

CHAPTER SIX

COPING WITH XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

Xenophobia and xenophobic tendencies appear to be the biggest problem faced by West African immigrants in South Africa. Xenophobia as a word, it is derived from a combination of two Greek words, '*Xenos*' and '*Phobos*' meaning stranger and fear respectively. Boehnke *et al* (1998), feel that xenophobia is an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given society, expressed through the use of derogatory terms and violence. Mujica, (2002) defines xenophobia as the fear of the unknown, further qualifying it as a passion equal to the passion of love. Heckmann (2001) argues that xenophobia is an ideology or action directed against foreigners and foreign influence, rooted from fear, hatred and ignorance of foreigners and their influence. Though there is yet no universal definition of xenophobia (Prince El Hassan, 2001), as a concept, it has been variously defined (Everett *et al*, 1999; Linder, 1994; Prince El Hassan, 2001), but in its simplest understanding, is a deep hatred and fear of strangers.

Bauman (1990) argued that, the fear of strangers is not just the lack of familiarity between the insiders and outsiders, but also because the outsiders are not well known, or known at all by the insiders. This notion of insider/outsider introduces the concept of boundaries in political sociology, which, structuralist-functionalist like Talcott Parsons sees boundary maintenance as a crucial function of the social system. For Parsons, a system external boundary is deeply related to its internal equilibrium. Boundaries are therefore envisaged as limits enclosing or bounding social systems, and act as defence mechanism for the preservation of internal equilibrium (Conversi, 1999). Thus, strangers are often outsiders who have come with foreign influence to disrupt the internal equilibrium of insiders' social system. Although the fear of outsiders is a common phenomenon, of recent, it has been growing with increasing intensity. It is in this respect that Linder (1994: 1) observes: "*The fear of the unknown is embedded into every fiber of our genetic code, just like fear of dangerous animals...*" Fear of the unknown because of ignorance, and the attached uncertainties appear to be a normal response, and only

abnormal when such fears are accompanied with negative responses. For this research purpose, the fear of strangers, and the resultant negative actions towards strangers will be adopted as the definition of xenophobia. Socio-biologists have come up with scholarly endeavours and debates explaining the origin and causes of xenophobia (Freedman, 1991; Southwick *et al.*, 1974; van der Dennen, 1987; Dunbar, 1987). To probe into these debates will be diverting from the focus of this dissertation.

Recently, xenophobia has emerged as a major social concern, attracting the attention of many governments, policy makers and social researchers. Such concerns emerged from the destructive consequences of xenophobia around the world. Cases of xenophobic actions and their negative consequences have been documented (Boehnke, *et al.*, 1998; Ford, 1992; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000; Waldinger *et al.*, 1990; Foner, 1987b; Wong, 1987; Wilson and Martin, 1982; Schiller, 1999a and b; Schiller and Fournon, 1990). In Africa, South Africa stands out unique especially in her treatment of African immigrants in the country (Ellis, 1999; Rogerson, 1997a and b; Reitzes and Crawhall, 1998; Reitzes, 1998; McDonald, *et al.*, 1999).

Most research endeavours on xenophobia in South Africa, are focused on the poor treatments of foreigners and their resultant consequences (Crush, 1998; Masuda, 2000; HRC, 2000; Rogerson, 1997ab; Reitzes and Crawhall, 1998; Reitzes, 1998; McDonald, *et al.*, 1999). This chapter goes beyond such endeavours and focuses on the socio-cultural adaptability of West African immigrants to xenophobia, and how such adaptabilities contributes in shaping West African identity in South Africa. The Chapter will also demonstrate how state action plays an important role in understanding xenophobia in South Africa, arguing that the new racism in South Africa is one without race, and that, xenophobia in South Africa has replaces internal racism of the past. This chapter will first review the emergence and causes of xenophobia, examining xenophobia and its causes in South Africa. The chapter will then present West African immigrants as socially excluded people before focusing on immigrants adapting to xenophobia, and how in the processes of adapting construct their identity in South Africa.

The emergence and causes of xenophobia

The late twentieth century saw the concept of xenophobia emerging as a major issue for scholarly and policy considerations. Although xenophobia is not a new phenomenon, research and policy considerations on xenophobia are quite recent. Its negative results, with its far-reaching implications have precipitated xenophobia as a concept worth considering by researchers and policy makers. It is against this background that in August 2001, a ‘World Conference of Racism and Xenophobia’ was organized in Durban, South Africa, to tackle the problems arising, and finding a solution for a way forward.

At global level, heightened tension between the religious worlds flourished, with reported incidences of anti-religious feelings between different religious sets. This tension reached its peak with the September 11th attack on the ‘World Trade Center’ and the ‘Pentagon’ in New York and Washington respectively. The attacks precipitated negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in most civil societies around the world. According to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC/RAXEN), since the September 11th attacks on the United States: *“there have been numerous press reports attributing violent assaults and attacks on property to Islamophobia resulting from the events of September 11th”* (EUMC/RAXEN, 2001a: 3). All over Europe, the United States, and in Africa, reports of attacks on property, physical and verbal threats, criminal damage, threatening and abusive emails against Muslims and Islam have been reported (EUMC/RAXEN, 2001a). In France for example, newspaper reports describing signs of distrust against Muslims and Arabs were noted: *“Maghrebian young people have been treated as terrorists in Sevran, a town located in the periphery of Paris”*, and, *“bearded men are objects of mistrust in some suburban cites”* (EUMC/RAXEN, 2001a). Similarly in Britain, anti-Muslim sentiments were common especially on the part of the far-right British National Party (BNP), which launched a campaign against Islam by circulating provocative leaflets. These leaflets actually blamed current troubles on the politicians who: *“forced a multicultural society upon us...”* and urge readers to *“join the BNP for the chance to help reverse the undemocratic folly of the old parties and stop the fanatics who want to turn Britain into an Islamic Republic”*. Another leaflet for schools *“encourages parents to withdraw their children from*

religious studies classes...as being the only way for ordinary people like us to protect our children from multicultural brainwashing". While a third leaflet, a church publication: *"identify Islam with intolerance, slaughter, looting, arson, and molestation of women and warns that Islam will be the death of Christianity"* (EUMC/RAXEN, 2001b: 11). During this period, similar anti-Muslim sentiments were reported in other parts of the world, and some still hold such malevolent sentiments till date.

Elsewhere, in Switzerland and Germany, serious cases of xenophobia and graffiti have been reported (Boehnke *et al.*, 1998; Ford, 1992; Weiner, 1995). In Germany for example, the importation of guest workers was stopped in 1973, leading to increasing numbers of application for asylum, leading to serious anti-foreigner sentiments in the country (Weiner, 1995). Such anti-foreigners' sentiments raised eyebrows all over Europe. Weiner (1995: 57) noted: *"Strains of xenophobia in Germany- although perhaps no worse than in some other parts of Europe – have evoked images of German nationalism and sent a chill throughout Europe and the United States"*. In Kenya, attacks on Sudanese refugees for perpetrating crime and importing diseases in the country have been reported (Crisp, 2000). In South Africa, the stigma that follows African immigrants as crime perpetrators, job stealers and importers of socio-economic ills in the country are well known and documented (Addison, 2000; Leggett, 1998, 1999; Rogerson, 1997a and b; MacDonald *et al.*, 1999). Hence, in the *World Conference of Racism and Xenophobia* in Durban, Prince El Hassan reported that:

No country or society, whether in the North or the South, is immune to the growing problem of xenophobia...Xenophobia is not a new phenomenon but in recent years, it has begun to occupy the center stage in many parts of the world (Prince El Hassan, 2001: 1-2).

Earlier, Flohr (1987) had pointed out the high frequency of occurrence of xenophobia, stating that, xenophobia may leads to high aggressiveness, which can even cause war. Mamdani (1999) for example traced the 1994 Rwanda genocide as rooted from the deep hatred that existed between the Hutu and the Tutsi ethnic groups. Mamdani States:

It was genocide by those who saw themselves as sons and daughters of the soil, and their mission as one of clearing the soil of a threatening alien presence. This... was not violence against one who is seen as a neighbour but against one who is seen as a foreigner; not a violence that targets a transgression across a boundary into home but one that seeks to eliminate a foreign presence from home soil, literally and physically (Mamdani, 1999: 14).

Xenophobia can be attributed to a number of interrelated factors. For example, it can be an aberration caused by chauvinism or ill-founded nationalism. Observations and informal interviews with African students in Russia⁴⁶ show a practical example of ill-founded nationalism on the part of some jingoistic Russians. It is alleged that every 20th April, the birth date of Adolph Hitler, extremist Russians celebrate this day by shading the blood of black people in the country whom they called ‘Negr’⁴⁷ or ‘Abisiana’⁴⁸. During my brief visit in Moscow, two Nigerians were reportedly attacked and killed by a group of extremists who were still celebrating Hitler’s birth date. I interviewed a Cameroonian student in Patrick Lumumba (now The People’s Friendship) University in Moscow about xenophobia and he replied in the following words: *“Since my five years in this country this year has been the worst. We can’t go to the Metro-station or to town except you want to die. No Africans on the road, they should be dead bodies”*. I also observed that African and East European students around the vicinity of Patrick Lumumba University walk in groups. Further inquiries uncovered that, moving in groups act as a protective measure in case of an attack by chauvinist Russians.

Xenophobia can also be a form of individual or collective insecurity, which makes individuals or groups aggressive towards outsiders. This cause appears to pattern the existing situation in South Africa, where individuals feel that West African immigrants in South Africa are a threat to the national security of the country. Xenophobia can equally be a manifestation of serious socio-economic problems, covered up by diverting public attention to aliens who serves as handy scapegoats. Chimni (1998) has established the link between state action and xenophobia, bringing out the possible dialectics between

⁴⁶ Presenting a paper for the “9th Conference of Africanists: Africa in the Context of North-South Relations” in Moscow from the 21st-23rd May 2002.

⁴⁷ The Russian word for Nigger.

⁴⁸ The Russian word for monkey.

state action and the rise of xenophobia. In such a situation, the media may be a major role player in promoting xenophobia and anti-immigrant feelings. This scenario also appears to be a prototype of the existing situation in South Africa. The role of the media in promoting xenophobia and anti-foreigners' sentiments in the country is discussed later in the Chapter. Doty (1999) argues that state's promotion of national unity and shared identity, have implications for promoting anti-immigrant violence. That such promotion can result to violent assertions of differences between the 'us' that belong to a particular territory and the 'them' that does not, or from officials governmental arenas in the form of immigration policies, citizenships and rights of immigrants (also see Reitzes and Bam, 2002). Finally, xenophobia can arise from the perceived inability or unwillingness of aliens to integrate, leading to strong resentments by local people. In reality, as far as this research is concerned, the immigrants in my study seemed to be willing to integrate into the main society, as this chapter will show. This study observed the unwillingness on the part of South Africans to integrate outsiders (Cameroonians and Nigerians) into the mainstream society. My research found out that, Cameroonians and Nigerians experience xenophobic hostility largely from black South Africans, giving the impression that xenophobia in South Africa has replaced internal racism of the apartheid years. It is racism without race.

A neo-racism

Doty (1999) points out that what has been termed 'Neo-racism' is a particularly significant aspect of anti-immigrantism⁴⁹. Balibar (1991) qualifies neo-racism as '*Racism without Race*', while Doty (1999: 588) refers to it as a theory of human nature, which suggest that: "*Human nature is such that it is natural to form a bounded community, a nation, aware of its differences from other nations. They are no better or worse. But feelings of antagonism will be aroused if outsiders are admitted*". If neo-racism is racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, then it does not posit the superiority of certain groups of people in relation to others, but only the harmfulness of abolishing borders, and the incompatibility of life-

⁴⁹First coined by Barker (1981) to describe a new kind of racism that does not draw upon the ideas of biological races that was prevalent in nineteenth century scientific racism.

styles and traditions. This kind of racism (differentialist racism⁵⁰) is in contrast to earlier racism legitimated by ideology of inequality of human types (Doty, 1999). With neo-racism therefore, cultural mixing is considered a mistake, which can endanger one's identity and can lead to social conflict. Doty elaborates:

For a nation to maintain its identity, to be truly itself, it must isolate and eliminate or expel the other, the false element. This can result in the radicalization of social groups and the attribution of them of various qualities signifying exteriority and impurity (Doty, 1999: 589).

Concerning the present study, isolating and expelling West African immigrants can be considered a neo-racism, as it is not related to biological hereditary but very much related to socio-cultural differences. A manifestation of such differences is evident in the use of derogatory terms when addressing immigrants, as well as the social stigma attached to asylum seekers and refugees in the country. From a comparative point of view, my research found that immigrants of today's democratic South Africa have replaced the biological difference, which imposes the superiority of one race over the other in the apartheid years. Leggett (1998; 1999) cautioned that this type of anti-immigrantism does not favour any form of socio-cultural mixing. It rather separates the marginalized groups from the mainstream society, forcing marginalized groups into a possible criminal class.

Doty (1999) argued that neo-racism operates under the guise of the inevitability of conflict if human beings of different cultures are mixed in inappropriate numbers. Hence, in neo-racism, immigrants have replaced that previously occupied by biological races, with no less damaging effects (Balibar, 1991). It is natural to create cultural boundaries, but if such boundaries are removed, or chances created for the coexistence of different cultural traditions within boundaries, the chances of aggression and conflicts become inevitable. In South Africa, the democratic elections of 1994 opened the country's doors to immigrants from elsewhere. As immigrants cross boundaries, they carry their cultures with them, what Malkki (1992) called 'the cultural displacement of people'. Increasing cultural mixing in South Africa has created the potential for possible cultural conflicts

⁵⁰ Is predicated on the imperative of preserving the group's identity, whose purity it sanctifies (Doty, 1999: 589).

between South Africans and the outsiders. The subsequent section will examine xenophobia in South Africa.

Xenophobia in South Africa

Since the collapse of South Africa's apartheid regime, xenophobia and xenophobic tendencies have been observed to be very prevalent in the South African society (McDonald, 2002). In a recent publication, Peberdy and Rogerson (2002: 39) observed that: "*Xenophobic public attitude to foreigners in South Africa show little sign of abating, while official discourses around migration remain restrictionist, if not hostile*". In the same vein, McDonald (2002:101-102) observes:

Xenophobia by most account is a serious problem in South Africa. Reports of harassments and violence towards non-citizens, particularly towards immigrants from other countries in Africa abound in the South African press, and anecdotal evidence would suggest that tens, if not hundreds, of non-citizens have been killed in South Africa simply because they are foreigners.

The belief that xenophobia only emerged in South Africa in 1998, when a mob of South Africans in the Pretoria region attacked and killed foreigners for allegedly taking away jobs (Singer, 2000), is inaccurate. The mob attacks and killing of foreigners in the Pretoria region was just one manifestation of the xenophobia present in the South African society. According to SAMP research report: "*Focus group studies of South African political attitudes in 1995 were the first to unveil a surprising amount of latent hostility towards foreign migrants*" (Crush, 2001: 11). Earlier, the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) noted that, there was considerable growth between 1994 and 1995 in negative sentiments towards foreigners in South Africa (Minnar and Hough, 1996). Xenophobia towards Africans had been prevalent in the South African society long before 1998. The history of xenophobia towards African immigrants in South Africa can be traced from when foreigners started entering the country on a much bigger scale than before. From all indications, such influxes of foreigners could only have been possible after the period of democratisation in the early 1990s, when the doors of South Africa were opened to the rest of the world. More so, to assume as Singer (2000) did, that xenophobia emerged in the country only in 1998, would mean to ignore the HRC

argument that South Africa's isolation from the rest of the world plays a major role in the xenophobic feelings South Africans have for African immigrants in the country. Singer's assumption also ignores the indoctrination into stereotypical and negative perception amongst South Africans, instilled in them during the apartheid era. Today, such negative perceptions South Africans used to have for one another have been transferred to black immigrants from other parts of Africa. Xenophobic sentiments towards West African immigrants in the country therefore had existed long before 1998.

Although in several occasions, state authorities, national and international organizations have condemned xenophobia in South Africa, it continues to manifest itself in many ways. In 1998 for example, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), in partnership with other organizations launched the Roll Back Xenophobia (RBX), to publicly educate South Africans that, hostility and prejudices against foreigners are wrong under any circumstances (Crush, 2001). The Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) equally condemned xenophobia, stating that:

It is regretful that white hatred and oppression of fellow black South Africans is being replaced by hatred of migrants from Africa...The government, civil society formations and all organs of the state must prioritise the fighting of xenophobia. Like racism and tribalism, xenophobia must be defeated lest we slowly turn into a fascist society that will grow into a new polecat of the world (Crush, 2001: 31-32).

Finally, and to crown such condemnation of the alarming rate of xenophobia in the country, in May 2001, President Thabo Mbeki cautioned thus:

Necessarily, we must continue to be vigilant against any evidence of xenophobia against the African immigrants. It is fundamentally wrong and unacceptable that we should treat people who come to us as friends as though they are our enemies (Mbeki, 2001: 30-1).

Despite these condemnations and concerns for xenophobia in the country, attitudes towards immigrants still remained very negative, as evidence from research conducted by South African Migration Project (SAMP) shows. The SAMP study demonstrated that: *"South Africans as a whole are not tolerant of outsiders living in the country"* (Crush, 2001: 2-3), with nearly 80% support for policies that place strict limits on or prohibit immigration completely. SAMP's findings further showed that between 1995 and 1999,

support for a highly restrictionist policy in the country increased from 65% to 78%, and that: *“South Africans, in general do not support the idea of immigration amnesties”* (Crush, 2001: 3). In addition, most South Africans still believe that immigration is a socio-economic burden on the country, that immigrants commit crime, are threats to the scarce jobs, and carriers of diseases (Crush, 2001). Popular opinion in South Africa wants the state to use draconian measures in controlling immigration such as the use of an electric fence on the borders, deploying the army to patrol the borders, giving extra rights and powers to the police to arrest and detain suspected immigrants, and penalizing those who employ illegal immigrants. Almost 40% of the population opposed African immigrants from gaining access to social facilities in the country, 54% opposed the right of housing, 85% feel that illegal immigrants should be denied of their rights of free speech, freedom of movement, and police protection (Crush, 2001). Although SAMP’s findings are mere public opinions, this research observed in practice that, such opinions are actually being operationalised by South Africans. McDonald (2002: 103) holds a similar view, and observed accordingly: *“Men and women, whites and blacks, young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, all hold the same generally negative stereotypes about immigrants and immigration in South Africa”*.

In South Africa as else where in the world, xenophobia is overtly selective and innately racist. According to the Human Rights Committee (2000), xenophobia in South Africa is a discriminatory weapon equal to racism, manifesting itself in different ways. One of such ways involve attempts by the state to control undocumented immigrants, which has resulted in draconian approaches leading to serious human rights abuses, especially on African immigrants in the country (Peberdy, 1999). Xenophobic tendencies have forced many South Africans to become resentful and suspicious of black foreigners especially West African immigrants in their midst. This has led to serious public hostility, violence, discriminatory arrests, detention and repatriation, torture and even to the death of some West African immigrants (HRC, 2000). In March 2000 for example, the Sunday Independent reported that, since 1997 more than 30 refugees and asylum seekers have been killed in South Africa (The Sunday Independent, March 12, 2000). South African’s continuous reluctance to accept other African immigrants, especially West Africans is

reflected in a research conducted by SAMP, which showed that 25 percent of all South Africans are totally against the reception of foreigners in the country, and, 45 percent of all South Africans favour strict restriction policies on immigration into South Africa (Crush, 2001). Earlier in 1995, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference reported that:

There is no doubt that there is a very high level of xenophobia in our country... illegal immigrants are flooding the country and the nation's social fabric is threatened by illegals fleeing economic, political and social upheavals in their countries. When the questions of prostitution, money laundering, arms and drugs trafficking are raised, more times than not they are linked to the question of illegal immigrants. One of the main problems is that a variety of different people have been lumped together under the title of illegal immigrants, and the whole situation of demonising immigrants is feeding the xenophobia phenomenon (Minaar and Hough, 1996: 174).

In South Africa, xenophobia appears to be largely characterized by fear and hatred of differences either on the basis of race, nationality and/or both. The incident of police dogs controlled by white officers being shown on television⁵¹ attacking black illegal immigrants was striking evidence of the xenophobia in South Africa. The then Safety and Security Minister Tshwete commented: *"I was horrified and outraged by these scenes of brutality and racism"* (The Star, Wednesday 8th 2000: 1). A recent combined publication of SAMP and SAHRC also observed that:

South Africa has become increasingly xenophobic in recent years, with a large percentage of South Africans perceiving foreigners-especially, almost exclusively black foreigners-as a direct threat to their future economic well being and as responsible for the troubling rise in violent crime in South Africa (Crush, 2001: 11).

In 1998, the 'Mail and Guardian' had reported that: *"anti-foreigner feelings have also increased alarmingly. Our post-apartheid philosophy emphasizes a oneness. A South Africaness. Any one who fails to come under that umbrella is an enemy"* (Electronic Mail and Guardian, June 18, 1998: 2). Coverage in the press has documented the high level of anti-immigrant feelings under headlines such as: *"Hawkers want the foreigners out"* (Electronic Mail and Guardian, October 24, 1997), *"Blame it all on the Nigerians"*

⁵¹ Presented on SABC3 'Special Assignment' on the 7th of November 2000

(Electronic Mail and Guardian, April 18, 1997), *“No immigrant tolerant says report”* (Electronic Mail and Guardian, June 18, 1998), *“The locals don’t want the competition”* (Mail and Guardian, September 14, 1998), *“Go home, foreigners”* (Electronic Mail and Guardian, September 14, 1998), and, *“South African Police burn Nigerian Passport”* (Thisdayonline, 09/ 05, 2001).

Cases have been cited where West African immigrants are subjected to serious xenophobia and gross human rights abuses based on their phenotypic characteristics amongst others, their skin colour, height, dressing and hairstyles, and their inability to speak the local languages. In 1998, Professor Jonathan Crush, co-director of SAMP commented on the widespread suspicion of immigrants and noted that, South Africans are more hostile towards immigrants than citizens of virtually any country in the world for which data is available (Star Newspaper, October 24, 1998). Before looking at how immigrants adapt to xenophobic hostility, it is appropriate to first examine the causes of xenophobia in South Africa, and what makes Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants socially excluded in the country.

Causes of xenophobia in South Africa

Attempts by the state to divert public attention to aliens serving as handy scapegoats of the socio-economic ills in the country have been supported by the media in exaggerating the numbers of foreigners in the country. State officials and media coverage have reported different figures as representing the number of foreign citizens in the country. Such exaggerated figures have increased the fears of most South Africans for the scares jobs and resources in the country (Dodson and Oelfse, 2002). There is no certainty as to the number of illegal immigrants in South Africa. The table below reflects some guesstimates. Interestingly, African immigrants in South Africa are usually seen as illegal immigrants, while Europeans, Americans and other undocumented immigrants from outside Africa are often ignored (Peberdy, 1999). According to the SAYB, in 1994, there were 5 million illegal immigrants in the country, and between 1998 and 1999, the number reduced to 1, 2 million. While it remains doubtful what could have happened to the remaining 3,8 million illegals, some suggestions readily come to mind. First, it is

tempting to say these illegal immigrants might have been repatriated which is likely not the case. Research conducted by Peberdy in 1998, show that from 1993 to 1997, only 176, 184 undocumented African immigrants were repatriated, and within the same period, 604,840 undocumented immigrants including those from other continents were repatriated (Peberdy, 1999).

Table 4: Guesstimates of number of immigrants in South Africa

Sources	Year(s)	Immigrants	Illegal immigrants	Refugees	Asylum seekers
SA Year Book	1992	-	2,5 million	-	-
	1993	-	3 million	-	-
	1994	-	5 million	-	-
	1998-1999	-	1,2 million	-	-
Minister Danie Schutte	1991	906,000	254,000	-	-
Police estimates	June 1995	5.5-8 million	-	-	-
HSRC ⁵²	1999	2.8-9.5 million	-	-	-
Ministry of DHA ⁵³	2000	-	2 million	-	-
UNHCR ⁵⁴	2000	-	-	14.500	17.300
COSATU ⁵⁵	2001	-	200,000	60,000	-

Sources: Bouillon, 1999; Crush, 2001; HRC, 2000 (Statistics extracted from various sections of these references to develop the table).

It could not be possible that within one year (1998-1999) 3,8 million illegal immigrants were repatriated, when according to the Ministry of DHA; there were only 2 million illegal immigrants in the year 2000. Second, while demography recognizes census, sample surveys, continuous registration, migration register and immigration records at port of entry and departure, as the main sources for getting migration data, it is not clear how the sources in Table 4 above obtained their data for illegal immigrants in the country. In June 1995, Police estimates stood at 5,5 million to 8 million immigrants in the country, while figures for HSRC ranges from 2,8 million and 9,5million immigrants in

⁵² Human Science Research Council

⁵³ Department of Home Affairs

⁵⁴ United Nation High Commission for Refugees

⁵⁵ Congress of South Africa Trade Union

the country. These figures are doubtful as the sources are not reliable, and the variations are too huge to be considered with any degree of certainty.

Whatever it might be, these figures are largely guesstimates as no effective survey has been conducted in the country to determine the number of legal, illegal, documented or undocumented immigrants. In addition, it is doubtful how the exact numbers of illegal immigrants can be got, when they live under cover in the country. This simple fact flaws any precision about the exact numbers of legal or illegal, documented or undocumented immigrants in the country. Schutte *et al.*, (1997: 2) are of the same view, noting that: *“issues of undocumented migration, is still shrouded in myth as opposed to hard facts. Part of the problem, of course, is that clandestine migration, by its very nature, is not very open to academic inquiry, especially in quantifiable terms”*. In much the same way, MacDonald *et al* (1999: 4), noted: *“It is not clear how many people are in the country illegally...the truth is there is no reliable methodology available for determining the actual number of non-citizens in South Africa”*. Perhaps the numbers might have been inflated to portray immigrants as potential threat to the country. When this happens, it generates individual and collective group insecurity amongst South Africans, which can result in individual or group aggression towards immigrants. The mob attacks and killings of West Africans in the Pretoria region are amongst the most notable examples in the country.

Another cause of xenophobia in the country can also be the lack of social interaction and/or socialization between South Africans and foreigners, which reduces the ability of both sides to develop independent opinions about one another (McDonald, 2002). According to a Nigerian immigrant: *“they treat us with a lot of reservations, some of them are very snobbish especially if you can’t speak their language and when they know you are an asylum seeker they treat you as a criminal”*. Immigrants are aware of the negative impressions South Africans have about them, and this has contributed in widening the social gap between South Africans and West African immigrants in the country. Only a small proportion of these immigrants interact with South Africans in social gatherings such as in churches and soccer matches. Interviews conducted with

Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants in Hillbrow for this research showed churches to be the most common place of interaction with South Africans. Yet, only 30.5% of Cameroonian and 15% of Nigerian immigrants interviewed meet and interact with South Africans in their respective churches. A total of 52% of the immigrants I interviewed claimed that their forms of interaction with South Africans are casual and on the streets. Ignorance and the lack of knowledge about West African immigrants have generated hatred and the fear amongst South Africans toward Cameroonians and Nigerians in the country. I interviewed a South African security guard why he preferred staying with a Cameroonian and he replied as follows: *“At first I didn’t like foreigners, but since I started working with Divine I noticed that they are nice people. So now I stay with him and we are like brothers”*. As long as most South Africans continue to see West African immigrants as criminals, a burden on the country’s socio-economic resources, and job stealers, both parties will continue to distanced themselves from one another, and, *‘West-A-phobia’*⁵⁶ will continue to manifest itself in the country. A Cameroonian immigrant commented:

Once they see you, they see a criminal; they will only come near you when they need something from you. There are those who are so ignorant that they don’t understand anything. For example, one will look at you, and some one from Ethiopia who is like different from you, and would think that you are both from the same country. There are some who are ignorant and those who understand. Generally I don’t like going near them because I know they don’t like me and they don’t know any thing about me or where I come from.

Most immigrants have distanced themselves from South Africans, leading to a continuous widening of the gap between both parties (HRC, 2000; McDonald, 2002). Frequent contacts and interactions between both parties might be a step towards reducing the high level of xenophobia in the country.

The HRC (2000) observed that, perhaps South Africa’s isolation from the rest of the world has been a major contributory factor to the high level of xenophobia in the country. The commission’s report noted that the stereotypical and negative perceptions South Africans have of their fellow black immigrants were deliberately instilled in them during

⁵⁶Discussed later in this Chapter.

the apartheid era (HRC, 2000). The argument is based on the striking similarities between how black South Africans were treated under the apartheid regime, and how black immigrants are currently being treated in the country. Comments from an immigrant throw more light on HRC's observation: *"Everywhere you go you carry your documents, a police man sees you, he wants to know everything about you, even where you are going. Apartheid still exists for Cameroonians in South Africa"*. Another immigrant expressed his dissatisfaction in the country as follows: *"I wish apartheid can come back to this country because in that way the white people will treat all of us the same. The bad thing is, it is the blacks who treat us like animals just because we are foreigners"*. This immigrant said that he was once arrested in Hillbrow because he was carrying US \$600 and could not produce the receipt of his cell phone. The immigrant was locked up in the John Vorster Police station in Market Street for four days. He was not taken to court for trial because he bribed his way out by paying the police Rands four thousands.

Police harassment is a common problem faced by many West African immigrants in South Africa, and was noted as the single biggest problem immigrants faced in the country (HRC, 2000). Against this background, the HRC (2000) argues that, the violation of foreigners' rights to basic dignity may well be inconsequential for those who have experienced a lifetime of systematic abuse. The notion indoctrinated into black South Africans that races were unequal, appears to be a contributing factor, and perpetuates racism and xenophobic tendencies to much that is foreign in South Africa. African immigrants particularly West Africans, who can speak the local languages, or understand the culture have become scapegoats to this policy bias and past trauma. Peberdy (1999) asserts that post-apartheid South Africa cannot separate completely from its past, because apartheid oppressors still exist in post-apartheid South Africa. When black South Africans for the first time gained full citizenship in 1994, while at the same time, black immigrants from elsewhere in Africa also for the first time become part of the nation legally or otherwise, there was increasing tension between South Africans and African immigrants from elsewhere. Sharing citizen rights is seen as creating conflicts because it supposedly would: *"deprive entitled citizens of their won rights and access to state resources which they are entitled to as members of the nation"* (Peberdy, 1999: 19-20).

Previously, African immigrants in South Africa hardly posed any threat as they were treated on the same bases as black South Africans (Reitzes and Bam, 2002). In addition, not many West African immigrants lived in the country before 1994 (Hussein, 1995; MacDonald *et al.*, 1999; Matlou, 1999; Rogerson, 1997a). Threatened black South Africans thus tended to see the new influx as potential consumers of state resources to which they are legally entitled (Peberdy, 1999). In some cases, the media can aggravate the problem, and South Africa is no exception. The section that follows, examine the role of the media in propagating xenophobia in South Africa.

The role of the media in perpetuating xenophobia

News coverage whether over the air or print media is crucial in shaping the ideology of public reaction, and promotes xenophobic sentiments towards immigrants in the country. The media plays a crucial role in the rising tides of xenophobia towards African immigrants in the country (Danso and McDonald, 2001; McDonald, 2002). According to an article in the Sunday Time of February 28th 2000 by Pamela Dube: “*South Africa displays one of the highest levels of xenophobia in the world*”, and, “*the media are guilty of stoking xenophobic tendencies towards African migrants*”. The report claimed further that: “*African migrants and refugees are the target of negative reporting by the media*”. Research conducted by Danso and McDonald (2001) also suggested that the media particularly the print-media amongst others play an important role in provoking xenophobia in South Africa. Their study claimed that most print-media in South Africa are neither analytical nor critical, use anti-immigrant terminology, and portrayed immigration from an anti-foreigner perspective. Media reports such as: “*20 ‘aliens’ held in Pta raid*” (News24, 06/11/2002), and “*Illegals: Home affairs blamed*” (News24, 17/06/2002), “*419 nabbed in crime blitz*” (City Press, 11/08/2002a), can aggravate xenophobic sentiments. Another article in the City Press of 16/11/2002, captioned as: “*Illegals could do better*” is actually very illuminating. It is stated in the article that: “*...illegal women from other countries are flocking in to South Africa in huge numbers ...this is unacceptable*”. The article further states:

How can we reach our goals if we allow illegal immigrants to flock into South Africa and live in shacks, RDP houses, flats and other crowded places when they have their own countries with rich mineral resources.

These illegal immigrants should go back to their countries and participate in improving the living conditions there. Once they are back in their countries their needs and wants can be identified, proper strategic planning can be carried out and world-class South African technical experts can help them build their required infrastructure (City Press of 16/11/2002b).

While these articles are biased towards immigrants in the country, media reporting of this nature only serves to divert and antagonize public attention to foreigners in the country.

It is a common thought in South Africa that West Africans particularly Nigerians are associated with drugs. Of course some Nigerians are involved in the trade, but this is a very unfair generalisation. Else where in Germany, the media plays a crucial role in promoting anti-foreigner sentiments. Media reports with anti-foreigners' rhetoric such as *'Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland'*⁵⁷, *'Überfremdungsangst'*⁵⁸, *'Asylschwemme'*⁵⁹, *'Lawine'*⁶⁰, *'Zeitbombe'*⁶¹, and *'Asylschnorrer'*⁶², dominated anti-immigrant discourses in the country (Weiner, 1995). These types of rhetoric are essentially overgeneralizations and misperceptions, which doomed some innocent immigrants to suffer the fate of others. Comments by a Nigerian immigrant support this fact: *"Once you are a Nigerian everyone think you are a drug dealer"*. According to this immigrant, people often approach him to find out if he deals in drugs, just because he is a Nigerian. The immigrant further noted that: *"People talk of Nigerians and drugs, if you put the thing in front of me I would not know what it is"*. The false notion South Africans have about immigrants and Drugs, diseases, and other social ills are partly implanted in them by the manner through which the media portals immigrants in the country.

Sadly enough, only a minority of South African journalist are accommodating and thoughtful in their coverage and altitudes towards immigration (Danso and McDonald, 2001). These later group of press often bring out the positive impact in the socio-economic development and reconstruction of South Africa. The need for the South

⁵⁷ Germany is not a country of immigration

⁵⁸ Fear of overforeignization

⁵⁹ Asylum flood

⁶⁰ Avalanche

⁶¹ Time bomb

⁶² Asylum parasite

African press to be more objective was expressed by Smuts Ngonyama an ANC National Executive Committee Member and Head of the Presidency at the ANC headquarters as follows:

What South Africa needs is a truly critical media... A truly critical media is one committed to ensuring its coverage is informative and fair. It strives to provide coverage that paints a picture of events or issues that are accurately as possible reflect reality... (Ngonyama, 2001: 3-4).

This is not often the case when issues relating to immigrants especially West Africans are presented over the media in South Africa. News coverage of immigration issues is often exaggerated or presented in a manner that could excite xenophobic feelings. Immigrants as aliens, immigrants and the unemployment problems of South Africa, immigrants as crime perpetrators, are common topics of discussions over the media. Topics of this nature often portray immigrants as potential threats to the socio-economic stability of the country. Perhaps the lack of knowledge about immigrants and where they are coming from might explain such misperceptions and over generalizations. Such ignorance is also exaggerated by the uncritical coverage of the media on matters related to immigration issues. The dangers of uncritical reporting by the media are not unknown, and seemingly suggest why state authorities have advocated for a critical media, which, ensures that its coverage is informative, and critical (Ngonyama, 2001). In much the same line of advocacy, President Thabo Mbeki pointed out as follows:

Our mass media has also done very little to inform our population in general about the Continent in a balanced way. As happens with news in general, what tends to get reported are the negative things that do, indeed, occur on our Continent (Mbeki, 2001:31).

The media if not careful, might exaggerate and misinform the public about immigration and immigrants in the country. The effect might lead to strong anti-immigrant sentiments in the country. It is the right and responsibility of the media to report on immigration issues as well as the xenophobic attitudes and actions of South Africans, but it would be counter-productive to exaggerate or ignore, and/or minimized popular sentiments. The media has a strong responsibility to ensure and avoid contributing unjustifiably to the problems of xenophobia by internalising xenophobic language and uncritically reproducing anti-immigrant stories and research. Sensational language and headlines such

as immigrants as job stealers, criminals and illegal dominating most press coverage in South Africa are stereotypical, which to a grater extent contribute to anti-immigrant sentiments in the country (Danso and McDonald, 2001).

Certain nationals in South Africa have been associated by the media with particular crime. For example, Nigerian immigrants are associated with the drug trade, and Money laundering. Congolese immigrants with passport racketeering, Zairians with diamond smuggling and Mozambicans and Zimbabwean men and women with car theft and prostitution respectively (Danso and McDonald, 2001; Leggett, 1999). I interviewed a Nigerian immigrant who claimed that: *“When police people or traffic cops see a Nigerian, they see drugs”*. The immigrant further claimed that, when a Nigerian is being interviewed on TV: *“The topic of discussion is always about drugs or 419 (money laundering)”*. Despite all such anti-African immigrant propaganda, Western Europeans and North American immigrants appear to be hardly associated with crime or illegality in South Africa. Of course, some nationals from these countries also do commit crime as well, and many of them are in South Africa illegally (Danso and McDonald, 2001). Reports from ‘News24’, have shown that, there are many Germans living in South Africa illegally. These reports suspect that there are about 1000 Germans who have entered the country as tourist and then decided to remain illegally in the country (News24, 17/06/2002). Though Europeans and Americans are illegally staying in the country, officials are not troubled because, according to the Cape Town Tourism head Sheryl Ozinsky: *“Germany had a rich diversity of resources and skills that could help South Africa”* (News24, 17/06/2002: 1). Once issues of crime and immigrants are concern the immediate focus is on African immigrants in the country particularly on West Africans.

If xenophobia and anti-immigrants’ sentiment is to be reduced in the country, then there should be a need for media objectivity and impartiality in their coverage of immigration issues, especially about African immigrants. When the media associate immigrants with particular crime, for example, West Africans with drugs trafficking, the chances are that, it might attract some immigrants to their ‘crime specialty’ as presented in the media. Also, the use of anti-immigration terminology and sensational headlines needs to be

unbiased, properly sorted, and unprejudiced because as Danso and McDonald (2001:106) put it:

In using these terminologies, the press has predefined thousands of otherwise law-abiding migrants as criminals and described their very presence in the country as a crime despite the fact that there may be good logistics or financial reasons for why they have entered the country without documentation or overstayed a visa.

The fear and dislike of West Africans: “WEST-A-PHOBIA”

In this Chapter, the term ‘*West-a-Phobia*’ is used to mean the fear and hatred, and the resultant negative actions towards West African immigrants in South Africa. Although South Africa is beginning to accept the realities of cross-border migration, xenophobic stereotypes about immigrants from other parts of Africa are still very common (Maharaj and Rajkumar, 1997; Rogerson, 1997a; McDonald *et al.*, 1999). Many studies have shown that most South Africans feel immigrants particularly West Africans, bring diseases, commit crime, and are a threat to the socio-economic stability of the country (Minnar and Hough, 1996; Maharaj and Rajkumar, 1997; McDonald *et al.*, 1999). This has led to some serious xenophobic hostility in the country. Elsewhere, studies have established that negative experiences are common experiences of most Diasporic population (Clifford, 1994). The presence of West Africans above all, Cameroonians and Nigerians in the country generates fear and hatred in most South Africans. They see these immigrants as disease carriers, and a threat to the social and economic stability of their country. This stigmatisation is just one aspect of the general rejection of Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants, and has effectively increased the levels of ‘*West-A-phobia*’ in the country. According to a Cameroonian immigrant I interviewed: *I was arrested and locked up in the Hillbrow Police Station for no good reason*”. I made further investigation and found that, this immigrant was arrested pending investigations on his temporary resident permit, which according to the immigrant had expired for one day on the day of his arrest.

Similar research conducted by Schiller and Fouron (1990) in the United State demonstrated that, the stigmatisation of Haitian immigrants as carriers of AIDS has increased the fear and dislike of Haitians immigrants. Such fears and dislike have forced

Haitians immigrants to restore their pride at all cost and means. In South Africa as in the United States, the fear and the subsequent xenophobic hostility against West African immigrants has influenced the types of economic activities of these immigrants. This view is supported by an observation made by a Nigerian immigrant as follows: *“I need to work hard because if I am caught I know I will pay high”*. How ‘West-A-Phobia’ has influenced the economic activities of West African immigrants is discussed in details in Chapter Seven.

Many social analysts have argued that, the effects of ‘West-a-Phobia’ in South Africa have prevented national and local policy makers from fully appreciating the positive role of West Africans in the economic development of South Africa (Plender, 1986; Cohen, 1991; Rogerson, 1997a). This lack of appreciation could be attributed to immigrants’ weak capacity to advocate their views and interests in the country (Reitzes and Crawhall, 1998). West African immigrants, particularly Cameroonians and Nigerians have been stereotyped in South Africa thus rendering any sort of advocacy on their behalf difficult. A Cameroonian reported as follows: *“When I was locked in John-Vorster police station, they police people didn’t want to hear anything from me”*. This immigrant was arrested in Hillbrow for carrying United States Dollars and a cell phone without a receipt. According to the immigrant, all attempts made to free himself from the police officials failed because he was a Cameroonian. Because of ‘West-a-Phobia’, some West African immigrants have adopted certain socio-cultural strategies to survive in the country. How West African immigrants adapt and cope with ‘West-a-Phobia’ and discrimination will be discussed later in this and subsequent chapters.

Although West African immigrants are often blamed for the high crime and unemployment rates, and for the high incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS and related diseases in the country (Plender, 1986; Cohen, 1991; Maharaj and Rajkumar, 1997), research conducted by SAMP challenged much of such stereotypical thinking (McDonald *et al.*, 1998). Such accusations as stealing jobs away from South Africans, accepting low wages, and carriers of diseases are unfounded and unreasonable. Accusations of this

nature are largely myths, which strengthen West African solidarity in the country. Conversi (1999: 560) affirms the capacity of myth amongst immigrant communities:

Myths have a unique capacity of conveying a sense of belonging and continuity through successive generations. At the same time, myths powerfully carry and disseminate the distinction between in-group and out-group, which is the essential function of boundaries, even in the absence of promptly visible ethnic makers.

Considering the South African Affirmative Action policy, discrimination, and West-a-phobia, which prevents immigrants from working, it becomes doubtful how they could steal away jobs from South Africans, or accepts low wages from employers when they are not employed or working. My research findings showed that, of the total number of immigrants interviewed, only 6% of the immigrants are formally employed, while the majority, 74%, are not formally employed in South Africa. Notwithstanding, negative perceptions about these immigrants continue to persist amongst many South Africans including some politicians and government officials. This view is strongly supported by their pseudonym '*Kwerekwere*', a disparaging term for African immigrants in South Africa (Maharaj and Rajkumar, 1997). 'West-a-phobia' has placed West Africans as targets of violence and attacks from the general public. Anti-West African perceptions have marginalized West Africans in the country, forcing them either to create their own system of survival, or, resort to unlawful activities in the country. The survival strategies of these immigrants and the resultant benefits from their activities are discussed in Chapter Seven.

The effects of 'West-a-Phobia' have led most African immigrants in South Africa to prefer their home countries to South Africa (McDonald *et al.*, 1999). Immigrants' desire to leave South Africa is a consequence of the serious xenophobia in the country. A total of 48% of the immigrants interviewed for this research stated that xenophobia and frequent police harassments are the main reasons why they would like to move out of South Africa to elsewhere. Up to 16% claimed if they have to move out of South Africa, it would be due to the high crime rates and insecurity in the country. Detailed reasons why Cameroonians and Nigerians would want to move out of South Africa are presented

in Table 5 below. The Table is based on Nigerians and Cameroonian immigrants interviewed who expressed the preference of moving out of South Africa⁶³.

Table 5: Why West Africa immigrants would want to move out of South Africa

Reasons	Cameroonians (N=22) %	Nigerians (N=9) %	Total (N=31) %
Xenophobia/Frequent police harassments	41	67	48
High crime rates/insecurity	14	22	16
For Further studies	04	11	07
Search of employment elsewhere	23	-	16
Prefer home country than South Africa	14	-	10
Poor economy of South Africa	04	-	03
Total	100	100	100

Although most immigrants claimed that they are well treated in South Africa, some negative responses can be anticipated when it comes to treatment by black South Africans, the South African Police Service, and some government officials (McDonald *et al.*, 1999). SAMP research findings show that immigrants in South Africa get their best treatment from fellow-immigrants from the immigrant's home country. Immigrants from SADC countries were second in the ranking order, while, treatment by South African citizens was not uniform. Whites were considered better in their treatment of immigrants than blacks. These findings tie in with my research conducted with Nigerian and Cameroonian immigrants in Hillbrow. Of the 112 Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants interviewed, 67% claimed they get their best treatment from other African immigrants, while only 19% and 11% claimed such good treatments come from white and black South Africans respectively. My data shows that the overall worst treatment of West African immigrants by South Africans comes from landlords, employers and some

⁶³ A total of 112 Nigerian and Cameroonian immigrants were interviewed and 31 of the 112 expressed the wish to move out of South Africa if they could have the chance.

government officials, especially immigration and police officials. What other research in this field has not dealt with is how immigrants deal with this treatment, something I will explore later in this chapter.

Hostility to West African immigrants in South Africa remains a serious and persisting problem in the country (Reitzes, 1998). Alienation of immigrants in the country can have far reaching implications for both the state and the immigrants. For example, while it may tarnish the country's image abroad, immigrants *'live on the edge of the law'*, waiting for opportunities to achieve their goals. The immigrants in this study are marginalized people in their home countries, while in South African they are alienated and socially excluded. The next section will critically examine why and how West African immigrants suffer from social exclusion in South Africa.

The Socially Excluded in South Africa

Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants appear to be socially excluded from the realities of the South African society. Though a new term in the South African social science, social exclusion is an expression that is widely used in social science debates in Europe (Porter, 2000). In the United States, it has replaced the pejorative term the 'underclass' in discussions about the poor, unemployed and the underprivileged (Byrne, 1999). In South Africa, this underclass is called by derogatory terms, and seen as aliens who bring diseases, steal jobs and parasites of South Africa's national cake. The concept of social exclusion involves changes in society, which have consequences for some individuals in the society (Byrne, 1999). Exclusion is not poverty, or the lack of material resources such as income, but the dynamic process of being shut out fully or partially from both the socio-economic, political and the cultural system (Byrne, 1999). The UK and EU Social Policy Unit consider social exclusion as: *"A label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown"* (Porter, 2000: 77).

According to Walker and Walker (1997), social exclusion is the denial or the non-realization of civil, political and social rights of citizenship. West African immigrants in South Africa seemingly lack all three categories of citizenship rights. Their participation and relationship with the state is quite poor, and their inclusion into civil society is hardly encouraged. While West Africans generally do not want the right to vote or be voted in South Africa (political rights), it seems fair for them to want civil⁶⁴ and social⁶⁵ rights. These basic rights for any human being are absent in the lives of West African immigrants in South Africa. In this respect, undermining the country's constitution, which states in its Bill of Rights that: *"This Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom"* (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The immigrant community in this study experience an acute exclusion define as:

A multiple dimensional process in which various forms of exclusion are combined such as participation in decision making, political process, access to employment, material resources and integration into common cultural processes (Madanipour *et al.*, 1998: 2).

According to Madanipour *et al* (1998) exclusion manifests itself in three levels namely, political, economic and the socio-cultural life of any society. This research will focus on the socio-cultural and economic domains experienced by West African immigrants in South Africa. At the socio-cultural level, Madanipour *et al* (1998) argues that to maintain the social continuity for any given society, exclusionary process should work in close relationship with inclusionary activates. Further stating that, *"At the social level, exclusion without inclusion would lead to a collapse of social structure"* (Madanipour *et al.*, 1998: 77). The implication is that, there must be a balance between exclusion and inclusion to maintain the social fabric of any given society. In South Africa, the exclusion of West African immigrants from the wider society is not in any way balanced with any form of inclusion. My findings show that immigrants are generally cut off from access to resources, and the active participation in the socio-cultural life of their host society.

⁶⁴ These rights include immigrants' liberty, right to justices, speech, own property and movements.

⁶⁵ These rights include the right to economic welfare and social security and employment.

From an economic point of view, Madanipour *et al* (1998: 77) noted that, “*Exclusion from the economic arena is often considered to be a crucial and painful form of exclusion*”. This has far researching implications not just for the excluded but also for the society as a whole. In South Africa, the marginalized immigrants in my study take advantage of the system, and adopt survival strategies beyond the margins of the law (discussed in Chapter Seven). Madanipour *et al* (1998: 78) emphasized that:

The exclusion from work and its impacts are widely known as undermining the ability of individuals and households to participate actively in social processes...these form of exclusion can create an acute form of social exclusion which keeps the excluded at the very margin of the society, a phenomenon all too often marked by a clear spatial manifestation in deprived inner city or peripheral areas.

Recently, a publication by the Cabinet’s Office of the Government of the United Kingdom defined social exclusion as:

A shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (Cabinet-Office, 2001: 1).

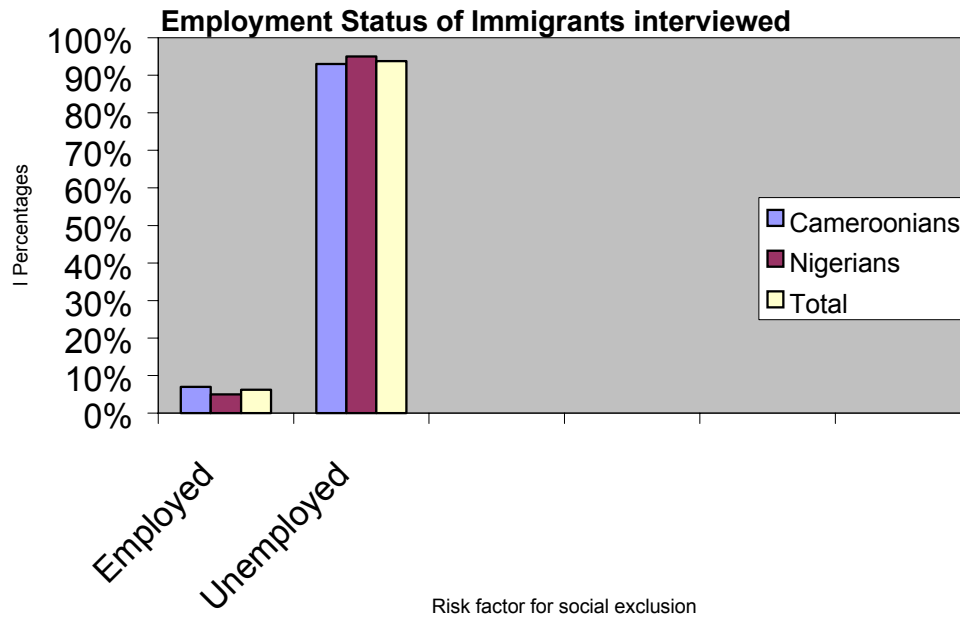
West African immigrants in South Africa, suffer a combination of these problems namely, low income, unemployment, living in a deprived neighbourhood, and form an ethnic minority group in the country. These factors mark their exclusion in South Africa an acute one and their discussion follow below.

Unemployment and Low Income

The majority of West African immigrants in South Africa are unemployed. Interviews conducted with Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants for this research showed that of those interviewed 93% of Cameroonians and 95% of Nigerians are unemployed. A total of 94% of the total number of immigrants interviewed for this research were unemployed at the time of the interviews. Only 7% and 5% of Cameroonians and Nigerians respectively were employed, amounting to an overall of 6% of the total number of immigrants interviewed. Elsewhere, Gilroy and Speak (1998) argue that socially excluded are compelled to be unemployed, as they lack insiders’ knowledge about job

vacancies. Although most jobs in South Africa are advertised in newspapers, experience shows that even before they are advertised the employers already have someone in mind. Immigrants applying for jobs in the country are usually unsuccessful because they lack insiders' knowledge about the job vacancy. According to a Nigerian immigrant: *"It is useless to apply for a job in this country because they will never call you for an interview. They have their people waiting, they just advertise to blindfold people"*. In a similar vein, Gilroy and Speak (1998: 97) affirm the bias nature of the politics of employment in South Africa as follows: *"Employers rely on their workers using word of mouth to recruit someone from their own circle. It follows that it is important to have friends who have jobs to gain a chance of getting one yourself"*.

South Africans find jobs more easily than foreigners especially as they are favoured by the South African affirmative action policy, which gives them preferential treatment in the country's job market. This is not the case with West African immigrants in South Africa. An immigrant expressed his frustration as follows: *"I came here with my degree but I can't get a job because I am not a South African"*. The educational status of these immigrants is discussed in Chapter Seven. This section discusses immigrants' unemployment problems, which are a result of discrimination in the South African job market. The unemployment picture of Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants interviewed for this research is presented in Figure 4 below.

Figure4: Employment Status of Cameroonians and Nigerians

The 7% of immigrants interviewed who were employed, held positions as sales consultant, lecturer, Human resource manager and chief security officer. Their wages are relatively low when compared with that of an average employed South African. According to the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), average monthly salaries and wages of an average employed South African stood at approximately Rands 8000 plus if working for a governmental institution, Rands 4000 plus if working for a non-governmental institution, and Rands 7000 plus if working for community, social or personal services (Global Policy Network, 2004). Interviews conducted with immigrants for this research showed that their monthly salaries range from Rands 1500 to Rands 6000. Only 14% of the 7% of the immigrants who were working earn approximately Rands 6000 monthly. The rest, 86% of the 7% who were working earn between Rands 2000 and Rands 3000 per month. With such low monthly earnings, it is unlikely that the immigrants will be able to sustain a living, or take care of family members back home. An immigrant working as a security expressed his dissatisfaction with his monthly earnings thus: *“Yes they pay me R 3000 a month, when they cut off taxes what do I get? How do I pay my rents? How do I go to my job side? What do I eat and remember I have a family back home to support”*. Table six below

presents the monthly earning of employed immigrants who were interviewed for this research.

Table 6: Monthly Salaries of Employed Immigrants

Monthly Earnings in Rands	Cameroonians (N=5) %	Nigerians (N=2) %	Total (N=7) %
1500	20	-	14
2000	40	-	29
3000	40	-	29
4000	-	50	14
5000	-	-	-
6000	-	50	14
Total	100	100	100

One consequence of low earnings is that these immigrants are more likely to live in poor housing conditions in order to meet up with the socio-economic demands of their society. In much the same context, research conducted on Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants in the United Kingdom show high rates of unemployment, while those employed earn low wages, and spread across large household sizes (Cabinet-Office, 2001).

Poor Housing/Living Conditions

The second part of Chapter One has presented the Hillbrow neighbourhood as a West African stronghold. The dreadful and dilapidated situation of Hillbrow's infrastructure and life styles of the people are well known and documented (Barron, 2000; Clay, 1982; Morris, 1996). West African immigrants therefore, the majority of whom residing in Hillbrow, live in poor housing conditions. My interviews showed that immigrants stay in over crowded houses in Hillbrow mainly because, they are unemployed, and cannot afford to stay in more decent neighbourhoods. A total of 83% of Cameroonians and 70% of Nigerians interviewed stay in one-room flats⁶⁶ with an overall total of 78.6%, while, 17%

⁶⁶ A single room, which is made up of a sleeping space and a kitchen.

of Cameroonians and 30% of Nigerians stay in larger apartments⁶⁷, 21.4% of the total. None of the immigrants interviewed stay alone in a flat or apartment. When asked why, the general response was: *“I cannot afford to pay alone”*. Based on the interviews conducted, Tables Seven and Eight below present a clearer picture of immigrants’ room-density in flats and apartments respectively.

Table 7: Room Density in Flats

Room Density In Flats	Cameroonians (N=60) %	Nigerians (N=28) %	Total (N=88) %
2	13.3	43	23
3	13.3	43	23
4	20	14	18
5	33.3	-	23
6	20	-	13
Total	100	100	100

Table 8: Room Density in Apartments

Room Density in Apartments	Cameroonians (N=12) %	Nigerians (N=12) %	Total (N=24) %
2	-	33	17
3	67	67	17
4	33	-	66
Total	100	100	100

In some of the apartments, immigrants have converted their balconies to sleeping rooms in order to create space for other compatriots. I interviewed a Cameroonian immigrant about why they stay that many in their room and he replied as follows: *“We are five in the room plus two in the Balcony. We stay seven because it is cheaper”*.

⁶⁷ Has a sitting room, sleeping room(s) with a kitchen.

Belonging to Minority Ethnic Groups

West African immigrants form different ethnic minority groups in South Africa, and they experience disproportionate disadvantage across the board. Barth (1996: 75) defines ethnic group as:

A population which is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms, make up a field of communication and interaction and has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other category of the same order.

As a result of their minority status, West Africans are more likely than others to live in deprived areas, be unemployed, suffer from low employment, to be poor and be victims of crime and xenophobia. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal observed similarly in the UK society that minority ethnic communities are more likely to be poor and unemployed compared with white people with similar qualifications (Cabinet-Office, 2001). Discrimination and xenophobia play important roles in the disproportionate social exclusion experienced by West African immigrants in South Africa. Elsewhere in the UK society, despite equal or higher qualifications, research on immigrant's communities have shown that people from minority ethnic backgrounds have lesser chances of employment at all levels of qualification (Cabinet-Office, 2001). This is equally true with West Africans immigrants, whom, despite their educational background are more unemployed and suffer more from discrimination and xenophobic hostility than South Africans.

Figure 4 above presents the employment status of the immigrants I interviewed for this research. Different unemployment rates have been set for South Africa. Using the broad definition of unemployment⁶⁸, the Global Policy Network (2004) estimated the rate at between 20% and 26%. The Health Systems Trust (2004), claims it is 28.2%, while Kingdon and Knight (2004) think since the year 2000, the rate has been between 36% and 40%, and the World-Fact-Book (2004), put the rate at 31%. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) thinks that these rates are probably much lower than previous estimates, indicating that the rates may be as much as one-third lower than stated figures

⁶⁸A person is considered unemployed if the person has not actively sought work in the past four weeks (Global Policy Network, 2004).

(ILO, 1996). Although in South Africa unemployment is inequitably distributed amongst certain groups (Kingdon and Knight, 2004; Global Policy Network, 2004), research conducted by Kingdon and Knight (2004) show that the characteristics of the unemployed people make them liable to be at the end of the queue for employment. Their study further demonstrated that, the group most likely to suffer from high unemployment rates are those that lack human capital characteristics such as education and employment experience.

The section that follows will demonstrate how West African immigrants adapt to xenophobic hostility and discrimination, and how it has influenced their identity in the country.

Xenophobia and West African identity

West African immigrants in South Africa are aware of their unwanted presence in the country. To fight this situation, immigrants adapt themselves to the prevailing situation, and in the process of adapting; it influences their West African identities in different ways. Lemert and Branaman (1997) pointed out that when an individual enters the presence of others he would want to discover the facts about his new environment. Once the facts are gathered, and depending on the nature of the facts, the individual will make adjustments, which might take several forms to suit the situation, and to meet unforeseen circumstances. My research found out that, through external clues, attributes, characteristics, marks peculiarities and immigrants' virtues, West African immigrants can be easily identify and discriminated against. Consequently, some Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants I interviewed have adapted to the hostility of xenophobia, and in the process of adapting have influenced their West African identity in South Africa.

Studies conducted elsewhere by Malkki (1992) on 'urban' and 'isolated camp Burundian refugees' in Tanzania showed similar findings on how urban refugees assimilate and manipulate their identities. In Malkki's work, 'camp refugees' were engaged in an impassioned construction and reconstruction of their history as a 'people' and saw themselves as a nation in exile, while 'town refugees' did not construct such a

categorically distinct collective identity. Malkki's research found that, urban refugees are more concern with ways of assimilating, and manipulating multiple identities as strategies for survival (Malkki, 1992). The study essentially establishes the role of place and the prevailing circumstances in the construction of identities. The subsequent sections will demonstrate that West African immigrants manipulate and develop multiple identities as strategies for surviving discrimination and xenophobic hostility in the country.

Dressing and hairstyle

Many Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants agreed that, since they entered South Africa, their dressing and hairstyles have changed. The reason advanced for this adjustment is not just because they see South African dressing and hairstyles as better than theirs, but also because it is a form of disguise, trying to become more South African to escape from xenophobic hostility. Interviews conducted with immigrants confirmed that 67% of Cameroonians and 38% of Nigerians wanted to learn about South African culture in order to better fit in the South African society. Dressing and hairstyle, and language were the main aspects of culture immigrants would want to learn in South Africa. A recent interview with a Cameroonian immigrant concerning his hairstyle is illuminating:

Where I come from, in Bamenda⁶⁹, if you have dreadlocks on your head people will think that you are crazy or you smoke marijuana. Here many people have it and they are all South Africans. That is why I made mine so that when they see me they will think I am a South African especially the police people. They don't trouble people with dreadlocks.

Another Cameroonian who is always dressed in jean trousers, t-shirt, a big jacket with a 'face-cap' covering half of his face explains why he adopted such dressing style:

⁶⁹ The provincial capital of the North West Province of Cameroon, one of the two English-speaking provinces of the country.

When I first came here, I used to dress as if I was back home. Put on a nice suit and a tie. I didn't know the dangers I was putting my self into, until one day in Hillbrow I was attacked in Pretoria Street and my phone and R 50 was taken away from me. That same day, as I was going back to my flat in Church Street, the police stopped me and asked for my papers. When I showed them my asylum seeker papers, they asked for cool drink because *'you Nigerians have lots of money'*. When I asked the policeman what makes him think I am a Nigerian he said *'I can tell from you dressing'*.

The policeman took Rands 20 from him, to buy a 'cool drink'. The immigrant further notes: *"I am forced to dress like a South African because I have to avoid problems with the police. You see, when I am like this people think I am from SOWETO⁷⁰ some of them are even scared to come closer to me"*. Adopting the South African dressing and hairstyles are strategies used by some immigrants who feel unprotected from xenophobia hostility in the country. Adopting these strategies impact on their West African identity, as they borrowed other identities from the social context in which they live. Elsewhere, strategies of assimilation and adopting new identities have been termed hybrid identity (Crush and McDonald, 2002; McDonald, 2002; Malkki, 1992). My research found that, West African immigrants in South Africa take on multiple identities, which includes combinations of their home and the host countries. Of recent, I interviewed a Cameroonian immigrant who noted as follows: *"In South Africa I behave like a South African, and in Cameroon I behave like a Cameroonian. I know both countries well enough"*. The understanding is, immigrants understand that success in their host country depends on preserving their home identity and adopting host identity and not abandoning their home identity.

However, not all West African immigrants are adapting in response to xenophobia in the country. Interview conducted with a Cameroon immigrant who came to South Africa in 1998 claimed that no form of cultural or social change has affected his identity from when he first entered South Africa. According to the immigrant: *"I still dress the way I used to dress in Cameroon, and my hair style has not changed from the way it used to be in Cameroon"*. He further admitted that: *"I am not good in foreign languages, I don't*

⁷⁰ South Western Township, the biggest township in Gauteng province and perhaps the whole country.

think I will ever speak Zulu because I am planning to go to the US next year". Ironically, during our discussion, the immigrant's manner of talking, and his expressive gestures struck me as very South African. Even though the immigrant claimed his South African gestures and expressions are not used to avoid xenophobic hostility in the country, the fact is, the immigrant portrayed a hybrid personal identity during the discussion. Perhaps for this immigrant, the need for socio-cultural adaptation is not necessary as he plans to move out of the country in the near future. This immigrant would certainly use different gestures and expressions if he were speaking to someone in Cameroon.

Learning the local language(s) and dancing styles

Learning the local South African languages is amongst the many strategies adopted by some West African immigrants to avoid xenophobic hostility in the country. In the process of learning, their West African identity shifts. From the interviews I conducted, 32% of Cameroonians and 36% of Nigerians agreed that they have been influenced one way or another by South African cultures. Of these percentages of immigrants who feel influenced by South African culture, 57% of Cameroonians and 47% of Nigerians, a total of 53% of all the immigrants in this category, admitted they are learning South African language(s) and their dancing styles. The impact on their West African identity is that feeling of '*South Africanness*' each time they speak or dance the '*South African way*'. A Nigerian immigrant said in an interview that he had a private Zulu teacher and remarked that: "*When you speak Zulu you feel like a South African, and is the only way to get a nice job in this place*". In much the same vein, a Cameroonian immigrant alleged that:

When black police people stop you, they first greet you in Zulu just to know if you are a South African or not. If you don't answer in Zulu they know you are a 'Kwerekwere' then they start looking for all sorts of faults just to get money out of you or create problems for you.

The fear of xenophobic hostility and discrimination, and the resultant adjustments made by immigrants to survive the situation construct an emerging West African identity in the country. This research is not claiming that adopting new personal identities is solely due to resist xenophobic hostility in the country. Some immigrants were identified during the research who actually liked and preferred South African cultures than those of their home countries. A Cameroonian immigrant, for example claims that, South Africans are more

'socially advanced' than Cameroonians, hence, he likes their dressing and social lifestyles. For this immigrant, doing things 'the South African way' is a matter of free choice and not done to resist xenophobic hostility. Another immigrant claims that he enjoys South African languages because they are 'nicer' in music than that of Cameroon. However, the majority of the immigrants interviewed for this research adopt South African cultures to resist discrimination. According to an immigrant: *"The only time I try to speak Zulu is when I am in a Kombi"⁷¹ because everybody inside is a South African*". For this immigrant, attempting to speak Zulu in a taxi is a way of disguising as a South African. In this way, the immigrant might prevent any hostility directed to foreigners. Whether as a strategy of disguise in order to escape xenophobic hostility, or out of admiration for South African cultures, adopting South African cultures plays an important role in skewing immigrants' identities away from the West African norm. Based on interviews conducted with immigrants, the reasons are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9: What West Africans like about South Africans

Reasons	Cameroonians N=72 %	Nigerians N=40 %	Total N=112 %
The Love for their country	11	-	07
The love for their local language	24	25	24
Their unity	10	-	06
Nothing in particular	28	25	27
Their cultural activities	12	35	21
The fast rate of development	01	-	01
Their friendly and honest nature	13	15	14
Total	100	100	100

The love South Africans have for their country (11% of Cameroonians), the love for their local languages (24% of Cameroonians and 25% of Nigerians), and their cultural

⁷¹ The local taxis in South Africa

activities (12% of Cameroonians and 35% of Nigerians) are amongst the main aspects of life here that West African immigrants admire. An immigrant made the following observation about South Africans and their local languages:

I like the way they speak their language because they have learnt it in school. Once you speak their language they immediately know you are one of them. Once I was drinking in a bar and this South African man was speaking in Zulu to me. I felt so bad because I could not reply in Zulu, when he noticed that I am not South African his reactions towards me changed. He was no longer friendly as he initially seem.

Another immigrant noted about South Africans and their culture: *“I like this people because they respect and feel proud of their culture. They even dress in their traditional attires on normal days, in my country it is mostly during occasions”*. These admirable traits of South Africans could have an impact on the West African identity in the country. The more these immigrants admire South African culture and life styles, the closer their identity skewed towards that of South Africa.

Making more South African Friends

The majority of immigrants interviewed for this research agreed that making more South African friends, helped reduce xenophobic hostility towards them. From the interviews conducted, 93% of Cameroonians and 73% of Nigerians claimed that they have South African friends. The research observed that immigrants use their South African friends to protect themselves against xenophobic harassment from police officials and other South Africans. McDonald (2002) observed similarly amongst Marconi Beam informal settlement in Cape Town that increased contact improves people’s understanding of the ‘other’ and therefore reduces discriminatory and xenophobic behaviours. According to an immigrant: *“I feel protected because every one think I am a South African, even when we meet police people I am not scared because they feel we are all South Africans and no one stop or attack us”*. Another immigrant claims that the only time he moves freely around Hillbrow is when he is with his South African roommate. When asked what he has in common with his roommate, he explains as follows:

We have been staying together now for two years and we do so many things together. We cook together, we eat together and we go out drinking together. He has been nice to me, he likes me and I like his ways. We have never had any problems and when we are off sometimes we visit his family in Boksburg.

While this immigrant gets protection from his South African roommate and friend, he gradually acquires a South African culture through modelling his behaviour on that of his South African friend. A comment by a Cameroonian immigrant illuminates how an appreciation of a local culture develops: *"I like the way they build and decorate their houses when I go back my house will be exactly the same"*. I further interviewed this immigrant about the usefulness of his South African friend and he replied as follows:

First of all he is my friend, and he is always there to support me when I am in trouble. For example, once the police stopped me when they noticed that my "Ngunda"⁷² had expired they threatened to jail me, but fortunately, my roommate was there to help me out with the police.

Having South African friends and living with South Africans are among the socio-cultural adjustments adopted by some immigrants to resist xenophobic hostility in the country. As observed: *"Friendship is a voluntary relationship, with no legal or moral components to maintain or enforced obligations"* (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 110). Some immigrants make South African friends for the purpose of dealing with xenophobic hostility in the country. MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000: 111) observed similarly with Congolese immigrants in Paris, noting that: *"To a considerable degree, the institution of friendship functions to protect the individual as far as possible, from the arbitrariness of state authorities"*.

Changing Legal Status

Although the majority of these immigrants entered South Africa as asylum seekers, they are gradually changing their status to that of *'Accompanied Spouse'*. Lubkemann (2002)

⁷² A common term used by many immigrants to mean the asylum seekers permit they are carrying in South Africa. This word was initiated by Congolese musicians in Belgium and France to mean cops or police people and has been adopted by immigrants in South Africa to mean a paper that keeps them free from police and DHA officials (Kalombo, D. K., personal communication, 12/11/2002)

has explored transnational polygyny⁷³ among Mozambican migrants in South Africa, and its implications for migration, marriages, community and identity. The study further found that transnational polygyny has developed through transnationalism into a strategy for immigrants to deal with broader political instability and economic insecurity (Lubkemann, 2002). My research found out that some West African immigrants are entering marriages of convenience with South Africans in order to acquire the permanent resident permit. With such permit, they can resist discrimination and xenophobic hostility, and improve their security in the country. Hence, like Lubkemann's (2002) observation with Machaze men from Mozambique, the majority of the marriages observed for this study served as tools for coping with the challenges faced by immigrants in South Africa. From the interviews conducted, (16) 22% of Cameroonians and (20) 50% of Nigerians are married, amounting (36) 32% of all the immigrants interviewed who are married (reference appendix 1, Table 2). Only (16) 14.3% of the total numbers of immigrants interviewed for this research were females, and none of them were married at the time of interviewing. Of those immigrants interviewed who were married, (20) 56% were married to South African women, while only (8) 22% each were married to Cameroonian and Nigerian women (see appendix 1, Table 9). None of the married immigrants in South Africa was previously or has a second wife elsewhere. Immigrants advanced the following reasons in response to why they got married:

- Securing a permanent residence (16.6% Cameroonians and 15% Nigerians).
- To look for employment (13.8% all Nigerians).
- Have reached marriage age (25% all Nigerians).
- Love for wife (62.5% Cameroonians and 15% Nigerians).

From the above responses, it appears some of the marriages with South African women are instrumental marriages signed to avoiding police harassments, and/or create opportunities for employment.

In addition, informal interviews and discussions with immigrants show that there is more to these marriages than they appear to be. According to one immigrant: *"Marriage is the only way of going home for a visit"*. As asylum seekers/refugees, it is not possible to get

⁷³ When a man gets married to multiple wives in different countries (Lubkemann, 2002)

a re-entry visa into South Africa. Getting married to a South African citizen will grant them the '*accompanied spouse*' status, which permits the holder to move in and out of South Africa without a re-entry visa. Another immigrant claimed that whenever he has a problem with the police his wife takes care of the situation. Others use their wives national identity cards to secure accommodation, business sites, install telephone lines, and open bank accounts. For some immigrants, their wives act as human shields against xenophobic hostility from South Africans. In a recount story with a Cameroonian immigrant: "*When I move with my wife I feel safe. I am not afraid of the police or any body. My wife loves me and she is always there to protect me*". I further interviewed him why he needs protection, he replied as follows: "*We are not safe in this country, anything can happen. For example, when ever you have a problem with the police and your wife is present, they treat you differently*".

Although some of the marriages were strategies for fighting discrimination and xenophobia, others were genuine. A Nigerian immigrant for example observed that for the past two Decembers he has been taking his wife to Nigeria and they are planning a trip for the coming December. Another Cameroonian immigrant alleged that his South African wife just gave birth to a baby, and he is staying with his in-laws. When I followed up this interviewee, I found that he had been arrested in 2002 for illegal possession of South African identity booklets. He was locked up and later sent to jail. After a month in jail, the wife who was then pregnant had to pleaded on his behalf warning the officials that if her husband is not released she will kill herself and her unborn baby. She claims that the husband takes good care of her and her family. The immigrant was released from jail based on suicide threats from his South African wife.

Joining Social Clubs and Organizing Social get-togethers

Belonging to social clubs, and organizing social get-together, are other ways in which immigrants adapt to xenophobia and discrimination in the country. Some of the immigrants interviewed agreed that they are members of social organization in South Africa. Amongst their activities, football, athletics and aerobics are the most popular. According to the immigrants interviewed, social clubs are useful arenas for socialising,

and create milieus for socialization with South Africans. A member of the '*Nigerian football club association*' observed as follows about their club:

We play with every body and a lot of South Africans play with us. Even police people come and play with us. It is good because we know ourselves. These boys cannot attack me when they see me at night because they know me and I know them. I have many police and South African friends because we meet and play every Sunday morning in Germiston.

Sports play a crucial role in providing a positive space for social discourse and physical activities, as well as breaking the socio-economic and geographical boundaries between different ethnic groups (McDonald, 2002). Another Nigerian immigrant, a member of '*Keepers of Body Building Club*' (KBB) in Bedfordview, claims that his club helps him to: "*socialized with other people*". He further noted:

People say we are bad because they don't socialize with Nigerians. When you come closer to them you will find that not all Nigerians are bad. One reason why I join this club is to bring out that good side of Nigeria to people who don't know and I am achieving it slowly. When I started with the club most people didn't like me but today most of the people are my friends and they like me.

It is common amongst Cameroonian immigrants in Johannesburg to organize what they commonly called a '*Makossa*⁷⁴ Night'. During this night, Cameroonians come together formally dressed and dance their popular Makossa music from dusk to dawn. Such nights look like an occasion for Cameroonians as they talk about it, prepare and wait for that day to come. During this night mainly music from Cameroon is being played. I interview the president of English Speaking Cameroonians in South Africa, and he explained the importance of makossa night in the following words: "*This is the only opportunity we have to listen and dance to our own music. We meet other Cameroonians, which we haven't seen for a long time, and you feel free inside because you know every one here is like your brother or is a Cameroonian*". This is quite significant because it not only presents them as immigrants who have been excluded and discriminated against, but as immigrants who are trying to revive and identify with their oppressed identity. In a similarly interview, a Nigerian immigrant commented about xenophobia and related

⁷⁴ Popular Cameroonian music discussed in Chapter Seven.

issues. His responses present a snapshot of how West Africans perceive and cope with xenophobia in the country. The immigrant defined xenophobia as follows:

When people dislike you because you speak a strange language, Xenophobia from my own point of view is mistrust, or lack of security of people who feel that their country is been invaded by people they don't know, people that are foreign. Sometimes, intermingled with xenophobia are things like jealousy, envy, unreasonableness and so on.

The immigrant further expanded his definition and views about jealousy as follows:

What happens is this; black South Africans are the main cause of xenophobia in the country. You don't experience xenophobia from white South Africans. It is blacks against blacks that's why there is a lot of jealousy, envy and rivalry, which are all sentiments of xenophobia. For instance, a black South African who spend all his time walking around drinking in a 'shebeen' or a bar, when he sees you driving a car, he develops that feeling of jealousy or envy. Secondly, a lot of black South Africans look at other Africans with a pinch of salt and scepticism. why? They think we are going to steal their girlfriends, take away their jobs. But you can see, how many West Africans do you know who actually occupied statutory positions in this country? Most of them are unemployed or do their individual business. Actually, xenophobia in this country is more of jealousy, envy and rivalry. Some people say Nigerians are too arrogant, I think it is not arrogance but a display of a lot of confidence. If a black South African sees a white foreigner, he says he is a tourist, if it is a black foreigner, he says this is a 'kwerekwere'. All this leaves ugly scars in your life as a foreigner in the country.

When asked if he had ever experienced xenophobia in South Africa, the immigrant replied:

Yes, many times. For example, when you walk into a supermarket, they serve a white man before you because you are a black and a non-South African. When a non South African drives a car in the country it is a big deal, when it is a South African it is normal.

The immigrant further elucidated on how he cope with the problems of xenophobia in the country: *"I mind my business and my wife also mind hers too"* Is your wife a South African? *"Yes we got married last year"*. Do you live with your wife? *"Yes of course I stay with her she is my wife and I am the legal husband until death do us part"*. Asked whether there was any other way in which he dealt with xenophobia in the country, he replied:

There are a lot of dresses I have in my wardrobe that I don't wear except I am going for a function that demands that type of dressing. For example, the shoes I am wearing now (*I observed and he was putting on a white tennis shoes*) are not the type of shoes I would have wanted to wear as a Nigerian. Most of the shoes I would like to wear as a Nigerian are only for big Nigerian functions or church services on Sundays. Basically, I tried my best to avoid jealousy and envy. Some South Africans when they see you well dressed they interpret it as arrogance.

I further asked the immigrants how his wife has helped him to solve the problems of xenophobia and he replied:

Like I said we mind our business, but she is very useful whenever we meet police people and traffic cops. Once I was detained on a Friday for no good reason. My passport was valid but the policemen threw blind eyes to it with the pretext that they want to verify it. Knowing that it is Friday I can only come out on Monday the policeman didn't care. When my wife came, she started shouting, screaming and crying saying her husband must come out now, and I was released. In short, your rights are better protected if you are married to a South African.

Formation of social organizations and clubs

The formation of social organizations and clubs has been observed amongst immigrants elsewhere as a means of resisting exclusion and adapting to discrimination (Eitzen, 1973; King and Knights, 1994). Geschiere and Gugler (1998: 311), traced the history of immigrants' organization back to the colonial times, noting that: "*Members of such associations see it as their task to bring development to the village by launching more or less ambitious projects and enforcing more or less sanctioned co-operation among the home people in the city*". Similarly amongst West Africans in South Africa, social organizations are used as defensive mechanism to resist discrimination, xenophobia, preserve their identity, and create a forum for immigrants' solidarity. Organizations also help secure immigrants' survival in the country through networks, which facilitate employment, skill transfer and training. Elsewhere in Marconi informal settlement in Cape Town, McDonald (2002) observed that social organizations such as football clubs increase interactions between citizens and non-citizens with a resultant decrease in discriminatory and xenophobic reactions. Grieco (1995) argued that employment relations in modern societies frequently harness and depend upon existing patterns of social relations or social networks in their recruitment dynamics. I found in this research

that, the formation of West African associations with solid social relations and networks has resulted in West African ethnic niches in the Hillbrow, Berea, Braamfontein and Yeoville neighbourhoods. In these neighbourhoods, Nigerian and Ghanaians eating houses, Cameroonian drinking and hair dressing salons, Congolese nightclubs and West African fruit, vegetables and other grocery shops are popular institutions. They mainly employ mostly West Africans. Similarly with the Bangladeshi community in Rome, Bangladeshi associations are major step in fighting the difficulties they encounter in the country (King and Knights, 1994). The United Asian Workers Association (UAWA), later followed by the Bangladeshi Association (BA), play the role of negotiating with local authorities for residence permits, better housing and other social facilities, setting up small businesses, and for supplying initial capital to compatriots to start own business.

West African associations in South Africa

The social organisations of West African associations in Johannesburg exemplify many of the important issues concerning immigrant social organisation. Several West African Associations were visited and observations made. Amongst these were, the Association of English Speaking Cameroonians in South Africa (AESCA-SA), Association des Camerounais en Afrique du Sud (ACAS), Association des Ivoiriens en Afrique du Sud (AIAS), The Nigerian Family Meeting in South Africa (NFMSA), The Association of Momo-Elits South Africa (AMESA), and the Ghanaian Association in Johannesburg and Surrounding Areas (GHAJOSA). The functioning and objectives of these associations were found to be very similar. I studied and observed that, they are philanthropic associations, created to look after the well being of their members in South Africa. I observed that they have well structured executive bodies headed by a chairperson, a vice, a secretary, treasurer and a public relation officer. Their main objectives were to support members in times of difficulty, establish cordial relationship with other groups, deal with their embassies, and create economic opportunities for members who are in need. Issues affecting their survival in South Africa are often discussed, looking for ways of dealing with such issues. I interviewed the chairperson of AESCA-SA and he claimed that the enhancement of solidarity amongst members is a major objective of his association. The

financial secretary of GHAJOSA said a similar objective noting that: *“We essentially take care of one another and make sure that we are out of problems in South Africa”*.

Through organising rituals surrounding major events like death, birth, marriages and parties, West African associations are able to unite their communities. In such events, they dress in their traditional outfits, dance their traditional music and eat their ethnic foods. I found out that the operations of these organisations are similar. I observed in AESCA-SA that, a major aspect in their agenda is *‘problems arising’*. During this period, members come forward to present their problems or that of a compatriot to the association. Amongst these problems, death of a member or family member, a sick member, a member who is arrested, and a new arrival in need of accommodation were the most common. Members are requested to contribute, and the amount, depends on the severity of the problem. For the death of a member or family member, a minimum of Rand 50 is demanded. For a sick member, visiting a newborn baby, or a newly arrived spouse of a member, a minimum of Rand 20 is demanded. Apart from the contributions, members are also requested to bring presents of any form. A record of those who contribute is kept, and the contribution is made in the form of an exhibition. I interviewed the president of AESCA-SA about the record and why such manner of contributing and he replied: *“We keep records to know who is serious and who is not, so that we will know how to treat that person when he/she has problems. When people contribute for all to see, it motivates others to challenge the amount, and then more money enters our coffers”*.

During my visits to these associations, I realised that new arrivals are often requested to introduce themselves, after which, they are advice about the prevailing situation in the country. They are briefed about the difficulties of getting a job, going to school without proper documentation, and the high rate of xenophobia and discrimination in the country. They are also advised and encouraged on the best possible options in South Africa, and in some cases people give testimonies of their experiences in South Africa. In one of such occasion, a Cameroonian immigrant claimed that he came to South Africa as an asylum seeker who cannot work or study, so he opened a hair salon. According to this immigrant, he was able to buy a car out of the profits he made from his hair salon. In contrast to

Geschiere and Gugler (1998) observations of urban associations, most West African Associations in South Africa do not focus on development projects in their home countries. It is probably because most West African associations in South Africa have a recent history, dating only from the early 1990s. It might also be as a result of their unemployment status in South Africa. Venture back home is on an individual bases and not on collective bases as observed elsewhere by Geschiere and Gugler (1998).

CONCLUSION

Although xenophobia is not a new concept, research and policy considerations on issues relating to xenophobia and its consequences are quite recent. The negative effects of xenophobia both on individual states and civil societies have attracted global attention, policy makers and social researchers. Xenophobia is caused by a number of inter-related factors amongst which, ill-founded nationalism, collective insecurity leading to aggressiveness of insiders towards outsiders, state's strategy to divert public attention towards aliens population, and the inability or the unwillingness of outsiders to integrate into the main stream society are the most common. Some researchers feel that xenophobia is just a neo-racism, whose dominant theme is based on cultural differences rather than biological heredity (Balibar, 1991; Doty, 1999).

In South Africa, the causes of xenophobic hostility are many, and could be traced from far back as 1994 when African immigrants started entering the country. Increases in the number of African immigrants simultaneously with job shortages in the country, misperceptions about African immigrants, are some of the major causes of xenophobia in the country. Although xenophobia in South Africa can also be traced as emerging out of an economic threat, the political situation of the country is such that the urban environment promotes xenophobic hostility. While South Africa's racist past has contributed to the present situation (HRC, 2000; Peberdy, 1999), the media is also a major player in the alarming levels of xenophobia in the county.

Xenophobic hostility towards West African Immigrants (*West-A-Phobia*) in the country has far reaching implications both for the state, civil society and the immigrants. West

African immigrants suffer from discrimination in the job market, xenophobic hostility and frequent police harassments. They are also socially excluded from the broader South African society, staying in Hillbrow a deprived neighbourhood, and are largely unemployed in the country. These findings parallel with research conducted by the Cabinet's office of the government of the United Kingdom, which confirmed that people staying in deprived neighbourhood, low income, unemployed and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately likely to suffer social exclusion (Cabinet-Office, 2001).

The consequences of *West-A-Phobia*, in South Africa have resulted in immigrants adopting certain socio-cultural strategies to cope with the situation in the country. Some of such strategies include dressing and hairstyles, learning South African local languages and dancing styles, having South African friends, changing their legal status, joining social clubs, organizing social get-together and associations. As they adopt these strategies, it impacts on their West African identity. This ties to Malkki (1992) observation that, space and place has significance in identity formation, especially among urban refugees, leading to consciously control identities.

Having examined how West Africans adapt and cope with xenophobic hostility and discrimination, the preceding chapter will examine their survival strategies in the country.