

“the idea that democracy should not be seen as a one size fits all, off the shelf endeavour, and

that the advanced industrialized countries did not possess all the answers”

government in general, and in trying to normalize its institutions, in particular.

Joseph also articulated the problems with democracy and society here in Nova Scotia and in Canada. Civic participation is in trouble what with the stats regarding voter turnout, especially among young people, which is partly why the entire Democracy 250 event was planned in the first place. Access to resources of all kinds for the everyday working person often proves problematic, and there is the problem of subtle racism and various forms of discrimination alive and well, unfortunately. Joseph also sees many issues dealing with class divisions in Canada and in Nova Scotia.

Joseph mused about transferring social and political ideas back home to Liberia. But he maintained that such an intention was fraught with problems. Like the one of elitism. That he might be dismissed by the common people as being elitist, himself. Many people back home suffer from class divisions and a lack of education much more extremely than in Canada. And people who protest unfair treatment by government are the targets of intimidation and violence. People often complain about being marginalized by the unequal and unfair application of law by the powers that be.

There was another point Joseph hinted at but did not fully explain, yet it did kind of tickle the political imagination. About the idea that democracy should not be seen as a one size fits all, off the shelf endeavour, and that the advanced industrialized countries did not possess all the answers. But Joseph spoke of a different idea. The idea of a Canadian democracy, a Nigerian democracy, a Liberian democracy, etc. That in maybe each of these democratic configurations, that the specific needs of a country be taken into account, forming more of the foundation of governance, that is a needs driven formulation, rather than a textbook recipe from university campuses, or the applicable government ministries, perhaps?

Also he questioned about what he has learned in Canada and whether these ideas could be taken home to Liberia? Several points were emphasized: access to all kinds of resources for the average, everyday man and woman. Also, civic participation is a huge issue. But one of the barriers to civic advocacy is whether or not the general population is ready for the exercise of democracy? Or educated enough to begin to accept the idea? Because there are issues with respect to the different ethos in the land.

The ideal in Canada is that if you dream it, you can make it happen. If you aspire to something, you can achieve it. In Liberia your social and economic station is determined by your ranking at birth. People from elite families are born into power and wealth, and they experience an unfair advantage when seeking the much sought after opportunities in work and life, compared to the average person. Obviously huge challenges still exist, and much hard work needs to be done.

Ali Duale came to Canada 10 years ago. He spoke passionately and powerfully about democracy in Nova Scotia and in Canada. Coming from his home country of Somalia, it is not much of a stretch to understand why he felt so deeply about our governmental processes and democratic way of life. In Somalia, he never once had the chance to vote at any time for any person. Most of the rest of the world do not have a chance to experience democracy like it is practiced here with freedom of mind, and freedom of thinking your own thoughts, let alone freedom of speech and the many other freedoms that people enjoy, according to Ali.

Ali is concerned that many Nova Scotians and Canadians are familiar with the word “democracy” but



do not really know what it means. In Somalia, governance is all about power. He asserted that colour, religion, language really make no difference. It is all about power. The families, the tribal groupings are what it's all about in Somalia. There is no democratic government. All tribes are unique and they all want power.

Accountability is something Ali spoke about as well. He lauded the nature of holding people and government accountable. There is no accountability in Somalia. If one is lucky, one is born a king, lives the life of a king, dies a king but along the way there is no accountability. However, for those born a follower, that unlucky person or family is always and forever a follower. And then there are refugees. “A refugee is the lowest form of human being,” said Ali quite sombrely. “I am a refugee from Somalia. And I arrived in Canada without knowing a single word of English.

“With Democracy 250 we have much to celebrate,” said Ali. “In Canada I am a free human being, a respected human being. There is so much to celebrate due to this fact. I am a free human being in Nova Scotia, a free human being in Canada.

“If I ever go back to Somalia, I have much to tell my friends there. I have learned so much about equal and fair alternatives to everyday life compared to Somalia. If I ever go back I have much to teach to those oppressed and less fortunate. The people of my home country must learn from my stories about living in a free society, like how life is lived in Nova Scotia and in Canada.”

Also, Ali is the first black African Canadian firefighter in HRM. Much of his success in landing such a job he attributed to the kind and generous help of an immigrant friend. He, said Ali “Has been a mentor and a nurturer for me while I have been struggling to settle down in Nova Scotia. He has been such a great friend. When I first heard about the job on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s call for more minorities in the fire department and elsewhere, I hesitated. My friend encouraged me encouraged me to apply.

The friend nurtured Ali through the entire process, until he successfully landed the job. This has turned out to be Ali’s first full time job, as well.

Finishing off the evening were several stories of immigration to Canada from people in the audience as well as Juan Carlos’s experiences about what motivated him to leave Chile and come to Canada 30 years ago. It was all about government corruption.

Juan Carlos was enjoying a successful career in the Ministry of Chilean Folkloric activities when he found out about a billing scam involving Ministry administrators when it came to cashing cheques of employees who had never been hired for the folkloric programs, for whatever reason. They were making out like a bandit until Juan Carlos notified officials in the government about the abuse.

What happened was a real eye opener for him, and a civic lesson he will never forget. He was let go, and the folkloric program was shut down in an act of vengeance. The guilty parties, however, were transferred to another posting in government, like no problem. Juan Carlos was outraged. But what could he do, with the present configuration of such a corrupt system? He thought about looking elsewhere for a place to call home. His mind began to drift northward. Northward to Canada.

One of the final stories was this writer, Bill Krampe’s accounting of he and his wife Kristin’s immigration journey to the promised land, Canada, in 1974.

“My story is all about economics. It is not a tale of corruption, like so many we have heard tonight. There were no threats of imprisonment or torture due to our politics or because of how we cast our ballots. There were no police thugs coming into our home, beating us into submission. Nor government secret agents tracking our every move and every telephone conversation and harassing us. Yet there were and still are abuses of power in my home country, but all this pales in comparison to the stories we have heard this evening. At the time of



our immigration, my wife and I lived in Seattle, Washington.

“I was born and raised in New York City, and my wife was born and raised in Seattle. Anyhow our motivation to come to Canada was all about economics. My wife and I realized we were running out of money and also running out of employment prospects:

we had to find jobs. And to do this we had to get out of Seattle. Poor Seattle was all but a ghost town with the huge layoffs at Boeing Aircraft, the biggest employer in the region.

“We decided we liked living in the Pacific Northwest region, especially on the coast. So I bought an old beater Buick and we hit the road. Oregon’s mainstay industries in the woods did not provide relevant employment opportunities for us, and obviously nor did Washington State. So our third choice was British Columbia. Third choice! It doesn’t sound like we came to Canada, do or die. A life and death struggle like so many who come here. But our job search motivations were real, nevertheless. And British Columbia was boomin’ baby! That’s it!

“We jumped through some hoops for our immigration papers to be filed, our numerical assessments to be calculated (age, education and career path counted for so many points, as did other factors in the numerical grading system). Also interviews had to be conducted and our applications had to be reviewed. Finally, we passed muster with all the requirements, and the rest is history.

As for me, after receiving landed immigrant, or permanent residence status, I later decided to make Canada my home, permanently, and applied for Canadian Citizenship. I went before the Prince Rupert, B.C. Citizenship Court on January 22, 1980 and gratefully received my Canadian Citizenship certificate. As time went on, however, eventually my wife and I made different plans, and as a result have since gone our separate ways; she living in British Columbia, me in the wonderful Maritime Province of Nova Scotia!”

Yes, I bitch and groan about the Nova Scotian power elite and the questionable government responses to issues of the day, but I am glad to be here at home in Nova Scotia, Canada. Yet I still maintain that *Atlantica’s* reach is long and broad and the threats to our democratic way of life is real. This free trade strategy is eating away at and eroding democracy here more and more and turning it into a strange and unfamiliar thing, a beleaguered thing. Holy jumpin’ catfish, as they say in Nova Scotia.



**Leonard
Preyra**

**MLA
Halifax Citadel
-Sable Island**

**Community Office
989 Young Ave. (at Inglis)
Halifax, NS
Tel: 444-3238
preyra@eastlink.ca
www.preyra.ca**