleb Oladipo, "Piety and Politics in African Christianity: The Role of the Church and the Democratization Process," *Journal of Church and State* 45 no. 2 (2003): 347–48.
46. Hijab is the clothing adorned by Islamic women that covers their faces and most parts of their bodies. Different Islamic and national cultures define the style and modes of dressing in this way.
47. Pamela A. De Voe, "Symbolic Action: Religion's Role in the Changing Environment of Young Somali Women," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15 no. 2 (2002): 234–46.
48. Aisha Sultan, "Local Islamic Foundation's Leader Steps Down," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 16, 2006; "Islamic Foundation Turns to Youth," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 08.
49. Peter C. Gutkind, *Urban Anthropology: Perspectives on 'Third World' Urbanization and Urbanism*, (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum and Company, 1974), 62.
50. A cultural community is defined as "Ling Huping, *Chinese in St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 12.

51. George E. Marcus, "Ethnography In/Of The World System: The Emergence of Multi-Site Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 95–117.
52. Some Africans have suffered in the post-9/11 era. Given that the 9/11 Commission highlighted some African countries as danger zones, some Africans especially those who are Moslems have met greater suspicion. The case of Sulaiman Oladokun, a Nigerian Student at the SUNY Maritime who was rusticated and eventually deported following some arguments regarding tuition with a school official is a case in point. Unfortunately, Africans, and presumably even African Muslims, were victims of the 9/11 events. Two South African Muslims heading to the United States for a conference were denied admission and later both deported. The same was the case of Moustapha Seck a Senegalese Imam and itinerant preacher, who was detained in St. Louis in 2004 (see Aisha Sultan, "Imam Held on Visa Charge Near Release," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July, 2004). Even the Nigerian-born Akeem Olajuwon founded Islamic Da'Wah Center in Houston was named to be at the center of a Federal probe involving a sting of donations to the Islamic African Relief Agency alleged to have ties with Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaida, an organization virtually accused of perpetuating the 9/11 events.
53. David W. Machacek, "Prayer Warriors: African Immigrant Religions," Paper presented at the Religious Pluralism in Southern California Conference, University of California-Santa Barbara, May 9, 2003.
54. Chris King, "They Survived Death in Nigeria to Pray for Life in St. Louis," *St. Louis American*, July 29–August 4, 2004: A14.



## Chapter Five

# ‘Born in the USA’: Dislocation, Disrupted Kinship Networks, and the Transformative Power of Music and Dance in African Immigrant Baby Naming Ceremonies

Sherri Canon

This chapter examines the adaptive strategies by Senegalese and Ghanaian immigrants when replicating one of the primary African family ceremonies, the baby naming ceremony, in Los Angeles. With the far and wide transmigration of Africans during the past few decades, family ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals have become more transnational and multi-sited. Rituals and celebrations are often performed in dual or multiple locations in Africa and abroad, and often include “stand-ins” to represent important family elders or relations. In terms of performance practice, immigrants’ notions of authenticity and appropriate behavior are constantly re-negotiated in the diasporic performance settings. Ghanaian and Senegalese immigrants in Los Angeles formulate their identities as transnational subjects by alternately adapting to and resisting assimilation into the host society. On the one hand, immigrants adapt their rituals and celebrations to the constraints and limitations of the foreign surroundings, making subtle or significant changes to the rituals. On the other hand, immigrants Africanize the landscape and soundscape of their surroundings to ensure ritual efficacy, in both religious and social terms.

My focus is on the ethnomusicological issues of performance and identity during diasporic naming ceremonies. When African immigrants perform locally meaningful styles of music, dance, poetics, and praise at baby naming ceremonies, they create boundaries around like-identified groups, re-inscribe ethnic and national identities, reinforce social relationships, and accentuate the kinship ties between extended families across the Atlantic. At the same time, immigrants sometimes resist expected or

appropriate behavior in order to assert newfound freedoms, away from the watchful gaze of family elders. To compare the various strategies of identity negotiation and cultural retentions during diasporic naming ceremonies, I present three case studies from Los Angeles, including ceremonies by a Ghanaian Christian family, a Ghanaian Muslim family, and a Senegalese Mouride family. One thing that these ceremonies share is that they were videotaped by family or community members, with copies of the videotapes made available to family and friends across the Diaspora. Videotaped media have become a critical feature of modern transnational African ceremonies and thus, have figured prominently into my research and analysis.

## DISLOCATION AND DISRUPTED KINSHIP NETWORKS

Ghanaian scholar John Arthur writes, "To the majority of African immigrants, the journey to America is a family's investment in its future."<sup>1</sup> Similar to other immigrants in America's past and present, Africans have come to the U.S. seeking educational and economic advancement and to escape certain limiting conditions in their countries of origin. However, contrary to the trope of rugged individualism that informs the American journey, Africans use the opportunity to advance the security and well-being of their extended families and kinship networks back home. In other words, their success or failure in America represents the success or failure of an extended family (Arthur 2000). While much has been said about the deleterious effects of the brain drain in West Africa, fewer reports have examined the extensive contributions made by African immigrants living abroad to their countries of origin. Recently, Ghanaian president John Kufuor, addressing an audience of Ghanaian immigrants in Los Angeles, reported that the remittances from immigrants abroad currently comprise the largest source of income in Ghana.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, I draw out themes of dislocation and disrupted kinship networks to better understand the identity negotiations at play during family ceremonies.

African immigrants in the U.S. face a unique set of challenges with the birth of a child in America. On the positive side, a child is considered a blessing to a family and represents an increase in the status of the family as an extended social unit. Also, the majority of African immigrants believe that a child born in America will have more opportunities than in Africa, which ultimately signifies an increase in the family's investment. However, in terms of raising a child in the U.S., immigrant parents express concern that American culture threatens their traditional African social and familial values. They feel they must compete with the popular media, which valorizes individualism and consumerism, portrays youths disrespecting elders,

and represents blacks as criminals and outcasts. African children also become victims of discrimination and negative stereotypes about Africa in the schools. In response to excessive ostracizing, African children tend to assimilate into the "Black melting pot" of African American culture. This concerns African parents who believe that associating with African America offers fewer economic and social opportunities for black immigrants in the long run. To counteract these threats of identity crisis and "downward assimilation," African immigrants attempt to discipline their children according to their own traditional social values and limit their exposure to American media. Some families resort to sending their children home to Africa to be schooled and socialized and then have them return when they are of age to attend university.

Against this backdrop, a baby naming ceremony in the Diaspora is a potentially conflicted event for immigrant parents. To fully grasp the conflicts, it is necessary to introduce the key components and cultural significance of the naming rite in many West African societies. The baby naming rite is a social arena for publicizing the name of a newborn child to a family and a community. The act of naming establishes the identity of the child within the ethnic group, clan, and kinship network. The name selected for a child is believed to not only influence the child's disposition and behavior, but reflect on the quality and character of the entire family. Following a birth, it is customary to leave a baby and mother in seclusion during the first week of its life to ensure the protection of the mother and child, both physically and spiritually. The naming rite marks the end of the period of seclusion and introduces the baby to the community. During the naming ceremony, families perform a series of symbolic rites that provide further spiritual protection for the child. Following the naming rite, there is a large-scale public celebration to introduce the baby to the community, which includes traditional and popular music, dancing, feasting, and gift exchange.

The case studies below will illustrate various adaptive strategies, cultural retentions, and resistance by immigrants from Ghana and Senegal in Southern California. While these groups have different social histories and cultural expressions, they share the practice of naming their babies in a religious rite and introducing the infant in a community-wide celebration. How do immigrant parents reconcile their anxieties of being away from home regarding their child's first ever lifecycle ritual? How do immigrants, who belong to kinship-based social systems which uphold a host of customary and religious rites, familial obligations, and age group responsibilities, manage to reproduce the naming ceremony in a style that will ensure the newborn's spiritual protection and introduction into the community? In

terms of performance practice, how are immigrants' notions of authenticity and appropriate behavior re-negotiated in the host society?

## GHANAIAN CHRISTIAN NAMING CEREMONY AND OUTDOORING

In Ghana, the baby naming rite is traditionally performed at the home of the parents in the early morning on the seventh day of the baby's birth. The rite is officiated by a family elder, who reveals the name to the baby and to the family and friends in attendance. This is followed by prayers and customary rites that instruct the infant on proper codes of behavior such as honesty, hard work, and respect for others. Recently, Ghanaian Christians have appropriated this traditional naming rite into a church setting, known as a baby dedication (*asubø* in Akan). The baby dedication differs from a Protestant or Catholic baptism, which involves water as a sign of initiation into the religious faith. Situated towards the end of a regular Sunday church service, the baby dedication is officiated by the pastor, who publicizes the baby's name to the congregation, prays for the infant's health, long life, and prosperity, and requests a special offering of money to benefit the baby.

One such dedication took place in an African immigrant Pentecostal church in an area of town known as Beverly Hills Adjacent in August of 2003. The service consists of an hour of music from the gospel band, or "praise team" (which included myself on drumset), the sermon, more singing, and prayers. Towards the end of the service, the pastor announces the baby dedication, and requests that the family come to the front of the sanctuary. The mother and father come forward with the baby girl, dressed in a white christening gown, and face the pastor. They are surrounded by a dozen family members dressed in Western-style suits and formal dresses. The pastor asks the praise team to play a song while he prays. The band quickly peruses their set list from the beginning of the service and selects a slow worship song appropriate to the occasion. Holding the baby, the pastor prays for blessings for the young daughter, mentioning her by name, and welcomes her into the church community. He then dots the infant's forehead and crown with olive oil from a small crystal bottle, as he softly chants a prayer to Jesus Christ. A prominent feature in Pentecostal healing and dedication practices, olive oil is regarded as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and a powerful medium for consecrating people and objects.<sup>3</sup> As the pastor prays aloud, the praise team continues to play and sing worship songs softly in the background.

At the end of the dedication, a special offering is collected for the baby and family. The praise team switches gears and plays a quick tempo highlife

song, while the congregation forms two lines, dancing in a procession towards the basket at the center of the room. As each person approaches the basket, they discreetly drop their offering inside and dance back to their seats.

Later that afternoon, the family hosts the outdooring at the parents' apartment in South Los Angeles. In Ghanaian culture, the term "outdooring" literally signifies the first time the baby is brought out of doors, to the community-wide celebration. Inside the small apartment, the sofas and chairs have been pushed against the walls, opening up the center of the room for dancing. Gospel highlife music blasts from the home stereo. The ladies of the house pass through the living room with trays of sodas and Heineken to offer the guests. So far, the guests are sitting quietly or talking intermittently among themselves. Soon I discover that the festivities cannot officially begin until the elder man of the family arrives to pour libations. One man goes to the back bedroom and changes out of his casual clothes into a wrap of screen printed cloth folded down around his waist. After pouring some liquor into a small glass, the old man steps onto the threshold of the front door and pours libations outside onto the front stoop. Each time he dribbles a few drops onto the stoop, he chants a call to the ancestors. Outside, a young man is videotaping.

Now that the ceremony has officially been opened, the guests begin to dine and dance. The dining table is spread with a buffet of large aluminum tins of Ghanaian food, and guests load up their paper plates with *fufu* and groundnut soup, rice and fish, *banku* and *okro* soup, and fried plantain. The highlife music continues in the background as people eat. One of the guests, from Côte d'Ivoire, asks permission to play some other music on the stereo and fetches a tape of Congolese *soukous* music from his car. The *soukous* plays for a while, but does not inspire any dancing from the guests. After awhile, one of the male family members puts on another tape of highlife music and soon, nearly all the guests are dancing in the middle of the living room. Women and young men form tight circles and take turns going to the center of the small circle to dance and then retreat to the outer circle. One young woman brings the baby girl into the circle and dances with her. Holding the baby, she gently manipulates her limbs to the music. Then the father holds the baby and bounces her to the two-pulse highlife rhythms. This activity not only teaches the child from the earliest age how to interpret and move to the rhythms of the national music. It also sends information to the child about the value of music and dance in a social setting. The circle dissolves into couples dancing between persons of opposite gender and same gender. The dancing continues into the night.



Naming ceremonies are sites at which Ghanaian immigrants creatively negotiate religious and traditional performance practices. This Akan baby dedication exhibits some of these creative negotiations. The first issue involves the syncretization of traditional and Christian practices, which are evident in the use of music and dance during the baby dedication. Traditionally, among the Akan and other ethnic groups, there is no music during the early morning naming rite, however, there is much music and dancing during the outdooring. In the case of an asubø (baby dedication), the naming rite has been appropriated into a Christian church context, and therefore, music and dance are central, because the church, particularly the Pentecostal denomination, regards music and dance as key components of worship.

The second issue involves the creative negotiation of traditional rites, such as pouring libations, with Christianity. Within these negotiations, certain traditional practices continue to be contested. Today, Ghanaian Christians are divided over the practice of pouring libations in ceremonies. Without condemning traditional cultural practices wholesale, some Christians view certain traditional aspects of the naming ceremony as running counter to their religious path. The prohibition over pouring libations is rooted in Western missionary ideology that conflated African traditional religious practices with demonic worship and fetishism. Using liquor for libations and symbolic rites were misunderstood by missionaries as a satanic practice, given liquor's potency for communicating with beings in the spirit world. Other Ghanaian Christians refuse to abandon traditional rituals such as pouring libations because of its deep association with the interactive relationship between living beings and ancestors, a cornerstone of Ghanaian traditional cosmology and an important indicator of cultural identity.

To negotiate between the prohibitions of the received religion and traditional religious practice, Ghanaian immigrants devise new ways of performing their rites that are spiritually and emotionally satisfying. In some cases, they adapt Christian concepts into otherwise traditional performance contexts, in effect "assimilating Christianity into their own world."<sup>4</sup> Christians who choose to pour libations often diffuse the fetish aspect by using water rather than liquor. Using water for pouring libation de-activates the magical element and renders the activity merely symbolic. The Akan proverb, "AdeE a yEde nsa yE no, yen mfa nsuo nyE!" meaning, "You can't use water to do something that requires liquor," indicates that pouring water for libations lacks the power to invoke the ancestral spirits since ancestors demand liquor to drink. Also, Ghanaian Christians associate water with Jesus' life and power.

In other cases, people keep the religious and traditional rites separate by performing them at different locations. As the case study above illustrates, a family may perform the *asubø* in the church and later perform the outdooring in the home where a family elder may pour libations to honor the ancestors. This strategy allows the family to conform to Christian ethics and prohibitions and at the same time, appease the ancestors by continuing a tradition that is central to kinship-based rites.

## GHANAIAN MUSLIM NAMING CEREMONY AND OUTDOORING

In a Los Angeles hospital on Halloween night 2001, an African American woman has just given birth to a baby girl. The father, a recent arrival from Ghana, picks up his baby and whispers in her right ear the *adhan*, or Call to Prayer:

*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.  
Asb-hadu alla ilaha illa-llah (etc.)*<sup>5</sup>

In her left ear, he recites the *iqamah*, or Standing for Prayer. Then he whispers in Chamba:

*Siyeedi Hibah.* You shall be known as Hibah.

In Chamba culture, the child is the only one privileged to know her name until the formal naming ceremony in seven days. The practice of revealing the name first to the newborn is common to many northern Ghanaian ethnic groups, including Hausa and Konkoba, but contrasts that of most southern ethnic groups, including Asante, Ga, Fante, and Ewe, who regard a newborn as a visitor during its first week of life and thus, conceal the name until the official naming ceremony.

When they arrive home, the father spreads shea butter over the infant's body to protect her from evil spirits and the evil eye. He only regrets that hospital policy has prevented him from taking away the placenta, which he would have buried in the ground, a custom with both Islamic and traditional African roots. Seven days later, the father invites a few friends to a naming ceremony at a mosque, where the imam announces the baby's name and prays for her health and long life. Afterwards, the guests gather in the modest reception room to have refreshments and listen to tapes of Ghanaian music. But for the father, this is only a makeshift gesture, a place holder. He later tells me, "Because it's so important to have this rite, I sent the

information home [to Ghana] that I want them to do the naming ceremony at home for her, and that they should tape it and send it to me, so when she grows up she will see the difference of how it's done back home and what they do here. It's so big, honestly."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the videotape of the naming ceremony performed in the absence of the father, mother, and baby, will serve as the infant's official naming ceremony. The video, taped in a small town near Accra, opens with several women wearing screenprint dresses and headgear in green, purple, and red, sitting in a tight circle over a large aluminum basin of small red tomatoes. They are preparing enough rice, fish stew, and *tuo* (fufu made of corn or millet) to feed everyone who will stop by throughout the day. Several boys are tying up the front and back legs of a sheep and then carry it toward a hole they have dug in the ground. One boy grabs a ribbon of skin along the animal's neck and cuts straight through, allowing the blood to pour into the hole. The sheep twitches, then lies lifeless, as the words "Happy Birthday" superimpose over the screen.

The next morning, the men and women gather at the mosque to perform the naming rite. In the front room, the men sit quietly on rugs against a bright green wall. A silver tray of cedi notes and candies and a bowl of kola nuts are placed on the floor. The imam chants the announcement of the child's name, "Hibah," three times. Then each man in turn prays aloud as the room responds "Amee." After a brief sermon by the imam, the men spill out into the compound outside to eat from communal bowls of millet and meat stew served by the women.

The mood back at the family compound is light and celebratory for the outdoorings. Dozens of people mill about talking, laughing, and visiting. Under a tarp, escaping the dry sunlight, four drummers play two *longa*, small hour-glass shaped tension drums, and two *digonga*, double-headed bass drums, beating out proverbial language in praise of the child and her family line. Several people dance forward and paste money on the drummers' foreheads and then dance into a loose circle formation. One *bucci* (praise song) praises Hibah's father's clan, which established the village in northern Ghana where they originate. The song celebrates the idea that if everyone in the village were to die, the village would still belong to the clan.

*Bani bikpe ki to*, (Even if everybody dies)

*binse ndo*, (They own the village).

One elder woman dances to the center of the loose circle, bends sharply at the waist, and accentuates the drum rhythms with her hips and

behind. She gestures with her hands and feet to the right, left, up, and down, signifying the village's magnitude and importance. The buccis, both drummed and sung, celebrate the valor and warrior aspect of the Chamba people, the heroics of the family's clan, and other notable activities in the village. These songs "place" the guest of honor, the child Hibah, who is not actually present, but regarded as a member of the lineage, in a regional and historical context of kinship.

As this case study illustrates, new arrivals to America sometimes struggle with their inability to properly perform a baby naming ceremony. In this case, the immigrant asked his family members in Ghana to perform the ceremony in his absence and videotape it, in order to ensure ritual efficacy. This relates to a second issue, which is the use of videotapes in rituals and celebrations. As videos of naming rituals circulate around the Diaspora, the distance between extended families collapses. As we have seen from the video, the family celebrates the baby's birth by situating the newborn in a complex of familial relationships, which are expressed through proverbial drum language, songs, and dances. Although the baby and her parents are not present during this ritual and celebration, the video will serve as her official naming ceremony.

### A SENEGALESE MOURIDE *BAPTÊME* (BAPTISM)

Similar to other Senegalese immigrant enclaves in New York, Paris, and Milan, the community in Los Angeles consists largely of disciples of the Mouride order. Mouridism is a Sufi brotherhood (or *tariqa*) particular to Senegal that revolves around the teachings of its founder and saint, Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Today, the majority of Mourides work as merchants in the bustling downtown markets of urban centers, selling luxury items such as hats, sunglasses, and watches. Many of the wives of Mouride merchants work as hair braiders. It should be noted that not all Mourides are merchants and not all merchants, Mouride.

In March of 2003, a Wolof Mouride couple hosted an *ngente*, or baby naming ceremony, also known as *baptême* (French for baptism), in their apartment in the mid-Wilshire area of Los Angeles. In Senegal, the Wolof naming ceremony is performed in two segments—the religious ritual, which occurs on the morning of the seventh day after the baby's birth, and the cultural celebration, which is geared towards women and features traditional and popular music, dancing, feasting, and a systematic form of gift exchange among the women, called *ndowtel*.

At the naming rite in Los Angeles, the living room is filled with men seated quietly on sofas and available floor space. The women are a few

feet away in the kitchen preparing the traditional breakfast of ‘*lab*’ (a warm cereal, or porridge). The family has hired a Senegalese videographer to record the ngente. The video captures the following events: First, the local leader of the Mouride community holds the baby and leans in to pray quietly, blowing the prayer toward the infant. He passes the baby to the imam, who follows suit, and then announces the name of the child to the crowd. Then, each man in turn holds the baby and whispers a blessing and softly spits it toward the infant. Senegalese Muslims believe that the words of a prayer are imbued with a visceral power, which is transferred by blowing or spitting the prayer onto another person or oneself by wiping the hands on one’s face.

The celebration takes place later that day at the apartment reception hall. While the women dance to *mbalax* music in a large circle around the birthmother, the men sit off to the side, eating and discussing matters of their own interest. The women take turns going to the center of the circle to dance a flashy, sometimes explosive solo dance, and then quickly retreat to the outer circle. Each new song initiates a new dance movement and the women impress one another with their movements in a spirit of intimacy and relaxed glee.

At one point, the *gëwël* women (those of the praise singer, musician, historian caste) hover around the seated *gëer* ladies (those of the noble or free-born caste). The *gëwël* clap straight beats and chant a praise song targeted to the birthmother:

*Lidibe sama mbokula* (The baby, he’s my parent).

*Sama nijaay moko diur* (He’s the son of my uncle).

*Sama mbokula* (He’s my parent).

A man standing behind the birthmother hands a couple of twenty dollar bills to the lead singer, who waves the bills in the air as she strikes up another song. This exchange of song and money signifies the social dynamic between *gëer* and *gëwël*. This particular praise song speaks to a unique set of familial relationships and obligations in Wolof society. If a woman and her brother of the same mother and father each bear a child—e.g., the sister bears a daughter and her brother bears a son—the woman’s daughter regards her cousin, the son of her uncle, as her caretaker or parent, and he, in turn, is expected to give her money if she asks for it. This relationship is uni-directional, in that it applies only from the sister’s child towards the brother’s child. The *gëwël* at this baptism are highlighting the special caretaker relationship between cousins by asserting that, “*Lidibe sama mbokula*,” “The baby, he’s my parent;” “*Sama*

nijaay moko diur,” “He’s the son of my uncle.” In fact, they are not actually related to the baby or the mother, but are placing themselves in a position to request money through the poetics of the praise chant and obligations of kinship.

Throughout the ceremony, the women’s dance movements become increasingly sexual and flirtatious. At one point, the mother is seated in a chair, and several women form a circle and take turns dancing in front of her, some allowing their dresses to open and expose their undergarments. During another song, a woman clutches the back of the chair, bends forward at the waist, lifts her dress slightly, and bumps her hips and behind to the rhythms. As she winds her hips, she gives a mock look of seduction towards the camera, then laughs and skips away. Other ladies take their turn one and two at a time. During the rhythmic break in the song, a woman turns the chair to face the camera while another bumps her behind precisely to the call and response vocal and drum pattern, as the camera zooms in on the shaking cloth of her dress. The song, called “Songa Ma” by Mbaye Dieye Faye, literally means “Attack Me,” meaning, sexually. During the drum break, he sings, “Diafandou” meaning “Hang on!” suggesting to his lover how to respond to his acrobatic love-making. Consequently, the dancers at the party playfully act out the sexual connotations by “hanging on” to the chair back while dancing to the rhythmic break.

Among Senegalese Mouride families in Los Angeles, the performance of kin-based ceremonies such as the naming rite is important for asserting and maintaining different aspects of identity, such as class, social caste, ethnicity, nationality, age-group, religion, and gender. For one, the interdependent relationship between géer and géwël is clearly marked through musical performance practice of praise singing. In this example, the géwël move around the reception hall singing short repetitive praise songs to the géer, who in turn exercise their grace and honor through giving money to the singers.

sister ----- brother



her daughter >>> his son

Figure 5-1.

However, according to Senegalese immigrants, women of the géer caste are taking liberties to blur the line between the social classes in the area of dance and are thus, resisting the norms of appropriate behavior. Their resistance in the area of dance can be read as an extension of contemporary attitudes in Senegal, but with the added particularity of diasporic identities and strategies. According to Deborah Heath, women's dance in urban Senegal has been the focus of a "struggle for control" in what she calls a "politics of appropriateness and appropriation." Heath suggests that, "The struggle over the meaning of dance has to do with shifting notions of appropriateness, grounded in relations of power."<sup>7</sup> Whereas géwël are believed to be born with music and dance aptitude and have license to dance suggestively in public, due to their relatively lower status, géer women are associated with "the concept of *kersa* (honor), which links high status to restraint," (Heath, 90).

At baptisms and wedding celebrations in Los Angeles, Senegalese claim that everyone is dancing "like a géwël," regardless of their social class, even in mixed company. One Senegalese man commented that, "Maybe it's because we don't see each other for a long time, so we just go wild. We crave for Senegalese parties and each other's company. And also, it's because the elders are not there watching."<sup>8</sup> But we must also consider the culturally specific notions of decency and appropriate behavior. Senegalese consider the erotic hip and derrière movements, such as those for "Songa Ma," to be sexually provocative and daring, but not necessarily indecent. These types of movements have a long association with traditional music and dance and are not deemed inappropriate. The real measure of indecency for Senegalese pertains to géer women, in mixed company, who expose their legs or undergarments. This is where resistance is situated for Senegalese immigrant women.

## CONCLUSIONS

Family ceremonies reinforce and regenerate kinship bonds through a series of customary rites that celebrate the new family roles that people have created for themselves. For immigrants in the Diaspora, the added components of dislocation, disrupted kinship networks, and transnational identities can add a certain amount of conflict or anxiety for new parents. This chapter has explored various strategies of cultural retention, negotiation, and resistance among Ghanaian and Senegalese immigrants in Los Angeles when performing baby naming ceremonies.

For the Ghanaian Christian family, the naming ceremony hinges on recognizing and ritualizing the interactive relationship between humans and

their ancestors. The family in question creatively negotiated their religious and traditional performance practices by performing an appropriation of the traditional naming rite in a church setting and then later performing the customary rite of pouring libations to the ancestors at the outdoorings at their home. Music and dance were key components of the both the naming rite in the church and the outdoorings afterwards.

For the Ghanaian Muslim man and his family, it was more important to get the ritual and celebration right than to attempt to recreate a naming ceremony on his own in Los Angeles. Being a recent arrival, the man was still very connected to his family and home area, and asked that his family perform the proper rite and celebration in their absence and videotape it for him. The videotape has the power to collapse the expanse between himself and his family at home, and it will be an opportunity for his daughter to view her heritage and homeland. In terms of performance practice, the music and dance at the celebration clearly situate the infant in a historical and regional network of kinship.

At the Senegalese naming ceremony, the women re-evaluated the degrees of appropriate behavior in the realm of dance, along the lines of social caste and age group. The factors that contribute most to these changing dynamics among Senegalese immigrants include a real and imagined separation from the older generation, who are the arbiters of appropriate behavior, the absence of certain social barriers which exist at home but not so much in the Diaspora, and the inclusion of videotaping in the performance of family ceremonies, which provides a catalyst for more expressive performance.

## NOTES

1. John Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000), 96.
2. Sherri Canon, *Music, Dance, and Family Ties: Ghanaian and Senegalese Immigrants in Los Angeles*, Ph.D. Dissertation, (The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Musicology/Ethnomusicology, 2005).
3. The church's pastor references two Bible verses, James 5:14-15 and Mark 6:13, regarding the use of olive oil during prayer and worship. James 5:14-15: 14. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15. and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Mark 6:13: And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.
4. Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, (London, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994), 28.



5. The *Adhan*, or Call to Prayer:  
*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.*  
 Ash-hadu alla ilaha illa-llah.  
 Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar-Rasulullah.  
 Hayya 'ala-s-Salah, Hayya 'ala-s-Salah . . .  
 Hayya 'ala-l-falah, Hayya 'ala-l-falah.  
 Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.  
 La ilaha illa-llah.  
 Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest.  
 I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allah.  
 I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.  
 Hasten to the Prayer, Hasten to the Prayer.  
 Hasten to real success, Hasten to real success.  
 Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest.  
 There is none worthy of worship but Allah.
6. (21 May 2004, personal communication).
7. Deborah Heath, "The Politics of Appropriateness and Appropriation: Recontextualizing Women's Dance in Urban Senegal," *American Ethnologist*, 21 no.1 (1994):88-104; 90.
8. Ibrahima Ba 2005, personal communication.

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Chapter Six

*A Viagem Da Minha Vida*

The Voyage of My Life: Identity  
Formation and Resettlement among  
Angolan Women of Color in Toronto

Robert A. Kenedy

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores identity and resettlement issues among Angolan Lusophone (Portuguese speaking) women of color in Toronto. While Lusophone immigrant groups have been studied,<sup>1</sup> much of the literature examines Lusophone women from Portugal.<sup>2</sup> Generally, scholarship on immigration and settlement in Western countries tends to ignore the experiences of migrant women of color, (Dua, 1999). Most Portuguese-speaking groups seem to be homogenized into one community by Canadians because of their common language. Those outside the Canadian Lusophone community may not know the tensions that exist among Lusophone groups and are often unaware of the history between Portugal and Angola. Therefore, investigating the needs of Angolan women is necessary in order shed light on their predicament, and educate others about them. Although Angolan immigrant women are not as numerous as the Portuguese, they remain a growing, contributing, and thriving community.

Only one systematic study to date has focused on the Angolan Diaspora in Canada.<sup>3</sup> This research attempts to fill the gap in the literature about Angolan Lusophone women of color and their resettlement experiences in Canada as well as how this process influences these women's identity formation. By studying these women, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of their experiences. It is necessary that research be completed on the experiences of these women in order to better understand these women's experiences. A study of Angolan minority women is crucial as many of these women come to Canada as independent applicants,

without families. The needs that immigrant women require in order to overcome settlement and language difficulties are often ignored because of the nature of Canadian immigration policies, (Giles, 21).

The influx of Angolan Lusophone women arriving in Canada with various resettlement issues and challenges highlights the importance of studying and understanding these migrants. This is especially important as news reports of Canada's deportation of Angolan refugees have created concern in the Angolan community. The Department of Immigration decided to send letters requesting Angolans that have applied for refugee status in Canada between 1999 and 2001 to leave Canada.<sup>4</sup> The Canadian government argues that Angolan refugees can no longer make claims for refugee status in Canada as Angola is no longer at war (*Sol Português* 2004). After working hard to build new lives, the Canadian government is now insisting that they be sent back to a country that is just beginning the process of rebuilding after a bloody thirty year war. The continued deportation of Angolans merits the need for further study on Angolan immigration and settlement experiences in Canada.

The literature regarding Lusophone and other African women's resettlement experiences focuses on various issues connected to migration and issues regarding their work experiences. Giles, Messias and Lebert studies focus on Lusophone groups and their settlement experiences.<sup>5</sup> Messias, Giles and Toro-Morn's investigate the relationships between migrant women and their working experiences.<sup>6</sup> Franz's comparative study examines the settlement and work experiences of Bosnian refugee women in New York and Vienna.<sup>7</sup> She specifically explored the mechanisms these women utilized in order to survive in their new countries.

The study of migrant women's transnational experiences is present in Toro-morn's study of Puerto Rican women in Chicago and Lebert's study of Angolans living in Toronto and in the United Kingdom. Kumsa's<sup>8</sup> and McMichael and Manderson's<sup>9</sup> studies explore African refugee women and how they negotiate identity. McMichael and Manderson concentrate on how ". . . loss of social relationships as a result of civil war and displacement contribute to women's distress and sadness within the Somali community of Australia," (88). While differences exist between Kumsa, Lebert, McMichael and Manderson's studies, as all authors study different African ethnic groups, highlight African communities and explore the links between settlement and issues of identity with Lebert exploring Angolans in Diaspora.

The findings common to all studies were the difficulties experienced by immigrants when adjusting and forming an identity in a new country. This proved to be a challenging process of adjustment for the majority of

the participants of all studies, (Giles, 2002; Franz, 2004; Messias, 2001; Toro-Morn, 1995; Kumsa, 2002; Lebert, 1999; McMichael and Mander-son, 2004).

Giles' found that "... gender, race and class relations are associated with nationalisms and shape immigration policies and global ways of working and living," (17). It is this reason, according to Giles, why so little attention has been paid to the lives and work of the immigrant women who formed the majority of immigrant workers from Portugal during the height of the Portuguese migration to Canada. She found that Portuguese women were largely ignored by Canada's immigration policy that resulted in problems of settlement that continue to persist today. She also found that these immigrant women continue to be marginalized and ignored largely due to the policies of immigration that brought them here for a better life. Giles found many women adapted to these conditions, even more successfully than others, as in the study of Franz.

Franz also found that women adapted more successfully than men. She found Bosnian women in Austria did so because they responded to the existing economic segregation and demands by creating networks with other Yugoslav women and Austrian citizens. In New York City, female Bosnian newcomers neither desired nor considered it necessary to form these alliances with previous Yugoslav immigrant groups. As such, their integration occurred along ethnic or local boundaries, (Franz, 2004). Similar to Franz's study, Messias found that through daily life and work experiences, immigrant women made efforts to forge, maintain, or recreate contacts with values and perspectives from both Brazilian and American society. These women found contacts to be crucial in rebuilding their lives in a new country, and the maintenance of culture to be of utmost importance, as is Toro-morn's study.

Toro-Morn noted that political economy had in fact forced many of these working class women to migrate. Her participants discovered themselves maintaining their Puerto Rican culture and identity by becoming housewives, though many also worked out of the home as a result of economic necessity. While all wives were placed in charge of womanly duties "such as cooking and cleaning" (Toro-morn, 9), different strategies developed along class lines within this context and married working class women adapted to this new way of life. In contrast, middle-class women felt different about work and familial obligations. They struggled over their roles as mothers and wives, often rejecting traditional ideologies about women's roles. Their class position in fact afforded them options not available to working class women such as hiring help to deal with housecleaning and childcare. Their maintenance of cultural values helped

these women in their settlement process and the maintenance of culture for them was crucial. In short, Giles, Franz, Messias and Toro-Morn's studies suggest that working class women found ways to deal with their economic situation and that their status was at times less than equal to their male counterparts.

Kumsa found that escaping the geography of the third world does not mean escaping the economic exploitation of the third world. Women still found strong ties in cultural values and the importance of cultural maintenance in a new land. The women she studied were even oppressed in the Western society in which they lived. Although they came here to escape oppression, they encountered economic oppression also as many of the positions afforded to them as women, were low-wage jobs. As in the studies of Giles, Franz, Messias and Toro-Morn, Kumsa's study showed that working class women are often exploited in the settlement process in their new country.

Lebert found that Angolans are in fact a Diaspora, even in exile, yet they did not admit it, (Lebert, 117). Though planning to return to Angola, many of her participants still maintained strong cultural bonds to their country. Lebert also showed that maintenance of cultural ties was important for Angolans as it was for them in Kumsa's study. McMichael and Manderson found that despite instances of solidarity and supports, including both formal and informal community services, Somali women have an overwhelming sense of social networks that have eroded and become fractured. This was also a significant source of sadness, distress, anxiety, and depression for them. What these studies all have in common is that they show that people who often move to a new land find social networks important and the maintenance of them to be crucial in resettlement. Though Franz's study of Bosnian women in New York did not, the overwhelming majority of immigrant groups revealed that without these ties they would feel lost.

These studies are important in researching and reviewing issues and variables for my study such as identity formation, resettlement, class, ethnicity, race, and gender. Through studying Angolans in Canada, the issues outlined in the studies of exploitation of women, loss of familial support and feelings of loneliness apply to all immigrant groups, regardless of wherever they come from. The qualitative interview as employed by Giles, Messias, Toro-morn, Franz, Kumsa, Lebert and McMichael and Manderson is relevant to this study. It seems that migrating women always appear to suffer and be second-class citizens wherever they may go. The maintenance of social ties may be crucial for immigrant women as they adjust to new countries, (McMichael and Manderson, 2004).

## METHODS AND ANALYSIS

In order to understand the methodological issues associated with interviewing women in this study, we will begin by reviewing methodological issues of interviewing women with various migration experiences. Then, the methodological and sampling issues in our study are discussed. Finally, the analysis examines these women's experiences.

### METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE LITERATURE

Methodologically, it is commonly held that in order to investigate women's narratives of their migration experience, it is best to utilize a qualitative interviewing method, (Franz; Giles; Kumsa; McMichael and Manderson; Messias; Toro-morn). This is due to a feminist ethic that was present in all the above studies that ensures the subjects would feel more comfortable in this type of conversational interview. Reinharz (1993:69)<sup>10</sup> argues that this is "because feminist research stems from the critical distrust of earlier non-feminist research, and because much of this earlier work was conducted using quantitative methods, a symbiosis has occurred between "feminist" and "qualitative," in the minds of many people."

In studying immigrant groups, researchers often conduct in-depth or focused qualitative interviews to extract personal stories and experiences from their subjects. Giles' study of Portuguese women in Toronto (from 1989 and 1992) used "61 qualitative interviews," (5). It is also important to mention that Giles examined quantitative data from the Canadian census and the Portuguese Emigration Bureau in reporting the numbers of Portuguese that emigrated from Portugal to Canada in her research. A qualitative focused interview was also used in Messias' study of Brazilian working women living in the United States. Similar to the studies of Messias and Giles, Toro-Morn interviewed Porto Rican women in Chicago from March 1989 to July 1990, using the qualitative in-depth interview model. By immersing herself in community activities and cultural events, she was able to meet a network of women. Her interviews lasted from 1–3 hours and were conducted mainly in Spanish and English (Toro-morn, 713). As in the previous studies, Franz also utilized a qualitative focused interview technique.

Differing from the other studies mentioned above, Kumsa used a flexible qualitative guide with five themes to open up spaces for narration. She conducted qualitative interviews with her participants from June to August 1998, over the telephone and held face-to-face conversations with two of them, (Kumsa, 475–476).

In the U.K., Lebert also conducted qualitative interviews as well as unstructured conversations and participant observation. Scatzman and Strauss define the qualitative participant observation method as “. . . speaking of observations of actual situations. Referring directly to what is known as the field method—a generic term for observing events in a natural situation.”<sup>11</sup> In Toronto, a preliminary phone conversation was followed by an interview. As Lebert could not speak Portuguese, a translator was present. The interviews were conducted in English, French, and Portuguese and lasted between three and a half to ten hours, (Lebert, 17–18).

McMichael and Manderson used ethnographic research and conducted in-depth qualitative interviews from August 2000 to July 2001, with 42 Somali women that entered Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Act. The interviews were carried out in Somali in the participant's homes with the assistance of a Somali community worker. Women selected to participate were based on an extensive network of friends and relatives.

Common to all studies was the use of the qualitative interview, (Giles; Messias; Toro-morn; Franz; Kumsa; Lebert; McMichael and Manderson). This method proved to be the most successful for all authors to be in obtaining information from their participants. Because of this, it could be said that when conducting interviews with such participants, a qualitative interview is the best approach in data collection.

## METHODS

For this study a semi-structured interview schedule with 61 open-ended questions, was used to interview 11 Portuguese speaking Angolan women. These women were interviewed primarily in Portuguese, and in some cases using a combination of Portuguese and English. During the interviews these women's immigration experiences, their past personal histories, and personal adjustments to life in Canada were discussed. Follow up questions were also asked in order to clarify points the participants made and explore various issues regarding settlement and related issues. At times questions were re-phased and clarified in order for participants.

In this study, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted, as in the studies of Giles, Messias, Toro-morn, Franz, Kumsa, Lebert and McMichael and Manderson. This method is also defined in the literature section as “In-depth interviewing involves asking open-ended questions, listening to and recording the answers, and then following up with additional relevant questions. On the surface this appears to require no more than knowing how to talk and listen. Beneath the surface, however, interviewing becomes an art and science requiring skill, sensitivity, concentration,

interpersonal understanding, insight, mental activity and discipline.”<sup>12</sup> This method proved to be successful in gaining information from participants and in increasing the comfort levels of participants during the interview process. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and a half to two hours and took place in participants’ homes, the Angolan Community Center, Roberts Library at the University of Toronto and in coffee shops around the city of Toronto. Participants consisted of both married and unmarried women, with the majority of them currently pursuing a university education. The interviews were all conducted in Portuguese, in order to accommodate and make the participants more comfortable in discussing the subject matter. The interviews were unstructured, in order to allow for participants to respond freely to the questions being asked, without undue pressure and lasted from 45 to 90 minutes.

All studies, Giles, Messias, Toro-morn, Franz, Kumsa, Lebert and McMichael and Manderson, provided possible variables in order to examine in this study and also provided the source of the hypothesis. I examined all these studies in order to provide more information and educate myself on the issues facing migrating women before, during, and after the settlement process in the country of destination. These studies provided a window and a glimpse into the lives of immigrant women and the issues that affect them.

The dependant variable in our study is identity formation. The main independent variable in this study is resettlement. Other variables include gender, ethnicity and race. Overall, resettlement influences the identity formation of Angolan women. More specifically, it is hypothesized that resettlement issues may have positive and negative influences on Angolan women’s identity formation. Positive influences could include the construction of a new identity in a new country and the ability to start over again in the new country of settlement. Negative aspects could include loss of familial ties, loss of confidence and feelings of homesickness.

## **SAMPLING THE LITERATURE**

A common sampling technique for all studies was the use of snowballing to gain participants. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where “. . . researchers collect data on the few members of the target population they can locate, and then ask those individuals to provide the information needed to locate other members of that population whom they happen to know,” (Babbie and Benequisto, 166). This method proved to be the most successful for the authors in gaining participants. Though not clearly stated in her book, Giles’ sampling method probably consisted of snowball sampling. Her sample consisted of “20 first-generation



Portuguese women, 4 first generation Portuguese men, 4 second generation men, and 16 Portuguese community workers,” (Giles, 2002,5). Messias utilized informal networking and a snowball sampling method to obtain her participants, (Messias, 3). Her sample consisted of “26 Brazilian women” (Messias, 1) and she recruited participants “. . . within urban Brazilian immigrant communities on the east and west coast,” (Messias, 3). As in Giles’ study, Messias’ study focused on working class women. Giles’ sample of working class women was similar to that of Messias and Toro-Morn’s study. Toro-morn’s sample consisted of 17 married women. Eleven were mostly working class, with little education that came to Chicago in the early 1950s and 1960s. At the time of migration, most were married or had children. The six professional women in the sample had all migrated in the 1960s and had over 14 years education,” (Toro-morn, 714). A similar study to Messias’ is the work of Franz that focused on Bosnian refugees living in New York and Vienna. Her fieldwork for this study was conducted in Vienna from November 1998 to March 1999 and in New York from May 1999 to September 1999. Though not specified, Franz also probably utilized a snowball sampling technique in order to obtain participants. Franz also did not indicate her sample size in her published study.

The studies of Kumsa, Lebert, and McMichael and Manderson all deal with immigrants from Africa. In Kumsa’s study, she interviewed 16 Oromo refugee women who fled Ethiopia in the 1990s and resettled in Western cities including: Berlin, London, Melbourne, Minneapolis, New York and Toronto. The women’s parents had been killed, jailed, or fled Ethiopia for embracing their Oromo identity and rejecting their Ethiopian one. Lebert and Kumsa used a snowball sampling method to obtain their sample. In Lebert’s case, she interviewed 13 Angolans living in Toronto and surrounding areas, (Lebert, 9). Though nine participants resided in Toronto and two in Ottawa, they were all linked with the community in Toronto and in Portugal. McMichael and Manderson interviewed 42 Somali women from August 2000 to July 2001. These women entered Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Act. The interviews were carried out in the participant’s homes with the assistance of Malyum Ahmed, a Somali community worker. Most of the interviews were conducted in Somali for whom Malyum not only interpreted but also added his own cultural insight. Women selected to participate were based on an extensive network of friends and relatives of Malyum, and relationships formed with women by McMichael (2001)<sup>13</sup> in her capacity as a settlement support worker, (McMichael and Manderson, 90). Though not specified in the study of McMichael and Manderson one can deduce that the researchers utilized the non-probability method of snowball sampling.

All researchers used snowball sampling in order to obtain their research participants. These studies also used primary and secondary data to present the immigrant populations that were studied. It can then be said that snowball sampling is the best method utilized in order to obtain participants for these types of studies even if the sample size differed, as it did in all these studies. Thus, it can also be said that the decision of the size of the sample is usually left to the discretion of the researcher and the focus of their research.

## SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND THE SAMPLE

The types of sampling used in this study included the non-probability methods of purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling, which is based on, “[a] purposive sample is one in which each sample element is selected for a specific purpose . . . [c]onvenience sampling means using subjects who are available to you<sup>14</sup> . . . [snowball sampling is based on] researchers collect data on the few members of the target population they can locate, and then ask those individuals to provide the information needed to locate other members of that population whom they happen to know,” (Babbie and Benequisto, 166).

This combination of sampling techniques was used due to the fact that it was not easy to locate participants for this study. Therefore, once participants were located and interviewed, they were asked if they knew of others who would consent to being interviewed. Participants were also succeeded with the help of Patricia, a volunteer at the Angolan Community Centre in Toronto, and also with the help of an Angolan graduate student. Even with these contacts, it was extremely difficult to find participants due to the sensitivity of the subject matter and due to the fact that the researcher was not Angolan. The limited number of participants and the difficulty in obtaining participants limits the representative of Angolan women. Participants were obtained through purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling, as these women were often reluctant to participate given the research subject and focus.

One of the difficulties Lebert identified in accessing the Angolan community in Toronto was her inability to speak in Portuguese. It is crucial that a study of these women in their mother tongue is completed; even with the use of an interpreter, much valuable research could be lost as a result of the lack of comprehension.

Many subjects were reluctant to participate if the Angolan graduate student was not present. And even then, many participants were uncomfortable at times during the interview process with the subject matter of

discussion. The participants consisted of 11 Angolan women between the ages of 20–29 who were all landed immigrants but had come here initially as refugees. The interviews occurred during the summer months of July and August 2004. The sample was extremely difficult to obtain due to the mistrust of the participants towards the researchers and the bias towards the researcher, as the researcher was not Angolan. By using a non-probability sampling method to obtain participants, this at times limited the study and could question the reliability. The snowball sampling method used did not allow for representativeness but rather, only obtained available participants. Even so, participants were reticent to provide information during the interview process, as they felt uncomfortable, given the focus of the research and subject matter. Many of the participants were also reluctant to provide information, as the researchers were not of Angolan descent.

Given the fact that Angolans in Canada are currently undergoing a refugee crisis, and the Canadian government has recently taken their refugee status away, the timing of this study and the subject matter could have also affected its outcome. Many women chose not to participate in the study, as they were in Canada as illegal refugees. Believing we were from the government or from a government organization, many Angolan women thought that they would be reported and deported if they participated in this research, as they were mistrustful. In future consideration for such a study more community involvement is necessary in order to facilitate obtaining a more representative sample. Participants were all now landed immigrants, and none possessed refugee status, thus possibly biasing the results because of this. Contact between the researcher and community is important, as this is the key to obtaining an accurate sample. Employing community members to conduct the interviews would facilitate this process and improve and diversify research results.

Similar studies are currently being completed on the identity of Lusophone Africans in Portugal and in Brazil, as these are Lusophone countries, then the participants' comfort levels may be greater and this would allow for a wider scope of both participants and feedback. As this research was taking place, many Angolans' refugee status is also being taken away due to the fact that the Canadian government considers Angola no longer to be at war, thus eliminating the need to claim refugee status in Canada. This prevented many participants from taking part in the project as they are now here under illegal status. Had this been the case, then perhaps the results would have been different.

The subject matter used in this study was highly sensitive and of a problematic nature at times. The study of personal identity-formation and settlement issues provided problems as all subjects experienced some degree

of discomfort while relating their experiences in this manner. The ethical limitations were those of the subject matter most of all which provided a high degree of discomfort to all participants. It was of a personal nature and many participants became very emotional while discussing these issues. Regardless of this, we proceeded with the research while being aware of the discomfort of participants. All participants' consent was voluntary and they signed a form of informed consent agreeing to participate in the study. Participants' pseudo-confidentiality was guaranteed as only the researcher knew the identity of the participants and in the study no names would be used. Though we informed the participants several times they could stop at any time if they wished, they still continued. Ethically to improve the study, we could have stopped the study at the point of discomfort for the participants. But the problem with this would be that at the start there was a high degree of discomfort. Also, in such future studies, group introductory sessions may be necessary in order to fully accommodate and answer to the needs and concerns of all participants and address their questions in the study. Debriefing could also be added at the conclusion of each interview in order to discuss and address the problems that arose with participants during the interviews.

Though the sample was limited and non-random, these interviews yielded valuable findings concerning identity and resettlement. The more challenging aspect of the methodology was locating women who were interested in being interviewed. This location process, was at first difficult and time-consuming. However, once contacts were made in the Angolan community, through the community centre and those connected to these Angolans, finding willing participants gradually became easier. Snowball sampling facilitated the later part of the study in terms of finding various participants. Generally, 50% of the potential participants refused to be interviewed, as they thought that the researcher was working for the Canadian government.

## **ANALYSIS**

This qualitative analysis of Angolan immigrant women in Toronto explores questions related to identity formation and settlement experiences. Using "situational identity"<sup>15</sup> as a theoretical guide to investigating the settlement process and identity formation, the "find" feature in Microsoft Word was used to find key words such as settlement, family, home, and other concepts. Once the interviews were translated into English, this process of searching for key words led to discovering various themes related to identity and settlement. These themes were connected to other variable such

as race, gender, and other issues in order to make sense of these women's experiences.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE FINDING: SELF-IDENTITY AND SETTLEMENT**

The notion of identity is often thought of in diverse and dynamic ways. In applying the concept of identity to Angolan women, the changes they have experienced, as the biggest change of settlement has had a profound impact on their identity formation. Ira Silver discusses the notion of "self-identity" that he defines ". . . the individual's subjective sense of his or her biography being continuous, coherent and unique."<sup>16</sup> This notion of self-identity has the possibility of being ever-changing as the events occurring in each person's life can directly influence and change the self-identity of the individual. According to Gilroy self-identity ". . . provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Gilroy maintains that identity can be formed on the basis of "racial, ethnic, regional [and] local" ties, ". . . and yet self-identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging," (301). They experienced what is known as a "situational identity" (Kenedy), which is ". . . the way individuals view themselves and define their situation . . . as a life circumstance," (Kenedy, 118). As such, it can be argued that identity provides a way of understanding the relationships between our individual subjective experiences and the social settings. In short, with a new social setting and a shift in personal circumstances may influence identity as well as a person's view and how they define a situation.<sup>18</sup> As identity may be influenced by the life circumstances such as resettlement, this may influence the identity formation of Angolan women.

As noted, the concept self-identity becomes almost a reflexive project, an endeavor that we continuously work and reflect on. We create, maintain, and revise a set of biographical narratives, the story of who we are, how we came to be, and where we are now. Giddens and Mills speak of this and Giddens comments upon this when he states, "The 'identity' of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness. It is what the individual is conscious "of" in the term "self-consciousness". Self-identity, in other words, ". . . is something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual."<sup>19</sup>

The notion of self also changes, according to our "biography" or life story. That is, the events of our lives shape our "selves." Self-identity is based on an account of a person's life, actions and influences that makes

sense to them, and which can be explained to other people without much difficulty. It explains the past, and is oriented towards an anticipated future, (Giddens, 32). This changing notion of the self presented itself in the interviews with participants, as identity and settlement seemed in fact to be two variables that were inexplicably linked together. Participants identified experiences of settlement with personal growth and change, as in the case of participant five who remarked that being an immigrant woman in Canada “has made me confront challenges and become stronger.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, participant three noted that, “. . . it has made me vulnerable and strong at the same time. Everything I have gone through is almost like a journey. In order for me to get to the university where I am today, I needed to go through the hardships and trials that I did. The sadness, loneliness and loss of family ties was one of the hardest things I faced.”<sup>21</sup>

As in Kumsa’s and McMichael and Manderson’s studies the theme of isolation and loss of family ties was an outcome of this shift in identity, and this was pointed out in all interviews. All participants also agreed that they themselves had changed as a result of their immigration and settlement experience proving this link to be a valid one. All participants revealed that the immigration/settlement process had affected what they had gone through. As most of the participants had come here independently, many identified isolation as noted above as a consequence but also referred to growth, as they had to face many of these challenges alone.

“It [being an immigrant woman] has affected me by making me more alone . . . before I came from a large family and friends, now here having no support network like back home it made me more of a loner. It also affected how I am with people; it made me more mature and independent as I came here and had to deal with many issues here by myself.”<sup>22</sup> Isolation and lack of family ties were a remarked change in the identities of all women as noted in the quote of participant nine. Feeling “alone” may be a direct cause of the settlement process as was the “growth” experienced by all participants.

All participants also agreed that they enjoy living in Canada. They had lived in Canada four or more years with the most being six years. When asked how do feel about living in Canada for example participant two replied, “I really like living in Canada.”<sup>23</sup> As noted above the process of settlement in a new country proved to be difficult, but rewarding at the same time. All participants noted that the greatest negative challenge was finding suitable housing in Toronto. Participant four pointed out “Just finding a place here and learning the language has been extremely difficult. Those two things are the things that stand out most in my mind. Also, feeling isolated and alone without any family has been extremely difficult.”<sup>24</sup>

Participants also identified that having a prior knowledge of English before coming to Canada made the adjustment integration process much easier. As participant one stated “. . . I spoke English already and that wasn't a barrier for me.”<sup>25</sup> Participant two noted: “The fact that I knew English helped me a lot,” (Transcript of Interview with participant two). This brings another point to light that a prior knowledge of English is important as it eases the settlement process and lowers barriers for many immigrant women.

The key theme of isolation again came into play as many of the participants came to Canada alone without any family. This isolation was mentioned in all interviews as stated above and was also a key variable in the new identity formation of these women in Canada, still, participants found strong ties to cultural values and the importance of cultural maintenance in their new country of Canada. The importance of maintaining their Angolan identity or “Angolanness” (Lebert, 154) in Canada was also stressed by all participants, though in different ways, suggesting that keeping this component of their former selves was important and necessary during and after the process of settlement in order to make the adaptation process much smoother. All participants identified personal growth and change as a result of settlement, thus creating a relationship between the change in self (identity) and settlement. Participant three identified this change when she stated, “I am more grown, mature and sure of myself” (Transcript with participant three). This notion of changing identity was present in all interviews of the participants. As identity is created and changed depending on the life and “activities” (Giddens, 57) of each individual, then the fact that settlement impacted significantly on the identities of these women is not surprising as settlement was a major change or “activity” that occurred in their lives.

Although participants identified retaining their “Angolanness” (Lebert, 154), to be important, all participants also thought that “Canadianness” was also an important part of their new identities or new selves. Participants also identified values associated with this “Canadianness” and adapted these values into their new definitions of self, such as respect for democracy and a sense of permanency. This presented itself in the case of participant 11 when she stated: “Being Canadian to me means permanence and no fear and democracy and a good life for my children. Although there may be prejudices here, I do not fear for my life or for my family, and that is important.”<sup>26</sup> This change in identity again came as a result of settlement in Canada, thus linking again the variables of identity formation and settlement. The importance of maintaining aspects of their former selves, such as their Angolan identity, despite having gone through the process of

immigration is a natural process of creating the new self, according to Giddens as the self is ever changing and adapting.

This ever-changing process of identity identified by Silver and Giddens represents the fluidity and explanation by which Angolan women's identity continues to grow and change because of their settlement experience. Giddens also states "self-identity, then, is not a set of traits or observable characteristics. It is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. Self-identity has continuity—that is, it cannot easily be completely changed at will—but that continuity is only a product of the person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography," (Giddens, 53). Giddens says that in the post-traditional order, self-identity becomes a reflexive project—an endeavor that we continuously work and reflect on. Giddens maintains that we create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives—the story of who we are, and how we came to be where we are now. As a result of the settlement process, these women's identities have grown, changed and developed because their narrative and life story has changed as well. The concept of identity is also related to the point of stigma, whereas participants identified the stigma of being a refugee woman as relating to their own identity. Some participants identified a stigma associated with the term "refugee", as a term of shame, not wanting to be associated with it. This shame and "stigma" of being a refugee is one that they preferred to do without. This "stigma" will be discussed in the following section.

## STIGMA

In his work on stigma and social identity, Erving Goffman (1963) makes the important distinction between "virtual" and "actual" social identity. An encounter with a stranger usually proceeds based on various assumptions made of the stranger's appearance, and these imputed characteristics can be regarded as their "virtual social identity." On the other hand, "actual social identity" refers to the attributes and characteristics a person actually does possess. Someone's actual identity refers to who they really are and their virtual identity refers to who they appear to be to others. An encounter with a stranger usually proceeds based on various assumptions made of the stranger's appearance, and these imputed characteristics can be regarded as their "virtual social identity." On the other hand, "actual social identity" refers to the attributes and characteristics a person actually does possess.

Goffman emphasized the fact that people are constantly displaying characters, and expecting other people to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. People are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he/she appears to possess. Goffman



assumed that when individuals interact, they want to present a certain sense of self that will be accepted by others. In *Stigma*, Goffman was interested in the gap between what a person ought to be, “virtual social identity,” and what a person actually is, “actual social identity.” Anybody with a gap between these two identities is stigmatized as being different and abnormal. One may have a “discredited stigma,” in which the fellow participants are aware of the actor’s abnormality; or, one may have a “discreditable stigma,” in which the individual’s differences are not readily discernible.

Stigma constitutes “a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity . . . a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype,” (Goffman, 12–14). Goffman distinguishes between two types of stigma. “Discredited” stigma refers to types of stigma that are immediately obvious or are already known, as opposed to “discreditable” stigma that refers to characteristics that would produce stigma, but are not known during the social interaction, (Goffman, 12–14). Discredited individuals often build up a repertoire of coping behaviors and strategies that are then employed methodically in some sort of hierarchical order. For the stigmatized it is an important stage in the process of learning to socialize, and may be regarded as a viable coping mechanism. Stigma management is not restricted to public encounters, however and indeed the individual’s intimates can become just the persons from whom she/he is most concerned with concealing something shameful, (Goffman, 71).

An example of such stigma was encountered during the interview process. After referring to participants as “refugees,” some participants took offence at this and asked to be referred to as an “immigrant” rather than as a “refugee.” Participant eight asked the interviewer “Please don’t say refugee because I see myself as an immigrant and not refugee,”<sup>27</sup> suggesting a relationship between, self-identity and stigma. Participant five asked, “Please can you refer to me as an immigrant because refugee, there is almost a shame attached to being a refugee. I see myself as an immigrant woman and not as a refugee. It is not you, but refugee it almost means you are poor and hungry, getting to Canada with nothing, and I immigrated from Angola,” (Transcript of Interview with Participant five).

Participant nine noted, “I prefer immigrant woman to refugee as there is almost secondary class attached to refugee and not to immigrant. I came to Canada to settle and not to go back” Transcript of the researcher referred to all participants as “immigrants” rather than “refugees.” All these responses refer back to the Goffmanian notion of stigma as participants’ had negative notions of themselves when referred to as refugees, in their preference for immigrant to be used instead. In his influential essay, Goffman describes stigma as referring to “any bodily sign designed to

expose something unusual or bad about the moral status of the signifier.” On meeting such an individual, we “construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences,” (Goffman, 18). As identity is dependent upon each individual’s life story or narrative, such a stigma imposed on these women directly impacts upon how they view themselves. This inferiority was clearly felt by these women in regards to the term “refugee,” used during the interview. The image constructed of the poor woman, coming to Canada without anything, was an integral part of the new identity created by some participants. Goffman believed that each type of stigma has a distinct effect on a stigmatized individual’s behavior. Discredited people may try to compensate for the initial loss of status from an audience, whereas a discreditable person may try to hide, or worry about their secret becoming known by critical people. As these women wished to gain and not lose status in their settlement and identity formation, the use of such a negative term such as “refugee” hindered this process and made them want to identify as “immigrants,” rather than as “refugees.”

Stigma was also identified by participants from the community as a result of the color of their skin. All participants routinely identified being victims of racism, including racist and derogatory comments because of the color of their skin. Participant six stated in this regard “. . . The Portuguese are really racist and the guys think I am a slut just because I am black. They call me a *puta* [prostitute] all the time and treat me that way. I think the Portuguese are really bad.”<sup>28</sup> Despite sharing a common language and Lusophone identity, relations between the Angolan women of color and the Portuguese seem to be of a stigmatized nature. Stigmatized individuals assimilate the values of the dominant group, and as participants identified that they at first felt the need to assimilate into the “Portuguese” community because of a common language and as they are the dominant Lusophone group in Toronto. Participants identified interaction between themselves and the Portuguese in Toronto to be strained and uncomfortable, making them feel stigmatized and separate. In return, participants retaliated with a strong dislike for the Portuguese community as a result of this stigma. Goffman in this respect noted that people like actors on a stage manage social cues to create and sustain an impression of who they are and what they are doing all the time. Some people however are cast in roles that constrain their capacity for projecting positive impression of themselves. These people are stigmatized; that is, they are marked as fears what Goffman identified as a “spoiled identity.” Goffman asserted that stigmas are socially constructed relationships. Historically stigmas were imposed on

individuals in the form of physical marking or branding to disgrace them. Such an individual is recast, not as a whole and normal but as a tainted and alienated being apart from the rest.

## GENDER RACE AND GENDER ROLES

Within this framework of settlement and identity, anti-racist feminist discourse addresses the issue of settlement as it focuses on women making sense of their experiences in a new society. As a theory applicable to immigrant women of color, it provides the best theory applicable to the study of their settlement experiences and how this has affected their formation of identity. As women of color, Angolan refugee women also are faced with the same migratory problems that many non-white immigrant women face. Anti-Racist Feminist Theory presents the best theoretical approach for the study of Angolan women, their identity formation, and settlement process, as current mainstream feminist theory has failed to address the problems and issues faced by non-white and ethnically diverse women, (Dua, 18). As “women of color’s experiences with all aspects of gender, femininity, sexuality, marriage, varies substantially from that of white women,” (Dua, 20) this theory will help guide the research of non-white Angolan immigrant women. Mainstream feminist thought typically ignores the needs of non-white women, thus different factions within the feminist movement have developed in order to support these other women who feel marginalized by the movement, such as Angolan refugee women, (Dua, 17).

Anti-racist feminism can be used as an alternative means to understand Angolan women and all other women of color. Dua identifies the Anti-Racist Feminist movement and cites the current “third wave” of Anti-racist feminist literature as “concentrating on interrogating mainstream feminism, both theory and praxis for its role in perpetuating racial difference,” (Dua, 17). She also states that anti-racist feminist theory has built on the “project of integrating race and gender by its second-wave predecessors,” (Dua, 17). Anti-racist feminism could then be considered the most rational approach needed in this study of Angolan women as it addresses the marginalizations occurring in their lives in regards to gender, race, class and ethnicity, which are all alternative variables in this study. As such, by applying this theory to the different experiences of marginalized women, it can also be argued that anti-racist feminists have developed a more inclusive approach.

Calliste and Dei maintain “that critical anti-racist feminist discourse “. . . explores the implications of racial, gender, class and sexual minorities’ ways of making sense of their every day experiences.”<sup>29</sup> As Anti-Racist

Feminist theory focuses on the experiences of women of color, the variables of identity and settlement, which are also part of these experiences, are considered because of their relationship to each other. As a result of settlement, it could be argued that the formation of identity of these women also has changed. As such, identity may provide a way of understanding the relationships between our individual subjective experiences and the social settings. Therefore, identity formation is a key component when applying Anti-Racist Feminist theory to the lives of Angolan women and exploring how their sense of self as these women may have changed as a result of resettlement.

According to Calliste and Dei, "... critical anti-racist feminism locates the dialogue in the reality of women's lives and at the intersection/s of race, ethnicity, gender and class," (15). This statement outlines the independent variables of race, ethnicity, gender and class, that are considered in this study. These variables are all key components of Anti-Racist feminist theory and also comprise the alternative variables that are explored in this study. Rather than identifying the separate impact of race, ethnicity and gender on individuals' lives, feminist anti-racist theory stresses the need to develop understandings of how these forms of stratification intersect and overlap. It is this overlap of race, ethnicity and gender, which will be explored in this study.

As anti-racist feminist theory is comprised of these additional variables, then it could be said that it is the best approach to studying Angolan women, as it not only presents the settlement/identity variable but also addresses the issues of race, ethnicity and gender. Within this framework, this study analyzes how these key principles of anti-racist feminist theory and identity theory come to define a woman's settlement experience and sense of self in the new country where she now lives.

Feminist anti-racist theories focus on the ways in which individuals are socially located within interactive race, gender, and class hierarchies. Friedman notes that a "locational" approach in feminism is based on "recognition of how different times and places produce different and changing gender systems and these intersect with other different and changing societal stratifications."<sup>30</sup> Rather than identifying the separate impact of race, gender and class on individuals' lives, feminist anti-racist theory stresses the need to develop understandings of how these forms of stratification intersect and overlap. Bottero argues, for example, that "gender divisions are both "social" and "economic," which means that gender is not just additional to class, it also overlaps with class."<sup>31</sup> The focus on the connected nature of race, class and gender are key components of Anti-Racist Feminist Theory. First, rather than possessing particular ethnicities, class positions

and gender traits; individuals occupy social locations, which are relational and shifting. Often gender and race thus intersect with each other as they are inexplicably linked to the identities of women. As Razack argues: "it is vitally important to explore in a historically and site specific way the meaning of race, economic status, class, disability, sexuality, and gender as they come together to structure women in different and shifting positions of power and privilege."<sup>32</sup>

As pointed out by Anti-Racist Feminist theory, gender, race, and ethnicity were inexplicably linked in this study. Participants identified gender, race and ethnicity at simultaneously as being one in the same in their lives, linking them in turn to their own identities. For participants being women and of color was the same. Gender was continuously identified as an obstacle as pointed out by Participant seven: "My being an immigrant woman, I found out, gave me fewer rights than men. Many men I know had a far easier time in paperwork and jobs etc. than I did and it seemed it was because they were men."<sup>33</sup> Participant seven also identified that being an immigrant woman "has made me work harder to get where I want to be because as an immigrant woman you have to be better than men and at the same time maintain your femininity and that is very hard," (Transcript of Interview with Participant seven). Maintaining the idea of "femininity" was important to most participants though an interesting observation was that some of the participants identified that had they been men of color than they would have had a much harder time in Canada due to prejudices against colored men. Participant one thought that had she been a man she would have been judged "Worse, definitely worse," (Transcript from Interview with participant one). Participants identified that being of women and of color also put them at a disadvantage. As Participant 11 stated" it has made me work hard (being an Angolan woman) to fight the prejudices against women of color. The color of my skin does not dictate who I am and what I can do and many people believe that," (Transcript of Interview with participant three).

Since gender and race are key components of anti-racist feminist theory, the participants' notion of gender and identity and race and identity are inexplicably linked together. In fact, Feminist Anti-racist theory focuses on the ways in which individuals are socially located within interactive race and gender hierarchies. Rather than identifying the separate impact of race, gender and class on individuals' lives, feminist anti-racist theory stresses the need to develop understandings of how these forms of stratification intersect and overlap together. Race and gender for Angolan women seem to be almost one in the same as they felt they could not separate their perceptions of themselves as women and themselves as women of color. By thinking in

this way, this also links the variable of gender/race to that of identity/settlement as through these changes in perceptions of gender/race, the identity/settlement variable was also affected. All participants identified that keeping their Angolan identity in Canada was important to them. To some this meant through language and culture and to others this meant passing it on to their children. Participant three stated, “. . . I think it is important to maintain this identity because it was the one I was raised with and the one I hope to pass on to my children”(Transcript of Interview with participant three). To others, an Angolan identity meant rejecting the patriarchal culture in which they were raised. Ethnicity and identity seemed to be clearly linked. An example of this occurs in the interviewed with participant 11 when she states, “To me to be Angolan is an individual thing. It means to be proud of where you come from, to have a sense of equality, of justice and, of peace for all. It means to have respect for your fellow man and not to belittle them” (Transcript of interview with participant 11). Almost all participants identified themselves as “Angolan”. Some participants identified themselves as “Canadian,” while others maintained an ethnicity of “African Canadian.” This change in identity may have occurred as a result of the settlement and identity formation process.

While some participants felt “Angolan,” other clearly shed this ethnic identity for a broader “African-Canadian” one. This shift in some cases or maintenance of ethnicity in others also shows the relationship between the variable of ethnicity to the identity formation/settlement variable. As in the studies of Giles, Toromorn, Franz and Messias, the maintenance of cultural ties and ethnicity was crucial in the settlement process for Angolan women as well as the women in these studies.

## RELIGIOSITY

The *Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* defines religiosity as “the quality of being religious.”<sup>34</sup> As such, the devoutness or “religiousness,” being a characteristic or phenomenon in the lives of others, makes a direct impact on our identities. Religiosity is a multi-faceted word with many implications, which makes describing religion or religiosity extremely difficult and often subjective. For some, being religious means simply attending church, for others it includes specific beliefs and practices such as prayer, rituals, and accepting certain values and morals. This ambiguity makes operationalizing religiosity difficult, even in this study. As a result, many narrowly define their religiosity, or commitment to religion simply as church attendance. The most recent attempt to square the circle can be found in the work of Hervieu-Léger (1993)<sup>35</sup>, who endeavors to integrate

the best of both emphases through the concept of religious memory. The specificity of religiosity lies in a particular mode of believing, in which the idea of a chain of memory is crucial. Religiosity becomes therefore “the ideological, symbolic and social device by which the individual and collective awareness of belonging to a particular lineage of believers is created, maintained, developed and controlled.”<sup>36</sup> The aim is to include more than the beliefs and practices of universally acknowledged world faiths but to avoid widening the agenda so far that it is difficult to distinguish the specifically religious from any other meaning system. In Europe, the discussion relating to dimensions of religiosity takes a different form. The principal feature of the late twentieth century appears to be the persistence of the softer indicators of religious life (that is, those concerned with feelings, experience, and the more numinous religious beliefs) alongside the undeniable and at times dramatic drop in the hard indicators (those that measure religious orthodoxy, ritual participation, and institutional attachment). These are the findings of the European Values Study, a source of empirical information for a growing number of societies.<sup>37</sup> Currently, social scientists are in general agreement that religious commitment varies across all religions, and that religious commitment may manifest itself in different ways within the same religious tradition. Good research attempts are now being made to come to terms with belief, practice, and self-perception in determining the relative effect of “religiosity” on behavioral and attitudinal measures.

Not surprisingly, religiosity was a major factor in the lives of these women. All participants identified religion or belief in a particular religion, as affecting the decisions they made in their lives and in helping shape their identity as women. All women also came from Roman Catholic backgrounds with participant 11 actually converting to Judaism, as a result of marriage. All women also identified a belief in God and maintained that religion was a major factor for them in their lives and that religion also influenced the decisions they made in their lives. Religiosity had a clear correlation to identity formation identity/settlement in this respect, as participants also identified the fact that their faith had helped them overcome the difficult passages in their lives, including their immigration experience. Their religiosity clearly affected their perceptions of themselves and who they thought themselves to be. As in Peña and Frehill’s (1998, 621)<sup>38</sup> study, where religiosity is “empowered” so is the case with all participants in this study. Religion became a key component for overcoming settlement difficulties as it provided a point of strength and guidance to many participants in the study. The new formation of self in a new country and the difficulties and challenges associated with this were often overcome because of

religious belief in God, as identified by respondents. This belief often acted as a moral compass for several other participants, thus helping guide and shape their new selves in the settlement process.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative analysis of Angolan immigrant women in Toronto explored the main variables of identity formation and settlement experiences. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, this investigation focused on immigration experiences, past personal histories, and how non-white Angolan women have adjusted to life in Toronto. The dependant variable in this study was identity formation and the main independent variable in this study was settlement. In reality after analyzing participants' interview responses it was discovered that in fact these two variables were often thought of as one unique variable as all participants identified that new identity formation occurred as a result of settlement in Toronto. Other variables included gender, ethnicity and race and participants also identified that these variables indeed affected their settlement/identity formation. Settlement did indeed influence the identity formation of Angolan women. The construction of a new identity in a new country and the ability to start over again in the new country of settlement were positive changes identified by participants. The loss of familial ties, loss of confidence and feelings of homesickness were negative aspects of this combination of variables identified by participants. The weaknesses apparent in this exploratory study include the limited research time frame of four months, the small number of participants, the subject matter, sample and the sampling technique. Many potential participants on learning about the focus of the study suspected the researcher to be employed by the Ministry of Immigration and therefore refused to participate, as they were illegal refugees in Canada.

In order to improve this study, we would increase the sample size by allowing more time and also hiring someone from the community to conduct these interviews. As there was no funding available, we had to resort to snowball sampling in order to gain participants. Also, the difficulty in obtaining participants even by these methods would make this study difficult to replicate in the future. If this study were to be replicated, more community involvement is necessary in order to gain more participants. Thus, clear guidelines would be established with the community beforehand in order to alleviate the difficulties that occurred during this study. Future research of the Angolan women is crucial, but this cannot be completed without community support, thus any future research must include much community involvement in order to be successful. Overall, this study may



have specific methodological limitations, but it does reveal an identity formation related to resettlement.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks go to my research assistance, Diana Reis. Her dedication, insight, and work ethic were instrumental to the final product.

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Part II

# African Refugees and Policy Implications



# The Making of a Modern Diaspora: The Resettlement Process of the Somali Bantu Refugees in the United States

Omar A. Eno and Mohamed A. Eno

## INTRODUCTION

A refugee is an individual with a national origin no longer enjoying the protection of the national government and who had not acquired the nationality of the host country. Thousands of Somali refugees are scattered all over the world waiting to acquire the citizenship of their respective host nations, as part of the process in the making of a modern Diaspora. According to the 2002 world refugee survey,<sup>1</sup> there are 40 million displaced people throughout the world, of whom 15 million are asylum seekers. In addition, the prospect of life and liberty in the United States has attracted immigrants and fortune seekers from all over the world. However, about 13,500 Somali Bantu refugees currently being resettled in the United States are among those persons forced either into exile or internally displaced because of the ongoing regional war in southern Somalia. The Somali Bantu regions were seized and are under the control of the warring nomadic militiamen, thus forcing the Bantu to flee because of well-founded fear of persecution. Prior to their acceptance into the United States for resettlement, the Bantu refugees were willing to resettle anywhere in the world because their war wrecked homeland (Somalia) was not an option for them.<sup>2</sup>

The over 13,500 Somali Bantu refugees in the United States are also in the making of a modern Diaspora. This is the largest African group ever granted a non-forced migration to resettle in the US as a persecuted “minority” group. The so-called regional war in Somalia, which began in 1991, has led to the collapse of the social system and governmental structures. In the face of this situation, millions of Somalis took refuge



in parts of the country as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and in the neighboring countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Yemen, seeking asylum and a safe haven. Most of the Somali Bantu refugees crossed into the neighboring boarder of Kenya where the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has established camps.<sup>3</sup> Among the most affected groups by the Somali inter- and intra-tribal regional war are the Somali Bantu who inhabit in the inter-riverine valleys and in the interior, off Juba and Shabelle rivers (Eno, 2002). The Somali Bantu are considered a “minority” group in southern Somalia whose members are ethnically and culturally distinct. They are openly discriminated against and derogatively detested as inferior people by the dominant-clans, Somali nomads. During the Somali regional war, thousands of Bantu farmers were robbed, raped, and murdered. After an exhausting struggle of advocacy for resettlement by concerned individuals, in 1999, the United States Congress approved the resettlement process of about 13,500 Somali Bantu refugees from Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya. The first batch of new settlers began arriving into the United States in mid 2003, while the process is currently approaching completion because over 12,000 of those refugees have already reached the US. It is likely that for the remaining batch of refugees the resettlement process will be concluded by the year 2006.

This chapter addresses the underpinning factors of the following questions; 1) Why are the Somali Bantu people the most victimized community by the warring factions? 2) Why is the Somali war confined to the south including the Bantu regions, while the provinces of the nomadic warring factions are relatively peaceful and calm? The chapter also observes the existing relationship between the Somali dominant clans (nomads) in the US and the newly arrived Somali Bantu refugees. Relevantly, we shall also examine whether their relationship and interactions in the Diaspora has changed/improved. Our observation regarding Bantu—Nomad relationship is partly incited by the existence in the past of imbalanced association of the two groups, which was based on a superior attitude and self-ennoblement by the Somali nomads and an inferior social status, which they (nomads) created for the subjugated Bantu population. Methodologically, the primary research used in this study is mostly ethnographic. The empirical data collection includes oral tradition, oral history, personal interviews, and written materials. Before we proceed to the main body of this chapter, the following is a brief historical overview on the background of the Somali Bantu, their origins and their place within Somali society.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SOMALI BANTU AND THEIR SOCIAL STATUS IN SOUTHERN SOMALIA

This study focuses on the southern territory that was colonized by Italy, also referred to as the southern regions. In southern Somalia, there are two groups of Bantu origin who are sedentary farmers, and, locally known as *Jareer* (Lit. “kinky hair”). The first group resides along the banks of the Shabelle River and is believed to be the indigenes of that region, the Shabelle river valley. During the Somali war, a large number of them are believed to have taken flight to Yemen, and continue to stay in refugee camps there to date.<sup>4</sup> The second group of Bantu, which resides along the banks of Juba River valley, and known as *Wazigwa*, took refuge to the neighboring borders of Kenya, under the mandate of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). As we emphasized earlier, the first group of Bantu along the Shabelle River valley composes of the autochthons to their current location of abode, their residence in this territory preceding both the early arrival of the Galla/Oroma and the later migration of the dominant nomadic Somalis, which many scholars have described as a more recent movement.<sup>5</sup>

However, the second group of Bantu along the Juba River valley consists of the descendants of ex-slaves, originally imported from south-east Africa by Arab/Swahili commercial planters and later sold to local Somali slave traders early in the nineteenth century. They were specifically brought from regions such as Tanganyika, Pemba, Zanzibar, Mozambique, and Malawi, to the coastal cities of southern Somalia, such as Brava, Kisimayo, Marka, and Mogadishu (O. Eno, *Abolition of Slavery*). They were exploited and used as slave laborers in the commercially oriented plantations overseen by a combination of Arab/Swahili and Somali merchants. They were imported into Somalia to grow grain and other food products to be exported to the then expanding population of the Omani Empire in the East African Coast and to the markets of southern Arabia and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Slaves were also used as means of transportation for the movement of merchandise such as Ivory from the southern Somali interior to the coastal cities. They were as well exploited in the thriving weaving textile-industry in the Banadir area, particularly in the city of Marka. After dwelling in southern Somalia for almost two centuries, some of the *Wazigwa* people vividly remember their ancestral country of origin and how they were transported into Somalia.

According to Cassanelli, around 1903, Salemi, who was a runaway slave in Somalia, sought refuge and the protection of the Italian abolitionists,

according to Salemi, he was captured on the Mrima coast of Tanganyika with about 40 companions by Arab traders of Sur.<sup>7</sup> Then, Salemi and his companions were transported into Somalia through the port city of Marka two decades ago. According to the Bantu oral traditions, the Wazigwa people left their country of origin (modern Tanzania) because of several years of severe and consecutive famine and droughts and because of the prospect to work on a fertile land in southern Somalia as laborers.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, the Omani-Arab merchants, who assured to take the Wazigwa to their rescue in a fertile land where famine and drought had never been a concern, duped them into slavery.<sup>9</sup> However, other scholars believe that some of the Wazigwa people might have deliberately sold their children and themselves off because of persistent droughts, which affected Tanganyika early in the nineteenth century. As we enlightened earlier, the Arab-Omanis brought them (the Bantu) to Somalia and later sold them to local Somalis along the coastal cities as slaves to meet the increasing demand for labor to grow grains, particularly sorghum, maize, and sesame seeds.<sup>10</sup>

After a few years of being entrapped in Somalia as slaves, the Bantu, particularly the Wazigwa, decided to rebel against slavery. They escaped and established a safe haven and a maroon society with an impenetrable defense along the banks of Juba River valley, locally known as Gosha. Thus, Gosha became a safe haven and an independent polity for all runaway slaves; later it was dismantled by the Italian colonialists who took over Somalia in 1890s as part of their colonial domain. Up until late in the 19th century, the Banadir coastal cities of Somalia were under the domain of the Arab-Omani Sultanate of Zanzibar. Subsequently, Italy purchased the Banadir coasts and immediately established a military might to be reckoned with and became part of its European colony in the Horn of Africa.

In addition to the slave labor, though, the Somali nomads treated the Bantu people callously. As Hess notes in his report, drawn from information obtained from Italian archives, “. . . slaves were harshly treated, often kept in manacles and fetters, overworked, and underfed.”<sup>11</sup> Several Somali Hawiye sub-clans of nomadic origin in the interior such as the Gaaljael, the Wadan, the Bimal, and the Mobilen had owned slaves for farming purposes. Since the aforementioned groups possessed the nomadic Somali's traditional disdain for agriculture, they viewed owning slaves was a necessity for labor and for survival.<sup>12</sup> The above-mentioned groups not only owned slaves, but they were also inhumanely harsh to their subjects. This inhumane treatment was noted by colonial officers who reported, “Slaves and their wives, being laborers, were housed miserably in small, half-roofed huts, with their usual food [of] parched Indian corn and fish from the river.”<sup>13</sup> In the first decade of the 20th century, Italy abolished

slavery in southern Somalia. Immediately after the abolition, the European colonial regime introduced a coerced labor system, which indiscriminately conscripted the emancipated Bantu ex-slaves, the runaways, and the Bantu indigenes who were all exclusively used in the Italian agricultural scheme (Menkhaus 1989). Unlike in West Africa, where slave treatment was more passive, in the sense that slaves somehow resigned to their servile status but silently struggled to resist and to create more room for him/herself,<sup>14</sup> in east Africa, slaves were harshly treated so they rebelled. According to our perception, all of these harsh treatments and poor living conditions might have been responsible for the slave rebellion that has taken root in southern Somalia.

A heroine by the name of Wanakucha coordinated the mutinous operation. The reason behind the rebellion was to return to their respective countries of origin in southeast Africa (Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi). Unfortunately, it was an arduous and impossible journey by foot, so the leader, Wanakucha, decided to settle them in a place known as Gosha (Forest), which is located along the Juba River, a settlement where their current name of Heer-Goleet (people of the forest) derived. They cleared the forest and established new abodes and farming lands for survival as well as a strong defense mechanism against the pursuing ex-slave masters, Somali nomads. By the 1940s, there was the rise of a Somali national movement against Italian occupation, which demanded independence for Somalia. The Bantu sided with the Somalis (ex-slave masters) to resist against the Italian colonialists where Nassib Bunde (leader of Gosha at the time) was arrested by the Italians and later died in a colonial prison.

In 1960, Somalia obtained its independence from Italy and it was the hope of every Somali to prosper under an independent Somali flag. Unfortunately, that was not the case for the Somali-Bantu people, who were and still are discriminated against and kept languishing at the bottom rung of the social strata<sup>15</sup> because of the stigma of slavery, which is still haunting them. In October 1969, the army ousted the Somali civilian government and the late Siyad Barre became the head of the Military Regime. In 1991, after 21 years of Siyad Barre's military dictatorship under an autocratic regime, a militia group overthrew Barre, because the Somali people were dissatisfied with the political leadership of the military junta. Subsequently, a new armed wing from the same dominant clan had emerged. This new militia group, consisting mainly of the Hawiye clan family, known as the United Somali Congress (USC), actually overthrew Siyad Barre's military government.<sup>16</sup> From 1991 to date, the militia groups who ousted Siyad Barre's Military Regime could not form a legitimate and viable government that could be recognized by all Somalis and by the international community.

To the despair of the Bantu people, the replacement of the military regime did not result in freedom and justice. Instead, it resulted in the replacement of one tribal dictatorship with many militia dictatorships, and a continuance of the macabre injustices<sup>17</sup> and land prowling of the highest degree. Therefore, Somalia continues to suffer from anarchic and uncompromising de-facto governments based on warlordism. As a result of that, many Somalis were hit hard by that painful “civil war,” the most affected among them being the Somali Bantu who were raped, robbed and killed by various militia groups from dominant clans. In Somalia, the Bantu were viewed as the African Diaspora from southeast Africa (Mozambique, Tanzania, and Malawi) to another African nation, Somalia. Consequently, after almost two centuries of abuse and discrimination in Somalia, and having been treated as inferior stock of humans by the Somali nomads, in 2003, a new Diaspora journey for the Bantu has begun, but this time to the US. For elaboration, the following is a description of the social imbalances, economic exploitation, and resource control subjected to the Bantu by the nomadic clans that claimed “nobility” for themselves.

## THE PLIGHT OF THE SOMALI BANTU POPULATION

The potential plight of the Somali Bantu community has been predicted in the 1960s by a team of scholars called The International Committee of Urgent Anthropological and Ethnic Research: “For all we know, the future of the group [Bantu] as an entity ethnically and culturally distinct from the dominant Somali [nomad] may well be in grave danger from the moment the Italian administration withdraws from Somali land.”<sup>18</sup> That premonition is evidently supported by the fact that from 1991 to current, the inter-clan and intra-clan war among the nomads has caused a total collapse of the Somali nation, intensifying the agony of the Bantu community in particular. Simultaneously, the country continues to remain in a state of anarchy, which is intertwined with intricacies of clan rivalries led by several unruly warlords aiming for the control of Bantu resources.

In view of this circumstance, the question that instantly comes to mind is; how is it conceivable that a nation such as Somalia, whose people supposedly belong to a “homogeneous society,” sharing one language, one religion, and one culture, could disintegrate so severely and remain so irreconcilable? A section of the scholarship has suggested that the motive for the Somali regional war was embedded in power struggle, clan rivalry, personalities, greed, and in the legacy of the Cold War. Others have portrayed their views as due to inequitable distribution of resources that were very limited in nature. However, in this chapter, we argue that among the main

ingredients that precipitated Somalia's regional war and the current political turmoil are entrenched vehemently in urban resources. These resources, in our belief, do not only consist of monetary grants and foreign aid from the international community as the case is often purported by certain scholars, but likewise involve potential local capital such as land, labor, water, harbor control, and the enabling environment that provides access to their exploitation.<sup>19</sup>

Although the impact of national politics on a locally produced resource is a common phenomenon to a diverse population in Africa, even the so-called "homogeneous" society like the Somalis is not immune. In order to control the national resources, the warring militia groups from the nomads have expropriated the agricultural fertile land between the rivers Juba and Shabelle in southern Somalia, in other words the Banadir and its environs. This land belongs to Somalia's victims of war and non-partisan groups, such as the Bantu and others. From independence in 1960 to date, the nomadic groups who arrogated to themselves the right to govern Somalia, and abrogated the democratic system at will, utterly dominated Somalia's sociopolitical as well as socio-economic system, thus leaving no room for inclusiveness or a turn-taking system in the nation's leadership. The "minorities" in southern Somalia particularly the Bantu, are victimized because of various reasons: one, they are the most vulnerable group in southern Somalia because they are not armed like the militia nomadic groups whose culture is embedded in belligerence. Another factor that makes the Bantu victims is that they are non-partisan; they opted to remain impartial in the ongoing tribal feud in the south. They choose not to support any of the warring nomadic clans or sub-clans. In addition to the aforementioned reasons regarding the Bantu victimization, is their ethnic composition and physical feature (the Negroid look), which places them distinctly from that of the nomadic groups. Due to these circumstances, their status became subjugation and as an inferior stock of humans of slave ancestry. Above all, the most significant *raison d'être* is their ownership of the most arable, most fertile, and most habitable agricultural land in the entirety of the Somali peninsula. On the other hand, the Bantu are traditionally known to be the most laborious and productive people in Somalia. In sum, the two rivers (Juba and Shabelle), which run parallel in Bantu regions, provide an abundant source of water for irrigation and livelihood, with potential to sustain and develop the whole inter-riverine south, if not the country at large.<sup>20</sup> For all practical purposes, therefore, a combination of the above-mentioned dynamics places the minorities particularly the Bantu in a precarious and susceptible situation, because the Somali nomads have acquired the guns, weapons that the Bantu spurn as tools subversive to human development.

Without any consideration to Somali society's sufferings, almost every Somali leadership wasted the nation's scarce resources on nonsensical and unjustifiable avenues, such as tribal defense and the security of the late life-president and his family. Although the infrastructures established in Bantu areas are undeveloped, even those developed around the nomadic groups such as schools, hospitals, and roads, the state bureaucracy allowed them to become rundown. However, this trend should not obscure the reality that state officials had access to better facilities abroad. With influence and availability of state resources, their children were safely tucked away into expensive foreign institutions,<sup>21</sup> while the children of ordinary Somali citizens are discriminated and abandoned to decay in the squalid ghettos of Buur Koroole, Boon Dheere, Buulo Eelaay, Buulo Tiinka and Baraaka Cabdoow, in Mogadishu.<sup>22</sup> It is appropriate and safe to say that the Somali Bantu felt (and still feel) like foreigners in their own homeland after being alienated ethnically from political participation in all post-colonial administrations, and presently surrounded by violent armed gangs from the Cushitic nomads.

For a Somali Bantu, acquired or inherited status such as being a King, Queen, Prince, Princess, or as an elite of outstanding academic performance and wisdom, do not put him at par with his/her peers in the society. As long as the Bantu's physical features resemble those of the Negroid looking Africans, and as long as the quality of his/her hair texture is *Jareer* (kinky), then with all intents and purposes he/she falls in the undesirable race of those humans considered as descendants of slave ancestry, *Adoon* (slave). Catherine Besteman noted ". . . the [Bantu] category is equated with "African"—and thus slave—ancestry, as distinguished from the (mythical) "Arabic" ancestry of [nomadic] Somalis."<sup>23</sup>

To the contrary, regardless of one's ancestral background, lack of education, and less contribution to national development, as long as the texture of one's hair is soft like that of the Cushitic Somali, hence *Jileec* (lit. soft hair), one automatically qualifies for ascription as the descendant of a pedigree from Arabian "nobility." Nobility that the world is mystified to determine its exact origin, as Mukhtar elucidates, "Although Somalis claim they are homogeneous, the exact origin of their race remains mysterious."<sup>24</sup> Due to the aforementioned social classification and physical labeling amongst Somali society, purported particularly by the nomads, the identity of the indigenous Bantu people along the river valley areas in southern Somalia was distorted as "imported slaves" because of their physical resemblance (Negroid) to the ex-slave Bantu, a status that is undesirable phenomenon in Somali society. As Eno states, "The Negroid features of the Bantu soon became a distinct identity where people with such features were classified

as slaves and subjected to a variety of discriminatory practices regardless of where they came from. As a result, for the majority of slave owning groups, Negroid features became synonymous with inferior status,” (O. Eno, *Landless Landlords*, 138).

It is also noteworthy to envisage that, in Somalia, identity shapes one's place in society and gives one a sense of belonging amongst Somalis. In fact, if one belongs to a powerful sub-clan or clan, it earns one status and other exceptional privileges. Identity also bears the potential to opportune one with an unprecedented access to the looting of the national economy, top political position, and high quality education, which the Bantu people were exempted due to their derogatively tainted identity classifying them all as imported slaves with Negroid physical properties. Although our study delving into a Somali-Italian conspiracy against the Bantu is not conclusive, suggestions have it that the Somali nomads and the Italian colonialists deliberately smudged the authenticity of the majority of the Bantu people along the river valley into an ambiguous ethnic origin, with the intention to deny them their primordial citizenship as first class citizens.<sup>25</sup> As Besteman highlights, “. . . the origin of the reer Shabelle [Bantu] people of upper Shabelle is unclear, [even though] they are not connected so overtly with a slave past,” (Besteman 1999, 186).

The plight of the Somali Bantu includes their paradigmatic denial to political participation and the marginalization against them upon parliamentary representation. In 2002–2004, when the Somalis were forming an interim government in Kenya, all the nomadic Somali clans were allocated an appropriate and equal number of representatives in the parliament. However, the Bantu and other “minority” groups were denied equal representation as non-qualifiers, hence a connotation of non-Somaliness (Eno, M. 2005). Discriminatorily, a dubious committee composed of exclusively nomads engineered an infamous strategy based on which they formulated an unequal and inequitable allocation of the parliamentary seats, commonly celebrated as 4.5 (four—point—five) Clan Power Sharing Formula. In other words, all the so-called four pastoral and agro-pastoral clans Darod, Dir, Hawiye, and Digil-Mirifle were each given one full representation whereas the minority and Bantu people were entirely lumped together to share half representation, hence 0.5 (point five). The group that was given half representation or literally half-Somali status, (minorities and Bantu) consists of the few communities in Somalia that did not take up arms against any clan during the Somali regional war; put in another way, they refrained from committing any atrocities against the society. Deplorably, according to the nomadic culture, these peace-loving communities do not qualify for full/equal representation, in either parliament or government, since they did



not arm themselves to indulge in the dehumanization that shrank the entire south Somalia to graveyards. Ridiculous though it may sound, in order to qualify for equal representation (according to nomado-cultural pastoral democracy), and full status of Somaliness, these marginalized communities should have first committed against humanity crimes commensurate to those meted out by the nomads themselves.<sup>26</sup>

According to Rasheed Farah, from an outcast minority group, Somalia needs, "A state that recognizes and appreciates Somalia's cocktail and conglomerate culture and traditions, where ethnic fairness and justice are the moral basis, where people are judged by the content of their character, not by the community and clan they belong to. Consequently, fairness and justice can secure the normative structure for a new egalitarian system in which Somalis of every ethnic background are treated and valued equally."<sup>27</sup>

We may reveal that the reality on the ground in southern Somalia is quite different from the myth of homogeneity and egalitarianism, a mythical knowledge often promulgated by the Somali nomads. It is also worthwhile mentioning that there are no intermarriages or intermingling between the nomads and the Bantu because of clan and class stratification. The lack of intermarriage between the two communities prevented from building a common family bond and compassion between them during difficult times. For example, militiamen loyal to certain nomadic warlords have been forcing Bantu farmers, including women and children in the fertile zone of the inter-riverine region, to work on plantations without any compensation save a meager diet of boiled beans consumed once a day, and only after work. Not only are these people denied their rightful earnings, but they are also turned into slaves, denied and subverted of their person-hood because there are no blood-ties to bridge the racial gap. The warlords and few foreign companies benefit from the sweat and travail of the forced laborers from the farming communities. The victims are confined to semi-prison camps guarded over by the de-facto authority group, the militia. These poor Bantu farmers exist in the shadow of oppression, isolation, and exploitation, leading a perturbed life of perpetual intimidation. Stories of humiliation, horror and ill treatment in Somalia are not isolated incidents though. Numbers are hard to come by, but estimates exceed that thousands upon thousands of this community are antagonized, killed, raped and maimed as daily routine.<sup>28</sup>

The warring nomads target the Bantu population for no other reason than that they did not fit in the Somali nomad's framework of Somaliness. However, that framework is often faulty, as Kusow postulates that although Somalis are often portrayed as a self-same nation, that notion

itself downplays and sometimes violently oppresses the aspirations of others.<sup>29</sup> From Aw-Dhegle to the banks of Bu'aleh, where most local farming settlers are unarmed, militiamen who have abandoned the camel nomadic life are oppressing these communities. Indeed, these young nomads have never acquired a skill for trade or to earn an income in urban cities, except being Morian (armed youth gangs), who are attached to and take their orders from their clan leaders although the only associable characteristics of leadership in their portfolio rests only in that of killer-ship, (Eno, M. 2005).

In 1992, during the Somali tribal war, some warlords and their militia refused all humanitarian relief supplies that were meant to be delivered to the most devastated and hunger-stricken areas, namely the inter-riverine region of Somalia. This resulted in an astounding number of deaths due to starvation of nearly 300,000 people, mainly women and children. As a result of this manmade disaster and destruction in the inter-riverine areas, mortality and malnutrition rates reached a peak in Baidoa (the city of death), and its surroundings, turning the region into "one big graveyard." The Somali nomadic warlords' actions show clearly that, at present, Somalia's main problem is not solely due to clan rivalry but to the murderous ambitions of the war criminals (warlords).<sup>30</sup>

## **THE SOMALI REGIONAL WAR AND THE WREST CONTROL OF BANTU LAND**

Unlike others who categorize the Somali conflict as a "civil war," in this chapter we take a different direction by calling it a "regional war" between multifarious Somali clans and sub-clans that are contending for the control of local and international resources. First, the war in Somalia is utterly confined in the south, while other regions of the nomads are relatively experiencing calm and tranquility. Secondly, those quiet nomadic regions have in fact either declared regional autonomy or seceded as an independent state such as the Republic of Somaliland in the north, the autonomous region of Puntland in east-central, and others awaiting just the slightest opportunity to announce their self-autonomy.<sup>31</sup>

As we read in many academic texts, journals, and newsletters, Somalis are a predominantly nomadic society with a traditionally nomadic way of governing. Colonialists, however, introduced the concept of state through their cities where societies were often sedentary. Then, the question that begs for an answer is, why is the world astounded with the lack of a central government in Somalia, knowing that from independence to date, the Somali state was utterly controlled and dominated by the nomadic groups? Yet,

the concept of a state is the creation of settled societies<sup>32</sup> and is no way a suitable institution for the nomads whose traditional system of governance, coded 'pastoral democracy', has failed the country. From this background, we may hypothesize that the current chaotic situation in southern Somalia is, veritably, as a consequence of the visionless nature of long-enduring schemes of nomadic governance and their inept socio-political system of democracy (O. Eno, 2004).

Regrettably, the southern regions became the battlefields for the contending warlords for resources. Amazingly though, it is the very nomads from the far and strange regions who are fighting amongst themselves for the control of southern regions while the real owners of the region (minorities) are pushed to the side because of being unarmed! From Somalia's independence in July 1960, the minorities particularly the Bantu were excluded from the political process, economic opportunities, and educational advancement. Therefore, when the war broke out in 1991 in the south, they had neither the trained youth to protect the community nor the will to acquire weapons and thus became sufferers thus losing everything including their land.<sup>33</sup>

Land looting and economic exploitation in the Inter-riverine and coastal areas of Somalia have a long-standing history throughout the period of Italian colonization down to the period of civil anarchy. Eager to exploit the agricultural potential of southern regions, the Italian colonial government set up a settler-based plantation system and development strategy, with large land concessions made to Italian settlers, particularly in the Lower Shabelle, a region near the capital and the coast. While individual settlers were given long-term leaseholds, the state remained the proprietor thereby retaining ultimate property rights.<sup>34</sup> In October 1993, an issue of *African Rights* by Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal documented the looting of land from its Bantu owners, which reached unprecedented levels; they said, "This 'land looting' was more comprehensive and far-reaching than any that had gone before; it reached to even the most inaccessible areas along the two rivers. Again, land was acquired by a mixture of purchase, bribery, threat, and outright violent seizure. The legislation for co-operatives was grossly abused as a method of land looting. The beneficiaries were, once again, elites connected with the government."<sup>35</sup> Lee V. Cassanelli, an associate professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania and an occasional consultant to the United States Department of State on Somali affairs, has written numerous papers asserting that a major aspect of the Somali crisis that has been largely overlooked by many journalists and analysts is the intense contest for land being waged in the country. The major battlegrounds of the current civil war are located where armed militias are

competing for control of southern Somalia's most productive assets—irrigable land, port facilities, and urban and peri-urban real estate. While journalists (and even many Somalis) continue to frame the current struggle in terms of competing warlords and clan factions, what is at stake is really access to the country's material resources. The allocation of land and water rights will almost certainly remain a critical and contentious issue in Somali reconstruction.<sup>36</sup>

According to Menkhaus, past exploitation of agricultural land in the Juba valley region and incidents of land expropriation have caused the displacement of thousands of the traditional farmers including the Bantu who practiced farming for generations. Some of the major products that are harvested for export are banana, grapefruit, and others, from which the gains are not distributed equitably by the state. Menkhaus further warns that because of the abundance of agricultural wealth in the Bantu regions, it is not likely the situation will change any time soon. In fact, the region is attracting more Somali nomads and outside investors, [which diminishes the prospect of the Bantu people ever regaining their land].<sup>37</sup>

John Prendergast also notes that the Bantu land was being manipulated by the state itself. Land tenure laws were manipulated, abrogating individual and group ownership and expropriating all land to the state, such that the country's controlling powers [nomads] were also able to control some of the country's best land.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, land tenure in southern Somalia remains a critical issue, which has been described by one Somali official as "a ticking time bomb." It is among the issues that led to the current chaos in Somalia and yet continues to remain at the root of much of the fighting in the south, as Omaar and De Waal confirm, Clan-based militias have ravaged the country, but the commonest reason for their war is land.<sup>39</sup> Evidence from an aid official supports the aforementioned view; describing the Bantu and other farmers as historically the most affected populations in the river valley region, while further characterizing the Bantu as "great survivors."<sup>40</sup> Even prior to the war, Menkhaus noted many poorer Juba valley communities, especially in Gilib and Jamame districts, no longer subsisted on the staple maize dish (soor), instead eating boiled green bananas (moos), earned in exchange for plantation labor, (Menkhaus, 1994).

Reviewing the episode of land misappropriation and land looting in Somalia in his chapter entitled "Land Rush in Somalia", Ahmed Qassim Ali<sup>41</sup> discusses, ". . . how tenure policies enacted by both colonial and post-colonial regimes led to the total alienation of land from its original owners . . ." as he details in depth on what he describes ". . . the unjust land tenure processes that begun (sic) during the Italian Colonial Administration, and adopted and later intensified by the successive post-colonial Somali

regimes.” In the south, the nomadic clans have looted at will almost all the Bantu plantations and more than half of the mainly cultivable land most suitable for agricultural production “without any due process,” (Ahmed, 2004). Due to this manmade disaster and destruction in Inter-riverine areas, mortality and malnutrition were at a peak in Lower Juba, according to Abdi Aden of Oxfam-UK, characterizing the southern region as “one big graveyard.”<sup>42</sup> The inter-riverine community in Somalia has been the prime victim of looming atrocities, genocide, and massive human rights abuse. Yet, they refrained from retaliating, because retaliation would only make a bad situation worse. Nor has it ever been part of the inter-riverine tradition to mutilate, kill, and torture the unarmed, especially women and children (M. Eno, 2004). Despite the fact that the Bantu were kept at the bottom layer of Somali society, Luling writes that: “Among the effects of the present disaggregation of Somali society, has been the emergence of these people [Bantu], or at least some of the more politically conscious of them, claiming their rights as a community and determined to speak with their voice.”<sup>43</sup> To that end, we foster the notion that this could probably be the beginning of the end of the Somali dogmatic clan supremacy and its willy-nilly policy towards the Bantu and other communities in Somalia.

## THE ARRIVAL OF THE SOMALI BANTU REFUGEES IN THE US AND THE REACTION OF THE HOST COMMUNITY

The Somali Bantu refugees have arrived in the US with high expectations. Adaptation to the new culture was anticipated as among the major challenges. Their adaptation process, however, is comparable to the earlier experience of the Nuer, Sudanese community in Minnesota, who were fast enough in their acculturation to the US everyday life.<sup>44</sup> To facilitate through the process, the US government engaged experts to train the US service providers in the various host states as a preparation measure for this immense resettlement program.

The resettlement of the Somali Bantu reminds one of its contrasts with the Hmong community who had been resettled in the US in the 1970's. The commonality between these two communities (Somali Bantu and Hmong) lies in their social paradigm that (a) both have experienced a long history of discrimination as low status people, (b) agronomic culture dominates as their predominant mode of living, and (c) literacy levels of both communities is low and hence face similar linguistic challenges in the job market, for further reading see.<sup>45</sup>

In order to enhance adaptation, it was suggested that prior to their arrival in the US, the Bantu should undergone a cultural orientation

program in Kakuma Refugee Camp. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the agency mandated to conduct the orientation program during which the refugees are familiarized with aspects of the American culture and way of living.

The resettlement of the Bantu has attracted a mixed reaction from the American community. Although an overwhelming majority of Americans welcomed the initiative with tremendous willingness to support in the process, an insignificant number of anti-immigration people expressed concern. As experts later discovered, the negative sentiments of the anti-immigration and whit-supremacist groups particularly focusing on this case was as a result of misinformation depicting the Bantu as primitive people. The misinformation, which was quoted from non-expert sources/individuals with little knowledge about the Bantu, was later addressed by experts such as Omar Eno and Dan Van Lehman through successive orientation programs in seminars and workshops for members of the US resettlement agencies.

Contrary to the negative depiction of the Bantu as an extremely backward community “incapable of opening a door”, the experts have brought into the limelight the various skills many of the Bantu have acquired in trades such as auto-mechanics, electricians, masons, and carpenters, albeit through informal apprenticeship system traditional in Somalia. This revelation has to a considerable extent helped diffuse the negative picture smeared on the Bantu.

The US refugee service providers have stated the Bantu immigrants’ fast adaptation to their environment and to the American culture and general way of living. Some have expressed surprise over the fast pace of adaptation, admitting, “We were over-prepared,” an undertone of the effects of the earlier misinformation. The service providers remain unequivocal about the Bantu’s eagerness for employment regardless of the entry-level although poor English proficiency, like the Hmong, poses a major challenge to the adult Bantu. The outcome of ESL (English as a Second Language) classes has proven tremendous success, with many of the host states reporting positive adult participation. A report elaborates that almost all Bantu learners are performing well in their ESL classes while school-age children go to school regularly. The Bantu realize that in order to break through their obstacles in the job market, they have to improve their English language proficiency. But like the Hmong have experienced, transportation stands as one of the major obstacles to employment.

Notwithstanding the cultural predominance in agriculture, the Bantu in the US have displayed skepticism about farming. Unlike the Hmong who have established distinguished agricultural entrepreneurship, the Somali Bantu are yet to overcome the stigma associated with farming in

their homeland, Somalia, a mode which was utilized as a mechanism to disadvantage them socially as well as psychologically. They gauge their preference between education and agriculture from the perspective of their Somali experience, thus education as their prime choice in the US rather than engage in farming.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SOMALI NOMADS AND THE SOMALI BANTU REFUGEES IN THE US

Overall, the relationship between the Bantu population and the nomads in Somalia can be categorized as the served (nomads) and the server (Bantu), in other words master-servant relationship. The nomads have always dictated to the Bantu what to do and when to do because of their dominance of the governing institutions within Somali society. To substantiate our argument we may quote Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal who, during their research trip to Bantu villages in southern Somalia, after the militias took over the country, witnessed this scene, “In one Bantu village in the lower Giuba, our interview with the village headman was broken up by the Hawiye man [nomad] who claimed he had ‘liberated’ the village plantation and who ordered ‘his’ Bantus not to speak to outsiders without his permission. ‘I am your master now,’ he shouted, as he manhandled the elder away from us. ‘I will come back and kill you if you do this again.’ Throughout the research, farmers were both passionate about the subject of land tenure, and frightened of letting their identities be known,” (Omaar and de Waal 1993).

Unlike the popular perception, which portrays Somalis as a homogeneous society, we contend that Somalis are composed of diverse communities of multiple historical and cultural backgrounds. Thus Somalia as a nation, should harmonize the wealth and strength embedded in the diversity that held together people from different cultures, traditions, and languages. For example, the nomadic Somali administrations, especially Siyad Barre’s military regime, have deliberately stifled all the non-nomadic social languages, dialects as well as accents, among them the Jido, the Dabare, the Bajuni, the Barawa, the Tuni, the Shikhal-Gendershe, the Shanshiye, the Yibir, and others. Although the two major languages are Maay and Maxaaa, the nomads predominantly speak a dialect of Maxaaa, while southerners particularly the Bantu speak predominantly Maay.<sup>46</sup> However, the ruling nomadic class standardized their own version of the Maxaaa language and “sub-standardized” the Maay language and other versions of the Maxaaa dialects such as spoken in the regions from Hiran down to Lower Jubba.

In the United States, although there are some positive signs of collaboration between the Somali Bantu and the Somali nomads, it would

be dangerous, irrational, and even naive to assume that the relationship between these two groups is smooth and cordial. The relationship between the Somali Bantu (the oppressed) and the Somali nomads (the oppressor) in the United States is still ambiguous, because of the infamous culture of subjugation prevailing in Somalia against the Bantu.

As they say, Rome was not built in one day; accordingly, a mutual relationship between these two groups cannot be built overnight either. We hope that the bridge to better relations between the nomads and the Bantu in the United States will be improved gradually. The Somali Bantu are coming to the United States under the American P-2 immigration status, which is preserved for persecuted minority groups. Because of this, there was much discussion surrounding what role, if any, the Somali refugees (nomads) now in the United States—many of whom are from the dominant political clans that have, and continue to, persecute the Bantu in Somalia—would play in the resettlement of the Bantu. As we emphasized above, in Somalia and in the refugee camps in Kenya, the Somali Bantu were always condescendingly told what to do by the dominant clans. Since their arrival in the United States that contemptuous notion has been reversed because the Somali Bantu do now feel that they are in the US, where all men of all ethnicity should be equal. As a result, the Bantu have already started forming their own communal organizations under their own leadership. The Bantu have also agreed to work with the nomadic Somali clans, but only at a mutual and equal level with separate community organizations. Thus, the relation between these two groups is somewhat not alarming but the desire to work separately and equally is evident on the Bantu side (Eno, O. 2004).

Upon arrival at the airport, it is likely that the sponsor, staff member of a resettlement agency, and a translator meet the Bantu refugee family. In the event of a nomadic caseworker or translator, the Bantu refugee families either request a Maay speaker or keep low profile until they reach their destination or their host's home. Upon first arrival at a United States airport, several Bantu express their shock at being received by an Af Maha-speaking Somali from one of the politically dominant "nomadic" clan members. Anyhow, the relations between these two communities have not changed dramatically because the Somali nomads still feel "superior" to the Bantu while the Somali Bantu are still incredulous about the Somali nomads although they are the social workers engaged in helping them.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, after almost two hundred years of living in southern Somalia, the Wazigwa/Bantu people are denied respect and the right to be equal



to their nomadic counterparts. They are denied access to the basic necessities of life; therefore, they continue to feel as foreigners in their own homeland. The war in Somalia, which has uprooted this community from their habitat, is utterly based on resource control; whoever succeeds to seize and control the majority of southern agricultural regions is likely to win the struggle, since as a matter of reality the agricultural produce of the south feeds the rest of Somalia. We conclude, therefore, that the war in Somalia is not a civil war with participation by all member clans of the larger Somali society, nor has it engulfed traumatically in the nomads' regions and towns as it has devastated southern Bantu land. It is, due to its tribal and geographical nature, rather a regional war targeting the acquisition of the fertile Bantu territory, rendering the Bantu victims in multiple spheres.

## NOTES

1. World Refugee Survey 2002/2003 Table 1, key Statistics. This information was prepared by US Committee for Refugees; available at [www.refugee.org/data/wrs/03/stats/sskeystatistics.pdf](http://www.refugee.org/data/wrs/03/stats/sskeystatistics.pdf).
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## Chapter Eight

# Voluntary Trans-Atlantic Migration: Nigerians' Attitudes to the American Diversity Visa Lottery Program

Elizabeth Augustus and Preston Augustus

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines Nigerians' attitudes towards transatlantic migration through the American Diversity Visa Lottery program. Data for the study was collected with the use of structured questionnaires using a large sample size. The results of the study reveal that the proportion of those attempting the American Diversity Visa Lottery is very high among Nigerians who are less than fifty years of age. 82% of the respondents indicate that the program should continue while 81% state that the absence of facilities encourages migration through the American Visa Lottery program. 86% of the respondents are also favorably disposed to the fact that the American Diversity Visa Lottery program provides opportunities for self-development and 87% agree that transatlantic migration provides career development. The probit regression model further shows that respondents' age and number of attempts are inversely related to attitude at 0.27 and 0.32 respectively. However, marital status, educational level and income are significant variables influencing the respondents' attitudes to the American Visa Lottery program. The results of the study provide useful data and general information, and should impact the development of policies both by Nigeria and the United States.

Human migration in a general sense denotes any movement of groups of people from one locality to another, rather than of individual wanderers.<sup>1</sup> Another definition asserts that human migration simply means any movement by humans from one locality to another, often over long distances or in large groups.<sup>2</sup> One basic inference from these definitions is that human migration entails an act of movement from one's own country to another country or one region to another.

There is nothing new about migration. Different people from places all over the world have migrated from one place to another due to diverse



reasons: wars, pestilence and disease, famine, drought, trade, search for knowledge, religious calling, ethnic conflicts or clashes, love of adventure and many others. For instance, the Europeans went to Africa in search of raw materials/markets to sustain their economies; to seek slaves to be carried to America, the West Indies and the Caribbean. The importation of Arabs and Indians to the Southern African countries to build railways across the Southern African countries is also a form of migration. Recent hostilities (political, ethnic and genocidal) in African countries are forcing people to migrate, as in the examples of Rwanda, South Africa, Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Eritrea and Sudan. Thus, Africa with more than fifty nations and six hundred ethnic groups has about one-third of the world's refugees.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, thousands of Nigerians have taken to migration. The civil war (1967–1970) caused the migration of many Nigerians to America, Britain, Germany and some African states such as Cameroon, Gabon and Ghana. Presently, it is not war but economic decline that has put large numbers of Nigerians on alert to take the next opportunity to fly out of the country. Other reasons include lack of security, political intolerance leading to killings and assassination, lack of admission into higher institutions for the youth, lack of jobs for graduates, insensitivity of the ruling class to the plight of the ordinary man, and religious intolerance among others.

The focus of this chapter is voluntary transatlantic migration, which can be described as a willing movement of people across the Atlantic Ocean. The study is particularly interested in determining the attitudes of Nigerians to the American Visa Lottery program and the factors responsible for their migration to the United States.

## **AMERICAN DIVERSITY VISA LOTTERY PROGRAM**

The federal government of the United States, from 1988 to 2006, ran a diversity lottery program that awards 50,000 visas to nationals of a special list of designated countries that are deemed “under-represented” in the current legal immigration system. The winners of the visa lottery are granted a visa to enter the United States, lawful permanent residence status (the coveted green card), and the recipients eventually qualify for naturalization.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the American green card visa lottery, as stated by the lottery literature, is to expand the nationalities that make up the USA. Hence, citizens of countries that are already well represented in the US population, such as England and Mexico, do not qualify for the lottery. Since there are far more people who want green cards in the US than green cards allowed by law, the fairest way to deal with it is to run a lottery.

Some people say that the American visa lottery is neo-colonialism, asserting that it has warped the reasoning of Nigerians as most in “big” jobs at home are now cleaners, office messengers, park-guards, day and night watch people, taxi drivers and laborers in the country of sojourn. Others regard it as a blessing and believe that it brings benefits to immigrants, their families, communities, home and host countries alike. It is important to note that transatlantic migration, when managed well, brings benefits to immigrants, to their families, to their old and new communities, to sending and receiving countries alike.

## THE CONCEPT OF ATTITUDE

Attitude is generally viewed differently by two schools of thought, the mentalist and the behaviorist. The mentalist sees attitude as mental and neural state of readiness; that is, attitude cannot be directly observed but must be inferred by the subject’s introspection. Thus, attitude is defined as a hypothetical construct, used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior by reference to relatively stable and enduring disposition in people. Attitudes cannot be directly observed. A person’s thoughts, processing system, and feelings are hidden. Therefore, attitudes are latent, inferred from behavior. A common expression of attitude is an opinion.<sup>5</sup> Expressing a behaviorist view, it has also been observed that attitude or disposition is simply overt, an observable response to social situations. It is thus regarded as a dependent variable. In essence, no one needs to observe, tabulate and analyze overt behavior.<sup>6</sup>

A working definition describes attitude as feeling, outlook and belief about a concept. It is on these criteria that we value and judge that particular concept (attitude affects behavior; hence affects feeling). Attitudes are also defined as a mental predisposition to act that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor. Individuals generally have attitudes that focus on objects, people or institutions. Attitudes are also described as being attached to mental categories. Mental orientations towards concepts are generally referred to as values. Attitude then comprises four components, cognition, affect; behavioral intentions and evaluation. Simply described, cognitions are our beliefs, theories, expectations, cause and effect beliefs, and perceptions relative to the focal object.

Affective component refers to our feeling with respect to the focal object such as fear, liking or anger. Behavioral intentions are our goals, aspirations, and our expected responses to the attitude object. Evaluations on the other hand are often considered the central component of attitudes.

In other words evaluations consist of the imputation of some degree of goodness or viciousness to an object. When one speaks of a positive or negative attitude toward an object, one is referring to the evaluative component. Evaluations are therefore functions of cognitive, affect and behavioral intentions of the object.

In the same vein, attitudes are further defined as a disposition or tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain thing (idea, object, person, situation). They encompass, or are closely related to, our opinions and beliefs and are based upon our experiences, (Law, 1–4). Since attitudes often relate in some way to interaction with others, they represent an important link between cognitive and social psychology. First major theories of attitude change, developed in the framework of Hull's learning theory, were provided and oriented towards the effects of persuasive communications.<sup>7</sup> According to the Hovland et al theory, changes in opinions can result in attitude change depending upon the presence or absence of rewards. That is, the acceptance of a new opinion resulting in attitude formation is dependent on the incentives.

One basic inference from these explanations is that attitude uniquely influences people's behavior and decisions. Moreover, reinforcement or reward determines positive disposition or attitude. To this end, this chapter seeks to determine Nigerians' attitudes to transatlantic migration through the American Diversity Visa Lottery program.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Oyo State, Nigeria. This state is located in the heartland of the Yoruba people and shares the distinctive high urbanization characteristic of the other Yoruba speaking states in the South-western Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> This area, however, is densely populated with a large number of immigrants from other parts of the country. Study samples were selected using a large sample size technique of  $N$  greater than or equal to 30. Data was collected through the use of a structured questionnaire, which elicited information from one hundred and twenty-nine respondents.

## METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The administered questionnaires were thoroughly examined for accuracy. Frequency distribution, percentages, and probit regression models were used to describe and summarize the data.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Is attitude towards AVL influenced by socio-economic characteristics?

## HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics and attitude towards AVL.

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 presents the personal characteristics of the respondents. Thirty-eight percent of them are between the ages of 30 and 39 years, with a mean age of 38 years. The proportion of those attempting the American Visa Lottery (AVL) is very high among the people who are less than 50 years of age. A majority of the respondents are males, (53.5 percent), married (50.4 percent), and with at least three children (38.8 percent). The socio-cultural demand on married men as heads of the household might be responsible for this trend. About 88 percent of the respondents are Christians as against few Muslims and traditional worshippers. The notion that western countries are mainly Christians could explain this pattern of distribution. A higher proportion (83 percent) of the respondents had basic educational qualifications such as a Higher National Diploma, Bachelor, Masters, and Doctoral degrees. The prevailing underemployment and unemployment situations could be responsible for middle and high level manpower participation in AVL. Similarly, a majority of the respondents are civil servants, followed by students, in proportion of the different occupational categories. Respondents with an annual income greater than or equal to 200,000 are 22 percent, with a larger proportion of 70.5 percent not indicating their annual income. About 86 percent of the respondents belong to the Yoruba ethnic group which may be due to the fact that the study was carried out in a Yoruba area.

## AVL ATTEMPT VARIABLES

From Table 2, about 54 percent of the respondents have tried the AVL, with a majority on their second attempt. Eighty two percent also indicate that the program should continue while 81 percent indicate that the absence of facilities encourages migration through AVL. About 46 percent of the respondents, however, stated that with improvement in the home country they would be willing to return. Increasing awareness and chances of

**Table 8-1.** Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Personal Characteristics

Variables		Frequency	Percentages
Age	Less than 20	2	1.6
	20–29	40	31.0
	30–39	49	38.0
	40–49	23	17.8
	50–59	13	10.1
	60–69	2	1.6
Sex	Male	69	53.5
	Female	60	46.5
Marital Status	Single	64	49.7
	Married	65	50.4
Number of Children	1–3	50	38.8
	4–7	13	10.1
Ethnicity	Yoruba	112	86.8
	Hausa	6	4.7
	Igbo	8	6.2
Religion	Christianity	114	88.4
	Islam	8	6.2
	Traditional	7	5.5
Educational Level	Primary School	4	3.1
	Secondary School	12	9.3
	National Certificate	6	4.7
	Higher National Diploma	40	31.0
	BSC/BA	25	19.4
	Med/MSc	22	17.1
	PhD	11	8.5
Occupation	Civil servant	83	64.3
	Students	21	16.3
	Business men	4	3.1
	Nursing	2	1.6
	Armed Forces	8	6.2
Income	<200,000	10	7.7
	>200,000	28	21.8
	Non response	91	70.5

**Table 8-2.** Distribution According to AVL Attempt Variables

Variables		Frequency	Percentages
Attempted AVL	Yes	69	53.5
	No	55	42.5
Number of Attempts	First	4	3.1
	Second	115	89.1
	Third	2	1.6
	Fourth	2	1.6
	Not yet	6	4.7
Program Continuity	Yes	106	82.2
	No	10	7.8
AVL Encouraged by Poor Facilities	Yes	105	81.4
	No	12	9.3
Willingness to Return if Facilities Improve	Yes	59	45.7
	No	37	28.7

being selected might be responsible for the high percentage of respondents attempting AVL.

## RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS AVL

Table 3 presents the attitudinal dispositions of respondents to the AVL program as measured on a 3-point Likert type scale of agree, undecided and disagree. Respondents are favorably disposed to items such that AVL provides opportunity for self development (86 percent), career development (87.6 percent), skill acquisition (79.8 percent), exposure (86 percent) employment (85.3 percent) and better conditions of living (80.6 percent). On the other hand, respondents disagree with views that the AVL program is exploitative (30.2 percent), dehumanizing (35.7 percent), violates human rights (31.8 percent) or is discriminatory (26.4 percent).

## ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS AVL

The probit model seeks to explain the attitude of Nigerians to AVL as a result of the socio-economic characteristics and AVL attempt variables. The

Table 8-3.

Attitudinal statements	Agreed	Undecided	Disagreed
Provides opportunity for self development	111 (86.0)	12 (9.3)	4 (3.1)
Provides opportunity for Career development	113 (87.6)	8 (6.2)	6 (4.7)
Provides opportunity for Skill acquisition	103 (79.8)	15 (11.6)	7 (5.4)
Provides opportunity for Exposure	111 (86.0)	8 (6.2)	6 (4.7)
Provides opportunity for Employment	110 (85.3)	9 (7.0)	4 (3.1)
Provides opportunity for Better conditions of living	104 (80.6)	14 (10.9)	9 (7.0)
Provides opportunity for Welfare	98 (76.0)	20 (15.5)	9 (7.0)
Provides opportunity for Social services	97 (75.2)	20 (15.5)	8 (6.2)
Provides opportunity for Social security	85 (65.9)	15 (11.6)	23 (17.5)
Provides opportunity for Self actualization	76 (58.9)	29 (22.5)	18 (14.0)
Provides opportunity for Educational development	100 (77.5)	9 (7.0)	14 (10.9)
Provides opportunity to Generate income	102 (79.1)	17 (13.2)	8 (6.2)
Creates better sources of information	93 (72.1)	16 (12.4)	12 (9.3)
Improves remittances	75 (58.1)	25 (19.4)	25 (19.4)
Improves linkages with people	81 (62.8)	25 (19.4)	19 (14.7)
Promotes interaction with people	71 (55.0)	34 (26.4)	22 (17.1)
It is exploitative	55 (42.6)	29 (22.5)	39 (30.2)
It is dehumanizing	31 (24.0)	48 (37.2)	46 (35.7)
It violates human rights	54 (41.9)	30 (23.3)	41 (31.8)
It subjects migrants to second class citizenship	63 (48.8)	36 (27.9)	26 (20.2)
It promotes discrimination	48 (37.2)	43 (33.3)	34 (26.4)
It jeopardizes equal rights	48 (37.2)	42 (32.6)	27 (20.9)

probit model has a good fit and it is significant at 5 and 10 percent respectively. The Chi-Square value of the Likelihood ratio is 595.88 at  $p = 0.00$  which implies that the model is of good fit and consistent with theory. Significant variables that can be used to predict the probability of the attitude towards AVL are the age of respondents ( $t = -2.62$ ), number of attempts ( $t = -2.25$ ) and attempted AVL ( $t = 2.54$ ). Of these 3 variables, age and number of attempts are inversely related to attitude. At 10 percent, marital status ( $t = 1.81$ ), educational level ( $t = 1.79$ ) and income ( $t = 1.88$ ) are significant. The magnitude of the probability that these variables would influence attitudes towards AVL are represented by the corresponding values of the regression coefficients as shown in Table 4.

Table 8-4. Probit Regression Model

Variables	Regression coefficient	Standard Error	t = value
Intercept	-1.409	0.033	-2.25**
Age	-0.075	0.048	0.277
Sex	0.013	0.068	1.817*
Marital status	0.125	0.057	1.52
Number of children	0.088	0.058	-0.34
Religion	-0.020	0.013	1.79*
Educational level	0.024	0.011	-0.321
Occupation	-0.0035	0.00	1.88*
Income	0.00	0.031	-0.583
Ethnicity	-0.0185	0.527	2.54**
Attempted AVL	0.134	0.023	-2.62**
Number of attempts	-0.061	0.053	-0.312
Program continuity	-0.0167	0.577	0.278
Poor facilities	0.016	0.033	-0.068
Improved home country	-0.0023		
X <sup>2</sup>	595.88		
DF	113		
P	0.00		

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study have clearly shown that Nigerians give credence to the American Visa Lottery basically on economic grounds. Many Nigerians regard it as an “open door” to wealth, new opportunities, and new ways of becoming affluent and self-reliant. Based on the findings of this study, however, it is recommended that Nigeria’s government should diversify its economy. The mono-cultured economy in which oil is the mainstay of the foreign exchange earning should be reconsidered. The country should stop the wasteful burning away of her gas reserve but harness it for productive purposes within and (without) economic earnings. Welfare packages in the form of “free education” for all citizens at least to the secondary level should be adequately and tenaciously put in place. Likewise, compulsory basic literacy education should be vigorously pursued to eradicate illiteracy among the populace because Nigeria is still one of the e-nine countries with the highest population of illiterates in the world.



Along with the private sector and other stakeholders in the country, basic infrastructural facilities such as water, uninterrupted electricity supply, food, cheap but decent accommodation and health services should be made available to the masses, even if only for a token. There should also be a new orientation for the youths and elites to develop new attitudes for the love of their country and for its development. Adequate measures should be taken to protect the future of the working class after retirement. The government should also note that many brains from the academy and other professions have been lost to immigration. Moreover, the spirit of patriotism is ebbing as nobody seems to bother about the plight of our best people. However, migrants who have benefited and gained from host countries should be patriotic enough to come home and build their fatherland. Every effort should be geared towards the promotion and well-being of their country of origin. Hence, the recommendations have special implications on the Nigerian government and its citizenry, for a better and ideal Nigeria.

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## Chapter Nine

# Managing the Migration of Health-Care Workers toward the Transfer of Knowledge, Skill and Professionalism

Oladapo Augustus

## INTRODUCTION

The migration of health-care workers for various reasons is considered inevitable for now, and is posing great challenges to both source countries and destination countries. Research has shown that about 65 percent economically active migrants who have moved to developed countries are classified as “highly-skilled.” The highly skilled health professionals so recognized among this group of the health-care workforce are physicians, dentists, pharmacists and nurses. The health care systems of a nation are of crucial importance both to their economy and to the well being of their citizens. There is therefore the quest in many developing nations for strategies to fully enjoy the impact of modern rapid innovation and the diffusion of health technologies from developed nations. The continuing disparities in working conditions, management of health systems and professional development between richer and poorer nations offer a great deal of “pull” towards the more developed nations.

This chapter considers the factors affecting, and the challenges of migration of health-care workers with reference to both the giving and the receiving countries. It further seeks to prove that proper management of the migration of healthcare workers can be mutually beneficial to both the country of origin and the country of destination. To this end, the chapter attempts to identify certain forms of temporary migration that could be strategically designed for the evolution of a well-managed health system in the immigrants’ countries of origin. The role of international organizations in delivering adequate technical support to developing countries, in advising the management of international migration flows and in promoting intergovernmental cooperation to achieve the set goal is highlighted in this chapter. Also, the chapter draws attention to the proposition that

international migration of health professionals on temporary basis has a proven ability of facilitating the transfer of knowledge, skill and professionalism for the enhancement of the quality of health care delivery system of the affected developing nations.

The economic, political, cultural, and religious relationships between nations have been identified as a notable catalyst for international migration. International migration also has a significant role to play in strengthening such interrelations among nations whether they are developing, developed or with economies in transition. Experience has shown that an increase in the number of people migrating is significant for many resource-poor countries because they are losing their better-educated nationals to richer countries. Stilwell, B. et al. claims that around 65% of all economically active migrants who have moved to developed countries are classified as "highly skilled."<sup>1</sup> His study further states that highly skilled professionals are generally assumed to have completed tertiary education and to have a professional job. In terms of the health care workforce, this refers to physicians, nurses, dentists and pharmacists. The loss of these highly skilled health professionals is likely to have a lasting negative effect on the health care delivery system of their countries of origin.

Not much research has been undertaken on the migration of health professionals worldwide. Among the most current research undertaken by WHO in this field was in the mid-1970s when Meija et al<sup>2</sup> found that 6% of physicians and 5% of nurses were living outside their country of birth. These researchers admitted that it was difficult to obtain qualitative data on the effects of migration on people and health systems. These difficulties in obtaining reliable qualitative and quantitative data probably account for the dearth in this area.<sup>3</sup> Data from countries that recruit or accept health professionals (destination countries) appear to be more reliable than data from the home countries of the professionals who travel to work abroad (source countries). Despite the limitations of this data, it is still possible to be assured of the important trends in migration of health-care professionals. The number of people migrating has never been higher than it is now and the majority of migrants are highly skilled.<sup>4</sup> Little is known about whether migrants return to their home countries because it is more difficult to collect information about emigrants than immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

## **FACTORS AFFECTING MIGRATION OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS**

Though it is evident that many factors may generally influence people to migrate, the individual's perception of the importance of these factors varies

to make their impact personal and circumstantial. Therefore, in the final analysis, the decision to migrate is essentially a personal one. The decision to migrate is based on a person's evaluation of the push factors and the pull factors: push factors include negative home conditions that compel one to emigrate while pull factors are the positive attributes perceived to exist at a new location where one wants to immigrate.

There are many factors affecting migration of health-care workers with reference to both the source and the destination countries. One major factor that influences migration of highly skilled health workers is the greater career opportunities made available at the country of destination. Many health workers have migrated to more economically developed nations because of the high unemployment in the health-care labor market in their home country (Bach S 2003). There are also new developments in the health care labor market that affect to a large extent the international movements of health workers. Among these are the new communication technologies that provide opportunities for jobs and visas to be applied for internationally through electronic access.

There are also some governmental and private organizations undertaking recruitment exercises for health workers from resource-poor countries to fill vacancies in economically viable countries. For instance, both the United States of America and the United Kingdom have anticipated large short falls in the number of nurses they will need over the next ten to twenty years and have considered overseas recruitment as the probable solution to the problem.<sup>6</sup> However, since this is not a general problem affecting all health professionals, it can be said that the global labor market for health workers is not homogeneous, as it clearly shows that some factors affect different health professionals in different ways.

Another factor affecting the migration of health-care workers is the possibility for better career success based on opportunities made available for such in the destination country. Career success factors have been identified to include pay and benefits, opportunity for continuing education and job flexibility.<sup>7</sup> The achievement of career success following successful completion of basic training is an important goal for all professionals. Career success defined as the perception of an individual's employment achievement over time is pivotal to one's decision to either remain in one's home country or to migrate to another country with better career success opportunities.

External and objective measures of career success are pay and position attainment.<sup>8</sup> Other measures described as internal and subjective are the possession of human capital assets like education (Melamed, 1995), job satisfaction<sup>9</sup>, job flexibility (Melamed, 1995), how an individual's

job impacts social roles,<sup>10</sup> personal characteristics like ethnical (ethical?) practice<sup>11</sup> and interpersonal factors like receiving respect or recognition (Peluchette, 1993). Continuing disparities in working conditions and pay between richer and poorer countries offer a great deal of pull towards more developed countries.<sup>12</sup>

Migration is also significantly influenced by social networks through which the emigrants inside destination countries will offer support to their colleagues in their home countries by informing them of new employment opportunities and assisting them with social and cultural assimilation.<sup>13</sup>

Another factor that influences migration is how tight the conditions are for obtaining visas and work permits to migrate to the destination countries. These conditions may be relaxed for certain health professionals to encourage their migration to nations where they are needed.

It is a basic fact that migration of health workers is primarily dependent on the demand for them in the destination country. Consequently the shortages of health-care personnel in some destination countries (such as the United States and United Kingdom in particular) have a significant impact on the flow of health-care workers to such countries. It has been predicted that the flow of health workers from developing countries to developed countries is likely to continue or even grow unless there is a commitment from developed countries to train more health workers to meet their own needs instead of recruiting from overseas.<sup>14</sup> If otherwise the labor market in the destination country is saturated, the migration of highly skilled health-care workers will decrease because individuals are more likely to migrate when they are reasonably sure they will find suitable employment in a destination country.

The disparity in the levels of development between developed nations and developing nations also encourages migration of health care workers to developed nations. The two parameters of development that are of special interest to health workers are (i) The level of Health Technology (ii) Standard of living.

### *Level of Health Technology*

Things that are essential for human existence are done and achieved in different ways in different nations depending on their levels of technology. The technical industry is not static but dynamic (progressing). There are technical means and skills characteristic of a particular civilization, nation or period that put them far ahead or far behind others. There are technical methods employed in a particular field of industry or art in a nation that elevates such a nation to a position of honor in that area of "technological excellence." In any nation where scientific procedures are carried

out using the best universally acknowledged technical methods, such scientific feats will create in such a nation an environment most conducive for her rapid industrialization and economic growth. This is a major factor that has earned such nations with high level of technology the privilege of being recognized as developed nations and of attracting immigrants from other nations to come and borrow from their wealth of technology. It is also in this regard that there is a general quest in many developing nations for strategies to fully enjoy the impact of the rapid innovation and diffusion of health technologies from developed and technologically advanced nations. An example of such innovation is Telepharmacy as a new method of dispensing drugs to patients. The method centers on the use of electronic information and communication technologies to dispense medications and provide medicine information and pharmaceutical care when distance separates the patient from the pharmacist. One of the proven ways of achieving the goal of a well managed health system in the immigrants' countries of origin is to ensure that short-term migration of health workers to such technologically advanced nations leads to the diffusion of recent innovations in health technologies on their return.

Standard of Living is a function of the level of development in a country and is measured by factors such as the amount of personal income, levels of education, food consumption, life expectancy, availability of health care, ways natural resources are used, level of technology and others. Countries with high levels of urbanization and industrialization that enjoy high material standards of living are referred to as developed countries. Countries with lower levels of progress and prosperity are considered less developed or underdeveloped countries. Countries showing evidence of economic, social and political progress are termed developing countries. Some measures of development include: National product per person e.g. sum total of all goods and services produced in a nation in one year divided by the total population; occupational structure of the workforce e.g. percentage of the labor force employed in manufacturing (developed) versus agriculture (less developed); consumption of electricity per person; transportation and communication facilities per person e.g. the per capita index of telephones, railroads, roads, and radios; standard of living e.g. literacy rates, caloric intake per person, infant mortality, life expectancy.

## **CHALLENGES THAT MIGRATION OF HEALTH WORKERS POSE TO THE IMMIGRANTS' COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN**

Human migration and settlement are for the most part linked to the availability of the resources that guarantee high quality of life. All nations have



the potential to grow or decline based upon the health and utilization of the economy, which provides resources needed for the personal and collective development of the inhabitants.

## **EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENT ON THE MIGRATION OF HEALTH WORKERS**

Humans affect environment and environment affects humans. The developed nations are so called because of the positive ways their citizens interact with and affect their environment. The environment in this regard refers to all factors, circumstances and conditions (social, moral, spiritual, economic, physical, technological, political, cultural, aesthetic), which can influence the competence, productivity and commitment of health professionals. The health professionals and the government of their home country must therefore take up the challenge to provide an environment that is most conducive for an ideal professional practice. All the factors affecting the environment must be constantly monitored and clearly tailored towards wielding a positive influence on the retention of health-care workers in their home countries for optimum productivity. Instead of adopting permanent migration as a defeatist solution to problems rendering the home environment non-conducive for productive and profitable practice, health professionals should offer services that would guarantee a transformed environment needed for a well managed health system.

## **MANAGING THE MIGRATION OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS**

International migration of health workers, if well managed, can have positive impacts on both the source and the destination countries. It also has the potential of facilitating the transfer of knowledge, skill and professionalism from technologically advanced nations to developing nations.

It is of primary importance to have good record and information systems about the health-care workforce in a nation, and this should include a database on migration. This would serve as a good basis for any meaningful planning. One way of ensuring reliability of available data is for both the source and the destination countries to agree on a regular exchange of data on migration of health-care workers.

In order to manage the migration of health-care workers effectively, there is need for governments and other private organizations to develop strategies that will control the flow of health workers between countries. Each country will have to develop strategies relevant to its own situation

to control and manage the issue of migration. It is a known fact that the migration of health-care workers cannot be well managed without great consideration and attention given to the factors that influence the development of health systems of a nation. The inter-dependence of these two closely inter-woven issues should be appreciated and considered for their mutually beneficial management. A well-managed health system will guarantee a well-managed migration of health-care workers and vice-versa. It is therefore necessary for a nation that intends to manage migration of health-care workers for the achievement of a well-managed health-system to adopt a policy and design strategies that will ensure proper retention, recruitment, deployment and development of health workers.

Lack of adequate investment in health-care systems by the governments of developing countries, resulting in low wages and poor working conditions, has been identified as a major factor that pushes many to migrate. Therefore financial and non-financial incentives are important to motivate health workers both to do a good job and to want to remain with their present job. Such incentives include training, study leave, provision of needed modern facilities for efficient practice and provision of basic necessities of life to retain staff in rural areas.<sup>15</sup> The analysis given by Vulicic M. et al<sup>16</sup> has further shown that wage differentials between source and destination countries are currently so large that reducing them by small amounts is unlikely to affect migration flow. In this circumstance, therefore, consideration should be given to other factors such as working conditions, health management systems and professional development as important incentives to retain professionals in their countries of origin.

The intended long-term effect of well-managed international migration is to make the option to remain in one's country a viable one for all people. Sustainable economic growth, with equity and development strategies that are consistent with this aim, are a necessary means to that end.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, all efforts to achieve sustainable economic and social development toward ensuring a better economic balance between developed and developing countries should be strengthened.

The countries of origin and countries of destination can also initiate bilateral and multilateral agreements to encourage cooperation and dialogue in order to maximize the benefits of migration to those concerned (the migrants) and increase the likelihood that migration has positive consequences for the development of both sending and receiving countries. Examples of such are:

- (i) Agreements could be initiated between governments of two nations whereby regulatory frameworks would be designed to

control and unify the training, recruitment and deployment of health professionals in both nations. This will allow the two nations recognize each other's qualifications and make it easier for health professionals to move from one nation to another and continue working in the same field (Stilwell, B. et al 2004).

- (ii) Opportunities could be offered to health-care workers from developing nations to work in developed nations for limited periods of time for which temporary visas are granted, or such offer could be through institutional agreements to take or exchange workers. This type of scheme is being tried with some measure of success between the United Kingdom and South Africa.<sup>18</sup>
- (iii) A scheme could also be arranged between the source country and destination country to encourage skilled health professionals from the source country to work in the destination country on a rotational basis going for three years or so and then returning (Buchan, J et al 2003).
- (iv) There could be an agreement between countries specifying that the destination country will invest in institutions in the source countries so that, in effect, some source countries will act as providers of health-care personnel for destination countries by training a surplus of health workers.<sup>19</sup>
- (v) Governments of countries of destination could consider the use of certain forms of temporary migration, such as short-term and project-related migration of health workers, as a means of improving the skills of nationals of countries of origin, especially developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
- (vi) Governments of destination countries are encouraged to engage in technical cooperation to aid developing countries in addressing the impact of international migration by exchanging with them information regarding their international migration policies and the regulations governing the admission and stay of migrants in their territories. This is in agreement with the regulation given by the international convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families (International conference report on population and development 1994).
- (vii) Governments should cooperate with international and non-governmental organizations and research institutions by supporting the gathering of data on flows and stocks of international

health-care migrants and on factors causing their migration, as well as monitoring international migration of health professionals. They should also help to identify and execute strategies to ensure that migration contributes to the development and international relations of the countries affected.

- (viii) Sufficient encouragement should be given to international organizations in their role to deliver adequate support to developing countries, advise in the management of international migration flows and promote intergovernmental cooperation through, *inter alia*, bilateral and multilateral negotiations, as appropriate.

Studies have shown also that the decision to migrate may be influenced by family wealth. When professionals from poorer countries migrate to richer countries, they often do so with the intention of sending a portion of their wages back to their families, (Connell, J. 2002). Therefore the governments of countries of origin wishing to foster the inflow of remittances and their productive use for development should adopt sound exchange rate, monetary and economic policies, facilitate the provision of banking facilities that enable the safe and timely transfer of migrants' funds and promote the conditions necessary to increase domestic savings and channel them into productive investments. Thus the government can enhance the potential contribution that expatriate nationals can make to the economic development of their countries of origin.

## CONCLUSION

It is of great importance that both the source and destination countries devise strategies to facilitate the re-integration process of returning health-care migrants. Governments of countries of origin are to facilitate the return of health-care migrants and their re-integration into their home communities and to devise ways of using their knowledge and skills.

Governments of countries of origin should collaborate with countries of destination and engage the support of appropriate international organizations in promoting the return on a voluntary basis of qualified health-care migrants who can play a crucial role in the transfer of knowledge, skill and technology. Countries of destination are also encouraged to facilitate the return of health-care migrants to their home countries by adopting flexible policies such as the transferability of pensions and other work benefits.

It is pertinent at this point to quote from the personal experience of a Nigerian emigrant,<sup>20</sup> married with children, who had returned to her home

country. An excerpt from her unpublished write-up reads thus: “Emigration (from developing countries to the developed) is not uncommon and in fact has been on the increase since 1990s. From personal experience it is not a bad thing if it results in the ultimate return of the emigrant to his/her home country to transfer skills acquired over time in a developed country. I left Nigeria in the late 1980s and was in the U.K for well over ten years rising through the ranks. I have now returned to Nigeria, and I am not only using the skills gained, I am transferring them to others.”

Returning to one’s home country can sometimes pose even more challenges. Having been away, you then face some of the same challenges you faced in the host country. You need to adapt to the new environment and be accepted. Finance may not be a pressing problem, but you may need a job and it may not be so easy to find your feet especially because quite often it is not what you know but who you know that matters. There are not yet mechanisms to adopt new-comers regardless of their skills and experience into Nigeria. If however those hurdles are crossed, there is a lot to be gained from the return of an emigrant. You are able to put in what you gained. Personally, as a clinical pharmacist, the skills gained have helped my country in some of the following ways:

1. My local community has gained a lot because they found that the way I practice is quite unique. I not only use the clinical skills acquired to assist them, but I also collaborate with other members of the healthcare team on their behalf, which is not too common here, but what I am used to.
2. The exposure gained abroad has made it quite easy for me to give good presentations, especially with the multi-media projector. This was transferred to a company I worked for. When I got there, presentations were done with over-head slides. I trained the Marketing Group and encouraged the Company to buy a multi-media projector. This is what is now used for their presentations.
3. I have been able to train several other pharmacists in clinical pharmacy and I have a mentorship program.
4. I am working with some friends abroad with the aim of networking and training other pharmacists based in Nigeria. The transfer of skills is the key thing. We have an NGO and one of the key objectives is to have a vehicle for cross-country training and skills transfer. Several people abroad have responded positively with a willingness to transfer the skills and knowledge gained.

To conclude, I have found that emigration is not necessarily a bad venture especially when and if people in developing countries have something to offer their counterparts abroad.

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## Chapter Ten

# African Immigrants' Families and the American Educational System

Cecilia S. Obeng

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the experiences of African immigrant families in American Educational institutions and the different strategies used by these families to cope with the system. The study uses qualitative methods and is done within the frameworks of analytic induction and constant comparison analysis (Strauss; Goetz and LeCompte; Bogdan and Biklen) and Van Maanen's<sup>1</sup> impressionistic ethnographic tradition. The study demonstrates that African immigrants face considerable challenges relating to adaptation into the school system in their acquisition of the necessary professional competence needed to gain access to high paying jobs.<sup>2</sup> The study concludes that cultural differences and being "foreign"<sup>3</sup> put the immigrants at risk and contribute to problems in adaptation and proper assimilation.

African presence in the United States dates back to the times of slavery when black peoples of African descent were transplanted into the new world. According to Frazier, voluntary migration of Africans into the United States started around the 1860s when Cape Verdean sea-men came to the States to work mostly on cranberry bogs and textile mills. African emigration to the United States continued, but in smaller numbers when compared to those of the Europeans. However, recent reports on African immigrants<sup>4</sup> indicate that because of poor economies and wars in some of the countries of Africa, black Africans are migrating to the United States in numbers even greater than in the slave trade period. These reports cite United States Census Bureau figures as indicating that about fifty thousand Africans enter the United States yearly. Roberts (2005) quotes Kim Nichols, co-executive director of the African Services Committee, which directs newcomers to health care, housing and other services in the New York region, as saying

that the report represents only people who enter the country legally. The report estimates that the actual number could be four times the official figure.

Although the U.S. is known to be one of the countries where many of its inhabitants are immigrants, newly arrived immigrants face many challenges upon their arrival, especially in connection with adaptation and with getting the education needed to gain access to high paying jobs, (Aonghas, 2002). These immigrants from all over the world come with different cultural and educational backgrounds, and with different family patterns. African immigrants are no exception; they face cultural differences which definitely put them at risk of having problems with adaptation.

Researchers have identified adaptation as playing an important role in students' academic performance, (Aonghas, 2002). The academic success of immigrants is tied to proper adaptation to the majority culture.<sup>5</sup> Warner and Srole (1945) note that immigrants of European descent have fewer problems than other immigrants adapting or assimilating to the majority of the people in the United States once they learn the language.

Since Africans are coming into the United States in large numbers and are likely to face challenges because of cultural differences relating to family systems, healthcare, and education, among others, research on such immigrants will help the African families, educators, and policy makers address the challenges that are bound to occur.

Regarding family systems, for example, due to the collectivist nature of African societies, African immigrants may come to the United States with large families (nuclear and extended—nephews, nieces, and cousins) and this hinders the giving of effective and undivided individual attention to their own children. This is because in African societies such extended family members are not seen as 'outsiders' and are required to be treated in the same way as members of one's nuclear family. In Africa, other extended family members who may be financially and socially capable may be called to assist when there are such large families. However, given the geographic distance such help will be physically impossible. The large family immigrant parents or guardians therefore tend to be exclusively stuck with the burden of taking care of their families. The pressure of work and the need to provide for their families exacerbate the burden faced by such families.

With regard to healthcare, a considerable difference obtains between perceptions about disease causation and disease management in that whereas Africans view disease as caused by both organic and supernatural sources, most mainstream Americans attribute disease causation to organic or physical sources. For example, whereas depression is viewed

as being caused by (evil) spirits and is therefore treated by spiritual means in most African (Ghanaian, Togolese, etc.) cultures, its causation is attributed to emotional or mental sources in the West and is therefore treated through the administration of mental health drugs and psychological counseling.

## AIMS

The main object of this chapter is to examine the experiences of African immigrant families in American Educational institutions. In particular, the chapter examines the challenges that the immigrants face in the school system and the strategies that they employ to deal with such challenges.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study employs qualitative methods in its design. With regard to the qualitative method, the data collection technique stems from several methodological traditions. The work is done within the frameworks of analytic induction and constant comparison analysis (Strauss, 1987; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Van Maanen's, 1988) impressionistic ethnographic tradition.

The analytic induction and constant comparison methods used in this study involved grouping respondents' narratives into categories based on identification of particular issues or themes and examining the connection between those issues. In particular, the experiences of African immigrant families (in the American educational system) were grouped into categories based on their characteristic similarities or differences.

Van Maanen's ethnographic impressionism, which requires researchers to assume a native point of view and try to be "emic" rather than "etic" is also used in this research. Using this research model will help me to refrain from imposing my ideas on the respondents. Thus, allowing the respondents' voices into the research will help me to get their interpretations of their own actions and experiences, and will subsequently enable me to develop a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. Such an understanding and knowledge of their experiences and needs will help me to make realistic recommendations to various stakeholders namely (parents, educators, students, and the community) as well as similar populations in the same social context.

An important reason for employing qualitative analysis is that it will enable us to hear the real voices of the research consultant.

## METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE METHOD

The participants who took part in this study were thirty-eight African immigrants who lived in Indiana and Virginia. The idea of using families in which the parents were born in Africa was to ensure that the information collected was authentically African-oriented. Data collection for the study was done by this author (the principal investigator) and three graduate students. The principal investigator and a graduate assistant started the interview in Indiana (Bloomington and surrounding towns), and when the number of eligible participants was difficult to find (because there are only a handful of African immigrants living in the Bloomington area), the state of Virginia was added as a data collection site because of the large number of African immigrants residing in that state. An added advantage of using Virginia was that it was the home state of my second research assistant. This made data collection feasible and relatively easy since she could contact some of the research consultants via phone and was also seen as a member of the larger community. Data collection in Virginia went on very smoothly and lasted only a couple of weeks.

After the data were collected, a third research assistant with training in transcription was hired to assist with the transcription and codification of the data.

## PROCEDURE

The study involved personal interviews and the answering of close-ended and open-ended questions. The principal investigators and one graduate assistant identified common themes and issues. Those themes and issues were used to find out the experiences of African immigrants in the American Educational system from the perspective of these immigrants and the factors that influence their education. All three graduate assistants involved in this research had previous interview experience and were well vested in interview techniques. The interviews were conducted in participants' homes from June to December 2005 for forty-five to ninety minutes. Some participants were asked to fill in questionnaires and others were interviewed by phone. Some of the interviews were audio taped, others were written by the interviewers and the participants. Various non-verbal communication behaviors such as nodding the head, using various gestures, and different kinds of facial expressions were written down by interviewers.

## FINDINGS

The findings for the research are in themes which provide a picture of the immigrants' experiences in the United States school system. The themes discussed are: bullying, children's homework supervision and general academic performance, disciplinary issues, cultural alienation and cultural crossing, benefits gained by the immigrants from the United States Educational System, and a determination of what motivates the immigrants and their children to be successful. We begin with bullying.

### BULLYING

A majority of the African immigrants who participated in this study believed that their children had been bullied either on their way to school or within the school. For the children in elementary schools, some respondents believed that the bullying took place on their way to school especially when they were waiting for the bus or when they were on the bus. Also, parents of some of the elementary age children and some middle school and high school students reported some form of teasing at the initial stages when they were admitted into the schools. This is what one participant reported: "I think they were kind of making fun of them and the children were very aggressive because of that. They were fighting all the time. People were calling him all kinds of names." Some parents with children in the middle schools believed that their children were bullied in the Locker room. One parent said, "Because he was thin they made him carry their school books in the locker room and also called him gay."

Another parent said the boys: "used to kick his backpack—the book, whatever; the backpack had a cartoon on it. Scooby-Doo cartoon. And he would be kicking it until eventually everything in it got off. And after that he started ridiculing him that "you are so stupid that you can't even fix your own bag?" An observation of the transcripts shows that although there were instances of bullying involving name-calling, lampooning, and teasing of the immigrant children, such bullying occurred outside of the classroom. This could be due to an effective administration of the school system.

### HOMEWORK SUPERVISION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Almost all the participants interviewed for the study said they made sure that their children's homework was done and on time. The families with

the father in the home were most likely to supervise the homework of the children. With respect to families in which the father did not live with them, the respondents indicated that at least the father called and asked the children whether they were doing their schoolwork.

Concerning the academic performance of the African immigrant children, few parents (less than 5 percent) reported that their children were not doing well at all. Those who reported that their children were doing well said although compared to their classmates their children were doing great, they still wanted the children to do better. One parent said: "Ha ha ha; not how I want him to perform academically. But here in America he is doing very well compared to his classmates, I mean, compared to his mates, he's doing extremely well. He gets almost all "A" but not as well as I want him."

Other parents also said the following about their children's homework: "It's almost part of my homework everyday." "I check whether he's done his homework by asking "Did you finish your homework? Are all your assignments done? and things like that." Finally, a close attention to the transcripts shows that almost all the parents interviewed cared about what their children will do in the future. They also have high expectations for their families, especially their children. The parents also wanted their children to have high paying jobs in the future and as a result warned or impressed upon them the need to work hard. The parents also talked about the children's future plans together with them. One mother said: "When he was ready to go to college, we would talk about stuff; what his goals were; what he wanted to do."

Another mother said: "We talked about her future plans on a regular basis." From the above excerpts, we can conveniently argue that there was a high degree of parental involvement in the daily social and academic lives of the children. Such an involvement and support augured well for the children's social and emotional development and acted as a strong support network for the children.

## IN SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND OTHER PROBLEMS

Although almost all participants surveyed for this research appreciated teacher support and believed that most American teachers are friendly and helpful, a majority of the people reported that they have had problems with the school system. These are some of the good things said about American teachers: "My son had a good experience when he was in elementary school. When we arrived, the teacher assigned him somebody, a kid, who was very nice, and he was in our neighborhood. And this kid literally took

care of my son until when he got settled. And they are even still friends today.” “The younger one has always had very good experience with the teachers;” said another family member.

In contrast to the above compliments, some African immigrants noted that some teachers in the schools sent them notes about problems that either did not exist or were at best imaginary. Some of them complained about their children being picked upon among a group of children for a problem that they did not cause.

Here are some of the comments that some of the participants made:

“If you are from Africa, you can get into trouble. I can give you an example, why I’m saying this; there was something in the hall, some place in the school anyway, somebody threw candy on the floor, and there was a lot of noise. I’m told the kids were just unruly or something like that. Then the teacher came, it was the math teacher, the 10th grade math teacher at high school, the kids were supposed to go back to classes. I think it was a short break or something like that. So, they were supposed to go back, and they were hanging on and not going back. With this commotion, the teacher comes out. And then she picks my son and said, “You are the one who threw away the candy on the floor,” this and this, this and this. And he said, “I didn’t.” She took him to the office, or in fact, she said he should go to the office. He refused. And then, later, I think she called the principal or somebody else, and then he was taken, and was suspended. So, I went to the school and I told them they are not going to suspend my son for something that he did not do. And I told, told them plainly that I think this is racism. Yes, because did you see him throw the candy? No. Was he the only child that was there? No. Why pick on him? There were other kids that were there with him. I mean, he could have played a role in that, but why do you pick up on him. He was suspended. But I told them “no” he wasn’t the only person who was there why suspend him only? The day that he came home with that letter, he was the only one that was suspended. And when I went to the school to ask, they said they were still investigating, but he’s the only one, because he refused to get to the office of the school. My son claimed that “he didn’t want to go because he was mad because it was Miss T. who picked me, because she hates me. That’s why she picked on me. There were all the other kids that she knows, but she didn’t pick them up. We were all there as a group.”

This is what another respondent from another family said about something that happened at school:



“I just don’t understand why this happened to me or why this is happening to me. One thing I found confusing, I received a letter from the school saying my child had “touched” another child. Honestly it just said, “touched” and, I didn’t know what “touched” meant and so forth, but since I realized it was a bad thing, I ended up having to discipline my own child. I know they don’t allow beating, but I had to beat him. That’s what I did—hit him somehow, really just to make him realize that I wouldn’t really tolerate such report. Whatever “touched” meant, that was it. I didn’t go to school. My problem really is transport. I wish I could have gone there, but having to wait for the bus and so forth, it takes so long, and I don’t have much time. And, so I didn’t go to the school I just wrote a note to say I just disciplined the child and I told him not to touch other students.”

The mother explained that her eight-year old child was allowed to go back to the school the following day when the mother sent the note because they realized that the touching was not from a bad motive but from cultural differences. From the culture where the child was coming from it did not mean anything when one child touches another child at that younger age.

From the above excerpts it may be argued that the disciplinary issues faced by the immigrant children are mainly due to cultural differences and parents reporting about some teachers being overzealous and sometimes determined to find scapegoats and hence picking on some of the immigrant children. To avert such crises, it is important for both the parents and the school system to learn each other’s culture and to become tolerant of one another’s genuine mistakes instead of resorting to scape-goating and taking actions that could be interpreted as stereotyping.

## CULTURAL ALIENATION AND CULTURAL CROSSING

Almost all the participants who came to United States with their children from their native countries have observed some form of cultural alienation in the form of how their children dress up, their language, and their mannerisms. These changes, some families believed, would be admired when they go back to their native countries. One family noted that their children would be respected even by teachers by being proficient in English and French, and the way they speak. The family noted that their children’s “accent is just American” and “dresses like people in America.”

Other families had problems with cultural alienation and commented that this is a big concern and may be a problem when they go back home. This is exactly what one family member said: “Even the way they ask

questions, as an African you know the question “why” doesn’t really come very easily when you talk to your mother or somebody elderly. But, I think she has that character of asking why anytime she talks to any adult.” The problems some families had were how their children will adjust in their home country with the teaching styles where you have to communicate with the teacher the way the teachers want. A family member noted that: “Back home, children are expected to be quiet, to be seated, and so forth. Now, of course that bothers me because that’s definitely going to hurt them and they are going to be ridiculed the way they dress up and talk.” Other families were also worried about the type of pants that their children wore—the type that they described as always “falling down.” They felt that such pants may not be viewed with much respect if worn back in Africa. There were few respondents who thought their families were fine in both cultures because they knew what to do in both cultures. One woman commented: They “behave in a certain way when they are in the U.S. When they get home, they will know that they have to do things in a different way.”

From the above excerpts and comments, it could be argued that most parents were worried with respect to their children crossing completely into mainstream American culture, since they felt that such a cultural crossing might pose the problem of alienation when they return home to Africa. For the few parents who felt there was no cause for concern, their hope was based on the assumption that the children will be able to adjust to the African culture upon return without any difficulty whatsoever and that initial blunders upon return would be viewed as normal given their being away in the United States.

## **BENEFITS FROM THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND GOOD/MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES**

Concerning the educational system, most of the respondents had positive things to say. In particular, some emphasized the opportunities that their children have in the schools to better themselves, the enviable educational resources available to students with special needs, and the sheer volume of books and other materials put at the disposal of students in the United States—things which most of them indicated were non-existent in Africa. With respect to the opportunities in the schools, one woman noted: “Here in America we have more opportunities to study. And back home, I don’t think I will have this courage to go to school.” Others thought their children had had excellent years in the school system from Kindergarten through 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, and so on. Those who had children with special needs believed that the school system provided the

necessary and sufficient educational materials for an effective education of their children.

Some parents expressed optimism that because of the rich educational resources, their families will surely have a successful academic future. One parent commented: "The equipment that the corporation has invested in him due to his special needs is amazing. I mean, they spent over 20,000 dollars just for a single student. And, we are really appreciative of it." Some families also believed the work that they do in the schools is amazing and that some of the teachers are really effective because they really care for and about their students. Some families in which one or both parents were also students had many good things to say about American college professors. Most of the African immigrants believed that American college professors are extremely good. The participants believed that they have very well qualified professors and very good facilities. Others also believed that technology makes doing research easier in the American educational system than in Africa. One participant commented: "There are books, good libraries and so on and all those are very positive things that make personal development of the student."

The respondents also believed that they were having fun in their departments. One respondent commented: "As far as my department is concerned, I like them, because I find that it's really as a second home. No problem, really, I mean it is a good place. I liked it. People were very helpful." Another said: "I have had many good experiences being in this system; things have gone better. I've had fellowships and count myself a blessed person." Some African immigrant parents had some problems with their professors. These were mostly about giving them low grades in their assignments and quizzes on which they believed that they had performed better. The above stretch of utterances from the respondents and the commentaries about them point to the fact that despite the problems faced by African immigrants, they do appreciate the support they receive from the teachers/professors and the overall American Educational system. Specifically, they see the system as offering opportunities for them to build successful careers and a future for them and their children.

## **DETERMINATION OF WHAT MOTIVATES OR KEEPS THE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES GOING**

African immigrants have wide varieties of goals or strategies that keep them going in the American educational system and their daily living in general. Some families always advised or encouraged their children to ask

questions if they did not understand anything at school. One father said: "If you don't understand something, ask your teachers." Another family said they encouraged their children not to give up but rather keep on trying and never give up until they succeed. Some of the research participants believed in maintaining a high level of motivation to attain success in life. Others believed friends and humor had kept them going. There are some African Immigrants interviewed who believed that extra curricular activities, strong family ties (making everybody feel important in the family), the love of life, and the spirit of togetherness as African immigrants kept them going most of the time. One mother said; "it is important to let your kids have high self esteem, my kids have a lot of self esteem and that helps a lot."

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The themes identified in this study suggest that most African immigrants surveyed for the study are performing well in their schools in terms of academic work. This good work could be attributed to good parental supervision of students' homework, good family ties, and the encouraging words that parents give to their children. Strategies like parents telling their children to ask their teachers any time that they do not understand anything in school may have contributed to this success.

Another factor that may have contributed to the success of the immigrants interviewed for this study was the fact that some of them did not want to see any letter grade on their children's report card other than an "A." The parents' high expectations literally forced their children to study hard. From the participants' responses, we also observe that the high achievement being made by the African immigrants could be attributed to the collaborative work being done in these families. Almost all the families said they worked together for the benefit of their children, the students. Each family emphasized the fact that they wanted their children to achieve the best in life.

Another important finding about these African immigrant families is that most of the families had a father, a mother, and kids. The families with both biological parents and their children formed a majority of the families surveyed for the study. There were some families living with extended family members but the way they addressed and related to the adults in these families suggested that they were so close knit that there was no way an outsider could tell that such families were extended and not nuclear. Another finding about these families is that even when the father did not

live with them and was in Africa, such women were still married and had input from the father somehow. There were very few families in which the parents were divorced. Such couples divorced after their immigration to America and their children were mostly grown-ups so the divorce did not appear to affect the children negatively. Concerning having problems, approximately 87 percent of the respondents reported having had some form of a problem with the school system, a teacher or some students. The remaining 13 percent had some bad experiences that they ascribed or attributed to things that happen in every day life. Thus, there was no particular finger pointing and the respondents were willing to forgive and get on with their lives. Specifically, an important finding about this study is that some of the African immigrant families surveyed in this study indicated that any time that they encountered a problem they would go to the school or try to solve the problem with the person involved, forget about the problem, and get along with their lives. Thus, they did not hang on to their problems or bear anyone a grudge for any long period of time. Most of the respondents reported that such an attitude was best for their own sanity and for them to move on in life.

We learn from the survey that almost all the families that had problems indicated that such problems were connected with their male siblings. Only two families reported that a female in their family had a problem in school. The above situation may have implications for policy makers. It may point to gender bias against males of African origin and this may need a close study in order to find solutions to it. Furthermore, the African immigrants surveyed in the study had a clear preference for the American educational instructional activities which comprised discussions and hands-on activities. While some of the respondents mentioned that that was not the norm in their countries; a number did mention that variety of the teaching methodology in the American educational system is important and helpful. Immigrant families with students at the universities who were graduate students frequently expressed a dislike of classes that consist of graduate and undergraduate students in combination, as below their standard and sometimes time wasteful, boring, and unstimulating.

Finally, one of the most interesting findings about these African immigrants is that most of those sampled attributed their problems to cultural differences. Some of them believed that there were certain things that they considered as rude, unheard of, and taboo in their cultures. In particular, they mentioned things like calling an adult by the first name, children joining or interrupting adults' conversations, calling somebody gay while the person is not, and even a child touching another child and being

suspended—something which they viewed as mere play. They felt that it was inappropriate for the school to punish a child for an act that emanates from a cultural misunderstanding. Finally, less than half of the respondents attributed their problems to racial differences and the idea of being “foreign,” that is, being an African.

## NOTES

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Conclusion

# The New African Diaspora Waves: Shifting Diversity of American Culture

Toyin Falola and Niyi Afolabi

“As the coastal areas become crowded, people have started to move further inland to places like Arizona, Nevada, Georgia, and Tennessee (. . .) Immigration is adding diversity by bringing in people with new ideas, skills and cultures which mean we are able to communicate and do business with other countries.”

—William Fay

“The shift is changing the relationship of Americans to the land and to their idealization of the American dream. The concept of the “frontier,” of existence under an open sky, still exists in celluloid, but fewer and fewer people live it.”

—Ed Pilkington

From the abolition of slavery and Civil Rights accomplishments to multicultural and diversity initiatives, African immigrants have been inadvertently left out of the debate on global diversity since race and ethnicity continue to be crucial determinants in the integration of the immigrant in American culture. Yet, despite this omission, African immigrants are no longer invisible in the American cultural landscape. From Washington D.C. to New York, from Alabama to Missouri, from New Orleans to Georgia, and from Philadelphia to Minnesota, African immigrants are making America their home in urban areas and beyond. As the essays in this volume have pointed out, African as well as Jamaican, Bahamian, Puerto Rican, Brazilian, Haitian, and Mexican immigrants are steadily constituting and re-constituting a “new diaspora.” While the focus of this study is on Africans specifically, the issues they grapple with resonate across other cultures in terms of the challenges of assimilation and the attainment of the American dream. Considered in three “waves” in the last two decades, especially since the Immigration Reform Control Act of 1986, it has been easier for highly educated



and skilled immigrants to secure permanent residency in the United States. During this same period, a second wave of Africans (in this case, political refugees from the Horn of Africa) came to secure refuge in the United States after fleeing repressive and violent regimes or religious conflicts in Africa. With the introduction of the Diversity Visa Lottery (DVL) came the third wave of the 1990s. The commonality they share lies in the desire to improve their living standards and have a peaceful environment in which to function. As sojourners in a new land, the obvious constraints caused by cultural adaptation, the stress of educational pursuits to improve their technical skills, employment, business opportunities, and overall American competition do lead to other social issues, which make the American dream elusive for many.

One of the many coping strategies is to negotiate the new citizenship through adaptive cultural-religious institutions and practices as well as support networks, to minimize feelings of alienation and estrangement despite the initial euphoria. In a case-study of African immigrants in Maryland, Gabeyehu Adugna reports that “African-born residents in the United States are highly educated, urbanized, and have one of the highest per capita incomes of any immigrant.” Despite this accomplishment, many Africans would suggest that they have suffered some form of discrimination at one time or another. The question is not so much if African immigrants or any immigrant should be treated with respect, but rather why anyone should have to be disrespected or humiliated in the first place, especially based on the color of their skin. Since the founding fathers of this nation, in their wisdom, stated that “all men are created equal”—thus reaffirming a Biblical mandate—the shifting dynamics of American diversity are worth examining. The United States’ population has now reached the 300 million mark, a reality that raises a curious question: of that population, what is the political representation of Africans as a “new” (voluntary) minority in the United States. Ed Pilkington’s study, “300 Million and Counting . . .” (*Guardian*, October 13, 2006) provides a cogent and yet interesting prognosis: “The largest single national group of immigrants now is Mexican, and the largest ethnic group Hispanic. By 2050 it is projected by the census bureau that the proportion of non-Hispanic whites will have fallen from 69% in the 2000 census to about 50%. Hispanics will have doubled to 24%, Asians also to 8%, while African-Americans will increase marginally to 14%.” If the role of African immigration is factored into this analysis, it is obvious that the new African diaspora is still not as compelling in terms of numbers, but is noteworthy in terms of its contributions to American diversity and prosperity.

The future of African migration may need to be focused on the first generation of US-born Africans, the implications of their shifting identities,

as well as policy issues on both sides of the Atlantic. It is imperative that as these young African Americans negotiate American and African identities; that they do not fall into the trap of acceptance of a permanent “minority” status. Rather, they should be encouraged to retain and maintain their dual citizenship where possible. In a society where others are speaking for them, where their articulation is minimized by the dominant voice of first generation Americans, where the stereotypes about the “primitivism” and “barbarity” of Africa are replayed to them in the media, in their academic curricula, and in the systematic negation of their “difference,” it would be rewarding, especially when funds permit, that while still young, they are allowed to visit their home countries. The issue of policy implications of immigration and displacement may be resolved through mutual partnership between the host country and the emigrating country but a problem that still confronts African minorities in the New World lies in the feeling of not being part of the so-called global community. Diversity fulfills its objective when all races are received as equal partners into the American “melting pot” not when some are provided the tools and opportunities to melt and others deprived of those very tools or agencies. In the final analysis, to be American is to part of the bigger dream and the process of achieving it; not just a footstool for others towards the dream. New African minorities look forward to the realization of that dream. It is livable.



## Appendix

# Abbreviations and Linguistic Clusters

### ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

- ACC: Angolan Community Center (Toronto).  
ANPP: All Nigerian People's Party.  
APGA: All Progressive Grand Alliance (Nigeria).  
AVL: American Visa Lottery (same as DVL).  
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency.  
CMAG: Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.  
DFW: Dallas-Fort Worth (Texas, USA)  
DVL: Diversity Visa Lottery (same as AVL).  
EAC: East African Community Corporation  
GSM: Genital Sexual Mutilation.  
ING: Interim National Government (Nigeria).  
INS: Immigration and Naturalization Services.  
ISNA: Islamic Society of North America.  
NADECO: National Democratic Coalition.  
NCPN: National Center Party of Nigeria (Nigeria)  
NGO: Non-Government Organization.  
NPM: Non-Probability Method.  
NPRC: National Political Reform Conference (Nigeria)  
OAU: Organization of Africa Unity.  
PDP: People's Democratic Party.  
PIP: Performing Improvement Programming (United Nation's Model).  
PRM: Probit Regression Model.  
RC: Refugee Camps.  
RCCG: Redeemed Christian Church of God.  
SS: Snowball Sampling.  
U.K.: United Kingdom.  
UN: United Nations.  
UNDRO: United Nations Disaster Relief Organization.  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.  
UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

UNICEF: United Nation's Children and Educational Fund.

UNPD: United Nations Population Division.

UPN: Unity Party of Nigeria (Nigeria).

US/U.S./USA: United States of America.

## LINGUISTIC CLUSTERS & TERMS

### *African Languages*

Akan: An ethnic group and language in Ghana.

Swahili: Coastal Bantu language of East Africa.

Yoruba: Southwestern Nigerian language of the Yoruba people.

Wolof: Language of the Wolof people; the largest ethnic group in Senegal.

### *Creole*

Creole: Language created when many languages come into contact to form a unique one (i.e. pidgin English); also refers to the original French settlers in Louisiana; may also qualify a Southern (United States) cuisine typical of Louisiana.

### *European Languages*

#### *English*

*Blackmoors*: African immigrants in the American colonial era.

#### *Portuguese*

*Viagem da minha vida*: voyage of my life

#### *Spanish*

*Mestizaje*: race-mixture.

*Mestizo(a)*: racially mixed person, bi-racial, or multi-racial.

*Moreno*: "dark-skinned" native Indians.

*La Raza*: The Race.

## TERMS & EXPRESSIONS

*Fufu*: Typical African dish made of manioc flower.

*Banku*: Typical Ghanaian soup.

*Kikuyu*: A matrilineal Eastern African society (Kenya).

*Ndowtel*: A term in Wolof. A systematic form of gift among women in Senegal.

*Soukous*: Congolese music.

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