



## 2006 African Immigrant Symposium: Presentation Abstracts

### Shifting Identities: West African Muslims and the Meaning of Africa in Harlem

Zain Abdullah, Temple University

At the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market, West African Muslim vendors foreground their African identity in ways that curtail their Blackness and Islamic sensibility. The art products they sell allow them to highlight their Africanness through a discourse of storytelling and discovery. Because western consumers of African art have their own understanding of which products symbolize Africa, merchants, as modern *griots*, provide them with objects representing an Africa they understand, essentially an Africa signified by a whole set of exotic images. By the same token, merchandising products like statues violates their Islamic beliefs forcing them to downplay their Muslim affiliation. Their traditional garb and ethnic chatting at the Market distinguish them from Black Americans, underscoring their African authenticity and enticing seekers of exotica. While Africa has come to mean many things, understanding how people construct and shift their identities around their idea of Africa is at the heart of this work.

**Zain Abdullah** is currently working on a documentary film on West African Muslims in New York City, while completing a book, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem*, which will be published by Oxford University Press. A recipient of various grants from organization such as the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the International Center for Migration, Ethnicity and Citizenship, and the Social Science Research Council, Dr. Abdullah is an Assistant Professor of Religion, Race and Ethnicity at Temple University.

## **Reproducing Home, Producing Locally: Senegalese Female Immigrants in New York**

**Awa Ba, Uppsala University**

This paper focuses on the way in which Senegalese female immigrants in New York deal with transnationalism. This is achieved through a combination of a dynamic associational life while they, at the same time, recreate “home” and domesticate the “American” space. Religious associations called *daai'ras* and *tontines* (credit associations) are reproduced in New York, playing a key role in the relationship of these women with their home country. The central argument is that these associations are hybrid spaces where apparently conflicting logics cohabit. They are also spaces of exchange and solidarity for women sharing common or similar experiences, and facing conflicting challenges that are mainly related to their status as women and secondarily as Muslim immigrants in an “alien” territory.

**Awa Ba** is a Senegalese scholar and she is currently completing a doctorate degree in social-anthropology on Senegalese women immigrants in New York at Uppsala University (Sweden). Her research interests include gender issues, migration and Islam. She also has a background in journalism.

## **West African Muslims in New York City: When is a Muslim not a Muslim?**

**Linda Beck, Barnard College/Columbia University**

Identity is commonly viewed as multifaceted and situational, with a single group identification becoming particularly salient depending on the context. This paper examines the multifaceted identities of West African Muslims in New York City to investigate the alleged situational nature of identity and its impact on group membership and relations. Based largely on a series of interviews conducted in the summer and fall of 2005 with West African immigrants and representatives of the broader Black American and Muslim communities, the paper analyzes the dual “foreignness” of West African Muslims not only in terms of their immigration status, but also in socio-cultural terms as African and Muslim, focusing on their relationships with two marginal groups in the United States: the largely foreign-born Muslim communities and autochthonous African Americans. It is argued that the tension and confluence among these communities with overlapping identities are a product of not only their interactions, but also the conceptions of the dominant “autochthonous” population (i.e., White Christian Americans) as to what it means to be African, Muslim and foreign.

**Linda Beck** is a political science professor at Barnard College and the current Acting Director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University. In addition to various publications on Senegalese politics, Dr. Beck has a forthcoming article on Senegalese associational life in New York, which will be published by the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, and a chapter on West African Muslims in New York, which will be published in an edited volume on *African Immigrant Religions in America* (NYU Press). She is also a member of the executive board of the African Services Committee, which services the African immigrant community in New York.

## **Forging University-Community Partnerships: The African Refugee Community Resilience Project in Staten Island**

**Joan Bennett, Columbia University**

Approximately 6,000 Liberians live in or around the Stapleton and Park Hill sections of Staten Island's north shore. Representing the largest Liberian Diaspora community, both neighborhoods have become the epicenters of Liberian cultural, social and political life via various institutions that Liberian refugees have created or reestablished in the US. This has allowed Liberian refugees to remain connected to their war-torn homeland, preserve their traditional customs and values, and has played a

critical role in the collective process of rebuilding fractured lives and communities. Since 2003, African Refuge, a program sponsored by the International Trauma Studies Program at Columbia, has worked with Staten Island's West African communities to sustain community resilience. This paper discusses contributions made and challenges encountered by this university-endorsed, community-led center.

**Joan Bennett** is a doctoral student at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Her research interests are in the collective impact on groups and communities that have experienced extreme life events such as forced migration, displacement, fire catastrophes and chronic illness. Ms. Bennett has been part of the research team at the International Trauma Studies Program (formerly affiliated with NYU) in the Mailman School of Public Health since completing a certificate program in 2003.

### **Killer Bargain: Senegalese Muslim Networks, the U.S. Patriot Act and the Internal "War on Terror"**

**Beth Anne Buggenhagen, University of Rochester**

"Killer Bargain" addresses Islam, civil liberties and immigration reform and debates over new media technologies, informal networks and "terrorist" financing in the U.S. after the events of September 11, 2001. In the summer of 2003, an Ohio television station warned of "killer bargains," inexpensive counterfeit goods sold by street vendors whose trade was purportedly financing terrorist networks. Based on ethnographic research on the global circuits of Senegalese Muslims in New York City, this paper demonstrates how the peddling of these goods by Senegalese Muslim vendors has become linked to the debate over how to "follow the money trail" to dismantle terrorist networks.

**Beth Buggenhagen** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology and an Associate in the graduate program in Visual and Cultural Studies, the Frederick Douglass Institute for African and African-American Studies and the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Rochester. She has conducted field research in Senegal and the U.S. concerning gender, domesticity, and the historical development of global circulation. Dr. Buggenhagen is currently working on a manuscript entitled *Prophets and Profits: Cloth, Gender and Islam in Global Senegal*.

### **Immigrant New York at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century**

**Nancy Foner, Hunter College**

This presentation provides a brief overview of the massive immigration that has brought more than two and a half million newcomers, including a growing number of African immigrants, to New York City over the past four decades. Among the topics to be discussed are: Who are the recent immigrants, and how and why they have come, as well as the many ways they have dramatically changed the city.

**Nancy Foner** is a Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is the author or editor of 13 books, including *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* (Yale University Press, 2000) which won the Theodore Saloutos Award of the Immigration and Ethnicity History Society, *New Immigrants in New York* (Columbia University Press, 2001), and *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (NYU Press, 2005). Among her other activities, she is a member of the Social Science Research Council Committee on International Migration, the Russell Sage Foundation Immigration Advisory Committee, and the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island History Advisory Committee. She is also an elected member of the Executive Board of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society and the Council of the International Migration Section of the American Sociological Association.

## **Inter-War Migration of French Colonial Subjects from West Africa to New York**

**Daouda Gary-Toukara, Université Denis Diderot**

While the presence of Francophone Africans in the United States has increased dramatically since the 1980s, it is important to recognize that their migration to New York dates to the inter-war period during the era of colonial French West Africa (AOF). Previously oriented toward the French metropole, Senegalese, Guineans and other West African from the AOF began to increasingly turn toward the United States as a destination. One of the primary reasons for this change is that the living conditions for these clandestine migrants were less difficult than in the French metropole. But in addition, the migratory flows, which were widely unrecognized by the colonial administration, evolved independent of the political agenda of maintaining a migrant labor force in the French territories.

**Daouda Gary-Toukara** is a doctoral candidate in African history at the Laboratory SEDET of the University Paris VII. His research is on migratory flows and policies in West Africa and the identities of these migrants in their territories of origin and reception. Mr. Toukara has written various publications on Malian migratory policy, including “La communauté musulmane et la quête de l'égalité politique dans la Côte d'Ivoire de l'ivoirité (1993-2000),” in *L'islam politique au sud du Sahara : identités, discours et enjeux* (Paris: Karthala, 2005).

## **Lost in the Movements: The Voice of the Battered Immigrant African Woman**

**Natasha Johnson-Lashley, Sanctuary for Families**

This paper sets out to document the lives of African immigrant survivors of domestic abuse in New York City. Members of immigrant communities commonly arrive striving for a fresh start. Many also come bearing an identity not their own and live underground, underserved and under-resourced for fear of detection. Buried in this bundle of the hidden is an especially innumerable group even more concealed—victims of domestic abuse. Her voice, her concerns, and more importantly her rights get misplaced between and among various movements: the physical movement from continental Africa to America; the social movements of women's and immigrant's rights; and the movement from victim to survivor. This paper questions how, when, and where room is being created for their voices in the social and legal spheres. Through the act of writing this paper, the author proposes to serve as a catalyst for a forum in which African immigrant survivors of abuse in New York City can create an image of themselves that truly begins to capture all that has been lost in the movements.

**Natasha Johnson-Lashley** is an Equal Justice Works/ Cingular Wireless Fellow who designed a project to provide direct legal representation, outreach, and education to African immigrant victims of domestic violence. She is currently the Sub-Saharan African Community Liaison/Staff Attorney at Sanctuary for Families Center for Battered Women's Legal Services, where she works to not only empower women through the often time-encumbering legal processes in family court, immigration proceedings, and matrimonial law, but also to collaborate with the many public entities present in the lives of African survivors of domestic violence.

## **Chain Migration among the Haal Pulaar Community**

**Abdoulaye Kane, University of Florida**

Since the 1990s, Fulton Street in Brooklyn has become a place with a large concentration of Haal Pulaar immigrants from Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Guinea Conakry. The pioneers of Haal Pulaar immigration in New York were concentrated in a few apartments located on Fulton Street. These first immigrants helped their families, friends and neighbors to find their way to New York City by sending

them the necessary money to pay for their plane ticket and the information needed to secure an American visa. Using life stories, this paper examines the importance of chain migration in the displacements and settlements of Haal Pulaar migrants in the United States, demonstrating how chain migration is embedded in the moral economy of reciprocity that governs social relations among Haal Pulaar people.

**Abdoulaye Kane** is an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Florida. His research is on transmigration with a focus on the diaspora of the Hal Pulaaren community from the Senegal River Valley between Senegal and Mauritania.

### **African Immigrant Experiences in Comparative Perspective: The United Kingdom**

**Dabo Oyewole, Center for African Policy & Peace Strategy**

The history of the United Kingdom and Africa dates back several centuries and has been marked by what can be described as “the good, the bad and the ugly.” While the relationship at the international level has been subjected to much media scrutiny, academic debate and policy analysis, there is another dimension to this relationship that has not received equal attention: the domestic dimensions of Africa’s relationship with the U.K. as characterized by Africans living in Britain, often as British citizens, while juggling dual cultural identities. Millions of Africans have immigrated to the U.K. through the different phases of U.K.-Africa relations and many now live as British citizens. While the older generation often remains resolutely African in their cultural identities, younger generations of British-born Africans now see themselves, and to a great extent live their lives, as British people. Yet this generation often speaks an African language, practices aspects of their African culture and still adheres to African norms and values, even though they may have never been to Africa or feel no direct connection to the continent. These “Afro-Brits” straddle both worlds and juggle both identities in a multicultural Britain and in a globalized world. This presentation will examine the issues and challenges faced by Afro-Brits.

**Dabo Oyewole** is the Executive Director of the Center for African Policy & Peace Strategy, an independent African policy think tank that facilitates the development of policy and strategies that enhance human security, socio-economic development and good governance in Africa. Mr. Oyewole is currently a doctoral candidate in International & Political Studies at the University of Warwick. He has recently served as Governance and Security Adviser to UNAIDS, a liaison between the Commission for Africa Secretariat and the African diaspora in the U.K., and the head of the International Office of the Centre for Democracy and Development (U.K.). He has written extensively on African governance, security and development issues and is a regular Africa analyst for numerous international news networks.

### **One Family’s Odyssey: A Microcosmic History of West African Migration**

**Enid Schildkrout, Museum for African Art**

This paper argues that many West Africans, especially Muslims, but others as well, have been involved in global migration throughout history. Tracing the movements of five generations in one family — from Bourkina Faso, to Ghana, to New York — the author explores the reasons for and consequences of migration, showing how identity and community are continually redefined, yet remain strongly consistent, in changing social and cultural environments.

**Enid Schildkrout** is Chief Curator at the Museum for African Art and Curator Emerita at The American Museum of African History. She began working on African migration and ethnicity in the 1960s when her doctoral research focused on second-generation immigrants from Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali, and Niger who were living in Kumasi, Ghana. This work is

summarized in her book *People of the Zongo: the Transformation of Ethnic Identities in Ghana* (Cambridge University, 1978). She has maintained contact with members of this community for over three decades.

### **With Patience and Forbearance: Social and Psychological Resilience among West Africans in New York City**

**Paul Stoller, West Chester College/ Temple University**

When they suffer through adversity, many Songhay people in Niger, Mali and New York City like to say “kala suuru,” a reference to a Songhay expression that roughly translates as “with patience and forbearance, we will weather this storm.” From the traditional Songhay perspective, life is seen as a series of potentially dangerous crossroads—points of misfortune—at which one must choose a path and walk toward a new destination. These choices are made with “patience and forbearance,” for like an existential philosopher, the chooser must bear the consequences of his or her choice. Based on more than 15 years of field research among West Africans in New York City, this paper describes how West Africans in New York City have negotiated many novel points of misfortune. No matter the results of these difficult existential negotiations, this patient and forbearing approach to life decisions provides to West African immigrants a robust degree of social and psychological resilience in the turbulent vortex of contemporary social life of transnational New York.

**Paul Stoller** teaches anthropology at West Chester University and Temple University. For more than 30 years he has conducted ethnographic fieldwork among Songhay and Hausa people in western Niger and New York City. The recipient of many grants and awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, he is the author of 10 books, including the award-winning *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*.

### **Other Participants:**

**Yinka Akinsulure-Smith** is the Chair and Co-Founder of Nah We Yone, a non-profit organization that provides social and psychological services to displaced African war victims in metropolitan New York. A licensed psychologist originally from Sierra Leone, she has extensive clinical experience working with war trauma survivors, refugees, asylees, survivors of sexual violence, and persons afflicted with HIV/AIDS. She has been conducting psychotherapy and psychological assessments for the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture since 1999, and has been involved in human rights investigations with Physicians for Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Division in Sierra Leone. In 2003, Dr. Akinsulure and her co-founders at Nah We Yone won one of NYC’s Union Square Awards. In 2005, she received Teachers College’s “Early Career Award.”

**Victoria Ebin** is an anthropologist and journalist who carried out research for several years on Murid migration and commerce in New York, France and Senegal. As an anthropologist at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) in Senegal, she studied Murid trade networks and made a film on Murids in Marseilles, Antwerp and Senegal for Arte TV in France. She now works as a consultant on media assistance programs in Africa and teaches anthropology as an adjunct at Ramapo College.

**Kadiatou Diallo** is the founder and president of the Amadou Diallo Foundation. Created after her son was killed by NY police officers, the Foundation’s mission is to promote racial healing through various activities such as school programs that seek to diminish prejudice and racial conflicts and enhance police-community relations. Ms. Diallo recently published a book, *My Heart will Cross this Ocean*, about her son and the challenges she has faced since his tragic death.

**Zeinab Eyega** is the Executive Director and Founder of Sauti Yetu: Center for African Women. Sauti Yetu, which means "Our Voice" in Swahili, provides direct services and support to African women as well as policy analysis, community engagement and education activities. Ms. Eyega routinely speaks publicly on issues affecting immigrant African women and children in order to change attitudes that perpetuate violence and build community awareness. She has published and contributed to various articles such as "Caring for Women with Circumcision: A Technical Manual for Health Care Providers" and "Female Genital Mutilation: A Guide to Worldwide Laws and Policies." In addition, Ms. Eyega has conducted numerous cross-cultural competency workshops for health care providers and social workers, and has developed education and training materials.

**Fallou Gueye** is the president of the *Association des Sénégalais d'Amérique*, which provides both a community and services for the Senegalese immigrant community. A doctoral student in African literature at CUNY, Mr. Gueye currently teaches French at Hunter College, CUNY and the New School. He has also taught Wolof at Columbia.

**Mohammed Mbodj** is a professor of History and chair of African and African-American Studies at Manhattanville College. Before joining the faculty at Manhattanville, he taught at Cheikh Anta Diop University (Dakar), where he was the founder and first director of the Institute for Historical Demography, and Columbia University. Dr. Mbodj received his M.A. from the University of Dakar and his Ph.D. from the University of Paris Jussieu. He has several publications African history that deal with themes ranging from politics, religion, economy, social change, and demography. His current research is focused on national identity, social change, and the African diaspora.

**Mojúbàolú Olúfunké Okome** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Brooklyn College, CUNY who specializes in African International Political Economy. She is a co-editor of the two online journals, *Jenda: Journal of African Culture and Women Studies* and *Irinkèrindò: a Journal of African Migration*, and is also the author of *A Sapped Democracy: The Political Economy of the Structural Adjustment Program and the Political Transition in Nigeria, 1983-1993* (University Press of America, 1998). She has numerous other publications, including: "African Immigrant Churches and the New Christian Right" in *African Immigrant Religions in America*, (NYU Press, Fall 2006), "Emergent African Immigrant Philanthropy in New York City" in *Race and Ethnicity in New York City* (Elsevier Press, 2004), and "Domestic, Regional, and International Protection of Nigerian Women Against Discrimination: Constraints And Possibilities," *African Studies Quarterly* (2002).

**Bakary Tandia** is a Case Manager and Policy Advocate at African Services Committee, Inc., a social services agency providing culturally and linguistically appropriate health and social services to African refugees and immigrants in New York City. In that capacity, besides the direct services, he has been participating in public hearings and leading legislative visits at the city, state and federal levels. He is also currently the President of the Forum for African Immigrant Associations, an organization advocating on behalf of African immigrant communities.

All information included here was complete and accurate at the time of the symposium on April 21, 2006. Some participants may have changed their affiliations in the interim time period.