

IMMIGRATION, OTHERNESS, ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE HOMELAND

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the impact of migration on the Cultural identity of Francophones in the diaspora. It explores the fascinating role of Culture and identity in national and regional integration. Examining the experiences of francophone immigrants from the diaspora, the study shows how 'otherness' affects immigrants' capability to self-assert and adapt to reclaim their Africaness in the homeland. Two sets of immigrants are presented; the forced immigrant (Slavery), with a forced culture and the liberal immigrant, with liberal culture. Drawing from interviews, and individual experiences, the study emphasises the role of the immigrant, the community and the institutions in successful cultural integration in the homeland.

Keywords: Migration, Otherness, Inclusion, Homeland

INTRODUCTION

Francophone African immigrants in the diaspora are choosing to return to the homeland rather than remaining in the new world (Lochmann et al., 2019; Trudell, 2012; Vandeyar, 2012; Vigouroux, 2005). A francophone African diaspora is a group of Africans whose first language is French or who have the French language as an official language and who because of colonialism have assimilated the French culture. Resulting from the fact that there existed many French colonies in West Africa, it is worthy to note that out of the seventeen African nations in West Africa, ten are Francophones. Resulting from the dehumanizing treatments, problems of economic instability and negative sentiments, the creation of anti-immigration feelings and political groups (Scherrer, 2008), and negative legislations, many immigrants have decided to either immigrate to other countries like the United States or return to their homeland.

For more than a decade, Africans have continued to migrate for various reasons. France has been the hub of immigration for both Africans and other nationals, due to her friendly policy on immigration, since her Revolution in 1789. For Francophones, apart from the French policy on immigration, their historical, cultural and linguistic connections, made them choose France as their destination over other developed nations (Braithwaite, 2020; Gao et al., 2012; Love, 2009; Malenkina & Ivanov, 2018; Umukoro & Ohanyere, 2020). Because of her immigration policy, the immigrant population in France increased to

about ten percent of the total population after the independence of several of the French colonies and territories, especially including West Africans. (United Nations, 2006) recorded a total number of 6,471,000 immigrants in France in 2006.

The question “Really, Why do people migrate?” arose in the cause of this study. People immigrate to a destination for various reasons, such as favourable nationality laws, Friendly immigration policies, Refugee status, existence of family members, commonalities in culture, language, standardize higher education, economic opportunities and marriage among others are common pull-factors. For francophone immigrants, which is the concern of this study, being familiar with the culture and language of the destination facilitates assimilation in the new world. Because of this factor, Francophone West African immigrants have over the years chosen to eventually spend the rest of their lives in France. To confirm this, (GIST, 2001) reveals that to facilitate immigration and the acquisition of French nationality, France has created certain accord with some of its former territories.

METHOD

The study employed a face-to-face interview on three sets of Francophone Africans arriving from Paris-France, London-Britain and Barcelona-Spain. The interview took twelve weeks. The first phase at designated airports in selected Francophone African countries. In the second phase, Research students were asked to assist in the data collections. The results were grouped into “A” and “B”. while ‘A’ represented (forced immigrants) up to three generations who were returning home for the first time, “B” represented responses from liberal immigrants who returned home either after higher education or after achieving their goals.

Data Gathering

In the first phase, preliminary questionnaires were administered to 38 returnees to fill out while waiting for their luggage or connecting fares. Items like gender, nationality, age range, level of education, country of residence, first visit, and marital status. Reasons for returning were listed as follows; a) family reunion b) Racial discrimination c) Deportation d) Address and e) other. The second phase took place about eight months after. Only 29 of the returnees were located for further questions like 1) Why did you relocate home rather than other European countries? 2) Do you consider going back to France? 3) If No, why? 4) Do you leave alone or with family? 5) Have you found adapting to the way of life here easy? 6) What are your observations so Far? 7) How long do you intend to stay? 8) Speak freely about your experiences in France and now.

The information given by each respondent was analyzed one by one, responses were compared and conclusions were drawn based on the stories as narrated by the respondents

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents in group “A-Forced immigrants”, were either relative of slaves who as a result of the new laws were no longer at home in France, so decided to trace their lineage back to the homeland, it took some time though but some succeeded. Others were trafficked, while some merely deceived by the stories they heard, decided to try it. This group of respondents was almost hit by the new laws; some had families, and most were young within the ages of 18 to 20. While the elderly ones travelled back with some of their children, the younger returnees left France without their parents who were already citizens and were benefiting. Some members of group “A” believed that with the standard of

education they have attained before leaving France, Africa would be a stepping-stone, while it was for some; others found the homeland and the people strange, complicated and difficult to adapt.

Group “B” respondents were focused on immigrants who voluntarily immigrated for greener pastures. While some planned to acquire what they went for and leave, others informed that they decided to stay back longer than they planned due to the opportunities available. However, this desire was cut short by the treatments they received from the government, and French nationals and the subsequent laws that deprived them of their expectations and finally reminded them of the homeland.

The two groups shared the following commonalities

1. They found it difficult to adapt to the homeland, though for those who came with degrees, they found it easy to get jobs, the general standard of living did not meet their expectations.
2. There were little or insufficient economic opportunities available in the homeland
3. They are likely to reconsider relocating to other western countries like the United States, China, Canada or Ukraine

CONCLUSION

Francophone African immigrants are either leaving France to other western countries or returning to the homeland. Past studies and face-to-face interviews have revealed that due to commonalities in language, culture and perceived economic opportunities, Francophone immigrants would have preferred to remain in France rather than, relocate or return home. However, the focus of this study was to find out why Francophone immigrants are returning to the homeland and the difficulties in integrating. The study was based on interviews and individual experiences of some francophone returnees. Findings reveal that while commonalities in language and culture, job, healthcare and higher education opportunities, remained pull-factors for Francophone immigrants to France, unfriendly nationality laws that led to immigration sentiments, racial discrimination, resentment were deciding factors not to remain in France. The study further reveals that, while the forced immigrants with a forced culture are finding it difficult to integrate, the liberal immigrants who willingly immigrated to the new world with a focus on improving life, and probably return home to impart in the homeland, has little or no challenges integrating with the homeland. They are rather disappointed by the level of underdevelopment in the homeland. Thus, this study suggests that to achieve successful cultural integration, government, the community as well as the immigrants themselves have vital roles to play.

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