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Exploring the 'Third Coast' and 'Second City': Background and research on African migration in the Midwestern U.S. and Greater Chicago Metropolitan Area

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Abstract

Sub-Saharan African migration to the U.S. is rapidly yet quietly growing, and the Midwestern/Great Lakes region of the country (its "Third Coast") is becoming an increasingly important destination. In particular, the so-called "Second City" of Chicago – the regional epicenter and third largest U.S. city – is in need of social scientific research addressing the unique trajectories and experiences of its expanding African populations. This paper provides a background for these dynamics by drawing from primary and secondary data on Midwestern African migrant communities' organizing and activities as observed through interviews and fieldwork among more than fifty African migrant organizations in the Midwestern U.S. and Greater Chicago Metropolitan Area. It will outline the evolution and distribution of African migration in the Chicago area and provide a brief overview of African resources, organizations, and other institutions and establishments as they seek to bring together and represent the burgeoning African community within and beyond the city.

Keywords: Africa; United States; diaspora; migrant associations; settlement patterns.

Introduction

The United States now represents one of the foremost destination for contemporary African migrations, as the U.S. is the second largest non-African recipient country for migrants from all corners of the African continent (Ratha et al., 2011), and is quickly becoming the single largest non-African recipient country for those originating south of the Sahara (Capps et al., 2012). Even so, voluntary African migrations into the U.S. are relatively new developments in the grander scheme of global population movements, following the removal of racially restrictive immigration policies in the mid-1960s as an ancillary to broader civil rights movements at the time (Castles et al., 2014).

In the decades since, U.S. Census Bureau demographers estimate that the nation's "stock" of migrants born on the African continent has almost doubled

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in each successive decade, resulting in nearly 1.6 million foreign-born Africans currently residing in the U.S. – accounting for around 4% of all immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006; Gambino and Trevelyan, 2014). During the first decade and a half of the 21st Century, African migration has experienced an even more dramatic upsurge as populations of African-born individuals residing in the U.S. have more than doubled from around 880,000 in 2000 to nearly 2.1 million in 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

The relative newness of African migration is even more pronounced in interior regions of the country, as more densely populated coastal and border areas constitute natural arrival points for migrants from which they often branch outward to settle in larger metropolitan areas in the Midwestern U.S., particularly around its Great Lakes region (Yeboah, 2008; Capps et al., 2012).[1] For the most part, African populations were absent in large numbers from Midwestern states and cities until the mid-to-late 1990s, and in some cases into the early 2000s; thus, researchers have paid very little attention to the unique experiences and challenges of Africans in this increasingly important migrant-receiving region of the country (see, e.g. Ocran, 2005; Yeboah 2008).

Early on, steadily increasing trickles of African migrations to large Midwestern/Great Lakes regional metropolitan areas like the nation's "Second City" of Chicago, Illinois in the mid-to-late 20th century were driven by (predominantly male) students seeking college and university education in the US beginning in the late 1960s and carrying into the 1980s. Since then, African populations in Illinois have doubled between each of the decennial census rounds following the liberalization of immigration laws, making African migrants one of the fastest growing foreign-born populations in both the region and the U.S. as a whole (Capps et al., 2012).

The U.S. Census Bureau states that around 43,000 African migrants currently reside in the greater Chicago metropolitan area, although estimates in the city indicate that total foreign-born African population did not reach five-digit figures until the 1990s (Paral & Norkewicz, 2003; Gambino and Trevelyan, 2014). Survey data further suggest that the vast majority of African migrants (70%) arrived between 1996 and 2008 (Wilson, 2012), while over the course of just the past few years (2013-2015), populations have increased by more than 11% in the area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Among West Africans in particular, the last two decades of the 20th century saw significant increases in population sizes in the U.S. and its Midwestern

[1] See, for example, Buggenhagen's (2005) reporting of these dynamics with respect to Senegalese movements into Chicago, while Steffes (2005a; 2005c; 2005d; 2005e) notes similar patterns among Beninese, Guinean, Ivoirian, and Malian populations in the city. Likewise, Yeboah's (2008) findings among Ghanaians in Columbus and Cincinnati also reflect these East-to-Midwestern trajectories.

heartland. Overall, West Africa is now estimated to be the single largest regional source of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa: populations in the US currently stand at over 750,000 individuals, adding up to just over 37% of the total African-born population and approximately 48% of the total Sub-Saharan African-born populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Across Midwestern states, West Africa now accounts for over 31% of the total African-born population, with numbers increasing by 3.5% between 2010 and 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

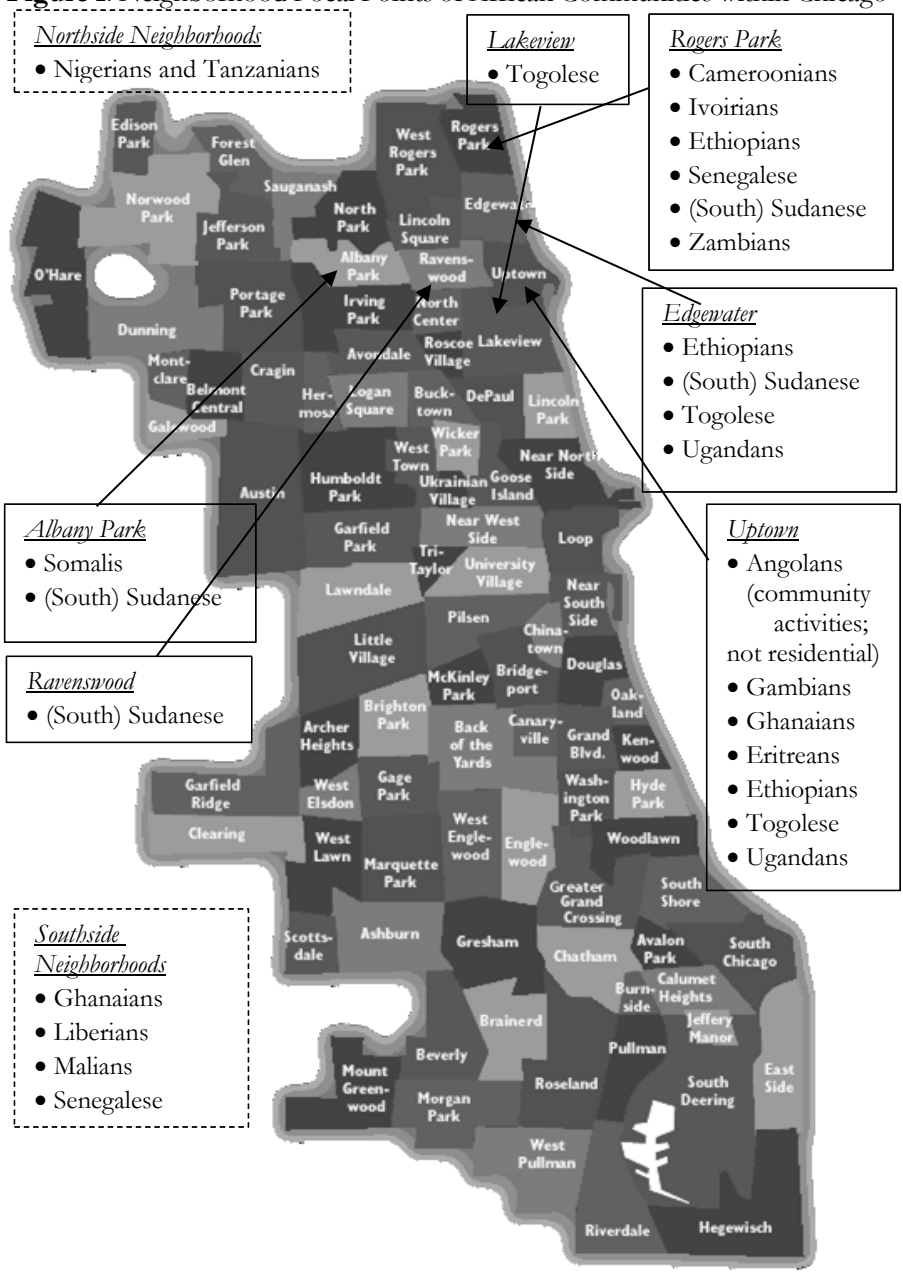
Nigeria and Ghana, two of the largest sending states on the African continent, have largely been driving these dramatic changes in the (Midwestern) U.S., as they now account for 22% of all African-born individuals in the country as a whole (Gambino and Trevelyan, 2014). Ghanaians in particular have quickly become one of the largest and quickest growing African groups over the past four decades in both the U.S. and its Midwestern region. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), Ghanaian-born populations in the country have expanded from around 8,000 in 1980 to over 150,000 in 2015 – an increase of nearly 2000%, or roughly 4,228 migrants annually over the course of 35 years (Gibson and Lennon, 1999).

Focal Points for African Residential & Community Life in Greater Chicago

The traditional settlement patterns and geographic focal points of African migrants vary somewhat across Midwestern cities, with spatial concentrations in Chicago most closely conforming to what migration scholars have traditionally called "ethnic communities" or "enclaves," as mapped out in Figure 1 below (Castles et al., 2014; see, e.g. Avila, 2003). While information on the geographical distribution of various African communities list the primary neighborhood(s) (officially known as "community areas") where many nationality groups tend to cluster, it is worthwhile to note that there are not firmly defined boundaries between these populations as there are often multiple groups living in the same or overlapping community areas. On the city's northeastern boundaries, the Uptown community area in particular is well-known as a residential focal point for a large set of African populations including Angolans (Poe, 2005a), Gambians (Steffes, 2005b), Ghanaians (Settergren, 2005), Eritreans (Hepner, 2005), Ethiopians (Hunt, 2005), Togolese (Cogan et al., 2005), and Ugandans (Poe, 2005d) who concentrate in the area.

These concentrations into "pan-African" neighborhoods (Poe, 2005d) often allow for a more robust African-centric resource base to spring up addressing the associational, communal, professional, culinary, and other needs of migrants in these areas, as illustrated in the frequently published *Illinois African Community Resource Guide* (UAO, 2017b). The heat map in Figure 2 features the

Figure 1: Neighborhood Focal Points of African Communities within Chicago[2]



[2] Data on the geographical concentration of African communities is derived from multiple entries in the Chicago Historical Society's *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, including Buggenhagen (2005), Butler (2005), Cogan and Ibe (2005); Cogan et al. (2005), Hepner (2005), Hunt (2005), Morrissey (2005), Poe (2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2005d), Prevost (2005), Settergren (2005), and Steffes (2005b; 2005d; 2005e; 2005g).

distribution and concentration of these establishments based on neighborhood-level listings therein, which were geocoded for this visualization. The results of the plot provide visual evidence of the somewhat intuitive assumption that African-centric businesses, organizations, churches, merchants, professionals, and other service providers tend to cluster in areas where the African populations are higher.

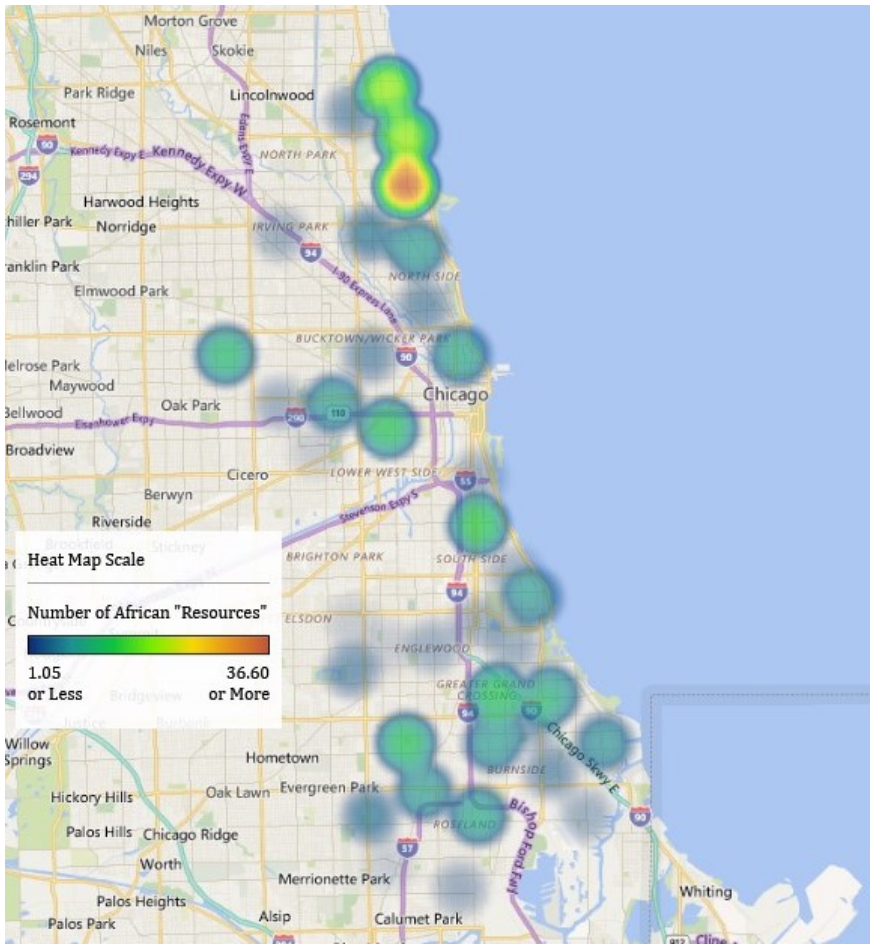
Three such neighborhoods – Uptown, Rogers Park, and Edgewater – are at the center of these dynamics and combine to account for nearly 70% (74 out of 110) of listed establishments across the African-dense northern parts of the city. Not surprising, the Uptown community area alone, with its larger and more diverse African population, is home to the single largest array of these (nearly three dozen in the listing), which accounts for over 9% of the total in the greater metropolitan area – a notable statistic given that there are officially 77 community areas in the city and dozens of villages and towns in the surrounding suburbs.

On the South Side of the city, the area's reputation as perhaps the second most important clustering of African migrants is reflected in the long list of African-centric businesses, organizations, churches, and professionals located here as well. South Side neighborhoods like Bronzeville, Greater Grand Crossing, and Auburn Gresham combine with nearly two dozen nearby South Side community areas to account for over 35% (132 out of 373) of the Chicago region's African-centric establishments.

While the city proper remains the primary focal point for African business and community activities, increasing suburbanization has seen a slight shift toward less central areas. Chicago's extensive Ghanaian community, for example, has a large residential concentration in the southwestern suburb of Bolingbrook (Settergren, 2005), which now plays home to its own multi-ethnic association for Ghanaians living there. This is echoed to some extent among other African communities in the area, including Ugandans who have begun purchasing homes in other southern suburbs (Poe, 2005d) and Ethiopians who have moved to the north and northwest of the city in towns like Evanston and Wheaton (Hunt, 2005).

As a result, growing African-centric economic and associational activities have sprung up to cater to and support these increasing communities. According to the aforementioned directory (UAO, 2017b), there are now 45 such establishments located across all of the city's suburbs (equaling just over 12% of Chicago area totals). The plurality of these can be found south of the city where they account for 40% of all suburban establishments and 5% of totals across the entirety of the Greater Chicago Metropolitan area.

Figure 2: Concentration of Chicago's African-centric Resources by Neighborhood.



A Brief Overview of African Organizations & Institutions in Chicago

The life of migrant associations is in many instances a potentially transient existence fraught with internal and organizational hurdles (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005). This is perhaps not surprising given that they are, after all, formed by those more accustomed to movement and liminality. It is also sometimes the case that the public "footprint" of an association, both locally and in social media and elsewhere online, can be fleeting or otherwise hard to pin down for those outside of its constituent group or community. As indicated in Table 1 below, evidence and public accounts gathered during fieldwork for this project for even some of the oldest associations are often spotty and

Table 1. Umbrella organizations among Chicago/Illinois African migrant communities

Place of Origin	Organization	Founded	Status	UAO Member
Africa	United African Organization	2005	Active	--
Angola	Kudissanga, Chicago Branch	1992	Unclear	
Benin	Association of Beninese of Illinois	1999	Unclear	
Cameroon	Cameroonian Brotherhood Association of Chicago	1997	Active	✓
Côte d'Ivoire	Union Fraternelle des Ivoirians D'Illinois	2000	Active	
DRC	Congolese Community of Chicago	2001	Active	✓
Eritrea	Association of the Eritrean Community in Chicago	1985	Unclear	
Ethiopia	Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago	1984	Active	✓
Gambia	Gambian Association of Chicago	1998	Unclear	
Ghana	Ghana National Council	1977-1979	Active	✓
Guinea	Guinean Community Association of Illinois & Iowa	1998	Active	
Kenya	United Kenyans of Chicago	1998-2002	Unclear	
Liberia	Organization of the Liberian Community of Illinois	1993	Active	✓
Mali	Malian Community Association	2001	Active	
Nigeria	Nigerian American Professionals Association	1998	Active	✓
Rwanda	Rwandan Community Association	N/A	Active	
Senegal	Senegalese Community Association	N/A	Active	
Somalia	Somali Community of Metro Chicago	N/A	Active	
South Africa	South African Community Association	N/A	Unclear	
Sudan	Sudanese Community Association of Illinois	N/A	Active	
Tanzania	Tanzanian Community Association, Midwest USA	2002	Active	✓
Togo	Association of Togolese in Chicagoland	1991	Active	✓
Uganda	Ugandan Community of Greater Chicago	2011	Active	✓
Zambia	Zambian Heritage Association of Chicago	1997	Active	✓
Zimbabwe	Association of Zimbabweans in Chicago	N/A	Active	

difficult to confirm outside of the odd mention on a social media post or infrequent newsletter.

Nevertheless, both surveys and case studies of African migrants and their participation in diaspora organizations indicate that they, like many migrant communities (see, e.g. Guarnizo et al., 2003; Portes et al., 2008), assign a great deal of importance to the role associations can play in facilitating strong social networks in host societies and cultural connections to homelands (Wilson,

2012; see, e.g. Mazzucato, 2008; Riccio, 2008; MPI, 2015). Indeed, both primary and secondary data gathered for this project indicate that African populations certainly seem to be putting these beliefs into practice: a safe estimate of the number of African organization in the U.S. based on compilations of several partial national directories, coupled with fieldwork among several dozen migrant associations and institutions, indicate that there are at the very least several hundred such organizations nationwide, though a more realistic assessment would probably number in the thousands (see, e.g. ALPN, n.d.; The African Times/USA, n.d.; Fung, n.d.; DFWICA, 2014; ASC, 2015).

Associational life for Africans in the Midwest has been robust in the region's larger cities. In the city of Chicago and state of Illinois, for example, 40% of African migrants affiliate with at least one nation-of-origin association here in the U.S. according to United African Organization survey data, although these figures do not touch on the number of migrants that exclusively belong to sub-/multi-national ethnic, communal, and/or regional associations (Wilson, 2012). According to interviews with organizational representatives, the bulk of these associations in Midwestern cities like Chicago started taking root in the 1980s before becoming increasingly institutionalized into the 1990s and early 2000s.

Indeed, some of the longest-standing African associations to originate in the Midwest naturally sprang up in Chicago, due to the relative size and earlier arrival dates of its African populations drawn to the nation's third largest city. One of the first national-origin associations to organize in the city, the Ghana National Council (GNC), began in the mid-to-late 1960s among Ghanaian college students as the Ghana Student's Union (GSU), which officially became the GNC umbrella organization in 1984 after joining efforts with other Ghanaian associations in the city (GNC, n.d.). During this same era, the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago (ECAC) began its path to incorporation and was also officially founded in 1984, placing it among the ranks of Chicago's earliest African migrant associations (ECAC, 2014).

While many similar groups would go on to form in the latter half of the 20th century, Chicago lacked a formally institutionalized representative body for the whole African community until the mid-2000s (Wilson, 2012), though its roots lie in migrant organizing efforts during the preceding few decades according to organizational leadership interviewed for this project. Founded in 2005 to serve as a representative, advocate, and uniting force among Chicago's African populations, the United African Organization (UAO) – arguably the Midwestern region's most expansive umbrella group – represents African communities hailing from over twenty nations. According to UAO documentation and respondents, the organization's membership is comprised of over two dozen member-associations, which are themselves typically comprised of national-level umbrella groups that often represent smaller regional, ethnic, communal, and other types of associations at the sub-national

level, depending on the size and diversity of the underlying community (Wilson, 2012; UAO, 2017a).

Despite increasing institutionalization of the UAO and many of the area's other African associations, nearly one in four of the previously documented national-origin associations currently face an uncertain fate, further illustrating the aforementioned potential for migrant associations to be short-lived and institutionally challenged (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005). Over the course of about a decade these organizations have effectively vanished from public record, including both the UAO resource guides and official IRS non-profit organization databases, though this does not necessarily mean they have ceased operation within their respective communities.

A prominent example is the city's (former) Angolan organization, the Chicago branch of the Kudissanga Angola Community Association in the U.S. While the national-level organization is still active and thriving, all traces of the Chicago chapter of the association have disappeared online, in social media, and in IRS documentation, despite appearing in the Chicago History Museum's archival documentation of major African associations in the city (Poe, 2005a). In a similar fashion, multiple South African organizations which had been previously documented by Steffes (2005f), as well as the more recent South African Community association featured in recent UAO (2014) resource guides, all no longer appear in the current UAO (2017b) guide nor in other official records.

Even so, a few communities with unclear organizational status seem to be maintaining some form of public presence, if only via social networking. Within the Eritrean community, for example, fieldwork data show there are still several active Eritrean church congregations in Chicago, though there appear to be no current records for the community's umbrella group, the Association of the Eritrean Community in Chicago. Nonetheless, a social media site identified as the Eritrean Community of Chicago has sprung up in the past few years which bemoans the recent distancing within the community and is attempting to "hopefully change this trend" (ECC, n.d.).

Similarly, the Association of Beninese of Illinois also seems to be flying a bit under the radar, as it no longer maintains a functioning website, does not appear in recent UAO community guide listings, and is no longer referenced by representatives of other Midwestern Beninese associations when asked in interviews about their co-nationals' efforts at organizing throughout the region. With that said, the Chicago group at the very least maintains an (infrequently updated) online social media profile (ca. 2015), and is still listed on the national Beninese diaspora organization's website as a member-association (BDUSA, 2008), though both resources have been neglected over the last few years.

Chicago's Kenyan community was perhaps headed for a similar period of institutional waning in recent years, as several prominent associations disappeared over the first two decades of the 21st century, including the United Kenyans of Chicago (UKC) group and the Chicago Association for Kenyan Professionals. While both formed around the turn of the century (Ogeto and Steffes, 2005), the UKC seems to have petered out around 2013 according to official IRS tax records. However, in 2011, a multi-ethnic women's association called the Kenyan Women's Support Group was founded so that Kenyan women might "come together to connect, share ideas, [and] support and socialize with one another" as its members attempt "living and navigating through the challenges in the United States" (KWSG, 2017a). Although the organization's membership is exclusively female, they do provide service to the broader Kenyan community regardless of gender (KWSG, 2017b).

Collective Actions and Activism among Chicago's African Communities

While most associations profiled for this project do not view themselves as inherently "political" – particularly with regard to domestic (U.S.) or home state partisan politics, as frequently emphasized by interview respondents – they do sometimes take part in advocacy, public relations, and other forms of networking designed to build forms of political capital, at least at the grassroots level. Individual communities have engaged in outreach to government officials, particularly at the city level, and according to archival research both the Ghana National Council and Ewe Association of Chicago have received official resolutions from the City Aldermen recognizing their accomplishments and contributions to promoting cultural awareness in Chicago and development support in Africa (City of Chicago, 2011; City of Chicago, 2013). Even so, the broader ambit of the UAO as an umbrella organization leads it to coordinate and facilitate efforts to promote civic engagement and coalition building among various African communities, governmental entities, and other organizations, while also sponsoring and conducting research on issues relevant to its constituents and offering legal aid for navigating immigration and refugee/asylum laws (UAO, 2017d).

In the past, the UAO has proven adept at coalition-building among its constituent communities, local and state officials, and regulatory agencies to reform state regulations that proved unnecessarily prohibitive to the city's many African hairbraiders (Chicago Tribune, 2009; Owen, 2009; Steffes, 2005; UAO, 2016). More recently, the UAO's advocacy has focused on immigration and refugee policy reform, especially in light of the rhetoric and outcomes of the 2016 U.S. election. For example, an ongoing information campaign has been launched in conjunction with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights which centers on disseminating information via flyers and in-person "Know Your Rights" workshops on perceived challenges to migration and

asylum-seeking, particularly for those hailing from the Muslim-majority North and East African nations of Libya, Somalia, and Sudan (UAO, 2017c).

Concluding Discussion & Future Research

While African populations on the whole account for less than five percent of all foreign-born individuals in the U.S., the pace at which migration from the African continent has increased over the past two decades is quite remarkable (Gambino and Trevelyan, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Similar patterns are reflected in the Midwestern region, as larger cities like Chicago, Illinois; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Columbus, Ohio have also experienced significant influxes of African-born populations, while smaller non-traditional destination cities in the region like Indianapolis, Indiana and Cincinnati, Ohio have recently started to attract larger numbers of African migrants. There is of course the potential for problematic issues to accompany these trends; as has too often been the case with many new arrivals over the course of U.S. history, a few African populations are experiencing pushback from their native-born neighbors, as the Somali community in Minneapolis can recently attest in the current political context (see, e.g. Carlson and Chambers, 2017; Osman, 2017; Polletta, 2017).

Even so, as evidenced above, African communities are gradually becoming more organized and their associations are becoming increasingly well-versed in advocacy and in the navigation of political and other institutions throughout the region and nation more broadly. Despite the dissolution or waning of a few groups, African associations across the Midwest and Greater Chicago metropolitan area appear to be thriving on the whole. Indeed, Chicago's African communities are arguably becoming more interconnected under the umbrellas of organizations like the UAO and smaller nation-of-origin associations, whose broader networks are helping migrants make inroads into the socio-political fabric of the city.

Moving beyond Chicago, it is important to note that the organizational lay of the land is in some ways dissimilar elsewhere in the Midwest. In another large metropolitan area in the nearby state of Ohio, for example, efforts to form more broadly-inclusive and representative associations within certain African communities have proven less fruitful in the face of increasing "ethnicization" of associational life, as bemoaned by local community leaders serving as interview respondents. As larger numbers of African migrants come to call the Midwestern U.S. home, the potential interplay of increasing diversity and ethno-regionalism as an emergent institutional locus (see, e.g. Yeboah, 2008) raise new and interesting questions about how these factors may impact the nature and effectiveness of both domestic and transnational activities and activism in which African associations may engage in the near future.

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