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Dimensions of the New Diaspora: African Immigrant Communities & Organizations in New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta

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Dimensions of the New Diaspora:  
African Immigrant Communities & Organizations in  
New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta

Prepared for Nunu Kidane, Priority Africa Network

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## I. Introduction

### a. Overview and Purpose

This report assesses the needs and challenges of African immigrants<sup>1</sup> living in the New York City, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta metropolitan areas, and the efforts of organizations in these regions to serve them.

This research was conducted on behalf of Priority Africa Network (PAN), a national organization whose mission is to “inform, educate and mobilize people in support of the peoples of Africa for sustained peace; economic, political, and social justice; and democratic development.”<sup>2</sup> As a network committed to mobilizing US solidarity with progressive reform on the African continent, recent African immigrants to the United States are an important constituency for PAN.<sup>3</sup> As King and Pomper have argued, “Presumably, most diaspora communities in the United States, if properly organized and funded, can exert substantial influence on U.S. foreign policy [related to their countries and regions of origin] when the issues at hand do not overtly contradict other U.S. national interests.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By “African immigrants,” I refer to people residing in the United States who were born in sub-Saharan Africa. Even though the term “immigrant” has a specific legal meaning, throughout this report I use the blanket term “African immigrants” to refer to the entire population of African-born migrants to the United States, including resettled refugees, asylees, temporary visa holders (termed “nonimmigrants” in US immigration law), undocumented immigrants, lawful permanent residents, and naturalized citizens. At times, e.g., when discussing social issues affecting African immigrants, I also use the term to include the children of African immigrants who may be native-born Americans (“second-generation immigrants”). However, when analyzing demographic data, I use the term only to refer to the African-born.

<sup>2</sup> Priority Africa Network website, <http://www.priorityafrica.org/>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> PAN website, African Immigrants, [http://www.priorityafrica.org/African\\_Immigrants.html](http://www.priorityafrica.org/African_Immigrants.html), last visited July 9, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> David C. King & Miles Pomper, *Congress, Constituencies, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Caspian*, in *THE LIMITS OF CULTURE: ISLAM, FOREIGN POLICY & THE CASPIAN* 167, 171 (Brenda Shaffer ed., 2005).

This report seeks to inform and support PAN’s advocacy efforts by investigating African immigrant communities and the organizations that serve them, with particular attention to questions of civic engagement and political influence. I hope that it will also be of use to other organizations serving and engaging the African immigrant diaspora in the US, including the organizations herein profiled.

b. Methods

This report addresses the following policy questions:

1. What do organizations working with African immigrants see as the greatest issues, challenges, and unmet needs within African immigrant communities? What do they see as the greatest assets and opportunities?
2. To what extent are African immigrants civically and politically engaged? What barriers do they face to increased civic and political participation?
3. What is the capacity of organizations currently serving African immigrants? What are the strengths and the challenges of different organizational models in meeting the needs of this constituency?

In February 2012, I conducted in-person and telephone interviews with 13 officers, employees, and former employees of ten organizations that work with African immigrants in the New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta metropolitan regions. I selected these three metro regions because, as Table 2 shows, they have the largest numbers of residents who were born in sub-Saharan Africa. As Table 7 shows, I sought to interview representatives from a range of different types of organizations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For further discussion of the types of organizations selected and interviewed, *see infra*, IV.a.-b.

This report presents respondents' views on the questions above, along with my own analysis and observations, drawing on social science research and journalism about African immigrants in the US to provide further context.

c. Overview of Report

In Part II, I briefly summarize the report's findings. Part III is a demographic profile of the African immigrant diaspora, using data from the American Community Survey. Part IV profiles the organizations I researched for this report, describing their history, the services they offer, and the clients and constituencies they serve. In Part V, I consider the issues and challenges that affect African immigrant communities, drawing together observations and cross-cutting themes from respondents. In Part VI, I examine the civic engagement and political influence of African immigrants and the organizations that serve them. Part VII considers the challenges of organizations serving African immigrants, and the advantages and disadvantages of various organizational models. I conclude the report by describing key opportunities for, and assets of, the new African immigrant diaspora.

Of course, a report like this cannot scientifically measure social problems among African immigrants in the US or provide a comprehensive needs assessment. However, I hope that presenting the observations and professional judgment of organizations that are on the front line of serving African immigrants alongside existing scholarly research will prove useful to practitioners, funders, and policy makers concerned with the well-being of this community.

I conducted some of the research that this report draws on in 2011, while I was a visiting graduate student at the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California,

San Diego. I thank CCIS Director John Skrentny and CCIS Associate Director David FitzGerald for their generous hospitality and support of my research.

Finally, I was deeply impressed and moved by respondents' commitment to African immigrants, their thoughtfulness about issues in the community, and the quality of the services they provide, often with inadequate resources. I thank them for their generosity in sharing their insights with me. Any misstatements are my responsibility, and not that of respondents.

## II. Summary of Key Findings

### A Profile of African Immigrants in the United States

- Immigration to the US from Africa has grown rapidly in recent years. In 2010, an estimated 1.5 million US residents were born in Africa, 40 times as many as in 1960 and four times as many as in 1980. 1.26 million Americans were born in sub-Saharan Africa. Changes in US immigration law along with economic and social change on the African continent have driven the rapid growth of the African immigrant diaspora.
- Among African countries, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Somalia, Liberia, and Sudan sent the most immigrants to the US, though many African immigrants did not specify their country of origin.
- Most African immigrants to the US live in or around cities. The New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta metro areas house the largest populations of African immigrants in the US.
- African immigrant educational attainment is exceptionally high. Nearly 65% of African immigrants have one or more years of college education, more than any other ethnic group except Asian Americans. However, African immigrant educational attainment is unevenly distributed. Some African ethnonationalities with unusually high educational attainment, such as South Africans and Kenyans, include larger numbers of white and Asian immigrants. Somali immigrants, many of whom are refugees, have below-average educational attainment. Furthermore, educational attainment among African immigrants



has decreased over recent decades, and will likely decline further due to demographic changes.

- African immigrants, though more educated than the average American, are also poorer than average. 20% of African immigrants live below the poverty line, and 41% live below 200% of poverty. This proportion is significantly higher than whites, Asian Americans, and Americans on average; though it is lower than average for African Americans or Hispanics. Ghanaians and Nigerians have slightly lower than average poverty rates, while immigrants from Western Africa, Sudan, and Somalia experience poverty rates above the average of African Americans.

### Profiles of Organizations

- I interviewed representatives of ten organizations that work with African immigrants in the New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta metropolitan regions. While diverse in model, constituency, and history, these organizations fall into four basic types.
- *Multiracial service providers* (MSPs) are typical nonprofit agencies with a diverse client base, of which African immigrants are usually a minority.
- *African-focused service providers* (ASPs) are nonprofit agencies that grew out of and remain rooted in African immigrant communities, serve a majority of African immigrants, and have African immigrants in top leadership positions.
- *Ethnic specific associations* (ESAs) are membership organizations serving immigrants from a single African country, region, linguistic group, or ethnicity. ESAs are volunteer-run, democratic or semi-democratic, and funded primarily by community donations.

- *Multiracial advocacy organizations* (MAOs) are nonprofit community organizations that are explicitly political in their missions and their programs, and whose primary focus is advocacy. African immigrants make up a minority of their membership.

### Issues Affecting African Immigrants

- Respondents report that African immigrants face significant legal and economic challenges common to low-income immigrants, including undocumented immigration status; obstacles to employment, particularly in better-quality jobs; educational barriers; and difficulty accessing public services.
- Many respondents described African immigrants as struggling—and sometimes failing—to adapt and integrate into their new society. Integration poses distinct challenges for refugees and voluntary immigrants, especially the Diversity Visa (DV) population.
  - African *refugees* are likely to have relatively low education levels, English fluency, and familiarity with American culture and society. Many have been psychologically traumatized by armed conflict, persecution, and displacement. In today's high-skill, highly competitive economy, refugees need more support to integrate and become self-sufficient in America, yet they receive less support than past generations of refugees.
  - While African *voluntary immigrants* may be better-off than refugees in some respects, they receive even less assistance with integration—indeed, virtually none. Many, especially those who immigrate via the DV program, are cut off from family and social networks, and profoundly disillusioned by their inability to

advance in American society. As a result, many struggle to integrate in ways similar to their refugee counterparts.

- Finally, respondents report that many African immigrants confront serious psychological, behavioral, and health issues, including mental illness, domestic violence and gender inequality, intergenerational conflict, and chronic diseases.

### Civic Engagement and Political Influence

- Organizations serving African immigrants use a variety of strategies to engage African immigrants in civic life and advocate on their behalf, including domestic policy advocacy, international policy advocacy, constituent education, and grassroots campaigns.
- Respondents unanimously agree that levels of civic engagement among African immigrants are currently low, and the political influence of African immigrant communities is minimal.
- While barriers to African immigrant civic engagement and political influence are numerous, a central challenge for African immigrants—as for other immigrant and minority groups—will be building panethnic identities and organizations across cultural, socioeconomic, and national origin divisions.
- The experience of other immigrant communities, especially Asian American immigrants, suggests that over time African immigrants will shift from organizing and identifying on the basis of “microethnicity”(sub-national grouping, linguistic group, clan, or tribe) to identifying and mobilizing on the basis of *panethnicity* (i.e., as African immigrants or

African-Americans). However, panethnic organizing need not “crowd out” organizing on the basis of nationality; it is possible for the two to grow together. African immigrants’ diversity of national and ethnic origins is not an insuperable obstacle to panethnic unity. Indeed, within certain limits, such diversity may spur panethnic organizing.

### Challenges of Serving African Immigrant Communities

- As respondents described their own organizations and other organizations in their fields, four qualities emerged that define an organization’s ability to meet the needs of African immigrants: *resources*, *responsiveness*, *commitment* and *cultural competency*.
- The four models of organizations—multiracial service providers, African-focused service providers, ethnic-specific associations, and multiracial advocacy organizations—have differing advantages and disadvantages in relation to these four qualities. Often exceling in one quality is a disadvantage with respect to another.
- Some challenges affect all organizations serving African immigrants, irrespective of model. These include the low priority given to African immigrant populations by government and private funders, inadequate research on and information about African immigrant populations, and political and social challenges specific to localities and regions.

### Conclusion: Assets and Opportunities

- While this report focuses on the needs and challenges of African immigrants and the organizations that serve them, African immigrants are resilient and resourceful. Like

other immigrants before them, African immigrants can draw on unique assets in their struggle for inclusion in American society. These include:

- *Education.* Outstanding educational attainment has not proved sufficient for African immigrants to advance in American society. However, African immigrants' high aspirations and disappointments are conducive to organizing panethnic collective action and institution building. African immigrants' exceptional educational attainment may give them tools to take charge of their own institutions, reducing their dependence on professional staff from outside their communities.
- *Mutual aid networks.* African immigrants bring strong interpersonal networks and traditions of "mutual aid" to the US. As new African immigrant organizations, particularly panethnic organizations, emerge, they should seek to supplement and build on this mutualistic tradition, not crowd it out. Nonprofit service providers should seek to tap into the wealth and human capital of African immigrant communities, extending these resources by raising supplemental funding, providing expertise, and serving as a trusted broker.
- *Entrepreneurship.* Many African immigrant communities have thriving cultures of entrepreneurship. Creating enterprises owned by African immigrants is not solely an economic empowerment strategy. African immigrant entrepreneurs and professionals can also play an important community-building role, by supporting the growth of African immigrant organizations and exercising political influence with local government. However, this will require more organizing among African immigrant small businesses and professionals.

- *Identity and Connection to Cultural Heritage.* African cultural heritage and identity can provide African immigrants with a sense of individual self-esteem, promote group cohesion, provide tools for coping with racism, and support achievement and health. However, like other immigrants before them, first-generation and second-generation African immigrants will have to adapt and reconstruct their cultures and identities in order to integrate into American society. Organizations serving African immigrants can play an important role in this process of adaptation.
- Educational attainment, entrepreneurship, networks of mutual aid, and connection to cultural heritage and identity are all forms of *human capital*. Scholars of immigration find that human capital matters not only at the level of individuals and families, but that the human capital which all members of an immigrant group share—its “ethnic capital”—is a major determinant of how successfully the group integrates. While African immigrants face major social, economic, psychological, and cultural challenges to integration, African immigrants also have significant ethnic capital assets.
- There is a great opportunity for new initiatives and institutions to serve African immigrants, particularly panethnic organizations. To promote empowerment as well as for practical reasons, these initiatives should emphasize developing African immigrants as leaders, promoting greater civic engagement and political influence, building on existing mutual aid networks, and otherwise tapping into the ethnic capital of the African immigrant diaspora.

### III. A Profile of African Immigrants in the United States

Who are the immigrants who make up the new African diaspora in America? In this Part, I track the changing nature of African migration to America, which is driven by changes in both US policy and changing conditions on the African continent. American Community Survey data show that this new African diaspora is more diverse than it has sometimes been portrayed. While African immigrant educational attainment is exceptional, it is also unevenly distributed. High levels of poverty and persistent employment discrimination refute the idea that African immigrants are a “new model minority.”

#### a. African Immigration to the US

In the century following the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, levels of African immigration to the US were low. From the 1860s through the 1950s, fewer than 500 Africans arrived each year on average.<sup>6</sup>

Though large-scale voluntary immigration from Africa is relatively new, it has grown exponentially in recent decades. In 2010, nearly 1.5 million US residents were born in Africa.<sup>7</sup> This was roughly 40 times the number present in 1960, and four times the number in 1980.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin J. A. Thomas, *What Explains the Increasing Trend in African Emigration to the U.S.?*, 45 INT’L MIGRATION REV. 3, 4 (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Author’s analysis, 2006-10 American Community Survey (ACS) data weighted 5-year sample, analyzed via <http://sda.usa.ipums.org/>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron Terrazas, Migration Policy Institute, *African Immigrants in the United States* (Feb. 2009), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=719>, last visited July 10, 2013; Mary Mederios Kent, *Immigration and America’s Black Population*, 62 POPULATION BULLETIN 4-5 (Dec. 2007) available at <http://www.prb.org/pdf07/62.4immigration.pdf>, last visited July 10, 2013.

overwhelming majority of today’s African immigrants—1.26 million—come from sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Changes in US immigration law have driven the growth in African immigration to the US, particularly the establishment of the “diversity visa” (DV) program, which admits immigrants from countries that historically sent few immigrants to the United States; expansion of “family reunification” provisions in immigration law; and liberalization of US refugee policy which expanded humanitarian admissions beyond those fleeing Communist regimes.<sup>10</sup> Recent scholarship has also documented how “push factors,” including stagnant economic growth and displacement of refugees, have spurred emigration from Africa; “pull factors,” including the emigration of close relatives, have made the US a more attractive destination; and “enabling factors,” including urbanization in Africa and the development of telecommunications and transportation technology, have greatly increased transnational mobility.<sup>11</sup>

African immigrants may enter the US either as refugees or as “voluntary immigrants.”<sup>12</sup> Refugees are admitted to the US on humanitarian grounds, because they face persecution in their country of origin.<sup>13</sup> The general term “refugee” may refer to immigrants who enter the US in two distinct ways: either by being admitted through US overseas resettlement programs (“resettled

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<sup>9</sup> Author’s analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7. I included the following ACS country of origin codes in sub-Saharan Africa: 60015, 60020-60099. Of the North Africans excluded, the majority were from Egypt.

<sup>10</sup> See Kent, *supra* n.8, 6-7; DAVID A. MARTIN ET AL., FORCED MIGRATION LAW AND POLICY 672-74 (1st ed. 2007).

<sup>11</sup> See generally Thomas, *supra* n.6.

<sup>12</sup> But see Martin et al., *supra* n.10, 5-11, 27-28 (discussing the challenges of distinguishing between “forced” and “voluntary” migration, and the many groups that fall outside the refugee definition but are forced to migrate by external factors).

<sup>13</sup> See *id.* at 9; United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees art.1.A., July 28, 1951, 189 U.N.T.S. 150.



refugees”), or by traveling to a US point of entry and claiming asylum (“asylum seekers” or “asylees”).<sup>14</sup> Refugees of both types account for approximately 30% of US immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>15</sup>

The 70% of African immigrants who are not refugees enter through sponsorship by an American citizen family member (40%), employment-based visas for skilled workers (9%), or the DV program (22%).<sup>16</sup> Due to the challenges of qualifying and applying for DV admission, the DV program has tended to attract highly educated and skilled African immigrants.<sup>17</sup>

#### b. Where Do African Immigrants Come From?

Accurately estimating the number of African immigrants in the US, and particularly the number coming from each African country, is challenging. Several of the respondents I interviewed believe that the US Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) significantly undercount African immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants and immigrants with temporary work or student visas. These African immigrants may not understand how the Census works, may be unwilling to disclose their presence to the government, or may wrongly believe that as non-citizens they are not eligible to be counted. Furthermore, counts of people born in Africa will exclude most of the children of African immigrants (“second-generation immigrants”), who may be native-born Americans but maintain strong cultural and personal connections to their parents’ countries of origin.

Many of those African immigrants who are enumerated by the Census do not specify their country of origin. As Table 1 shows, the second most common birthplace listed for African

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<sup>14</sup> See Martin et al., *supra* n.10, at 77.

<sup>15</sup> See Kent, *supra* n.8, at 7.

<sup>16</sup> See *id.*

<sup>17</sup> See *id.*

immigrants was “Africa, not specified/not elsewhere classified” (n.s./n.e.c) (163,000 people); the seventh most common was “Western Africa, n.s” (60,000); and the ninth most common was “Eastern Africa n.e.c./n.s (35,000). Together, African immigrants from unspecified countries make up the largest single group of African immigrants.

Of those African immigrants who specified their country of origin, the largest number came from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Somalia, Liberia, and Sudan. As Table 1 shows, the top 10 birthplaces (including “unspecified” birthplaces) account for 84% of African immigration to the US, with a relatively small proportion of African immigrants coming from all the rest of Africa.

**Table 1: African Immigrants in the United States**

Birthplace	Estimated Population	Proportion	% Male
Nigeria	205,904	16%	55
Africa, ns/nec	163,000	13%	52
Ethiopia	149,086	12%	51
Ghana	112,689	9%	56
Kenya	86,901	7%	51
South Africa	86,246	7%	50
Somalia	74,048	6%	47
Liberia	71,860	6%	49
Western Africa, ns	59,572	5%	61
Sudan	42,245	3%	60
<i>subtotal</i>	1,051,551	84%	
Eastern Africa, nec/ns	35,426	3%	47
Sierra Leone	34,199	3%	47
Cameroon	30,577	2%	49
Eritrea	23,023	2%	50
Tanzania	20,361	2%	55
Uganda	18,462	1%	52
Zimbabwe	18,118	1%	51
Senegal	16,642	1%	66
Guinea	10,846	1%	62
TOTAL /AVG.	1,259,205	100%	53

Source: Author's analysis, 2006-10 ACS weighted 5-year sample.

c. Where Do African Immigrants Live?

Nearly all African immigrants—95%—live in a in a city or its surrounding suburbs; i.e., in a metropolitan statistical area (henceforth, “MSA,” “metro area,” “metro region,” or simply “area”).<sup>18</sup> The 15 American MSAs with the greatest number of African immigrants are Washington, D.C./MD/VA; New York - Northeastern NJ; Atlanta, GA; Minneapolis-St. Paul,

<sup>18</sup> Author’s analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

MN; Houston-Brazoria, TX; Los Angeles - Long Beach, CA; Dallas-Fort Worth, TX; Chicago, IL; Philadelphia, PA/NJ; Seattle-Everett, WA; Boston, MA-NH; Baltimore, MD; Newark, NJ; Columbus, OH; and San Francisco-Oakland-Vallejo, CA.<sup>19</sup> These 15 MSAs account for nearly half of the population of African immigrants in the US (46%).<sup>20</sup>

This report focuses on the three metro areas with the largest populations of African immigrants: New York, D.C., and Atlanta. As Table 2 shows, each of these areas has distinctive populations. In New York, the largest ethnonationality is Ghanaians, followed by Nigerians and West Africans. In D.C., Ethiopians predominate, followed by Nigerians and Ghanaians. And in Atlanta, Nigerians, Ethiopians, and Ghanaians make up the largest African immigrant communities. While New York has the largest African immigrant community in absolute numbers, African immigrants make up a much smaller proportion of the area's population than in D.C. or Atlanta.

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<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

**Table 2: African Immigrants by Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)\***

Birthplace	NY-Northeast NJ	DC/MD/VA	Atlanta, GA	TOTAL
Ghana	32840	18377	5348	56565
Nigeria	32007	19838	14128	65973
Africa, ns/nec	21291	16714	7486	45491
Western Africa, ns	14169	6299	2881	23349
South Africa	7555	2249	3852	13656
Liberia	6479	5616	4705	16800
Senegal	5088	1805	905	7798
Sierra Leone	4739	10220**	1129	16088
Guinea	4462	1158	996	6616
Kenya	4109	4141	3519	11769
Ethiopia	3502	31150	9885	44537
Sudan	2625	2557	824	6006
Eastern Africa, nec/ns	2468	2473	1019	5960
Tanzania	1463	1226	462	3151
Uganda	1236	1234	714	3184
Zimbabwe	1224	819	540	2583
Eritrea	1137	3893	604	5634
Cameroon	987	10751**	1894	13632
Somalia	250	2508	2261	5019
TOTAL	147631	122057	63152	353811
TOTAL MSA POPULATION	17,554,850	5,345,155	4,774,974	27,674,979
PROPORTION AFRICAN	0.84%	2.28%	1.32%	1.28%

Source: Author's analysis, 2006-10 ACS weighted 5-year sample.

#### d. African Immigrant Diversity: Race, Education, Poverty, and Gender

In recent decades, African immigration has accounted for about 20% of the growth of America's black population.<sup>21</sup> The growing number of African immigrants in the US has complicated old debates about racial identity, race relations, and inequality in America. As

<sup>21</sup> Kent, *supra* n.8, at 4.

research has demonstrated that African immigrants' educational attainment (as well as that of Afro-Caribbean immigrants) far exceeds the average for African-Americans, and even exceeds that of native-born white Americans,<sup>22</sup> a backlash has emerged against the idea of African immigrants benefiting from affirmative action in higher education and other racially targeted initiatives, allegedly at the expense of multi-generational African-Americans.<sup>23</sup>

The backlash was perhaps best embodied in Harvard professors Lani Guinier and Henry Louis Gates.<sup>24</sup> Guinier criticized Harvard for privileging "voluntary immigrants" over multi-generational African Americans in admissions, saying "I don't think, in the name of affirmative action, we should be admitting people because they look like us, but then they don't identify with

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<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., John R. Logan & Glenn Deane, Lewis Mumford Ctr. for Comparative Urban & Regional Research-Univ. of Albany, *Black Diversity in Metropolitan America*, Aug. 15, 2003, available at <http://mumford1.dyndns.org/cen2000/BlackWhite/BlackDiversityReport/black-diversity01.htm>, last visited July 10, 2013; Kristen McCabe, Migration Policy Institute, *African Immigrants in the United States* (July 2011), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=847>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> See Scott Jaschik, *Black (Immigrant) Admissions Edge*, INSIDE HIGHER EDUC., Mar. 17, 2009, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/03/17/immigrant>, last visited July 10, 2013; Rachel L. Swarns, "African-American" Becomes a Term for Debate, THE WASH. POST, Aug. 29, 2004, at A1; Cord Jefferson, *Ivy League Fooled: How America's Top Colleges Avoid Real Diversity*, GOOD MAGAZINE, Aug. 31, 2011, <http://www.good.is/post/ivy-league-fooled-how-america-s-top-colleges-avoid-real-diversity/>, last visited July 10, 2013. I use the term "multi-generational African-Americans" to refer to the majority of African-Americans whose families have been in the US for four generations or more, most of whom descend from Africans brought to America by the transatlantic slave trade. I use the broader term "African-Americans" to include all black people in America, including African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants. As the articles in this note suggest, the nomenclature to describe such natal and ancestral differences is underdeveloped, lacks uniformity, and remains controversial. See also Violet M. Showers Johnson, "What, Then, Is the African American?", *African and Afro-Caribbean Identities in Black America*, 28 J. AM. ETHNIC HIST. 77, 78 (2008); Randall Kennedy, *Finding a Proper Name to Call Black Americans*, J. BLACKS HIGHER EDUC., Winter 2004-05, 72, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Marcella Bombardieri, *Harvard's Black Community Reunites*, THE BOSTON GLOBE, Oct. 5, 2003, at B1; Sara Rimer & Karen W. Arenson, *Top Colleges Take More Blacks, but Which Ones?*, N.Y. TIMES, June 24, 2004.

us....It's not what you look like but what you do. Do you help other black people get into this institution? Do you identify with other black people?"<sup>25</sup>

The data certainly confirm that African immigrants have exceptionally high educational attainment. But closer analysis of the data (as well as the observations of respondents) refutes two prevalent stereotypes: African immigrants as “privileged interlopers,” getting ahead by unfairly taking advantage of opportunities intended for multi-generational African Americans; and African immigrants as “model minorities,” succeeding through cultural superiority.<sup>26</sup> The data show that while levels of educational attainment are high for most African immigrants, educational attainment varies greatly among African immigrant groups. Racial diversity among African immigrants may further complicate the picture, as some of the highest-achieving African immigrant nationalities have large white and Asian populations. Further, educational attainment among African immigrants has declined, and will likely continue to decline in future years. Most tellingly, educational attainment has not translated into prosperity: African immigrants get an exceptionally poor economic return on their education, and experience above-average rates of poverty.

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<sup>25</sup> Bombardieri, *supra* n.24.

<sup>26</sup> For examples or critiques of the model minority stereotype as applied to African immigrants, see, e.g., Clarence Page, *Black Immigrants, An Invisible 'Model Minority'*, REALCLEARPOLITICS, Mar. 19, 2007, [http://www.realeclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/03/black\\_immigrants\\_an\\_invisible.html](http://www.realeclearpolitics.com/articles/2007/03/black_immigrants_an_invisible.html), last visited July 10, 2013; F. Nii-Amoo Dodoo, *Assimilation Differences among Africans in America*, 76 SOCIAL FORCES 527, 531-32 (1997); Showers Johnson, *supra* n.23, at 80, 82, 88; DINESH D'SOUZA, WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT AMERICA 129-130 (2002); see also Gates' comments in Rimer & Arenson, *supra* n.24 (“We need to learn what the immigrants' kids have so we can bottle it and sell it, because many members of the African-American community, particularly among the chronically poor, have lost that sense of purpose and values which produced our generation.”)

i. Race

Do African immigrants “identify with other black people,” in Prof. Guinier’s phrase? Government data suggest that most do, at least in how they describe their own race for purposes of enumeration. As Table 3 shows, 84% of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa identify as black. Roughly 10% of African immigrants are white, while just fewer than 4% are Asian.<sup>27</sup>

However, there are significant differences in racial composition by birthplace. The racial composition of South African immigrants, who make up 7% of all African immigrants to the US, inverts the racial composition of the rest of Africa: over 80% of South African immigrants in the US are white, while only 10% are black.<sup>28</sup>

Several other African birthplaces send large numbers of Asians to the US, including Kenya (12%) and three birthplaces not appearing in Table 3: Tanzania (38%), Uganda (23%), and Eastern Africa (19%).<sup>29</sup> This likely reflects the large numbers of South Asians who immigrated to East Africa during British colonial rule and were subsequently expropriated or expelled by post-colonial African regimes.<sup>30</sup> Sudan is also something of a racial anomaly: only 82% of Sudanese immigrants identify as Black, while 7% identify as White, and 10% identify as either “Some Other Race,” “Two or More Races,” or “Three or More Races.”<sup>31</sup> This may reflect both phenotypic and cultural differences: scholars have noted that in Sudan, which lies at the

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<sup>27</sup> Author’s analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> See generally Robert G. Gregory, *SOUTH ASIANS IN EAST AFRICA: AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY, 1890-1980* (1993).

<sup>31</sup> Author’s analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7. The data were collected prior to the independence of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011.



crossroads between North and sub-Saharan Africa, the terms “Black,” “African,” and “Arab” may reflect linguistic, political, and class affiliations more than physical distinctions.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that the racial composition of African immigrants has shifted significantly over time. Fifty-one percent (51%) of white immigrants from Africa have been in the US for more than 15 years. Similarly, 55% of Asian immigrants from Africa have been in the US for more than 15 years. Meanwhile, only 21% of black African immigrants have been in the US that long.<sup>33</sup> Blacks make up 91% of African immigrants who have been in the US for 5 years or fewer, but only 70% of African immigrants who have been in the US over 15 years.<sup>34</sup> This is significant because it means that African immigrants who have lived in the US the longest—and are most likely to have advanced economically<sup>35</sup>—are disproportionately white or Asian. Meanwhile, African immigrant newcomers are overwhelmingly black.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Mahmood Mamdani, *The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency*, 29 LONDON REV. OF BOOKS 5 (2007).

<sup>33</sup> Author’s analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Jongsung Kim & Francis Kemegue, Addressing the Low Returns to Education of African Born Immigrants in the United States, at 14 (May 15, 2007) (Economics Working Papers, Paper 4, Bryant Univ.), <http://digitalcommons.bryant.edu/econwork/4> (finding, *inter alia*, that recently-arrived cohorts of African immigrants receive substantially lower hourly wages in the U.S. labor market than those who have been here longer).

<sup>36</sup> See also Tibbett Speer, *The Newest African-Americans Aren't Black*, 16 AM. DEMOGRAPHICS 9 (1994) (Demographic analysis finding that as recently as 1994, only 50% of African immigrants were black, while 40% were white and 10% were Asian).

**Table 3: Racial Composition of Largest African Immigrant Populations**

Birthplace*	White	Black	Asian	Other	2+/3+ Races
Nigeria	1.6	97.3	0.7	0.1	0.4
Africa, ns/nec	11.9	81.9	3.4	1.9	0.9
Ethiopia	2.4	95.8	0.7	0.3	0.7
Ghana	0.9	97.5	0.9	0.4	0.2
Kenya	4.7	80.7	12.4	0.4	1.8
South Africa	80.6	10.1	5.2	1.6	2.4
Somalia	0.6	97.8	0.6	0.3	0.6
Liberia	2	96.9	0.5	0	0.6
Western Africa, ns	4.7	93.3	0.3	0.3	1.5
Sudan	6.7	82.5	0.7	5.4	4.7
<i>All Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	9.9	84.5	3.6	0.8	1.2

Source: Author's analysis, 2006-10 ACS weighted 5-year sample. Race categories are not exclusive; some respondents indicate more than one race.

\*Top 10 birthplaces, ordered by size of US population

## ii. Education

Immigrants from nearly every part of Africa attain education at above-average rates. As Table 4 shows, half of all Americans aged 25 or over have completed one or more years of college, 44% have between a 9th and 12th grade education, and 25% have no more than an 8th grade education.<sup>37</sup> Whites and Asians have greater than average educational attainment, while Blacks and Hispanics have lower than average educational attainment.<sup>38</sup> African immigrants have higher educational attainment than nearly any other group of Americans. Nearly 65% of

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<sup>37</sup> Author's analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* When referring to Census and ACS data, I use the Census and ACS terms "Black", "Hispanic", etc., for consistency with the data sources and clarity. The Census "Black" category includes African immigrants as well as multi-generational African Americans and any other immigrant or native-born people who identify themselves as black.

African immigrants have one or more years of college education.<sup>39</sup> The only American racial group with slightly greater educational attainment is Asians, 66% of whom have some college.<sup>40</sup>

However, Somali immigrant educational attainment is a striking exception to this pattern. Thirty-one percent (31%) of Somalis in the US have no more than an 8th grade education, and fewer than 28% have any college education.<sup>41</sup> This level of educational attainment is lower than any American racial group.<sup>42</sup>

Low levels of educational attainment among Somali immigrants likely reflect the large number of Somali immigrants who arrive in the US as refugees, particularly among the Somali Bantu. The Somali Bantu are the largest group of resettled refugees from Africa in history; in the last decade, 13,000 Somali Bantu were resettled in the US. Somali Bantu, also known as Jareer, were a stigmatized, marginal and impoverished group in Somalia. Many lived in refugee camps for as long as 10 years before emigrating; and most arrived in the US with little education, low English proficiency, and few resources. As might be expected, the Somali Bantu have faced profound challenges of adaptation and integration into American society.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Pindie Stephen, Int'l Org. for Migration, *Somali Bantu Report* (Apr. 2002), available at <http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/bantureport.pdf>, last visited July 10, 2013; FROM MOGADISHU TO DIXON: THE SOMALI DIASPORA IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT (Abdi M. Kusow & Stephanie R. Bjork eds., 2007); Int'l Rescue Comm., *Somali Bantus Begin a New Life in the United States* (June 2, 2003), available at <http://reliefweb.int/node/127936>, last visited Apr. 7, 2012; Rick Hampson, *In the U.S., Africa's Bantu See a Reversal of Fortune*, USA TODAY, Aug. 3, 2003, at 1A; Michael Scott Moore, *What Makes Somalis So Different?*, MILLER-MCCUNE, Dec. 22, 2010, <http://www.miller-mccune.com/culture/what-makes-somalis-so-different-26347/#>, last visited July 10, 2013; MARTIN HILL, MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP INT'L, NO REDRESS: SOMALIA'S FORGOTTEN MINORITIES (2010), available at <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=10370>, last visited July 10, 2013.

**Table 4: Educational Attainment, African Immigrants 25 or Older, in Comparison**

Birthplace*	Up to 8th	9th-12 <sup>th</sup>	1-3 years college	≥4 years college	1 or more years college
Nigeria	2.3	15.7	20.4	61.6	82
Africa, ns/nec	7.9	34.8	26.1	31.2	57.3
Ethiopia	6.6	38.6	27	27.8	54.8
Ghana	3.5	35	26.5	35	61.5
Kenya	2.6	20	30.5	47	77.5
South Africa	0.9	20.3	21.1	57.7	78.8
Somalia	30.9	41.3	16.7	11.1	27.8
Liberia	7.6	30.9	32.6	28.9	61.5
Western Africa, ns	11.1	30.8	24.4	33.7	58.1
Sudan	11	34.7	22.9	31.4	54.3
<i>Average, Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	6.7	28.6	24.6	40.1	64.7

All Americans	Up to 8th	9th-12 <sup>th</sup>	1-3 yrs college	≥4 yrs college	1- ≥4 yrs college
All races	6.2	44	21.8	27.9	49.7
White	5	43.7	22	29.3	51.3
Black	5.6	51.9	24.8	17.7	42.5
Asian	8.1	25.8	16.7	49.3	66
Hispanic (any race)	23	46.8	17.2	13.1	30.3

Source: Author's analysis, 2006-10 ACS weighted 5-year sample. Race categories are not exclusive; some respondents indicate more than one race.

\*Top 10 birthplaces, ordered by size of US population

Looking beyond Somali immigrants, other immigrants from Africa attain education at sharply differing rates. While all African immigrants except Somalis have educational attainment that exceeds the national average, immigrants from some countries are far above average.

Approximately 80% of immigrants from South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria have one or more years of college education. As noted *supra*, III.d.i, large numbers of South African and Kenyan immigrants are white or Asian. If average educational attainment differs between blacks and

non-blacks, then the large number of non-blacks in these groups may affect the groups' average educational attainment (However, racial variation is not part of the explanation for Nigerian educational attainment, since nearly all Nigerian immigrants are black). The proportion of African immigrants from the other top birthplaces who have some college education ranges from 55%-65%. This is still above the national average of 50%, but the difference is far less dramatic than in the top achieving birthplaces. The proportion of African immigrants who complete four or more years of college, and thus are most likely to complete a college degree, also varies widely, from as little as 40% for Somalis up to 75% of Nigerians.<sup>44</sup>

Not only are educational patterns among African immigrants diverse, but they are changing. Past generations of African immigrants had even greater educational achievement than today's African immigrants.<sup>45</sup> Current African immigrants come from more economically and socially diverse backgrounds than the small, relatively elite populations who were able to emigrate in the past.<sup>46</sup> Refugees who are resettled in large numbers, like the Somali Bantu, may have relatively low educational levels, and so may African immigrants who are admitted to the US as family members of naturalized African immigrants.<sup>47</sup> As one interview respondent, Dr. Tsehaye Teferra, noted, "The first wave of immigration from any country is the 'cream.'" That is, the first wave is likely to be disproportionately educated and affluent due to the severe barriers for early immigrants, while subsequent waves face lower barriers and tend to be lower-

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<sup>44</sup> Author's analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

<sup>45</sup> Kent, *supra* n.8, 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

skilled and less well-off.<sup>48</sup> Finally, studies of immigrant assimilation have shown that differences between the educational attainment of immigrant and native-born Americans tend to decrease among second- and third-generation immigrants.<sup>49</sup> All these factors suggest that the dramatic educational attainment of African immigrants will decrease in years to come.

While this analysis was necessarily cursory, it reveals more diversity in African educational attainment than scholarly and media discussions of the topic have generally acknowledged. Given the sensitive nature of topics like black educational attainment and affirmative action, scholars concerned with educational achievement should undertake more nuanced, in-depth analysis of African immigrant educational attainment and avoid misleading generalizations.

### iii. Poverty

High educational attainment has not been a fast track to the American Dream for African immigrants. African immigrants, though more educated than the average American, are also poorer than average. Research also shows that African immigrants earn a worse economic return for their education than other groups, including multi-generational African Americans.

As Table 5 shows, African immigrants experience above-average levels of poverty. Sixteen percent (16%) of all Americans live on incomes that put them at or below the official poverty line, while 34% live on incomes up to twice that level (referred to as “200% of poverty,”

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<sup>48</sup> Author interview with Dr. Tsehaye Teferra, Exec. Dir., Eth. Cmty. Dev. Council, Feb. 14, 2012. *See also* Kent, *supra* n.8, 10-11. In the interest of brevity, I hereafter cite and footnote statements attributed to an interview respondent only on the first occasion that the respondent is quoted. All quotations attributed to respondents should be assumed to be drawn from the cited interview with that respondent unless otherwise specified.

<sup>49</sup> George J. Borjas, *Ethnic Capital and Intergenerational Mobility*, 107 Q. J. ECON. 123 (1992).

a common measurement of low-income status).<sup>50</sup> Poverty among African immigrants is approximately 25% higher than average: 20% of Africans live below the poverty line, and 41% live below 200% of poverty.<sup>51</sup> African immigrants are significantly more likely to be poor than whites, Asians, and Americans as a whole, despite exceeding or equaling these groups in educational attainment.<sup>52</sup>

As in education, some groups of African immigrants significantly outperform others economically. Ghanaians and Nigerians have poverty rates slightly lower than the average among all Americans, though even these high-achievers are more likely to be poor than whites and Asians.<sup>53</sup> Only South Africans, whose racial composition is, as discussed *supra*, III.d.i, distinct from most other African immigrants, do better economically than all American racial groups.<sup>54</sup>

All other African immigrant ethnonationalities have above-average rates of poverty. Counter to the model minority and privileged interloper myths, African immigrants from several birthplaces experience higher poverty rates than African Americans as a whole. Fifty-one percent (51%) of all African Americans fall below 200% of poverty, compared to the poorest African immigrants from Western Africa (51%), Sudan (60%), and Somalia (a startling 78%).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Author's analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> See also Speer, *supra* n. 36 (“If we're getting white immigrants from South Africa and from what used to be Rhodesia [sic], we are getting the absolute upper levels,” [said demographer Jeffrey] Passel. “You're not going to get people from the very bottom strata coming to us.”)

<sup>55</sup> Author's analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

## 1. Education, Economic Disadvantage, and Discrimination

On average, African immigrants are less likely to be poor than African Americans as a whole or Hispanics. However, the difference in poverty rates between African immigrants and these groups is considerably smaller than the educational differential. For example, African immigrants over the age of 25 are twice as likely as Hispanics of the same age to have some college education.<sup>56</sup> Despite education levels that are twice as high, 20% of African immigrants live below the poverty line, compared to 24% of Hispanics.<sup>57</sup> African immigrants are 50% more likely than all African Americans to have some college, but only 30% less likely to be in poverty.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that, for African immigrants, educational advantage does not translate to economic advantage—even when compared to other racial minorities.

In fact, research shows that African immigrants get an exceptionally poor economic return on their education, even compared to other blacks. Doodoo found that while African Americans gain a 24% wage advantage by obtaining a degree, for African immigrants the benefit is only 11%.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Kim & Kemegue found that the returns to college education of black African immigrant workers were 8.4% lower than those of native black workers.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, this disadvantage does not apply to immigrants from the Caribbean, who earn 26% more than their counterparts without college degrees.<sup>61</sup> This “African penalty”<sup>62</sup> cannot be fully accounted for by other factors, like English fluency or even whether degrees were earned in the US or

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<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> Doodoo, *supra* n.26, 539-41; 544, n.9.

<sup>60</sup> Kim & Kemegue, *supra* n.35, at 16.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> “African penalty” is my term for this phenomenon, not Doodoo’s.



Africa.<sup>63</sup> Doodoo argues that it is hard to explain this discrepancy other than through “demand factors”—i.e., employer discrimination, possibly rooted in persistent stereotypes of Africa and Africans.<sup>64</sup>

Other research shows that the “African penalty” does not extend to white immigrants from Africa. Kim and Kemegue found that, unlike black African immigrants, white immigrant workers from Africa received a wage boost from education that was not statistically different from that received by black native workers.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Borch and Corra found that white immigrants from Africa have a significant wage advantage over black African immigrants, even when controlling for human capital factors like education and language fluency: white women from Africa earn 11% more than black women from Africa in the US labor market, and white men 55% more per hour than black men.<sup>66</sup> This strongly suggests that the “African penalty” is the product of discrimination against black Africans, not merely human capital factors or immigrant disadvantage.

One sociologist who extensively interviewed African immigrants in the US about their attitudes toward America noted that:

African immigrants see high levels of investment in human capital as crucial to economic advancement. The African immigrants who were surveyed spoke about the economic opportunities in this country. They made references to the

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<sup>63</sup> *Id.*, 532-33; 538-39.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*, 542-43; 530-31. Another possible explanation for the “African wage penalty” is that African immigrants have less social capital than African-Americans or Afro-Caribbean immigrants, and thus are less likely to find high-wage employment through their social networks. This hypothesis, which is fully compatible with a “demand-side” or employer discrimination explanation, deserves further research.

<sup>65</sup> Kim & Kemegue, *supra* n.35, at 16.

<sup>66</sup> Casey Borch & Mamadi K. Corra, *Differences in Earnings Among Black and White African Immigrants in the United States, 1980–2000: A Cross-Sectional and Temporal Analysis*, 53 SOC. PERSP. 573, 586-88 (2010).

educational and cultural opportunities America offers and generally concluded that racism and discrimination notwithstanding, those who apply themselves usually succeed in America.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear that African immigrants are investing in their own human capital.

However, whether because of racism and discrimination or other factors, it is not clear that this investment is paying off in the way that African immigrants expect.

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<sup>67</sup> John A. Arthur, *INVISIBLE SOJOURNERS: AFRICAN IMMIGRANT DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES* 79 (2003).

**Table 5: Poverty among Largest African-Born Groups**

Birthplace*	≥100% poverty	≥200% poverty
Nigeria	13.5	30.4
Africa, ns/nec	23.3	47.4
Ethiopia	20.4	42.5
Ghana	12.9	31.7
Kenya	21.7	38.6
South Africa	8.8	17.9
Somalia	52.2	77.8
Liberia	21.8	46.9
Western Africa, ns	22.6	51.2
Sudan	35.3	60.8
Average, all sub-Saharan Africa	20.5	40.9

All Americans	≥100% poverty	≥200% poverty
All races	16	33.8
White	13.3	29.6
Black	28.5	50.8
Asian	12.8	27.3
Hispanic (any race)	24.10	52.2

Source: Author's analysis, 2006-10 ACS weighted 5-year sample. Race categories are not exclusive; some respondents indicate more than one race.

\*Top 10 birthplaces, ordered by size of US population

#### iv. Gender

Finally, African immigrants to the US are also diverse by gender. As Table 1 *supra* shows, African immigrants are fairly equally distributed along gender lines, with men slightly predominating. Overall, 53% of African immigrants to the US are men, but this proportion varies widely by birthplace. Most places of origin send slightly more male than female immigrants. However, several send slight female majorities, including Somalia, Liberia, Eastern Africa, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon. Meanwhile, immigrants from a handful of birthplaces, including Western Africa, Sudan, Senegal, and Guinea, are 60% or more male. One interview respondent noted that many of the West African immigrants his agency serves are part of “divided families,” i.e., one parent is working in the US to support a family that is being raised by another parent in Africa.<sup>68</sup>

Male predominance among African immigrants comports with the observations of scholars that African emigration processes select for “gender, age, birth order, and educational attainment.”<sup>69</sup> That is, families with finite resources are more likely to invest them in helping more privileged family members, often elder sons, emigrate.<sup>70</sup> The fact that different African places of origin differ widely in the proportions of male and female immigrants they send suggests that these dynamics do not operate in a uniform way across sub-Saharan Africa, or that other dynamics are at work.

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<sup>68</sup> Author interview with Mulusew Bekele, MPH, Dir. of Health Programs, African Serv. Comm., Feb. 10, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur, *supra* n.67, 113-17.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

#### **IV. Profiles of Organizations**

In this Part, I take a closer look at the organizations that are seeking to serve and engage African immigrants. I interviewed representatives of ten organizations that work with African immigrants in the New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta metropolitan regions in order to understand the issues and challenges of African immigrants. To obtain a range of perspectives, I sought to talk with respondents from multiple types of organizations: from service agencies with dozens of staff to volunteer-driven associations; from exclusively African organizations to organizations where Africans make up a minority of clients. While these organizations are diverse, they can be roughly divided into four types with distinct characteristics.

##### **a. Four Models of Organizations Serving African Immigrants**

As I spoke with respondents, certain commonalities in organizational model emerged among them. The organizations that I observed fall into four types: 1) multiracial service providers, 2) African-focused service providers, 3) ethnic-specific associations, and 4) multiracial advocacy organizations.

*Multiracial service providers* (MSPs) are typical nonprofit service providers with a diverse client base. African immigrants may make up a majority of the population they serve, as with Refugee Women's Network, or a relatively small proportion, as with Union Settlement Association. The services MSPs offer may be diversified, as with Union Settlement Association, or relatively specialized, as with Tahirih Justice Center.

*African-focused service providers* (ASPs) are in most respects typical nonprofit service providers similar to multiracial service providers. However, unlike MSPs, ASPs grew out of and remain rooted in African immigrant communities. Though all ASPs I encountered also serve

non-African clients (partly due to the nature of their funding), African immigrants make up the majority of their clients. Unlike most MSPs, African immigrants hold top leadership positions in ASPs. The names and mission statements of ASPs signal a continuing prioritization of African constituents. ASPs also maintain some connection with the countries of origin of their constituents: Ethiopian Community Development Center and African Services Committee run community development projects in Ethiopia, and Sagal's programming addresses issues and events in Somalia and Ethiopia as well as the US.

*Ethnic specific associations* (ESAs) are membership organizations that serve immigrants from a single African country, or sometimes a particular region, language, or ethnic group. Sometimes they serve a specific purpose, such as religious congregations, soccer teams and other recreational associations, small business associations, or women's groups. At other times, they are general membership organizations for everyone from an ethnic community. ESAs are run by volunteers from the community they serve, often have democratic or semi-democratic leadership structures, and their activities are funded primarily by community donations.<sup>71</sup> The only ESA interviewed for this report was the National Council of Ghanaian Organizations but many others exist, such as the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization<sup>72</sup> and the Cameroon American Council.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See also Arthur, *supra* n.67, 70-72 (describing the importance of "African mutual aid associations" formed to represent "ethnic, clan, religious, village, alumni, and national affiliations" to the economic, psychological, cultural, and political support of African immigrants in the US).

<sup>72</sup> NIDO Americas website, <http://www.nidoamericas.org/>, last visited Apr. 7, 2012. Note: as of July 10, 2013, unrelated commercial content appears to have taken over the former [nidoamericas.org](http://www.nidoamericas.org/) website, and NIDO's organizational website appears to have migrated to <http://www.nidoamerica.org/>.

<sup>73</sup> Cameroon-American Council website, <http://cameroon-american-council.blogspot.com/>, last visited July 10, 2013.

Like the service providers, *multiracial advocacy organizations* (MAOs) are run by professional staff, and funded primarily by grants. However, MAOs are more likely to have organizational members, whether individuals or organizations, not solely clients. MAOs are also explicitly political in their missions and their programs, and advocacy is the primary focus of their work, rather than a complement to it. MAOs have diverse organizational models. For example, Georgia STAND-UP is primarily an institutional coalition, while Tenants and Workers United is a grassroots membership organization. However, they share a common orientation toward building power over time, versus providing services in response to the immediate needs of their constituency.

These categories are not absolute. Service providers engage in advocacy, and advocates provide services. When they were founded, both ASC and ECDC seem to have functioned much like ethnic associations, and become more like other service providers as they grew and professionalized. Sagal still resembles an ESA in many ways. However, the characteristics of these organizations seem to follow this general schema.

**Table 6: Types of Organizations and Characteristics**

Type of Organization	Respondents	Characteristics
Multiracial service providers (MSPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugee Resettlement &amp; Immigration Services of Atlanta</li> <li>• Refugee Women’s Network</li> <li>• Union Settlement Association</li> <li>• Tahirih Justice Center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonprofit service providers.</li> <li>• Diverse clientele; African immigrants may be a majority or minority.</li> <li>• Services may be specialized or diversified.</li> </ul>
African-focused service providers (ASPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African Services Committee</li> <li>• Ethiopian Community Development Center</li> <li>• Sagal Radio Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonprofit service providers.</li> <li>• Grew out of and remain based in African immigrant communities.</li> <li>• African immigrants make up the majority of their clients.</li> <li>• Panethnic: serve African immigrants of many ethnic groups and national origins.</li> <li>• African immigrants hold top leadership positions.</li> <li>• Names and mission statements signal a continuing prioritization of African constituents.</li> <li>• Maintain programmatic connection with the countries of origin of their constituents.</li> </ul>
Ethnic specific associations (ESAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Council of Ghanaian Associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership organizations of African immigrants.</li> <li>• Ethnonationality-based or microethnicity-based: serve African immigrants from a single African country, region, linguistic group, or ethnicity.</li> <li>• May be specific purpose (e.g., soccer club, religious institution) or general interest.</li> <li>• Volunteer-run, and democratic or semi-democratic.</li> <li>• Activities are funded primarily by member and community donations.</li> </ul>
Multiracial advocacy organizations (MAOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Georgia STAND UP</li> <li>• Tenants &amp; Workers United</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run by professional staff, and funded largely by grants and institutional donations.</li> <li>• Membership organizations; members may be individuals or organizations.</li> <li>• Explicitly political in missions and programs; advocacy is the primary focus.</li> <li>• Models may vary widely, but share a common orientation toward building power over time versus direct services.</li> </ul>



## b. Organizational Interviews

As noted previously, while I sought to interview a diverse range of organizations serving African immigrants, I did not seek to make my sample statistically representative. Organizations were not selected randomly. I compiled a list by consulting nonprofit directories, searching Guidestar archives of nonprofit tax filings, and conducting general internet searches, and sent out a large number of interview requests by email and telephone. In some cases, I used personal contacts to arrange interviews.

While I believe I was successful in obtaining a range of perspectives for this report, it is important to note some limitations of my research. In particular, a large proportion of my respondents are Ethiopian-American: four respondents (Bekele, Betru, Teferra, and Mohamed) out of 13. This bias may partly reflect the fact that Ethiopian-Americans hold a disproportionate share of leadership positions in organizations relative to other African immigrants (3 of 4 Ethiopian respondents were Executive Directors or Program Managers of their organizations). However, it may also reflect the fact that, as an Ethiopian-American, I was more readily able to arrange interviews with other Ethiopians. By contrast, the experiences of some key African immigrant nationalities are inadequately reflected by my interviews. These include Nigerian and Somali immigrants.

Finally, while I made great efforts to reach out to ethnic-specific associations, only one representative of an ESA is interviewed herein. Because they are largely volunteer-led, ESAs may have less capacity to respond to this type of survey and may also have shorter duration as organizations, *see infra*, VI.a.ii. For example, the Executive Director of the Cameroon American Council declined a request to be interviewed for this report, citing frequent requests from

researchers and her limited availability. I made repeated inquiries to Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO), an organization with an impressive website and roster of volunteer directors, but found their primary contact email inoperative and received no response from other contacts. NIDO's website makes several references to an internal dispute over elected leadership, and it may be that the organization is defunct or had temporarily suspended programs.<sup>74</sup>

Of course, the fact that an outside researcher had difficulty communicating with ESAs does not mean that they do not have a visible and robust presence within their ethnic community. But my research suggests, at least, that many of these organizations do not have the resources to maintain a visible presence *outside* their immediate communities. In discussing ESAs, I supplemented my lone interview with observations from other respondents, many of whom frequently interact with ESAs, and from secondary sources.

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<sup>74</sup> NIDO website, *supra* n. 72.

**Table 7: Organizations Interviewed**

Organization Name	Metro Area	Type	Reason Interviewed
Union Settlement Association (USA)	New York	MSP	Serves significant minority of African immigrants.
Tahirih Justice Center	Washington, D.C.	MSP	Serves significant minority of African immigrants.
Refugee Women’s Network (RWN)	Atlanta	MSP	Serves primarily African immigrants.
Refugee Resettlement & Immigration Services of Atlanta (RRISA)	Atlanta	MSP	Serves primarily African immigrants.*
African Services Committee (ASC)	New York	ASP	Serves primarily African immigrants.
Ethiopian Community Development Council	Washington, D.C.	ASP	Serves primarily African immigrants.
Sagal Radio Services	Atlanta	ASP	Serves primarily African immigrants.
National Council of Ghanaian Associations (NCOGA)	New York**	ESA	Serves exclusively African immigrants.
Tenants & Workers United	Washington, D.C.	MAO	Serves significant minority of African immigrants.
Georgia STAND UP	Atlanta	MAO	Does not currently serve African immigrants but knowledgeable about population, organizations, and politics in the Atlanta region.

\*\*Accurate for legal program from 2009-10; current information may differ.

\*National organization, but headquartered in NY.

c. Profiles of Multiracial Service Providers (MSPs)

i. Union Settlement Association

Union Settlement Association (USA) is one of New York's oldest social service agencies, serving East Harlem from its current location since 1895.<sup>75</sup> Founded as part of the settlement house movement, USA originally served the neighborhood's Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants. After World War II, East Harlem assumed its current, largely Latino, character, and today the neighborhood is approximately 55% Hispanic, 35% African-American, and 10% people of other ethnic backgrounds.<sup>76</sup>

USA is a comprehensive social service agency: its services include elder housing, childcare, citizenship classes, and even a community-based bank. USA also provides referrals to other types of services, such as immigration counseling.<sup>77</sup>

Most relevant to New York's African immigrant communities, USA runs a large adult education program. The program's client base is 80-85% Latino. However, Africans from Senegal, Côte D'Ivoire, and Mali make up growing share of USA's non-Latino clientele. According to respondents Nocenti and Nieves, though few West African immigrants live in East Harlem and USA does little to market the program to West Africans, positive word-of-mouth about the program has attracted West African clients from all over New York City.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Author interview with David Nocenti, J.D., Exec. Dir., and Melissa Nieves, Dir. of Adult Educ., Union Settlement Ass'n., Feb. 10, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

## ii. Tahirih Justice Center

The Tahirih Justice Center came into existence as a result of *In re Kasinga*,<sup>79</sup> a groundbreaking case brought by a Togolese woman seeking asylum in the US to avoid forced polygamous marriage and female genital mutilation.<sup>80</sup> The *Kasinga* case not only won asylum for the appellant, Fauziya Kassindja,<sup>81</sup> but set a precedent for other refugee women fleeing gender-based violence. After Layli Miller-Muro, a student attorney on the *Kasinga* case, co-authored a book with Kassindja about the case,<sup>82</sup> Miller-Muro was flooded with inquiries from women fleeing gender-based violence, and decided to use her share of the book's proceeds to found Tahirih Justice Center.

Tahirih offers free legal assistance with immigration to women and girls fleeing gender-based violence. Tahirih clients are escaping from “female genital mutilation, torture, rape, human trafficking, honor crimes, life-threatening widow rituals, forced marriage, and domestic violence.”<sup>83</sup> In addition to legal services, Tahirih offers its immigration clients a comprehensive set of social services. Tahirih also runs a Policy Program which advocates on issues affecting immigrant women and girls fleeing gender-based violence. Tahirih is gradually expanding its geographic scope: it opened a Houston office in 2009 and a Baltimore office in 2010.

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<sup>79</sup> *In re Kasinga*, 21 I. & N. Dec. 357 (BIA 1996).

<sup>80</sup> Author interview with Lindsay Harris, Immigration Staff Attorney & Akin Gump Equal Justice Works Fellow, Tahirih Justice Ctr., Feb. 14, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> The case misspells Kassindja's last name as “Kasinga.”

<sup>82</sup> FAUZIYA KASSINDJA & LAYLI MILLER-BASHIR, *DO THEY HEAR YOU WHEN YOU CRY?* (1999).

<sup>83</sup> Tahirih Justice Ctr, *Our Clients*, <http://www.tahirih.org/services/our-clients/>, last visited July 10, 2013.

Though Tahirih grew out of a West African case, its proportion of clients from Africa has gradually diminished, even as the number of clients Tahirih serves has grown. At the time of interview, Tahirih handled approximately 700 legal matters each year,<sup>84</sup> for clients coming from over 25 countries, and Africans made up 31% of its clients. Among African clients, some of the most common countries of origin were Cameroon, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As a Fellow and Staff Attorney at Tahirih, Lindsay Harris launched and managed the African Women’s Empowerment Project, an effort to inform African communities about Tahirih’s services.

### iii. Refugee Resettlement & Information Services of Atlanta

Refugee Resettlement & Information Services of Atlanta (RRISA) is one of the major providers of resettlement services to Atlanta’s refugee population,<sup>85</sup> with a 2009 budget of \$3.3 million.<sup>86</sup> As the Atlanta-area affiliate of Church World Service and Episcopal Migration Ministries, two national refugee resettlement agencies (also known in refugee resettlement terminology as “voluntary agencies” or VOLAGs<sup>87</sup>), RRISA is responsible for meeting all of its clients’ short-term needs for shelter, medical care, and orientation to the US. Under contract with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, RRISA also provides medium-term transitional services designed to help refugees become economically secure, adjust to their new environs, and obtain permanent immigration status.

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<sup>84</sup>Tahirih Justice Ctr., *Our Services*, <http://www.tahirih.org/services/>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>85</sup>RRISA, *About Us*, <http://www.rrisa.org/about.html>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>86</sup>RRISA IRS Form 990, accessed via [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) on Mar. 1, 2012.

<sup>87</sup>For further discussion of the role of VOLAGs, *see infra*, IV.d.ii.

Edget Betru worked in 2009 and 2010 as an Equal Justice Works Fellow at RRISA.<sup>88</sup> She was principally responsible for providing legal services to RRISA's clients, who were mostly refugees but also included a number of immigrants who met certain income guidelines. RRISA served refugee clients from Burma, Afghanistan, and Iraq as well as African countries including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, and Sierra Leone. Betru estimates that between one-half and two-thirds of her own clients were African.

Betru's responsibilities consisted almost exclusively of direct legal services, though on a few occasions she ran "Know Your Rights" trainings for clients. Betru helped both resettled refugees and other immigrant clients with immigration matters. While RRISA's legal services were exclusively related to immigration status, the agency also provided supportive services in areas including employment, housing, education, and family issues. In addition to government funding and funding from private sources (such as Betru's outside fellowship), RRISA charged its clients nominal fees for immigration legal services.

#### iv. Refugee Women's Network

Refugee Women's Network (RWN) was founded in 1995 by a group of refugee women who sought to address what they saw as failures of refugee resettlement agencies to meet the needs of refugee women. "Resettlement agencies would focus on employing refugee men, which

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<sup>88</sup> Author interview with Edget Betru, former Equal Justice Works Fellow, Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Serv. of Atlanta, Feb. 27, 2012. Because Betru was no longer employed by RRISA at the time of the interview and (unlike Liss of TWU) had not served as the organization's director, her views should not be taken as representing RRISA's views.

made many refugee women feel marginalized,” said Doua Kue-Morris, RWN’s Executive Director.<sup>89</sup>

RWN’s primary service is a microenterprise program that loans women \$500-\$10,000 to start businesses. A grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement funds microloans to refugee women, who make up 70% of loan recipients, and RWN raises supplemental funds from private foundations to extend the loans to non-refugee immigrant women. In addition to loans, RWN provides its women entrepreneur clients with training, technical assistance, and marketing help.

In the past, RWN also ran a leadership development and advocacy program that sought to empower refugee women through leadership trainings and engagement on policy issues. However, in 2011 RWN experienced significant loss of funding and staff turnover (including transition of the Executive Director), and in 2012 was operating only the microenterprise program.

While Africans are not the largest refugee population in Atlanta, African women, primarily from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Liberia, make up 69% of RWN loan recipients. Kue-Morris noted that the previous manager of the microenterprise program was an African woman who was well-networked in African communities, which may have contributed to RWN’s high proportion of African clients.

d. African-focused Service Providers (ASPs)

i. African Services Committee

African Services Committee (ASC), based in West Harlem, was founded by Asfaha Hadera, an Ethiopian refugee, in 1981.<sup>90</sup> Originally chartered as the Committee to Aid Ethiopian

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<sup>89</sup> Author interview of Doua Kue-Morris, Exec. Dir., and Sandra Achury, Microenterprise Program Coordinator, Refugee Women’s Network, Feb. 16, 2012.



Refugees, the agency grew beyond an Ethiopian constituency. At the time, few agencies were addressing the needs of New York's growing African immigrant communities, particularly the crisis of HIV/AIDS infection among recent West African immigrants. Today, HIV/AIDS services make up the bulk of ASC's work, and the majority of its clients are West African immigrants.

ASC provides a continuum of services. Its outreach workers engage in health education and refer community members to testing for sexually-transmitted infections, including HIV. For HIV-positive clients, ASC provides case management, supportive services, housing, and legal assistance. Legal services are funded through the Ryan White CARE Act, and mostly relate to HIV/AIDS, though ASC also provides free or low-cost legal services to clients seeking asylum, the "V" Visa for survivors of domestic violence, etc.

ASC serves approximately 450 clients each year, of which approximately 80% come from Francophone West African countries, principally Senegal, Côte D'Ivoire, Mali, and The Gambia. Only a handful of ASC clients are Anglophone West Africans, most of them from Ghana. Many of ASC's clients are young parents, and many are part of internationally divided families that have parents (often but not exclusively fathers) working and living in the US, and children being raised in Africa.

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<sup>90</sup> Author interview with Mulusew Bekele, MPH, Dir. of Health Programs, and Kim Nichols, MPH, ScM, Co-Exec. Dir., African Serv. Comm., Feb. 10, 2012.

## ii. Ethiopian Community Development Council

The Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) was founded in 1983 by its current Executive Director, Dr. Tsehay Teferra.<sup>91</sup> The 1973 revolution in Ethiopia prompted a major wave of refugee resettlement from Ethiopia to the US. At the time, most refugees to the US came from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. American resettlement systems were designed around the needs of these Southeast Asian refugees, and largely failed Ethiopians. For example, many Ethiopian refugees were high-skilled professionals, and resettlement agencies were ill-equipped to find them employment that matched their skill levels. While a handful of Ethiopians, including Teferra, were studying in America prior to 1973, the community as a whole lacked institutions that could ease the transition for newcomers. “The situation called for an organized, systematic response, particularly from Ethiopians who had already established themselves in the country,” said Teferra.

Initially, ECDC’s primary role was to educate service providers about the needs of Ethiopian clients through workshops, trainings, and research. A secondary role was to raise public awareness and advocate for policy change on issues affecting Ethiopians. For example, ECDC waged a successful campaign that convinced the US to halt deportation proceedings against a group of Ethiopian asylum-seekers by educating officials about the risks of persecution facing political dissenters in Ethiopia.

Over time, ECDC’s work shifted from educating agencies about the needs of their African clients to directly meeting those needs. Today, ECDC is one of only 11 VOLAGs who contract with the State Department to provide refugee resettlement services at the national level.

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<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Dr. Tsehay Teferra, Exec. Dir., Eth. Cmty. Dev. Council., Feb. 14, 2012.

VOLAGs like ECDC conduct initial processing of refugees, arrange for sponsorship, and decide where to resettle refugees based on resources in those communities.<sup>92</sup>

After the initial resettlement period, ECDC contracts to provide refugees with transitional services, either through its branch offices in Arlington, VA; Denver, CO; and Las Vegas, NV; or through a network of independent but affiliated agencies in other communities (e.g., Chicago). The services offered by ECDC branches and affiliates vary by location, and include immigration assistance, health education, and employment training. In Arlington, ECDC runs a microenterprise and microfinance program, a business incubator, and adult education programs focused on entrepreneurship.

ECDC maintains a special commitment to Ethiopia and Ethiopians, as evidenced by the agency's name and by the several cultural preservation and community development programs it runs in Ethiopia. However, as a refugee resettlement agency, ECDC serves all refugee populations, not just Africans. Currently, the largest populations of refugees admitted to the US are from Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, and Iraq, so the majority of ECDC refugee clients come from these countries. Among Africans, significant resettlement populations include Somalis, Eritreans, Congolese, Ethiopians, Kenyans, Mauritians, and Nigerians. Similarly, ECDC's social service programs are open to immigrants of other backgrounds, and a large proportion of its clients are non-African immigrants.

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<sup>92</sup> For a description of the role of VOLAGs, *see generally* Martin et al., *supra* n.10, 674-75. For a list of current VOLAGs, *see* US Dep't of Health & Human Serv., Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Voluntary Agencies*, [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/partners/voluntary\\_agencies.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/partners/voluntary_agencies.htm), last visited July 10, 2013.

### iii. Sagal Radio Services

In 1998, the DeKalb County Department of Health and the Atlanta Regional Commission hired Ethiopian immigrant and community worker Hussien Mohamed to survey Somali, Ethiopian, and Bosnian refugee community leaders regarding their health needs.<sup>93</sup> Mohamed found that many refugees were cut off from news, information, and entertainment because they were not proficient in English and (unlike larger immigrant groups, such as Spanish-speakers and Arabic-speakers) had access to few media outlets in their native languages. “People like my mother, they would stare at the TV all day and wouldn’t understand any of it,” said Mohamed.

Mohamed founded Sagal to fill this media vacuum. Leasing airtime from a local radio station, Sagal initially broadcast a one hour Somali-language program each week. Sagal has grown to offer four hours of programming in Somali and four hours in Amharic weekly, as well as broadcasts in English, Swahili, Karen and Bhutanese-Nepali.

Sagal’s offerings are geared toward helping refugee and immigrant listeners adapt to their new environs. Sagal airs programs in which experts and community members discuss the civil rights of immigrants, how to obtain a driver’s license, and challenges that Somali youth face in the Atlanta public schools. Sagal has a particular focus on health education and promotion, and partners with an Emory University program called Health Education via Airwaves for Refugees (HEARMe) to provide culturally-relevant health information to refugees. Sagal is entirely volunteer-driven, and most of the programming that targets particular ethnic communities is created by members of those communities. Sagal also maintains a website,

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<sup>93</sup> Author interview with Hussien Mohamed, Founder and Volunteer Dir., Sagal Radio Serv., Feb. 23, 2012.

<http://www.sagalradio.org>, which archives many of its programs and resource guides, and provides links to other services.

e. Ethnic-Specific Associations (ESAs)

i. National Council of Ghanaian Organizations

The National Council of Ghanaian Organizations (NCOGA) was formed in 1986, in response to the death of a prominent member of the Ghanaian diaspora in the US.<sup>94</sup> NCOGA's purpose is to engage the Ghanaian community on issues affecting it in the US and in Ghana. NCOGA is an umbrella group, consisting of 15 Ghanaian membership organizations defined by shared region of origin or interest (women, veterans, etc.).<sup>95</sup> Although NCOGA is a national organization, its greatest presence is in New York City, home to the largest Ghanaian community in the US,<sup>96</sup> much of it centered in The Bronx.

According to its Secretary-General Rose Quarshie, NCOGA plays a number of roles in the Ghanaian community, including supporting members through the immigration process, mentoring Ghanaian youth and sponsoring academic scholarships, collecting relief funds in response to natural disasters, and advocating on issues. Both NCOGA and its member associations are operated by volunteer board members, and function on a largely ad hoc basis. Rather than maintaining operating budgets or continuing programs, NCOGA and its member associations respond to issues as they arise in the community, and collect funds through project-specific appeals.

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<sup>94</sup> Author interview with Ivy Rose Quarshie, NCOGA Exec. Sec'y-Genl, Feb. 16, 2012.

<sup>95</sup> NCOGA website, <http://www.ncoga.org/association/home>, last visited Apr. 7, 2012. Note: as of July 10, 2013, this website was inactive, and had not replaced it. However, the organization remains active.

<sup>96</sup> Author's analysis of ACS data, *supra* n.7.

f. Multiracial Advocacy Organizations (MAOs)

i. Tenants and Workers United

Tenants and Workers United (TWU) in Alexandria, VA, is one of the oldest and most successful “worker centers” in America. Worker centers are a new and fast-growing type of civic organization that seek to empower low-income and working class immigrants and (less commonly) African-Americans by combining direct service provision, grassroots organizing, and advocacy for policy reform.<sup>97</sup>

TWU, formerly known as the Tenants and Workers Support Committee, emerged from grassroots mobilizations against proposed evictions in 1980 that would have displaced thousands of African-American and Latino families.<sup>98</sup> Since that time, TWU has led a series of campaigns to create resident-controlled housing cooperatives, challenge anti-day-laborer regulations, pass living wage policies, and win expanded school and youth programs. In 2007, TWU helped launch Virginia New Majority (VNM), which organizes low-income voters and voters of color statewide. Liss recently left TWU to run VNM, but remains closely connected to his former organization.

TWU has been relatively successful at organizing low-income African immigrants to participate in a grassroots policy campaign and become dues-paying members of the organization. TWU’s multi-year campaign to reform the Alexandria taxicab industry organized a

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<sup>97</sup> See Janice Fine, Economic Policy Institute, 2 WORKER CENTERS: ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES AT THE EDGE OF THE DREAM (2006).

<sup>98</sup> Author interviews with John Liss, former Exec. Dir., Tenants & Workers United and current Exec. Dir., Va. New Majority, Mar. 2, 2012 and Mar. 3, 2012.

base of African (primarily Ethiopian) and South Asian (primarily Pakistani) immigrant drivers.<sup>99</sup>

As a result, roughly 25-30% of dues-paying TWU members are African and South Asian taxi drivers, while two-thirds are Latino and roughly 5% are African-American.<sup>100</sup>

## ii. Georgia STAND-UP

Over the past 10 years, Georgia STAND-UP (GSU) has established itself as a major player on issues of jobs, economic development, and public services in the Atlanta metropolitan region. GSU has negotiated community benefits from the regional “Beltline” development; convened a policy institute for leaders of grassroots organizations; and launched Georgia Trade-UP, a “pre-apprenticeship” program designed to expand employment of underrepresented minorities in the building and construction trades (GSU is closely affiliated with, but structurally independent from, organized labor).

GSU operates primarily as an institutional coalition. Its STAND-UP Alliance includes over 160 organizations, from major labor unions to small neighborhood associations. The Alliance meets monthly to discuss and take action on civic issues ranging from public education to senior services to redistricting.

Executive Director Deborah Scott has worked in Atlanta and Georgia community organizing, electoral politics, and government for the past 25 years.<sup>101</sup> Scott noted that African

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<sup>99</sup> See *infra*, VI.a.4.

<sup>100</sup> However, a small proportion of the African and South Asian taxi drivers who pay membership dues also participate actively in TWU; see *infra*, VI.a.4. While charging membership dues, currently set at \$25 per year, is an important part of the organization’s model, dues represent less than 5% of the organization’s budget. See Fine, *supra* n.97, 220-23 (discussing the challenge of collecting dues for worker centers and how worker center approaches to membership differ from those of labor unions and other membership organizations).

<sup>101</sup> Author interview with Deborah Scott, Exec. Dir., Ga. STAND-UP, Feb. 17, 2012.

immigrants first began to have a visible presence in Atlanta during the 1970s, when an influx of Nigerian students fleeing Nigeria's civil war came to the historically black higher education institutions of University Center. Today, clusters of African residential communities and businesses dot the region's landscape. Even though GSU has successfully engaged even comparatively small community organizations in its coalitions, Scott has found little interest or capacity in African immigrant communities to engage in Atlanta's regional politics.



## **V. Issues Affecting African Immigrants**

African immigrants are culturally, economically, and socially diverse, and the constituencies that respondents serve are heterogeneous, both within and across metro regions. Nonetheless, as I spoke with respondents about the needs and challenges of the African immigrants they serve, they raised certain issues with remarkable frequency and uniformity.

African immigrants face legal and economic challenges that are common to low-income immigrants in the US, including undocumented immigration status; unemployment and underemployment; educational barriers; and obstacles to accessing services and public benefits. African refugees and the African Diversity Visa population struggle with distinct challenges of cultural adaptation and social integration. Finally, African immigrants confront psychological, behavioral, and health issues, including mental illness, domestic violence, intergenerational conflict, and chronic diseases. I explore these issues in this Part.

### **a. Economic and Legal Challenges**

#### **i. Immigration Status**

African immigrants who lack legal authorization to reside or work in the US face greater barriers to finding employment, accessing public services, obtaining credit, owning businesses, and participating in civic life. It is difficult to estimate what proportion of African immigrants in the US are undocumented, since the undocumented as a whole are notoriously difficult to count. One 2004 report on undocumented immigrants in the US estimated that 57% came from Mexico;

24% from other countries in Latin America; 9% from Asia, 6% from Europe and Canada; and 4%, or 400,000 residents, came from “Africa or other.”<sup>102</sup>

Several respondents raised immigration status as a challenge facing African immigrants. Bekele believed that a high proportion of Harlem’s West African residents were out of status, and that this was “the number one challenge” facing the communities that ASC serves.<sup>103</sup> Quarshie of NCOGA also cited regularizing immigration status as a top challenge of Ghanaian immigrants. Quarshie believed that lack of documentation was a primary reason that many Ghanaian immigrants with high skills and advanced degrees end up driving taxis or working other low-wage jobs in the US. When asked about the most significant differences between refugees and non-refugee immigrants, Betru of RRISA cited the former group’s legal immigration status and relatively easy access to permanent residency and citizenship as a major advantage.

However, not all respondents shared this concern, and the prevalence of undocumented status may vary by country of origin. Teferra believed that most Ethiopian immigrants in the communities that ECDC serves are lawfully present in the US.

Several respondents cited immigration status as a barrier to accessing social services. According to Harris of Tahirih, “There are many programs and services that Africans could access if they knew about them, which are not dependent on immigration status. But they don’t

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<sup>102</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel, Pew Hispanic Center, ESTIMATES OF THE SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UNDOCUMENTED POPULATION 7 (2004), *available at* [http://mns1.morris.com/mns.morris.com/Special\\_Pages/Immigration/Hispanic-Estimate%20of%20Undocumented.pdf](http://mns1.morris.com/mns.morris.com/Special_Pages/Immigration/Hispanic-Estimate%20of%20Undocumented.pdf), last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> NB: I asked agency representatives to speculate, based on their professional experience, about the prevalence of undocumented status in the communities they serve. However, I did not ask for any information about the documentation status of the agency’s clients, nor did agency representatives share any such information with me.

know about them or feel they have the right to access them. There is an assumption that they don't qualify, or fear of coming forward as undocumented.” Quarshie of NCOGA also stressed the need to educate African immigrants about services they are entitled to access regardless of immigration status.

Finally, several respondents, including Betru and respondents from ASC, USA, and NCOGA, cited expanding access to free or low-cost immigration legal services as a top priority for African immigrant communities. Notably, organizations which currently provide legal services or referrals to legal services were likely to see the supply of immigration legal services as inadequate to meet the demand.

#### ii. Employment

Many respondents pointed out the disparity between the high educational attainment of some African immigrants and the low-skill, low-wage jobs they hold. Respondents from ASC, NCOGA, GSU, TWU, and ECDC all described the resentment and frustration that many African immigrants feel because they cannot find work in their profession, either because they are unable to obtain an American credential or license, or because they are rejected by employers. “Even when Africans are high-skill, they are often outcompeted by other immigrant groups,” Teferra said, noting that many are unwilling to take entry-level employment, or are deemed “overqualified” by employers. Respondents also pointed to frustrated professional aspirations and economic insecurity as underlying many of the social, psychological, and behavioral challenges discussed *infra*, V.c.

African immigrants face workplace challenges even after finding employment. Betru noted that when refugees first arrive, agencies usually place them in low-level jobs in

warehouses, retail, or food service, and that it can be difficult to find other work—or better work—after that. Betru also encountered many African immigrant women who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Liss of TWU noted that African immigrants working as taxi drivers in Northern Virginia are classified as independent contractors, and are therefore ineligible for employer-sponsored health insurance. Several respondents cited assistance with job training, job placement, and credentialing and licensing as key unmet needs.

### iii. Education and Skills

As discussed *supra*, III.d.2, African immigrant educational attainment is generally high, but varies significantly by nationality of origin. Some respondents pointed to specific challenges that low-income African immigrants face in accessing education.

The immigrants from Francophone West African countries that ASC and USA serve have relatively low levels of educational attainment. Roughly half of USA’s West African clients present special educational challenges: either they speak only a creole language and do not speak standard French or Arabic, or they are not literate in their first language, or both. Before these clients can be “mainstreamed” into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, they must acquire basic literacy skills. The other half of USA’s West African clientele comes in with skills equivalent to an American high school education. This group can often, with minimal instruction and support, take the General Educational Development Test (GED) in French and earn credentials.

Nocenti of USA noted that demand for USA’s French-language GED preparation program and other adult education programs among West Africans far outstripped the availability of classes. In the wake of state budget cuts, USA has been forced to cut its adult

education offerings from 45 classes to 16. Even while USA has been forced to eliminate its popular French-language GED preparation program, New York State has contemplated ending French-language GED testing because of a perceived lack of demand. “This is frustrating, because if we teach people English and help them get a credential, they don’t need us anymore,” Nocenti said. Similarly, Bekele of ASC identified ESL instruction as a key unmet need in the communities that ASC serves.

Bekele and Betru also noted that many African immigrant parents do not know how to effectively engage with their children’s public schools. Bekele pointed out that African norms of deference and professional respect to schoolteachers may conflict with American expectations that parents take an active role in their children’s education. African immigrant parents who seek to be involved may confront language barriers, lack “insider” knowledge about how the educational system works, or lack the skills to effectively advocate with teachers and administrators. African immigrants need help to understand their rights and responsibilities as parents and define reasonable expectations for their children’s schools. Liss of TWU noted the importance many African immigrants place on obtaining education, and saw an opportunity to engage African immigrants in advocating for improvements to public education.

#### iv. Access to Services and Public Benefits

Public education is not the only service that African immigrants struggle to access. Every respondent raised issues about the ability of African immigrants to access services and public benefits. These concerns tended to be of four types: inadequate benefits, failure to access available services, childcare-specific issues, and challenges of navigating systems.

First, immigrants are often ineligible to access public assistance, or the services that they can access are inadequate. Resettled African refugees qualify for resettlement benefits paid for by the federal government. Since most of these benefits are administered through a patchwork of grants and partnerships with nonprofit, state, and local government agencies, their level and duration varies by specific immigration status, geographic location, and categorical eligibility criteria (e.g., disability and parenthood).<sup>104</sup> In particular, refugee benefits vary widely depending on the county and state in which refugees are resettled, which has caused some observers to criticize a “lottery effect” that leaves some refugees much better or worse off through no fault of their own.<sup>105</sup> According to Mohamed of Sagal, many refugees resettled in Georgia who were unable to become self-sufficient within program time limits relocated to states where benefits were more generous.

Generally speaking, refugees qualify for eight months of cash assistance and medical assistance, and up to five years of supportive social services, and may also qualify for programs such as Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).<sup>106</sup> The eligibility period for cash and medical assistance was shortened recently to eight months from three years.<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, as Kue-Morris of RWN noted, it takes longer for refugees to integrate into American society today than in past decades, due to both demographic changes among refugees and social and economic changes in America,. Thus, assistance to refugees has been cut short at the same time that sustained assistance is urgently needed.

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<sup>104</sup> See Andorra Bruno, Cong. Research Serv., U.S. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT ASSISTANCE 6-15 (Jan. 4, 2011) available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41570.pdf>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>105</sup> *Id.* at 19.

<sup>106</sup> *See id.*

<sup>107</sup> *Id.* at 5.

After years of disregard, policy makers have begun to take notice of the inadequacy of the current resettlement infrastructure and benefits for today's refugees. The Obama Administration recently initiated the first review of the resettlement system in 30 years,<sup>108</sup> and a recent Senate Committee on Foreign Relations report on the system was entitled, pointedly enough, *Abandoned upon Arrival*.<sup>109</sup>

Unlike refugees, DV and other voluntary immigrants do not receive resettlement assistance. Their eligibility for public assistance programs is limited, especially since "welfare reform" in 1996.<sup>110</sup> Several respondents noted with concern the paucity of services and support for DV and other non-refugee African immigrants. According to Harris of Tahirih, voluntary immigrants are less able to access services than refugees, not only because they are ineligible for some services, but also because it is harder for service providers to locate and communicate with them (unlike refugees, who are relatively accessible through resettlement agencies).

Respondents also said that many undocumented immigrants are afraid to access even those services to which they are entitled. These respondents pointed to a need to educate undocumented immigrants about services for which eligibility is independent of status.

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<sup>108</sup> See *id.* at 1; Anna Gorman & Alexandra Zavis, *Federal Review Aims to Improve Refugee System*, L.A. TIMES, June 23, 2010, available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jun/23/nation/la-na-refugee-20100623>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>109</sup> ABANDONED UPON ARRIVAL: IMPLICATIONS FOR REFUGEES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES BURDENED BY A U.S. RESETTLEMENT SYSTEM THAT IS NOT WORKING, REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE S. COMM. ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, 111th Cong. (July 21, 2010), available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-111SPRT57483/pdf/CPRT-111SPRT57483.pdf>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>110</sup> See Ruth Ellen Wasem, Cong. Research Serv., NONCITIZEN ELIGIBILITY FOR FEDERAL PUBLIC ASSISTANCE: POLICY OVERVIEW AND TRENDS 1-7 (Dec. 14, 2010), available at [http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key\\_workplace/818/](http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/818/), last visited July 10, 2013.

Several respondents specifically cited a lack of affordable childcare as one of the greatest barriers to self-sufficiency for African immigrant families. Nocenti of USA noted that program eligibility rules exclude many immigrants from subsidized childcare. Nocenti, Mohamed, and Bekele all said that immigrant parents, including refugees after their initial support services expire, often face a choice between not working and leaving their children unattended. Inadequate childcare is not a challenge limited to African immigrant communities, but it does appear to be an acute challenge within them. Absent comprehensive national childcare reform, there may be an opportunity for practitioners to undertake more modest, targeted initiatives, such as programs to support the development of community-based childcare providers in African immigrant communities.

Finally, several respondents described their clients' struggles with "navigating systems," such as health care providers, public schools, and social services agencies. ASC helps its clients access services by providing them with escorts who act as both translators and advocates. Bekele noted that under New York law, social services and health care providers are required to provide "language line" translation services. However, he said, while these systems often work well in the medical setting, it can be difficult to provide complex or sensitive counseling services through a translator who is patched in on speakerphone. Kue-Morris of RWN and Harris of Tahirih noted that clients often rely heavily on family and community members who are more English-proficient and acculturated to help them navigate systems.

#### b. Social and Cultural Integration

Many respondents described African immigrants as struggling—and sometimes failing—to adapt and integrate into their new society. A common theme raised by respondents was the



psychological toll that economic disappointments, cultural dislocation, and loss of supportive networks take on new African immigrants and the long-term disconnection from American society that can result.

### 1. Voluntary Immigrants

Respondents consistently noted that African refugees and voluntary immigrants face differing challenges of integration. While African voluntary immigrants may be better-off than refugees in some respects, they receive little or no assistance with integration, and struggle in ways similar to their refugee counterparts.

Many respondents described the experience of African immigrants who enter through the DV program as one of disappointment and disillusionment. Teferra of ECDC and Quarshie of NCOGA both noted that African DV immigrants often take on large debts in order to emigrate, thinking that they will be well off. According to Teferra, “The DV population has unrealistic expectations that life is easy in the US. People sell their houses and cut ties with their home countries. They find a lack of opportunity that they can’t understand.” Once they have emigrated, he added, many Africans who entered via DV feel constrained to remain in the US by sunk costs and a lack of appealing options in their home country. This “locking-in” effect may be exacerbated by expectations from family members that African immigrants in the US will support their family financially with remittances, and familial shaming of African immigrants who fail to do so.<sup>111</sup>

Another issue is that, unlike resettled refugees, DV immigrants receive no cultural orientation and support services. Mohamed of Sagal pointed out that while orientation for

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<sup>111</sup> See Arthur, *supra* n.67, 133-34 (discussing financial pressures and familial obligations of African immigrants, particularly those who have naturalized).

resettled refugees is often insufficient, DV immigrants receive no orientation and no supportive services whatsoever. Mohamed of Sagal said that African DV immigrants “are suffering. They get no orientation when they get here. No medical help, no caseworker, nothing.” This lack of supportive services may contribute to profound social and psychological challenges that many African voluntary immigrants, particularly DV immigrants, experience.<sup>112</sup>

Unlike family-sponsored immigrants, DV immigrants may have no family network for emotional and financial support. Quarshie of NCOGA said many African DV immigrants emigrate alone and think they can make it on their own. “They don’t know what they are in for,” she said. Harris of Tahirih said that, because VOLAGs usually resettle refugees from the same country together, resettled refugees “have an instant community,” while no equivalent community exists to support DV immigrants.

## 2. Refugees

Respondents agreed, however, that African refugees also face profound challenges. African refugees are diverse, and include, for example, highly educated and formerly high-ranking political dissidents. However, in general African refugees are likely to have lower education levels, English fluency, and familiarity with American culture and society than voluntary immigrants.<sup>113</sup> The case of the Somali Bantu, discussed *supra*, III.d.ii., dramatically illustrates the struggles of displaced African refugees. Several respondents noted that refugees are likely to have experienced psychological trauma related to armed conflict, persecution, and displacement, which may have long-lasting effects on mental health.<sup>114</sup> Betru also speculated that

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<sup>112</sup> See *infra*, V.c..

<sup>113</sup> See Kent, *supra* n.8, at 11.

<sup>114</sup> See *infra*, V.c.iii.

the insular enclaves which resettled refugees form on arrival may actually cause them to integrate into American society more slowly than voluntary immigrants.

As Betru noted, African immigrants and refugees “are different, but not so different”: while their backgrounds and the roads they travel to get to the US are quite dissimilar, they face common challenges of integration and adaptation when they arrive.

ii. Invisible Sojourners or Marginalized Migrants?

Some respondents suggested that African immigrants have an “outsider” mentality that prevents them from engaging in American civic life, a view shared with some scholars of African immigration. Bekele, Teferra, and Mohamed described African immigrants as being more attuned to current events, culture, and interpersonal relationships in their countries of origin than in the US. Teferra noted that for many in Washington, D.C.’s Ethiopian community, “Physically they are here, but mentally they are still back in Ethiopia. People who have lived here for 40 years will still think and act like they are in Ethiopia.”

Because many African immigrants aspire to return one day to their countries of origin, even those who can afford to invest in their country of residence, such as by buying a home or building a business, may be reluctant to do so. Teferra recalled that when he was a new immigrant himself, a friend taught him the concept of equity: “You can build it up here, and take it home with you. But this is not how most African immigrants think.”

This homeland orientation led one sociologist to label African immigrants “invisible sojourners” and conclude that

...Africans are different from Hispanic and Asian immigrants who vigorously pursue citizenship....Most African immigrants expect to return to Africa to live

there permanently...Becoming culturally and economically integrated is not a major goal.<sup>115</sup>

However, while the outsider status of many African immigrants is apparent, respondents' descriptions give cause to doubt that it is entirely voluntarily. First, it is unclear that refugees, who have been forced to flee their countries of origin, view their move to the US as a temporary "sojourn." Respondents who worked with resettled African refugees did not suggest that their clients were attuned to current events in the countries that they fled, or that they were eager to return to them. To the contrary, respondents were more likely to describe refugees as traumatized and "turned off" from civic life in both their old country and their new one.

Second, several respondents described the psychological, economic, and legal difficulties of returning to Africa permanently for many in the DV immigrant population, and the unlikelihood that most will do so. Respondents' descriptions suggest that, in the case of voluntary immigrants, homeland orientation and disconnection from American civic life may not reflect a plausible plan to return "home." Instead, it may be primarily a psychological strategy for adapting to economic disappointment, cultural dislocation, social exclusion, and the continuing dependence of immigrants on their coethnic social networks for survival.

Finally, it is worth noting that maintaining connection to a homeland and native culture is not necessarily in conflict with active participation in American civic life. Several American immigrant diasporas, including Irish Americans, Cuban Americans, Armenian Americans, and Jewish Americans, have managed to balance cultural adaptation with cultural retention, even

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<sup>115</sup> Arthur, *supra* n.67, 127-28.

over several generations. To date, the African immigrant diaspora has yet to strike this balance successfully.

c. Social, Psychological, Health, and Behavioral Challenges

i. Mental Health

Respondents believed that challenges of adaptation, loss of community, and preexisting trauma lead directly to depression and other mental health conditions for many African immigrants. While there is relatively little systematic research on the mental health needs of African immigrants in America, some studies support this assessment.<sup>116</sup> Several respondents shared anecdotes of African immigrants committing suicide because they were unable to adapt to their new surroundings. According to Quarshie of NCOGA, “They become depressed when they don’t succeed.”<sup>117</sup> While there appears to be little data on how common this phenomenon is, the fact that it is seen as a widespread problem by African immigrant service providers is interesting in its own right.

Mental health challenges among African immigrants may be compounded by social stigma. Mohamed from Sagal Radio noted that mental illness is stigmatized in many African communities, and the mentally ill are shunned and disparaged, which may make mentally ill African immigrants reluctant to seek treatment. Betru noted that many refugees experience

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<sup>116</sup> See Lucia Ann McSpadden, *Ethiopian Refugee Resettlement in the Western United States: Social Context and Psychological Well-Being*, 21 INT’L MIGRATION REV. 796 (1987) (reporting the results of a pilot psychological study of mental health among male Ethiopian refugees, which found above-average levels of stress and depression); Homer Venters & Francesca Gany, *African Immigrant Health*, 13 J. IMMIGRANT MINORITY HEALTH 333, 338-339 (2011) (summarizing international mental health research on African immigrants, and finding, *inter alia*, “high levels of need but low levels of utilization” in some communities).

<sup>117</sup> See also McSpadden, *supra* n. 116, 813-14 (reporting that stress and depression were highest among Ethiopian refugees who were economically insecure and those from high-status or high-education backgrounds employed in low-status positions).

severe trauma prior to emigrating, and that challenges of adjustment may compound their trauma and need for mental health services.<sup>118</sup>

ii. Domestic Violence and Conflict over Gender Roles

Most respondents, including ECDC, RWN, USA, Tahirih, and Betru, pointed to gender inequality and domestic violence as serious issues in African immigrant communities. Teferra of ECDC noted that often African immigrant women find it easier to secure employment than men, which may threaten traditional, patriarchal gender roles. African immigrant men may respond to depression and perceived threats to their identity by lashing out at female partners and children. Attitudes toward domestic violence vary widely within African cultures, but many patriarchal African cultures tolerate or condone abuse, and some African immigrant communities may treat it as a community issue that should be concealed from “outsiders.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> See Venters & Gany, *supra* n. 116, at 338 (noting that African immigrants who experience traumatic displacement prior to arriving in the US may manifest higher rates of mental health problems as they attempt to integrate into educational, social or employment settings).

<sup>119</sup> See Arthur, *supra* n.67, 112-13 (discussing how Americanization can weaken rights of dominance that men exercise in patriarchal African societies, and some African immigrant men “try to retain this dominance through physical and psychological abuse”); Heidi H. Boas, *Understanding Cultural Perspectives on Domestic Violence in African Immigrant Communities* (2009), Am. Bar Ass’n Comm’n on Domestic Violence, [http://www.americanbar.org/newsletter/publications/cdv\\_enewsletter\\_home/vol13\\_expert1.html](http://www.americanbar.org/newsletter/publications/cdv_enewsletter_home/vol13_expert1.html), last visited July 10, 2013 (discussing cultural and legal factors contributing to violence against women in sub-Saharan Africa and among African immigrants in the US); Sheri L’agle, *The African Victim’s Journey: Experiences of African Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence in the United States* (2009), [http://www.americanbar.org/newsletter/publications/cdv\\_enewsletter\\_home/vol13\\_expert2.html](http://www.americanbar.org/newsletter/publications/cdv_enewsletter_home/vol13_expert2.html), last visited July 10, 2013 (describing the legal, economic, and cultural dynamics that make African immigrant women in the US vulnerable to domestic violence).

Betru noted that African immigrant women may also confront abuse in the workplace: many of her low-income clients experienced sexual harassment on the job, but had little idea of their rights to be free of harassment or how to assert them.

Respondents also noted the challenges that patriarchal gender roles can pose to service provision. Even though the African immigrant women entrepreneurs that RWN serves are relatively autonomous and empowered, Kue-Morris said that the women often feel obliged to involve male partners and relatives in key business transactions, even if only as passive observers, out of a sense of deference. Respondents who offer services targeted towards women noted that, except for some small bodies within churches or mosques, most of the African immigrant organizations they came in contact with were led by men. While none encountered hostility to programs targeting women, they speculated whether male leaders were likely to see such services as a high priority.

Liss of TWU found that not only were the Ethiopian and other African taxi drivers overwhelmingly male, but they were unwilling to involve their wives and family members in demonstrations, meetings, and other events: “Only the men participated as wage-earners and patriarchs.” Liss said that most of TWU’s organizing is women-led, and that it is more challenging to organize men to take collective action because they are generally more isolated and less effective at engaging their personal networks.

### iii. Intergenerational Conflict

Respondents pointed to another set of challenges between adult African immigrants and their adolescent and teenage children. Teferra, Mohamed, and Betru all noted that children of African immigrants, whether born in the US or abroad, may “Americanize” more rapidly than

their parents, leading to intergenerational conflicts. Betru said she often saw young African immigrants struggling with being outsiders, and believed that some of their disciplinary and even criminal problems stemmed from attempts to fit in with their American-born peers.<sup>120</sup>

African immigrant parents also struggle with American norms around parenting, which can be sharply different from their own. Not only is acceptance of corporal discipline lower in the US than in many African countries, but many African immigrants have grown up with the idea that disciplining children is a collective responsibility: “If I see your child misbehaving, I should punish him,” as Teferra put it. Teferra also noted that because children adjust faster, they may use the new country’s norms against their parents, e.g., threatening to report parents to the authorities if they spank them. According to Teferra, some African immigrant families have been unjustly separated by child protection agencies over such conflicts in parenting norms.<sup>121</sup> Among other solutions, Teferra believes African immigrants need better access to affordable family law services.

#### iv. Other Health Issues

Finally, multiple respondents pointed to health issues as a key challenge for African immigrants. The agencies that raised this issue, ASC, ECDC, and Sagal, were the agencies that themselves provide health-related services, and thus were likely more tuned in to these concerns.

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<sup>120</sup> See also Arthur, *supra* n.67, 113-17 (discussing intergenerational conflicts in African immigrant families related to cultural identity, achievement, and relationships with other minority groups); Slobodan Djajić, *Assimilation of Immigrants: Implications for Human Capital Accumulation of the Second Generation*, 16 J. POPUL. ECON. 831, 839-41 (2003) (noting that intergenerational differences in the pace of assimilation can have an impact on the ability of immigrant parents to influence the behavior of their children).

<sup>121</sup> See also Arthur, *supra* n.67, 61-62 (describing incidents in which African refugee families came into conflict with child protective services agencies over corporal punishment issues).



Mohamed noted that in their home countries, many African immigrants were never diagnosed with chronic conditions like diabetes, cholesterol, and hypertension because they lacked preventative health care: “People just died, and no one knew why.” In the US, African immigrants may be more likely to have chronic conditions that go undiagnosed and untreated than native-born Americans.<sup>122</sup> Mohamed also said that health problems often result from the failure to adapt traditional African diets to the differing lifestyles and food options available in America.<sup>123</sup>

Research on chronic health issues among African immigrants in America, like research on their mental health, is still sparse and inconclusive.<sup>124</sup> In fact, providers of health-related services pointed to the scarcity of data on African immigrant populations as a key challenge, *see infra*, VII.b.ii.

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<sup>122</sup> *See Venters & Gany, supra* n.116, at 340 (finding that low rates of insurance and acquisition of new risks are dual factors that put African immigrants at particular risk for undiagnosed and untreated chronic disease).

<sup>123</sup> *See id.* at 339 (noting that African immigrants may face considerable barriers in either maintaining a healthy African diet or acquiring healthy diets adapted to their new circumstances).

<sup>124</sup> *See id.* at 333 (reviewing research on African immigrant health, and noting that while African immigrants are generally healthier than African Americans of the same age, they arrive in the U.S. with some unique health problems, and their acquisition of risk factors for chronic diseases is poorly understood).

## **VI. Civic Engagement and Political Influence**

In this Part, I turn from considering the issues and problems affecting African immigrant communities to considering the ability of African immigrants and their organizations to redress these issues through civic engagement and policy advocacy.

Organizations serving African immigrants use a variety of strategies to engage African immigrants in civic life and advocate on their behalf, including domestic policy advocacy, international policy advocacy, constituent education, and grassroots policy campaigns. However, respondents unanimously agree that levels of civic engagement among African immigrants are low, and that the political influence of African immigrants is limited.

African immigrants face numerous barriers to civic engagement and building political influence. Like other immigrant and minority groups, African immigrants are challenged by building panethnic identities and organizations across cultural, socioeconomic, and national origin divisions. The history of immigrant integration in America suggests that such panethnic organizing, despite being difficult, is both necessary and highly likely to develop in response to internal and external forces.

### **a. Models of Civic Engagement and Policy Advocacy**

Nearly all of the groups I spoke with make some effort to influence policies that affect their African immigrant clients and constituents (The sole exception is RWN, which suspended its advocacy program due to budget issues, but aims to resume it in the future). They employ a range of strategies, including domestic policy advocacy, international policy advocacy, constituent education, and grassroots policy campaigns.

#### **i. Domestic Policy Advocacy**

The most typical form of policy engagement among respondents was domestic policy advocacy, in which professional staff experts educate and lobby government decision-makers on issues salient to the organizations and their clients.<sup>125</sup> Tahirih, ASC, and ECDC all pursue this approach, with some variation. While this model of advocacy draws on the familiarity of professional staff with the issues and needs of their constituency, and may engage small numbers of constituent spokespeople, large-scale constituent mobilization is not a primary strategy for these respondents.

Tahirih maintains a Policy Department consisting of two attorneys. The Department advocates on legislation and regulations relating to gender violence, immigration policy, and family law, as well as periodically responding to anti-immigrant legislation advanced by local jurisdictions. Tahirih has also created programs that attempt to engage past and present clients in advocacy around policy issues. However, like many direct service organizations, Tahirih has at times struggled to transition immigrant women from being clients to being activists and leaders. Tahirih has been most successful in client engagement when it has engaged former clients in outreach to other women who may qualify for Tahirih's services.

ASC's policy engagement is managed by its Director of Advocacy and Mobilization. According to Bekele, ASC advocates on a range of issues, including HIV/AIDS, health, immigration, social services, and refugee policy. The Advocacy Director and other ASC staff represent African immigrant perspectives and issues on a range of boards, including UN bodies,

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<sup>125</sup> *See, e.g.,* Jack L. Walker, Jr., 19 MOBILIZING INTEREST GROUPS IN AMERICA: PATRONS, PROFESSIONS, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS (1991), 19-40 (describing the increasing role of professional advocates and nonprofit interest groups in shaping US public policy).

New York City and State commissions, and HIV/AIDS activist groups.<sup>126</sup> Much of ASC's advocacy and education are directed at increasing acceptance of HIV-positive people among African immigrant communities.<sup>127</sup>

As a VOLAG, ECDC plays an important role in shaping Federal refugee resettlement policy. The organization also seeks to educate the public and decision makers about issues affecting African immigrants. As part of this public education strategy, ECDC convenes a national network of service providers to African immigrant communities, and organizes an annual national gathering of these community-based organizations that includes a visit to Capitol Hill.<sup>128</sup>

#### ii. International Policy Advocacy

NCOGA's policy advocacy centers on its close working relationship with the Ghanaian diplomatic mission in the US and the Ghanaian government, and directly involves Ghanaian immigrants. NCOGA regularly organizes forums and community meetings among Ghanaian immigrants when officials from the Ghanaian government, including the President and Vice-President, visit the US.

NCOGA has also advocated around several Ghanaian government policies. NCOGA organized members of the diaspora to give input on legislation that established dual citizenship, thereby enabling naturalized Ghanaians to travel and do business in Ghana more easily. NCOGA has also weighed in on tax and tariff issues that affect import-export businesses between Ghana

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<sup>126</sup> Author interview with Bekele and Nichols, *supra* n.52; AFRICAN SERV. COMM., *Advocacy*, <http://www.africanservices.org/what-we-do/advocacy>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>127</sup> *See id.*

<sup>128</sup> ETHIOPIAN CMTY. DEV. COUNCIL, *What We Do: Engage in Public Education and Advocacy*, [http://www.ecdcus.org/What\\_We\\_Do/Advocacy.html](http://www.ecdcus.org/What_We_Do/Advocacy.html), last visited July 10, 2013.

and the US. Currently, NCOGA is working with the Ghanaian diplomatic mission on issues of “brain gain” or “reverse brain drain,” i.e., encouraging Ghanaian skilled professionals to return to Ghana to live, work, and do business.

To a lesser extent, NCOGA has relations with local elected officials in the Bronx and has weighed in on some local policy issues. For example, it was part of a coalition opposing the proposed eviction of dozens of ethnic grocers, many of them Ghanaian, from the Bronx Terminal Market.<sup>129</sup> However, the Ghanaian government appears to be the primary focus of NCOGA’s policy advocacy.

### iii. Constituent Education

Sagal Radio does not generally advocate for specific policy reforms on behalf of the communities it serves. However, Sagal does play an important role in educating its audience about civic and political issues such as health insurance, public education, and civil rights. Several respondents noted the broad audience and potential political impact of Sagal and analogous radio broadcasts in New York and the D.C. metro area. Sagal and other community radio programs could be influential partners in educating and mobilizing African immigrant communities around policy issues.

### iv. Grassroots Policy Campaigns

In the course of my research, I came across only two examples of policy reform campaigns that directly engaged and mobilized large numbers of African immigrants at the

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<sup>129</sup> See GHANAWEB, *NCOGA Joins In Fight To Save The Bronx Terminal Market*, Apr. 29, 2005, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=80445>, last visited July 10, 2013.

grassroots level. Both cases involved African immigrant taxi drivers seeking to win reforms to their industry.

In recent decades, many American cities have instituted “medallion” systems of taxi regulation in an attempt to limit taxicab quantity and control service quality.<sup>130</sup> In a medallion system, cities require taxi operators to have a permit to enter the local taxi market, and then sell off a limited number of such permits, known as medallions. In markets where the medallion system has been implemented, taxi companies that directly employ cab drivers have been largely replaced by medallion owners. These medallion owners then lease to cab drivers who are deemed “independent contractors” or “independent owner-operators.”<sup>131</sup>

In this system, drivers have little bargaining power and medallion owners are able to set high leasing prices. Cabbies work longer hours, often earn incomes that leave them below minimum wage levels, and are unable to access employer-sponsored health insurance.<sup>132</sup> As in other low-wage sectors with minimal barriers to entry, it is common for recent immigrants to hold the majority of cab driver jobs.<sup>133</sup>

a. Alexandria

TWU led a campaign that directly challenged the medallion system in Northern Virginia. The campaign emerged in the aftermath of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. After the

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<sup>130</sup>See, e.g., Fitzroy Lee, Chief Fin. Officer, Washington, D.C., Memorandum to Neil O. Albert, City Adm’r, Regarding Taxi Medallions, Jan. 4, 2010, *available at* [http://www.scribd.com/doc/59538837/Washington-DC-Department-of-Finance-Memo-Taxicab-Medallion-Systems-Jan-2011\\_mo\\_jan4.pdf](http://www.scribd.com/doc/59538837/Washington-DC-Department-of-Finance-Memo-Taxicab-Medallion-Systems-Jan-2011_mo_jan4.pdf), last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>131</sup>*Id.* at 6.

<sup>132</sup>*Id.*

<sup>133</sup>See, e.g., Michael Luo, *Study of Taxi Drivers Finds More Immigrants at Wheel*, N.Y. TIMES, July 7, 2004, at B5.

attacks, the government closed Washington National Airport (now Ronald Reagan Airport) for an extended period, causing significant economic hardship for taxi drivers based there.

As part of a strategy to expand beyond its traditionally Latino and African-American membership base, TWU initiated a relief project for airport taxi drivers. Over several months, TWU met with 700 drivers and distributed relief funds—raised from the government, AFL-CIO, and private foundations—to roughly 400 of them. Prior to this project, TWU had never engaged in direct distribution of assistance, and it took a different approach than other charities. Consistent with its organizing model, TWU sought to be transparent with drivers about its explicitly political mission, and to engage cabbies in political conversations while distributing funds.

As a result of the visibility and relationships TWU developed through the driver relief project, an Ethiopian immigrant taxi driver sought out the organization on behalf of a group of drivers in Alexandria, VA. Alexandria's taxi medallion system had created a virtual monopoly for one company and poor working conditions for Alexandria cabbies. Drivers approached TWU because they saw the organization's staff as having the capacity to run a campaign to challenge the medallion monopoly and ultimately help drivers negotiate with decision makers.

Alexandria drivers had been struggling for years to change the city's ordinance and break the medallion monopoly, with little effect. "There was a lack of political and strategic analysis among the drivers. They were doing random leafleting actions and strikes with no plan," said Liss. Drivers, who were predominantly Ethiopian and Pakistani, tended to have high levels of education. According to Liss, this made them more likely to have faith in legal and elite lobbying strategies, rather than direct action and political mobilization: "[Drivers] were convinced that in

America the path to success leads through someone's law firm." Before approaching TWU, the drivers had raised and spent \$50,000 to hire a lawyer, the brother of a Congressman, who failed to win any policy changes.

Over the course of a three-year campaign, TWU gradually organized Alexandria cabbies to believe in and exercise their own political power. From 2002 to 2005, drivers worked with TWU to organize marches, demonstrations, lobby visits with City Council members, and community meetings. Despite their initial discomfort with the grassroots action model, African and South Asian immigrant drivers grew into effective grassroots leaders. Liss found that drivers generally held progressive personal politics, that a committee of a dozen drivers could mobilize "a couple hundred people" to actions, and that several drivers became effective public speakers and negotiators.

Based on its experience of organizing resident-owned housing cooperatives, TWU suggested early on in the campaign that drivers establish a driver-owned taxi cooperative. When the Alexandria City Council finally voted in 2005 to change the taxi ordinance and break the monopoly, TWU helped workers launch the Alexandria Union Cab Cooperative. Today, the co-op operates 230 taxis out of Alexandria's fleet of 750.

However, after the success of the taxi campaign, TWU struggled to keep African and South Asian drivers engaged in the organization. While the co-operative's charter required drivers to pay TWU dues, most saw this as another operating expense rather than a form of political expression. Relatively few of TWU's taxi driver members actively participate in the organization's work on a regular basis: out of over 200 taxi driver members, less than 10% are in



the “core member” category, while the proportion for the entire organization ranges from 20%-30%.

One challenge TWU faced was that Ethiopian and Pakistani drivers were geographically dispersed, making it difficult to organize place-based committees and campaigns. Another obstacle was that African and South Asian immigrant drivers felt little sense of identity with, and sought to differentiate themselves from, TWU’s Latino immigrant members, who generally had less education and lower social status: “Drivers would say, ‘We’re not like them, we speak English,’” said Liss.

#### b. Atlanta

In Atlanta, taxi drivers led the only large-scale mobilization of Atlanta’s African immigrants that Scott has encountered. As in other cities, many of Atlanta’s immigrant cab drivers are educated professionals who are unable to work in their chosen profession. Like other drivers working under the medallion system, Atlanta cabbies have little control over their employment conditions, which are determined by taxicab companies, and as independent contractors lack the legal remedies available to direct employees.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Atlanta’s airport cabbies mobilized in response to concerns that the airport dispatching system forced them to wait in long lines to get customers, that facilities for waiting drivers were inadequate, and that they were harassed and mistreated by Atlanta’s (predominantly African-American) cab inspectors. In response to these issues, Atlanta drivers formed the Atlanta Taxicabs Industry Association. During his 1980 mayoral campaign, Maynard Jackson, who employed Scott as a Field Coordinator at the time, met with the association and pledged to support drivers’ issues. When Jackson was elected, he indeed instituted reforms that

reduced airport wait times and improved conditions for drivers. The association also brought a successful lawsuit for \$500,000 against the former Director of the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire, who was subsequently removed from office.<sup>134</sup>

However, much like the drivers organized by TWU, Atlanta drivers demobilized after winning their initial demands. According to the Association's own self-description, "The group is governed by elected officers. Members do not pay dues, and there is no staff or full-time employees...The primary needs of the organization include office space and full-time officers who can work on driver issues. The primary obstacle to organizing drivers is their perception of driving as a part-time job, and subsequent lack of interest in organizing until confronted with serious problems."<sup>135</sup>

Conditions for Atlanta drivers remained challenging over the last decade. In 2001, drivers and company owners jointly lobbied to make more medallions available for purchase, in an effort to spur competition and drive down lease rates.<sup>136</sup> Like Alexandria drivers who had to confront the medallion monopoly, Atlanta drivers were opposed by a local Ethiopian taxi mogul, Solomon Bekele. Bekele, who owned a large share of Atlanta's medallions, was a major political donor to several Atlanta mayors. He used his political access to win appointment to key political bodies and influence policy relating to the taxi and hospitality industries.<sup>137</sup> In 2008, the Association voted to affiliate itself with the Teamsters Union, but it is unclear if Atlanta drivers realized any reforms as a result of this association.

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<sup>134</sup> International Taxi Workers Association, ITWA website, "Driver Organization Information," [http://www.i-twa.org/?page\\_id=250](http://www.i-twa.org/?page_id=250), last visited Mar. 12, 2012.

<sup>135</sup> *Id.*

<sup>136</sup> Janet Frankston, *Atlanta's Taxis / King of the Cabs: A Driving Force, But for What?*, ATLANTA J.-CONST., Dec. 17, 2001, at 1A.

<sup>137</sup> *See id.*

c. Washington, D.C.

While Washington, D.C., has not seen a grassroots policy campaign among taxi drivers like those in Northern Virginia and Atlanta, the D.C. taxicab industry has been a site of political mobilization for African immigrants. However, efforts to raise standards for D.C. cabbies have been derailed by corruption among local elected officials and, even more than in other cities, attempts to corner the market by a small number of African immigrant medallion owners.

Abdulaziz Kamus, the Ethiopian-American Executive Director of the African Resource Center (ARC) in D.C., rose to local prominence as an advocate and political activist for African immigrants.<sup>138</sup> However, Kamus became embroiled in a conspiracy to distribute \$250,000 in bribes to D.C. city officials, in exchange for limiting the number of taxi medallions and permitting a group of Ethiopian- and Eritrean-American businessmen to corner the medallion market. Kamus eventually became an FBI informant in the investigation, pled guilty, and was sentenced to eight months in jail.<sup>139</sup> ARC is now defunct, and it is likely that the high-profile scandal dealt a blow to the ability of D.C.'s African immigrant communities to establish a legitimate voice in local government.

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<sup>138</sup> See, e.g., Megan Greenwell, *Out of Africa, Into Helpful Hands; Community Offers Newcomers Advice and a Voice*, THE WASH. POST, July 27, 2006, at B03 (article praising ARC's efforts to teach African immigrants about their rights, bring issues to the attention of elected officials, and advocate for reform of taxi regulations); Swarns, *supra* n.23 (describing Kamus' efforts to advocate for inclusion of African immigrants in African-American health education efforts); Howard Lesser, *Africans Help Get Out U.S. Vote On Election Day*, VOA NEWS, Nov. 7, 2006 (describing ARC's voter mobilization operations in 2006, including organizing African taxi drivers to provide free rides to the polls on Election Day).

<sup>139</sup> See, e.g., Del Quentin Wilber, *Three Accused of Taxi Bribery: Alleged Leaders Sought Licenses*, THE WASH. POST, Oct. 3, 2009, at B01; Maria Glod, *Guilty Plea Entered in D.C. Taxi Bribe Probe*, THE WASH. POST, Apr. 15, 2010, at B04; Victor Zapana & Del Quentin Wilber, *FBI Tapes Used to Show Two Sides of Ex-Graham Aide*, THE WASH. POST, June 8, 2011, at B05.

## b. Assessing Levels of Civic Engagement and Political Influence

Regardless of which model of civic engagement and policy advocacy respondents they pursue, respondents unanimously agreed that levels of civic engagement in African immigrant communities are very low, and—partly but not exclusively for this reason—African immigrants exercise little influence with government officials.

If Atlanta's African immigrant communities and organizations participated in an organized way in Atlanta government or civic organizations, Scott and STAND UP would encounter them. But Scott has found that African immigrants in Atlanta have virtually no political presence. She noted that in the Atlanta metro region's three major counties, Folsom, Clayton, and DeKalb, not one African immigrant (or child of immigrants) serves as an elected official. "You would think the fact that Atlanta is a black city would facilitate that, but that's not the case. The Latino community is actually much better organized and mobilized." Scott noted that, from the outside, Atlanta's African immigrant communities seem insular and disengaged. Scott has found relatively few formal organizations of African immigrants. Instead, Atlanta's Africans participate in relatively small church- and mosque-based organizations, or in occupational networks which appear tight-knit, such as those of vendors in downtown Atlanta and Ethiopian parking attendants.

Betru, Mohamed of Sagal, and Kue-Morris of RWN all described government officials in DeKalb County, where many African immigrants live, as being aware of African immigrant communities. But they also agreed that officials do not see African immigrants as a political priority. Beyond DeKalb, respondents believe that African immigrant issues are not even on the political radar screen.

According to Kue-Morris, civic awareness and civic engagement among RWN's African refugee clients are low. At most, some are aware of national electoral politics. Kue-Morris has found that most of RWN's African clients are less civically engaged than their Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian counterparts, who are more attuned to US politics that affect their countries of origin. Kue-Morris describes many of RWN's African refugee clients as turned off to politics and government by experiences of political conflict in their homelands: "They just want to provide for themselves and families." However, Kue-Morris noted, African immigrant women entrepreneurs quickly discover that they must deal with government in order to obtain business licenses, permits, etc., and often find the process mysterious and frustrating. Kue-Morris also noted the importance of citizenship to civic engagement, pointing out that their clients who have naturalized are more likely to participate in civic life beyond voting.

According to Mohamed, African immigrants in Atlanta are "learning, but we are too slow in learning about politics." Mohamed said that a small number of Ethiopians in Atlanta are regularly involved in political campaigns. While politicians are glad to accept their help and make appearances in African immigrant communities during election campaigns, this does not result in an ongoing ability for African immigrants to address issues of concern with elected officials between elections. Mohamed does not believe that low levels of citizenship among African immigrants are the primary problem: "We have enough citizens in the community to make a difference, we're just not organized."

Betru raised similar concerns, saying that she had seen few organizations try to go beyond providing African immigrants with services, into organizing and mobilizing them. Betru

also believes that African immigrants are a large enough population to wield political influence in Atlanta, if African immigrant communities were better organized.

African immigrants are similarly marginal in politics and civic life in the Washington, D.C. area. Teferra pointed out that Ethiopian immigrants make up a large part of the population of Arlington, where ECDC is headquartered. Teferra himself is active with Arlington County government and the Democratic Party, sitting on county commissions and participating in the appointments process to public boards and commissions. Yet in 40 years of living in Arlington, Teferra has not seen a single Ethiopian-American run for office in Arlington.

Teferra contrasted African immigrants with Latino and Asian-American communities, which he noted have had a presence in the US for a longer time, have greater numbers, and have built more institutions. Teferra noted that Latino institutions are major national political players: “When La Raza speaks, they are heard.” He cited the appointment of Cecilia Muñoz, former Vice-President of National Council of La Raza, to head the White House Domestic Policy Council as an example of this influence.<sup>140</sup> According to Teferra, the Obama Administration has appointed African immigrants to national policy positions for the first time, including positions in the Office of Refugee Resettlement Services, an advisorship to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Diaspora Affairs, and a key position in the Import-Export Bank. However, Teferra said, this is the first administration to do so, and African immigrant appointees tend to hold less strategic positions than their Latino counterparts. Teferra noted that Asian-American communities have generally been less effective at wielding political influence, but have been

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<sup>140</sup> See Sandra Lilley, *President Obama Names Cecilia Muñoz to Head Domestic Policy*, NBC LATINO, Jan. 10, 2012, <http://nbclatino.tumblr.com/post/15634606810/president-obama-names-cecilia-munoz-to-head-domestic>, last visited July 10, 2013

more successful than African immigrants at exercising influence through business and professional networks.

According to Liss, elected officials in Northern Virginia are slightly more attentive to African immigrants than to TWU's Latino members, who officials generally see as ineligible to vote. But African immigrants are less influential than African Americans, and wield little influence overall. Liss noted that Ethiopians are widely dispersed throughout the D.C. metro area. Since both issues and influence are usually connected to specific local jurisdictions, such as cities or neighborhoods, this significantly dilutes Ethiopian-American clout. Liss saw potential for the Ethiopian-American community to wield greater political influence through its small business networks, which seem relatively well-organized, and through its popular AM radio broadcast. Like Scott, Liss saw African immigrants' ethno-occupational networks as central, noting that Virginia's taxi drivers are impressively connected to co-ethnic drivers in other cities, and that he has received numerous invitations to speak with taxi drivers across the country about TWU's taxi campaign.

Respondents described the political climate for African immigrants as varying across the Washington, D.C. metro region, much as it varies across the Atlanta metro region. Fairfax County, with its large and diverse population, seems to be comparatively liberal and friendly towards immigrants. Harris of Tahirih noted that Ethiopians in Arlington and Alexandria seem relatively engaged in local government, and credits the work of ECDC for facilitating that engagement. Harris described some other counties in the D.C. metro area as having less welcoming political environments toward immigrants and lower levels of African immigrant civic engagement. Harris also linked the dearth of African immigrant organizations in the D.C.

area to the fact that African immigrants who are out of status are unwilling to seek out services or assert their rights. By contrast, Harris noted, undocumented Latino immigrants seem more empowered to assert their rights, partly due to the history and density of organizing in Latino communities and the civic influence of Latino organizations.

Despite their large absolute numbers, African immigrants in New York make up a smaller proportion of the population than in Washington or Atlanta.<sup>141</sup> As might be expected, New York's government officials are less aware of and concerned with African immigrants than their counterparts in Washington and Atlanta. Bekele of ASC has found that local City Council and State Assembly members are aware of the presence of African immigrants in their districts, but this awareness rarely extends to members of Congress. "In the past, candidates have come and spoken to African communities, but once they've learned how few are citizens, they've lost interest," Bekele said. Kim Nichols, Co-Director of ASC, described a recent attempt to engage a candidate for Congress from Harlem about African immigrants, which was met with disinterest. "If you were to do a policy analysis of how many candidates for office from the area have spoken to the African community about its concerns, you'd be shocked by how low the number is," said Nichols.

In addition to low levels of citizenship, ASC's clients have low levels of civic engagement with US politics. This is due in part, Bekele believes, to their low incomes and education levels. However, Bekele has found that ASC's clients are highly engaged with political issues in their countries of origin. Like other respondents, Bekele noted the importance

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<sup>141</sup> *See supra*, Table 2.



of native-language radio broadcasts to the community, and said that the radio programs serving New York's West African communities primarily discuss current events in their homelands.

Respondents from USA agreed that New York's African communities have little "political backing" compared to other immigrant communities. "Hispanics have been fighting for a long time," noted Nieves, "There has to be a movement for Africans to be noticed." Nocenti of USA agreed that African immigrants' minimal political clout hurts their ability to win a share of public resources, though he added that other factors, such as systematic budget cuts, have a greater effect on the level of resources going to immigrant communities overall. While Quarshie said that NCOGA has developed relationships with elected officials, especially local officials in the Bronx where the Ghanaian population is largest, these relationships seem less robust than NCOGA's relations with the Ghanaian government, which it has lobbied and partnered with on policy initiatives.

I did not make a systematic study of African immigrants seeking political office. However, to my knowledge, no first- or second-generation African immigrant has been elected to any federal office, nor to any local office in the New York, D.C., or Atlanta metro areas. Even examples of African immigrants running for such offices are rare and recent. Arkan Haile, an Eritrean-American, ran for the At-Large City Council seat in Washington, D.C. in April 2011, and lost by a large margin.<sup>142</sup> In Maine, where large numbers of Somali Bantu have settled, two Somali university students ran in primary races—one for a Democratic nomination, and one as a

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<sup>142</sup> See TADIAS MAGAZINE, *Meet Arkan Haile: A Candidate for DC City Council Seat*, Feb. 16, 2011, <http://www.tadius.com/02/16/2011/meet-arkan-haile-candidate-for-dc-city-council-seat/>, last visited July 10, 2013; *Official Results, April 26, 2011 Special Election*, D.C. BOARD OF ELECTIONS & ETHICS, [http://www.dcboee.us/2011\\_special/results.asp](http://www.dcboee.us/2011_special/results.asp), last visited July 10, 2013.

Republican—for the State Legislature.<sup>143</sup> The pair, Mohammed Dini and Badr Sharif, lost by large margins, despite the small number of votes cast.<sup>144</sup>

c. Barriers to Civic Engagement and Political Influence

Why are levels of civic engagement and political influence low among African immigrants? Respondents offered numerous possible explanations. Many of them have already been discussed *supra*, including:

- Many African immigrants are not US citizens, and lack of citizenship makes them less invested in civic and political life;<sup>145</sup>
- African immigrants may adopt—voluntarily or not—a “sojourner” mentality, and orient themselves culturally and politically toward their country of origin rather than the US;<sup>146</sup>
- Some African immigrants are undocumented, and are afraid to be visible to the government because of their status;<sup>147</sup>
- Many African immigrants struggle with poverty and economic instability,<sup>148</sup> and like many low-income people, place relatively low priority on civic participation and political engagement;
- Due to their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, African immigrants have limited prior experience with collective political action or American-style political culture;<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Kate Bucklin, *Somali Immigrants Eye Portland Legislative Seats*, THE FORECASTER, Apr. 20, 2010, <http://www.theforecaster.net/node/54789>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>144</sup> *Election Results 2010-2011*, STATE OF MAINE, DEP’T OF THE SEC’Y OF STATE, <http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/prior10-11.htm>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>145</sup> See also Arthur, *supra* n.35, 126-40 (discussing the causes of low rates of naturalization among African immigrants, even for those who are eligible, and the consequences for African immigrants’ sense of “citizenship.”).

<sup>146</sup> See *supra*, V.b.iii.; Arthur, *supra* n.67, 90-91.

<sup>147</sup> See *supra*, V.a.i.

<sup>148</sup> See *supra*, III.d.iii.

- Many African immigrants come from non-democratic or repressive states, and their negative experiences with politics and government in Africa make them reluctant to participate in American civic and political life;<sup>150</sup>
- African immigrants are primarily concerned with economic advancement and accumulating wealth in America which they can take back to Africa, and have little investment in changing an American society which they do not perceive themselves as belonging to;<sup>151</sup>
- African immigrants face language barriers to civic participation, and have fewer native-language media outlets than do larger immigrant groups;<sup>152</sup>
- African immigrant communities are not only relatively small, but they are also geographically dispersed, which dilutes their political power;<sup>153</sup>
- African immigrant communities are relatively new, and have fewer civic institutions created by prior generations of immigrants than do other immigrant communities;<sup>154</sup> and
- While many organizations are providing services to African immigrants, relatively few are systematically working to engage and develop African immigrants in civic and political life.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> See *supra*, VI.a.iv.a. (discussing the challenges of grassroots organizing among African taxi drivers).

<sup>150</sup> See *supra*, VI.b. (discussing this dynamic among clients of RWN); Arthur, *supra* n.67, 88-90.

<sup>151</sup> See Arthur, *supra* n.67, 90-91; 128-29.

<sup>152</sup> See *supra*, IV.d.iii (discussing Sagal Radio Services, and the shortage of media outlets in African languages).

<sup>153</sup> See *supra*, VI.a.iv.a (discussing the dispersion of African taxi drivers in Northern Virginia as a challenge to organizing and exercising political influence).

<sup>154</sup> See *supra*, VI.b. (discussing the relative paucity of organizations in African immigrant communities compared to Latino and Asian-American communities).

<sup>155</sup> See *supra*, VI.b.

Many of respondents' hypotheses are plausible and supported by anecdotal evidence. They invite future empirical research by scholars, as well as experimentation by organizations seeking to overcome the challenges and engage African immigrants in civic and political life.

i. The Challenge of Panethnic Collective Action

One hypothesis commonly voiced by respondents deserves further exploration. Nearly every respondent said that a significant barrier to political influence is that most African immigrants do not organize or mobilize as "Africans" or "African immigrants." As Bekele observed, "If there are organizations in the African community, they are language- and country-specific. It's the Senegalese immigrant community, or the Malian immigrant community, not the African immigrant community. The community doesn't speak with one voice." Nearly every respondent pointed to the lack of shared identity or umbrella organizations as diluting the political power of African immigrants,<sup>156</sup> particularly given that the numbers of African immigrants are low and their communities are geographically dispersed.

Teferra noted that political decision makers sometimes respond to demands from African immigrant groups by saying that there are too many differing voices, and that they cannot be expected to respond to the needs of the African immigrant "community" if that community cannot agree on its priorities. "While people in power take this as a convenient excuse not to do anything [for African immigrants], it is also a reality," Teferra said. "My hope is the African community will wake up one day and say. 'We are Africans.'"

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<sup>156</sup> See also Arthur, *supra* n.67, 71-72 (noting that while many African immigrants recognize the necessity of pursuing a pan-African identity, organizational problems often ensue when "an attempt is made to generalize and connect the immigrants to a common tie of Africanness.").

How likely is that hope to be achieved? Are African immigrants in America likely to identify and organize as a *panethnicity*—e.g., as Africans, African immigrants, or African-Americans—rather than by *ethnonationality*—as Ethiopians, Somalis, or Nigerians—or *microethnicity*—Oromos, Somali Bantus, or Igbos? Certainly the foregoing demographic analysis and information from respondents demonstrate that African immigrants are a diverse group socially, economically, historically, and culturally. Critics often respond to the idea of African immigrant collective action with the geographic truism that “Africa is a continent, not a country”—the implication of which is that African immigrants supposedly share little in common besides a continent of origin.

But it is not self-evident that national origin provides a more natural or stable identity for immigrants in America than does a continent of origin. After all, Asia is also a continent, and Latin America encompasses more than one continent. Yet Asian-American and Latino organizations have proliferated since the Civil Rights movement, and “Asian-American” and “Latino” have proved to be powerful organizing identities. What can the development of other panethnic identities and communities tell us about whether, how, and to what effect African immigrants might organize panethnically?

The study of panethnicity in America is relatively new. I was unable to identify scholars who have examined panethnicity among African immigrants in any depth. However, some scholars have considered panethnicity among Latinos, Asian-Americans, and American Indians,

or as a general phenomenon.<sup>157</sup> Most of these analyses are historical case studies of particular communities or ethnicities; statistical analyses are rare.

However, Okamoto has empirically tested theories about panethnicity among Asian-Americans, in ways that may be useful for consideration of African immigrants in the US.<sup>158</sup>

Okamoto notes that Asians in America first organized along microethnic lines: Chinese Americans formed district, province, and family associations; Japanese Americans organized along prefectural lines, and Filipino Americans, Korean Americans, and Indian Americans organized by province or by religion.<sup>159</sup> However, nationality-based organizations emerged soon after, often in response to acts of racist exclusion or violence by white majorities.<sup>160</sup>

Panethnic Asian organizations did not develop until much later, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, beginning with university campuses.<sup>161</sup> However, once pan-Asian-American organizations emerged, they rapidly spread, in part because such organizations gave Asian-Americans increased clout with policy makers and funders as compared to ethnonational

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<sup>157</sup> See Yen Le Espiritu, *ASIAN AMERICAN PANETHNICITY: BRIDGING INSTITUTIONS AND IDENTITIES* (1992); Yen Le Espiritu & Paul Ong, *Class Constraints on Racial Solidarity among Asian-Americans*, in *THE NEW ASIAN IMMIGRATION IN LOS ANGELES AND GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING* 295 (Paul Ong et al. eds., 1994); Ian F. Haney López, *RACISM ON TRIAL: THE CHICANO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE* (2003); Felix M. Padilla, *LATINO ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS: THE CASE OF MEXICAN AMERICANS AND PUERTO RICANS IN CHICAGO* (1985); Richard W. Trottier, *Charters of Panethnic Identity: Indigenous American Indians and Immigrant Asian Americans*, in *ETHNIC CHANGE* 271 (Charles F. Keyes ed., 1981); Stephen Cornell, *THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE: AMERICAN INDIAN POLITICAL RESURGENCE* 106-28 (1988); Dina G. Okamoto, *Toward a Theory of Panethnicity: Explaining Asian American Collective Action*, 68 *AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV.* 811 (2003); Dina G. Okamoto, *Institutional Panethnicity: Boundary Formation in Asian-American Organizing*, 85 *SOC. FORCES* 1 (2006).

<sup>158</sup> Okamoto (2006), *supra* n.157, 3-4.

<sup>159</sup> *Id.*; see also Espiritu (1992), *supra* n.157, at 19.

<sup>160</sup> Okamoto (2006), *supra* n.157, at 4.

<sup>161</sup> *Id.*, 4-5; see also Espiritu (1992), *supra* n.157, 31-49.

organizations.<sup>162</sup> While pan-Asian-American organizing was useful, it was also made difficult by differences of culture and class, historical enmities, and nationality-based conflicts over resources.<sup>163</sup>

As Okamoto and others have described, there are two primary sociological theories of how and why immigrants and racial minorities in America begin to identify along panethnic lines: *competition theory* and *cultural division of labor theory*.<sup>164</sup> These two schools reflect broader sociological theories about ethnic identity and collective action.<sup>165</sup>

*Competition theory* suggests that ethnic identities are created or strengthened when social and economic changes bring members of differing ethnic groups into contact, creating competition for scarce resources, such as jobs and public benefits.<sup>166</sup> Competition theory focuses primarily on *inter-group* forces. The idea that government decisions to allocate resources to one “race” might prompt another group to organize itself along “racial” lines is an example of competition theory, as is a growth in panethnic organizing in response to racist hate crimes.<sup>167</sup>

By contrast, *cultural division of labor theory* focuses on forces producing *intra-group* unity. According to this theory, when people who share common cultural markers are segregated into the same occupational sectors, they develop a common social identity based on ethnicity

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<sup>162</sup> Okamoto (2006), *supra* n.157.

<sup>163</sup> *Id.* at 5; see also Espiritu, *supra* n.157, 82-111.

<sup>164</sup> Okamoto (2003), *supra* n. 157, 813-15.

<sup>165</sup> See François Nielsen, *Toward a Theory of Ethnic Solidarity in Modern Societies*, 50 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 133 (1985).

<sup>166</sup> Okamoto (2003), *supra* n.157, 813-14.

<sup>167</sup> *Id.* at 812.

instead of class. This identity is based on their similar work experiences, similar structural positions, and daily interaction with other group members.<sup>168</sup>

Okamoto tested these theories as they apply to panethnic organizing among Asian Americans, and found that neither adequately explained why Asian Americans organize panethnically, instead of by nationality<sup>169</sup> or microethnicity. Neither growing competition with other panethnic groups nor occupational segregation alongside other Asians correlated with increased panethnic collective action.<sup>170</sup> However, Okamoto did find that when there were significant disparities between different Asian national origin groups (e.g., when one national origin group was more likely to experience occupational segregation than another) then panethnic collective action among Asian Americans was less likely. This finding would tend to support cultural division of labor theory.<sup>171</sup>

Another, possibly counterintuitive set of findings has potential implications for African immigrant collective action. Okamoto found that, *contra* expectations, Asian-American ethnic heterogeneity did not appear to depress pan-Asian-American collective action. Rather, a growth in Asian-American ethnic diversity—such as new populations of Filipino Americans and Korean Americans immigrating into a mostly Chinese-American community—actually correlated with

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<sup>168</sup> *Id.*, 814-15.

<sup>169</sup> Okamoto uses the term “ethnicity” to refer to this intermediate layer of identification—e.g., Chinese-American, Vietnamese-American, etc. I use here the terms panethnic, ethnonational, and microethnic, which I find more descriptive and distinct from one another.

<sup>170</sup> *Id.*, 827-31. *See also* Okamoto (2006), *supra* n.157, at 7 (“...the theory of panethnicity posits that the occupational segregation of Asian ethnic subgroups from one another, not simply the segregation of Asians as a group, will affect collective action outcomes.”), 18 (“...when Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese and Koreans are occupationally segregated in low-paying occupations vis-a-vis other Asians, this dampens the likelihood of panethnic organizational formation.”).

<sup>171</sup> *See* Okamoto (2003), *supra* n.157, at 831.



*increased* panethnic collective action—up to a point.<sup>172</sup> However, beyond that threshold, increased diversity did depress collective action.<sup>173</sup>

Okamoto also found that panethnic organization and collective action detracted from ethnonational organization and collective action over the short term, but not over the longer term. When Asian communities first mobilize along panethnic lines, it is associated with less mobilization by ethnonationality.<sup>174</sup> Okamoto's data show that most panethnic collective action is organized through ethnonational organizations, not through panethnic organizations. When ethnonational organizations divert scarce resources into panethnic collective action, it depresses ethnonational collective action.<sup>175</sup>

However, over time, Asian-Americans created new panethnic organizations. Once communities organized and mobilized panethnically, they were more likely to organize panethnically in the future.<sup>176</sup> Okamoto theorizes that as panethnic organization occurs, a division of labor emerges between nationality-based and panethnic organizations, as each respond to different needs and issues. This produces a net increase in both ethnic *and* panethnic

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<sup>172</sup> *Id.* at 829, 831. *See also* Okamoto (2006), *supra* n.157, at 18 (“...as the percentage of non-Japanese Asian in-migrants [sic] increases, this raises the likelihood of panethnic organizational formation. Competition theory posited that when ethnically-distinct others enter the metropolitan area, there will be competition for scarce resources, leading to less panethnic activity since each ethnic group is collectively working to improve or maintain its own share of the resources. This claim is not supported here. Instead, an increase in Asian in-migrants leads to new panethnic organizational activity, which is likely due to the need of new Asian ethnic populations.”).

<sup>173</sup> Okamoto (2003), *supra* n.157, at 631.

<sup>174</sup> *Id.* at 832.

<sup>175</sup> *Id.*, 832-33.

<sup>176</sup> *Id.*, 831-32.

collective action.<sup>177</sup> As Okamoto notes, this supports “the idea that [ethnic] identities are layered, not competitive and exclusive.”<sup>178</sup>

Obviously, Okamoto’s findings relating to Asian Americans cannot be conclusively applied to African immigrants. However, her research can suggest a set of predictions and hypotheses about how, when, and to what effect African immigrants might organize panethnically. These include:

- Like other immigrant groups in America, African immigrants are likely to shift over time from organizing and mobilizing on the basis of microethnicity, to ethnonationality, and eventually to panethnicity. However, this does not mean that they will abandon other “layers” of ethnic identification.
- African immigrants are most likely to identify, organize, and mobilize panethnically where they are segregated into the same occupations as each other. Building panethnic organizations will be most challenging when different African immigrant nationalities occupy very different occupational niches.
- Contrary to conventional wisdom, the ethnic diversity of African immigrants in the US need not depress panethnic collective action by African immigrants. Indeed, it may promote such unity, at least up to a certain level of diversity.
- When African immigrants begin to mobilize panethnically, the initial base of mobilization will be nationality-based organizations. As a result, collective action along ethnonational lines will initially be depressed as panethnic collective action grows.

However, as new panethnic organizations are created, and a division of labor emerges

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<sup>177</sup> *Id.* at 833.

<sup>178</sup> *Id.* at 835.

between ethnonational and panethnic organizations, there will be a net increase in both ethnonational *and* panethnic mobilization.

- As this process continues, African immigrants' identities will grow more layered and variable, and they will organize, mobilize, and identify differently according to circumstances.

As with the hypotheses about other barriers to civic participation by African immigrants, these predictions can and should be put to the test both by scholars and by African immigrant community organizations.

## VII. Challenges of Serving African Immigrant Communities

In this Part, I consider in greater depth the challenges that organizations face in serving African immigrant communities. I describe four variables that affect the ability of organizations to serve African immigrant clients—organizational resources, responsiveness, commitment, and cultural competency—and describe how they differ among the four types of organizations—multiracial service providers, African-focused service providers, ethnic-specific associations, and multiracial advocacy organizations. Finally, I describe key challenges that affect all organizations serving African immigrants, irrespective of their model: limited funding focused on African immigrant communities, lack of research on and needs assessment of African immigrants, and region-specific political and social challenges.

### a. Assets and Challenges Specific to Organizational Models

Based on respondents' assessments and my own observations, each of the four organizational models—multiracial service providers (MSPs), African-focused service providers (ASPs), ethnic-specific associations (ESAs) and multiracial advocacy organizations (MAOs)—have differing strengths and challenges in meeting the needs of African immigrants.

#### i. Four Organizational Qualities

As respondents described their own organizations and other organizations in their fields, four qualities emerged that defined an organization's ability to meet the needs of African immigrants: *resources*, *responsiveness*, *commitment* and *cultural competency*.

“Organizational resources” are those forms of cultural capital and institutional expertise, often associated with professionalized nonprofit organizations, which enhance an organization's ability to fulfill its mission. Foremost among them is the capacity to raise funds from

government, private foundations, and major donors. Closely related are professional nonprofit management practices that are often required or expected by government, private foundations, and major donors. These include having articulated mission statements, strategic plans, programs that are internally coherent and consistent over time, measurements of impact, and employee management policies.<sup>179</sup> Other types of organizational resources may be specific to an organization's model. Among service providers, key resources might include efficient service delivery and adeptness at partnering with other agencies. Among advocates, sophistication about organizing members, waging campaigns, and shaping policy might be crucial.

“Responsiveness” is the ability of an organization to identify the unmet needs of its constituents, respond to them, and mobilize resources to meet these needs. Responsiveness requires creating new initiatives, campaigns, programs, service offerings, and even new organizations as issues surface. For an organization to be responsive, it must have a close connection to its constituency that allows it to detect emerging needs and opportunities; an entrepreneurial ability to identify and secure resources, including from non-traditional sources; and the time, energy, and risk tolerance to experiment with launching new ventures.

“Commitment” refers to the centrality of African immigrants to the organization's mission. Does the organization prioritize serving African immigrants specifically? Does it do so even if it might serve other populations more easily or advantageously?

Finally, “cultural competency” is the familiar idea that an organization needs to understand its constituents' cultures in order to serve them effectively. Specific areas of cultural

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<sup>179</sup> See also Espiritu (1992), *supra* n.157, 86-90 (discussing how these capacities determine whether agencies serving Asian American immigrants can raise funding for their programs).

competency might include understanding of languages, communication styles, values and belief systems, and social and interpersonal structures (family structures, ethnic groups, etc.).<sup>180</sup>

These four qualities vary across the four types of organizations, with certain organizational types being more conducive to certain qualities and less conducive to others. This variation should be seen as reflecting aptitudes and challenges inherent in organizational models, rather than any organizational shortcomings. As previously noted, I was strongly impressed by respondents’ thoughtfulness, dedication, and professionalism. However, any organizational model requires trade-offs of priorities, funding, expertise, and organizational culture. Because different types of organizations have different strengths and challenges, effectively serving African immigrants will require a diversity of organizations pursuing a diversity of strategies.<sup>181</sup>

**TABLE 8: Strengths & Challenges of the Four Organizational Models**

	Resources	Responsiveness	Commitment	Cultural Competency
MSPs	Higher	Lower	Lower	Lower
ASPs	Lower	Lower	Higher	Higher
ESAs	Lower	Higher	Higher	Higher
MAOs	Higher	Higher	Lower	Lower

<sup>180</sup> See, e.g., Mitchell F. Rice, *Promoting Cultural Competency in Public Administration and Public Service Delivery: Utilizing Self-Assessment Tools and Performance Measures*, 13 J. PUB. AFFAIRS EDUC. 41 (2007) (discussing various definitions and dimensions of cultural competency, and their significance for delivery of public services).

<sup>181</sup> See also King & Pomper, *supra* n.4, 176-77 (discussing how competition between two national organizations of Armenian-Americans, each pursuing distinct strategies, contributed to the political influence of Armenian-Americans by mobilizing a larger share of community resources than would have been possible under an organizational “monopoly” ).

## ii. Organizational Resources

As might be expected, among the four types of organizations, MSPs command the greatest resources. MSPs have the capacity to meet the rigorous proposal and reporting standards imposed by large government and foundation funders, and generally have larger budgets than the other types of organizations. Some large MSPs like USA have been in operation for over a century and have developed considerable efficiency and expertise in service delivery. Many benefit financially and operationally from their affiliation with national organizational networks. Independent agencies and specialized MSPs like Tahirih and RWN tend to be smaller and face greater resource constraints; and, of course, all nonprofit service providers operate within a context of insufficient resources. Despite this, MSPs are the best resourced as a group.

The two MAOs I profiled also have considerable organizational resources, including fundraising capacity, well-developed organizational models, and political sophistication. Like most advocacy-oriented nonprofits, their budgets are significantly smaller than their direct-service counterparts. However, this is a somewhat inapposite comparison, given the fundamentally different nature of their services; among other factors, direct-service agencies may “pass through” much of their funding to clients.

Two of the African-focused service providers I interviewed, ASC and ECDC, command resources comparable to a large multi-racial service provider. However, they appear to be exceptional among ASPs. Over the course of several decades, their sophisticated top leadership has built them into major institutions through sheer diligence. I sought out other nonprofit service agencies around the country that specifically serve African immigrants and refugees, consulting nonprofit directories, searching Guidestar archives of nonprofit tax filings, and

conducting general internet searches. I turned up only a handful of examples. Most of these had no reported income, and none had budgets over \$500,000.

I also encountered high-profile incidents in which ASPs folded due to alleged mismanagement or corruption. As discussed *supra*, VI.a.iv., the African Resource Center in Washington, D.C., achieved significant political stature and publicity in the D.C. area before the organization's Executive Director became embroiled in a criminal bribery scandal involving D.C. City Council officials. Like Kamus, Ethiopian-Eritrean immigrant Nikki Tesfai parlayed her personal charisma and status as a spokesperson for needy African immigrant communities into laudatory media coverage, political access, and a successful African immigrant agency in Los Angeles.<sup>182</sup> Also like Kamus, Tesfai was embroiled in a scandal; accused of misappropriating agency funds to support a lavish personal lifestyle, financial mismanagement, falsifying her agency's accomplishments, and lying about her own credentials.<sup>183</sup> Eventually, Tesfai pleaded no contest to felony charges of fraud and conspiracy.<sup>184</sup> While it was less

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<sup>182</sup> See Irene Borger, *Phenomenal Woman: The Escape Artist*, O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINE, Jan. 2002, available at <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Phenomenal-Woman-Nikki-Tesfai>, last visited July 10, 2013; Sharon Boorstin, *Providing Save [sic] Haven*, JEWISH JOURNAL, Apr. 4, 2002, available at [http://www.jewishjournal.com/community/article/providing\\_save\\_haven\\_20020405](http://www.jewishjournal.com/community/article/providing_save_haven_20020405); Stephen Gregory, 'We Are Not Going to Die Out' : Budget Cuts and Policy Changes Threaten the African Community Resource Center, One of the Few Government-Subsidized Support Organizations That Place Their Focus Primarily on African Refugees, L.A. TIMES, July 09, 1995.

<sup>183</sup> Jeffrey Anderson, *Is the Saint of South L.A. for Real?*, L.A.WEEKLY, May 20, 2004, available at <http://www.laweekly.com/2004-05-20/news/is-the-saint-of-south-l-a-for-real/>, last visited July 10, 2013; Jeffrey Anderson, *Seeking Refuge*, L.A.WEEKLY, May 31, 2006, available at <http://www.laweekly.com/2006-06-01/news/seeking-refuge/>, last visited July 10, 2013; Richard Winton, *Refugee Agency Founder Held*, L.A. TIMES, Sep. 22, 2007, available at <http://www.laweekly.com/2006-06-01/news/seeking-refuge/>, last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>184</sup> Press release, L.A. County Dist. Attorney, Founder of Nonprofit Refugee Center Pleads in Conspiracy, Fraud Case (Oct. 17, 2011), available at <http://da.lacounty.gov/mr/archive/2011/101711a.htm>, last visited July 10, 2013.



sensational, the African Community and Refugee Center (ACRC) in Atlanta also folded amid a scandal. ACRC, a local affiliate of ECDC, was scrutinized for failing to provide refugees (especially Somalis) with the services to which they were legally entitled, leaving the refugees destitute. ACRC was trusted by ECDC, and is now defunct.<sup>185</sup>

Mismanagement by a handful of high-profile ASPs likely makes the challenging funding environment for ASPs even more difficult. Since ACRC's closure, the only ASP currently serving Atlanta's African immigrants is Sagal, which offers a much more specialized service. Despite the popularity and reach of its radio programs, Sagal faces major resource challenges. Sagal has been able to stay operational largely due to critical support from Emory University's Office of University-Community Partnerships, which has helped Sagal secure 501(c)(3) status, publicize its programs, and obtain a steady stream of interns who perform crucial staff functions. Emory also hired Mohamed to run HEARMe, which has given him the occupational stability and flexibility to build Sagal. Mohamed has raised funds for Sagal from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and local government. However, this support has only been sufficient to cover Sagal's operational costs, not to afford full-time staff or scale up to meet community demand.

Mohamed attributes Sagal's challenges of capacity to several factors. Some are specific to Sagal's model: funders see radio programs as commercial enterprises, rather than community services. If such a bias exists among funders, it seems counterproductive: Sagal's radio programs and website provide the same kind of information and referral services as many community-based organizations, and may reach a broader audience with a greater depth of information than

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<sup>185</sup> Records I obtained from the Guidestar website indicate that ACRC's tax-exempt status was revoked by the Internal Revenue Service.

most CBOs are capable of. Other challenges are likely to be shared by ASPs regardless of their specific services. Mohamed has found that many foundations and government agencies are reluctant to fund relatively small organizations like Sagal, and most small agencies cannot afford expert grant writers to market their work. Finally, Mohamed notes that because African immigrant and refugee communities are not highly visible and vocal, they are a lower priority for funders.<sup>186</sup>

Respondents' descriptions make it clear that ethnic-specific associations experience the greatest resource challenges. Liss of TWU described the D.C. area's landscape of African organizations, which he has also interacted with in his role as a local community foundation board member, as consisting primarily of "micro-organizations." Liss described most of these groups as unincorporated, lacking well-developed political analyses, and prone to "chasing funding," i.e., developing programs in an opportunistic rather than a strategic fashion. Harris of Tahirih noted that most D.C.-area ESAs do not provide continuing, organized services or programs. Rather, they respond on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis to individuals in crisis. Among the subset of organizations that are incorporated and raise funds, Harris, like Liss, has found that many shift the focuses of their organizations and start or end programs frequently based on funding. Scott of GSU similarly assessed Atlanta's ESAs as being few in number, small, and reactive: "They only seem to mobilize when something bad happens, like a death in the community."

Service provider respondents described the challenges of trying to partner with ESAs. Kue-Morris and other respondents have found that, even when they offer free services that could

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<sup>186</sup> See also Espiritu (1992), *supra* n.157, 86-90 (discussing similar dynamics among agencies serving Asian-American immigrants).

be of value to African immigrant women, ESAs may not have the capacity to connect their members to these services. Contacting and getting a response from ESAs can be a slow and difficult process, depending on how well-organized and well-established the organizations are. Given RWN's limited resources and the disappointing results, RWN often foregoes outreach of this type. Most RWN clients, like most of Tahirih's clients, find the organization through recommendations from former clients, rather than through inter-organization referrals.

NCOGA appears to be one of the largest, best-organized, and best-resourced ESAs of African immigrants. Like other ESAs, however, NCOGA's work is essentially reactive rather than programmatic: "We work on issues as they come up in the community," said Quarshie. NCOGA has no paid staff and is run by volunteer officers, as are its member associations. The council has no operating budget, but collects funds for its initiatives by organizing collections.

While NCOGA has successfully maintained itself despite minimal resources, most ESAs do not appear as functional. As volunteer-driven endeavors, they are prone to decline caused by turnover among leadership, infighting, and simple inertia. While I found dozens of references to particular ESAs, most proved impossible to contact and many seemed to have gone out of existence.

The resource challenges of ESAs and most ASPs are not unique to African immigrant communities. Espiritu describes how professionalization of social welfare programs makes it difficult for many agencies serving Asian immigrant communities to access government funding, especially if they are small, "ethnic-specific," or do not have a track record of programs.<sup>187</sup>

### iii. Responsiveness

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<sup>187</sup> Espiritu (1992), *supra* n.157, 86-90.

Many of the greatest challenges of ESAs are also their greatest strengths. The very qualities that cause respondents to characterize most ESAs as ad hoc, opportunistic, and unable to attract outside resources also make ESAs flexible, responsive, and skillful at mobilizing resources from within the community.

According to Mohamed of Sagal, African immigrant community networks, whether organized through ESAs or even more informally, play a critical role in the survival of low-income African immigrants and refugees in Atlanta. Informal African immigrant community networks frequently mobilize in response to their members' personal and financial crises: they may take up collections to pay rent when a community member faces eviction, or buy a bus ticket when a member is forced to relocate to another city. NCOGA and its member associations regularly play this role in pooling and mobilizing the community's resources. Despite the fact that many Ghanaian immigrants are low-income, NCOGA collects funds not only to assist members of the Ghanaian community, but to provide charitable donations to other communities in crisis, such as survivors of the Haitian earthquake.

In this respect, ESAs fall in a long tradition of "reciprocal relief" among immigrants in America. Immigrant mutual aid organizations, fraternal societies, and ethnic political associations were central to the survival of European, Asian, and Mexican newcomers before the advent of Great Society programs and development of a social safety net.<sup>188</sup> Even very poor immigrants paid in to such relief organizations, and many belonged to several societies.<sup>189</sup> Immigrant mutual aid organizations played many roles, but one of the most important was to

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<sup>188</sup> See David T. Beito, *FROM MUTUAL AID TO THE WELFARE STATE; FRATERNAL SOCIETIES AND SOCIAL SERVICES, 1890-1967*, at 19-20, 42-43 (2000).

<sup>189</sup> *Id.*, 22-23.

provide funds when members experienced financial crises, such as covering funeral expenses after the death of a family member.<sup>190</sup> In this way, mutual aid organizations provided a form of social insurance, helping immigrants “smooth consumption” and avoid disastrous financial shocks. Today’s ESAs play a similar role, albeit on a more modest scale.<sup>191</sup>

MAOs have significant capacity for responsiveness, as demonstrated by TWU’s taxi driver organizing campaign. TWU took the initiative to engage African and South Asian immigrant taxi drivers, and was willing to take the risk of pursuing the taxi drivers’ campaign even though it fell outside their usual constituency and model. The taxi campaign drew on and developed the skills of African and South Asian immigrants themselves, not only staff representatives. Finally, creating a driver-owned taxi cooperative was an innovative solution that empowered immigrant cabbies while also providing a sustainable dues base for TWU’s continuing work.

By contrast, responsiveness is a greater challenge for service providers. The very professionalism that enables these agencies to provide services effectively and predictably may constrain their ability to rapidly reorient their work. Numerous ASP and MSP respondents pointed to the same unmet needs among African immigrants, such as helping African immigrant families cope with the pressures of transition; significantly expanding access to affordable, high-quality immigration services; and building panethnic political advocacy among African immigrants. Yet there appear to be relatively few efforts to experiment with creating new

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<sup>190</sup> *Id.*, 12-16.

<sup>191</sup> *See also* Arthur, *supra* n.67, 70-72 (describing the importance of African immigrant “mutual aid associations” to the economic, psychological, cultural, and political support of African immigrants, including assisting “during periods of crisis such as illness or death and payment of legal expenses.”).

programs, collaborations, or organizations to meet these needs. The range of services offered by most service providers is fairly narrow, and appears to change fairly little over time.

In some cases, ASP and MSP providers noted that funding was unavailable from traditional sources for needed programs. However, service providers do not appear to have tapped into the “mutual aid” capacity of African immigrant communities to the extent that ethnic associations have. Even if funding is unavailable to offer immigration legal services or high-quality adult education for free, there are other options that might make use of community resources. These might include greater “de-professionalization,” i.e., training clients to perform services themselves or provide services on a peer-to-peer basis; charging near-market rates for high-demand services;<sup>192</sup> partnerships with private providers (particularly African immigrant professionals) in which agencies recommend trusted providers to their clients in exchange for provider guarantees of quality and affordability; and creating separate organizations that are able to access different funding streams (e.g., for-profit institutions and political action committees). Expanding political advocacy could also pay off with a greater share of public goods going toward African immigrant communities over the long term.

Of course, service providers must spend much of their time and attention to simply maintain and manage their existing services, which may limit such experimental and entrepreneurial activity. It may also be that the tax-exempt status of ASPs and MSPs, and their receipt of government funds—which often explicitly prohibit or limit certain types of advocacy—constrain the kinds of strategies that their leaders can pursue (at least in their official capacities). However, given the rapid decline of the social safety net for all low-income

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<sup>192</sup> ASC does run a program of this type, the Nominal Fee Immigration Clinic, which provides self-funding low-cost legal services which complement its grant-funded free legal services.

Americans, and the particular paucity of services available to African immigrants, agencies serving African immigrants may need to look to the resourcefulness and responsiveness of pre-safety-net immigrant mutual aid organizations as a timely model.

#### iv. Commitment

ESAs and ASPs are highly committed to an African immigrant constituency. For ESAs this commitment is inevitable, since African immigrants are their sole constituency. But ASPs have more choice in which clients they serve. ECDC, ASC, and Sagal all serve some non-African immigrants, albeit a minority. Any of them could have chosen to change their names or redefine their missions to serve a broader immigrant clientele, but have not. ECDC and ASC maintain community development projects in Ethiopia, even though they are tangential to their other programs and require different funding sources. The high commitment of ASPs to their African immigrant constituents is a defining characteristic, and is likely rooted in both the histories of these organizations and the personal backgrounds of their leadership.

Because African immigrants are usually a small part of the diverse clientele that MSPs serve, their commitment to this constituency is comparatively low. Given limited resources, MSPs have little incentive to invest disproportionate resources in a population that may be smaller than other ethnic groups, more reluctant to seek out services (per respondents), and harder to serve (for reasons of cultural competency, *see infra*, VII.a.v.). These organizational disincentives are likely to be more pronounced among MSPs that are large and offer a wide range of services than among smaller, specialized MSPs like RWN and Tahirih. The decline in Tahirih's African immigrant client base and the "mainstreaming" of USA's West African clients illustrate the difficulties of prioritizing African immigrants. At the same time, the fact that both

Tahirih and USA created programs specifically targeted towards African immigrants is an illustration that organizational leaders may maintain their personal commitment to serve African immigrants despite forces that pull their focus away from this constituency.

African immigrants are generally a low priority for MAOs as well. Because of their insularity and minimal political engagement, African immigrant organizations are not part of GSU's regional coalition of community-based organizations. While I did not interview a New York-area MAO for this report, one source, the former head of a large immigrant worker center in New York City, was aware of Harlem's West African community but knew of no efforts by MAOs to organize it.<sup>193</sup>

According to Liss, in his decades of organizing in the D.C. area, TWU's taxi organizing campaign was one of very few attempts by multiethnic advocates in the region to organize African immigrants. During the 1990s, the service workers union UNITE-HERE waged a successful campaign to organize the D.C. parking lot industry, which is dominated by Ethiopian immigrants, and as a result the D.C. local today has a sizable membership of Ethiopian-Americans.<sup>194</sup> Liss said that another worker center, CASA de Maryland,<sup>195</sup> has made some efforts to organize African immigrants living in the Maryland counties surrounding Washington, but the results have been modest.

There appear to be few other examples of MAOs seeking to organize African immigrants. During 14 years of working as a labor and community organizer, I heard of only one other such

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<sup>193</sup> Author conversation with Andrew Friedman, former Co-Director, Make the Road New York, Feb. 7, 2012. *See also* Make the Road, [www.maketheroad.org](http://www.maketheroad.org), last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>194</sup> *See* Stephen C. Fehr, *Metro Lot Workers Say They Get No Relief, No Respect; Attendants Protest Job Conditions, Wages*, THE WASH. POST, May 28, 1993, at D1.

<sup>195</sup> *See* Casa de Maryland, <http://www.casademaryland.org/home>, last visited July 10, 2013.



campaign: in 1999-2000, UNITE-HERE led an organizing drive and strike among multiracial hotel workers in Minneapolis-St. Paul, which included large numbers of Somali, Ethiopian, and Eritrean immigrant workers.<sup>196</sup>

v. Cultural Competency

Predictably, ESAs and ASPs are not only highest in commitment to African immigrants, but most competent in navigating the cultures of African immigrants as well. As grassroots institutions growing out of African immigrant communities, ESAs reflect the cultures of the communities they serve. ASPs must perform a more complex balancing act between American nonprofit practices and the cultures of African immigrant communities. Also, since ASPs are panethnic, they must navigate the diversities of language, religion, and custom among—and sometimes within—African countries. Nonetheless, the African immigrant leadership of these organizations is tightly networked to the communities they serve and expert at bridging cultures.

MAOs are weaker in cultural competency with respect to African immigrants. They are less likely than African-focused service providers or even multiethnic service providers to hire African immigrants as staff, since African immigrants are a relatively small part of their constituency. Though TWU is deeply embedded in Northern Virginia's Latino communities, Liss explained that organizing African immigrants required TWU to navigate quite different languages, educational backgrounds, cultural institutions, and gender norms than those to which they were accustomed. Integrating African immigrants with TWU's existing, mostly Latino membership base presented other challenges which TWU has never fully resolved, *see supra*, VI.a.iv.a.

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<sup>196</sup> *See, e.g.*, Todd Nelson, *Immigrant Workers Join Picket Lines of St. Paul, Minn., Hotel Strike*, ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS, June 6, 2000, at 1A.

Cultural competency presents significant challenges to the ability of multiethnic service providers to serve African immigrant communities. The MSPs I interviewed had, at best, linguistic capability in one of the indigenous African languages spoken by their constituency, and most had none (by contrast, ECDC and ASC had multiple African language speakers on staff). MSPs communicated with clients in English or French (as noted *supra*, V.a.iii., many “Francophone” Africans have limited proficiency in standard French or speak creole), relied on volunteer or paid translators, or counted on clients to bring their own friends and family members as translators. MSPs seem to manage relatively well with limited language capability, in part because many African immigrants are relatively proficient in English and, due to their small numbers and sparse ethnic enclaves, accustomed to managing in a non-native language. But as Betru and Harris both noted, it can be challenging to obtain precise information like that required for legal representation from African immigrants, even without barriers of language. Bekele of ASC noted that it is challenging for health providers and social workers to conduct complex—and often sensitive—counseling with non-English-proficient African immigrants, even when working through a professional translator.

Nocenti described linguistic and cultural competency as one of the greatest challenges that USA faces in serving African immigrants. While USA produces informational flyers and posters about its services in English, Spanish, and Chinese, it currently lacks the resources to translate them into languages spoken by West African immigrants. USA runs large-scale nutritional programs, serving over 200,000 meals a year, primarily to seniors and children. However, it lacks the capacity to make its meal preparation *halal*, i.e., consistent with Muslim dietary requirements. “I have no idea how demand for or participation in the food program might

be different if we had the capability to do that,” said Nocenti. Where USA has had the resources to make its services culturally competent, the organization has seen positive response from African immigrants. Nocenti attributes the Adult Education program’s popularity with West African adult learners to the fact that USA hires designated “Navigators” who share students’ backgrounds. Navigators work alongside instructors to explain cultural differences, facilitate student participation, and help students cope with unfamiliar systems. USA has made great efforts within its limited resources to make its programs culturally competent.

However, not all multiethnic service providers are so diligent. Independently of each other, Kue-Morris of RWN, Mohamed of Sagal, and Betru all raised serious concerns with the cultural competency of MSPs serving African immigrants in the Atlanta area. Kue-Morris and Mohamed both criticized these agencies as having little racial diversity and hiring few staff from the communities they serve. According to respondents, when these agencies do hire African immigrants and refugees, they hire them primarily for their language capability and only in direct-service positions, not as managers or program directors. Immigrant and refugee employees are rarely trained to advance to managerial or directorial positions, and if agencies no longer need their language abilities (e.g., because refugees from a particular country or linguistic group are no longer being resettled), immigrant staffers are let go. Mohamed also criticized Atlanta MSPs for being overly bureaucratic and devoting too high a proportion of the funds they take in to overhead, instead of direct service. “The money finishes in the office, not enough is getting to the refugees themselves,” Mohamed said.

The most disturbing reports came from Betru, who began her fellowship at an Atlanta affiliate of major national VOLAG before transferring to RRISA.<sup>197</sup> According to Betru, her prior agency's staff was openly abusive to the African immigrants and refugees they served. "I would hear the legal staff yelling at clients. They would say things like 'It's a privilege for you to be in this country, not a right.'" Betru's situation improved dramatically after she transferred to RRISA, whose staff she describes as self-sacrificing and genuinely committed to the constituency they serve. Nonetheless, Betru shares Mohamed and Kue-Morris's assessment that cultural competency is a major problem for agencies in the Atlanta area serving African immigrants, and greater hiring of African immigrants and refugees, particularly at the managerial and directorial levels, needs to be part of the solution.

#### b. Challenges that Cut Across Organizational Models

Respondents raised several challenges of serving African immigrants that are largely independent of organizational model. These include the low priority given to African immigrant populations by government and private funders; inadequate research on and information about African immigrant populations; and political and social challenges that are specific to particular cities and regions.

#### i. Funding

Several respondents said that government funding agencies and private philanthropy know little about African immigrants and refugees and do not see them as a high-priority population. Respondents including Bekele of ASC, Teferra of ECDC, and Mohamed of Sagal

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<sup>197</sup> I did not receive a response from the agency in question, despite repeated inquiries. Because I was unable to ask an agency representative about these issues, I have elected to omit the agency's name.

attributed this lack of visibility and priority to many challenges discussed previously: the relative newness, smallness, and dispersion of African immigrant communities; the lack of a cohesive panethnic identity; community insularity; and lack of political mobilization.

Nocenti of USA situated the funding challenges of African immigrants within the broader context of the shrinking American welfare state. Broad trends like systematic government budget cuts, elimination of welfare, health, and education programs, and tightening of eligibility requirements have driven down the overall level of resources going to low-income immigrant communities and the organizations, like USA, that serve them. However, African immigrants' minimal group clout and lack of political champions hurts their ability to win a share of public resources and ensure services are delivered in ways that reflect their needs.

Harris of Tahirih and Teferra of ECDC described funding as “distorting” the services that are available to African immigrants. Both said that agencies serving African immigrants frequently create programs in order to pursue available funding, rather than based on an assessment of the most significant unmet needs. This may lead to duplication of services in certain areas, and shortfalls in others. “Right now funding, not need, is driving the interventions,” according to Teferra. Like other issues discussed, this problem is not unique to African immigrants. But the lack of funding specifically targeted toward African immigrant communities may heighten competition for the few available funds and make it more likely that certain needs go entirely unaddressed.

#### ii. Research and Needs Assessment

Several respondents pointed to a lack of rigorous research and information about African immigrant communities as a major obstacle to their work. As noted *supra*, III.b., one of their

most basic challenges is getting accurate information of the size and composition of African immigrant communities. Respondents believe that the Census and ACS systematically underestimate the number of African immigrants present in the US, and the high proportion of African immigrants who do not specify their country of origin presents a barrier to advocating for and targeting services toward African immigrant communities.

Respondents were also outspoken about insufficient research into the needs of African immigrant communities by government, philanthropy, and nonprofit agencies. While respondents had definite subjective impressions about the prevalence of issues like poverty, domestic violence, and mental health challenges, all believed that more rigorous measurement and analysis of these conditions is needed. According to Harris, “No one is proactively and systematically looking at the needs of the community.” Teferra put the matter even more pointedly: “Everybody is in the dark.”

Teferra has advocated with government agencies and philanthropy to fund African immigrant community needs assessment, but has found them generally unwilling. He recounted his experience trying to convince the Centers on Disease Control (CDC) to study diabetes among African immigrants separately from African-Americans, given the sharp differences in diets and lifestyles between these groups. The CDC declined, pointing to the relatively low numbers of African immigrants. Teferra criticized the CDC’s unwillingness to take a more “population-based approach,” noting that distinctiveness of population may be more epidemiologically significant than absolute numbers, particularly for communicable diseases. Teferra also said that African immigrants have also been a peripheral concern for most academic institutions, who study them only sporadically.

In the absence of rigorous research about African immigrants, respondents said that service providers often react to immediate conditions, as well as funding, rather than taking a more proactive approach. “People see a problem, and they create a program to solve it,” said Harris. Even if agencies are accurately perceiving community issues, there is little targeting, prioritization, analysis of underlying causes, or consideration of different strategies. “All service providers are kind of reactive. There is very little sustainability, or focus on preventative services,” said Teferra.

Some agencies have begun to conduct their own research on African immigrant issues. For example, ASC is currently drafting a report on African immigrants, HIV, and HIV-discordant couples, including a review of all available research on HIV among African immigrants in the US. However, filling the information gap on African immigrant issues—particularly conducting “basic” research like large-scale surveys and scientific studies—will require much greater engagement from government, philanthropy, service providers, research institutions, and academics.

### iii. Local and Regional Challenges

A final theme that emerged from respondents was that African immigrants face challenges specific to the politics and demographic composition of each metro area.

In the Atlanta and D.C. metro areas, several respondents pointed to the wide geographic dispersion of African immigrants as a challenge to serving this constituency. In the D.C. area, large populations of African immigrants live in the District, in neighboring Maryland counties including Prince George’s and Montgomery, and throughout Fairfax, Alexandria, and other parts of Northern Virginia. In the Atlanta area, African immigrants are spread throughout the city of

Atlanta and other parts of Fulton County, Clayton County, and (in particular) DeKalb County. Unlike previous generations of immigrants who clustered together in dense urban ethnic enclaves, African immigrants may move to, or be resettled in, suburban areas in search of higher quality of life and better schools. However, this de-concentration makes community-building among African immigrants challenging, dilutes their political clout, puts African immigrants further away from support services, and may isolate them personally, particularly if they do not drive.

African immigrants may also find the suburbs more politically conservative and hostile to newcomers than in cosmopolitan cities. All the D.C. and Atlanta respondents pointed to a rash of local immigrant exclusion laws in Georgia, Virginia, and Maryland as contributing to a hostile environment for immigrants and raising challenges for service providers—even though these laws appear to be primarily directed against Latino immigrants.<sup>198</sup>

Betru found that local anti-immigrant backlash rarely transferred directly from Latino immigrants to African immigrants; unlike Latinos, African immigrants in the Atlanta area are not frequently asked to produce immigration documents. Betru believes the fact that Atlanta is a majority African-American city mitigates this kind of harassment. However, she said that African immigrants face other kinds of harassment and discrimination, especially in housing and obtaining small business loans, and particularly in suburban areas outside Atlanta: “It is the South, ultimately.”

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<sup>198</sup> See also Jill Esbenshade & Barbara Obrzut, *No Place to Call Home: Repercussions of Local Anti-Immigrant Housing Ordinances*, AILA’s Immigration Law Today, January/February 2008, at 40, available at <http://www.ailadownloads.org/ilt/2008/Jan-Feb08ILTFullText.pdf>, last visited July 10, 2013 (documenting that the majority of municipalities that have passed local anti-immigrant ordinances are small towns with populations under 65,000).



Another challenge specific to the D.C. and Atlanta areas are the relatively ungenerous social services offered by Virginia and Georgia. Betru noted that in Georgia advocating for African immigrants to get the benefits to which they are legally entitled is of little value, because those benefits are minimal. Liss of TWU noted that the typical strategy of organizing community members to demand more money for particular services is challenging in a period of economic and political retrenchment: even groups with significant political power cannot pressure state or local government in Virginia to allocate money the way they used to. Mohamed of Sagal said that Georgia's tight benefits have forced many African immigrants, particularly those with children, to move to states where benefits are more generous, including Maine and Washington.<sup>199</sup>

New York City is not as geographically sprawling, fiscally conservative, or xenophobic as the D.C. and Atlanta suburbs. But African immigrants in New York face their own political challenges. Of all the respondents I interviewed, those from New York were most uniform in saying that African immigrants were “not on the radar screen” of elected representatives and government officials. One reason for this may be that African immigrants are a lower proportion of New York's population than are African immigrants in D.C. and Atlanta. And New York's large population, massive government, and long-established network of community and political organizations may make it more difficult for African immigrants to get on the agenda of lawmakers.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> See Bruno, *supra* n.104 (describing the “lottery effect” created by benefit levels for refugees that vary widely by state and locality).

<sup>200</sup> See Frank R. Baumgartner & Bryan D. Jones, *AGENDAS AND INSTABILITY IN AMERICAN POLITICS* 18-21 (2d ed. 2009) (discussing how, in a large and complex democracy with limited

## VIII. Conclusion: Assets and Opportunities

Because of the questions that this report set out to answer, it has necessarily focused on the needs and challenges of African immigrants and the organizations that serve them. These issues—including poverty, struggles to adapt and integrate to a new society, low levels of civic engagement and political influence, and organizational challenges—are complex and daunting.

However, far from being hapless victims, African immigrants are resilient and resourceful. Many have overcome significant barriers to make it the US in the first place. Like other immigrants before them, African immigrants will continue struggling towards inclusion in American society. It seems appropriate, then, to conclude this report with a review of some critical assets that African immigrants and their organizations possess and some key opportunities to improve African immigrants' condition in the US.

### a. Education

Chief among these assets is African immigrants' outstanding educational attainment. For African immigrants to be the most educated group in America is no small achievement, particularly given that they come from the poorest continent in the world. No doubt, some of African immigrants' high educational attainment reflects the fact that immigration from Africa selects for elite status, including prior educational attainment.<sup>201</sup> But it likely also reflects the exceptionally high value that many African immigrants place on education, both intrinsically and as a strategy for economic advancement.<sup>202</sup> However, even highly educated African immigrants

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governmental resources, one of the greatest barriers for interest groups seeking policy change is the difficulty of getting “on the political agenda”.

<sup>201</sup> See Arthur, *supra* n.67, 113-17

<sup>202</sup> See *id.*, 143-44.

continue to struggle with poverty, *see supra*, III.d.iii, which suggests that individual pursuit of education is not sufficient for African immigrants to improve their status in American society.

Many respondents noted that currently, the failure of many African immigrants to achieve economic success despite their education leads them to self-blame and depression. However, African immigrants' disillusionment may also offer an opportunity for mobilization and organizing: that is, to persuade African immigrants that their lack of success in American society is not due to individual failures but structural barriers, and that overcoming these barriers requires not just greater individual effort but collective action. Like other immigrants before them, African immigrants may not have found the American Dream they set out to find, but they can form a crucial part of broader social movements seeking to make that dream a reality.

Furthermore, academic education may provide African immigrants with tools to take charge of their own campaigns and organizations, reducing their dependence on professional staff. Liss' experience of Ethiopian taxi drivers is an inspiring example: with support, training, and strategic guidance from professional staff, these recent immigrants rapidly grew into sophisticated organizers, strategists, negotiators, and spokespersons, and ultimately into owners of their own cooperative enterprise.

b. Mutual Aid Networks

Two other critical assets of African immigrants are their strong interpersonal networks and tradition of "mutual aid." As discussed *supra*, VII.a.iii., given inadequate resources from government and service agencies African immigrants have been forced to take care of their own, particularly when crisis hits. African immigrants often provide each other with "reciprocal relief"

through informal networks and small ESAs that play roles similar to the mutual aid organizations built by previous generations of immigrants.

As new African immigrant organizations emerge, particularly panethnic organizations, they should seek to supplement and build on the mutualistic tradition of African immigrants, not crowd it out. While raising money from government and private philanthropy to meet the needs of African immigrants is important, organizations should also seek to tap into the wealth and human resources of African immigrant communities—not only through the contributions of middle-class professional African immigrants, but also the pooled resources of lower-income African immigrants. Nonprofit organizations can extend community resources by supplementing them with outside funding, providing expertise, and serving as a trusted broker.

For example, many African cultures have a tradition of “rotating saving and credit associations” (ROSCAs). In ROSCAs, such as the Ethiopian *ikub* or the Nigerian *susu*, members pool their savings and take turns making withdrawals. This arrangement provides members with large amounts of capital for major expenses, such as buying a home or launching a business.<sup>203</sup> ROSCAs could provide a vehicle for microenterprise and asset development: funders could agree to match funds that members put in, and agencies could help reduce transaction costs by helping manage and disburse funds.

### c. Entrepreneurship

Several respondents pointed to the “entrepreneurial spirit” of African immigrants as a key community asset. Kue-Morris observed that, compared with other populations that RWN serves, their African clients seem more “willing to do business.” Many ran small businesses in their

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<sup>203</sup> See Peter Kiko Kimuyu, *Rotating Saving and Credit Associations in Rural East Africa*, 27 *WORLD DEV'T* 1299 (1999); Arthur, *supra* n.67, 136-37.

home countries and are sophisticated businesswomen. While RWN has encountered cultural challenges when loaning to Bhutanese refugees, who often prefer group loans to individual loans, and to Iraqi refugees, who are often concerned about violating Islamic strictures on lending and borrowing, its African refugee clients tend to understand the constraints imposed by Western financial and credit reporting systems. Their African women clients are also relatively proficient in English, and more independent of male partners and family members. Finally, RWN's African clients tend to be more "tightly networked." Given that many of their businesses begin by providing services to their own ethnic community, such as hair braiding, cleaning, daycare, and import-export, these social networks are key economic assets.<sup>204</sup>

Quarshie noted that while there are many Ghanaians in New York employed in low-wage occupations, there are also many entrepreneurs. Ghanaian small business owners mostly provide professional services; as with RWN's clients, they often start with a base of customers in their own ethnic community and branch out from there. Typical businesses include travel agencies, doctors' offices, insurance agencies, financial services offices, law practices, import-export, and African markets. One 2007 white paper on the Bronx's African immigrant communities found that African-owned establishments included "16 *Masajid* (Mosques), 15 Churches, 19 African markets, 9 restaurants, 20 movie stores and other businesses, 6 hair braiding salons, 2 law firms, 4 community organizations, 1 women's organization, 1 research institution, 6 African-owned newspapers, and 1 website."<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See Arthur, *supra* n.67, 104-07 (describing the importance of family and social networks to business formation among African immigrants).

<sup>205</sup> Jane Kani Edward, Fordham Univ., Dept. of Afr. & Afr.-Am. Stud., Bronx Afr.-Am. History Project, WHITE PAPER ON AFRICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE BRONX (2010), *available at*

Development of African immigrant enterprises has obvious implications for helping African immigrants escape poverty. But African immigrant entrepreneurs can also play an important role in community-building. African immigrant small business owners and professionals already provide much of the financial and in-kind support for ESAs, and could help fund the growth of new African immigrant organizations. Furthermore, as Liss noted, small businesspeople can exercise considerable political influence with local government officials, due to their social stature and economic clout. “African immigrants are a political sleeping giant—or at least a sleeping moderate-sized person,” Liss joked. However, exercising influence in this way will require African immigrant business owners to organize themselves to advance their long-term interests, not only respond to short-term threats.

d. Identity and Connection to Cultural Heritage

African immigrants also benefit from strong connections to their countries and cultures of origin. American chattel slavery forcibly severed enslaved African-Americans from the cultures, histories, and family networks of their ancestral homelands. Of course, African-Americans have forged new cultures, networks, and ways of connecting with their African heritage. Still, many scholars of African-American life believe that disconnection from African cultural heritage has been profoundly damaging to African-American identity, self-esteem, and social structures, and that instilling a strong sense of cultural heritage is important to promoting personal resiliency among African-American youth.<sup>206</sup>

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[http://www.fordham.edu/images/academics/programs/baahp/white\\_paper\\_on\\_african\\_immigrati\\_on\\_to\\_bronx.pdf](http://www.fordham.edu/images/academics/programs/baahp/white_paper_on_african_immigrati_on_to_bronx.pdf), last visited July 10, 2013.

<sup>206</sup> See, e.g., Jerome H. Schiele, *Cultural Oppression and the High-Risk Status of African Americans*, 35 J. BLACK STUD. 802 (2005) (arguing that estrangement from cultural traditions is psychologically damaging, undermines group cohesion, and hinders economic advancement

The cultural heritages and identities that African immigrants' bring with them from their countries of origin are presumably linked to their other, previously-described assets: educational attainment, entrepreneurial aptitude, and traditions of mutual aid. Cultural heritage and identity can also provide African immigrants with a sense of individual self-esteem, and promote group cohesion. They can help African immigrants cope with the racism that people of African descent routinely experience in America.<sup>207</sup> Finally, cultural heritage and identity may be a source of behaviors and values that support educational attainment, economic success, and personal health.<sup>208</sup>

Of course, African cultural traditions can be a source of maladaptive values and behaviors as much as beneficial ones. Furthermore, respondents' descriptions of the struggles of African immigrants make it clear that migration profoundly disrupts the identity, culture, and social relations of African immigrants. Like other immigrants before them, first-generation and second-generation African immigrants will have to adapt and reconstruct their cultures and identities in order to integrate into American society. Organizations serving African immigrants can play an important role in this process of adaptation.

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among African-Americans); Danice L. Brown, *African American Resiliency: Examining Racial Socialization and Social Support as Protective Factors*, 34 J. BLACK PSYCHOL. 32 (2008) (psychological study finding that racial socialization messages emphasizing cultural pride and knowledge of African heritage and culture were significantly related to positive academic, mental health, and self-esteem outcomes among African-American children).

<sup>207</sup> See, e.g., Arthur, *supra* n.67, 72-77 (describing how African immigrants routinely experience racism in American society, but are less likely than native-born African-Americans to believe it constrains their opportunities for advancement).

<sup>208</sup> See, e.g., Djajić, *supra* n.120, 834-35 (noting that differences in customs, values and attitudes between immigrants and natives may have positive implications for the "human capital accumulation" of immigrant children).

e. Conclusion: Ethnic Capital and African Immigrant Empowerment

Educational attainment, entrepreneurship, networks of mutual aid, and connection to cultural heritage and identity are all forms of human capital.<sup>209</sup> Scholars of immigration have argued that the human capital of immigrant groups has a significant effect on economic and social integration. Human capital matters not only at the level of individuals and families, but also in the aggregate: the human capital shared by all members of the immigrant group, or “ethnic capital,” is a major determinant of integration.<sup>210</sup> African immigrants face great social, economic, psychological, and cultural challenges to integration, but they also have significant assets of human capital and ethnic capital.

While respondents vividly described the needs and challenges of African immigrants, and the current shortfall of institutions serving the new diaspora, they also stressed the opportunity for new initiatives and institutions, particularly panethnic approaches, to engage African immigrants. These approaches should emphasize developing African immigrants as leaders, promoting greater civic engagement and building political influence, building on existing mutual aid networks, and otherwise tapping into the ethnic capital of African immigrant communities. Such an approach is not only practical, but empowering as well. As Kue-Morris of RWN said, “Our job isn’t fostering dependence, but helping people control their own destiny.”

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<sup>209</sup> See generally *id.*

<sup>210</sup> See *id.*; Jeffrey G. Reitz & Sherrilyn M. Sklar, *Culture, Race, and the Economic Assimilation of Immigrants*, 12 *SOCIOLOGICAL FORUM* 233, 253 (1997) (arguing that for minority-racial-group immigrants, “ethnic attachments” are as likely to have positive as negative effect on education and income); Borjas (1992), *supra* n.49 (finding that the skills of second-generation immigrants depend not only on the skills of their parents, but also on the average skills of the ethnic group in the parent's generation); George J. Borjas, *Making It in America: Social Mobility in the Immigrant Population*, 16 *THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN* 55, 65 (2006) (finding that “a highly advantaged ethnic environment” imbues children with valuable characteristics that enhance their socioeconomic achievement later in life).