

Black Immigrants in Argentina: The Culture of Work and Fraternity

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5 December 2012

Word Count: 4,000

## Abstract

In recent years, there has been a relatively rapid influx of African immigrants to Argentina, particularly Buenos Aires, and, although extremely minor when compared to the total population, has continued and accelerated markedly. This phenomenon has not gone at all unnoticed by the general populace and has aroused much interest and curiosity among many, including me. I became interested in the culture formed by these immigrants upon arrival in Argentina and chose the subject area Social and Cultural Anthropology, with the following research question: **To what degree do the preeminence of work and mutual empathy define the culture developed by recent black immigrants to Buenos Aires, and how are these characteristics visible?**

Without formal anthropology study, I individually studied anthropological investigative practices, and work of renowned anthropologists, such as Franz Boas, served as parameters for this study. I could not carry out completely authentic ethnographic research and actually live with immigrants in an immigrant setting; however, being a child of Argentinean parents who travels annually to Buenos Aires, I had the possibility of interviewing and surveying black immigrants to Buenos Aires in person. I surveyed several jewelry vendors, immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Haiti, on the sidewalks and at *ferias artesanales* (craft fairs), consistently asking the same questions, and I conducted three longer, more in-depth interviews with two immigrants and one director of an aid organization. I also utilized two official U.N. reports on this immigration to guide and supplement my own findings.

In this investigation, I found that both work and fraternity are crucial factors in this black community. The importance of work was manifested by work habits, motives for immigration, and (typical lack of) family life, while fraternity was demonstrated by residence trends, economic financing, repeated explicit references to “African brothers,” and, once again, work habits.

Word count: 298

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### Introduction of the topic

*En Argentina no hay negros.* “There are no blacks in Argentina.” This assumption, widespread in the country (Baig), is largely due to a process of “invisibilización” (“invisibilization”) that took place between Argentina’s colonial era, when, as historian Marta Goldberg estimates, Buenos Aires’ “black and mulatto population constituted 29.5 per cent of the population” (Marcelino 18), and the present day (“Invisibilización”). There have nonetheless been some migratory trends from sub-Saharan Africa to Argentina, the most noteworthy being that from Cape Verde from the 1920’s through the 1960’s, documented by historian Marta Maffia; these immigrants, however, assimilated rapidly into Argentinean society. Beginning at approximately the turn of the century, there has been a relatively rapid influx of black African immigrants to Argentina, particularly to Buenos Aires. This phenomenon, unlike previous similar currents, has coincided with a surge of academic interest in both Afro-Argentines and African immigrants themselves (Marcelino 19-21).

This new migratory trend has started only recently for a few reasons. The original Argentinean Constitution clearly promoted European immigration. The restrictive Videla Law, a product of Argentina’s last military dictatorship in 1981, remained in force through the 1990’s,

resulting in insignificant African immigration. (Maffia 1-2). However, immigration controls became stricter both in the United States and particularly Europe, typical destinations for Africans, due largely to security concerns (especially after 9/11), severely restricting access to them. At the same time, the Argentinean law changed in the 2000's, as *Ley 25.871* and *Decreto 616/2010*, replaced *Ley Videla*, allowing for much easier entry and stay in the country. This, combined with overall lax immigration control in Argentina and the "porosity" of borders, were largely responsible for converting Argentina into a more promising destination for African immigrants (Maffia 1-2). This phenomenon has considerable anthropological significance, constituting a potential significant and long-term change in migratory patterns, a change in the local society's own historical consciousness, and questions regarding the insertion, integration, and/or assimilation of these newcomers to a so far unaccustomed society, one which so far has "otherized" them (Marcelino 1). Already various studies have been and are being carried out, demonstrated by both U.N. reports.

The largest percentage of these immigrants comes from Senegal, with other West African countries having the next largest share (Maffia 72-74).

#### Focus of study:

To what degree do the preeminence of work and mutual empathy define the culture developed by recent black immigrants to Buenos Aires, and how are these characteristics visible?

#### Method of investigation

Due to time constraints and the nature of the investigation (a largely unknown population within a large city), I could not carry out properly-stated ethnographic research. Data was collected mostly through "on-the-spot" interviews upon encounter (without previously contacting the interviewee), conducted in a street setting with various vendors, who are members

of the local African community (in truth much more diverse than is visible on the street); these interviews amounted to nine total. Additionally, I held three longer, scheduled interviews: one with Irene Ortiz Teixeira, the founder of *Casa de África*, an NGO that deals, among other tasks, with aiding African immigrants; with Paul Yeboah, a Ghanaian immigrant in Buenos Aires who previously worked as a street vendor; and Nengumbi Celestin Sukama, a Congolese immigrant and the founder of IARPIDI (*Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad, e Integración*), an NGO dedicated to promoting human rights and ending discrimination. Three more interviews were conducted via online questionnaires. Fortunately, I was able to undertake a small amount of participant observation: IARPIDI offers weekly tango classes, free of cost and open to the whole public, in order to promote integration of African immigrants. I attended three classes and thus had the opportunity to observe, as well as interact with and partake in, the culture contained in an integration channel. I also extensively consulted two official investigations already carried out about this community, one commissioned by the United Nations Organization and the other by PNUD (*Programa de las Naciones Unidas de Desarrollo*—United Nations Human Development Program), using them to supplement my research and occasionally comparing their findings with mine.

#### Problems with the methodology

Interviews are no substitute for participant observation, as they cannot provide the detail, subtlety, and deeper understanding that participant observation can. Questions posed and immediately answered allow neither for the reflection nor the complete and integrated context optimal for an study of culture, even if the questions are open-ended and left to the interviewee to freely answer, with no restriction or pre-fabricated options. Save for questions with concrete responses, such as country of origin, abstract questions concerning experience are impossible to

answer fully, as various descriptions are possible for any one given experience, depending much on the speaker's mood and circumstance at the moment. Not all questions were posed to all interviewees, as modifications and additions took place between interviews. Furthermore, the risk of deliberately false responses and participant bias always exists, for which there is no solution; my questioning of strangers on the street may have brooded distrust, annoyance, or even resentment, clearly affecting the responses. Additionally, this investigation cannot aspire to be quantitative or exhaustive; I was able to interview only a small amount, fifteen members, out of a whole population estimated between 2,000 and over 5,000. The research focused mainly on street vendors, the most accessible subjects for a study, and does not directly include any women or children. As a result, findings may be lacking or misleading in certain aspects.

#### Definition of useful terms

In order to be able to carry out a thorough investigation and analysis of any topic, it is necessary to define in precise language any terminology that may lead to ambiguity. Here, the terms "culture," "society," "community," "integration," and "immigrant" are key and are thus defined below *for the purposes of this essay*.

Culture: Following the definition of Franz Boas, that which "embraces all the manifestations of social behavior of a community, the reactions of the individuals as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the product of human activities as determined by these habits"

Society: a group of people that share a common culture

Community: here, a group of people that share a common culture (interchanged with "society")

Integration: the incorporation of any given social and cultural group into another such group of which it previously did not form part, *without* relinquishing its original culture in its entirety

Immigrant: a person who leaves his/her native country to live in another country (for the purposes of this essay, this definition also encompasses all migrants, temporary workers, and refugees, regardless of the motives for the migration, the finality of the migration, or the period of time remained in the foreign country; this definition, however, does not include tourists)

#### Final specifications

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify exactly of what the subject of this investigation consists. The term “African” is in itself rather vague. The U.N. study, authored by Pedro Marcelino and Marcela Cerrutti, acknowledges that existing “studies (this one included) overwhelmingly mention Senegalese migrants—and, to a lesser extent, Nigerian—as the focus of attention... Yet, the common Argentinean might be constructing an ‘otherized’ subject no more than the scholar or ... analyst” (1). Admittedly, this study also centers mainly on Senegalese immigrants, as they do constitute the most populous nationality; other African immigrants are nonetheless included. This study excludes North Africans (not sub-Saharan) and non-black South Africans. However, black Haitians are also included; Haitian immigration to Argentina has recently increased, many Haitians also engage in informal jewelry vending, and they are also largely “otherized.” There has been a considerable amount of immigration from the Dominican Republic; however, Dominicans are not considered here, even if there are many black people among them, as they speak Spanish and thus relate differently to Argentineans. Finally, Afro-Argentines (“Afro-Argentinos”), descendants of African slaves in Argentina, and descendants of Cape Verdean immigrants are also excluded from this study, although studies of them often do overlap. Thus, the most precise delineation of the study’s subject is as such: the community of recently-arrived, non-Spanish-speaking black immigrants homogenized and “otherized” by “the

common Argentinean.” Any references to it, including the term “African,” should hereafter be understood as signifying the above-described focus of study.

Additionally, within this essay, the term Buenos Aires is used to signify the urban conglomerate consisting of “Capital” plus “Gran Buenos Aires,” not solely the city proper, nor the entire province. This study was conducted entirely within Buenos Aires, and Argentina’s 2001 national census lists forty percent of the African-born population as living within Buenos Aires city, and thirty-five in Buenos Aires province (Marcelino 25).

#### A note on their current legal status

Legal status varies greatly among African immigrants (though trends exist). Argentina’s current migratory law, Ley 25.871, designates citizenship, available to an immigrant in just two years of stay, and different types of residency. However, a special residency type, *precaria*, exists. This category, as its very title, “precarious,” suggests, pertains specifically to people in the country with an undetermined status. As a signatory member of both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Argentina must consider refugees’ entry petitions. Although the fact that a request has been filed automatically grants the solicitant legal stay, legality is not permanent; the *precaria* is granted instead. The *precaria* theoretically allows the immigrant to “seek lodging, work and travel legally *within* the country legally” (Marcelino, 34) (Italics added); the extent to which this possibility really applies is questionable, as there is widespread ignorance on part of the population, which includes prospective employers and the police, of the fact that a *precaria* is actual legal tender (Marcelino, 41), thus placing the immigrants in a situation similar to completely irregular immigrants. This state of “liminality” or uncertainty about remainin, described extensively in

Marcelino's and Cerrutti's report, prevents much possibility of further establishment in Argentina.

### Proposal

I propose an understanding of the culture of these immigrants, not at all radical or even new, but instead rather self-evident. This understanding, further detailed and defended in this essay, consists of a view in which mutual empathy and the importance of work constitute the central features of the culture of the majority of African immigrants in Buenos Aires, and around which the African community is based and organizes itself. One may argue that these characteristics are true of any society and culture; work is crucial to physical survival, and just as importantly from an anthropological perspective, to organize society (for a member of society to survive, and for society to organize and define categories and roles); furthermore, without empathy and a shared, collective experience, society would not be cohesive. These claims are valid and true, but these qualities are manifested in this immigrant community more than in others.

### The culture of work

One characteristic distinguishing this culture from many other immigrant cultures and providing further support to the greater importance of work is the widespread absence of the often-denominated "building block of society:" the family. Instead, the society constituted by black immigrants in Argentina consists mainly of young adult men. By no means is this community completely confined to one gender or age range, and there is a considerable number of families consisting of husband, wife, and children. Furthermore, at least most of these men have grown up in their own families, and many are married, and many have children. However, these typically remain in the native country, as mainly the man migrates. It is thus reasonable to

state that the immigrant community proper to Argentina has developed overall independently of family and that the role of the family, at least in the immediate organization of the community, is severely diminished.

As the immediate presence of the family is largely displaced, other factors fill the void formed: I contend that one of these is work, for several reasons. First, the time which could be occupied by family (were it present) or dedicated to it, such as that consumed by domestic responsibilities and leisure spent with the family, can now be devoted to laboring further hours. It can be contended that there may not be much difference in the quantity of time in a day spent working in Argentina and that spent in the home country, especially when considering that a person who emigrated for economic reasons may very likely have been compelled to work much time in the native country to cope financially. This is a valid counterargument, and deeper investigation is admittedly necessary in this specific question, but it is not of great relevance to this study; regardless of the amount of time spent or not with family in Africa, it can simply be stated that in Argentina that time does not exist and thus does not constitute a part of the culture.

A final cause to regard work as the paramount basis of the immigrants' resulting culture is that the immigrant community itself exists because of a necessity to work. Most sources, including newspaper articles, coincide on the primary motive for migration: work. For instance, an article from online newspaper *Otrosenred* acknowledges a "diversity of motives alluded to as the cause of emigration" but "work has a central place" (Morales). Such evidence also comes directly from the immigrants. When asked to explain their reasons for moving to Argentina, seven out of fourteen people directly specified work as the main motive; many stated in interviews that they emigrated because of a lack of availability of work or employment opportunities. Furthermore, as described by both Paul and Irene, immigrants are often deceived

into paying expensive prices for the trip to Argentina and then must work off debt, which also augments their necessity to work.

In his investigation, Cerrutti discusses a phenomenon that perpetuates motivation to emigrate from Africa: “the fulfillment of *social responsibilities*” (7). He describes that, in order to conform:

to social expectation...migrants often maintain a positive narrative, despite the hardship most face...ultimately promoting the dissemination of a migration ideology back home, which, combined with migration pressure increases aspiration and (perceived) capability. But these narratives also perpetuate *hope*, a more intangible trait found on the discourse of many migrants in the streets of Buenos Aires—if often disguised by the *despair* tacitly displayed by many...a despair that they dare not transmit to those who expect them to excel. (7-8)

Similarly, Frigerio and Lamborghini note two different viewpoints on (in particular) Senegalese emigration, one contending that “emigration is a family-related strategy, a collective endeavor in which the family sees its emigrating son as its savior, and that gives prestige to whom undertakes it beyond the accompanying risks;” and the other claiming that “Senegalese immigration has become into an individual departure and into a sign of prestige, more than into a family-related strategy” (75).

Both reports directly indicate that immigrants are very likely to feel pressured, both by their families and society in the native country, to succeed economically in the new country. In order fulfill these expectations, success must be attained, or at least displayed; the expected means to success is through work. Although this knowledge cannot prove that immigrants work much harder, it can lead to the inference and thus support the argument that work does occupy a

paramount position in their lives and in result their culture, perhaps more than in other cultures not undergoing so much societal pressure. In fact, their culture largely exists because of the “disseminated” hope of success, which is inextricably related to the possibility of work.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence, however, comes from a simple statement repeated time and time again by various different people in various different situations during the interviews: “todo lo que quieren es trabajar y que los dejen en paz” (all they want to do is work and be left in peace). Paul gave this motive as a large part of the reason that the Unión de Ghana failed, for instance; members were simply not interested in sacrificing time in order to attend the meetings. Irene reiterated this statement already before the interview, finding it difficult to obtain an African interviewee for me, because they simply want to “work in peace.”

It may seem odd to claim that work is the primary reason for immigrants to enter Argentina with so many asking for refugee status. Many immigrants do experience actual war or persecution, such as in Sierra Leone. However, many people in the street interviews did claim to be soliciting asylum and named work as their motivation to emigrate; it should be considered that, due to the nature of the *precaria*, many immigrants make use of asylum-seeking simply to compel the government to consider their claims and resolve their residency issues in an timely manner.

### Mutual empathy

Just as work is the fundamental basis of this culture, so is mutual empathy the main societal bond. Émile Durkheim described a “collective consciousness,” in which the “totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average man of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own.” The African community and its intra-societal bonds, while well described by this definition, can be better described by the idea of solidarity as described in the Collins

dictionary of sociology: the “integration, and type or degree of integration, manifested by a society or group...often based on...direct mutual relations and shared values” (Collins).

A rather illustrative depiction of the situation is found in the PNUD publication: while discussing the reasons for forming an assistance-oriented African association, a Senegalese immigrant mentions a “friend, a compatriot if we could call him so (but he was from Mali)” who had died (“Afrodescendientes”, 76). Such a reference to a fellow immigrant, but not fellow countryman, manifests a close unity between immigrants, even of different nationalities. In fact, repeatedly during the interviews there were references to what Nengumbi termed “fraternidad africana.” In Nengumbi’s own words, on “foreign territory, Afro-Afro generates a mutual nearing.” When I asked Irene whether there are tensions here between different African nationalities or ethnicities, she strongly asserted that there are not; in her view, these immigrants put a complete “halt to conflict.” The same view was maintained by both Nengumbi and Paul. Not only, however, do tensions cease, but they actually form a harmonious community. Irene stated that they even use the word “hermano” to refer to Africans, even of a different nationality and/or ethnicity (thus reinforcing Nengumbi’s notion of African fraternity), a tendency that Paul stated in his interview as well. Irene, Paul, and Nengumbi seemed all in complete agreement on this topic, an occurrence which thus stresses its significance. The only street vendor to whom I asked this question was actually Haitian, yet he also coincided in calling Africans brothers. Only one out of fourteen people stated he did not identify with other Africans.

Referring to adaptation to life and work in Buenos Aires, Marcelino describes that most immigrants “have friends or relatives in Argentina and make use of migratory networks...to get established once they are in Argentina.” Furthermore, once “[the immigrants] arrive, kin lend them merchandize to sell and provide company during their first street experiences” (21). This

statement, while accurate, does not stress enough the influence of the society's "collective consciousness" or solidarity, instead seemingly relegating the role of mutual assistance to "kin" and "migratory networks," which may be misleading (unless of course the kin which Marcelino references is actually the above-discussed African fraternity). This fraternity truly does permeate the society, and all interviewees demonstrated this view. During the interview, Irene named her Senegalese secretary, Massar Ba, as an example, stating that he "may focus his work for his Senegalese community, but will gladly help others if asked." Paul maintained a virtually identical view in his interview, describing that, even if there is a "natural inclination to help people of one's own nationality first, if an African immigrant meets another who has just arrived from a different country, the more established one will provide assistance to the newer one until he is able to locate another immigrant of the newcomer's nationality, who will then help him."

One expression of this mutual nearing is the immigrants' tendency to settle together, in large groups, upon arrival in Buenos Aires. An English-language report by France24, a French television channel reporting news and current events, on these African immigrants, shows "a cheap hotel in downtown Buenos Aires, [where] about forty African people [live], five or six to a room" (Marianoge1989); such scenes are rather common. Out of seven vendors asked about their residential circumstances, three stated they lived *at the moment* with a fellow black friend. Another two responded that they lived at the moment with their respective Argentinean wives and families, whom they had met and formed after arriving in Buenos Aires; therefore, their cases cannot immediately be excluded, as it is possible that they had lived previously with fellow Africans.

Another manifestation of this characteristic is the widespread practice of selling merchandise as a pair, not individually. Out of ten vendors interviewed, four were interviewed in

pairs selling together, and another interviewed was selling with another vendor (the other vendor demonstrated a clear disinterest in being interviewed and is therefore not included). Additionally, while conducting the interviews, I encountered (and attempted to interview) at least two more pairs, one in Once and one in Parque Centenario, not included in the initial list because of their lack of Spanish proficiency and thus interviewing ability. Paul remarked on this tendency, noting that immigrants who have spent a longer time in Argentina often “help and accompany newcomers in their sales until the newcomers become accustomed to dealing in the new language.” Furthermore, Irene related that some better-established Africans do lend merchandise as front-money or start-up capital (in Spanish: *fian*), particularly to newcomers, allowing them to repay the goods after earning the necessary money, demonstrating the high degree of cooperation present within this society. Such cooperation is often crucial, as many black immigrants do arrive without any previous acquaintances whatsoever in Argentina: out of eight interviewees asked, three said that they moved without knowing anyone in Argentina; Paul stated that he did not know anyone in Argentina either upon arrival. With this factor taken into account, and with the knowledge that these immigrants have since then adapted and progressed, it becomes evident how powerful this fraternity truly is.

### Conclusion

The view of black immigrants in Argentina presented here simply aspires to reflect the most obvious characteristics observed frequently during the investigation. The culture formed by the immigrants has work as its foundation and “fraternity” as its social bond. Evidence for this abounds, from the misleading success-driven ideology, which often initially attracts immigrants, to the reluctance to sacrifice time for other causes, from living conditions to the use of the word

“brother.” These details, while not entirely overlooked, have been largely ignored in past studies, which focus perhaps more on trends and policies.

Admittedly, much more research is needed on this topic. Future like studies should encompass a larger and more diverse (age, gender) interviewee sample. Additionally, aspects of interest still to investigate abound. One concerns the importance of soccer (football) as an integration medium. In describing reasons for migrating to Argentina, Marcelino states that Argentina has “famous football teams, a fact that should not be underestimated in a football-obsessed continent” (15); however, its importance in integration should not be overestimated either, as interviewees consistently stated it was not so important, either due to societal dejection or mere lack of time. Another anthropologically meaningful area involves the interaction between Afro-Argentines, descendants of slaves, and these newcomers, as many institutions, like IARPIDI, interact with both. Finally, it is necessary to recognize that the community and culture forming are still extremely recent; Questions like “What is the degree of linguistic retention of these immigrants’ children?” or “How does their educational attainment affect acculturation?” require much more time to address. The culture and society described here constitute simply one imperfect interpretation, but one that will hopefully offer some insight on a group of people still rather “otherized” by the majority.

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\*All sources marked with an asterisk have been translated from Spanish by the essay's writer.

Interview on July 16<sup>th</sup> with Irene Ortiz Teixeira, founder/president of Casa de Africa (House of Africa) at her house/Casa de Africa—summary

\*The word “here” should be understood to signify Argentina, “she” signifies Mrs. Ortiz Teixeira (Irene), and “they” refers to African immigrants in Argentina.

When I called Irene to enquire about the possibility of an interview, if possible with an African immigrant, she stated the difficulty of such a task, saying that all they wanted to do was work in peace (and not be bothered). She described that, in her view, there is an extremely large amount of interest in African immigrants to Argentina, that she constantly receives phone calls from people like me, wanting to conduct investigations. She expressed much curiosity, or inquisitiveness, about the source of our investigators’ curiosity.

First, Irene told me about the history of Casa de Africa and how it came to be. Irene is herself the daughter of Cape Verde immigrants on her mother’s side. According to her, her grandmother had been involved in the rather recent (decolonization period) Cape Verde independence movement and had met/worked with people like Amilcar Cabral. Partly inspired by her own family’s history, which she viewed as contemporary and still transpiring, in 1995 she decided to start a small foundation in her own house. The main purpose of this House of Africa, at least initially, was to promote knowledge of the diversity contained within the African continent, as Africa was (and often still is), in her opinion, a very unknown and foreign part of the world for many Argentinians, who have no knowledge of the “unbelievable diversity” existent there and instead often homogenize all black peoples into a single group. At the beginning, she did not intend the foundation to be anything other than a small, informal “instituto barrial” (neighborhood institute) that would serve to spread awareness among her neighbors. This House was not a response to the relatively large waves of African immigrants, as she founded it a few years earlier.

According to Irene’s estimations, the large waves of African immigrants began in 1997-1998. With these waves, Casa de Africa took on new functions. Irene decided to begin a radio program, Amor por África, later another, Con Ustedes África, both of which deal with these immigrants’ lives and with African music.

According to her, there has always been harmony among all of them. Although in Africa there may be conflicts among them dealing with identity issues such as nationality or ethnic belonging, “hacen un corte con los conflictos” (they put a halt to conflicts) when they arrive here. She repeated that all they want to do is work in peace. Irene stated that “se llevan bien, porque son africanos” (they get along well, because they are African); she described that it is common, at least in what she has seen among African immigrants, for many of them from various different countries to use the word “hermano” (brother) among themselves, even between different nationalities, using the word to refer to one’s neighbor. She did admit that there may be disagreements and arguments dealing with matters such as politics and ideological differences, but nothing extreme. There are associations and groups affiliated with particular nationalities, but there is not discrimination among them: for example, Massar Ba, the Senegalese immigrant who is secretary of Casa de África, may focus his work for his Senegalese community, but will gladly help others if asked. As Irene said, African immigrants here do not want problems, so they make sure to never become involved in conflicts of any sort.

-According to Irene, the immigrants identify themselves first as African; if then asked about their nationality, they identify with their nationality, but do not state it unless specifically asked. They do not, at least in Argentina, make much reference to ethnicity or tribal groups.

One aspect that Irene views strongly maintained among these immigrant communities is that of family reunions, at least to the degree possible. She stated that there are often large reunions, which many immigrants attend, where traditional food is prepared, etc. According to her, these gatherings are very open, as the immigrants want there to be more awareness of them and their customs among the Argentinean community. There are many events that take place throughout the year, such as Eid-ul-Fitr for the Senegalese community, an event at the mosque which people of all nationalities attend, and many places to gather, such as restaurants and “boliches”. She stated that they largely maintain their aesthetic values, especially in their style of dress. Although fútbol (soccer) may act as a bridge between cultures, as it is extremely popular both within African nations and in Argentina, it is not extremely important for the immigrants here. Some may gather to watch games, occasionally play, but it is not such an important factor as some may believe. There are not truly any African customs that are, as a rule, lost by immigrants in Argentina, and there are not truly many, if any, customs or aspects of Argentinean culture that consistently seem to cause much displeasure or discord for the immigrants. However, one matter that does generally attract the immigrants’ attention here is the curiosity they typically arouse among Argentines, as they do not expect to draw so much intrigue.

According to her, the reason that African immigrants tend to become sellers is both that selling is the quickest method to obtain money and that selling does not require much knowledge of language. She asked, “Qué ha hecho el migrante cuando va a otro país? Se ha dedicado a vender” (What has the migrant done when he goes to another country? He has focused on selling). She then pointed out that other nationalities have typically done the same when arriving here, such as the Chinese with their many small grocery stores. The reason that African immigrants typically sell jewelry is that there is an African immigrant, well settled in Argentina, who lends them jewelry as front-money to be paid back later.

¿Cuánto influye el hecho de ser indocumentado o solicitante de refugio, lo cual significa estar a la deriva, esperando sin saber cual va a ser el resultado, en la manera en que se adaptan o integran a la comunidad argentina?

-It causes them much fear; it is a factor of distrust. According to Irene, they live with a fear of being deported (which is largely unnecessary, given the laxity of Argentinean laws in this respect), but understandable from their experience with respective European or American laws. Because of this, they are often less willing to open up to strangers, i.e. the general populace. When I related to her their level of openness with me personally, she attributed that to the fact that I was young, which likely intimidates them less. She did state that once they become more accustomed to life in Argentina, particularly once they begin to better manage the language, they become more independent and less fearful. She also stated that, due to the fact that they stand out in comparison with the general population and have less experience with life in Argentina, they are easy targets for manipulation by others, including aid in drug trafficking transactions or robbery. This also causes distrust towards the Argentinean people.

¿Cuánta unidad y coordinación ve usted entre las diferentes organizaciones que les brindan, o desean brindar, asistencia? Esto incluye la Casa de Africa, la FCCAM, el Estado Argentino, etc.

-Very little. The FCCAM is the ACNUR's (in English UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) regional branch/arm and thus receives assistance from the Argentinean government, including financial assistance, largely destined for the refugees. Outside of this, every agency acts independently of each other; there is very little coordination among their activities.

There are also situations, not so accidental, in which human smugglers deliberately deceive/lie to migrants about the destination and/or about the economic prospects in the destination, obtaining in that way a large sum of money, which leaves the migrant with a large debt that must be worked off in Argentina, or simply with very little money at all. I asked her about the killing of an immigrant last year on Puente La Noria, and she stated that he was just going to work when he was assaulted and then killed.

Interview with Mr. Paul Yeboah on July 18<sup>th</sup>, a Ghanaian immigrant in Buenos Aires, in the Constitución Area

As I expressed interest in the linguistic aspect of immigrants' integration in Argentina, Paul offered to bring along his three-year-old daughter Emiliana to the interview. Paul and I met right outside Constitución Station and then I accompanied him to his house a few blocks away to pick up Emiliana. As he knew I am American, he asked me from where I am; he then told me he has a brother that now lives in Ohio. Paul has a Ghanaian wife and two daughters, both born in Argentina: Emiliana, and Valentina, less than a year old. Paul's family lives in a two-story tenement-style building, with individual rooms and bathrooms for each family, but shared kitchens; the tenement also includes some activities, including a class for children that Emiliana had recently attended. I asked Paul about the residents of the tenement, and he said that they were mostly Argentinean, although there were some other nationalities as well.

-After leaving Ghana, Paul stayed in Libya for two years, Lebanon for four years, Turkey for six months, Cuba for four months, Ecuador and Colombia each for six months (Turkey, Cuba, Ecuador and Colombia were mainly transit countries), and then Argentina. He came to Argentina by plane, so did not pass through Brazil. He stated that he came to Argentina because he could not go to the U.S. (because of strict immigration laws). In Libya and Lebanon he learned to speak Arabic fluently, and he stated that he has lost much fluency now that he has had no reason to speak Arabic in Buenos Aires, but that he could remember much if he did start speaking it again.

-Besides Emiliana and Valentina, Paul has another daughter, Afra, who is seven years old, from another woman. He met Afra's mother, who is porteña, on the street in Buenos Aires; they were never officially married but lived as a couple for four years, then separated. He already knew Emiliana's and Valentina's mother from Ghana, and arranged for her to move to Buenos Aires once he was more established; they are officially married. Paul said that neither Afra nor her mother speak any language other than Spanish, nor does Emiliana. Paul's current wife does not speak much Spanish (although she has been in Argentina for four years, she speaks only Akan); Paul expressed his intention and certainty that his daughters will learn Akan from their mother, as she speaks to them only in Akan (Emiliana does, at the very least, understand it), and he in Spanish. Valentina, being less than a year old, obviously does not speak any language yet. When I asked him about other Ghanaian families (whose quantity he estimated at around six or seven), he stated that, of the children born here, some do speak Akan, while others do not. Those who immigrated, no matter at what age, always retain Akan.

They try to cook African food, and Paul's wife has much more experience and ease in cooking African food. However, as could be expected, not all is available, and at restaurants and the like, they eat typical Argentinean food (Paul then gestured at the pizza he had ordered for Emiliana).

Paul is Methodist. Here, he has participated in a Bible study group with Jehova's Witnesses (a mainly Argentinean group, but not confined to any one nationality); he did meet many people here through Jehova's Witnesses. I asked him what role Jehova's Witnesses plays in the integration of African immigrants. He stated that they have an important role, since they are welcoming and make the effort to reach out to the immigrants; the immigrants do not have to go to them. This is very important, for, as he said, the majority of Africans here just want to work; few are willing to make the effort or take the time themselves to go to them.

¿Estás en alguna asociación africana o para africanos acá, como la asociación senegalesa o IARPIDI? ¿Cuáles(es), y qué hacés ahí (qué actividades)? ¿Si no, sabés (alguna vez has oído) de alguna asociación africana acá? ¿Conocés/fuiste a la Casa de África? ¿Escuchás Con Ustedes África, Amor por África, u otro programa similar de acá? ¿Si sí, por qué?

-He knows of the different nationality-based associations, such as the Asociación de Senegaleses. He was for a time a member in the Unión de Ghana: several years ago, he and other fellow Ghanaians founded this union, whose main purpose was to provide assistance to the Ghanaians that had arrived in Argentina, so that they could start a living here. The Unión met once a month; at every meeting, every member was expected to contribute ten pesos; this way, any newcomer needing to make a living could have some money given to him in order to start. Once this newcomer had been able to establish himself sufficiently, he would also be expected to contribute. The meetings were an opportunity to chat and socialize, as well as to help the members to communicate with their families in Ghana, if they could not do so already. However, the union only lasted three or four years; Paul explained that as the members became more established in Buenos Aires, there ended up being very little spirit of cooperation and help; for example, out of approximately forty Ghanaians, it would be common for only around six to attend the meetings, and the members consistently did not pay the expected ten pesos. As Paul emphasized, most Africans who come to Buenos Aires simply desire to work, and therefore are often unwilling to put forth the time, effort, or money for causes such as this union. Therefore, the union eventually disintegrated. He stated that he met Nengumbi Sukama, IARPIDI's president, on the street. He knew of Casa de África, but has never visited, and he does not listen to the radio programs.

Paul is Ghanaian, but he feels identified with Africans from other countries as well. The only true tension that truly ever occurs between African immigrants here is that caused by work and competition, for example, if a new immigrant places his stand very close to another vendor. Any conflicts dealing with nationality, tribe, religion, etc. cease to exist upon arrival in Argentina. There may be disagreement due to these, but nothing further. He described that it is common for Africans, even among different nationalities, to refer to each other as "hermano" (brother); furthermore, even if there is a natural inclination to help people of one's own nationality first, if an African immigrant meets another who has just arrived from a different country, the more established one will provide assistance to the newer one until he is able to locate another immigrant of the newcomer's nationality, who will then help him.

Interview with Mr. Nengumbi Celestin Sukama, president of IARPIDI, on July 24<sup>th</sup>

The IARPIDI (Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad e Integración) is a civil, non-profit association with the objective, as stated on its website, of

“promoting the equality of rights, the principle of non-discrimination, the promotion of ethnic and cultural diversity with the aim of improving the process and possibilities of insertion and integration of refugees, Africans and Afro-descendants in Argentinean society.”

It was founded in October 2007 by Mr. Sukama as a response to

“the systematic and permanent violation of the human rights of those requesting refuge, refugees, African immigrants and Afro-descendants in the Argentinean Republic.”

I had visited the IARPIDI's headquarters three times already to participate in the free weekly tango classes offered there as a means of integration of Africans in Argentina/Buenos Aires. There I met Nengumbi, a Congolese immigrant who is now an Argentinean citizen. I requested an interview with him, and he agreed to an interview, which was held in his office at the IARPIDI headquarters.

### Interview Summary

Nengumbi came directly to Argentina in 1995 (explained five questions later). However, he moved to Australia in 2002, angry from the treatment he received in Argentina, but returned to Argentina in 2004. In 2005, he moved to England and returned again in 2007. Afterwards he visited the U.S., Paris, and Amsterdam for several months, but did not live there. He tried to obtain residency in both Australia and England, but could not, due to strict immigration laws, and thus had to return, not very willingly.

He met Sara, his porteña wife, in a Bible study group affiliated with Ministry of the Way, International. They do not have children. Fluently, Sara speaks just Spanish, but she is learning Lingala.

-In Zaïre, Nengumbi was a political activist. In Argentina, for the first two years he received money from the Argentinean government as part of the 1951 Geneva Accords; however, that income was wrongly

eliminated because of political processes, the Argentinean government disobeying the international agreement. Afterward, Nengumbi gave language classes. Then, he married, and for a time, both had to make do with only Sara's income. For two years, he worked in an Argentinean company as a manager. However, he explained that as he is dark-skinned, he earned three times less than the workers he directed, and the doorman had a larger pay than he. Finally, he quit. Now, he focuses solely on managing IARPIDI, but that does not generate any revenue.

For a time, he was a member in Ministry of the Way, International, which consisted of all nationalities. However, he is not a member now.

In regards to the liminal situation presented by the "precarious" residence, "es un bloqueo en muchas cosas." (It's an obstacle in many things.) If an immigrant does not have a DNI, even if he has a document certifying the *precaria*, he becomes much more vulnerable to policemen/law enforcement officers (who often are not well instructed in the recognition of *precaria* documents or choose to ignore them), and it becomes much more difficult to obtain employment; employers are unwilling to hire people without a DNI, as it would be typically illegal, although "la precaria" does specifically permit employment. Furthermore, without a DNI, the immigrants cannot visit their native countries, as they will not be allowed return into Argentina.

African immigrants work, per day, ten to fourteen hours; never less than ten. Weekends are the busiest time, as they are outdoor vendors, and they work the longest periods then. Many vendors therefore rest on Mondays, working fewer hours. On Fridays all Muslims do go to the mosque.

In Nengumbi's experience, among the different entities and organizations focused on African immigrants, there are, instead of cooperation and coordination, rivalry and competition. Every organization and association wants to gain public recognition for accomplishing objectives and stand out from the others. There is arrogance involved on the part of the presidents and leaders of the associations, and "cada busca su propia fama" (each one strives for his own fame) and desires to work independently of the others. This rivalry does not help the general situation, as cooperation among the associations would bring about better results. This is not at all a result of nationalism, but of inter-institutional rivalry. Nengumbi also asserted that the recently-formed Congolese Association would not behave this way.

¿Los inmigrantes que se casan con mujeres argentinas, dónde las conocen?

-It depends on each individual case. Some on the street, others in clubs, etc.

¿Tienen algún rol las asociaciones religiosas en la inserción en la sociedad acá?

-To some extent, but it depends. When one leaves his native place, he tries to obtain another place and continue with his religious practices; however, it varies by person. Groups such as Jehova's Witnesses and bible study groups can help with insertion and making new acquaintances, but the person must be willing to attend. Senegalese immigrants often attend the mosque in their own groups, thus not truly becoming more inserted on account of religion.

-In foreign territory, in Nengumbi's opinion, Afro-Afro naturally generates a mutual nearing. There exists a "fraternidad africana" (African fraternity), and there is much empathy. Once again, there is no nationalism; tensions can arise among/between different institutions, but not nationalities.

Soccer may seem a strong cultural connection, but there is much rejection from Argentineans, even in sports, greatly reducing the possibilities for integration by that means. Additionally, clubs have attempted to deceive Africans immigrants good at playing soccer into signing cheap contracts; this practice does not favor integration, instead fueling animosity, and is typically discovered by prospective players before signing. According to Nengumbi, very few immigrants fall into drugs; however, some do (and Nengumbi personally knows some, including some Congolese) end up completely cut off, there is a "desvinculación total" from the African community.

We also discussed some other topics, not specifically mentioned within the questions. I asked Nengumbi about the Senegalese immigrant who was assaulted and killed on Puente La Noria last October. Nengumbi said, according to eyewitness accounts, that he had descended from a bus to take another one, carrying his backpack with merchandise in order to go sell in the Gran Buenos Aires. A man approached him, threatened him with a gun, and demanded the backpack. The immigrant turned in his backpack without resisting, the assaulter took it, walked away a few steps, then turned around and shot the immigrant. Nengumbi was angry that no media outlet at all reported it, providing evidence that there still exists much racism. According to Nengumbi, in Argentina one does not see racism, but there is in reality great racism. The law may state one thing and not admit or tolerate racism, but reality says something else, and nothing is truly done about the matter. INADI, the national institute against discrimination, is in Nengumbi's view simply a tool to deceive the international community into believing that Argentina is doing something about racism; the very bureaucrats at INADI are the same blond-haired, blue-eyed racists against which the institution is supposedly fighting, and INADI itself discriminates. I also asked him how vendors obtain their merchandise, asking if there was an African distributor: he stated that, at least initially, there were no distributors; each community organizes itself, having an expert in the best purchasing, and searches for the best purchases. However, now there are some Africans that do lend merchandise as front-money.

Questions asked, key to spreadsheet

- 1) ¿En qué país naciste? ¿Hace cuántos años que estás en Argentina?  
*What country were you born in? How many years have you been in Argentina?*
- 2) ¿Qué nivel educativo traés de tu país de nacimiento?  
*What level of education do you bring from your country of birth?*
- 3) ¿Por qué viniste?  
*Why did you come?*
- 4) ¿Viniste directo a Argentina de tu país natal, o pasaste por otros países primero? ¿Viniste por Brasil?  
*Did you travel to Argentina directly from your native country, or did you pass through other countries first? Did you come through Brazil?*
- 5) ¿Cuál es tu idioma nativo? ¿Qué idioma hablás acá con tus compatriotas? ¿Dónde/como aprendiste español?  
*What is your native language? What language do you speak here with your compatriots? Where/how did you learn Spanish?*
- 6) ¿Tenés familia argentina? ¿Tenés familia en Argentina? Explicá. ¿Habla en tu idioma nativo, o solo conoce castellano/español?  
*Do you have Argentinean family? Do you have family in Argentina? Explain. Do they speak in your native language, or do they only know Spanish?*
- 7) ¿Qué comés típicamente (comida argentina o africana)?  
*What do you typically eat (Argentinean or African food)?*
- 8) ¿Con quién vivís?  
*Who do you live with?*
- 9) ¿Ya tenías amigos/conocidos acá antes de venir, o viniste a ciegas?  
*Did you already have friends/acquaintances here before coming, or did you come completely blindly (without knowing anyone already here)?*
- 10) ¿De qué trabajás acá? ¿Siempre has tenido el mismo trabajo acá? ¿De qué trabajabas en tu país natal?  
*What do you work as here? Have you always had the same job here? What did you work as in your native country?*
- 11) ¿Cuál es tu religión? ¿Estás (o estuviste alguna vez) en alguna asociación religiosa acá? ¿De sólo tu nacionalidad o de todas nacionalidades? Explicá.  
*What is your religion? Are you (or were you ever) in a religious association here? Consisting of only your nationality or all nationalities? Explain.*
- 12) ¿Tomás mate? ¿Te gusta?  
*Do you drink mate? Do you like it?*
- 13) ¿Jugabas fútbol en tu país natal? ¿Seguís (o estás ahora) jugando acá? ¿Estás en algún club deportivo acá?  
*Did you play soccer in your native country? Do you continue (or are you now) playing here? Are you in any athletic club here?*

14) ¿Estás en alguna asociación africana o para africanos acá, como la asociación senegalesa o IARPIDI? ¿Cuáles(es), y qué hacés ahí (qué actividades)? ¿Si no, sabés (alguna vez has oído) de alguna asociación africana acá? ¿Conocés/fuiste a la Casa de África? ¿Escuchás *Con Ustedes África, Amor por África*, u otro programa similar de acá? ¿Si sí, por qué?

*Are you in any African association or association for Africans here, like the Senegalese Association or IARPIDI? Which one(s), and what do you do there (what activities)? If not, do you know (have you ever heard) of any African association here? Do you know/have you been to Casa de África? Do you listen to Con Ustedes África, Amor por África, or another similar program from here? If so, why?*

15) ¿Le mandás dinero a tu familia en tu país natal? ¿Seguís en contacto con ellos?

*Do you send money to your family in your native land? Do you remain in contact with them?*

16) ¿Qué otras costumbres has adoptado acá que no conocías antes (por ejemplo, los saludos, actividades, etc.)? Describilas. ¿Hay alguna costumbre de acá que te guste mucho, o alguna que te cause desagrado o resulte chocante?

*What other customs have you adopted here that you did not know before (for example, greetings, activities, etc)? Describe them. Is there any custom here that you like much, or any that may cause you displeasure or appear clashing?*

17) ¿Cómo te autoidentificarías acá? ¿Con tu tribu, etnia, nacionalidad, etc.? ¿Te sentís identificado con otros africanos de otros países? ¿Cómo reaccionarías si te confundieran con otra nacionalidad?

*How would you auto-identify here? With your tribe, ethnicity, nationality, etc? Do you feel identified with other Africans from other countries? How would you react if you were confused for another nationality?*

18) ¿Dónde vivís más cómodo?

*Where do you live more comfortably?*

19) ¿En el futuro (por ejemplo, de acá a diez años, o el resto de tu vida), planeás permanecer acá o volver a tu país natal (o realmente no sabés)?

*In the future (for example, in ten years from now, or the rest of your life), do you plan on remaining here or returning to your native country (or do you really not know)?*

20) ¿Si querés contestar (si no te sentís cómodo, no tenés que contestar), cuál es tu estatus legal? Indocumentado, solicitante de refugio, refugiado, residente, ciudadano, etc.?

*If you want to respond (if you do not feel comfortable, you do not have to respond), what is your legal status? Undocumented, refugee-status applicant, refugee, citizen, etc.?*

Date, time of day, name if available	Location interviewed		1	2	3
July 9th, late afternoon	Plaza Dorrego (Capital)	Haiti, 4	not asked	not asked	not asked
July 9th, late afternoon	Plaza Dorrego (Capital)	Haiti, 2	not asked	not asked	not asked
July 14th, afternoon	Parque Centenario (Capital)	Senegal, 1	completed primary	work	work
July 14th, afternoon	Parque Centenario (Capital)	Senegal, 3	completed first year of high school	work	work
July 14th, late afternoon	Parque Centenario (Capital)	Cameroun, 2	completed primary	work	work
July 14th, late afternoon	Parque Centenario (Capital)	Senegal, 1	completed primary (not entirely sure?)	work	work
July 15th, midday	Plaza La Rocha (Moron)	Senegal, 9	completed high school	work	work
July 22nd, late afternoon	Parque Rivadavia (Capital)	Senegal, 6	completed first year of university	work, "probar suerte" ("try his luck)	work, "probar suerte" ("try his luck)
July 22nd, late afternoon	Corner of Acyfe y Rivadavia (Capital)	Haiti, 8 months	not asked	study and work	study and work
Nengunbi Sukama	IAPPDI	Zaire, 17	university graduate, licensed in management	political persecution (as he was an activist)	political persecution (as he was an activist)
Paul Yeboah	Constitucion	Ghana, 13	finished primary school and then took course at Agriculture Institute	"to make his own life"	"to make his own life"
Mustata Ndathie	online	Senegal, 5	Baccala ureate and two years university	to search for opportunities	to search for opportunities
Boubacar Traoré	online	Senegal, 19	"niveau supérieur"	to have another professional and university experience	to have another professional and university experience
Maxime Tankouo	online	Cameroun, 10	high school	originally just in transit, but liked Argentina so much that he decided to	originally just in transit, but liked Argentina so much that he decided to



		10	11	12	13
jewelry vendor, yes, not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	
jewelry vendor, works in a company on weekdays, not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	
jewelry vendor, yes, always has been a vendor	Muslim, belongs to an association	yes and likes it	not asked	not asked	
jewelry vendor, yes, worked on metallurgy on ships	Muslim, belongs to an association	yes and likes it	yes, but doesn't play here		
jewelry vendor, yes, has always been a vendor	Christian	no	somewhat		
jewelry vendor, yes, was a chef in Senegal	Muslim, belongs to an association	not asked	not asked		
jewelry vendor, yes, not asked (always been a vendor?)	Muslim, belongs to an association	yes and likes it	not asked		
jewelry vendor, yes, tour guide	Muslim, belongs to an association here consisting of only Senegals	yes, does not like it that much	not asked		
jewelry vendor, yes, had worked in factory in Haiti	Christian, in Bible Study group consisting of all nationalities	NO WWWOWOWOWOWOOC bothers him	not asked		
gave language classes/ worked in management, no, had been an activist	Christian, belonged to a Bible Study Group	yes	no		
now security guard, has mainly sold jewelry and acted in some commercials, volunteered for Civil Defense Organization	Christian, attended Jehovah's Witnesses Bible Study	yes, does not like it that much	not really		
receptionist, in Senegal studied and helped family, works Monday to Saturday	Muslim, in no association but attends both mosques	yes and likes it	yes, plays here, but in no club		
previously an officer of Senegalese Culture ministry, now works in academic setting--recently obtained Master's	Muslim	not very much	doesn't play anything here		
now the owner of an African restaurant in Bs. As., previously owned a ma xifosco, played in a soccer club in Cameroon	Protestant, not in any association	likes it but does not drink it much	played professionally in Cameroon, occasionally plays with Argentineans here, not in any club		

	14	15	16	17
not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked
not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked	not asked
not in my association. Knows about the Senegalese organization but does not attend	yes, yes	did not have much to say	not asked	not asked
not in my association. Little knowledge about them	yes, yes	did not have much to say	not asked	not asked
not in my association.	yes, yes	did not have much to say	not asked	not asked
yes, in Senegalese association	yes, yes	did not have much to say	not asked	not asked
yes, in Senegalese association	yes, yes	did not have much to say	not asked	not asked
not in my association. knows about the Senegalese association	yes, yes	bothered by extremely affectionate DVDs, rampant in Buenos Aires	not asked	not asked
is (or was until recently) in SUMMA (Indians in Argentina) knows of Casa de Africa, has never visited, but intends to do in the future to the radio program once he obtains a radio	yes, yes	directly asked, before even touching his question, "for que son un indio? he ignores argentina?" like nutritional systems and sanitation dealing with food, oil has towards	considers Africans "brothers"	
head of hospital, in Computer Association	not asked	maintain language, style of dress, food as stereotype, more like of intergender interactions had	"More Afro causes mutual negating"	
was in former Union of Ghana	sent money for a long time, yes	not much to say, bothered by vulgarity and lack of respect	referred to African fraternally	
Secretary of Asociacion de Senegaleses	yes, yes	likes changing a job	identifies with nationality but does not identify with other Africans	
in IABE/DU and Asociacion de Senegaleses	remains in contact with them, travels when possible	he likes gathering in clubs	identifies with nationality	
in no association	yes, yes	not addressed	identifies as a foreigner living in Argentina, does NOT feel identified with Africans from other nations	

