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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITIES: A CASE STUDY OF WEST AFRICANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

PETKOU CHAMBA LAWRENCE

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of how West Africa immigrants experience immigration into South Africa, and how they are affected by their new context. Based on interview schedule (survey), in-depth interviews, observations (direct and indirect), primary and secondary sources, some 112 Cameroonians and Nigerians (72 Cameroonians and 40 Nigerians) were studied between May 2001 and December 2003.

The study revealed that, xenophobia, discrimination, and the South African affirmative action, make it difficult for West African immigrants to achieve their goals in the country. From an overall perspective, these immigrants are not allowed to work or study; they suffer harassment, social exclusion and gross human rights abuses in the country. While the majority of these immigrants have actually abandoned their home countries for South Africa, various reasons account for their immigration into South Africa. A study of the factors influencing West African immigration into South Africa, found that, although several factors account for West African immigration into South Africa, the factors are interlinked to one another, and not independent in themselves. I showed that, although push and pull factors, such as political, economic, socio-cultural factors, communication and technological advances, proximity, precedence and tradition of migration influence West African immigration into South Africa, the role of family pride, usually ignored in most migration studies is fast becoming an emerging push factor of migration in the West African sub-region.

In South Africa, West African immigrants interact with the general public, as well as some government institutions most notably, the Department of Home Affairs. An examination of past and current immigration policy, the Department of Home Affairs, and the general public found that although immigrants enter South Africa with the hope of improving their lives, and those of family members back home, they are socially excluded; suffer from serious human rights abuses, discrimination and xenophobic hostility. The Aliens Control Act of 1991, the new Refugee Act of 1998, negative attitude of some officials, interpreters and the general public, a simultaneous increase in the

number of immigrants with unemployment, lack of socialization between South Africans and West Africans, apartheid isolation and indoctrination of South Africans, and the role of the media have all contributed to the high levels of discrimination and xenophobic hostility West Africans experience in South Africa. I have termed this fear and dislike of West Africans, and the resultant negative reactions by South Africans 'Westaphobia'.

The study saw West African immigrants as socially excluded in South African. An examination why, revealed the factors and the reasons as another facet of discrimination and xenophobia. It was found that, immigrants adapt in various ways to resist discrimination and xenophobia, and in the course of adapting, modify their personal identities, giving rise to multiple identities. Such hybridities were evident in immigrants dressing, dancing and hairstyles, expressive gestures, having more South African friends, changing legal status, joining, forming and organizing social functions.

Despite experiences of discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion, the study found that immigrants implement certain strategies to ensure their survival in South Africa. In the midst of these problems, some immigrants still manage to succeed in their businesses and other under takings. Immigrants' high concentration in Hillbrow with its commercial and locational advantages, initial capital through immigrants' networks, the use of family labor, are all added advantages. The study also found that through small business activities, and the trading of ethnic goods, immigrants are able to survive and send remittances back home. At the same time, trading in and consuming ethnic goods help strengthened immigrants self-identification, unify and link them to their roots. Further revelations saw some of the immigrants as transmigrants, who develop hybrid identities, and live their lives across boundaries. In this way, they are able to succeed despite their status as the undesirables in South Africa. Others are pushed to the wall, and are forced to transgress various margins of the law, to ensure their survival, resist discrimination and xenophobic hostility in South Africa. For some, transgressing margins of the law is the fastest means of amassing wealth to be able to live a better live in South Africa, and still take care of family members in their home countries.

I declared that this thesis is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

PETKOU Chamba Lawrence

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To my deceased family, sister Patricia Chamba, brother Jude Chamba, and my grandmother Emilia Njiki. May your souls rest in the peace of God

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Abbreviations

ACA: Aliens Control Act

ACAS: Les Association des Cameroonais en Afrique du Sud

ACTSTOP: Action Committee to Stop Crime

AESCA-SA: Association of English Speaking Cameroonians in South Africa

AIAS: Les Association des Ivoiriens en Afrique du Sud

AMESA: Association of Momo Elites South Africa

AMPROS: Anglo American Property Services

ANC: African National Congress

APIC: African Policy Information Center

ASP: Asylum Seeker's Permit

ASTP: Asylum Seeker's Temporary Permit

CCPJ: Central Committee for Polish Jews

CFA: Communaute Financiere Africaine

CNU: Cameroon National Union

COSATU: The Congress of South African Trade Union

CPDM: Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement

CRTV: Cameroon Radio and Television

CSVR: Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

DHA: Department of Home Affairs

ENAM: E'cole National de l' administration et de la Magistrature

EUMC/RAXEN: European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia

GHAJOSA: Association of Ghanaians Living in Johannesburg and surrounding areas

GTTC: Government Teachers Teaching College

HIV/AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

HRC: Human Rights Committee South Africa

HSRC: Human Science Research Council

IOM: International Organization of Migration

ISS: Institute for Security Studies

KBB: Keepers of Body Building Club

LHR: Lawyers of Human Rights

NFMSA: The Nigerian Family Meeting in South Africa

NICs: New Industrialized Countries

NWP: North West Province

OAU: Organization of African Unity

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SADCC: South African Development Co-ordination Conference

SAMP: Southern Africa Migration Project

SAP: Structured Adjustment Province

SAPS: South African Police Services

SAYB: South African Year Book

SCNC: Southern Cameroon National Council

SDF: Social Democratic Front

SDO: Status Determination Officer

SOWETO: South Western Townships

TPPP: Temporary Permit to Prohibited People

UAWA: United Asians Workers Association

UK: United Kingdom

UNDP: Union Nationale Pour la Democratic et la Progress

UNHCR: United Nation High Commission for Refugees

UPC: The Cameroon People Union

US: United States



Figure 1: The Study Area and the Official Boundaries of Hillbrow

HILLBROW AND HER SURROUNDING NEIGHBOURHOODS

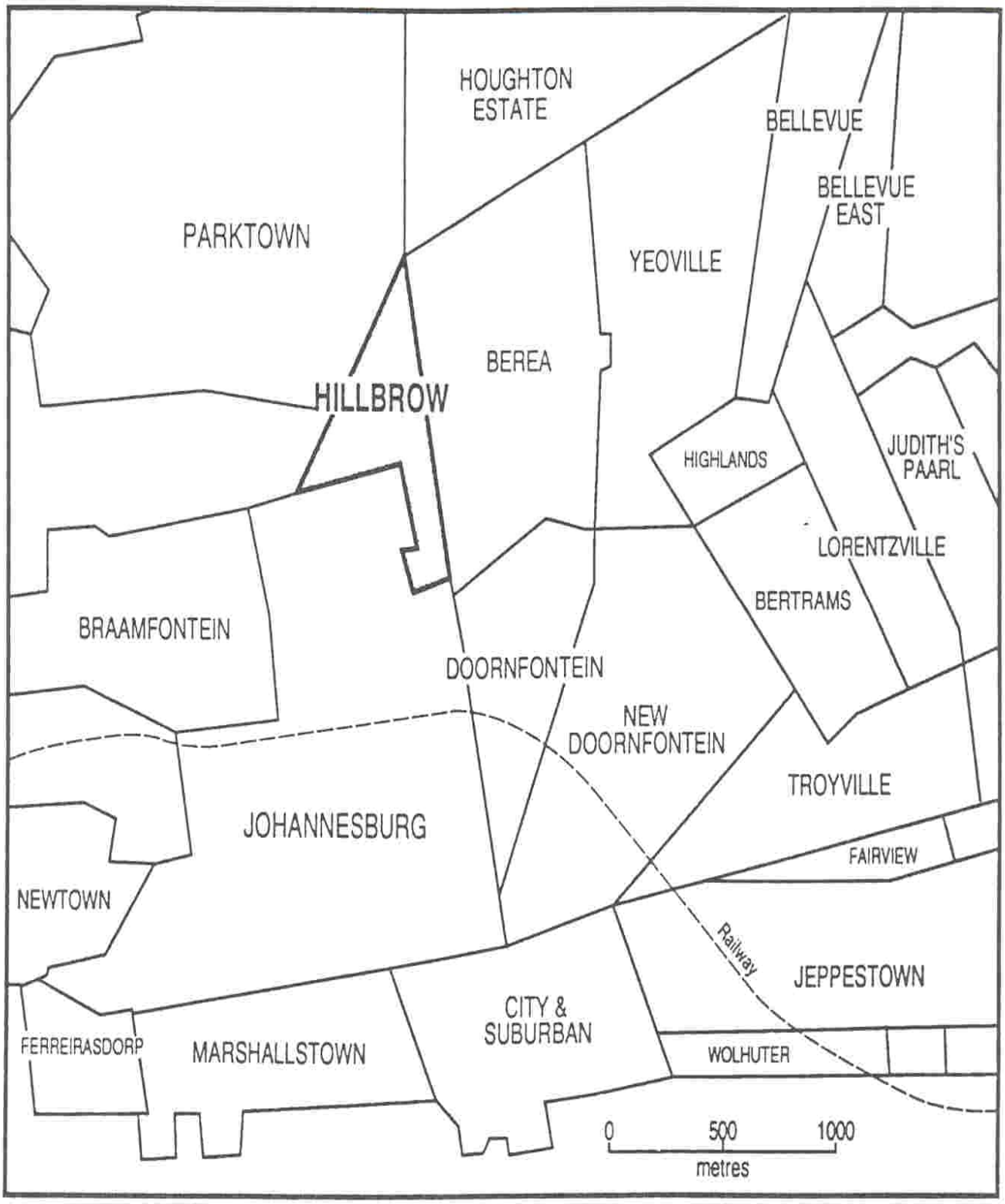


Figure 2: Hillbrow and her Surrounding Neighbourhoods.