BORDERS IN GLOBALIZATION
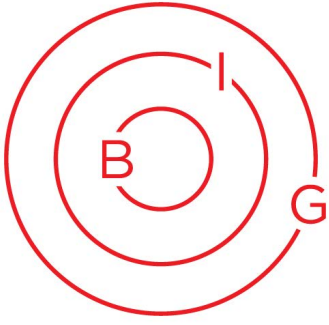
Borders in Globalization Research Project 94

The role of cultural communities in immigrant retention

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Abstract:

This paper presents findings from a research project funded by the Borders in Globalization network. The project investigated the role that cultural communities of African immigrants play in influencing the decision of these immigrants on whether to stay in the province of Nova Scotia.

This paper outlines the project's purpose and methodology with a special focus on current debates over immigration in the province. It also sheds light on an immigrant group's endogenous approaches to retention. Among the key findings of the research is the fact that to a rather unexpected high degree, the research itself was useful in clarifying the obstacles to successful retention in NS. Moreover, the research also highlighted the utility that ADAM, the African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes has in aiding provincial immigrant retention. The particular standing of this organization, due to its structure as an umbrella organization rather than a country specific organization, puts it in a favorable position to advise and guide the province in retaining more African immigrants of different backgrounds. However, the findings remained inconclusive concerning ADAM's objective of collaborating effectively with other country specific diaspora associations as well as indigenous African Nova Scotians.

Finally, this paper proposes possible ways to foster the engagement of existing immigrant cultural communities in the province's retention and planning processes.

Introduction

Despite new immigration policies that have made it significantly easier for Africans to immigrate to Canada, and despite the fact that Canada's provinces and territories increasingly rely on immigration as a source of skills and knowledge (Tettey & Puplampu, 2005), African born immigrants continue to experience difficulties settling in beyond the acts of border crossing and arrival. Concurrently, the question of how to develop a sound immigration and diversity management strategy is one that many Canadian provinces and cities are grappling with. In the case of the province of Nova Scotia, a study conducted by Goss Gilroy Inc. (2005) revealed that of the 25,493 immigrants who arrived in NS from 1991 to 2001, only 10,290 settled permanently, reflecting a retention rate of only 40 per cent. This despite the fact that attracting and retaining immigrants has been part of the province's strategic objectives for the last two decades; strategies that are mainly focused on creating employment opportunities for newcomers and opening up more access to settlement assistance. In the case of African immigrants however, Nova Scotia's attempt to improve retention is a particularly complicated task: first because existing data on the immigrant populations in Nova Scotia are quantitative, and not disaggregated to reflect the characteristics of the African immigrants and their diverse cultural communities. This makes it impossible to know who these immigrants are and, critically, how to help them settle and thrive. The African Canadian Immigrant Action Research, for instance, states only that African immigrants in NS represent about 30 African countries (Government of Nova Scotia, 2004).

Furthermore, there is a dearth of research on the organizations and activities of the African immigrant cultural communities in self-facilitating their settlement and retention within Nova Scotia. The recently released report produced by the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy (2014) underscores the pressing nature of this issue. The report emphasizes that Nova Scotia's "low rates of attraction and retention for immigrants, along with our negative inter-provincial migration trend contribute to our weaker economic growth over the past 30 years" (p.26). It emphasizes the place of culture: "having clusters of people with shared cultural backgrounds helps with attraction and retention for future immigration" (p.59). But the Commission's report as well as the overall provincial immigration strategy are problematic because they fail to provide a critical and practical analytic perspective on how such "clusters of people" are formed, the role they play and how to foster their resilience. To start that conversation, we then ask: What role do cultural communities play in immigrant retention among recent African arrivals in Nova Scotia?

This paper presents findings of a research project that investigated the most prominent cultural organizations of African diaspora communities in the province, including the African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM), the Ugandan Canadian Association of the Maritimes, the Ghanaian Nova Scotia Association, the Nigerian Nova Scotia Association, the Liberian Association in Nova Scotia, and the Sierra Leonean Association in Nova Scotia. Below, we outline the project's purpose, methodology and theoretical framework, and findings. To a rather unexpected high degree, the research helped clarify the obstacles to successful retention in NS. It also highlighted the utility that ADAM, the African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes has in aiding provincial

immigrant retention. However, the findings remained inconclusive concerning this organization's objective of collaborating effectively with country specific diaspora associations as well as indigenous African Nova Scotians. The research adds voice to the policy implications, with a special focus on current debates over immigration in Nova Scotia.

Purpose

This study seeks to deepen an understanding of cultural identity within the African diaspora in Canada and the role of culture as a unifying force beyond original borders among members of African diaspora communities. By investigating the role played by immigrants' cultural organizations, we are reflecting on new forms of cultural practices created by transnational groups of African immigrants as they seek to establish themselves in Nova Scotia. Understanding the settlement behavior of different immigrant cultural groups of African descent in Nova Scotia is important for several reasons. First, the issue of immigrant retention is an important public policy priority in Nova Scotia and Canada. According to Federal Citizenship and Immigration Minister, Chris Alexander (2013), "Immigration is one of Canada's most vital public policy issues… It's a question of our economic future. It is about nation-building" (para. 4). But as Akbari, Lynch, McDonald and Rankaduwa (2007) point out, such lofty ideas are much more difficult to operationalize in Atlantic Canada: "If immigrants are to make a durable contribution to NS, the province's success in retaining its immigrants is critical" (p.19). It is important, therefore, to understand the place of culture and collectivity within the process of immigrant retention. Second, such questions about immigrant retention are particularly important in Nova Scotia, since immigrant retention in the province has long been

compounded by the broader trend of out-migration. According to the Government of Nova Scotia (2013), the province's population was estimated to be 940,567 people as of October 2013 - a decrease of 222 persons (0.02%) over the July 2013 estimate (940,789).

In its current immigration strategy, the provincial government (2011) seeks to "increase retention of new immigrants to 70 per cent or better" (p.11). During the 2013 provincial election, the leader of the Official Opposition Progressive Conservative Party, Jamie Baillie (2013), campaigned on the objective of being the first premier to increase the population of the province to one million. The Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy (2014) argues that there is a need to "develop a current profile of our immigration attraction, retention, economic activity and geographic distribution" (p.36). For all these reasons, it is essential to shed a light on under-utilized capacities – notably immigrant groups' endogenous approaches to retention - and how they might be coordinated with the efforts of government and other community partners.

Theoretical context

Culture and acculturation are the foundational concepts within this proposed study. Our study draws on Zimmerman's (2012) definition that "culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts" (para.1). From a psychological perspective, Berry (1980) argues that acculturation refers to changes in behaviors, attitudes, values, and identities of individuals. Acculturation occurs at the level of the individual, but also for groups - a dynamic that will be critical to our investigations.

Drawing on two interrelated theories of acculturation – dissonant acculturation and social conformity – we critically examine what can be done to facilitate the settlement and retention of African diaspora communities. Towards this end, we engaged the leaders of the respective African immigrant cultural communities in Nova Scotia, and probed the assumption that some cultural communities have stronger and hence more successful settlement and retention capacities than others because of differences in their communal organizational, acculturation and settlement strategies. Berry (2005) argues that, "not all groups and individuals undergo acculturation in the same way" (p.704). In this context, examining and drawing upon the distinctive capacities of various diaspora associations may be of particular value in facilitating integration and encouraging retention.

The theory of dissonant acculturation holds that there may be different patterns of acculturation within the same family (Portes, 1999). We intend to adapt this theory with the supposition that there may be different patterns of acculturation within a cultural collective of interrelated, independent immigrant cultural communities. Replacing family with a collective of cultural communities retains the analytic logic of the theoretical supposition because cultural communities, among African diaspora peoples, have comparable importance to families (Nyemah & Vanderplaat, 2009; Chareka, Manguvo, & Nyemah, 2012). This research validates this theory in part, as it highlights that to a certain degree, the existence of cultural communities has helped members of the African diaspora feel welcome and better included in the community at large and has effectively helped many of them navigate a socially and administratively complex system that was their new home province.

The theory of social conformity, on the other hand, presupposes that the acculturative behavior of immigrants as it relates to a collectivity is driven by "the desire to fit in with others, strategic benefits from coordination, incentives to free ride on the information of others, and the tendency to interact with people similar to oneself" (Bednar, Bramson, Jones-Rooy & Page, 2010, p.414). We propose to analyze how the coordinated cultural activities of the respective African immigrant cultural collectives differentially influence their settlement and retention capacities. The combination of the two theories of acculturation is crucial because it allowed us to understand not only the settlement and retention differences between cultural communities, but also differences in their motivations.

Methodology and research population

To explore how African immigrants' cultural organizations might be engaged in immigrant retention processes in Nova Scotia, it was important first to understand who these organizations are, their memberships, and barriers they have identified to integration and settlement in the province. To achieve this objective, a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives of each prominent cultural organization were conducted. This research adopted a qualitative approach comprised of structured, semi-structured, and informal interviews with leaders of the most prominent cultural organizations of African immigrants in the province. These discussions contained open-ended questions to give participants an opportunity to develop their ideas and opinions on the subject with the hope that in the end, they could help us understand why some cultural communities have stronger settlement and retention capacities than others.

The total number of interviews planned was between 15 and 20 leaders of the organizations; the goal was not to have a representative sample of leaders of African immigrants' organizations but instead one that offered depth and detail on how these organizations operated and what particular factors allowed them to influence the retention of some of their members in Nova Scotia.

Strengths and limitations of the methodological approach

In the end however, not all the interviews could be obtained. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with official leaders of the aforementioned organizations, because soon after the research project started, I realized that the fact that I was seeking to speak to representatives of these organizations meant that only the president or founding member or official spokesperson of the organization felt they were the right and often only persons to speak on behalf of the organization. My numerous attempts to speak with more people were unsuccessful as subjects I had identified as potential respondents kept referring me to the "official" leaders of the organizations. Nonetheless, I was able to speak with representatives who had been part of the organizations since their beginning and in all but one instance were founding members of the organizations themselves. This provided a more complete picture of the origins of these organizations and a contextualization of how they relate to their members and to each other.

Although the site of our research was Nova Scotia, all of the organizations and their representatives were located in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). All the respondents reported living in the area, and we do not have evidence about any other African immigrant cultural organizations outside of Halifax. Although some of the representatives said some of their members lived outside of HRM, they could not account

for exact numbers of these members, both the total numbers of their memberships or those of the immigrants living outside of HRM.

African diaspora organizations in Nova Scotia: Mission statements and membership.

The roots of country-specific African diaspora organizations in Nova Scotia are fairly young. The Ghanaian and Nigerian associations of Nova Scotia are the oldest, and they were founded in the late 1980's at the initiative of international students originating from these countries. Other prominent cultural organizations were created in the late 1990s and throughout the early 2000s as a response to an increase in the number of immigrants from countries like Uganda in the late 1990s, as well as the influx of refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia following the civil wars in these countries.

The African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM), the umbrella organization of people and associations of African descent, was founded in 2005, with a goal to encourage, foster and welcome newcomers from the Caribbean, South America and Africa. Because of the special status of ADAM, I will dedicate a section to it later on. For now, we will start by considering the country-specific associations to understand how these organizations came into being, who they represent and how much influence they hold vis-a-vis their membership.

The Association of Nigerians of Nova Scotia

Founded in Halifax in 1983, this association was first called the Nigerian Students Association and later became the Association of Nigerians of Nova Scotia in 1986 after a decision was made to include all Nigerians living in Nova Scotia. In its mission statement, the NANS stands for the preservation and promotion of the socio-economic, cultural and civic interests of all Nigerians by birth, marriage or descent, living in Nova Scotia. It is unclear how many members the association currently has. Because the majority of the members are still international students attending school in one of Nova Scotia's higher education institutions, many members are by definition in transition, which means that the association is almost always in some measure of flux. The current leadership of the association estimates the number of Nigerians living in Nova Scotia to be around 4000 people, though they are not all active members of NANS. It is unclear what the current leadership of the association bases this estimate on, but the association's representative said it has tried to keep up with those who register to be members as well as those who attend the numerous events the association regularly organizes.

The Ugandan Canadian Association of the Maritimes (UCAM)

UCAM was founded in 2002 and has the status of a non-profit community organization. In its mission statement, UCAM strives to bring together Ugandan Canadians living in the Maritimes by way of "organizing social and community events to help promote networking and to have a good time". The Association is also part of the larger Ugandan Canadian National Association (UCNA). Because the association covers the Maritimes as a whole, and because its membership is open to non-Ugandan Canadians, UCAM does not have an exact number of its members. The current leadership estimates its

membership in Nova Scotia to be between 25 and 50 Ugandans-Canadians, based mainly in the Halifax region.

Sierra Leone Canadian Association

Prior to the influx of refugees from Sierra Leone in the 1990s following the civil war, it is not clear how many immigrants from Sierra Leone lived in Nova Scotia. The original association was called the Association of Sierra Leoneans in Nova Scotia (ASLINS), and was set up with the objective of contributing funds monthly to help with the settlement of the refugees from Sierra Leone in the mid 1990s. By the early 2000s however, the association had become dormant due to the fact that many former refugees had moved on to other parts of the country. The association was later subsumed into a new organization, the Sierra Leone Canadian Association (SLECA) and the current leadership estimates its membership to be under 100 in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia Society for Cultural Preservation and Empowerment of Liberian Diaspora

The story of the Liberian association of Nova Scotia follows closely that of the Sierra Leonian community. The association started in the 1990s following the influx of refugees fleeing the Liberian civil war. The Liberian association of Nova Scotia was founded to help with resettlement programs in Nova Scotia. But internal management problems caused by a number of members of the leadership team moving to different provinces made it difficult for the association to continue its operations; as a result, it was dormant

between 2006 and 2013. The current association officially started operating in early 2015 and it counts around 60 members, split between students and established families.

The Ghanaian association of Nova Scotia.

One of the oldest African diaspora associations in Nova Scotia, the Ghanaian Association of Nova Scotia (GANS) was formed 1989 in response to the increase in the size of the Ghanaian community. Its mission statement is to promote unity and love within the Ghanaian community and to preserve the culture of the Ghanaian people in Nova Scotia. It is also the only diaspora association in the province that makes it clear that it is independent of political or religious ideology. Its current leadership counts between 150 and 200 members.

The African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM): An umbrella organization

According to its internal documents, the African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM) was founded in 2005 as a non-profit, community-based organization dedicated to providing various services to assist Africans in the Maritimes. Members consist of individuals of African descent, non-African spouses of Africans, as well as individuals who share the mission, vision, and objectives of ADAM.

ADAM's mission is to foster successful participation and integration of members of the African Canadian Diaspora in educational, social, political, civic, and economic activities in Nova Scotia and in the Maritimes. ADAM's purpose is to provide services to its members and network with all levels of government and with other public and private organizations for the benefit of its members and the community at large.

We will elaborate later on how this organization operates and how it collaborates with country-specific African diaspora associations in the province. Although its name refers to an organization that is servicing African diaspora members in the Maritimes, the current leadership said that the primary focus has been in Halifax and in the HRM, though the organization was seeking to expand its reach to other regions of Nova Scotia and to the Maritimes in general.

ADAM is a service providing organization, which serves close to a thousand people; but as a membership-based organization, it has only approximately a hundred members. It is a challenge to know exactly how many people served by ADAM and who benefit from these services. The people that ADAM engages with and assists come to the organization because they were referred by other organizations or because someone told them about it. In many cases, newcomers come to ADAM when referred by settlement organizations. From a statistical standpoint, the organization is currently restructuring its membership and liasing with different community partners to gather more information on those who already do or can benefit from its services.

Research findings

   a) **Inclusivity and influence of African immigrants' organizations in Nova Scotia.**

To understand how much influence cultural organizations hold, it is important to examine first how representative these organizations are in reality. The data provided by the five most prominent cultural organizations of African diaspora in Nova Scotia is inconclusive

as to how representative the current leaderships are. These are the only organizations that are registered with the province, that have existent structures and for which an elected – or self designated – leadership could provide information for the purpose of this research. First, though these organizations are membership-based, they don't maintain any rigor as to who gets to be a member, who gets to be elected and why. Moreover, recruitment seems to follow a word-of-mouth strategy, where new members are brought in when someone tells them that there is a local organization of their fellow countrymen and women in Nova Scotia. At this moment, there is no accurate information on how the leadership is elected, and thus how influential the associations are among their respective communities. This however doesn't mean that the information we were provided with by the current leadership is skewed but rather that they have a limited reach among members and potential members. Because none of the country-specific organizations has clear numbers on their memberships, it is more likely that those who get actively involved in the activities of the organizations are those who are in the proximity of the leadership or the area where the cultural activities are held. There is no conclusive information as to how many African immigrants are in Nova Scotia, what their occupations are and more importantly, how effectively represented they are by their cultural organizations. The sporadic information that is offered by the current associations' leaderships suggests that most of African diaspora members are in the Halifax, and that they are a rather revolving door, made up mostly of international students who are very active but tend to move out of the province once their studies in Nova Scotia are done. The caveat being that the experiences of the African students attending institutions and other diaspora people of the Halifax region are not accounted for by the current structures of these associations.

There are also political considerations that need to be taken into account. In communities where there are ethnic divides, such as the Nigerian community for example, though the current leadership maintains that the association is open to everyone of Nigerian origin, the association itself may not be representative of the majority of Nigerians in Nova Scotia and thus not reflect their realities. This is particularly troubling when the local cultural association states - as in the case of the Nigerian association – that it fosters collaboration with the High Commission or the government of their country of the origin. This might influence the decision of the members on whether to participate in the cultural activities it organizes.

The five organizations focused on in this research are very aware of the importance of politics to foster inclusivity of their communities and this could be the reason why they all say that they are open to members that both originate from the countries they represent and those who are their supporters. To be more to the point, the associations' leaders told us that they were very aware of the need to be more inclusive of people of all political allegiances, and made it a point to include everyone, for fear of being seen as politically or ethnically biased against certain groups. But because it is not clear how many of these members they have, since none of these organizations has an exhaustive list of members or enforce membership requirements such as monetary fees and attendance, it is unclear how inclusive they really are.

Representatives said that although all their members are at different stages in the immigration processes, they tend to see two specific categories: the international students

and the more well established New Canadians (Those with a newly acquired citizenship). International students are those attending different universities and other post secondary institutions in Nova Scotia and all the organizations' representatives agreed that this is the most mobile membership they have as they tend to move elsewhere in the country, in the USA or back to their home country once their studies are completed. The rest of the memberships of these organizations are also diverse but have no new arrivals who are refugees in the process of immigration. This reflects the fact that their countries of origin are more or less stable and new immigrants are more likely to be economic migrants rather than refugees. This also means that these associations have moved away from traditional refugee settlement goals, although because they still count students as members, they intervene in helping them through their temporary work permit or permanent residency processes.

Members of the five identified associations are English speaking, though English is their second or third languages in many cases. Their occupations vary in the case of the more established associations such as the Ghanaian and Nigerian associations: most of their non-student members are professionals (medical, academic and others), while the rest work in a range of industries.

Although the 'quality of life' of their memberships vary, there seems to be a common denominator: it depends on the reasons why their members first immigrated to Nova Scotia. Associations with a more established membership, with members who have been in the province for two or three generations, are those who came for economic or professional reasons. In the case of GHANS for example, there are no Ghanaian refugees in Nova Scotia, because their home country has been violence-free for four decades now,

although there were some tumultuous times in the Rawlings era. This means that the majority of members are either international students or other professionals who immigrate to Canada for economic reasons. The case of the Sierra Leonian association is a good example here because despite the fact that the association maintains that it helped hundreds of Sierra Leonian settle in Nova Scotia in the 1990s, during and at the end of the Sierra Leonean civil war, the majority has moved away over the last 10 years. This is important to understand because it defines the nature and characteristics of the organization. Associations that were started by former refugees in Nova Scotia tend to disaggregate while those formed by economic immigrants are better organized, structured around an educated and professional membership.

Nova Scotia as a 'transit area' for members of the African diaspora: Culture as a stabilizing force only in an economically secure environment.

Diaspora associations representatives suggest that generally, Nova Scotia's African diaspora immigrated to Nova Scotia because of one of four reasons: refugee settlement, school, employment or marriage to someone from Nova Scotia. Those interviewed indicated that the initial motivation for moving to Canada was either linked to wanting a safe place for them and their families or to better employments prospects. For many of the African diaspora, Nova Scotia was the first point of entrance into Canada and North America and most likely into the world outside of Africa.

All those interviewed said that they take for granted that for international students who come to attend post-secondary school, Nova Scotia is a 'transit area', from which the students will go to other parts of the country or even of North America. In fact, these

associations don't consider their students membership to be full-fledged immigrants because they haven't made a decision yet where they will be going next.

You know—some finish, they will go back—they will finish. Others go back or go to another province in search of jobs.

The reasons why students move once school is finished vary but they all have employment as a common thread.

People leave for different reasons, some of which we can't explain because they are personal but the common things we hear from most of the students are lack of opportunities of course, lack of jobs, some of them don't feel comfortable with a small city and they want to go to a big city. Or they just want to change. What I would say it's just jobs.

But perhaps to be able to capture the sentiment that African diaspora members have when asked why they don't stay in Nova Scotia, this representative's words are most illustrative.

So, why don't the immigrants stay? Why don't the immigrants do what everybody else does, it's a naïve, it's an uninspired question. It is the wrong question.

These words were echoed by other representatives where the consensus is that African immigrants' decisions to leave the province are no different than anyone else's decisions. This representative thinks that the province should accept this fact.

I think traditionally and historically, Maritimers have always moved out west, even before the immigrants came. There is go west young man, that's what they say, "Go west, young man." So, it shouldn't be looked at in terms of that. I think they should welcome it.

Representatives also said that the movement of African diaspora members out of the province is motivated by the lack of economic and social incentives necessary to build a decent life in the province.

The answer is to grow the economy and people will flock to Nova Scotia and to the Maritimes from all over the place. Grow the economy. What is lacking is a sufficient mass, a critical mass of entrepreneurship culture.

In this instance then, the decision to stay in Nova Scotia is informed by economic conditions rather than the immigration experience itself. And it's a particularly significant fact in terms of retaining international students who are still in their immigration decision-making process.

"Those who get employed right after school will tend to stay in the province but those who feel they have no prospects might want to move away as soon as school ends."

Representatives we interviewed said that most people in the diaspora knew little or nothing about living in Canada, let alone in Nova Scotia, before they arrived, even though people tend to know one of two other people who live elsewhere, mostly in large cities such as Calgary or Toronto or Montreal. This is unsurprising given the small number of African diaspora members in Nova Scotia.

None of the interviewees said that they had tried to encourage members to stay in Nova Scotia or to join them here. One representative told us that after years of being in Nova Scotia, she had also made her personal decision to leave the province because she felt the province was far from being an open society.

I'll be leaving soon too — I give myself the next two years. It's good to bring up the children in Nova Scotia but after that there's nothing here in Nova Scotia because Nova Scotians are not open. They're not accepting.

The issue of racism is a thorny one. All the interviewees' acknowledged that some of their members have been discriminated against in one way or another but there is no clear answer as to the nature of this particular form of racism.

People say that people here are very nice, but that is not true. In order for you to understand Nova Scotia very well, you have to live here for as many years as I have.

On this topic, one of the issues that three out of the 9 representatives raised has to do with the relationship between Africans and indigenous African Nova Scotians. One of the representatives told us that some of her association members felt that they are competing with African Nova Scotians for jobs that are designated for 'diversity and visible minorities'. Another representative echoed this, by saying that a lot of social programs were created for African-Nova Scotians, and that the province has been unable to move to accommodate newly arrived Africans by considering distinct programs.

When you come here as a black and you are trying to get an idea on those sort of things, you find that some of the issue that you are addressing are already covered by those

programs. So, that means that we as a group cannot really push our agenda too far,

unless either push it gently with indigenous or try to navigate somewhere because the

funding they give they cannot be split into two parts.

These anecdotes about forms of latent racism in Nova Scotia demonstrate awareness, on the part of African diaspora members, of the social context of their new post-immigration environment. This awareness may be limited, since most of them haven't been living in Nova Scotia long enough to have a full grasp of the existing complexities between indigenous African Nova Scotians and the rest of the population, but it's still noticeable that new immigrants are conscious of how they might feel at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the community in Nova Scotia. It's not clear if this alone is reason enough not to want to stay in Nova Scotia but complex social relationships in a country that they are still trying to figure out, all in the context of an economically unstable setting, can prove to be hard even on the most resilient immigrants.

Representatives interviewed said that some of their members living in Nova Scotia had had positive experiences but they concerned mostly those who had been in the province for a long time and were professionals working for the public service rather than newcomers or international students. Interviewees all said that the decision to stay in Nova Scotia depends on employment opportunities and all touched on the issue of a lack of opportunities both for skilled jobs and unskilled jobs.

High-end jobs here are quite limited and the low-end jobs are so limited. I mean, if you

happen to be in Calgary, you have a meat packer where people can work shifts. Here

competition is very interesting because when you go to the shopping mall, for example

here, you would find that – even when you go to the airport, even in this Tim Horton's here, the one cleaning the floor and washing the toilet is a blonde Nova Scotian.

Another representative made a similar comment and both reflected on the fact that low-skilled jobs, which are traditionally the hub of immigrant employment, are highly competitive in Nova Scotia. They also reflected on the fact that when competition is high in the local market, the African immigrants are less likely to be hired for the job, a fact that they attribute to a form of latent discrimination.

It is and even I find that some of the things maybe they are sensitive, I know that. I go to the airport and I see, even people at Tim Horton's out there, the cleaners there are white. I say, where would the immigrants work if they don't work there? So there is a bit of that and I don't know who is to blame, but that's the make of Atlantic Canada.

They also spoke about the lack of information in terms of what the province has to offer to new African immigrants, saying that most people leave because they don't realize the full potential of opportunities in the province, such as how social and economic programs and other cultural programs compare to what other provinces have. What emerged from these comments and perhaps the most important highlight of this research is not so much a comment on whether diaspora groups can aid in settlement and retention, but rather the fact that representatives of these groups acted as a fascinating 'focus group' reflecting on why new migrants stay or go.

Limited influence: Country-specific cultural organizations and the decision to stay in Nova Scotia.

All the associations' representatives that I interviewed were unanimous in saying that diaspora organizations do not directly influence the decision of their members to stay or to leave the province. Instead, they all saw the prominent roles of their associations as one of helping the diaspora connect with their fellow countrymen in Nova Scotia and other Africans.

I don't know whether we really help much in terms of their staying here. The only thing I can say that what we do is to help them feel a little bit comfortable in their stay, particularly when they are studying, and we also try to foster a sense of networking so that as they network, presumably they link up.

When it came to describing the immigration experiences of their members, several representatives said that people were generally happy after they arrived in Canada but that they soon realized that there were not many job opportunities for them in the province. It is in this sense that representatives reflected on the fact that they had witnessed African communities that came to Nova Scotia in the 1980s and 1990s such as the Somalians and Sudanese struggle to stay in the province mostly for reasons linked to employment but also because they longed to be in larger cities such as Calgary and Toronto where they had more family members and friends.

So how, then, to explain why some communities have stayed and flourished in Nova Scotia? When asked this question, particularly relative to the apparent success and stability of the Ghanaian association and its members, one representative said that "*it's*

because Ghanaians have been in the West longer than other Africans which helped them

to come here, study and build a life here and bring their family members too."

There is a clear gap between organizations that have been established for a long time and those that are new, in the sense that the structures seem more solid within long-established organizations. But perhaps the key information in what the representative said is to be found in the access to education that certain diaspora members have had. The Ghanaian association of Nova Scotia is the only one that reported having a membership divided between professionals and students, with the professionals working in mostly skilled jobs in the health industry, in academia and in the public service.

All the associations' representatives said they don't envision their role as helping their members stay in the province. However, two associations have in their mandate to assist newcomers or students with finding apartments or immigration information. They also set up an informal network of students and other professionals who can provide support to students. The associations also try to help their student members navigate the local job market while they look for employment opportunities by informing them of where they could look for jobs.

In industries such as engineering we do know there are opportunities. We have a lot of

students in IT for example who might choose to stay probably because in the last few

years we found a few IT and financial companies moving out here to set up shops so most

of the students who would like to get an opportunity here stay.

In general, associations of African diaspora in Nova Scotia are very culturally active and events and activities they organize are intended not only for their direct members but also for the African diaspora community at large, where everyone who identifies as African, regardless of their country of origin, or as a friend of Africa is welcome to attend and participate. In fact, one representative remarked that cultural activities of these associations make it look like a "permanent party". One representative saw his organization's biggest accomplishment as *"creating stronger bonds among Africans out there"*.

All the representatives of African diaspora associations did indeed know each other on a personal level and had information and details on each other's associations. They reported helping each other with events organization and advertising. For example, they all reported having encouraged their members to attend cultural activities and independence parties organized by other associations even if they were not from the same countries. They reported encouraging a sense of "African-ness" that goes beyond their particular country of origin. In fact, I found that these representatives tended to see themselves and to speak of themselves in terms of being more African and less about their specific countries of origin. It is for this reason, one of them explained, that they had made their association's membership open to every one, a family of Africans, *"to make sure that all Africans in Nova Scotia felt welcome"*.

In conclusion, country-specific diaspora associations in Nova Scotia have a very limited role in influencing their members' decisions to stay or leave Nova Scotia. However, they all reported striving to organize cultural events that make their members and other Africans in Nova Scotia feel less isolated. These associations reported increasing rates of

participation in these cultural events, both from the African communities but also from other members of the local communities.

One of the key challenges is that, though all of them are membership-based, monetary participation (i.e., dues or membership fees) isn't enforced and they have very limited funds. They all said they raise money to help a member in bereavement or who is going through economically challenging situations but all the activities and programs they put in place are informal and carried out by volunteers.

One of the association's representatives explained that his association was trying to set up an after-school program for families who had younger children but his association had been unable to raise enough money for the last two years. This suggests that even the most organized associations with a more or less stable membership have very limited means to support their members on the long run.

African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes (ADAM): The untapped potential.

To understand ADAM's distinctive position in the province and its role in immigrant retention, it is important to understand first its rather complex structure. Initially, the organization was thought of as an umbrella organization under which specific country organizations would locate themselves, as well as other individuals who desired to be members. But given the level of services and programs that this organization has put in place, it looks more like a settlement agency than a cultural organization. This is not a

criticism, but rather an observation that seeks to cast a light on models of integration that can emerge when members of diasporas take the initiative of facilitating their own settlement.

In fact, a number of representatives of other cultural associations voiced concern over this new identity that ADAM had acquired over time, veering away from what they felt it was initially intended to be. Some of these representatives were among the founding members of ADAM back in 2005. As one representative who was also part of the founding team told me, the most contentious point seems to have been and to this day remains one of representation within ADAM.

We wanted ADAM to be an umbrella organization for the different African associations which initially it is. But in practice, it's not and it hasn't been able to work out like that.

The idea was that to be a member of ADAM, one had to be a member of a country specific cultural organization, which would be represented by a limited number of people on the board of ADAM. But the founders quickly realized that this model would exclude those members of the African diaspora who did not belong to any country-specific association. Moreover, there was also a fear of a potential take over by members of more powerful communities or that if the members are sent by the individual organizations, they then may be subject to pressure from those organizations and they may not be looking at things from a broader, more encompassing perspective.

This observation is important to understand how ADAM operates today, and its role in the individual decisions of the people it serves. In its current positions, ADAM works with all the other African cultural associations but there was no indication that these

associations hold a central role within the organization. There is cordial collaboration between them and ADAM's leadership and although their goals seem aligned in theory, in practice ADAM takes on a more formal role of providing integration and settlement assistance to members of the diaspora whereas the country specific associations seem more attuned to particular cultural integration of their immediate members. As far as the relationship between ADAM and country-specific associations is concerned, it seems that there is just a working relationship where they can share working space and collaborate on special projects. For example, if national organizations want to get the message to the broader Nova Scotia African diaspora community, they often pass this through ADAM's communication channels because it has a broader reach.

ADAM's programs serve everybody from professionals who have emigrated from the African continent recently, to people who have come as refugees from the African continent and everybody in between. The association also serves indigenous African-Canadians and a high proportion of people who are international students are involved in the organization in volunteer capacities.

In terms of helping people settle in the province, ADAM's leadership reported being committed to that role, though they define it in a different way from country-specific organizations. For ADAM, because they see a broad range of people with different immigration experiences and at different stages of the immigration process, they have adopted a rather practical approach that meets people where they are. In that sense, the organization can help with practical settlement assistance to people with immediate concerns or needs, such as refugees. But they can also help an African immigrant who is

taking a job in Halifax and who just needs to know about a good neighborhood or school for his children.

One interesting point was that the current representative of ADAM found it hard to 'quantify' the organization's role in helping African immigrants settle in Nova Scotia. But the association chose to see its existing role as being in line with common sense.

It's probably a good idea if there is somebody who is coming to Halifax, it just makes that sense that it will probably be more good than harm if they have a group that is able to welcome them, if they are able to see some faces from that community. That is just kind of like the common sense of this thing.

Nonetheless, this is an interesting reflection because it brings into question the link between settlement assistance and the decision to stay in the province. It raises the question of the quality of assistance that an immigrant receives when they first arrive in a province and their decision to settle. ADAM has not done any research on this issue and there is no data on this. The organization also has no means of creating interacting channels between itself and the people it has served to follow up and evaluate the settlement assistance it provided.

In terms of how the organization sees its programs filling in for the government in terms of immigration assistance, the leadership's views are that the association is better equipped because it understands that Africans have a unique culture and a number of people coming from the African continent have unique needs that are tricky to understand without having a very good grasp of the culture itself. The reasoning here then is that the organization's principles are based on the cultural perceptions of the people coming to Nova Scotia from the African continent. They have set up programs that are reflective of

this cultural understanding; for example they have people speaking different languages, they set cultural socialization programs and they conduct classes that are flexible in accommodating the experiences of their clientele.

Just that voice alone in their head from somebody they can relate to in a place where they feel comfortable, they can now say, "Okay, now I see the point of going there," and then they come to that service with a better perspective and they can be more relaxed at that service. That connection I feel is useful.

Settlement is a cornerstone of ADAM's programs, and as such, ADAM organizes cultural mixers, holiday galas and other activities on a regular basis in an attempt to help with cultural integration, by facilitating mingling activities among different people - Africans and non-Africans alike. ADAM's representative said that his organization is dedicated to fostering an intercultural environment to help their members and clients with their integration into Canadian culture. This dedication to cultural integration is recognized and shared by other African community leaders who reported that for African immigrants in general to settle in Canada, it was important to be exposed and to be able to interact with other cultures, particularly Canadian culture. One observation here has to do with an overarching sense of community that one feels when interacting with both ADAM's representative and the other associations' representatives, a sense of 'togetherness' among the African diaspora. This is a particularly positive thing, because it suggest that for those African immigrants who are involved within cultural organizations or who are involved in one way or another with ADAM, they get to experience a sense of community and ultimately of belonging that those who are isolated do not. But perhaps

the most important contribution of ADAM is that it serves those members of the African diaspora who do not belong to any country specific cultural associations, either because there are too few of them or because of other reasons for not wanting to approach their fellow countrymen. As the president of ADAM put it, his organization adds value to the benefit of the community as a whole.

Through participating in these kinds of events, it is a way for people to be connected as well to the broader or larger African community...

ADAM's views on the reasons African immigrants and other immigrants are leaving the province do not differ from what other community leaders shared. Some move for better economic opportunities but the organization is aware that there are others who have moved out of the province for cultural reasons, because some people feel isolated. It is in this respect that the organization sees its role expanding.

What we can definitely do is make sure that the warmth and the cultural aspect is not a problem for this province. So, I think something that we can definitely shoot for is we can definitely work in such a way that if African immigrants are leaving Nova Scotia to go out west, they are not leaving because they can't connect with other Africans or because they feel isolated, or because they feel like they are all alone here or they don't really feel any sense of community and Nova Scotia feels a little bit cold for them, not temperature wise. I mean in terms of community warmth.

ADAM sees the issue of cultural integration as part and parcel of a positive immigrant experience in Nova Scotia, and advocates for a solid strategy of connecting African immigrants and people of African descent with each other as a way of making their experiences in the province more positive. The organization suggests a need/opportunity

to tap into that population and get them to engage with ADAM, which in turn will make them engage with each other and become aware of each other's existence. ADAM's president summarized it in these words: "*So, nobody will have that feeling that there are no other Africans here, because people have alternate solutions.*"

The notion that more connections among immigrants will foster more positive experiences still has to be fully explored, both by researchers and by practitioners, but it is one domain where ADAM has more experience than any other local cultural organization in the province. In this sense, it is an organization that holds considerable potential for defining the immigrant's experience in the context of a small but highly diverse environment where different cultures mix and redefine each other.

Finally, the last component of ADAM's activities concerns the pursuit of a special relationship with indigenous African-Nova Scotians. In its official mandate, the organization caters to all people of African descent who are in the Maritimes. Though there were many discussions as to who was really African and who was not at the beginning of the organization, these discussions never got settled. According to the current leadership, contemporary policies reflect the fact that it serves every one, from new African immigrants, to people of Carribean descent, to indigenous African Nova Scotians. Though the objective of the research was not to assess how credible this claim is, it is worth mentioning here that ADAM has indeed instituted a number of projects through which it serves and collaborates with indigenous African Nova Scotians.

So I think that is a nice, open and practical base of people to cater to. Anything narrower than that gets gray and tricky and complicated because it's going to be very hard to narrow that.

In a practical sense however, the organization reflects a cross-cultural environment where the issues of indigenous African Nova Scotians and those of the new African immigrants meet. ADAM's challenge in serving these populations is to understand their particular differences and serve them according to their individual settings.

We have to understand what those differences are so we don't put ourselves in situations where we minimize it. We don't want to exaggerate the differences for one because then we can create problems where there may not be but we want to acknowledge them where they are though and we want to respect them, the differences that is.

The choice of ADAM to include African Nova Scotians hasn't always been unanimously agreed upon by prominent leaders in the African diaspora in Nova Scotia, but was taken out of necessity. It was clear that if African immigrants wanted to advance their agenda in the province, as one representative said, they felt they had to work with African Nova Scotians. There was sense that the programs that ADAM was interested in setting up, such as a mental health programming, were already existing within the African-Nova Scotian communities and it would be like creating a replica within the African community.

You come with an issue and trying to address it, but some of those issues are in relationship with an indigenous Nova Scotian here. Whatever issues you are dealing with, they would say, "That doesn't belong to you. That issue belongs to… or if you want to address that issue, maybe you should link with the African Nova Scotians."

The situation has evolved and ADAM's leadership reports a higher level of cross-communication between the organization and members of the African Nova Scotian

community. They run a community mental health awarenss program with the indigenous African Nova Scotian communities in the HRM area that is reportedly successful thanks to a better collaboration.

It is not clear if this pursuit of close collaboration is reflected in individual relations between African Nova Scotians and members of the African diaspora in Halifax. One representative even made a joke that one can be in Halifax for a week not knowing that there are entire black populations: *"And they are here, but they are hidden"*. There is a sense, among African diaspora representatives, that individual relations between African Nova Scotians and the African diaspora are still limited to formal settings and official collaborations on projects such as the ones that ADAM organizes.

Nonetheless, the organization is aware that moving forward, it will need to solidify its collaboration with the African Nova Scotian community. Currently, ADAM is applying for a grant around mental health and according to its president, there are two ways to go about it: applying alone for a smaller grant or applying for larger grants by forming a collaborative relationship with a pre-existing African Canadian association. The choice is obvious as the organization makes it clear that it will continue to foster relationship and understanding with the African Nova Scotian community, as a way to ensure its own survival. But the question is and will remain one about the viewpoint of African Nova Scotians on this relationship.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This modest research project suggests that cultural organizations that cater to members of the African diaspora in Nova Scotia have a limited if not minimal influence in the

decision of their members to stay or to leave the province. Instead, secure employment and other social factors are the main issues that will influence their retention. Cultural factors, such as a warm and welcoming community, as well as bonds with other Africans are important but only to enhance a quality of life that is already ensured by a secure job. The first recommendation of this research is to suggest a number of actions that Nova Scotia authorities can undertake in order to make the province more welcoming. It would be a good step to look at what other provinces are doing, particularly in Quebec and Ontario, to market themselves to immigrants. For example, the province of Quebec has a rather interesting approach to immigration, centered mostly on clarifying its expectations vis à vis immigrants as well as what is commonly acceptable in the province. Nova Scotia needs to approach potential immigrants while they are still students (through international students offices associated with universities for example), to tell them about the province, its people and its economy as a way to help them feel wanted and assist them in making informed decisions.

Second, it would be wrong to dismiss the role – however unclear – that diaspora organizations play in defining the overall experience of African immigrants. Such a move would understate the potential they still hold: for one, country specific cultural organizations have a direct and intimate knowledge of issues that their members encounter while navigating the system. In this sense, they should be seen as an ally for strategies that target an understanding of immigration trends in the province. Positive and sustained relations between these associations and local authorities (municipal and provincial) have the potential to influence immigrants' shift in perception particularly on issues of racism and discrimination. Most of these organizations undertake activities that

foster integration. It is important that they receive adequate support and resources, given the direct access that these associations have to their members.

Third, given the fact that ADAM has been able to redefine itself as a solid service provider for the community, and given its large outreach and its dedication to cultural integration, this research recommends that Nova Scotia authorities draw on their policy capacities as well as resources to make ADAM's role more prominent both within the community and in relation to other policymakers across the province.

And finally, ADAM's collaboration with African Nova Scotians, though still in its infancy, has the potential to make the experiences of (new) Africans more positive and with time create a more inclusive environment. But for this to happen, it is important for Nova Scotian authorities to explore what courses of action would aid in fostering closer links between diaspora and African Nova Scotian communities.

For example, immigration policy makers could team up with higher learning institutions across the province to actively invest both time and resources into researching and learning about intercultural living, with the goal of creating cross cultural exchanges between the two communities as a way to foster a rapprochement and a socially positive environment in which both African newcomers and indigenous African Nova Scotians can meet and thrive.

Overall, the findings of this study reveal some of the reasons why African immigrants don't settle in Nova Scotia, from the perspective of the representatives of diaspora organizations that cater to their needs. It is important to note that the scope of this study was limited to nine representatives of the most prominent African diaspora organizations in the province. As such, other researchers might want to carry out further inquiries with

more members of the African diaspora in Nova Scotia as a way to explore further some fundamental factors affecting their settlement in the province. The conclusions of this research, it must be understood, are not to be generalized to all African immigrants in NS. Rather, they should be used as a starting point for further research and insights into the nature and extent of their settlement in the province and how these insights can influence the existing policy on immigration in Nova Scotia.

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