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**THEORY OF SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIAN MIGRANTS'
INTEGRATION IN KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE**

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Abstract:

This article applies the framework of segmented assimilation which analyzes different patterns of migrant integration to understand variations in transnational activities among Nigerian migrants in Durban. It examines the role of migrant integration in determining the types of cross-border activities migrants pursue and their level of engagement in these activities. Given the monetary and legal resources needed to facilitate certain transnational activities, the article reveals that migrants with greater social and economic mobility in the host country demonstrate a wider range and an increased frequency of transnational behaviours. For instance, Nigerian migrants having legal migration status and occupational mobility demonstrate greater transnational behaviours than those illegally residing in South Africa and employed in low-wage menial jobs. It further, examines how South Africa's migration policies and the social context of reception affect the integration of migrants in their transnational activities.

Keywords:

Segmented assimilation, Nigerian migrants, transnational activities, South Africa's migration policies.

Citation:

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Introduction

The article examines how the social and economic integration of Nigerian migrants in KwaZulu-Natal Province affect their participation in transnational activities, or behaviours that enable them to maintain social ties in their countries of origin. With the emergence of transnational migration studies, the focus of international migration research has largely shifted from examining migrant integration in receiving nations to exploring their transnational behaviours. However, the relationship between migrant integration in the receiving country and the types of transnational activities migrants pursue, as well as the degree of their involvement in these activities has not been directly studied. Some migration scholars have suggested that transnationalism is, in part, an adaptive strategy, a reaction to the hostile reception and downward mobility that non-white migrants face in post-industrial nations (Basch et al. 1994; Portes 1997, 1999; Waters 1999; Faist 2000). Given the monetary and legal resources needed to facilitate certain transnational activities, downward mobility in the receiving society appears to limit the capacity of migrants to engage in these behaviours. The critical question of how Nigerian migrant integration affects transnational behaviour remains unanswered. The article addresses this issue by exploring how participation in transnational behaviours varies across the different patterns of migrant adaptation as outlined by the framework of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997).

Segmented assimilation explains the individual and contextual factors that account for the different patterns of migrant integration (Zhou 1997). If the extent to which migrants participate in transnational behaviours depends on the resources available to them, then the transnational activities of migrants with increasing social and economic mobility in the host country is greater in range and frequency. Conversely, the transnational activities of Nigerian migrants with declining mobility are more constricted (Portes 1999; Levitt 2000; Kivisto 2001). Therefore, the article shows that Nigerian migrants with legal immigration status and occupational mobility demonstrate greater transnational behaviours than those illegally residing in South Africa and employed in low-wage labour.

Methodological issues

Based on the research question posed: , how does the social and economic integration of Nigerian migrants affect the types of transnational activities they pursue and the degree of their involvement in these activities, the hypothesis *migrants with greater social and economic integration in the host country demonstrate a wider range and an increased frequency of transnational behaviours emerges*. This question contains four variables to be measured:

- a) The level of incorporation of Nigerian migrants in South Africa's economy;
- b) The level of their social adaptation;
- c) The types of transnational activities they practice; and
- d) The frequency of engagement in these activities.

This article is based on data collected and observation made in 2008-2009 in Durban central business district (CBD) of the KwaZulu-Natal Province. The city's diversified economy offers opportunities in both the primary and secondary sectors for migrants. An underground economy involving traffic in drugs, sex and stolen goods, in which Nigerian migrants are allegedly engaged coexists with the legitimate economic activities. With the

availability of these opportunities, it is not surprising that Durban has one of the largest numbers of African migrants in South Africa. It is for this reason that a high concentration of Nigerian migrants made the city an appropriate field site for this study.

Conceptual and theoretical issues

Basch et al. (1994:7) define transnationalism as the practices that enable migrants to maintain multiple social relations across national boundaries, binding migrants in countries of settlement and non-migrants in countries of origin. These social relations range from individual to collective ties including familial, economic, organizational, political and religious connections (Basch et al. 1994). With regards to the relationship between transnationalism and migrant integration, some researchers of migration studies have interpreted the transnational activities of recent nonwhite migrants as partly a response to the negative reception and marginal status faced in the United States (Portes 1997, 1999; Portes et al. 1999; Waters 1999; Faist 2000). Waters (1999:16) observes that for West Indian migrants in New York City, assimilation means becoming black American, a “stigmatized” minority; whereas a transnational identity, one that transcends nation-states, enables them to circumvent the racial categorization of the United States. However, while transnationalism may be partially a response to downward mobility or negative reception in the host society, income from low-wage menial jobs does not provide the monetary resources needed to facilitate certain transnational activities. Moreover, discriminatory immigration policies deny targeted groups the necessary legal rights to cross national borders.

Offering a different interpretation to the relationship between transnational behaviour and migrant integration, Kivisto (2001:557) defines transnationalism as a form of assimilation on the basis that migrants maintain social ties in their countries of origin while engaging in processes of acculturation in the host society. Moreover, Kivisto further argues that contrary to the transnational view of migrants simultaneously living in two countries, at any given moment migrants are located in one, and the immediate concerns of the receiving country take precedence over the more distant concerns of the sending community. However, understanding transnationalism as a form of assimilation or adaptation does not take into account the variation of transnational behaviours among migrants with comparable familial and social ties in their countries of origin. Why do some migrants travel back and forth while others simply send remittances? This article shows that the socio-economic integration of migrants in the host society accounts for much of the variance in transnational behaviour.

The theory of segmented assimilation offers a framework for understanding the relationship between transnational behaviour and migrant integration. Segmented assimilation attempts to explain the individual and contextual factors that determine into which segments of the host society second-generation migrants become incorporated (Zhou 1997:983). Three distinct outcomes of migrant adaptation are possible and these are (a) upward mobility through conventional acculturation and economic integration into the middle class; (b) positive perception as a result of economic integration into the middle class while retaining the migrant group’s values and affiliation and lastly downward mobility due to acculturation and economic integration into the underclass (Portes and Zhou 1993:85; Zhou 1997:1002). It is now clear that segmented assimilation differs from

classical assimilation and multicultural paradigms in its consideration of downward mobility (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997).

Although segmented assimilation has been used to describe the possible outcomes of second-generation adaptation with modifications, these outcomes are applicable to the first generation. For example, first-generation migrants can suffer downward mobility as a result of their economic incorporation into low-wage employment while experiencing minimal acculturation. Three features of the receiving environment that contribute to downward mobility: discrimination, residence in impoverished areas, and restricted economic opportunities are identified. The environment in which Nigerian migrants find themselves in South Africa presents all of these features. The limited acceptability of African migrants in South African society, their economic incorporation into the secondary sector, and the clandestine nature of their migration set conditions for the creation of a migrant underclass (Portes and Zhou, 1993:91).

An alternative to less desirable work in the secondary sector is the ethnic labour market. Portes and Zhou (1992) observe that Dominican, Cuban, and Chinese migrants, who remain within the ethnic economy, particularly entrepreneurs, do better than those who are not part of an ethnic economy. Resources made available through ethnic networks and niches enable migrants to avoid downward mobility (Portes and Zhou 1992, 1993). With the possible trajectories of migrant adaptation mainstream, underclass, and ethnic enclave the question of how transnational behaviour varies across the different patterns of adaptation becomes critical. To answer this question we used the variable below to measure the social, economic and cultural integration of Nigerian migrants in Durban.

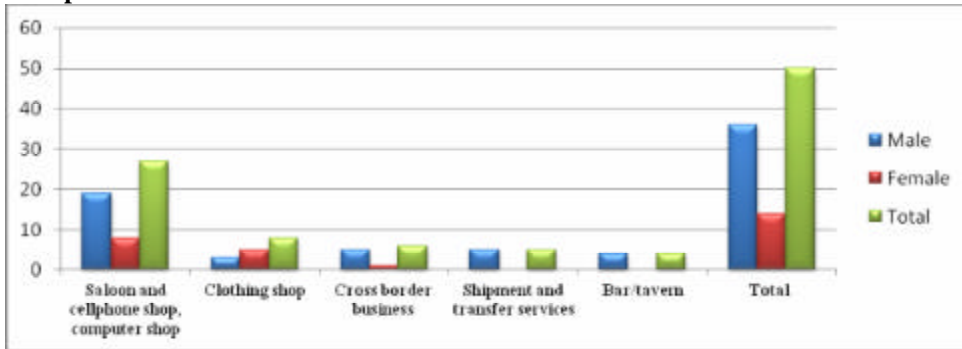
Variable to Measure Nigerian migrants' Integration

Occupational, immigration, income and educational levels amongst others are critical measures employed to measure Nigerian migrants in Durban.

? Occupational status in South Africa

Because dual labour market theory (Piore, 1979:110) has been the foremost perspective for understanding the economic incorporation of migrants in industrial countries, employment in the primary and secondary sectors are indicators of integration with the former having more weight than the latter. Self-employment, described as an alternative to less desirable work in the secondary sector (Portes and Zhou 1992:507), have a higher score than work in the secondary sector, but is less than employment in the primary sector since entrepreneurship is usually within the ethnic enclave. Occupation has been shown to be the best single predictor of social status and educational attainment and income are correlated with occupation (Miller and Salkind 2002).

Occupation in South Africa

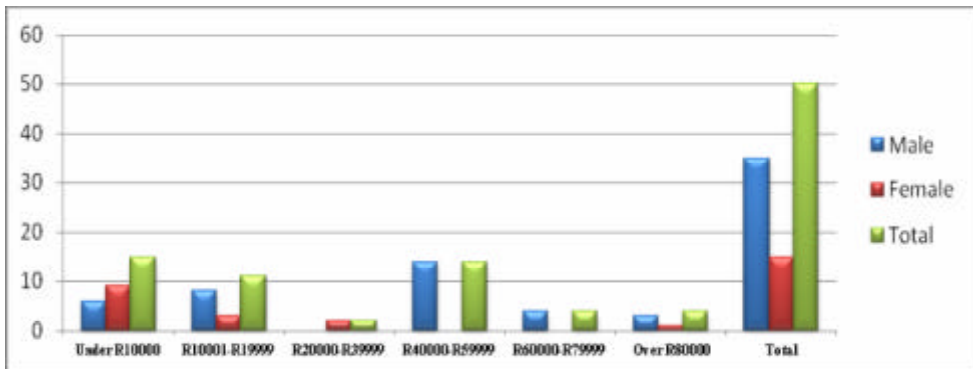


The occupations of migrants is a topic that was covered extensively during interviews and reflected a high mobility within certain segments of the labour market, specifically saloons, cell phone and computer shops and clothing shops which are male dominated. At the time of the interviews three worked in the tuck shop with 1 male and 2 female. One male worked as a shop assistant and 2 males owned a sports bar and 2 others owned taverns. Two women were hair dressers and one owned a saloon. All migrants had changed employment multiple times and sometimes had switched between several sectors. A majority of the Nigerian migrants started working in saloons as hairdresser and ended up becoming self employed. Men ended up owning cell phone shops, computer shops and clothing shops because they find them more lucrative than other type of economic activities available to migrants in Durban. One of the participants from Ijo in the Delta region mentioned that many Nigerians he knew sought out flee market vending and moved to different markets within KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape Provinces. He had done it himself but could not continue because the income from the business was very low. He was a primary school teacher before migrating to Durban but his wife and son are in Nigeria.

? **Immigration status**

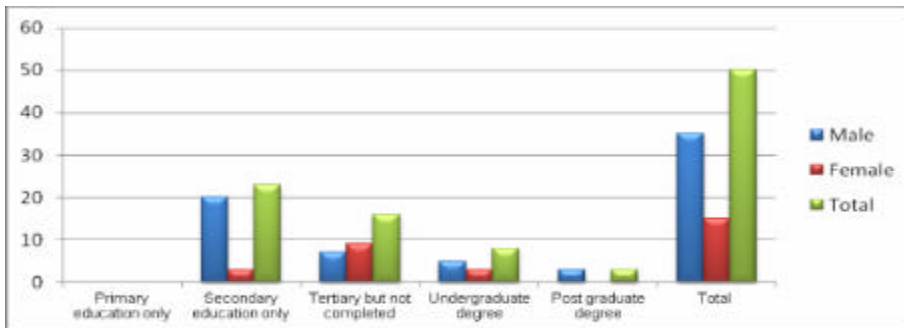
Legal status is an essential variable in the process of integration (Massey et al. 1987:1502). Legal status offers economic and social welfare opportunities unavailable to undocumented migrants that encourage integration. Powers et al. (1998:75) found that Mexican migrants in the United States experienced upward mobility from the first jobs they held after legalizing their status. Moreover, residency and citizenship give rights that facilitate particular transnational behaviours. For example, the legalization of status in the host country permits movement between sending and receiving countries without punitive consequences, which increase travel between the two countries. Because Nigerian immigration to South Africa is largely clandestine, many have legalized their immigration status by seeking asylum.

? **Income level per annum**



The income level figures for the participants were based on their own estimates of their net weekly or monthly earning, so the results were approximate amounts, but the income level of the fifty participants was divided into six categories. Fourteen participants earn between R40 000 to R59 000 per annum. However, in the interviews conducted, those earning less than R40 000 per annum described their economic situation as unsatisfactory or tight and only eight participants were satisfied with their economic situation. Migrants describe their work schedule as strenuous, having to work six or seven days a week and not being able to take vacations or not willing to do so because it could mean losing customers. Of the two individuals who did not provide any income information, one was unemployed and the other was a woman who could not provide information on her family's annual income.

? **Education level**



The table shows that all participants have primary education. 20 males attended secondary school and 3 female also completed secondary education. 7 males started tertiary education but did not complete their studies due to financial difficulties and leaving Nigeria to pursue their life in South Africa- hoping that they will return to school once they can afford to finance their studies. 9 females went to university but did not complete their university education due to marriage as well as financial constraints. Only 8 were able to migrate with an undergraduate degree and 3 hold post graduate degrees, 2 of whom hold an honors degree and 1 a masters degree. Looking at these figures; 23 of the 50 participants have a high school certificate.

? ***Nigerian Social Division***

The data collected shows that Nigerian migration to South Africa is diverse. For each social grouping there are different patterns, different purposes and different meanings that have characterized the movement. The wave of Nigerian migrancy in Durban is characterized by skilled and unskilled labour. The migrants are perceived by their families at home to be upper class, due to their level of success and achievement, when compared with the lack of opportunities at home. It is apparent from the respondents that most of them left Nigeria because of their inability to fit into the Nigerian working class. For this reason, unskilled migrants who took part in this study characterized their movements as permanent migration. However, skilled migrants range from school teachers to university graduates. Their movement is geared at improving their socio-economic position in order to return to Nigeria. This explains why their orientation is to return home evidenced by remittances of goods and capital. These patterns are differentiated by class, and they are reflected in other institutional orientation of different Nigerian migrants in Durban.

? ***Physical settlement challenges***

Nigerian migrants emerge from a high-culture context society which is faced with numerous challenges and adaptation strategies for resettlement. Physical, social, and cultural changes of resettlement create, on the one hand, a multitude of threatening situations associated with novelty, and on the other hand, multiple losses to bear. Baker further proposes that, migrants must be able to find their way around an unfamiliar social and cultural order (Baker, 1993:266). In this sense Nigerian migrants bridge this gap by making friends, learning a new language, getting a job, and establishing a network to recreate home in Durban. They also engage in different cultural activities (playing traditional music, observing ritual such paying respect to Nigerian traditional leaders, eating Nigerian food) to come to terms with the losses and gains of migrating.

Factors influencing the process of Nigerian migrants' settlement in Durban

Factors	Short term goal (settlement)	Longer term (integration)
Economic	-entering job market -financial independence -employment	? career advancement ? income parity ? entry into field of prior employments ? involvement in local economic activities ? transnational transaction
Social	-established social network -diversity within social network -strengthening relations	?accessing institution ?engaging effort to make Nigerian organisation to be of more help to the newly arriving migrants
Cultural	-adaptation to various aspects of lifestyle (e.g. diet, family, local language, relationships) -overcoming cultural shock	?engaging in efforts to redefine cultural identity ?adaptation or reassessing local and home values
Political	-citizenship -seeking asylum	?participation in political activities ?involvement in socio-political activities ?seeking permanent residence ?accessing refugee status

Table 11: NB: the table derives from discussion with Nigerian Migrants during fieldwork

Conclusion

According to segmented assimilation theory, Nigerian migrants involved in the transnational, economic, and educational activities mainly fall within the first option – acculturation and integration into the middle class – because they are doing everything necessary to become part of mainstream South Africa and to advance their socio-economic status. Theoretically, undocumented migrants who are obtaining a higher education will gain entry into the middle class by using their degree to secure a professional position. However, the possibility of pursuing a professional career is in jeopardy if they have not yet become legal permanent residents by the time they graduate. Without this legal status, they will be denied the opportunity to work within their professional fields and instead will be forced to re-join the underclass of undocumented individuals in the service sector.

Therefore, Segmented assimilation theory is most relevant for Nigerians who are legally in the South Africa. It does not fully take into account the role of the state in either incorporating or excluding certain groups of immigrants.

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