

1African Immigrants in the Washington DC Metropolitan Area: Immigration Waves and Community Building

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the literature on African international migration by freshly conceptualizing their move to the United States as one that happened as part of population movements which I refer to as “immigration waves.” There is a socio-economic and political story that can be told from further understanding of the African immigration to the US. Although this story may differ among various African countries, some common themes include: the quest for education, as well as the increased thirst for education due to the need for more trained manpower to fill in positions left by former colonialists during the independence era, the deteriorating economic conditions in the continent in the 1970s and the 1980s, and the failure of the Structural Adjustment Programs imposed on the continent’s struggling economies by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. This economic malaise gave rise to the exodus of economic immigrants from Africa in the 1990s. It also contributed to unstable political situations in various countries, which led to intensified struggle over access to resources and consequent civil wars that eventually produced the political (refugees) who continue to flee to the US. Some of the recent political refugees include those from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somali, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Woldemikael, 1996).

Introduction

In this article, I analyze the different waves of African immigration to the US in general, and to the Washington DC metropolitan area in particular, from the late 1950s to the early 1990s. Many of today's African immigrants came to America to fulfill various dreams and aspirations (Arthur 2000, Apraku, 1991). West Africans established the oldest community of African immigrants in North America. Cape Verdeans came to the US in the 19th Century, and established strong communities in New England, particularly in New Bedford, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island. In the 20th century, West Africans from Ghana and Nigeria to North America in even larger numbers. Ghanaians established vibrant communities in Toronto, Canada and in the Washington DC metropolitan area. The Senegalese community is established in the New York City region, and so are Nigerian communities in Chicago, New York, Houston and other major metropolitan areas.

I will also analyze the development of group entrepreneurship and formation of distinct communities amongst African immigrants in the 21st century. The forced migration of Africans through the inhuman practice of slavery is not discussed here, as it formed a distinctive African American community that is more American than African. Except for the shared African origin and Black color, there are various ways in which the historical experiences of African Americans of slave descent differ from those of recent African immigrants that began coming to the US after the end of the Second World War. African Americans who have been in America for the last four hundred years constitute a different and unique wave. "Sojourner" African immigrants seem to have emerged,

deciding to stay put (in situ) instead of making quick money and going back to their original home countries. In this sense, Africans have come to resemble other immigrants aspiring to settle in America, such as Europeans, Asians and Latinos.

The sense of community of African immigrants is expressed through various regional organizations and the observation of African traditional cultural practices. The 1997 African Immigrant Folklore Festival organized by the Smithsonian provided evidence of the presence of a migrant people that can now be referred to as “a community of Africans abroad (in the US)” (Macharia, 1997a). Most of the African participants in this Folklore Festival were from the Washington DC metropolitan area. Their presence portrayed many examples of institution building by a settling community. There was, for example, the Ethiopian community which has its own school in Arlington, VA, which teaches the Ethiopian national language (Amharic), and traditional Ethiopian ways of life.

The Ethiopians began establishing roots in the Washington DC metropolitan area in the mid-1970s. They have a strong community organizing body, the Ethiopian Community Development Council, which was founded in 1983. The Ethiopian Community Organization offers support to recent migrants (political refugees or economic immigrants, a service it has been offering to African immigrants for the last twenty three years (ECDC). It also has a quarterly newsletter, *Bridges for Cross-Cultural Understanding*, which reaches its community as well as other Africans in the region. This newsletter disseminates community news and publicizes activities for the DC-area Ethiopian community, as well for other African groups like the Ghanaians and Nigerians. In every issue, the newsletter profiles one African country. For example, Guinea was featured in the winter 2001 issue, which helped to educate Africans as well

as others who read the newsletter about the countries of origin and cultures of African immigrants. In addition, the newsletter occasionally covers such topics as changes in immigration laws, which it did in the case of the Legal Immigration and Family Equity (LIFE) Act signed into law by former President Clinton on December 21, 2000 (ECDC). The Act provided legal permanent resident status to certain categories of illegal immigrants who were in the US by the time the bill was passed.

Census data on African immigrants show, that the Washington DC metropolitan area is one of the top five intended for settlement by African immigrants, followed by New York City, Los Angeles–Long Beach, Miami and Chicago (Arthur, 2000). The presence of national embassies in Washington DC is a major reason why some of the residents live there—either as a result of their jobs as diplomats who stayed on after their tour of duty or as the relatives of such diplomats. Relatively warmer weather in Washington DC has also been a pull for Africans who prefer warmer climates that are similar to those in Africa (Arthur, 2000). Other factors include social networks (relatives or friends in certain cities), as well as economic and educational opportunities and the presence of other like minorities, such as African-Americans or Caribbean immigrants (Arthur 2000; Apraku 1991; Dadoo 1991). Blacks, including African-Americans comprise half of the population of Washington DC which was also among the top five cities having African residents that transitioned to permanent resident status between 1980 and 1993. The other four were New York, Boston, Los Angeles and Newark (Arthur, 2000). As a major hub for African immigrants, Washington DC has a sizable number of African immigrants and is worthy of a study on waves of African immigration and community building.

Methodology, Data and Sample Size

The discussion in this paper is part of a larger ongoing work on African immigrants in the United States, which will include Washington DC, and other select US cities. Most of the information is based on 45 interviews (unscheduled) conducted, mainly among African immigrants exhibiting at the Smithsonian Institute's 1997 Folklore Festival, from late June through early July. I was a volunteer official at this festival, which gave me an opportunity to meet and interview those who were exhibiting, particularly the entrepreneurs at whose stand I was officiating. I was able to meet those with various business activities in the region, as well as those who were employed in Washington DC-based non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and various other agencies. I was also able to interview visitors to the Festival, some of whom had migrated in the different waves discussed below. I followed up with some of the entrepreneurs in their places of business for further interviews on how they started their business and what contributed to its survival or collapse, as in the case of the formerly popular restaurant and club Kilimanjaro, which will be discussed later. Given that it was summer time and most had taken time off to come to the festival to relax, they had time and were indeed very cooperative during my interviews. I used a simple random sampling method, interviewing every fifth visitor to the stand where I was officiating. As for the entrepreneurs and others who were exhibiting, it was difficult to randomize, thus, I applied the snowball sampling procedure, starting with one of the willing hairdressers in one of the stands where I had some official responsibilities. The data from the interviews were more exploratory and descriptive – oral narratives and life

histories. I have not subjected the data to statistical tests, given that the purpose was to gain a wider view and understanding of this group that has been generally under-studied. As an African immigrant in the Washington DC area, I also have personal observations of trends and changes within this group. Over the last few years, I have engaged in intellectual discussions and debates on African immigration with fellow immigrants in a focus group setting, primarily on an informal basis during family visits in homes, as well as in social and academic situations. The combination of these different methods provides the basis of the arguments presented here.

The Uniqueness of the African Immigrant

Unlike earlier immigrants like the Irish, Italians and other European groups, African immigrants did not make decisions based on economic rationality that saw America as presenting better opportunities for their family's economic well-being. African immigrants are "reluctant immigrants" in the sense that they did not always calculate the economic benefits to be gained in the US. It is only in the mid to late 1990s that there were clear cases of African "economic immigrants"; that is, Africans making rational economic decisions that they will move to America to better their lives or to achieve the so-called "American dream." The 1980s and 1990s were two difficult decades for most of the African continent; hence the economic hardships acted as a push-factor necessitated by the pull-factor of the "American Promise" of assumed and anticipated better opportunities. Put simply, the deteriorating economies in Africa, which rendered most of the people poor, triggered (pushed people out) Africans to decide to move to the "wealthy America" with its many hopeful promises (pulled people in). A

number of the late “economic immigrants” have come about as a result of poor economic performance that has besieged most of the African continent in the 1980s and 1990s. This still forms a minority of the African immigrants.

Those that came in the 1990s also include refugees from various African countries, notably Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia, Rwanda and Burundi and other countries embroiled in various forms of conflicts and war. The Nuer from Southern Sudan in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area are an example of recent African refugees settling in the US (Holtzman 2000). Like the “economic migrants,” the refugees (“political migrants”) have been more determined to settle in what they believe is their newfound land of “peace and economic tranquillity.” Unlike other Africans who had come into the country in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980-90s groups are more likely to be engaged in different forms of entrepreneurship and have a sense of “home” being in the US. In comparison with other immigrants who came to the US in the last forty years, the African pool, estimated at 1.4 million, is smaller than other groups, such as Hispanics or Koreans (Arthur, 2000).

In addition, many Africans have taken advantage of the United States Visa Diversity Program or “Lottery Visa.” They applied successfully and moved to the United States with their families. These are among the “economic immigrants” that came to the United States for better economic opportunities than were available in their home countries. There are also people from the first wave (see below) who moved back to Africa, but for various reasons returned to the US in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, the waves discussed below should be viewed as possible typologies, but not as exact descriptions of how each and every recent African migrated to the United States.

Waves of African Immigrants to the US

As aforementioned, African immigrants did not come all at once but instead come to America in different important immigration waves which have indeed also contributed to varying characteristics and community/social group formation. I will turn to a discussion of these varying immigration waves and give approximate time periods of immigration. My conceptualization of the waves suggests that from the 1940s to the present, a substantial number of African immigrants with likely similar interests and background traits came to the US. The waves should be understood as typologies and may not capture every migrant. They do, however, give us a clearer picture of the diverse groups based on time periods of African immigration into the US in general and into the Washington DC metropolitan area in particular. I have deliberately left out the African American forced migration during slavery as this was a unique forced migration that is markedly different from those moving Africans to the US in recent times. I also left out in this discussion other Africans from the Diaspora (Caribbean, Europe) who may also have come to the United States earlier than, or simultaneously with the Africans that came directly from the continent in the mid 20th Century. I discuss four main waves, presenting them as typologies for periods when large groups of Africans came to the US.

The first wave was from the 1940s to 1950s. For most African countries, this was the pre-independence era and only a few select Africans were able to migrate. I consider this the first wave, followed by the second main wave, which I refer to as the airlift wave that occurred in the late 1950s to early 1960s. While the airlift may be more familiar to those who migrated from East Africa, and particularly Kenya, the concept is used here to refer to the substantial number of Africans from many newly (or about to become) independent nations. Many young men and women went abroad for further studies in preparation for return home to their countries of origin to take positions of leadership. Some came in full planeloads that comprised mainly of students, hence the term, airlift.

The third wave is made of the Africans that migrated in the 1970s-1980s and the fourth wave are those of the 1990s-2000s, consisting primarily of economic and political refugees and immigrants. The political refugees also began migrating in significant numbers during the Cold War years, especially in the 1980s as will be discussed below. The first wave had the least number of Africans immigrating compared with the fourth wave, which has more Africans who decided (or were compelled) to stay in the US. To the contrary, most of the first wave Africans went back home and did not form permanent communities in the US. The third and fourth waves are making their presence felt through institution building, various forms of community engagement, as well as cultural involvement, like the case of Ethiopians discussed above.

The First Wave: Africans Immigrating in the 1940s-1950s

The early African immigrants to the US (excluding the forced shipments of

slaves—today's African-Americans—which took place about four centuries ago) date back roughly to the 1940s (Apraku 1991, Arthur, 2000). During this period, a few Africans trickled into the US. Most were students. Based on accounts by respondents and my own observations, in general the few Africans that migrated to the US during this period were sons or daughters of prominent families in their home countries. Some such families gained prominence as a result of collaborating with colonialists, while some derived their wealth as a result of ascribed privileges and power in the pre-colonial socio-political system. For some of these students and their families, enlightenment under the new order imposed by the colonialists on Africans required access to knowledge from Europe and the New World it had previously colonized. Such families decided to send their son or daughter for further education abroad.

Others who came for education were exceptionally bright students who may have been in Christian Mission Schools with American missionary clergy and teachers who played a big role in arranging for the prospective student's study in America. Notable examples of such student immigrants during the 1940s include the former leaders, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana; Dr. Gikonyo Kiano, former cabinet minister in Kenya, and the first Kenyan to attain a Ph.D. degree. He studied Political Science at the University of California—Berkeley in 1956, and was the father of the first African American President of the United States, Dr. Barack Obama (personal interview with Dr. Kiano in 1999).

Many of the African students who came to America at that time went back home in the 1950s. They became engaged in their country's economic and political development while also maintaining institutional and personal contacts with Americans.

This would prove to be useful later as the next waves came to America. While it is difficult to establish the actual numbers of those in the first wave, it is safe to say that this was the smallest number as compared with later waves. The time period (1940s-1950s) obviously did not favor African immigration. Many African countries were then still under colonial rule, which blocked Africans' access to education and to their attainment of political or economic leadership. US immigration laws were also very restrictive and biased against non-European migration until 1965. For these reasons, the first selective wave of African migrants did not make an impact in terms of forming significant and easily identifiable communities in the US. Finally, most of those who came in the first wave had more attractive options back home, and they went back and indeed took up key positions in the governments of their newly independent countries.

Africans Establishing Communities in the United States

Whenever the concept *forming communities* is used in this article, it refers to establishment of African groups in sizeable amounts in the United States. Thus it implies an increase in the number of Africans choosing to stay in the United States, identifying themselves as immigrants, establishing institutions and organizing cultural festivals that are similar to those organized in their home countries. These include weddings, naming ceremonies after birth, and religious worship. They assert an identity that proclaims their ethnic and/or national origin, but also sometimes choose to construct trans-ethnic/transnational alliances of Africans that come together whenever there is a death, a birth, a religious event, a crisis or just for purposes of celebration. In the discussion

above, I have indicated that the first wave did not accomplish this level of community formation as later groups did.

The Airlift Wave of African Students: Late 1950s to Early 1960s

The late 1950s to early 1960s were the most dynamic and exciting years in the former colonial countries in Africa. Through various forms of political resistance and the struggles for independence, ranging from the violent Mau Mau Movement in Kenya (Clough, 1998, Macharia and Kanyua, 2006) to the non-violent nationalist movements in Ghana, Nigeria and Tanganyika, Africans were demanding the right to self-rule and the end of colonialism. After the Second World War, the US emerged as one of the two global superpowers. The weakening of Great Britain and France in particular opened ways for colonized African countries to agitate more seriously for an end to colonialism. It became increasingly clear in the late 1950s that there was a dearth of Africans to take charge of the new nations when they became independent. Some in-service bureaucratic training targeted at African civil servants was hurriedly arranged in institutions of the former metropolitan countries. Such training was woefully inadequate to respond to the needs of the emergent new nation states approaching independence.

This was a good time for the US to expand its new influence as a super power to Africa. Through foreign aid, and more relevant to this paper, through student airlifts that became particularly popular in some countries like Kenya in the early 1960s, the US used soft power to capture the African imagination and shape an internationalized intelligentsia that was committed to liberal political and economic principles. The airlifts were constituted by the large numbers of African students who filled airplanes and were

lifted from Africa and plunked down in the US to acquire Western book knowledge with an American flavor. There were geo-political interests at the center of US efforts to open its colleges to African students, who were considered future leaders in their young countries.

This airlift period should be viewed in the context of the Cold War, and the commencement of sharp competition between the US and the USSR. The US wanted to further its national interest by ensuring that its policies and ideology, both defined by democracy and capitalism, influenced a continent largely emerging from colonialism. Investment in the education of future leaders in African countries was considered a sure way of achieving that goal.

From a theoretical perspective, the US efforts to bring Africans to the US for education was consistent with the then-fashionable *modernization theory* and its contention that Africans would be educated to become modern (Inkeles 1966) and in turn, would go back and modernize their countries. Modernization theory specified that for developing countries to become developed, they had to become like the US and Western Europe. It was recommended that they adopt and acquire a western education and western ways of life. The education of African students in the US was therefore seen as a mechanism to bring modernization/westernization/development to Africans. These objectives were not realized, causing many modernization theorists and scholars to conclude that development is either perpetually elusive or impossible in Africa.

For the Cold War US, the simple logic was that Africans educated in America would be sympathetic to the American cause (economic, ideological and political). Friends of Africa in the US ranging from businessmen, entertainment personalities like

Harry Belafonte, and leading government officials fund-raised and lobbied for the airlift program (Mboya 1963). Most of the former Anglophone countries were persuaded to send their students to America in the late 1950s to early 1960s through this arrangement. Volunteer groups in the US would agree to receive and accommodate African students to ease their entry into the American educational and social systems.

Kenya was one of the countries that had a successful airlift program; it sent hundreds of students to the US during this period. The late Tom Mboya, A prominent Kenya politician at that time, and Dr. Kiano, a fellow academic-turned-politician who had himself studied in the US during the 1950s, organized the first of many airlifts. This was after Tom Mboya, while visiting the US, was introduced to President Kennedy, who pledged support for the airlift program (Mboya, 1963). This program started a few years before independence and continued for a few more years after Kenyan independence. The airlift was the most successful program to bring students to the US on a consistent basis. Most of the students were high school graduates coming to study toward their Bachelor's degrees. Many hoped to proceed to the Masters and Ph.D. levels. Most accomplished these goals.

Analysis of the Airlift and its Contribution Contemporary African Immigrant Communities in the US

While the first trickle of African students that came to the US in the 1940s mostly went back to their countries and indeed became prominent leaders of the struggles for independence, not all of them came went back. Some airlift students of the early 1960s formed what was to emerge later as the larger and more substantial communities of African immigrants. From interviews with some of the Africans in the Washington DC

metropolitan area that came around this time, the majority of their colleagues went back to Africa and joined leadership cadres in private or public service. They believe that only a few of them remained but the majority demonstrated their commitment of getting an American education and returning to contribute to the development of their country. They give the estimate that approximately 85% percent of this cohort returned to Africa and about 15% remained and established roots in the US. According to one respondent, “many of our colleagues went back and they have held high flying jobs in the government. Some of them have also become very wealthy, either through corrupt means or maybe by sheer hard work. Whenever we have a chance to meet with them, they look down upon us and wonder why we are still in America.”

Some in this cohort fell in love, got married and preferred to live in the country where they had spent much of their adult years while in college. Others specialized in some programs, especially in the sciences, that were not in demand in their countries and felt that their careers would better flourish if they remained in the US. Yet others were getting disillusioned with the governments in their newly independent countries, which had made so many promises to their people, but did not live up to their promises after colonialism ended. The Harvard-educated Ayi Kwei Armah from Ghana summarized these feelings in his outstanding novel *The Beatyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1970). The disillusionment was enough to keep some of the young African dreamers in America once they realized they might not be able to “change the world” back home.

Nonetheless, through the years, those who stayed behind in the US have become the pillars of established African communities in the US. The more established Africans, especially those who remained behind from this cohort of the 1960s, housed relatives or

friends in the later years, and their houses became central meeting places for social interactions including occasional dinner parties, traditional naming ceremonies or baptismal ceremonies. They are indeed the centers of what was to become chain migration to certain communities since people rely on their networks to decide where to move and/or settle in the US. This has been the pattern among many African communities, including Ghanaians, Nigerians, Kenyans and Ethiopians in the Washington DC metropolitan area.

Almost immediately after independence in most African countries, the new African elite that emerged simply took the places abandoned by the white colonialists. The challenges of development were tremendous. Many African governments' inability to deliver their pre-independence promises caused widespread despair and disillusionment. Additionally, the proliferation of problems including corruption and high levels of unemployment, high-handed and inhumane treatment of the masses by the new elite, in considerably worse ways than under conditions of colonialism, created gaps in material well being, decreased life chances, immiserated the poor, and nurtured active exploration of immigration as the avenue to survival.

Nouveaux riche elites emerged in Africa, with all the traits of profligacy. In Swahili-speaking East Africa, their preference for Mercedes Benz cars caused them to be collectively categorized as the "Wabenzi," or "the Benz people." In the context of the dynamics of the US in the 1960s, young African students who graduated from college were torn between going back home or staying for a while in the US. This was during the time when vociferous, unrelenting demands for civil and political rights were pronounced by the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the student and women's

movements. Most of these movements made demands similar to those made by the African nationalist movements to colonial governments. It was distressing to many Africans in the US that those demands were not only unmet under African post-colonial states, they were subverted and considered irrelevant. For these reasons, some African students did not want to return to their countries, whose governments they felt were exploiting and marginalizing the masses.

The 1960s were exciting for the younger generation. The freedoms won through the activism of the various movements were seductive enough for Africans to want to remain in the US a while longer. For some, like the respondents in this research, the seduction was not short lived but continued into the 1990s and beyond. According to one respondent, “life in the US in the Sixties was full of drama, freedom of expression, and the Black is Beautiful phenomenon. I could not bring myself to go back to Africa then where the new leaders had already started oppressing their own people!”

African immigrants from the sixties did not immediately engage in entrepreneurship. Instead, most of them secured employment in their professions. They later invested in businesses including real estate, and some today own rental properties. Others invested in tourism and organized tours primarily for an American clientele to their home countries. Some entered this business for nostalgic reasons, including the desire to return home but having been in the US for long enough to have established roots, making do by being contented with summer visits that could be partially sponsored by their part-time business. In contradistinction to this cohort which tends to be more white-collar oriented in pursuit of their careers, as I will show below, most African immigrant entrepreneurs come from the ranks of subsequent cohorts.

Post Independence Wave of African Immigrants: Mid 1960s to mid 1970s

Africans continued immigrating to the US during the period between the mid-1960s and the 1970s. Demographically, this cohort was comprised predominantly of students that wanted better educational opportunities or those that sought further education beyond the first degree that they may have acquired from their home countries. Generally, this wave of students tended to be more educated before they left their home than those in the airlift. They also tended to be more focused in their educational pursuits on specialized educational programs. The students were a mix of both undergraduate and graduate students, and this cohort had more graduate students than those in the earlier waves.

In addition, a number of American universities developed graduate level diploma courses for mid-career African civil servants. For example, universities like Syracuse and Cornell have programs in administration and agriculture respectively, which catered to the new cohort of African students that arrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In addition, some prominent universities had a handful of bright African students who were identified by their schools back home (for example, Alliance High School in Kenya), and were granted full scholarships to Harvard and MIT, a tradition that continued in the 1990s (personal observation). This period also saw the expansion of higher education, and therefore the need for more trained men and women to administer new programs in colleges and universities in their own countries. In what appeared to be a formalization of some of the earlier assistance granted to African students by the US government in relation to the airlift, the US Congress passed some bills that encouraged more African

students to come to the US.

A number of US government scholarships and fellowships targeting graduate students returning to positions in the higher education programs of their countries were instituted through the AFGRAD and Fulbright Programs. The first was specifically for African students who would come to the United States for doctoral programs in the humanities, arts, and sciences with the expectation that they would go back to teach and conduct research in institutions of higher learning back in their homes. Most of the students who qualified for these awards went to the already established Title VI universities that have African Studies programs. Such universities became little hubs for African students, many of whom returned home. The main universities with such a concentration included: Boston University in the East; University of Florida–Gainesville in the Southeast; Michigan State University–East Lansing, Indiana University, University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign, and Northwestern in the Midwest. In the West there was the University of California at both Los Angeles and Berkeley.

There were also a few students at the major private universities like Stanford, Yale, and Harvard. It is interesting to note that in these “academic hubs of African scholarship,” one will always find a present day record of either the African student who had gone there to study or his or her offspring who was either born in the US or born in Africa. The child usually comes to study in the vicinity of the parent’s former university, partly to draw upon the social networks that the parent may have established in the past. Some of those who studied in such programs returned to their home countries upon the completion of their education, only to be pushed by economic crisis and/or political conflict into migration back to the United States in the 1990s.

There are constant internal migrations in the US where people usually follow jobs and other opportunities to the cities that are reported to be doing well (Dodoo, 1991). While that is largely true, we still find enclaves of African immigrants surrounding some of the older generation migrants who attract their relatives to the cities that they have established themselves. The likelihood of establishing an old link to this date is still high. Directly or indirectly, those beneficiaries of AFGRAD and other government fellowships have contributed to today's African immigrant communities in the US. The prestigious Fulbright scholarship and fellowship also brought a number of African students who enrolled in most of the prominent graduate programs in US universities. A Fulbright scholarship holder could study in any of the prestigious US universities. Most of those who came under the two (AFGRAD and Fulbright) in the period up to the mid-seventies, went back to their countries and indeed gave leadership to their growing university programs.

Most of these scholars went back to privileged positions and joined the elite in their countries. They felt they had more to gain personally by going back home since many of them were now forming the first core of indigenous scholars in their countries. Such privileges would not be available to the later Ph.D. returnees in the 1980s to 1990, who considered the US where they had studied as possibly offering more benefits than their own countries for various reasons. Ironically, the 1980s saw the return to the US of those who had left the country in the late 1970s mainly because of economic and political deterioration of their countries. In most African countries where the political leadership has always been wary and uncomfortable with university professors, many have either been persecuted or imprisoned. Some of them have sought refugee status in the country

they had spent their youthful years attending college. They have been coming back not as a single student as they had done twenty-five years ago but “married with children” ready to settle and become part of the African immigrant community in the US.

Besides government-funded scholarships, a number of philanthropic foundations (e.g., the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation East Africa Regional Offices) had a number of scholarships which were targeted for training future lecturers and professors in the local institutions. Those who qualified got full funding to study for their doctoral degrees in major US universities. Most of them were usually the top of their class and had finished at least their first degree from their local universities. They were, therefore, mature and usually focused on their areas of specialization. They were also usually on leave from their local universities, which was a guarantee of a job upon completion of their degrees. A number of such students from East Africa, for example, went to study in the various campuses of the University of California, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan, and Michigan State University–East Lansing, to name a few. There were also a number of universities—especially Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, and like institutions—that gave a small number scholarships to international students, and a few Africans were beneficiaries. Some of these universities wanted to diversify their student population, as doing so was politically correct in the 1970s, as it continues to be in the 21st century.

It is notable that most of the African students who came during this wave, the “academic/scholarship” wave, went back home and filled key positions either in academia or in the government of their own countries. As aforementioned, while most of them returned to Africa and appeared to have settled down for the long term during the

late 1970s to the mid-1980s, a number of them returned to the United States in the late 1980s, when political and economic chaos in their home countries threatened them directly or indirectly. Among these, those who kept in touch with their former colleagues and professors as well as those with other ties in the US returned and were sometimes able to use these networks to fast track access to employment. In many cases, the returnees represent the later wave of African immigrants. Some reunited with their children who were born in the US when they were students in the 1970s and had come back to study in the US. Most of these children (now adult) may have American citizenship and also may have decided to stay in the US after their eighteenth birthday due to the ongoing political and economic problems in their motherlands.

Indeed, contrary to the past eras when parents badgered their offspring to return home to their countries of origin, by the 1990s the general tendency was for parents and relatives to tell those already in the US not to hurry to return home as economic and political problems made life more and more difficult. In addition, parents who are able to secure visas also come to join their children. Those who were in the US earlier as students find it easy to adjust and are among the Africans now embracing permanent immigration status and establishing immigrant communities in various regions of the Washington DC metropolitan area as well as other US communities.

The other major category of African students (those coming for their first degrees without scholarships) came in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. This group comprised primarily of the student cum worker. Most however had only minimum wage work. These students often came with only enough money to pay their tuition and fees for at most two semesters. They had to juggle between work and school and, while doing this,

got integrated more quickly into the American labor system as well as the communities around them than the earlier cohort. This is also the group which, if formal employment was unavailable, ventured into self-employment in the informal economy, or took jobs like taxi driving, or pursued other entrepreneurial activities. It is also this group that forms the bulk of Africans still in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Most of these African students were usually unable to secure university admissions in their home countries but still yearned for access to higher education. They consider the US more attractive as a venue of their pursuit of university education. This group presents mixed results on this goal. While some completed work and got their degrees, and a few of these chose to return to their home countries; others completed their education and chose to stay on in the US; and yet others did not obtain degrees but did not return to Africa. Instead, they chose to continue living in the US. Some of them got married in the US to Americans, Africans either from their own country or from other countries besides their own, as well as to Afro-Caribbeans (Waters 1994).

Despite the constant claims by most of the Africans in this group that they still intend to return home, the reality is that many of them have been in the US for at least twenty years. They have school-age children and, by all indication, appear to be settled in for a long while. Indeed, other than the nostalgic thoughts that they have of their home countries, many of them have reluctantly accepted their new roles as African immigrants in the US, and are now part of the foundation of the African immigrant communities mushrooming throughout the US, especially in the Washington DC area. The Nigerian students of the 1970s, now African immigrants, are an interesting group because most of them left their countries when there was an economic boom from petroleum revenue. For

some, economic chaos had beset Nigeria before they completed work on their degrees, and most chose to live in the US. They are well aware that the military dictators who ruled Nigeria for many years, would not welcome them, with if they insisted on their democratic right to freedom of expression.

After formal dictatorship ended and the era of democratically elected governments began, many were so entrenched in the US as to be unwilling to leave until retirement. Given Nigeria's large population and higher rates of immigration into America, the Nigerians as a group, form the majority of African immigrant groups in the US (Arthur 2000). Other major groups based on countries of origin are the Egyptians, Ethiopians, South Africans, Ghanaians and Liberians (Africa Profiles International, 1996). Linguistic culture is an important determinant of migrant destination, and the Africans migrating to the US are no exception. Majority of African immigrants are from the former British controlled territories of Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Egypt and Ghana (Arthur 2000). Of the Africans from former French colonies, immigrants from the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Democratic Republic of Congo form the dominant groups.

The Cold War African Immigrants (Political Refugees)

The period of the Cold War is the first in which an unprecedented wave of African immigrants came in large numbers to the US. As indicated above, until this period, most of the Africans had come to the US as students and even if they stayed on, they were reluctant immigrants. The first wave of reluctant migration came as a result of the ongoing Cold War between the USSR and the US, which had devastating effects

(since it was a hot and real war on the African continent). Some of the early refugees that were driven to the US by the civil wars in their countries include those from the former Zaire, now Democratic Republic of the Congo (Young 1993). After the late Mobutu Sese Seko took power in a military coup following Patrice Lumumba's assassination, for allegedly being more allied with the USSR, a number of Zairians sought refuge in European countries, especially Belgium, France, and the US.

Most African refugees, however, came into the US after the assassination of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia when forces led by Mengistu Haile Mariam seized power in 1974. Mengistu established a Socialist/Communist government and most of the supporters of the former emperor, especially the government officials, sought refuge abroad. The US had supported the emperor all along. It was not surprising therefore, that as a consequence of the political turmoil which was connected to the super power rivalry, many of the Ethiopian refugees ended up in large numbers in the US, particularly in the Washington DC metropolitan area. The Ethiopians in this area are conspicuous in their business presence.

As mentioned above, they have also organized themselves into a community called Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc. (ECDC) founded in 1983. The ECDC has organized a cultural training program in which Ethiopian cultural practices are encouraged and taught. Consequently, these practices continue to flourish. The community also has *Bridges for Cross-Cultural Understanding*, a newsletter, which reports social activities amongst Ethiopians in the metropolitan area. This newsletter has become popular with most African immigrants who rely on it to report the various African festivities in the region.

Other groups with community organizations in the Washington DC metropolitan area include the Nigerians, Ghanaians, Sierra Leonians, Cameroonians, Somalis and Kenyans. They all have organizations that perform various functions. For example, the Kenyans have a loose organization that meets whenever there are ceremonies like weddings, baby showers (mainly for the women) and Christian ceremonies (e.g., children's baptisms or confirmations). They also meet whenever a countryman/woman dies in the area and contribute towards funds to transport the body back to Kenya for customary burial. They have established specialized investment organizations with their friends, relatives and/or close professional colleagues. The Faida Investment Club is one such organization. It was established by Kenyan professionals who have been investing in stocks for the last nine years, since its founding in 1997 (personal interviews with members).

Over the years, the Washington DC metropolitan area has continued to receive political refugees, beginning with those in their countries' diplomatic service who reside in the US. Usually these are the first people to become *persona non grata* in their countries whenever there is a coup d'état or an undemocratic change of government. While some of them may move later on to other parts of the nation, most begin their life as political refugees in the Washington DC metropolitan area, as they usually want some form of continuity for their families, especially if they have children in the local schools. After the Ethiopian case, African refugees from neighboring Somalia who were not in cahoots with the former dictator Siad Barre also found political asylum in the US and Canada. A significant and vibrant Somali community is still in the Washington DC metropolitan area. The community sponsors various cultural shows and play Somali

music at various festivals in the area.

From Scholars/Refugees to Entrepreneurs and communities of African immigrants

The prospective students who came to the US in the 1970s form the first group of Africans who in the last decade have begun to acclimate to the US population. They organize their lives at both individual and community levels as a community of immigrants. Some of these communities of immigrants have existed for a long established by West Africans, especially Ghanaians in Canada and in the Washington DC metropolitan area, the Senegalese in the New York metropolitan area and the Nigerians in various parts of the US. The Nigerians are an interesting case as we find that many of them came to the US at a time of economic abundance generated by the oil boom in the 1970s. A number of the students became workers as money dried out back home and they had to maintain something close to the lifestyles they had before they suffered financial setbacks. Many of these also turned out to be the first critical mass of African immigrant entrepreneurs in the US. Entrepreneurship and community building have tended to go hand in hand in the Washington DC metropolitan area.

As the numbers of Africans settling in Washington DC increases, the number of entrepreneurs has also been on the upswing. Actual numbers could not be established, as it will require more interviews and a larger mapping or survey of the enterprises. Some of the ongoing entrepreneurial activities run by Africans include hair braiding and hair dressing salons, tailor shops specializing in African textiles and garments such the kente and boubou; the ownership of taxi cabs, restaurants, clubs, food stores carrying African foodstuff; and music stores (Macharia 2000). Others include management of parking lots

as well as auto repair shops. These are but a few of the wide variety of enterprises being run by the African community in the Washington DC metropolitan area.

There were no clear intentions for those who had come as students to either migrate permanently or to become entrepreneurs in the US and specifically in the Washington DC area. A number of factors led to this transition. Some of the reasons included their money supply drying up back home and the need to continue with life in the US, whether in schools or simply for basic survival, like maintaining an apartment. As the demographic transition of the students who came to study in the US changed from single status to being married with children, they needed higher income.

Venturing into business was an alternative some Africans in the Washington DC metropolitan area took either in combination with, or instead of formal employment. Another reason was that due to what was sometimes a reluctant transition into long term stay in the US, some people missed their favorite food and/or ingredients or cloth and clothing that were customary in their home countries. A few of them gratified this urge by asking friends, family and acquaintances visiting the US from their home countries to bring them whatever they crave. Eventually a few former students established small local stores to sell such foodstuff, and these stores eventually became full-fledged entrepreneurial ventures. This is how many of the Ethiopian and Nigerian restaurants and grocery stores, developed in the Washington DC metropolitan area. The clothing enterprises were also booming, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, with African-Americans patronizing them as a way of acquiring a symbolic African identity. Indeed, Kente cloth (from Ghana) shops and tailors in this area report that they are patronized more by African-Americans than by other Africans.

Social networks have been important as stimuli for establishing and ensuring the growth of more enterprises in the area as well. This is similar to what I found among urban migrants in African cities who used their social networks from rural areas (family, friends and co-ethnics) to start their enterprises in the city (Macharia 1997). Portes (1995) makes a similar observation while discussing the significance of social networks amongst immigrants from Latin America to the US. Light and Bonacich (1988) also observed a similar trend in the use of social networks amongst the Koreans who established various enterprises in Los Angeles.

Some African entrepreneurs in the Washington DC metropolitan area say that they were driven first by the need to have a cultural meeting place and secondly by the eventual economic benefits generated by such an establishment. In the 1980s the Kilimanjaro Restaurant and Night Club, was famous and popular in Washington DC and beyond as a major rendezvous for middle-class Africans and visiting dignitaries from Africa. The owner first and foremost wanted a place where Africans could meet to exchange views on their continent over a drink and light meal. An enviable club, soon developed, patronized by an international community as well as the local Americans, that was in existence for most of the 1980s but waned in significance in the early 1990s, eventually closing down in 1994 (personal interview with the owner).

The cultural linkages from Africa continue to be demonstrated through the kinds of businesses established in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Textiles, clothing, food, restaurants, entertainment businesses as well as taxi driving and ownership continue to be leading enterprises among Africans. Unconfirmed estimates suggest that for every five cab drivers in Washington DC, two or three are probably Africans. Another area that

has been dominated by Africans is the parking garage business in the major city buildings, 80% of which Africans, particularly Ethiopians, operate.

The types of social networks Africans in the Washington DC metropolitan have used to find entry into various enterprises and to build communities include the ethnic. There is a tendency to seek out people from the same ethnic group and to share favors and prospects. Those from a similar regional background also draw upon those networks in the US and in the Washington DC Metropolitan areas—It is more likely that Nigerians from the West, North, South or the East will do things collaboratively with people from their own regions in Nigeria in Washington, maintaining and reproducing more or less the same divisions as in their country in the United States.

Religious affiliation and denominational divisions have also become important sources of social networks and bases of community formation. Some families also tend to congregate in large groups in certain areas, thus forming social networks. There are some such families of Kenyans, Nigerians and Ethiopians that form a big part of their communities in Washington DC. Arguably, there are now active African communities both in terms of entrepreneurship and cohesive cultural groups in the Washington DC Area. The same tendencies exist in other metropolitan areas where there is a large concentration of African immigrants. Indeed, there is already a first generation of Africans who are call America home and identify with it just like the earlier immigrants from other continents to the US.

Conclusion

This article has shown how unintended African immigrants have now become part of the community of immigrants in the Washington DC metropolitan area as well as many other parts of the United States. The process is one where sojourners have transformed into permanent residents and indeed many have also become naturalized citizens. The social history is presented using the typology of waves that brought Africans into the United States in the past sixty to seventy years.

Deteriorating economic performance and unsteady regimes ousted by military coups, as in the case of Nigeria and Ethiopia, has meant an extension of stay for some Africans who had otherwise come just to earn academic degrees to be utilized back home. Instead, communities of African immigrants in all spheres of life as entrepreneurs, low cadre manual workers, and middle-class professionals, are developing, and a vibrant life has become a reality for Africans in America. The summer picnic parties and winter in-house dinners commemorating such occasions as new births and child naming ceremonies; religious ceremonies weddings and pre-wedding/engagement parties; and meeting visiting politicians and important clergy from the home country demonstrate the existence of established and growing communities of African immigrants. More immigration waves continue to flow to the US, making African immigrants an integral part of the ethnic diversity characterizing the US society in the 21st century.

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