Acculturation, Otherness, and Return in Adichie's Americanah

Acculturation, Otherness, and Return in Adichie's Americanah:

Outside the Homeland

By

Vida Rahiminezhad and Soheila Arabian

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Acculturation, Otherness, and Return in Adichie's Americanah: Outside the Homeland

By Vida Rahiminezhad and Soheila Arabian

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1410-2
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1410-2

The real tragedy of our postcolonial world is not that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to negotiate this new world.

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Throughout the process of writing this book, one special person has taken the time to help us. We would like to give special thanks to Paul Liboiron for editing this book.

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA

The concern of this work is to study the lives of Africans who immigrated to the US in recent decades based on the diaspora theory. In order to do so one of Chimamanda Nagozi Adichie's works entitled *Americanah* (2013) is taken into consideration. The examined concepts of diaspora are the *self* and *Other*, *acculturation*, *cultural diversity*, *hybridity*, *ambivalence* and *mimicry*, *unbelonging* and *return*. Since the novel *Americanah* is about African black people, especially Nigerians and their life after entering the US, it is necessary to explore the difficulties that African immigrants are faced with and compare the situations of Nigerian immigrants with other African immigrants. That is why in this chapter the focus is on the situation of African immigrants, mostly in the US and generally in recent years.

African people have immigrated to the US voluntarily and involuntarily through history. The Americans had a huge slave trade beginning in the 16th century. Voluntary black immigration started over the past two decades and in recent years the number of immigrants from Africa to the US has grown rapidly. As a result, the black immigrant population in America rose to 4.2 million in 2016 (Anderson) and changes in US immigration law along with economic and social changes on the African continent have driven the rapid growth of the African immigrant diaspora. The mostly African immigrants to the US come from countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Somalia, Liberia, and Sudan. These countries sent the most immigrants to the US while many African immigrants did not specify their country of origin (Kassa, 5).

Black African immigrants have different aims for entering the United States. It was noted that in 2007 about 30 per cent of all Americans were unauthorized—they had either entered the United States illegally or overstayed their valid visa. However, the rate of unauthorized Black African immigrants is low, about 21 per cent. In Pew's point of view, there are about 200,000 unauthorized Black Africans in the United States out of

the total unauthorized population of 11 million or more. Unauthorized immigrants are prohibited from government services; they are subject to arrest by the police and run the risk of deportation (Capps et al., 6).

Socioeconomic factors, including income, family size, gender, age, occupation, and education are recognized as particularly important influences on immigrants' lives. Of all these factors education plays the most important role in African immigrants' lives (Akintan et al., 15). Almost 65% of African immigrants have one or more years of college education, which is more than any other ethnic group except Asian Americans. 40% of African immigrants have at least a bachelor's degree. This means 30% more than the American population overall (New American Economy, 2018). African immigrant educational attainment is unequally distributed. Some African ethnonationalities with an uncommonly 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. However, educational attainment among African immigrants has decreased over recent decades, and will likely decrease to a greater degree due to demographic changes (Kassa, 5). The achievement of higher education is the great concern of young Nigerians and their parents today, that is why the government financially supports higher education institutes (Akpan, 545). Looking at the gender enrollment in Nigerian Universities between 1989 and 1997 shows that there is a gender gap in university enrollment generally. The investigation makes it clear that there was a lower female enrollment in all aspects of the universities. In the sciences and science-based disciplines a wide gap was observed and higher female enrollment in the south of Nigeria in comparison to the north was discovered. Female enrollment at the first two levels of education moves towards gender equalization, but at the university level it is the opposite (Adeyemi and Akoptu, 1).

Although African immigrants are more educated than the average American, they are poorer. It has been noted that 20% of African immigrants live below the poverty line. This percentage is significantly higher than it is for 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 West Africa, Sudan, and Somalia suffer poverty rates above the average of African Americans (Kassa, 6).

African immigrants face significant legal and economic problems, including an undocumented immigration status; obstacles to employment,

particularly in better-quality jobs; educational barriers; and difficulty accessing public services. African refugees face some problems in terms of low education levels, achieving English fluency, and having familiarity with American culture and society while many of them have been psychologically traumatized by armed conflict, persecution, and displacement. The increasing number and diversity of immigrants to America over the past few decades have brought up questions about their mental health (Larsen) since resettling in a new country can lead to psychological distress for immigrants (Burnam, Hough, Karno, Telles, & Escobar; Portes & Rumbaut). In today's highly competitive economy, refugees need more support to assimilate and become independent in America, yet they receive less support than past generations of refugees.

In general, the global economic climate in the past two decades has promoted the flow of high-level manpower from the developing countries to the developed countries. Since 1993, the United States (US) government has admitted up to 50,000 immigrants annually through its Diversity Immigrant Visa Program. The Canadian and British governments started the same programs in order to attract highly-skilled personnel with certain educational, health and work experience requirements, into their respective countries. Through these programs, Nigeria with a population of 130 million, constituting a quarter of the people inhabiting the continent of Africa, has lost more human resources than any country in the continent (Oyeyemi, Sedenu, 2).

While African voluntary immigrants may have a better situation than refugees in some respects, they receive even less support with integration—indeed, almost none. Many of them are cut off from their family and social networks, and are profoundly disillusioned by their inability to advance in American society. As a result, many of them struggle to assimilate in ways similar to their refugee counterparts. Furthermore, many African immigrants face serious psychological, behavioral, and health issues, including mental illness, domestic violence and gender inequality, intergenerational conflict, and chronic diseases (Kassa, 7-8). Concerning women, it should be mentioned that immigrants grew up in a culture where husbands were mostly responsible for all the living expenses, while responsibilities for household chores including cooking and cleaning were the tasks of the wife. In the new society, the matrimonial role is different from that of their homeland. Consequently, role changes such as male participation in household chores and child-rearing activities such as babysitting could have a disparate impact on the perceived health and well-being among the sexes. It is a common belief

among African immigrants that overall, American society offers a more conducive atmosphere for African women in comparison with society in Nigeria that is still relatively male-dominated (Oyeyemi, Sedenu, 6).

Organizations serving African immigrants use a variety of strategies to involve African immigrants in civic life and advocate on their behalf, including domestic policy advocacy, international policy advocacy, constituent education, and grassroots campaigns. The organizations' respondents unanimously admit that the levels of civic involvement among African immigrants are currently low, and the political influence of African immigrant communities is minimal. While obstacles to African immigrant civic engagement and political influence are multifold, a central challenge for African immigrants will be building panethnic identities and organizations across cultural, socioeconomic, and national origin divisions. The experience of other immigrant communities, especially Asian American immigrants, shows that over time African immigrants will shift their basis for organizing and identifying from "microethnicity" such as sub-national grouping, linguistic group, clan, or tribe to identifying and mobilizing on the basis of "panethnicity" such as African immigrants or African-Americans. However, panethnic organizing need not eliminate organizing on the basis of nationality; it is possible for the two to grow together. The variety of national and ethnic origins of African immigrants is not a difficult obstacle to panethnic unity. Indeed, within certain limits, such diversity may motivate panethnic organizing (Kassa, 8-9).

As respondents described their own organizations, four qualities define an organization's ability to meet the needs of African immigrants, which are resources, responsiveness, commitment and cultural competency. The four types of organizations, which include multiracial service providers, African-focused service providers, ethnic-specific associations, and multiracial advocacy organizations, have different advantages and disadvantages in relation to these four qualities. Often the increase in one quality has been disadvantageous with respect to another. Some challenges affect all organizations serving African immigrants. 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 (Kassa, 9).

While African immigrants and the organizations that serve them face many challenges, they are resilient and resourceful. African immigrants can draw on their own special advantages in their struggle for inclusion in

American society. The first advantage is education. Although, having an outstanding educational attainment has not proved sufficient for African immigrants to advance in American society, African immigrants' high aspirations and disappointments have been helpful in organizing panethnic collective action and building institutions. 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. The second advantage is the mutual aid networks.

African immigrants bring strong interpersonal networks and traditions to the US. As new African immigrant organizations, particularly panethnic organizations, appear, they should seek to boost and build on this mutualistic tradition. 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. The third advantage is entrepreneurship. Many African immigrant communities have flourishing 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. Eissa (2005) stated that African immigrants are setting up small businesses, cultural associations, religious institutions, and ethnic restaurants in cities across the country. It helps them to share languages and cultural backgrounds, which are a great source of comfort during the initial resettlement and adaptation phase in American society. In this way they can maintain their ethnic identities, which are very important for them. The last advantage is identity and connection to cultural heritage. African cultural heritage and identity can supply African immigrants with a sense of self-esteem, promote group cohesion, and provide tools for coping with racism, and support achievement and health (Kassa, 11). On the subject of racial identity formation among immigrant children, Rong and Brown (2002a) discovered that identities are fluid and changeable over time and in different social contexts; that Black immigrants tend to move along a continuum from a national origin identity to a hyphenated-American or American identity; and foreign-born black youths are likely to choose a national-originated identity. 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 assimilate into American society (Kassa, 11). Foner (1987) and Kasinitz (1992) state that first-generation black immigrants are eager to distance

themselves from American black people by emphasizing their national origins and ethnic identities. Organizations serving African immigrants can play an important role in this process of adaptation (Kassa, 11).

In general, 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 also that the human capital which all members of an immigrant group share, which is called "ethnic capital," is a major factor in terms of how successfully the group integrates. While African immigrants face major social, economic, psychological, and cultural challenges of integration, African immigrants also have significant ethnic capital advantages. Furthermore, there is a great opportunity for new institutions to serve African immigrants, particularly panethnic organizations. To promote empowerment as well as for practical reasons, these institutions should emphasize developing African immigrants as leaders, promoting greater civic engagement and political influence, and building on existing mutual aid networks (Kassa, 10-11).

Amaha Kassa tracked the changing nature of African migration to America, which is driven by changes in US policy and changing conditions in the African continent. American Community Survey data show that this new African diaspora is more diverse than it has sometimes been portrayed. An important way to examine variations in socioecono mic achievement among the black population in the USA is to carry out an intra-African immigrant comparison. In other words geography, the racial, economic, and political context of emigration, forms an important framework in understanding variations among African immigrants in the USA. First of all, African regions are culturally and ethnically different from each other and reducing them to one large sample reduces the level of socioeconomic diversity amongst African immigrants. The four regions, East Africa, West Africa, North Africa, and Southern Africa are different from each other economically, racially, and politically. Considering economic development indicators, Southern Africa and North Africa show higher levels of per capita income and life expectancy, and lower child mortality rates as compared to the East and West African regions (World Bank). Moreover, there are differences in the racial demographic composition of these four regions. North African immigrants are primarily of Middle Eastern background, and are considered to be white in the USA. South Africa has had a long history of white racial domination that dates back to the early seventeenth century continuing to the last decade of the

twentieth century. In 1991, South Africa's multi-racial population consisted of 12% white, 9% colored, roughly 3% Asian, and 75% black African (Marger). In East Africa, apart from a small population of Asian Indian descendents in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, the population of the greater East African region is black. Similarly, the population of West Africa is primarily black African (Kusow). In other words, Africa's regional population ranges from a majority of middle Eastern/white in North Africa, multi-racial in the Southern African region (e.g., South Africa and Zimbabwe), and primarily black African in the West and East African regions.

While the standard of education for the African immigrant is unique, it is also unequally distributed. High levels of poverty and continuous employment discrimination prove the idea that African immigrants are a "new model minority" (12).

In the century following the abolition of the slave trade, levels of African immigration to the US were low. Fewer than 500 Africans arrived each year on average from the 1860s through to the 1950s. Although the large-scale voluntary immigration from Africa is relatively new, it has grown rapidly in recent decades. In 2010, nearly 1.5 million US dwellers were born in Africa. This was approximately 40 times the number present in 1960, and four times the number in 1980. The extreme majority of today's African immigrants comes from sub-Saharan Africa (Kassa, 12-13).

Immigration Acts change through time; the 1965 Immigration Act removed the national-origins quota and allowed immigration to the United States based on four main categories—family reunification, labour certification, refugees for political and humanitarian reasons, and temporary visitors (Bean, Vernez, & Keeley; Ross-Sheriff). The 1980 Refugee Act facilitated the entry of a large number of Africans among other groups who came to America (US Immigration and Naturalization Service). There are two more Acts—the 1986 Immigration and Reform Control Act, which gave amnesty to undocumented people and particularly the establishment of the "Diversity Visa" or DV in 1990, which admits immigrants from countries that historically sent few immigrants to the United States. From 1998 to 2006, 27% of the awards of Diversity Visas to the United States were given to Africans (Kent, 2007). Recent scholarship has shown how "push factors," including stagnant economic growth and displacement of refugees, have boosted immigration from Africa; how "pull factors," including the immigration of close relatives, have made the US a more attractive destination; and how "enabling factors," including urbanization

in Africa and the development of telecommunications and transportation technology, have led to huge increases in transnational mobility (Kassa, 13).

African immigrants may enter the US either as refugees or as "voluntary immigrants." Refugees are allowed in the US on humanitarian grounds, because they face persecution in their country of origin. 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 as "resettled refugees," or by travelling to a US point of entry and claiming asylum as "asylum seekers." Refugees of both types account for almost 30% of US immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa (Kassa, 13-14).

The 70% of African immigrants who are not refugees enter through sponsorship by a family member who is an American citizen, employment-based visas for skilled workers, or the DV program. Due to the challenges of qualifying and applying for DV admission, the DV program has tended to attract highly educated and skilled 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. These top 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 (Kassa, 14-15).

In recent decades, African immigration has accounted for about 20% of the growth of America's black population. The growing number of African immigrants in the US has complicated old debates about racial identity, race relations, and inequality in America. As mentioned before, African immigrants' educational attainment far surpasses the average for African-Americans, and even surpasses that of native-born white Americans, a sudden reaction has come up against the idea of African immigrants benefiting from affirmative action in higher education and other racially targeted initiatives, at the expense of multi-generational African-Americans (Kassa, 18-19).

The data certainly support the notion that African immigrants have made exceptionally high achievements in education. But a closer analysis of the data as well as the observations of respondents reject two prevalent stereotypes. First, that African immigrants as "privileged interlopers," are getting ahead by unfairly taking advantage of opportunities intended for multi-generational African Americans; and second, that African immigrants

as “model minorities,” are succeeding through cultural superiority. The data show that while levels of educational achievement are high for most African immigrants, educational achievement 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 achievement among African immigrants has decreased, and will likely continue to decrease in future years. In short, educational achievement has not translated into prosperity, meaning that African immigrants get an exceptionally poor economic return on their education, and experience above-average rates of poverty (Kassa, 20).

The incidence of poverty is higher among the women than men, except in relation to female-headed households. The *World Bank Gender Stats* showed male labour force participation to be 65% and 35% for females. As noted earlier, increasing urbanization and globalization are expanding the range of career fields open to women considerably, yet poverty remains a common denominator shared by Nigerian women that greatly hinders their ability to compete in the labour market. The doctoral study found that generally women have fewer leisure hours and less sleep and do more work (reproductive and productive combined) than men. Hilda, then Permanent Secretary in the Adamawa State Ministry of Women’s Affairs, claimed that the academic performance of girls in the state was adversely affected by a double burden of school and domestic work. As a result, most girls wake up earlier and go to bed later than boys; they have less time for homework and recreation, and are more likely to be pulled out of school in the event of financial hardship and/or for marriage (Para-Mallam, 470).

During a focus group discussion with business and professional women they shared how traditionalism had thwarted their academic and professional aspirations. Nosa (a Master’s graduate in physics) gave personal testimony that is particularly instructive in showing how women’s goals are often sublimated to the interests and needs of significant other males in their lives (Para-Mallam, 470).

Similarly, Irene, then President of the National Association of Women Academics, underscored the real challenges academic women faced in trying to compete with male academics to fulfil the mandate to “publish or perish”. She alluded to three factors that severely curtail women’s career prospects: low expectations of women by the establishment, sexist attitudes from colleagues and a psychology of female underachievement.

Consequently, female academics end up being far outpaced by their male counterparts (Para-Mallam, 470).

African American and other black people

As the American Government data suggest, African immigrants, mostly "identify with other black people", at least in the way they describe their own race for purposes of enumeration. 84% of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa identify themselves as black. Nearly 10% of African immigrants are white, while just fewer than 4% are Asian (Kassa, 21).

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, reverses the racial composition of the rest of Africa. It means that while only 10% of South African immigrants are black, over 80% of them in the US are white (Kassa, 21).

Blacks and Hispanics have lower than average educational achievement. African immigrants have higher educational achievement than nearly any other group of Americans. Nearly 65% of African immigrants have one or more years of college education. The only American racial group with slightly greater educational achievement is Asians, 66% of whom have some college degrees. However, Somali immigrant educational achievement is a striking exception to this pattern. Thirty-one per cent of Somalis in the US have no more than an 8th grade education, and fewer than 28% have any college education. This level of educational achievement is lower than any other American racial group (Kassa, 23-4).

Low levels of educational achievement among Somali immigrants likely show the large number of Somali immigrants who arrive in the US as refugees, especially among the Somali Bantu. In the last decade, 13,000 Somali Bantu were resettled in the US; in fact, the Somali Bantu is the largest group of resettled refugees from Africa in history. The Somali Bantu, also known as Jareer, was a 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 a matter of fact, the Somali Bantu has faced profound struggles adapting to and assimilating into American society (Kassa, 24).

Looking beyond Somali immigrants, other immigrants from Africa have sharply different rates of educational achievement. Immigrants from some countries are far above average in educational achievement, while all African immigrants except Somalis have an educational achievement that exceeds the national average (Kassa, 25).

Almost 80% of immigrants from South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria have one or more years of college education, while large numbers of South African and Kenyan immigrants are white or Asian. If average educational achievement varies between blacks, then the large number of non-blacks in these groups may affect the groups' average educational achievement; however, racial variety is not part of the explanation for Nigerian educational achievement, since almost all Nigerian immigrants are black. The proportion of African immigrants from the other top birthplaces who have some college education ranges from 55% to 65%. This is still above the national average of 50%, but 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 (Kassa, 26).

The educational patterns among African immigrants are diverse and they are changing. Past generations of African immigrants had greater educational achievement than today's African immigrants. Current African immigrants come from a greater variety of economic and social backgrounds than the small, relatively elite populations who were able to emigrate in the past. Refugees who are resettled in large numbers, like the Somali Bantu, may have relatively low educational levels, as well as so many African immigrants who are admitted to the US as family members of naturalized African immigrants. As one interview respondent, Tsehaye Teferra, noted, "The first wave of immigration from any country is the 'cream.'" It means that 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 skilled and less well-off. Finally, studies of immigrant assimilation have shown that differences between the educational achievement of immigrants and native born Americans tend to decrease among second and third generation immigrants. All these factors suggest that the dramatic educational achievement of African immigrants will decline in years to come (Kassa, 27).

This analysis reveals more diversity in African educational achievement than scholarly and media discussions of the topic have generally

acknowledged. Given the sensitive nature of topics like black educational achievement and affirmative action, scholars concerned with educational achievement should undertake more meticulous analysis of African immigrant educational achievement and avoid misleading generalizations (Kassa, 27).

Though African immigrants are more educated than the average American, they are also poorer than average. African immigrants also earn less economic return for their education than other groups, including multi-generational African Americans (Kassa, 27). Segmented theory generally points out that the racial structure of the American society provides immigrant opportunities along racial lines in a way that white immigrant opportunities will join with the white native-born and vice versa even when education and skill are controlled (Nawyn; Bashi and McDaniel). This observation is confirmed by some scholars who find that black African immigrants earn less than white African immigrants even when human capital variables including education, are controlled (Dodoo; Dodoo and Takyi; Kollehlon and Eule; Nawyn). It has also been noted that black immigrants generally do have significantly lower earnings than white African immigrants, therefore race is an important factor in determining black African immigrant earnings in the USA. The best studies of the impact of origin on African immigrant earnings while controlling education and the demographic variable of race and gender come from the recent literature that desegregates African immigrants along racial and gender lines. The intra-African region comparison is important for a number of reasons because different regions of Africa have different levels of racial heterogeneity from mostly white in the case of North Africa to mostly black in the case of West and East Africa with South Africa in the middle. The hypothesis is that even after controlling for human capital and demographic measures, the hourly earnings of immigrants from the various regions of Africa will differ from one another (Borch and Corra).

African immigrants' experience of poverty is above average. Sixteen per cent (16%) of all Americans live on incomes at or below the official poverty line, while 34% live on incomes up to twice that level. Poverty among African immigrants is approximately 25% higher than average. That is, 20% of Africans live below the poverty line, and 41% live below double the poverty line.

As with 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 poorer than whites and Asians. Only South Africans, whose racial composition is distinct from most other African immigrants, do better economically than all American racial groups. All other African immigrant ethnonationalities have above average rates of poverty. African immigrants from several birthplaces experience higher poverty rates than African Americans as a whole. Fifty-one per cent (51%) of all African Americans fall below 200% of poverty, in comparison to the poorest African immigrants from Western Africa (51%), Sudan (60%), and Somalia (a startling 78%) (Kassa, 27-8).

African immigrants are less likely to be poorer than African Americans as a whole or Hispanics on average. However, the difference in poverty rates between African immigrants and these groups is considerably smaller than the educational difference. As an example, African immigrants over the age of 25 are twice as likely as Hispanics of the same age to have some college education in spite of education levels that are twice as high, 20% of African immigrants live below the poverty line in comparison to 24% of Hispanics. African immigrants are 50% more likely than all African Americans to have some college education, but only 30% are less likely to be in poverty. This explains that, for African immigrants, educational advantage does not lead to economic advantage even when compared to other racial minorities (Kassa, 28-9).

In fact, it shows that African immigrants obtain an exceptionally poor economic return on their education, even compared to other blacks. The researchers found that while African Americans achieve a 24% wage advantage by obtaining a degree, for African immigrants the benefit is only 11%. Similarly, they found that the returns from college education for black African immigrant workers were 8.4% lower than those of native black workers. Interestingly, this disadvantage does not apply to immigrants from the Caribbean, who earn 26% more than their counterparts without college degrees. This issue cannot be fully accounted for by other factors, like English fluency or even whether degrees were earned in the US or Africa. The scholars argue that it is hard to explain this discrepancy other than through the issue of employer discrimination, possibly rooted in persistent stereotypes of Africa and Africans (Kassa, 29-30).

Other researches show that the aforementioned issue does not extend to white immigrants from Africa. The scholars 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. Similarly, other researchers 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; it means that 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. It is the product of discrimination against black Africans, not merely human capital factors or immigrant disadvantage (Kassa, 30).

One of the sociologists who extensively interviewed African immigrants in the US about their attitudes toward America pointed out that African immigrants see high levels of investment in human capital as crucial to economic advancement. The African immigrants who were surveyed talked about the economic opportunities in this country. They referred to the educational and cultural opportunities that America offers and generally concluded that racism and discrimination notwithstanding, those who apply themselves usually succeed in America. 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 (Kassa, 30-1).

Finally, African immigrants are to some extent equally distributed along gender lines with men slightly predominating. On the whole, 53% of African immigrants to the US are men, but this proportion varies widely according to birthplace. Most places of origin send slightly more male than female immigrants. However, several, including Somalia, Liberia, Eastern Africa, Sierra Leone, and Cameroon, send a slight majority of females. At the same time, immigrants from some birthplaces, including West Africa, Sudan, Senegal, and Guinea, are 60% or more male. It has been noted that many West African immigrants are part of “divided families,” that is, one parent is working in the US to support a family that is being raised by another parent in Africa (Kassa, 33).

Male dominance among African immigrants accords with the observations of scholars that African emigration processes select for gender, age, birth order, and educational achievement. This means that families with finite resources are more likely to use them in helping more privileged family members, often elder sons, to emigrate. 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 (Kassa, 33).

African refugees and the African Diversity Visa population struggle with distinct challenges of cultural adaptation and social integration. Finally, African immigrants face psychological, behavioral, and health issues, including mental illness, domestic violence, intergenerational conflict, and chronic diseases. African immigrants who lack legal authorization to reside or work in the US confront greater barriers to finding employment, accessing public services, gaining credit, owning businesses, and participating in civic life. It is difficult to estimate what proportion of African immigrants in the US is 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 parts of the world (Kassa, 54-5).

Many African immigrants raised immigration status as a challenge facing African immigrants. However, a high proportion of West African residents did not qualify for immigration status, and this was “the number one challenge” facing African communities. Regularizing immigration status is a top challenge for Ghanaian immigrants. It seems that lack of documentation was a primary reason that many Ghanaian immigrants with high skills and advanced degrees end up driving taxis or working in other low-wage jobs in the US. The most significant differences between refugees and non-refugee immigrants are the former group’s legal immigration status and relatively easy access to permanent residence and citizenship as a major advantage. However, not all immigrants shared this concern, and the prevalence of undocumented status may vary by country of origin. It is noted that most Ethiopian immigrants are lawfully present in the US. It has been cited that lack of immigration status is considered to be a barrier to accessing social services (Kassa, 55).

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 know about them or feel they have the right to access them. Some think they are not qualified or others are afraid to come forward since they are undocumented. It is also stressed that there is a need to educate African immigrants about the services they are entitled to access regardless of immigration status (Kassa, 55-6).

The difference between the high educational achievement of some African immigrants and the low-skilled, low-wage jobs they hold has been pointed out. Scholars describe 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 highly-skilled, they often lose out to other immigrant groups and many are unwilling to take entry-level employment or are deemed overqualified by employers. They also mention frustrated professional aspirations, and economic insecurity as underlying many of the social, psychological, and behavioral challenges. African immigrants face workplace challenges even after finding employment. When refugees first arrive, agencies usually place them in low-level jobs in warehouses, retail, or food service, and it can be difficult to find other work or better work after that and also there are many African immigrant women who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. African immigrants working as taxi drivers in Northern Virginia are classified as independent contractors, and are therefore ineligible for employer-sponsored health insurance while assistance with job training, job placement, and credentialing and licensing are considered as key unmet needs (Kassa, 56-7).

As discussed above African immigrant educational achievement is generally high, but differs significantly by nationality of origin. Some scholars pointed to specific challenges that low-income African immigrants face in accessing education. The immigrants from Francophone West African countries have relatively low levels of educational achievement. Roughly half of the USA's West African clients show special educational challenges, either they speak only creole 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 an English as a Second Language class, they must acquire basic literacy skills. The other half of the USA's West African clientele come 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 in French and earn credentials (Kassa, 57).

Some scholars also note that many African immigrant parents do not know how to effectively engage with their children's public schools. They point 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 knowledge about

how the educational system works, or lack the skills to effectively advocate for changes 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. Because African immigrants place importance in obtaining education, there is an opportunity to engage African immigrants in advocating for improvements to public education (Kassa, 58).

Public education is not the only service that African immigrants seek to access. Scholars raised issues about the ability of African immigrants to access services and public benefits. These concerns tended to be of four types. They are inadequate benefits, failure to access available services, childcare-specific issues, and challenges of navigating systems (Kassa, 58).

Immigrants are often ineligible for 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 vary by specific immigration status, geographic location, and categorical eligibility criteria like disability and parenthood. In particular, refugee benefits vary widely depending on the county and the state in which the refugees are resettled, which has caused some observers to criticize this situation as it leaves some refugees much better or worse off through no fault of their own. Many refugees resettled in Georgia who were unable to become self-sufficient within the program time limits, relocated to states where benefits were more generous (Kassa, 59).

Some describe African immigrants as trying and sometimes failing to adapt and assimilate to their new society. A common theme raised is the psychological toll that economic disappointments, cultural dislocation, and loss of supportive networks takes on new African immigrants and the long-term disconnection from American society that can result (Kassa, 62).

Voluntary Immigrants

Some scholars often point out that African refugees and voluntary immigrants confront different challenges of assimilation. While African voluntary immigrants may have better situations than refugees in some

respects, they receive little or no assistance with assimilation, and are challenged in ways similar to their refugee counterparts. Many depict the experience of African immigrants as one of disappointment and disillusionment. Some scholars point out that some African immigrants often take on large debts in order to emigrate, thinking that they will be well off. The immigrant population has unrealistic expectations that life is easy in the US. Potential immigrants may sell their houses and cut ties with their home countries. Once they have emigrated, many Africans face the high cost of living expenses and the lack of appealing options as they had in their home country. This problem 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 (Kassa, 62).

Another issue is that, unlike resettled refugees, other immigrants receive no cultural orientation and support services. It has been pointed out that while the orientation for resettled refugees is often insufficient, other immigrants receive no orientation and no supportive services whatsoever. African immigrants are suffering. They get no orientation when they get here. No medical help, no caseworker, nothing. This lack of support services may contribute to the profound social and psychological challenges that many African voluntary immigrants experience (Kassa, 63).

Unlike family-sponsored immigrants, other immigrants may have no family network for emotional and financial support. Many African immigrants emigrate alone and think they can make it on their own. They don't know what they are in for. Refugees from the same country usually resettle together, resettled refugees have an instant community, while no equivalent community exists to support other immigrants (Kassa, 63).

Scholars note that African refugees also confront 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. The case of the Somali Bantu dramatically illustrates the struggles of displaced African refugees. Several respondents pointed out 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. It is also speculated that the insular enclaves which resettled refugees form on arrival may actually cause them

to integrate into American society more slowly than voluntary immigrants (Kassa, 63-4).

As it has been mentioned, African immigrants and refugees are different, but not so different. It means that while their backgrounds and the roads they travel to get to the US are quite dissimilar, they face common challenges of assimilation and adaptation when they arrive (Kassa, 64).

Some scholars suggested that African immigrants have an outsider mentality that prevents them from engaging in American civic life, and it is a view shared with some scholars of African immigration. They described African immigrants as being more attuned to current events, culture, and interpersonal relationships in their countries of origin than in the US. They mentioned that for many in Washington DC's Ethiopian community they are physically 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. This homeland orientation led one sociologist to label African immigrants as "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 so becoming culturally and economically integrated is not a major goal. However, while the outsider status of many African immigrants is apparent, the descriptions give cause to doubt that it is entirely voluntary. 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." Those 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, they were more likely to describe refugees as traumatized and "turned off" from civic life in both their old country and their new one (Kassa, 64-5).

Some African immigrants describe the psychological, economic, and legal difficulties of returning to Africa permanently for many in the immigrant population, and the unlikelihood that most will do so. Scholars' 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 ethnic social networks for survival (Kassa, 65).

It is worth noting that keeping connections 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 over several generations, while the African immigrant diaspora has not achieved this balance successfully yet (Kassa, 65-6).

Most black scholars refer to gender inequality and domestic violence as serious issues in African immigrant communities. They point out 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 other people outside their community. African immigrant women may also face abuse in the workplace. Many of the 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 (Kassa, 67-8).

The Nigerian Gender Policy admits that gender-based violence is a serious problem, but does not discuss its damaging effects in the learning environment. At all levels girls experience sexual harassment and assault primarily from male teachers or authority figures and male colleagues, including religious instructors. The incidence of teen pregnancy among school-goers is widespread. This fact is one reason that parents in Kano State were reluctant to send girls to school, particularly co-educational schools. If they are to promote learning for girls they need to feel that the school environment is not predatory or sexualized. The University of Jos is an example of an educational establishment that has taken the threat of gender-based violence seriously. In 2006 it approved a gender policy that, among other strategies, set up a Sexual Harassment Committee and a Gender and Diversity Complaints Committee for reporting sexual offenses and violence. It establishes practices worth emulating by other educational establishments at all levels. Because of the close proximity between church and society in daily social interaction the Nigerian federal, state and local government educational authorities could adopt a pragmatic