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

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CHAPTER FOUR

WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

There are few places in the world where you won't find West Africans. They seem to have spread their wings far and wide to every corner of the world in search of greener pastures. Since the early 1980s, the term West African Diaspora has gained much popularity in migration debates and discourses. According to the 'Intitut de Recherché pour le Developpement' (IRD): *"West Africa is the most important region of departure for immigrants into Europe"* (IRD, 1997: 1). The 'Atlas des Migrations Ouest-Africaines vers l'Europe'[26], equally observed as follows about West African destinations in Europe:

> In the heart of Europe there is developing a French-speaking African group made up of populations from Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast and new nationalities (from Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea)…In Northern Europe, an arc of English-speaking African people is becoming established, composed of Nigerians, Ghanaians, Gambians and, in smaller numbers, Liberians and Sierra Leonians…In the South, along the Mediterranean margins, Italy and Spain are the main host countries. Their West African communities are particularly diverse with people from Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria, and Ghana…(IRD, 1997: 1).

Diaspora is actually a descriptive, interpretative term for the contact zone of nations, cultures and regions. They are exemplary communities of the transnational moments (Clifford, 1994), and West Africans in South Africa are no exception. They undermine the state and her boundaries, as well as constructing identity far away from their homes. Though Diasporas live far away from their home countries, they are still able to maintain links with families and friends back home. West Africans in South Africa for example are interlinked with other dispersed West Africans at home and elsewhere, thanks to modern technologies in transportation and communication.

Clifford's (1994) definition of Diasporas fits the context of West Africans in South Africa. He defines Diasporas as:

[26] Translated in English as 'Atlas of West African migration to Europe'.

> Expatriate minority community, that are dispersed from an original center to at least two peripheral places; that maintain a memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland; that believe they are not and perhaps can not be fully accepted by their host country; that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Clifford, 1994: 304-305).

West Africans in South Africa exemplify Clifford's pattern of diaspora as will be shown in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Among theses features are a history of dispersal, myths and memories of their homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for an eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity shared by a common solidarity (Clifford, 1994).

Since the collapse of apartheid South Africa in 1994, the country has become one of the most popular destinations in the African continent for West Africans particularly, Cameroonians and Nigerians (Crush and McDonald, 2002; Peberdy and Rogerson, 2002). Several factors account for why West Africans immigrate to South Africa. These include socio-cultural factors (Hussein, 1993), Geographical proximity (Gomel, 1992; Heisbourg, 1991), communication and technological advances, and political and economic factors (Loescher, 1992). In migration studies, 'push-pull theory' assumes that immigrants have reasons why they decide to leave their country (push factors) while at the same time, have reasons why they choose a new country to live in (pull factors). This approach is applicable in the case of West African immigrants in South Africa. It is possible to identify the reasons why West African emigrants left their countries of origin and why they chose South Africa as their destination and host country.

In subsequent sections of this chapter, these factors will be critically examined, relating them to West African immigration to South Africa. Too often, discussions of migration focus on migrants as individuals who emigrate because they are attracted by better conditions elsewhere. There is little consideration on the migrants' country of origin, their families, and the role they play to stimulate migration (Amin, 1995). I will argue in this chapter that familial identities, (which I will, as a shorthand designate as 'family

pride') is an important factor in migration which is not considered in most scholarly writings of migration studies, play an important role in influencing West African immigration to South Africa. This Chapter examines such family role, and the relevance of family pride in influencing West African immigration to South Africa. The Chapter first traces the history, and critically examines West African immigration to South Africa. Second, the Chapter examines the factors influencing West African immigration to South Africa, bringing out the role of family pride in West African immigration to South Africa. The Chapter ends with a model showing the interrelatedness of the push and pull factors influencing West African immigration to South Africa.

MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

The SADC experience

Cross border migration within the Southern African region, particularly to South Africa is not a recent phenomenon (Rogerson, 1997a; McDonald *et al.,* 1999). Previous studies in South Africa have shown that sources of immigrants originate primarily from the country's traditional supply areas, the Southern African Development Community SADC (Rogerson, 1997a; Peberdy and Rogerson, 2002). It has an old history from the 1870s and 1880s when contract mineworkers started working in the gold and diamond mines of South Africa (Peberdy, 1999). The South African Migration Project (SAMP) research findings demonstrated that the long history of cross-border migration in the SADC region has resulted in most citizens of the region having at least one blood relative, parent and/or grand parents who have worked in South Africa before (McDonald *et al,* 1999; Peberdy and Rogerson, 2002). Perhaps this explains the large numbers of SADC citizens in South Africa. The national statistics released in May 2002, presented in Tables One and Two below present a vivid picture. Table one below shows the percentage change in the number of travelers arriving from leading African source countries into South Africa from May 2001 to May 2002, and Table Two present arrivals in South Africa by country of residence during the same period.

Table 1: Percentage Change in the Number of Travelers arriving from leading African Source countries into South Africa from May 2001 to May 2002

Leading African Source countries	Percentages (%)
Zambia	39
Malawi	33
Botswana	28
Swaziland	13
Namibia	10
Mozambique	09

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2002

Table 2: Arrival in South Africa by Country of Residence: May 2001 to May 2002

COUNTRIES	Numbers in May 2001	Numbers in May 2002
Lesotho	105336	81253
Swaziland	58762	66110
Botswana	47812	61317
Mozambique	42826	46952
Zambia	39450	49570
Namibia	16250	17896
Zimbabwe	7742	10794
Malawi	5832	7688
Kenya	Less than 3000	Less than 3000
Angola	Less than 3000	Less than 3000

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2002

The reasons for the high numbers of SADC citizens entering and/or resident in South Africa are quite obvious. Geographical proximity to South Africa is one key factor explaining this fact. This reasoning ties with Gomel's argument that immigrant population originates primarily from the same geographical area (Gomel, 1992). Hence, it

is not surprising that the bulk of African immigrants in South Africa are primarily from the SADC geographical area. Immigrating to South Africa, which is closer to their countries of origin, permits easy contacts with their countries of origin, through visiting and other modes of communication. Improved transport networks in the SADC region, and better socio-economic facilities in South Africa are also contributory factors in the high numbers of SADC citizens in South Africa. A detailed explanation of these factors favoring the immigration of SADC citizens to South Africa is discussed below.

Factors favoring migration within the SADC region into South Africa

Improved communication and technology have made movements within the SADC region easier, faster and cheaper. Hussein (1993: 8), observes: *"The tremendous advances in information technology witnessed by live CNN broadcasting via satellite has resulted in people having more information at their disposal and being better able to make more informed decisions regarding the feasibility to migrate"*. Precedent also plays an important role for the large number of SADC citizens in South Africa. Pioneer SADC citizens who came to South Africa as migrant labour acted as pull forces for further migration into South Africa. Gomel's work elaborated on this fact stating that: *"Migration flows are directed towards an area in which there is an initial nucleus of immigrants from a given country"* (Gomel, 1992: 72). Political, economic and socio-cultural factors can also be use to explain why citizens from the SADC region dominates the foreign black population in South Africa (Hussein, 1993). Also of significance, and contributing to the high flow of SADC citizens into South Africa, is the political cooperation existing within the region. Precisely, SADC objectives advocate integration rather than simply coordination. Hence SADC countries aim at cooperating through integration, thus, explaining why SADC citizens dominate the black immigrant population in South Africa. Established in 1980 as the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), in 1992 members of government and head of states of member states changed its name and signed the declaration and treaty of the Southern African Development community (SADC). Hussein and van Aardt (1998) pointed out that this change of name emphasizes on the strong need for community integration rather than community coordination, hence, promoting greater socio-economic and political

cooperation within member states. This venture facilitates cross border migration within the SADC region especially to South Africa. To probe the factors influencing migration of SADC citizens into South Africa would be diverting from the main focus of this study; this chapter will focus on the history of West African immigration to South Africa, and the factors favoring their immigration to South Africa.

The West African experience

International migration is not a new phenomenon, nor is it in itself a crisis or a disaster (Hussein, 1993). On the contrary, it is a response to specific situations in both the sending and the receiving countries. While it is difficult for people to migrate without the assistance of friends and relatives, the causes often varies each contributing its own incentive for people to migrate. Notwithstanding, international migration is almost always linked to a combination of factors both in the sending and receiving countries. In migration studies, the term 'push and pull' factors are often used to discuss factors influencing migration. The experience of West African immigration to South Africa is not different. A combination of 'push and pull' factors also account for the coming of West Africans into South Africa. These factors should not be considered in isolation of themselves, but as a set of interwoven factors each supporting the other in influencing West African immigration to South Africa (see Figure 3).

Since the early 1990s, there has been an increasing movement of foreign migrants especially from the West African sub-region into South Africa (Hussein, 1993; Rogerson, 1997a; McDonald *et al*, 1999). These countries supplying immigrants into South Africa have been identified as the new source countries (McDonald *et al*, 1999; Rogerson, 1997a). Although their immigration history to South Africa has not been traced, McDonald *et al* (1999) observed that it is quite recent and just a little more than ten years old. However, it appears from my interviews with West African immigrants that Ghanaians were the first West Africans to immigrate to South Africa. A Ghanaian immigrant, now a South African citizen on account of his twenty three years residence in South Africa, said: *"I have been here since 1979. When I first came here I was a teacher until 1994 when I started my own business. During that time, many Ghanaians were also*

coming to teach and work as nurses and medical doctors". Another Ghanaian immigrant working with the Gauteng Local Council as a Primary Health Care Officer claimed that most Ghanaians in the country today came during the apartheid regime to work as nurses and schoolteachers. So, it may be that West African immigration to South Africa began, on a small scale, earlier than has been generally recognized. This notwithstanding, the presence of West African immigrants in the country only became visible in the early 1990s, when the apartheid regime gave way to the new democratic South Africa. The following section will discuss the 'push and pull' factors influencing West African immigration to South Africa.

Regional and political instability

It appears political instability in the West African sub-region exerts a strong influence on West African immigration to South Africa. Political instability takes various forms, and can include aspects such as persecution, deprivation of political rights, civil wars, and coups (Loescher, 1992). World wide, political instability has been one of the most salient causes of population movement and displacement. The case of Iraqi Kurds escaping repression and persecution to Iran and Turkey, and the disintegration of former Yugoslavia due to civil wars, resulting to her citizens seeking refuge in Hungary and Germany are well known (Leoscher, 1992). The Nazi persecution of German Jews during the 1933 to 1945 period is also a salient and well-documented example (Graffard, 2001; Friedlander, 1995). In the SADC region, civil wars in Mozambique, Angola, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo have displaced millions of people in the sub-region. It is against this background that Hussein (1993: 14), commented on the relationship in the SADC region between political instability and forceful displacement and movement of people as follows: *"In Southern Africa, civil strife has displaced thousands of people: this too underlines the central role which political factors play in the movement of the region's people".* It is estimated that, in 1990 well over one million people died, with three million dislodged in Mozambique. In Angola, beside those killed in the Angola civil war, more than 1, 4 million people are suffering from material loss (Hussein, 1993). These displaced people, and those suffering from material lost as a result of political

instability are all potential emigrants, and will tend to migrate to relatively politically stable regions.

In West Africa, economic and humanitarian crises in the early 1980s, coupled with the proliferating situations of political instability, civil strife and armed conflicts, have made life in the sub-region less attractive (Rasheed, 1996). The continuous civil wars in Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, armed insurrections in Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, political disturbances prior to and post elections' revolts in Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Senegal, intra-state and inter-state disputes between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsular have led many West Africans to view the sub-region with great dejection and uncertainty. These crises have cumulatively developed as a crucial push factor in the sub-region. In the early 1990s, many West Africans began to see the need to move out of the sub-region to easily accessible, cheaper, peaceful and politically stable countries like South Africa. It is therefore important to understand the particular political backgrounds in Nigeria and Cameroon, the two countries in this study, which contributed to emigration to South Africa. I will therefore now provide brief outlines of these political contexts.

The Nigerian situation

At independence in 1960, the country was comprised of a conglomeration of ethnic nationalities with over three hundred different languages, organized into numerous kingdoms and states, operating in different political systems, religions and cultural traditions. After independence, the British colonial masters prescribed a federalist system aimed at ensuring a stable and balanced political order, in the most populous and multiethnic country in Africa. Funso (1999: 3) observed that the federalist constitution adopted in Nigeria, fashioned after the British system was: *"Meant to balance and accommodate national and local interests in the most heterogeneous African state. The experiment never worked"*. Political violence and intolerance of political opposition led to the total collapse of law and order in the country (Funso, 1999). In January 1966, just six years after independence, there was a military coup 'd'etat', led by five majors in the army, four of whom were Igbos. This coup developed an ethnic rift in the country as it

was seen as an Igbo uprising against the Muslim Northerners who dictate state politics. Funso (1999: 3) observed along similar line that: *"This development led to the unfortunate conclusion that this was an Igbo coup directed against the Northerners, who dominated the nation's politics"*. To solve these problems and pacify the country, the government introduced ethno-sectarian forces, which led to more violence especially in the North of the country. Such policy implementation resulted to more violence and the massacred of hundreds of Igbos in the North of the country (Funso, 1999). In July 1966, Igbo leader Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu declared an independent Biafra (Igbo) state from the rest of Nigeria. This was followed by a civil war (The Nigerian Biafra war), which lasted for two years and six months, leaving more than two million people death.

The petroleum boom that followed the civil war created more anarchy than it solved. The oil boom was an opportunity for the government to heal the injuries of the civil war. Paradoxically the boom instead led to gross mismanagement and corruption leading to another coup in July 1975, with the overthrow of the military ruler General Gowon Yakubu. One year afterwards, the new head of state Murtala Mohamed was assassinated in an abortive coup and General Olusegun Obasanjo took over. In 1979 elections were held and Alhaji Sheku Shagari was made president. Funso (1999: 3) observes about Shagari's government as follows: "*Its four years and three months in office was a disaster. This was the richest period in the nation's history, but it was also the most corrupt period on record"*. Gross official indiscipline, blatant corruption merged with the virtual anarchy that followed the confused and bizarre 1983 elections brought back the army under General Mohamed Buhari on the new year's eve of 1983. Two years after, Buhari's government was toppled and Ibrahim Babangida took over. Babangida's government soon became very unpopular and one of the most autocratic governments in the political history of the country. Babangida used his military to the benefit of his political ambition noting once that: *"soldiers are practitioners of violence"* (Othman, 1998: 2). In the same vein, Funso observed about Babangida's government in the following words:

> The government became more authoritarian and repressive, manipulating its democratic transition program to prolong its stay in power. Under Babangida, the military president became the epitome of military absolutism and autocracy, tempered only by his populist approach to policy formulation (Funso, 1999: 4).

Presidential elections held on the 12th of June 1993 soon made it clear that the Muslim multimillionaire Moshood Abiola was poised to win. Perhaps if the elections had been allowed to continue the problems facing the country today would have been averted. But the elections were cancelled, and General Sanni Abacha overthrew the appointed interim government led by Earnest Shonekan just after less than four months in power. Political historians have criticized Abacha's government saying that his government led Nigeria into the abyss of praetorianism marked by brutal repression, during which Nigeria became a rogue state dominated by a lawless autocracy (Funso, 1999; Nwabueze, 1994). In June 1998 Abacha died of a heart attack and General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over conducting elections yet again. In May 2000 he handed power to Olusegun Obasanjo. This was still no guarantee of political stability in the country. According to Armed Conflict Report (2000), the government has done little to end communal fighting in the country, and ethnic clashes still persist. There have been growing complaints within the Niger Delta region that decades of oil production have failed to benefit local communities. Armed Conflict Report (2000: 4) reported that:

> For the past ten years, ethnic groups in the Niger Delta demanding political autonomy and compensation for environmental damage caused by oil companies often have been met with repression…in other areas of the Niger Delta, inter-ethnic fighting over land ownership has occurred between Ijaw and llaje groups, most recently in Ondo state…Elsewhere, tension between the Hausa and Yoruba, Nigeria's two largest ethnic groups has escalated into armed fighting in a number of regions of the country but has concentrated in northern and Southwestern Nigeria.

From this overview of the political history of Nigeria, it is clear that the country has been politically unstable since her independence in 1960. Such instabilities are characterized by clashes in political views, rioting, ethnic differences, wars, abortive coups, military takeovers, rigging of elections and assassination of state presidents. It is not surprising therefore, if Nigerians are forced to move out of their country to areas, which are relatively, more politically stable. In Africa, South Africa is one of such countries. Pull

factors like perceived job availability, and the level of social and economic amenities in the country would attract most Nigerians to South Africa.

In addition, political disturbances in Nigeria have polarised along the lines of ethnic clashes and divisions between the Muslim dominated North and the mainly Christian South. While it is true that the Muslim Northerners in the country have always dominated the nation's politics, the Southerners, though regarded as more enterprising have often felt oppressed and discriminated. It is to be expected that discriminated people would want to move to areas where they feel more secure, free and enjoy some basic human rights. Perhaps this explains why the majority of Nigerians in South Africa come from the Southern region of the country.

Of the Nigerians in my research sample 50% of the immigrants are from Imo (Igbo) State, 10% from Endo state, and 20% each from Anambra and Delta states respectively (see appendix 1, Table 6). Amongst the responses in relation to why they left Nigeria for South Africa, violence, negative experiences in party politics, political instability and marginalisation were the most popular. One Nigerian stated: *"The country is so politically unstable that at any time there can be a military takeover, and each time it happens lots of people are killed. So many people are suffering today in Nigeria because of politics".* A Nigerian from the Oguni region emphasised his ethnic group's political marginalisation: *"Once you come from my region you don't get work easily. The government destroys the natural forest for the sake of oil and we don't benefit any thing from the oil of our land. When our people complain there is always big trouble and many people will be killed or disappear".* It is clear that there is sufficient political conflict in Nigeria for citizens of that country to see emigration to South Africa as attractive.

The Cameroonian situation

Cameroon presents a similar picture of military intervention and civil conflict. Before independence Cameroon was a multiethnic territory with different independent cultural, religious, kingdoms and administrative systems. It is because of this pluralism that led Eyoh (1998: 253) and Geschiere and Gugler (1998: 315) observed that Cameroon is *"the*

cross road of Africa". Between 1884 and early 1914, the territory was a German colony, administered as a single polity with the intension of laying a foundation for a subsequent Cameroon identity and citizenship (Eyoh, 1998). This was never achieved as the Second World War disrupted the German administration of the territory. In January 1916 when Germany was defeated and ousted from Cameroon, General Dobell proclaimed the partition of the territory into British and French territories (Bongfen, 1995; Eyoh, 1998). As a United Nation Trust territory, the French portion was administered together with French colonies in Equatorial Africa, while the British portion was divided into Northern and Southern Cameroon administered as an integral part of Northern and the Eastern regions of Nigerian respectively. In 1959 these British territories became full regions of the federation of Nigeria. This can be seen as the origin of the differences in political ideology and culture between the French and English speaking Cameroonians, and in turn as the root of the political problems in the country. Njeuma (1995: 3) observed that:

> The long-term political implication of this split may not have been perceived at the time. Nevertheless, it marked the beginning of the contest between two crucial movements i.e. for closer ties either with Nigeria or with East Cameroon, which has persisted in West Cameroon politics.

In a similar line of thought, Bongfen (1995: 1) observes: *"Thus, in political and administrative terms, the two British sectors and the French sphere had little in common with each other"*.

Even before 1959, conflicting political options dominated the political discourse of Cameroon's political foundation. First, there were supporters of unification with Nigeria, who proposed that Northern and Southern Cameroon be amalgamated to form a single administrative unit within or outside the framework of Nigeria's political system. Second, there were those who advocated for the integration of Northern and Southern Cameroon into autonomous regions or states of the federation of Nigeria. The third option supported separate independence for Northern and Southern Cameroon. Finally there was yet another option of unification, which proposed that all of the former German colony of Cameroon should unify to form a single independent state (Bongfen, 1995; Njeuma, 1995). Events developed rapidly in favor of a unitary independent state, even though unification was not the most popular option. Ahidjo, the then Prime Minister of the

former East Cameroon, had convinced Solomon Tandem Muna, and John Ngu Funcha, prominent West Cameroonian politicians, to sign in favor of unification. On the 1st of January 1960, East Cameroon became a sovereign state, and under the United Nation (UN) supervision, in October 1st 1961 the East and West Cameroon states federated to form the federal Republic of Cameroon. On the 20th of May 1972 in a national referendum the majority voted in favor of a unitary state with Ahmadou Ahidjo as the first president of the United Republic (Bongfen, 1995; Njeuma, 1995; Eyoh, 1998).

Ahidjo's Authoritarianism

After independence, Ahmadou Ahidjo ruled the country until 1982 when he resigned from the presidency. The newly independent state rapidly developed into an authoritarian single-party state the Cameroon National Union (CNU), with no respect for political and civil rights. During Ahidjo's reign, power was centralized to himself and in the capital city Yaounde. He established a centralized system of government and 'Ecole Nationale de L'Admintration et de la magistrature' (ENAM)[27] became the recruiting institution in the bureaucratic administrative system. Eyoh (1998) noted that in Ahidjo's regime, academics and administrators were appointed in to political position (politicians by degree) thus blurring the divide between politics and administration. Ahidjo's reign saw Muslim dominance in politics, which: *"betrayed the salience of ethno-regional representation at the summit of state power"* (Eyoh, 1998: 254). Thus, *"it became incumbent on established and aspiring political barons including the politicians by degree to position themselves as leaders of regional or ethnic communities or at least convey the impression that they command such followings"* (Eyoh, 1998: 254).

Earlier, rebellion and civil war precipitated by the first nationalist party, The Cameroon People's Union (UPC) led by Felix Roland Moumie and Reuben Um Nyobe forced Ahidjo to declare a state of emergency, which continues for years after unification and even after peace was restored (Bongfen, 1995; Njeuma, 1995). Ethnic conflicts and discrimination were common, thus strengthened and justified Ahidjo's autocratic governance. The former British colonies (now North West and South West Provinces),

[27] English translation: "National School of Administration and Magistracy".

suffered the most, especially as power was concentrated in the political capital Yaounde. These regions were the least developed provinces in the country, with no developmental projects (except for few plantations inherited from the German colonial rule). English speaking Cameroonians were totally marginalized and not represented in Ahidjo's government. They were simply passive receivers of Ahidjo's autocratic rule. The Muslim Northerners dominated ministerial appointments, key government positions and the military. Infrastructure and road networks in the English-speaking regions were ignored and worn-out, and the economy relied on subsistence farming. The predicament of the English speakers remained ignored until Ahidjo's era of authoritarianism was replaced with Biya's 'New Deal' Government.

Biya's 'New Deal' Government

On the 4th of November 1982, the country underwent a dramatic political change, when Ahidjo resigned from the presidency and two days latter Paul Biya took over. Biya's reign started a new chapter in the political history Cameroon. Ahidjo was not prepared to relinquish all his power, as he planned to retain greater control of the government through his domination of the ruling party the CNU (Eyoh, 1998). Contrarily, the new president had his own plan, and had built a coalition strong enough to overwhelm Ahidjo (Cameroon-politics, 2002). On the 6th of April 1984 there was an abortive but bloody coup led by the Republican guards (of the former president). Biya prevailed in the coup and Ahidjo's CNU was converted to Biya's 'Cameroon People's Democratic Movement' (CPDM). Ministers, politicians and bureaucrats who were closely associated with the Ahidjo's regime and whose loyalties to Biya were uncertain were demoted or dismissed from their positions. Eyoh (1998) observed that the reconfiguration of the regime brought to an end the second and most active phase of the nation's construction. The gradual collapse of CPDM political aspirations saw the emergence of numerous other political parties, driving the country into anarchy.

Ahidjo resigned just before the country entered into a state of serious economic crises. In 1987 Biya declared that the country was facing serious economic crises, which soon became the political theme song of Biya and his entourage. 'Rigor' and 'moralization'

soon became the 'New Deal' watchwords though in practice, corruption, favoritism, and discrimination marked the socio-economic, political and cultural affairs of the country. Biya's inability to improve the economic situation caused popular frustration and escalated opposition to his government. He promoted patronage, undermined efficiency in government and marginalized the Northerners and the minority English speaking regions. Up to the late 1980s, Biya's leadership style created a series of political tension in the country. His 'rigor' and 'moralization' policy was on the verge of failing as it was largely opposed by the disgruntled masses and even undermined by members of his government. Corruption, nepotism, discrimination and patronage persisted unchallenged, and Northerners who had enjoyed political privileges under Ahidjo's reign saw it eroded in favor of the Beti people of Biya's ethnic group (Cameroon-Politics, 2002). Eyoh (1998: 255) observed that: *"After 1984, members of his Beti tribe, Bulu and related ethnic groups in the center, south and East provinces who also are misleadingly lumped as Beti's, Ewondo's or 'les Yaoundes', increasingly dominated the inner core of Biya's regime"*.

The high unemployment rates amongst English speaking Cameroonians soon became perennial. A political challenge to Biya's one party state developed. In 1990, Biya allows for a multiparty democracy. Notwithstanding, his government and regime thwarted any democratic endeavor with corruption, discrimination and intimidation of opposition parties and ideologies.

In 1991, Biya refused to allow the passing of a new constitution, thus provoking massive strikes particularly in the South of the country. The government's response involved brutal killings, rapes, tortures, detention without trial and gross human rights abuses, particularly in the two English-speaking provinces. In 1992, multiparty legislative elections were held and Biya won by a narrow majority. In October the same year, he also narrowly won the presidential elections with 39.9%. The main opposition party the Social Democratic Front (SDF) got 35.9% (Cameroon-Politics, 2002). Widespread accusations of election irregularities and fraud led to another massive sit down strikes, and rioting. The consequences in the opposition strongholds were brutal. People lost their

lives, some were detained without trial, and women were brutally raped, while others simply disappeared.

The country was at an economic stand still, and the 'Operation Ghost Town' only brought more suffering to the people and escalated the hatred for Biya's government. The opposition on June 25 1991 announced 'Operation Ghost', in an attempt to force the government to accede to their demands for a national conference. The campaign, which involves general civil disobedience, voluntary closing of businesses, sea and air ports, shops and taxi services, and the refusal to pay government taxes gained popularity in many parts of the country (Cameroon-Politics, 2002). Tension continued to mount in the country, giving the opposition time to gather more support and sympathizers. The 1997 legislative elections where again characterized by gross irregularities, fraud and rigging. This was the 'last straw', pitching the country in to a state of political anarchy. In October the same year, the main opposition parties, the SDF and the Northern based 'Union Nationale pour la Democratie et le Progress' (UNDP) boycotted the presidential elections. The SDF strongholds, which included, the two English speaking and Western provinces and the Muslim northerners were the leading oppositions in the country. These regions became the targets of Biya's centralized and autocratic government. Two years after the 1997 incident, a separatist movement, the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) consisting mainly of English speaking Cameroonians and their sympathizers seized the South West Provincial radio station and proclaimed the independence of the 'Federal Republic of Southern Cameroon'. This led to killings of the rebels and supporters as well as members of opposition parties, arrests and detention without trial, and other human rights abuses. Increasing, vociferous, calls for secession from Anglophones in Cameroon continue to grow in strength and support, and the government continues to marginalize and discriminate against English speaking Cameroonians (Cameroon-Politics, 2002). Recently, in October 2001, a peaceful demonstration in protest against such marginalization and discrimination in national politics and to demand equitable participation and political rights was met with ferocious and uncompromising military repression (Cameroon-politics, 2002). Thousands of people were injured, some

killed, rapes were common, arrests and detention without trial, children physically abused, and many more are still on the run, or in their hideouts abroad.

Given such a background, many Cameroonians desire to escape from the consequences of political instability. Supporters and sympathizers of opposition parties are often on the run, some looking for alternative residences outside the country. Those who cannot afford to migrate to Europe or America look for other alternatives elsewhere in the African continent. In Africa, South Africa appears a better choice, since it is cheaper, easier and accessible from Cameroon.

The political situation in Cameroon is reflected in the composition of the refugees. Of the respondents in my research 80.5% of Cameroonians interviewed are marginalized English speakers from the SDF opposition stronghold of the North West Province (NWP) of the country. Only 12.5% of respondents were from another English speaking province, the South West possibly because the regime has some political support in this region. Only 7% of the respondents of this research come from the French speaking provinces in Cameroon (reference Appendix 1, Table 4), reflecting the low level of political discontent in the French-speaking regions.

The Cameroonians interviewed for this research reflected the political dissatisfaction in their country in the reasons they gave for emigration. Of the total immigrants interviewed, up to 28% claimed that political instability was the main reason why they hated their country, 17% feel they were politically marginalized, 12% cited discrimination and corruption, 7% cited human rights abuses, and 36% complained of the economic crises in the country. The dissatisfaction amongst marginalized Cameroonians and their urge to move out of the country is equally reflected in some of their expressed views:

> What I fear most about Cameroon is the state of affairs of the country. Looking at the situations in other countries we can predict a lot of things to come in the future. My guess is there will one day be a brutal war in Cameroon, which will be more devastating than Africa has ever known. During that time, only those who will be out of the country will be sure of their lives.

Another Cameroonian immigrant explains similarly that:

> Since 1990, the country has not been peaceful. Anything can happen at anytime that is why I have always wanted to leave the country. When I could not make it for the US because of visa problems I had to come to South Africa, which is cheaper, and nearer.

The quotations cited above reflect the state of political anarchy prevailing in the country. Tension and fear amongst some Cameroonians have increased their urge and the impetus to emigrate to other regions. Political factors in Cameroon and Nigeria since independence can therefore be identified as major push factors, explaining why Cameroonians and Nigerians leave their home countries to other countries abroad.

Economic and humanitarian crises

The West African Socio-Economic Situation

Over the past two decades, economic survival has been one of the main reasons for international migration. In Africa, movements in search for better economic conditions are in the increase. The desire for economic progress seems to be one of the prime motives for migration. Hussein (1993) observed that these categories of migrants are termed *'economic refugees'*. Mitchell (1989: 36) comments that the evidence from Africa tends to show that: "*Africans rarely travel long distances if they can make money under satisfactory conditions at home"*. Mitchell's observation supports the contention that movements induced by economic motives are crucial factor making for migration in Africa.

In the West African sub-region, economic retrogression, reinforced by seriously deteriorating humanitarian conditions, has created an unfriendly economic atmosphere in the region. This fact has to a greater extent contributed to the recent influx of West Africans coming to South Africa. Since the opening of South Africa's doors to the rest of the international community, West Africans, many of them poor, unemployed and/or underemployed, saw South Africa as their new economic haven. Perhaps this explains why the majority of these immigrants appear to settle in Johannesburg, the economic capital of the country (Bouillon, 1999a). Potential migrants would want to go to areas

where conditions are economically favorable, and because they need better pay jobs, they tend to move for longer distances.

The extent to which migrants are motivated by economic concerns varies widely, both between countries and within immigrants from a single country. From my interviews conducted with Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants, 36% of Cameroonians claimed they left Cameroon because of the economic crises plaguing the country, while only 2.5% of Nigerians complained of economic problems in their country. According to a Cameroonian immigrant:

> Getting a job in Cameroon needs a big godfather[28]. If you don't have people in the government where you want to work then forget about the job. Sometimes, people bribe with money, which is more than their salaries, yet they still don't get a job.

Another Cameroonian immigrant recounts how he remained unemployed in Cameroon until he decided to look for employment in South Africa:

> When I got my first degree in 1994, I was unemployed until I came to South Africa in 1998. I visited all the big towns and schools just looking for a job, but each time I go somewhere I will be told that there are no vacancies. Once I was called up for an interview to teach in a secondary school but the salary was just a little bit above nothing so I refused. I realized that staying there would not do me any good so I decided to move out. I tried Germany and the US and fail because of insufficient funds, so South Africa was my last choice.

These accounts are suggestive evidence that some West Africans immigrants in South Africa migrated to South Africa for purely economic reasons.

A Cameroonian immigrant observed that he was motivated to come to South Africa when he heard that, one of his friends who only had a diploma in education was teaching in South Africa. He thought that with his first degree it would be relatively easier to get a job in South Africa. If his friend with just a diploma could find one easily, then he will find his even quicker with his first degree. Disappointedly, this immigrant noted how he has never been employed in South Africa: *"I came here with all the confidence that I will*

[28]A relative, or (family) friend who is holding a good position (elite) in government and/or can influence the employment decision.

get a teaching job, but each time I fax my Curriculum Vitae (CV) I hardly get a reply". For this immigrant, the perceived job availability in the country was the main pull factor that attracted him to South Africa.

Apart from economic difficulties acting as a push factor in the West African sub-region, difficulties in migrating to Europe and the United States, have led many West Africans to reconsider their choices of new destinations. Such difficulties include amongst others, the huge amount of money needed for a flight ticket, immigration authorities demands for bank statements, hotel reservations in the country of new residence and the high level of refusals of visa. Such factors have pushed immigrants to considering South Africa as a country of new destination (Bouillon, 1999b; Rogerson, 1997a). To travel to the United States from Cameroon for example will incur the following expenditures. The cost of getting a passport 50,000frs CFA[29] (approximately Rand 500), negotiating for a visa 1,500,000frs CFA (approximate Rand 15000), a flight ticket 800,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 8000), Hotel reservation 1,000,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 10,000) and a bank statement of 2,000,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 20,000) making a total of about 5,300,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 53,000). Details from a Cameroonian immigrant I interviewed for this research gave a breakdown of his total cost of immigrating to South Africa[30] as compare to the cost of traveling to the United State. It includes the cost of getting a passport 50,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 500), cost of negotiating for a visa 300,000frs CFA, (approximately Rand 3000), and a flight ticket of 400,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 4000) amounting in total of 750,000frs CFA (approximately Rand 7,500). The immigrant reported that he did not make any hotel reservation in South Africa because he had so many friends in South Africa. For this immigrant, it is cheaper to travel to South Africa than to Europe or the United States, which might cost millions of Francs CFA. From a comparative point of view, it is in fact cheaper to travel to South Africa from Cameroon, costing in all approximately Rand 7,500 than to the United States, which will cost about Rand 53,000. The Cameroon Radio

[29] Communaute Financiere Afircaine
[30] These approximations were based on the Dollar/Rand exchange rate at the time this research was being conducted.

and Television Cooperation (CRTV) expressed the difficulties of traveling abroad in *'Cameroon Calling'* of Sunday 15 September 2002 as follows:

> The trend in recent years has been the intension of many Cameroonians to obtain visas for permanent residence either in Europe or America. That's why everyday, there are long queues in front of some foreign embassies based in Yaounde. In this light, the embassies of United States of America, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Holland, Belgium, Spain and even Canada are often the most crowed with visa applicants. Because of these large numbers of applicants, getting a visa to enter any of these countries is no easy affair. The difficulties stem from the fact that most of these countries want to restrict the number and kind of immigrants entering their countries (Websi, 2002: 1).

The American Green Card Visa lottery instituted by the United States government in 1995 did not open the doors for many Cameroonians to enter the United States. Statistics for 1999 show that out of a total of 6000 Cameroonian applicants for a United States visa, only 2,073 obtained such visa and left for the United States. In the same year, 1,164 Cameroonians were declared winners of the American visa lottery, but only 737 Cameroonians finally obtained the visas for the United States. More winners were declared in 2001 but the number of visas issued dropped to just 700 (Websi, 2002).

Since the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001 on the United States, there has been more rigorous control of the visa procedure. On September 11th 2002, the United States embassy in Yaounde issued a press statement announcing that: *"More screening measures for visa applications are in the pipeline and may lead to substantial delays of up to six weeks, eight weeks or even more before a visa can be issued"* (Websi, 2002: 2). The same difficulties of obtaining a visa are experienced with other embassies of Western European countries. Consequently, more and more Cameroonians are reconsidering other cheaper, easier and nearer destinations. At this juncture, the geographical proximity between Cameroon and South Africa plays an important role, as a factor influencing West African immigration to South Africa. South Africa is closer to Cameroon than Cameroon is to the United States; it is easier to travel to South Africa, and to visit Cameroon from South Africa than from the United States. Equally important is the fact that, information about South Africa is easily accessible than those of Europe or the

United States (Hussein, 1993; Gomel, 1992). For most potential immigrants in Cameroon, taking into consideration the factors mentioned above, South Africa appears to be the best option around them.

Having examined the role of political instability and economic hardship influencing West African immigration to South Africa, the discussion will now focus on how communication and technological advances are influencing immigration to South Africa.

Communication and technological advances

Communication and technological advances have contributed tremendously towards population movements worldwide. Such advances: *"has resulted in people having more information at their disposal and being better able to make more informed decisions regarding the feasibility to migrate"* (Hussein, 1993: 8). In the same line of thought, Loescher (1992) believes that television and radio has brought to people, particularly in third world countries, an understanding of their own poverty and lack of other socio-cultural and political facilities. Exposure to images of the more affluent life in developed countries, have largely strengthens the desire for people to migrate. Hussein (1993: 8) further argues: *"The communication and technology revolution has underlined the truism that we are all resident of a global village, while at the same time undermining the sovereignty of the nation-state"*. The situation is no different if one considers West African immigration to South Africa. The role of communication and technological advances in influencing West African immigration to South Africa can be view from three different perspectives.

First, exposure over the media of better socio-economic facilities in South Africa has resulted to potential West African migrants having more information about South Africa. According to a Cameroonian immigrant I interviewed for this research: *"The first time I saw Johannesburg in CRTV*[31]*, I told my self it is just like Europe"*. Further discussion with this immigrant demonstrated that because he could not afford the cost of traveling to Europe, he decided to emigrate to South Africa because: *"it is also developed like*

[31] Cameroon Radio and Television

Europe". Such conception about South Africa was implanted into this immigrant from images of more affluent lifestyle he saw on the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV).

Second, communication of immigrants to relatives at home, involving traditional technologies like letter writing and face-to-face contacts has also influenced West African immigration to South Africa. Immigrants traveling home for holidays and other business purposes, usually carry letters to friends and relatives back home. These letters carry information about better conditions and job possibilities in South Africa, increasing the impetus for potential migrants to migrate. From the interviews I conducted with Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrants living in Hillbrow, 61% of Cameroonians, and 95% of Nigerians had friends and relatives who had passed on information about better facilities in South Africa prior to their coming. Only 39% of Cameroonians and 5% of Nigerians immigrants interview for this research didn't have friends or relatives in the country before coming. In addition, when immigrants visit their home country, they often tell friends and relatives about better facilities and job possibilities in South Africa.

Third, communication of immigrants to relatives and friends at home, using new technologies like emails and cell-phones has also influenced West African immigration to South Africa. Through these new technologies, immigrants can easily pass on information about the affluent lifestyles they are experiencing in South Africa. The immigrants I interviewed for this research have contacts with their home countries through emails and telephones. Through these contacts, immigrants in South Africa are able to expose better facilities in South Africa to potential immigrants in Cameroon. This kind of information usually acts as pull factors for migration. A Nigerian immigrant reported as follows: *"I sent an email to a friend telling him about my car and he started begging me to do every thing possible so that he too can come here"*. Another Cameroonian immigrant observed that when he got his security job in central Johannesburg, he told his relative back home about the job, and: *"every one of my friends wants to come to South Africa"*. It appears from the above quotations that many potential immigrants in the sub-region assume finding a job or getting a car in South Africa is

relatively easier, than in their home countries. This presumption will certainly portray South Africa as an attractive country to potential migrants.

The Role of Precedence

Precedence as a factor influencing West African immigration to South Africa appears to be highly related with communication and technology as well as adventurous spirit. Pioneer West Africans who smoothly migrated into the country in the early 1990s set the scene for other West Africans willing to migrate to South Africa. Improved communication and technological advances like the mass media have exposed South Africa for potential adventurous West Africans. I interviewed an immigrant who had relatives in South Africa prior to his coming and he reported as follows: *"I was not worried in any way when I was coming here, because my brother was already here for two years, running a fruit and vegetable shop. I knew that if things come to the worse I would work in his shop".* It appears that the pioneer West African immigrant population in South Africa is a strong pull factor attracting other West African immigrants into the country. The presence of pioneer immigrant population in South Africa ensures socio-economic security of subsequent immigrants entering the country. My research findings show that 61% of Cameroonians and 95% of Nigerians had friends and/or relatives in South Africa prior to their coming to South Africa (reference Appendix 1, Table 7). These friends and relatives have facilitated their coming to South Africa. Hussein (1993: 9) observed similarly with Mozambican immigrants in South Africa noting that: *"This makes the relocation of subsequent arrivals less costly".* In a similar study, Gomel (1992) observed that the large concentration of Turks and Yugoslavians in Germany is due to their initial immigrant population in Germany.

Socio-cultural factors

People who suffer from social discrimination, a resultant of political and economic exclusion, have a higher tendency to migrate than those who are not. Early Indians who came to the colony of Natal as indentured labourers in the sugarcane plantations serve as a good example (Hussein, 1993). These Indians (Harijans or the lowest caste in the Indian political system), suffered from political as well as economic discrimination in their

country of origin. Hussein, (1993: 7) observed about these group of Indians as follows: *"Recognizing that they could not improve their lot in any significant way in their homeland, they chose to relocate to Natal and attempt to build a brighter future"*. Similarly, with English speaking Cameroonians and South Eastern Nigerians, both groups of people suffering from political discrimination and resultantly from socio-economic discrimination, relocation appeared to be a better option for them. Marginalised English-speaking Cameroonians are potential migrants because they hope to escape the discrimination they suffer in their home countries. In an attempt for discriminated Cameroonians to improve on their life standards, some have chosen South Africa more especially as it is an English speaking country. Perhaps this fact also explains why the majority of Cameroonian immigrants in South Africa come from the English speaking provinces of Cameroon.

Political and economic discrimination on an ethnic regional basis is a factor in the decision to emigrate for Nigerians as well as Cameroonians. In Nigeria it is believed that: *"people from the South eastern part of the country are only good in business because politics and education are for the favored Northern and Westerners"* observed a Nigerian immigrant when asked why he chose to settle in South Africa. It would not be surprising therefore; if more English-speaking Cameroonians, and South-Eastern Nigerians dominated the Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrant population in South Africa (reference Appendix 1, Table 4).

Tradition of migration

The common saying that: *"Everywhere in the world, even in hell, you will find a Nigerian"* is equally true for most West Africans. There is a tradition of turning to migration as a solution to personal and social problems in that region. As Zachariah and Conde (1981:31) observe: *"Long-distance migration is not new in West Africa; it has been a way of life for many young men in several parts of the region during much of the century"*. Elsewhere, Devine (1988: 4) had established such tradition of migration amongst the Scottish people noting that: *"Population mobility was already extensive before the mid-eighteenth century but became even more common later as befitted the*

pace of economic and social change". International migration in the West African sub-region developed to the present state in several stages (Adepoju, 1995; Zachariah and Conde, 1981). Before the colonial period, entire villages and clans were forced to move due to tribal warfares, and/or other natural disasters. During the colonial period, people moved long distances to join colonial army, and manpower in colonial plantations. In Ghana and the Ivory Coast for example, when manpower was in short supply: *"labour was brought in from countries such as Upper Volta often by force and with the convenience and assistance of local tribal chiefs"* (Zachariah and Conde, 1981:31). People from the North West of Cameroon, and the Igbos in Nigeria moved to work in the rubber, banana and cocoa plantations in the South West of Cameroon. Forced migration eventually gave way to migration of contract labour, an indirect forced movement through which local leaders were paid for providing a fixed number of workers for plantations or public works (Adepoju, 1995; Zachariah and Conde, 1981). When forced migration was finally abolished, Zachariah and Conde (1981: 31) observed that: *"Migration had become customary among the young men of Upper Volta and other interior parts of the region, a folkway sustained by economic and social pressure at home and incentives at the places of destination".*

Socio-economic and political pressures in the West African sub-region made life for most young West Africans unattainable especially when more attractive alternatives exist elsewhere. Zachariah and Conde (1981: 31) argue that: *"Many young men opted for these alternatives and many continue to do so".* Similarly, Adepoju (1995) observed that in West Africa, commercial migration and movements connected with trade and evangelization were so customary that migrants have considered most part of the region as a free zone within which people move freely.

Today, political instability, economic hardship and other forms of socio-cultural discrimination in the West African sub-region have added more impetus in some West African to explore other areas. Of course personal psychology is also a factor in the decision to emigrate. Hussein (1993: 14) noted that: *"There are personalities which are resistant to change- change of residence as well as other changes and there are*

personalities which welcome change for its own sake". Some individuals need to be seriously provoked before they can migrate, while others will migrate as soon as there is the slightest provocation (Hussein, 1993). But, a tradition of migrancy can foster an adventurous spirit, and this seems to be the case amongst West Africans who come to South Africa. South Africa came to be seen as a channel for this adventurous spirit with her democratization and opening to the world in 1994. Many West Africans who could not explore Europe or the United States because of the red tapes involve saw South Africa as a favorable alternative. Ever since, the country has become even more attractive to potential adventurous West Africans. No single factor is responsible for West African immigration to South Africa. A combination of the factors discussed above, and the role of 'family pride', which follows below are responsible for such West-South movement (see Figure 3 below). The section that follows will examine the role of 'family pride' in influencing West Africa immigration to South Africa.

FAMILY PRIDE

It appears family pride also plays an important role in West African immigration to South Africa. As will be shown in chapters Six and Seven, most West Africans in South Africa are unemployed, and suffer from serous xenophobia. Notwithstanding, more West Africans continue to immigrate to South Africa. The yet unanswered question is why these immigrants continue to come to South Africa despite the discrimination and xenophobia they experience in the country. As shown earlier, technology permits high level of communication between South Africa and Cameroon. Hence, any assumption that the continuous inflow of West Africans into South Africa might be due to communication gap is probably a fallacy. Migrants are well informed about conditions in South Africa before arriving. Why then do migrants still come, although fully aware of the unemployment situation of other West Africans in South Africa? This section attempts an explanation of this puzzle, using 'family pride' as a possible reason why West Africans continue to come to South Africa despite the discrimination and xenophobic experiences they encounter in the country. Before attempting such an explanation, the section will first examine the socio-cultural ethos of the family in one of the countries studied, Cameroon.

One characteristic feature of African migration is perhaps the fact that, the decision to move is fundamentally a family and not an individual decision. Growing evidence from micro-studies and from theoretical works on question of migration suggests that, the volume, type of movement, the particular family member to emigrate, the destination and whether the venture is permanent or temporary may all be affected by family decision (Goldstein and Goldstein 1981). The importance of remittances in African migration is a reflection of the important role of the family in migration (Adepoju, 1995). When African families sponsor one or more of their family relations abroad, as an economic survival strategy to engage in the labor migration system, they gain respect from other families simply for having a family member(s) abroad. This emerging feature in African migration reinforces the dual household phenomenon, which establishes a second home in the migrant's country of new residence (Adepoju, 1995). I will now focus on the West African sub-region, the study area of this research.

In most West African countries, a successful and happy family means much more than just the parents having a good job, and the children attending good schools. In Cameroon for example, a happy and perhaps respected family is one with family members abroad. Such families are admired in their neighborhoods, and acquire a social status in the society, which commands much respect. According to a Cameroonian immigrant working as a security guard in South Africa: *"I had to leave the country at all cost, and remove the shame on my family"*. This immigrant further mentioned that, because he could only afford a flight ticket up to Zimbabwe, he had to take the risk of crossing the Gonarezhou National Park[32], before entering South Africa: *"I didn't mind what will happened all I wanted was to enter South Africa and let my people in Cameroon know that I succeeded"*. It appears emigrating out of ones country bestow a certain status on the emigrant's family. In a similar study by Schapera on Botswana, Mitchell observed that migration enhances the status of young men, while *"girls prefer men who have face the risk of town life, and have shown that they are willing to work for the support of the*

[32] Located in the South Eastern boarders of Zimbabwe and is linked with the Kruger National Park in South Africa.

family" (Mitchell, 1989: 34). Similarly, in Cameroon, such status and pride are bestowed on the family, and intermarriages between families with members abroad are becoming easier and frequent. The whole idea rests on the shared pride of the two families, usually admired by other families without family members abroad. Mitchell observed similarly with the Alur in East Africa the prestige migration confer on young men. This growing value of migration is taking a stronghold in some Cameroonian families.

In Cameroon, it is not uncommon to hear traditional idioms like '*how many farms do you have abroad'* from elderly people in a typical drinking environment. Also, in a typical invitation card for marriages, deaths and other ceremonies, there is a special column stressing on the number and countries with relatives of the host of the ceremony. Thus, the number of family members abroad is a measure of the prestige of the family. It really does not matter whether these relatives abroad will be attending the ceremony or not. This pride in some cases overshadows the choice of where some families want their relatives to take up new residence. All they want to achieve is to have at least a family member abroad, so that the rest of the family members can equally enjoy the reputation that follows. I interviewed an immigrant why she opted to come to South Africa and not to Europe or the United States and she replied as follows: *"I had tried those places and it was difficult for me. All my parents wanted was to see me go abroad like other people around, they didn't mind where, they just want to have their child abroad like other families".* This research observed that such family prestige/pride plays an important role in motivating some West Africans to immigrate to South Africa. The following case studies below throw more light, and illustrate the significance of family pride as a push factor of migration in the West African sub-region.

Case study one

A Cameroonian immigrant living in Braamfontein left Cameroon on the 27th of November 1998 for South Africa. While in Cameroon, he was a relatively highly paid lecturer in a Government Teachers Training College (GTTC) in Kambe[33], with a salary of

[33] Kambe is a small town in the North West Province of Cameroon, and the divisional headquarters of Donga-Mantung Division

about 200,000 FRS CFA approximately Rand 2000. Though he complained in the course of my discussion with him that his salary in Cameroon was small, from Cameroon standards, he could be classed amongst the highest paid civil servants in the country. Since this immigrant entered South Africa, he has never been formally employed, but he is self-employed. He sells ethnic goods sent to him by his family from Cameroon on door-to-door basis. He claims that he makes about Rand 5000 a month. Considering the standard of living, and the life style in both Cameroon and South Africa, this immigrant could be considered better off in Cameroon than he presently is in South Africa. He commented: *"Things are more difficult and expensive here than in Cameroon. The money I make just barely take care of my needs because I can't save like I used to in Cameroon"*. He explains that what really motivated him to come to South Africa was the social pressure from his family and his community: *"Everybody was going abroad and when people see me they always asked me when am I also going"*. He recounted that those who were abroad often send remittances to their families, and his own family felt belittled because none of his family members were abroad. When suggested to him that may be his family felt belittled because they also wanted remittances from abroad like other families, he replied as follows: *"It was not because of the cars these people were sending to their families, because my dad is rich and driving a good car. I had a good job with a good salary. I could have done any thing for them. It was just for the pride of it"*. When asked to further justify what he has just said, he continues as follows: *"one of our neighbors who had a child in the US used to walk around like a lord. They didn't even have a car like we do, but they always feel they are superior to us"*. He further reported that this motivated his family to send one of them abroad. Successive attempts to secure an American visa failed. Attempts to travel to Germany were also not successful because of language barriers: *"Yet I had to do something and make my family happy and proud"*. It was only after all unsuccessful attempts to travel to the US and Germany that the immigrant decided to travel to South Africa. According to this immigrant, his reasons for choosing South Africa were, first because it was affordable to travel to South Africa, and second, because it is also prestigious to have a family member abroad. The immigrant was further asked if, considering his conditions in South Africa he would like to return to

his home country and he replied accordingly: *"I think my family feels proud of having their son abroad and I also feel proud that at least my family now has someone abroad"*.

On arriving in South Africa, this immigrant suddenly becomes the pride of his family, and experienced an increased sense of self-esteem. The aspect of family pride in this case actually led to a decrease in overall family income. Notwithstanding, the family remains proud and happy for having one of their members abroad. It appears that, in Cameroon, having a family member abroad is a social achievement, which elevates the family prestige. Perhaps having a family member abroad place the family in a certain class usually accompanied with a lot of respect. The above case study for example demonstrates such achievement, and the respect that follows as a result of having a family member in South Africa. Many other families in Cameroon with family members abroad usually carry such sense of achievement, and command a lot of respect in their communities. Schiller and Fouron (2001) also observed that amongst Haitians, having a family member in the US maintains the family pride, usually reinforced by remittances and the frequent visits of the immigrant to his home country.

From the Cameroonian case study above, the main reason why the immigrant came to South Africa was the family desire to have a family member abroad, and the need to establish that pride of having a family member abroad. It is clear from the discussion that the immigrant comes from a relatively wealthy family hence; the issue of economic reasons motivating his emigration from Cameroon to South Africa is out of the question. The immigrant was also a government employee in Cameroon, with an attractive pay package. It could therefore not have been economic reasons that motivated him to emigrate out of Cameroon to South Africa. The immigrant had abandoned his job in Cameroon to travel abroad, where he has been unemployed ever since, and has remained in South Africa for the sake of maintaining his family pride. The pride derived from having a family member abroad was the main motivating factor that influenced the immigrant's coming to South Africa.

Case study two

Another Cameroonian immigrant told me that she was motivated to come to South Africa because she knew someone who came to South Africa, and just after two years, she was able to bring two of her relatives to join her. But again, her family influenced her coming to South Africa in a considerable extent. As she explains: *"It was like a competition in our community. Everyday you hear someone has gone to Germany or America and people around will respect that family. My family too wanted me to go out and they kept on putting pressure on me to do something"*. She further explained that her family didn't want her to study in Cameroon because: *"You see it is a big prestige for a family to have their child studying abroad"*. Even though this immigrant is not studying in South Africa, she claims that she hopes to study one day when she has raise enough money to take care of her studies. I asked the immigrant if she would like to return to her home country and continue with her studies and she replied as follows: *"I don't mind studying anywhere as long as I am studying, but I am sure my family will prefer I stay here in South Africa than studying in Cameroon"*. This immigrant was further asked why her parents hated the idea of studying in Cameroon and she replied: *"I think for them going out is more important than studying. They think life is better and they feel satisfied that I am abroad"*. This all suggests that, sending a family member abroad is a family achievement and maintains family pride just like the first case study discussed above.

It is certain from the discussions held with this immigrant that her family and neighbours contributed in influencing her emigration from Cameroon. Since many people around her were moving abroad, and earning 'respect' for their families, her family also wanted such respect; hence, they pressurized her to emigrate. Her parents actually wanted her to study abroad as they claimed: *'it is a big prestige for the family'*, but they did not take any steps to finance her education or to help her get access to a college in South Africa. It seems that the prestige of having a child abroad overrides other considerations.

Case study three

Another immigrant, who came to South Africa in April 1999, has been unemployed ever since. However, sometimes he gets part-time teaching jobs in South Africa. He had just

finished his university education in Cameroon, but was forced to travel out of the country due to social pressure. First, he claimed that in Cameroon he had no friends because all his friends had traveled abroad: *"All my friends had gone to Germany and the United States and I was just alone in the neighbourhood"*. The lack of friends around his neighborhood, and the desire to travel abroad like his friends were motivating factors why he had to travel out of his country. According to this immigrant: *"Most people thought I was not serious because all my friends had left and I was not attempting in any way to travel abroad"*. This immigrant had to travel abroad, to prove a point around his neighborhood that he is a serious person. He claimed that he really didn't have any intensions of traveling, not the least to South Africa because he didn't want to put his family under any kind of financial constraints. I further interviewed this immigrant if he thinks his family could have afforded the cost of traveling abroad, and the discussion showed that, both of his parents were civil servants who could afford to pay for his expenses to travel anywhere in the world. It appears that the immigrant's mother wanted him to travel abroad no matter where and how. When I asked why his mother was so adamant about his traveling abroad, the immigrant replied as follows: *"Cameroon has reached a stage that it was boring for her to see me each day staying at home. She comes back from work; she wanted to be like other women around the neighbourhood who have children abroad"*. Despite the fact that his parents are well to do Cameroonians as the immigrant claims, they wanted to achieve something by sending their child abroad. This immigrant was a teacher in his home country with a salary of about 20, 000 frs CFA. Though his job was on a part time basis, he claimed that he was doing other businesses, which were earning him a lot of money. It could not be assumed therefore that his mother was pushing him out of Cameroon because he was ideal or unemployed. The immigrant claimed that even though his family was fully aware of the difficulties foreigner faced in South Africa, they still supported his traveling to South Africa. The immigrant reports:

> My mother's friend had a son in South Africa, and he was my friend too. Every since he came here he used to send mails telling us about the difficulties he is facing in South Africa. He will tell us how difficult it is to get a job, the xenophobia and the killings in South Africa. This did not disturb my mother in any way. Instead she was happy that I am going to South Africa. She even throws a sendoff party for me the night before I left for South Africa.

Further discussion with the immigrant to find out why his mother was so interested in his traveling abroad, demonstrated that the immigrant's mother actually admires her friends who had children abroad. According to the immigrant: *"My mother always visits her friends who have children abroad, and when she comes home she will praise them just because they have their children abroad"*. The family pressure on this immigrant to travel abroad influenced his emigration from Cameroon to South Africa. The immigrant recounted as follows: "*I noticed that my family wanted me to travel abroad but they can't sponsor my trip. All my family was interested in, was for me to travel abroad they didn't mind how or where"*. For this immigrant's family it is not important where their child is emigrating to, what is important is the pride and respect the family will gain if their child travels out of the country.

This immigrant was forced by his family to travel abroad to South Africa. Perhaps he chooses South Africa because he could not afford the cost of traveling to Europe or the United States. To begin with, he was not comfortable with the fact that most (if not all, as he claimed) of his friends were out of the country, and that spurred up his desire for traveling abroad. He also felt that he had to impress people in his neighbourhood. His reasons for traveling abroad could not be tied down to economic ones because the immigrant was employed in his home country. Yet the family encouraged their son to travel to South Africa. The family desire for the pride of having a son abroad was the main reason why the immigrant traveled abroad, which at the same time is an achievement on the part of the family.

What these case studies suggest is the impossibility of understanding migration in simple economic terms. Questions of social status, in the form of family pride, were crucial to the decision to emigrate.

Figure 3: Factors influencing West African immigration into South Africa

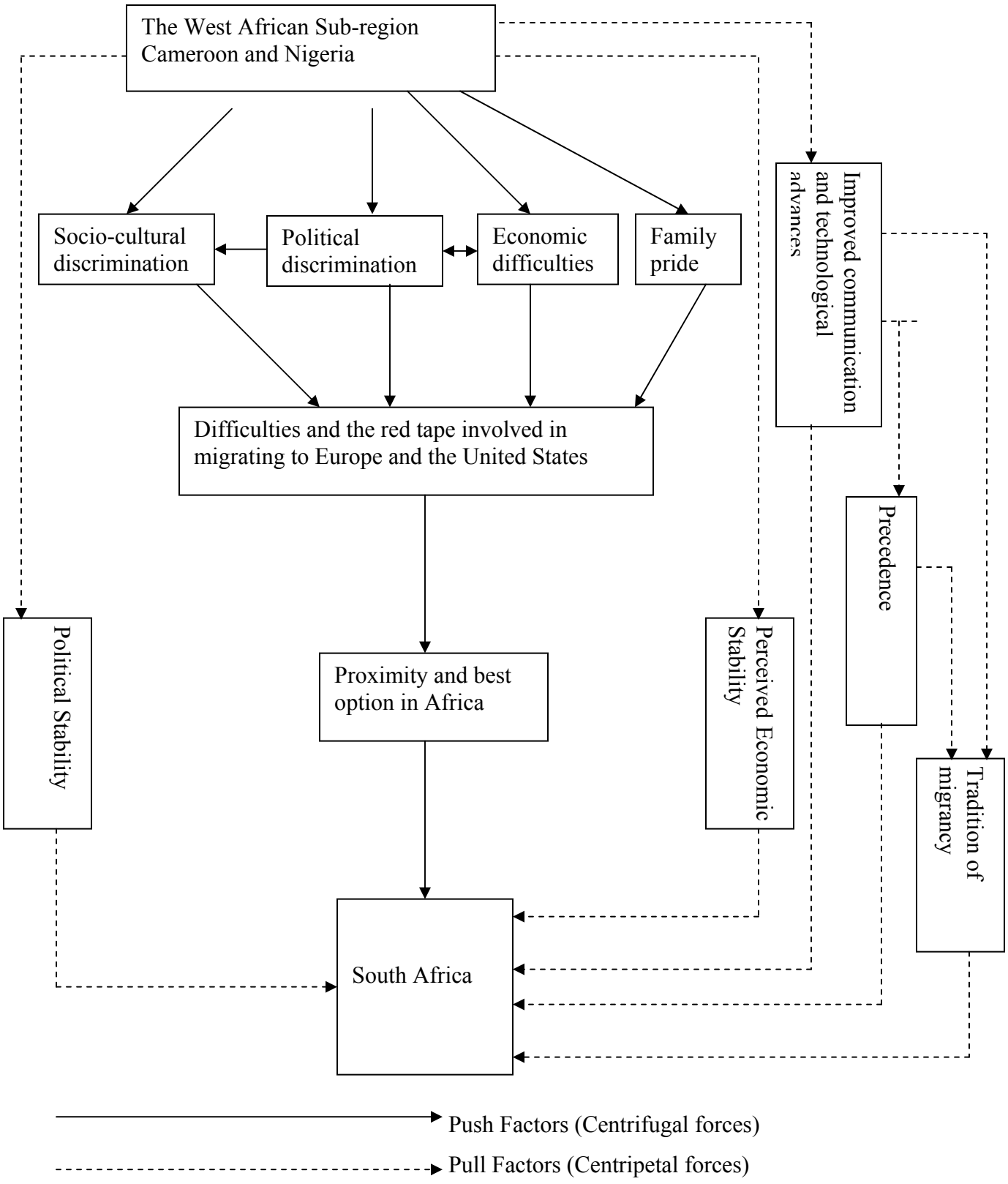


Figure 3 above, presents a model of the different push and pull factors, and how they are interrelated in influencing West African immigration to South Africa. With regard to the push factors, represented in the model with continuous arrows, include political instabilities which more or less lead to socio-cultural discrimination, economic difficulties, and the role of family pride are major centrifugal forces pushing West Africans particularly Nigerians and Cameroonians out of the sub-region. Because of financial difficulties and the red tape involved in migrating to Europe and the United States, potential migrants look for alternative, cheaper and nearer options. In Africa, South Africa seems the best of these options. With regards to the centripetal forces pulling West Africans into South Africa, political stability, perceived economic and other social opportunities in South Africa are amongst the most commonly discussed. In addition to these centripetal forces are factors such as improved communication and technological advances (the mass media, the Internet, photographs, cellular phones, cameras and airplanes) have exposed better conditions and opportunities in South Africa. Pioneer West Africans who entered South Africa in the late 1980s also made this exposure possibly. As a result, it has increased the impetus of some potential West Africans to explore South Africa. In addition, family pressure seems to have been important in decisions to migrate.

CONCLUSION

West Africans are found all over the world and not just in South Africa. Amongst the very first West Africans in South Africa, are probably Ghanaians who entered the country in the early 1980s as teachers and nurses. Many reasons account for West Africa Diaspora particularly to South Africa. They include amongst others socio-cultural, geographical proximity, communication and technological advances, as well as political and economic factors. However, these factors do not influence West African migration to South Africa in isolation to themselves. It is the combination of these factors that influence West Africans immigration to South Africa. Apart from these well-known factors, it is also prestigious for a family to have a relative abroad. This too has contributed to an extent in influencing some West Africans to immigrate to South Africa.

The West African sub-region is identified as the new source countries supplying immigrants into South Africa (McDonald *et al,* 1999; Rogerson, 1997a). The presence of West Africans in South Africa only became noticeable in the early 1990s when the South African democratic transition practically opened the country's doors to the rest of the world. Notwithstanding, other factors also contributed to their coming to South Africa. If assumed that international migration is a human response to specific situation, both in the sending and receiving countries, then the roots of West African immigration to South Africa become more understandable. More practically, West Africans have well enough reasons why they left their countries of origin, and at the same time why they choose to come to South Africa. Although these reasons are not considered in isolation to themselves, in this Chapter, they are discussed separately.

Political instability in the West African sub-region is a major centrifugal force propelling West Africans out of the region. Civil strife, wars, armed insurrections, disturbances prior to and post elections, inter and intra-state conflicts are common in the sub-region (Rasheed, 1996). In Cameroon and Nigeria for example, political instability, military coups and take over, disturbances that follow party politics have plunged these countries into a continuous state of anarchy. Secessionist, opposition members and minority groups in these countries are amongst the most vulnerable. Hussein (1993) observed that these categories of people are potential migrants, and would migrate to places, which are affordable, peaceful and nondiscriminatory. To escape from these persecutions some West Africans have emigrated from their countries of origin to better off countries. Europe and the United States are popular destination for these immigrants, except that some of them cannot meet up with the financial and other obligations involve. As a result, some of them are looking for other affordable and less demanding options like South Africa.

Economic hardship in the West African sub-region has increased the number of what Hussein (1993) termed 'economic refugees'. Reinforced by political instabilities, wars, and difficulties in migrating to developed countries, the economic desires of West Africans to emigrate are made even stronger. High unemployment rates amongst

marginalized Cameroonians and Nigerians for example act as a push factor from their countries, while perceived employment possibilities and other social facilities in South Africa act a pull factor especially to immigrants who cannot make it to Europe and the United States. In a similar study on Haitian immigrants in the United States, Schiller and Fouron (2001) observed that the high rates of emigration of Haitians in to the United States is as a result of the deteriorating economic conditions in Haiti, acting as a push factor; while improved socio-economic environment in the United States are acting as a pull factor. Geographical proximity between West African countries and South Africa makes it easier for West Africans to travel to South Africa. In addition, information about South Africa is easily assessable within the African continent than those of distant Europe and the United States. Precedence as a factor equally plays a role in the number of West Africans in South Africa. Pioneer West Africans who entered the country in the early 1990s acted as pull factor for potential migrants in their home countries. All these factors support the choice of South Africa for some West Africans particularly Cameroonians and Nigerians.

Nigerians and Cameroonians, who are discriminated against and marginalized in their home countries, simultaneously suffer from social discrimination. Such social discrimination adds an impetus to adventurous West Africans who would want to start a new life elsewhere. For some of these immigrants, South Africa is even better as there are attractive features in the country such as English language as one of South Africa's official languages. The commonality of language (English), spoken in South Africa, Nigeria and some parts of Cameroon could be considered as an attractive feature in South Africa. Family pride also plays an important role in West African immigration into South Africa. In the West African sub-region, having a relative abroad is a family achievement and contributes immensely to the prestige of the family. Some families would want to send their relatives abroad just to enjoy the prestige and respect that follows such value. Hence some families go all out to send their relatives to areas that they can afford the financial obligations involved. In Africa, South Africa is one of such places thus explaining why West immigrants continue to immigrate into the country.

Finally, in most cases, no single factor has an ultimate say in influencing West African immigration to South Africa. The factors discussed above are mutually reinforcing and jointly act as push and pull factors influencing West Africans to immigrate to South Africa (see Figure 3 above). For example, political instability in the sub-region combined with economic hardship will add an impetus in some West Africans to explore other areas like South Africa. The succeeding Chapter will examine immigrants' interaction with state institution, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).