

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

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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 undertakings. 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 life 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.

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*To my deceased family, sister Patricia Chamba, brother Jude Chamba, and my
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

List of Tables

Abbreviations

Acknowledgements

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND THE STUDY

AREA.....	1
Introduction.....	1
The Objectives of the study.....	2
The structure of the thesis.....	3
The study Area (Hillbrow).....	9
Why was Hillbrow selected for the research?.....	9
The history of West African immigration into Hillbrow: <i>From a white reserve to a West African stronghold...</i>	12
The period between 1977 and 1985: The breakdown of segregation.....	13
The period between 1985 and 1992: Hillbrow becomes African.....	17
The period between 1992 and 2003: Hillbrow becomes an immigrant area.....	20
West African immigrants-who are they?.....	22
How many are they?.....	22

Definition of terms.....	24
Immigration/Emigration.....	24
Immigrant ethnic minority.....	24
Ethnicity.....	25
Identity.....	25
Diaspora.....	26
Xenophobia/Westaphobia.....	27
Push and Pull factors.....	27
Asylum seekers/Refugees.....	28
Transnationalism/Transmigrants.....	29
Conclusion.....	30
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Methodology adopted for the present study.....	34
Review of primary and secondary materials.....	34
The survey (Interview schedule).....	34
Introduction.....	34
Organization and objectives of the survey questionnaires (interview schedule).....	35
Selecting the respondents (Snowball sampling).....	36
Piloting the questionnaire.....	38
Administering the questionnaires (interview schedule).....	39
Limitations of the survey (interview schedule).....	41

In-depth interviews.....	42
Selecting the respondents (Direct request and snowballing).....	43
Observation.....	45
Introduction.....	45
The use of direct observation.....	45
Objectives of direct observation.....	46
Limitations and problems encountered with direct observation.....	47
Covert participant observation.....	48
Limitations of covert participant observation.....	49
Analysis of the data collected.....	50
Conclusion.....	52
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	53
Introduction.....	53
International migration and the formation of ethnic minority.....	54
Contemporary global migration flow.....	56
Factors influencing international migration.....	59
Theories in migration.....	60
The gravity model.....	60
Zipf's Inverse Distance law.....	60

Stouffer's Law of intervening opportunities.....	61
Ravenstein's law of migration.....	61
The push pull theory.....	62
The formation of immigrants' ethnic minorities.....	64
Definition.....	64
Towards an immigrant ethnic minority group.....	65
Ethnicity and identity formation.....	68
Case studies in the United States and Europe.....	75
Experiences in the United States.....	75
Experiences in Europe.....	78
Minority groups and resistance to discrimination.....	82
The Congolese response to majority hostilities and discrimination.....	83
Conclusion.....	85

CHAPTER FOUR: WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRATION TO

SOUTH AFRICA.....88

Introduction.....	88
Migration to South Africa.....	90
The SADC experience.....	90
Factors favoring migration within the SADC region into South Africa.....	92
The West African experience.....	93

Regional political instability.....	94
The Nigerian situation.....	95
The Cameroonian situation.....	98
Ahidjo’s authoritarianism.....	100
Biya’s “New Deal” Government.....	101
Economic and Humanitarian crises.....	105
The West African situation.....	105
Communication and technological advances.....	109
The role of precedence.....	111
Socio-cultural factors.....	111
Tradition of migration.....	112
Family pride.....	114
Case study one.....	116
Case study two.....	119
Case study three.....	119
Conclusion.....	123

**CHAPTER FIVE: WEST AFRICANS AND THEIR
INTERACTION WITH THE STATE: *THE
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS*.....127**

Introduction.....	127
Why the Braamfontein Department of Home Affairs.....	128

Changing immigration policies: Implications for West African immigrants.....	129
The Aliens Control Act: A key cause of xenophobia.....	134
The Alien Control Act of 1991 (ACA).....	136
The new refugee Act of December 1998.....	139
The Department of Home Affairs.....	143
The night walk to Braamfontein Home Affairs office.....	144
The Braamfontein Department of Home Affairs office.....	146
The role of interpreters in the Home Affairs Office.....	150
Becoming an asylum seeker.....	152
Conclusion.....	160
CHAPTER SIX: COPING WITH XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	165
Introduction.....	165
The emergence and causes of xenophobia.....	167
A neo-racism.....	170
Xenophobia in South Africa.....	172
Causes of xenophobia in South Africa.....	176
The role of the media in perpetuating xenophobia.....	181
The fear and dislike of West Africans: ‘ <i>WEST-A-PHOBIA</i> ’.....	185

The socially excluded in South Africa.....	189
Unemployment and low income.....	191
Poor housing/living conditions.....	194
Belonging to minority ethnic groups.....	196
Xenophobia and West African Identity.....	197
Dressing and hairstyle.....	198
Learning the local languages and dancing styles.....	200
Making more South African friends.....	202
Changing legal status.....	203
Joining social clubs and organizing social get-together....	205
Formation of social organizations and clubs.....	208
West African Associations in South Africa.....	209
Conclusion.....	211
CHAPTER SEVEN: STRATEGIES FOR SOCIO- ECONOMIC SURVIVAL.....	213
Introduction.....	213
Success through exclusion.....	213
Hillbrow: The West African enclave.....	218
Trading as a last resort: Employing family labour.....	221
Immigrant traders and their trade.....	225
Restaurants and Bars.....	225
The Piccadilly center (Bar/Restaurant).....	226

Workers and newly arrived immigrants.....	227
Ethnic dishes.....	228
Ethnic music.....	230
Meaning of food and drinks for West African immigrants in South Africa.....	231
Clothing and beauty products.....	232
From asylum seekers to transmigrants.....	232
Hairdressing and beauty salons.....	236
Internet cafes and phone booths.....	238
Surviving outside the margins of the law.....	239
Contested boundaries: Survival of the rejected.....	241
Taxes and custom duties.....	242
Identification papers.....	243
Unlicensed taxi drivers and driver's licenses.....	244
The role of personal ties.....	247
Illicit Financial Transaction and Money Laundering: Feymen and 419.....	249
Illicit Bank Transactions.....	251
'Feymen' and '419'.....	252
Conclusion.....	253
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS.....	256
Introduction.....	256

Conclusions.....	256
Some policy considerations.....	265

References

Appendix 1 (Some useful tables)

Appendix 2 (419 sample letter)

Appendix 3 (Questionnaires)

Appendix 4 (Arguments for quantitative and qualitative methods)

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The study area and the official boundaries of Hillbrow.....	xix
Figure 2: Hill brow and her surrounding neighbourhoods.....	xx
Figure 3: Factors influencing West African immigration into South Africa.....	122
Figure 4: Employment status of Cameroonians and Nigerians.....	193

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Percentage change in the numbers of travelers arriving from leading African source countries into South Africa from May 2001 to May 2002.....	91
Table 2: Arrival in South Africa by country of residence May 2001 to May 2002.....	91
Table 3:DHA office for processing and renewal of documentation.....	128
Table 4: Guestimates of number of immigrants in South Africa.....	177
Table 5: Why West African immigrants would want to move out of South Africa.....	188
Table 6: Monthly salaries of employed immigrants.....	194

Table 7: Room density in flats.....	195
Table 8: Room density in apartments.....	195
Table 9: What West Africans like about South Africa.....	201
Table 10: Educational status of immigrants before coming to South Africa.....	219
Tables 11: Acquired skills/Educational status in South Africa.....	220
Table 12: Immigrants who own cars.....	245
Table 13: Type of driver's license.....	247

Abbreviations

ACA: Aliens Control Act

ACAS: Les Association des Camerounais 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: Communauté Financière 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 Democratie 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

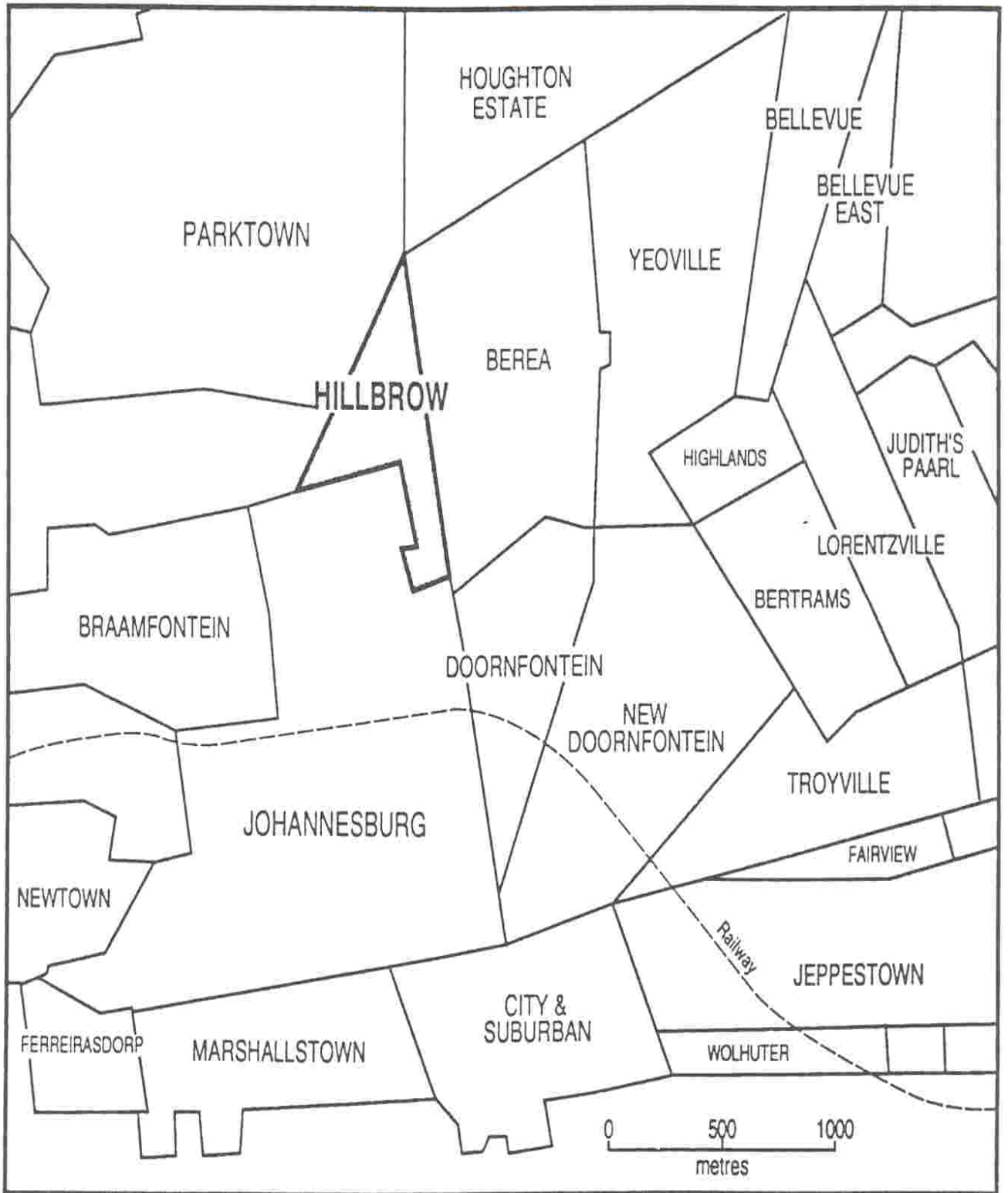


Figure 2: Hillbrow and her Surrounding Neighbourhoods.