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The development of ethnic minorities: A case study of west Africans in South Africa

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CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The research methods employed in this study were tailored according to how the research was conceptualized. The study focuses on the development of ethnic minority groups particularly Nigerian and Cameroonian immigrant groups in South Africa. The reasons why these immigrants emigrated from their countries, and what attracted them to immigrate into South Africa, the problems faced in South Africa, how they cope with these problems, and their survival strategies in the country were central questions when conceptualizing the study. These questions acted through out the research as guide questions and helped in maintaining the focus of this research.

The broad spectrum of this study meant that a wide range of information and data were required to satisfy the main objective namely, to understand how West African immigrants experience immigration to South Africa, and how they are affected by this new context. In addition, researching human experiences in social science can be a complex phenomenon, thus necessitating multiple perspectives approaches, to reflect the richness of these perspectives. These in effect necessitated the use of qualitative and to an extent quantitative research methodology. Duffield (1998: 1) had pointed earlier that: *"Different research ideologies lead to applying different methodologies"*. The reasons for using both methodologies in social science research have been spelled out in Bowen (1996) and Duffield (1998). Bowen (1996) believes that when qualitative and quantitative methodologies are merged in social science research, the internal validity of the research design is strengthened. In effect, a combination of the two methodologies brings out and utilizes the inherent differences between the two to the advantage of the social researcher. Furthermore, by combining the different perspectives a more comprehensive research design can be constructed. Duffield (1998: 1) states: *"If social research is the vehicle for the analysis of social phenomenon, then in parallel to the breadth of societal issues, so must social research contain equally diverse methods of discovery and analysis"*. This

study is largely a qualitative study, whose sample does not claim to be fully representative of Cameroonian and Nigerian communities in South Africa, neither does the conclusion claimed to be definitive. Nonetheless, the findings seem to be suggestive of some important insights.

There are extensive debates amongst social scientists about qualitative versus quantitative methods, which are discussed in the appendix 4. I have chosen the qualitative approach as the priority of this research. This choice of preference was based on the fact that first hand behavioral information was desired. In constructing a qualitative picture of how West Africa immigrants experience immigration in South Africa material on the complexity of their subjective views was needed. The present study was structured to gather first hand information to be able to present a contextual picture of how West African immigrants experience immigration to South Africa, and how they are affected by their new context. Qualitative interviews were thus supplemented by quantitative methods and participant observation.

Bearing in mind the fluidity, flexibility of human nature, and the difficulties of researching human experiences in a complex setting like Hillbrow, qualitative methodology was prioritized for this research. More so because, it was difficult to get a valid quantitative sample in Hillbrow even though, I have gathered materials to the best of my ability. In addition, to gather more informative data, which will very much include the opinions, views and perceptions of the researched, was only possible through close interactions and socialization between the researcher and the researched. In this way, the activities of the researched, their lives and how they operate and perceive their new environment will be better understood and clearly brought out by the researcher.

This Chapter discusses the different methodological techniques adopted to attain the aim and objectives of this research. The merits and demerits of each technique, the problems faced and how they were solved when employing the techniques will also be highlighted in the discussion. The methods include primary and secondary data, survey (interview schedule), in-depth interviews, and observations.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Review of primary and secondary materials

Relevant literature and documentation internationally and in South Africa were reviewed and analyzed with particular reference to what they tell us about factors that initiate migration, migrants becoming part of their new country, how immigrants adjust in their new environment, factors that contribute to their marginalisation and/or integration, legal and state constraints on immigration, including processes of acquiring documentation, and comparative immigration policies.

Primary and secondary materials used in the literature were useful in providing an historical context especially in the second part of Chapter One of this research. The materials gathered were equally useful in the other chapters, as they reinforced much of the data collected from other methodological techniques employed in this research. Newspapers and Internet articles provided an invaluable source of information and data required for this research, especially when examining immigrants' interactions in Hillbrow, and their relationship with state departments such as the SAPS and the DHA. They were equally useful and reinforcing in the other chapters of this research.

THE SURVEY (INTERVIEW SCHEDULE)

Introduction

The survey method was a central technique used to gather this research data. Using this method was useful in obtaining information relating to immigrants behaviour, opinions, characteristics and expectations in their new environment. Survey research is an accepted and widely used tool for academic investigation, and today it is widely used in the field of Sociology (O'Barr *et al,* 1973; Neuman, 2000). Notwithstanding, survey research has been criticized for its descriptive nature, and for failing to provide an explanation and an understanding of the phenomenon studied (Marsh, 1979). To avoid this bias, the present study employed other methodological techniques such as participant observation, and in-depth-interviews. These techniques were used to reinforce the survey methodological approach adopted in this research. The various techniques used in the survey are discussed in details below.

For a number of reasons, an open-ended questionnaire was considered befitting for the survey. First, it allows the respondents to freely express themselves, and could bring out details, which might have been ignored in the questioning process. Neuman (2000: 260-261) believes that open-ended questions may capture important details especially when researching individual's beliefs and feelings. The following were advanced as advantages of open-ended questions. First, they permit an unlimited number of possible answers. Second, respondents can answer in details, and can qualify and clarify responses. Third, unanticipated findings can be discovered, and permit adequate answers to complex issues. Finally, open-ended questions also permit creativity, self-expression and richness of details, and can show a respondent's logic, thinking process, and frame of reference. Still in support of open-ended questions Smith (1975: 157) high lighted as follows: *"Open-ended questions demand more motivation on the part of the respondents since he or she does not have the aid of preset structured responses"*.

Organization and objectives of the survey questionnaires (interview schedule)

An open-ended survey questionnaire was prepared and administered face-to-face to some Cameroonians and Nigerians immigrants living in Hillbrow. The questionnaire was conceptualized around three central questions:

1. Why are these immigrants attracted to South Africa?
2. What factors contribute to their marginalization and/or integration in South Africa?
3. What are their coping and survival strategies in South Africa?

A sample of the survey questionnaire is found in appendix two of this thesis.

The survey questionnaire was divided into four major sections, with sections three and four further divided into subsections. Section one was aimed at obtaining basic demographic data on Cameroonians and Nigerians living in and around Hillbrow. Section two focused on investigating why these immigrants are attracted to South Africa. How these immigrants interact with, and are treated by state institutions was also a key question when conceptualizing this research. Hence, section three aimed at investigating

immigrants' interactions with two major state institutions. As a result, the section was subdivided into two sections namely; immigrants' interaction with the South African Police Services (SAPS), and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

How these immigrants cope and survive in the country, and what facilitates their survival and successes has always been a contentious issue and needed research attention. Section four is divided into seven subsections, aimed at investigating the economic and social conditions of these immigrants. The first subsection looks at employment possibilities for these immigrants in South Africa, the second examines their unemployment status in the country, the third investigates their job-seeking strategies, and the fourth examines their survival strategies as well as their housing conditions in the country. The fifth subsection examines transportation and health conditions, the sixth examines their experiences with xenophobia and discrimination, and the last subsection examines their future plans in the country (reference appendix 2). The subsequent section will look at how the respondents were selected.

Selecting the respondents (Snowball sampling)

Due to time and financial constraints, and the difficulties in the way of obtaining a statistically representative sample, selecting the respondents was based on a non-probability sample technique. The fact that some Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants living in and around Hillbrow are engaged in clandestine activities, while others are illegally staying in the country meant that, they are living underground and difficult to identify. As a result, snowball sampling technique was adopted to facilitate the identification and the where about of some of the immigrants. Snowball sampling is defined as: "*Assembled by referral, as persons having the characteristic(s) of interest identify others"* (Stark and Roberts, 1998: 88). Neuman (2000) is more explicit and defines snowball sampling as: *"Snowball sampling (also called network, chain referral, or reputational sampling) is a method for identifying and sampling (or selecting) the cases in a network"*. Snowball sampling begins with one or few people or cases and spreads out on the basis of links to the initial cases (Neuman, 2000). This technique is popular especially with research that investigates activities outside the margins of the

law. Russsell (1994: 97) also holds a similar view, noting that snowball sampling is useful in studies of social networks, small, bounded, or difficult to find population, members of elite groups, recently divorced women, and urban migrants. MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000) observed similarly that snowball-sampling methods are particularly suited in researching activities that may be clandestine because of their reliance on establishing trust and report. In the same vein, Schutt (1999: 131) observed that: *"This technique is useful for hard-to-research or hard-to-identify interconnected population (at least some members of the population know each other), such as drug dealers, prostitutes, practicing criminals …and informal organization leaders"*. This research involved researching close West African networks, some of which include activities outside the margins of the law. Snowball sampling appears to be the appropriate technique to reach the respondents targeted for this research.

Snowballing in this research began with the identification of two key contacts, who have lived in Hillbrow since the early 1990s. One of them was a Cameroonian and the other a Nigerian. After interviewing these key contacts, they were asked to name other Cameroonians and/or Nigerians as well as how they can be contacted for interviewing. Each time new contacts were contacted and interviewed, they were equally asked to name other Cameroonians and/or Nigerians they think will be willing to cooperate with this research. The process continued uninterrupted by further asking new respondents to name other potential respondents whom they think will be prepare to respond to the research questions. MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000: 24) observed elsewhere about snowball sampling technique that:

> Such a snowball survey, in which trust is established by interviewing friends of initial contacts, then their friends, and so on, is the best method for research on activities outside the law…In this way, it is possible to get access to a wide rang and number of informants and to engage in repeated, extended, informal interviews.

For this research, once trust was established between the researcher and the researched, the process snowballed from one informant to another until a required number was attained. In all, some 72 Cameroonians and 40 Nigerians were contacted and interviewed.

A total of 112 respondents contacted for this research were considered sufficient to provide data that would sufficiently satisfy the aim and objectives of this study.

Piloting the questionnaire

A pilot survey was initially undertaken. In March 2001 two trained interviewers[14] including myself went out with 10 survey questionnaires each for the pilot survey. The last page of the survey questionnaire allocated space for the interviewers to provide general information concerning their observations where the questioning took place, the reactions of the respondents, respondents' comments, how cooperative or uncooperative they respondents were, possible reasons why, and the problems encountered when administering the instrument. The researchers were asked to note problematic questions, and those that seem to cause interviewees to repeat themselves in different forms. The trained researchers were also asked to note the time spent in completing each survey questionnaire. When all 10-survey questionnaires from both researchers and myself were completed, a meeting was convened to discuss the problems encountered and any observations made during the process. The problems were subsequently adjusted and ambiguous questions and instructions made clearer.

The main problem highlighted from the pilot study, was the fact that respondents complained about the lengthy nature of the survey questionnaire. It took approximately an hour and thirty minutes, and in some cases more to complete the survey questionnaires. The initial long nature of the survey questionnaire was an attempt to extract as much data from the respondents as possible. Piloting the survey questionnaire also brought to light two other problems. First, some of the instructions were not very clear and/or concise, and second, some questions repeated themselves in different sections of the survey questionnaire. To solve these problems, the instructions identified as problematic were clearly and concisely reconstructed, and the length of the survey questionnaires was reduced by cutting out ambiguous, problematic and repeating questions. This process reduced the survey questionnaire to a manageable length, and in

[14] 2nd year sociology students from the university of the Witwatersrand

the actual field research; the time spent on each survey questionnaire varies from between thirty and forty five minutes.

Administering the questionnaire (interview schedule)

The instrument was administered on face-to-face bases to Cameroonians and Nigerians living in and around Hillbrow. The main reasons why a face-to-face contact was adopted was that: *"Face-to-face interviews have the highest response rates and permit the longest questionnaires"* (Neuman, 2000: 272). In addition, it is established that direct personal contact with target population can produce better results than mail questionnaires. When a mail-questionnaires technique is adopted, differential return rates among various sectors of the population can provide serious biases (O'Barr *et al,* 1973). Face-to-face contacts can develop trust between the researcher and the researched, which may allow the respondents to freely express themselves especially on activities outside the law. In a research conducted on Congolese immigrants in Paris MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000:26) observed as follows: *"Trust once established, however, was very strong; we were able to get people to record hours of life history that included detailed accounts of activities outside the law"*. Details of immigrants' activities outside the law would not have been obtained for this research purpose if there were no established trust between the immigrants and myself. Face-to-face contacts also facilitated cooperation on the side of the respondent, and allow the use of extensive probes and avenues to ask complex questions (Neuman, 2000).

The survey questionnaires were largely open-ended questions though some closed ended questions were also included with sufficient probes to avoid any misunderstanding of the questions by the respondents. The interviewer and not the respondents filled in the questionnaires for the following reasons. Clarification of the questions can be made to the respondents, especially if they are not formally educated (Babbie, 1992). In addition, Morris (1996) pointed out that interviewers might reduce the number of '*don't know'* and *'not sure'* answers by probing for finite answers. Moreover, the interviewer can equally observe the surroundings in the process of administering the instrument. This joint process was also useful through out the data collection process, especially when

examining immigrants' survival strategies and activities outside the law, and immigrants' interaction with the DHA.

I carried a letter signed by my supervisor introducing me as a Wits student researching on Cameroonian and Nigerian minority groups in an around Hillbrow. The letter also asked for cooperation from possible respondents and invites them to make inquiries with the University or my supervisor if they had any doubts to clear. In almost all the cases the letter was first presented to potential respondents before any formal interviewing or discussion on the current research commences. In some exceptional instances the letter was never presented essentially in situations where the potential respondents recognized me and had previous knowledge of my student status. This introductory letter was very useful especially researching in a neighbourhood like Hillbrow where immigrants are almost always in the hideout from the police. In one occasion, while I was interviewing a Nigerian cell-phone dealer, police officers suddenly arrived from nowhere looking for illegal migrants. I was one of the suspects and my student card could not help me in that particular occasion; I had to convince them with the introductory letter before I was set free. The introductory letter was also useful in creating the needed trust to gather the data required for this research. The letter acted as proof that I was not a police spy, or would not in any way, time and place hand the information gathered to any police official.

Potential respondents were interviewed on the spot, except in cases where the respondent was either busy or not present. In cases where the potential respondent was busy an appointment will be made, and when he or she was not present a note was left trying to fix another appointment. I interviewed respondents in their rooms, business and work places, during their monthly meetings, during their sporting activities, along the streets, eating and drinking spots, nightclubs, beauty and hair saloons, and at the department of Home Affairs and police stations. This method enabled me to make useful observations of the migrants living conditions.

I experienced some difficulty in getting some Nigerians who have been nominated by their compatriots for interviewing. In most cases these Nigerians were too busy with their

business activities. In cases where the potential respondent was not present, a second attempt would be arranged, and if he or she could not be found after the second attempt, a replacement was made with any other Nigerian who is around and available for questioning. If the potential respondent is too busy with his/her activities, I had no other option but to wait until he/she is free to spare me his/her time. On one occasion I waited for more than two hours for a callphone dealer to attend to customers. In another occasion the interview was cut short when the respondent received an 'urgent business call', and had to leave immediately. He only returned after three hours from the time he left. Little problems were encountered in the cases of Cameroonians, as they were easily traceable and cooperated immediately they discovered that I am a Cameroonian. Only one such respondent was difficult to contact, as she was a vegetable vendor in the CBD[15]. Each time I visited her house she was not there, as she only enters her room late in the evenings. However, through telephone conversations I was able to contact and interview her in the CBD where she sells her vegetables.

Limitations of the survey (interview schedule)

Some critiques have argued that if factions exist within the population of interest, it is likely that respondents might not be willing to refer the researcher to members of the opposite faction (Schutt, 1999; Stark and Roberts, 1998). It was difficult to tell if there were any factions within these immigrant communities, but my subsequent work indicates that these immigrants live in a surprising degree of harmony and understanding with one another. Not only was there a high degree of cooperation amongst the immigrants, but the research also observed some degree of cooperation between Cameroonians and Nigerians immigrants living in and around Hillbrow. In an attempt to avoid this weakness, initial contacts were identified from different areas in and around Hillbrow, who in turns identified their friends thus avoiding a 'clique of membership' participation in the research.

Establishing trust with respondents was a problem as respondents are often wary of discussing activities that could create trouble for them with the police (MacGaffey and

[15] Johannesburg central business district

Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000). One potential respondent completely refused to talk on the grounds that he is pretty sure I am a police informant. There was no way I could convince him as he furiously refused to talk, listen or read the introductory letter from my supervisor. Establishing trust with these immigrants was of vital necessity. Much time was usually spent with the immigrants trying to convince them to talk. Some of the immigrants reluctantly cooperated with me just on the grounds that I am a West African. They could tell from my phenotypic characteristics that I am not a South African, more especially when I speak. This in itself established some form of trust between the respondents and me.

Another problem faced with the survey was that of language and translation. Some respondents who were willing to take part spoke either in French or Pidgin English, which required me to translate the responses. Fortunately, my knowledge of both languages facilitated their translations into English. There were however some expression in Pidgin English which could not be translated into English. Such difficult-to-translate idioms have been included in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Some meeting spots with potential respondents were also not convenient for the interview schedule. For example, it was difficult to interview one interpreter in the Department of Home Affairs because he was too busy with asylum seekers who wanted their documentation processed. I had to fix another meeting, which he did not attend; I was only able to get hold of him one week after our initial meeting schedule. Another meeting spot, which was also problematic, was a nightclub I visited in Hillbrow to observe as well as to interview a potential respondent. The vicinity was too noisy for our interview schedule and too dark to write down his responses. We agreed to meet the following day in the respondent's house for the interview to be conducted. Despite all these problems, the research generally went smoothly and much valuable data was gathered in the process.

In-depth interviews

To compliment the survey interviews, in-depth interviews were conducted with Cameroonians and Nigerians as well as some South Africans living in and around Hillbrow. In-depth interviews allow me to see these immigrants in the context of their

lives, and an understanding of the meaning of, and consequences of their social reality. The questions asked centered around the aim and objectives of this research, and their responses were tape-recorded. Though each time an in-depth interview was being conducted it looked like a friendly conversations, the discussion and the questioning had a clear purpose, to learn about how West Africans experience immigration into South Africa. The process was useful as it allowed for probing, listening and recording the conversations of how these immigrants experience immigration into South Africa.

Selecting the respondents (Direct request and snowballing)

A total of 50 respondents were interviewed in-depth on a face-to-face basis, and their responses tape-recorded. Those interviewed in-depth included amongst others, executive members of some West African associations in Johannesburg (AESCA-SA[16], ACAS[17], AIAS[18], NFMSA[19], AMESA[20], and GHAJOSA[21]). These associations were visited and through direct request I was able to interview in-depth some of the members, at the same time making valid observations. Other respondents interviewed in-depth included Cameroonians and Nigerians who are engaged in small business activities, hawkers, legal and illegal immigrants, as well as those involved in activities outside the law.

Popular Cameroonian and Nigerian spots in and around Hillbrow were identified, and through direct request and snowballing, immigrants were selected and interviewed in-depth. Although not all the potential interviewees agreed to be interviewed in-depth, the majority of those who were contacted for an in-depth interview responded in the affirmative. For most cases, if the potential interviewee accepts to be interview, we would agree on a convenient place where the in-depth interview would be conducted. In order to understand South Africans reaction to West African immigrations into the country, some

[16] Association of English speaking Cameroonians in South Africa
[17] Les Association des Cameroonias en Afrique du Sud
[18] Les Association des Ivoiriens en Afrique du Sud
[19] The Nigerian Family Meeting in South Africa
[20] Association of Momo Elites in South Africa
[21] Association of Ghanaians living in Johannesburg and surrounding Areas

South Africans[22] were also interviewed in-depth. Their selection was largely based on direct request. Amongst the South Africans interviewed in-depth, was an official of DHA, A researcher from CSVR, HRC South Africa, and two officials from the Human Rights Commission office. Their views about West African immigration into South Africa were crucial for this study.

The in-depth interview centered on key themes of the research such as xenophobia and discrimination, the treatment of immigrants in the DHA and by police officials, coping and survival strategies of immigrants, and how they adapt to the problems they encounter in South Africa. The discussions also centered on immigrants future plans, and what measures could be put in place to remedy the situation of these immigrants in the country (see concluding chapter).

Some interviewees were excited to talk to me especially when they realized I was tape recording the responses. It appears tape-recording what ever they had to say made them look important in front of those around them. This, in a way increased their desire to converse with me, so that I can tape record their conversations. In addition, using a tape recorder allowed me to engage in lengthy conversations, and capture long verbatim quotations. Another advantage experienced with tape recording is the fact that they tapes can be analyzed many times (Fetterman, 1998).

The time frame for conducting the in-depth interviews varied, and depended on how prepared-to-talk and informed the respondent was, about the topic of discussion. It also depended on the number of phone calls received by the respondent during the course of

[22] I got maximum assistance especially with the officials mentioned above. Five South Africans who were approached for in-depth interviews refused to cooperate, claming they were either too busy or are not interested in my topic of discussion. Of these five, two of them were landlords (caretakers), and one was a taxi driver (meter taxi). The occupation of the other two could not be known as I approached them in the streets of Hillbrow. The majority of South Africans who were willing to cooperate were mostly females who have one way or another interacted with West Africans. The immigrants who were approached for an in-depth interview gave me their full cooperation, which was also made easier each time I presented to them my student card. The student card wiped away all suspicion.

the in-depth interviews. Averagely, the in-depth interviews lasted about two hours. The shortest of them all lasted 45 minutes as the conversation was cut short by a phone call for the respondent.

OBSERVATION

Introduction

This study aimed at investigating how West Africans experience immigration in South Africa, and how they area affected by their new context. The study was carried out in the Hillbrow neighbourhood, where the majority of these immigrants appear to live and make a living for themselves. This explains why Hillbrow and its surrounding areas were the main observation sites for this research.

In most cases, observations were made simultaneously with in-depth interviews. The reason was, as Fetterman (1998: 9) observes: *"The most important element of fieldwork is being there to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions and to write down what is seen and heard"*. How West African immigrants interact amongst themselves and with South Africans, how they present themselves, how they are treated in the DHA and the public at large, the types of business activities they are operating, and their general experiences in South Africa were central themes for observation. The varied nature of these themes necessitated the use of different observation techniques. Hence, direct and covert participant observations were employed. An in-depth discussion of both techniques adopted follow below.

The use of direct observation

Direct observation made for this research started in mid-March 2001. The process involved spending much time in Hillbrow and its sounding areas, and at the DHA, and observing the interaction, activities and experiences of West African immigrants. Those observed were for most cases aware of my presence and research activity and time and again, I had conversations with those being observed. Hunt (1985) pointed out that direct observations might begin with or without a conversation with the actors and/or might eventually allow the research to take part in the daily lives of the people whose identity

and goals are being observed. This form of investigation has been described and accredited by many social researchers as an overt participant observation, and enjoys the advantages of allowing the researcher to get closer to the people being studied. It also minimizes the influence of the perception of the researcher(s) as an individual or as a group. This method of research has become popular in the world of social research and is today generally adopted as the norm in most social research (Malinowski, 1979; Hunt, 1985).

Using this method, I was able to identify with Cameroonians and Nigerians living in Hillbrow, and empathized with their experiences, ideas and values in other to share their social realities. I spent hours every day in Hillbrow with Cameroonians and Nigerians, seeking to understand the social realities of these immigrants. As an immigrant myself, I might in any case consider my work as participant observation. This technique has been credited with the ethical advantage of 'no secrets' about the research, leaving the observer free to concentrate on the objectives rather than covering identity (Duffield, 1998). It also provides for a richer and broader data collection. There is also the possibility of collaborative work, as a result enjoys the option of inter-subjectivity between the subject and the observer, leading to a mutual creation of data (Duffield, 1998). I was able to reflect on my own experiences as an immigrant. In some cases I stood apart to consider my observations in the light of existing data from comparable studies and accepted social concepts and theories. This technique prevents me from empathizing with the researched. Many social scientists especially those of the phenomenological bent, have supported this view, claiming that the reality of social behavior consists not of events as in natural science but of the subjective meaning those events have for the people (Hunt, 1985).

Objectives of direct observation

The need for an understanding of how Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants survive in the country was one research question, which this research needed to answer. This necessitated the use of direct observation techniques on immigrants' business activities in and around the Hillbrow neighbourhood. On a regular basis immigrant businesses were

visited and observations made, with notes taking. Immigrants' business activities such as fruits and vegetable shops, Internet cafes, hair dressing and beauty salons, shoe mending shops, cell phones (repair) shops, restaurants, clubs and bars owned by West Africans in the neighbourhood were the popular businesses directly observed for this study.

Visiting these places, spending time with the owners, conversing with them and taking down notes proved useful in proving me with the relevant information needed for this research. For most of the above-mentioned business activities, several visits were organized, and in some of them I was actually an active participant. In a Cameroonian fruit and vegetable shop for example, I soon became a close friend of the owner who allowed me sometimes to sell in his shop while he goes out to get more stock. It was only because of my active participation in the shop that I was able to observe the strong network, and mutual cooperation existing between the immigrants visiting this shop. Directly observing these business activities threw more light on how they operate, their networks, South African reaction towards them, theirs towards South Africans, and the cooperation existing amongst them.

Direct observations were also made outside West African business activities such as, visiting homes of West African immigrants living in Hillbrow and it's surrounding, walking with other west Africans around the city center and in shopping-centers, driving around the city both during the day and at nights with West Africans, visiting South Africans in their homes and work places, and visiting the Braamfontein Department of Home Affairs. In this way, I was able to observe some of their social lives and activities, their experiences in South Africa, and how they interact with some government officials like traffic cops, the police and DHA Officials.

Limitations and problems encountered with direct observation

Critiques of participant observation technique have emphasised on the dangers involved, highlighting on 'over-rapport' by the researcher (Willis, 1990; Duffield, 1998; Gold, 1992), a sense of inadequacy and pressure leading to research fatigue Hammersley and Atkinson (1985), and personal dangers Patrick (1973) and Duffield (1998). Whyte (1955:

p. 154) highlighted the dangers of overlapping roles in the following example: *"I started off as a non-participant observer and ended up a non-observing participant"*. These weaknesses no matter how serious they may be largely depend on the individual researcher. To avoid these problems, many research methods and techniques were used, For instance, the use of observation supplemented the interview schedule, official statistics and informal interviews, each of which supported and confirmed the results of the other. Hunt (1985) stresses on the lack of generalizability of the findings of participant observation, arguing that though the principles deducted from the findings of observation might be similar, no two human groups are subjected to an identical set of influences. If the observed is aware of the observer, the findings may be contaminated with censored words and actions, and self-consciousness (Duffield, 1998).

Personal danger (Patrick, 1973), hanging around a neighbourhood like Hillbrow with its high crime record (Clay, 1982; Morris, 1996 & 1999), driving and walking around the city center both during the day and at night, were major concerns which disturbed me through out the whole observation process. However, in occasions where I sensed a threat of personal danger, I either got a friend to accompany me, or if I was already in the scene, I would leave the area as soon as I deemed it necessarily. The fear of over exaggerated responses (Duffield, 1998) was initially anticipated since the immigrants for most cases were aware of my objectives. Though this fear was short-lived, it was wiped off only after several observations confirmed similar results. For example, a car owner reported that traffic cops would charge immigrants between Rands 20 and Rands 500 for driving without a driver's license. I thought it was an exaggeration until my many rides in the city with Cameroonian and Nigerian car owners confirmed the veracity of such statement. Other observation techniques were also employed for this research.

COVERT PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Employing this technique qualifies the researcher as a complete participant since the researcher is covertly role-playing with a concealed identity and unknown research objectives to the group under research (Gold, 1992). It is a **"***conscious and systematic sharing, in so far as circumstances permit, in the life activities and on occasion in the*

interests and effects of a group of persons" (Kluckholm, 1944, p. 331). As a covert participant observer, I was required to infiltrate the actors with my identity concealed; yet remaining a bona fide member of the group under research. In this way, I was able to make detailed observations, which if the members were aware of, would normally not have been possible. This technique was useful through out my interaction with state institutions and some government officials. For example, for almost two years I was very active posing as an asylum seeker in the Braamfontein Department of Home Affairs. In other to understand the whole process of asylum seeking, how these immigrants feel about the treatment they get from this office, their experiences on their way to this office, experiences inside and outside this office, how the officials treat immigrants, and the role of interpreters, I had to be a covert participant observer, to avoid influencing the observations being made. Although some Cameroonians knew I was doing some research none of them were actually aware of what it all entails. Likewise, none of the officials in the DHA was aware of my research. I was just another West African immigrant.

Limitations of covert participant observation

The dangers involved using this technique has made it less popular especially amongst social researchers (Patrick, 1973; Burgress, 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1985). However, this loss of popularity is based on ethical rather than epistemological reasons (Festinger *et al,* 1956). The argument is, its methodology is an ethical invasion of privacy (Hunt, 1985; Duffield, 1998). For this research such claim of ethical inversion of privacy was unfounded as covert participant observations took place in and outside the Department of Home Affairs, contacts with police and traffic officials, and the public at large. No privacy of any individual or institution was invaded during the process thus, justifying any ethical considerations. The research may also be handicapped as a result of the assumed role of the researcher since the researcher must keep up the pretence within certain boundaries. There are also feelings of personal morality and principles, that whilst assuming the role, the researcher may also be involved in unsavoury activities (Duffield, 1998). This method no doubt is still appropriate in situations where there are good reasons to think that if the research purpose is known the researcher will either be refused

access to the group or accepted but censors their activities, behavior, or put under control what is to be researched.

Covert participant observation has gain lots of reputation and widely used in cases where groups have strong and binding rules of secrecy on its members (Oleson *et al,* 1967). Using this technique, the researcher enjoys the in-sights of the social settings and meanings of the researched, even though the risks of being immersed are quit high (Duffield, 1998). The argument is, the researchers learn aspects, which other techniques might ignore, and can also uncover more than the casual relationship that questionnaires and interviews often only achieve. This method therefore allows the researcher to study marginalized groups especially if access to these groups needs permission (Festinger *et al,* 1956; Humphreys, 1970).

The technique is time consuming especially as it requires the researcher to qualify or attain certain skills to infiltrate or join the group to be researched. In some cases it might require the researcher to learn total new or false skills all together to become a bona-fide member of the group to be researched. Presenting a 'false-self' especially for a long period of time can be difficult and stressful. I had the advantage of coming from the West African sub-region, and could speak some of the languages of that sub-region. Other arguments advanced against this technique centers around the risk of the researcher being converted and if it happens, the quality of the research will be largely affected. It is also widely criticized as a breach of professional ethics and violates the collective conscience of the community. Not withstanding, Hunt (1985) argued that because little or no harm is done on the people being observed, and valuable data is being collected, the deceptiveness of covertness is fully justified (Hunt, 1985). Hunt's argument also applies in my case, as I did not for example go to the newspapers or to the superiors of the officials observed to report corrupt officials.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA COLLECTED

The data was analyzed in many levels. First, materials collected from the interview schedule were grouped according to the different themes of the research. From these

broad categories, simple means, tables, percentages and charts were calculated. The categorization of the raw data under the various themes followed the same structure as the questionnaire of the interview schedule. The first section concentrated on the demographic characteristics, the second section categorized and analyzed the factors influencing West African immigration to South Africa, as well as the socio-economic cultural and political background of the immigrants in this study. The third section grouped and categorized West African integration and/or marginalization in South Africa. Finally, the last section grouped and analyzed the socio-economic conditions and the future plans of immigrants.

The taped recorded responses from the in-depth interviews were transcribed and organized according to the broad themes of this research. As the themes were already well structured in the questionnaires of the interview schedule, the transcribed materials easily fitted with the themes. Transcribing the tapes was a costly and difficult exercise, as it required some of the tapes to be replayed over and over again. The third level of analysis was the material gathered from observations. The field notes collected during the process was tailored according to the objectives of the observation. The field notes written were grouped under personal notes, notes from direct observation, analytic notes, and inferential notes (Neuman, 2000). As the objectives of the observation were very clear to me the raw data collected easily fitted with the major themes and objectives of this research.

CONCLUSION

Different research methodologies were used in collecting the research data. First, a review of relevant literature both internationally and in South Africa on how immigrants experience immigration and how they are affected by their new setting was conducted. Second, interview schedules were conducted with immigrants living in Hillbrow and its environs, using snowball sampling to select the respondents. Third, interview schedules were complimented by in-depth interviews, and lastly, observations were also conducted an invaluable methodology that provided most of the information outside the margins of the law, and from the DHA.

All of the above methodologies applied in this research were very useful, and mutually reinforcing one another. Though they were not without problems, much of the problems encountered in the data collection process were more of technical rather than epistemological. Notwithstanding, the methods provided me with the data necessary in explaining an understanding of how Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants experience immigration in South Africa, and how they are affected by their new context.