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The Impact of Social Interactions on Ethnic Identity Perceptions: The Case of Shona and Ndebele Migrants Living in Johannesburg, South Africa

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Abstract

In Zimbabwe, interethnic relations led to animosities and divisions, between and among ethnic groups. Zimbabwe's main ethnic groups fought interethnic wars in pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial Zimbabwe. Interethnic differences Between Shona and Ndebele people caused the massacres of Ndebele people from 1980 to 1987. This study aimed at determining the impact of social interactions on ethnic identity perceptions or prejudices Shona and Ndebele people of Zimbabwe have of each other within Johannesburg. To do so, I first understood respondents' perceptions before leaving Zimbabwe and perceptions after social interactions in Johannesburg. The nature and extent of social interactions were surveyed. Sixteen participants from each group were interviewed. Collection of data was made through in depth face to face interviews. Literature was reviewed to construct a theoretical framework for the inquiry.

The main finding in this work is that social interactions have helped in weakening negative ethnic identity perceptions Shona and Ndebele people have of each other. A larger number of respondents expressed views which showed support of weakening negative ethnic identity perceptions through social interactions such as intermarriages, street vending associations, church interactions and business sharing. The impact of that on the existing literature is that the findings support the argument that under certain conditions contact leads to the weakening of prejudices, perceptions or attitudes. But there are other minor findings that show that perceptions of few respondents have not changed. Basing on minor findings, I discovered that Shona and Ndebele people might have forgiven each other but that does not necessarily mean that the Shona and Ndebele people like each other as much.