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# Introduction

## 1.1 A Tale of Two Families

"They will kill you, so go!" Mary exclaimed as she recounted to me the events of November 1969, when she and her family were forced to leave Ghana – her birth country – and return to Ogbomosho, Nigeria.[1] Mary was born in 1941 in Tamale, the capital of Ghana's Northern Region. Mary belongs to the Yoruba ethnic group, a group indigenous to land now located mostly in Nigeria and Benin. She has lived and worked as a petty merchant in Ghana's urban centers most of her life. A trading opportunity originally brought her parents to northern Ghana from Ogbomosho, as it did many other members of Nigeria's Yoruba community.

Mary lived a rather typical Yoruba existence in Ghana: her parents sent her back to Nigeria to attend primary school and learn the Yoruba language, but she quickly returned to Ghana upon completing her primary education. She met her husband through the Yoruba First Baptist Church of Tamale, a vibrant church where the Yoruba-only membership prays and sings in Yoruba. Soon after marrying, she and her husband moved to

[1] Interview, Accra, Ghana: February 6(A), 2007. The letter "A" denotes the first interview conducted that day. "Mary" is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the respondent.

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Kumasi, the capital of Ghana's coffee-producing Ashanti Region, home to the historically powerful Ashanti Kingdom. There they rented a house from a fellow Yoruba they met in the Yoruba First Baptist Church of Kumasi. Mary's husband provided some start-up funds and she began her career as a petty trader in Kumasi. She joined her hometown union, the Ogbomosho Parapo, and regularly remitted money back to Ogbomosho through the organization to support hospitals and orphanages.

Mary was twenty eight years old when Prime Minister Busia of Ghana decreed his famous Alien Compliance Order on November 18, 1969. This executive order announced over the radio that "it has come to the notice of the Ghana government that some aliens are residing in Ghana without the proper documents. The government is hereby giving them two weeks to regularize their stay in Ghana or they will be expelled."[2] Mary recalls with slight amusement how she first thought that Prime Minister Busia was joking. But when Ghanaians began harassing her and her family, she realized this was no joke: "You don't know whether they will kill you or they will not kill you. . . . All of us – we are afraid!" The Kumasi she knew turned into an unwelcoming and unsafe space. An official countdown to the December deadline was aired on the radio everyday, and as Ghanaian police patrolled the streets to ensure Ghana's "aliens" were packing up their belongings, fear overtook Ghana's Yoruba community. Mary's husband rented a car to Lagos; they left with her child and parents promptly before the December deadline.

Mary might have been a Yoruba, an ethnic group indigenous to Nigeria, but she was born in Ghana. She had a Ghanaian birth certificate. She owned indigenous Ashanti dress. She spoke fluent Twi, the Ashanti language. Her parents owned a house in Tamale. And yet none of these factors protected her during the bushfire that was Busia's Alien Compliance Order. Her parents were forced to undersell their house, and her entire family followed the exodus back to Nigeria, a country she did not know. Many died on the road back. As Mary recalls, "it was no small thing."

[2] Interview with a Yoruba Muslim chief in Accra, Ghana: January 24(B), 2007.

Sulaiman assures me that there is no such thing as a Ghanaian Hausa: "Most of us who were born here...our grand-fathers came from Nigeria."[3] Sulaiman is a Hausa born in Ghana. The Hausa, an ethnic group indigenous to land now located in northern Nigeria and Niger, have become such a natural part of Ghana's demographic landscape that the debate as to whether Ghanaian Hausas exist, and whether Hausa is an indigenous Ghanaian language, is current and vivid.[4] Sulaiman was born in 1948 in Ghana, but he says he is originally from Nigeria: his parents migrated as traders from Nigeria to Accra, Ghana's capital city.

Although Sulaiman has married a woman who shares his religion, Islam, his wife is a Yoruba born in Ghana and thus not his coethnic. His friends are "both Ghanaians and Hausas." Indeed, his social network expands vastly beyond his Hausa brethren.

Sulaiman was jobless at the time of the 1969 Quit Order. His memory of it is stark, but his experience was quite different from Mary's. He neither witnessed nor endured harassment at the time. He made no effort to acquire a residence permit. Not only did he stay while thousands of Yorubas fled; all his friends – Ghanaians and Hausas – stayed as well.

The portraits presented in this section highlight two very different immigrant experiences in the same host country, Ghana. The Yoruba experience has been characterized by instability, fear, and exclusion. The Hausa experience, by contrast, has been almost trivial. This book sets out to explore and explain this divergence.

## 1.2 Three Assumptions Challenged

What explains immigrant exclusion in urban West Africa? Why do some immigrants display greater levels of attachment to their immigrant community than do others? Why do some immigrant

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[3] Interview, Accra, Ghana: December 10(F), 2010. "Sulaiman" is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the respondent.
[4] On March 28, 2007, the local magazine *Bilingual Free Press* ran an article in its *Hot Issues* section, entitled "Hausa: Is It a Ghanaian language?" (Sulley 2007).

groups seamlessly integrate into their host societies while others face exclusion and insecurity? Why do some countries expel their immigrants en masse while others never resort to this form of violence?

Scholars have long recognized the dynamic and political nature of citizenship in Africa and have demonstrated the various ways in which African leaders have manipulated citizenship for political gain. Until 1990, Cameroon's president Paul Biya – a southern Christian who rose to prominence under a northern Muslim president – emphasized national unity. But in the face of a threatening opposition, Biya played the sons-of-soil card and Balkanized his constituents along regional lines (Geschiere 2009; Konings 2001). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mobutu manipulated the citizenship status of the Banyarwanda (or Banyamulenge) of South Kivu based on electoral competition and dynamics. And from the 1970s onward, Mobutu made it a habit of "affirming and then again denying Congolese citizenship for the Banyamulenge" (Geschiere 2009: 37; Manby 2009). In Nigeria, the riots pitting Hausa settlers against the indigenes of Plateau State revolved around access to, and exclusion from, state resources such as land, via the definition of indigeneity (Ostien 2009). In both South Africa and Botswana, black immigrant Africans or Makwerekwere – who oftentimes have lived in the country for decades – become scapegoats in times of economic hardship (Nyamnjoh 2006). In Zambia in the 1970s, the government launched a national registration campaign asking headmen to identify who among their villagers was a Zambian and who was not; in many instances, headmen "willingly vouched for Malawian and Rhodesian strangers who wanted to be accepted as Zambian citizens, thus avoiding their alien status" (Shack and Skinner 1979: 15).

In some cases, the fluidity of citizenship in the region has led to all-out civil war. In Côte d'Ivoire, the concept of *Ivoirité* has been used to characterize the country's southerners *only* and to exclude its northerners from access to increasingly scarce virgin forest-land for cocoa production (Woods 2003). This movement was born out of economic and political competition,

specifically the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections, in which electoral rules were redefined to bar children of noncitizens from running for presidential office; these effectively shut out of the competition Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim northerner whose mother was allegedly born in Burkina Faso (Copnall 2007; Geschiere 2009; Manby 2009). By 2002, this source of contention devolved into the Ivoirian civil war, as Guillaume Soro, a Northerner, led a rebellion against President Gbagbo's government. Soro was quoted as saying: "Give us our identity cards and we hand over our Kalashnikovs" (Manby 2009: 11). Similarly, Sindou Cissé, a senior leader of the New Forces rebel group during the civil war, has explained why he does not hold Ivoirian identity papers: "Because my name is Sindou Cissé, and I sound like I come from Mali or Guinea, they would not give me an ID card. That is what we are fighting about" (Copnall 2007: 14).

Countless more examples illustrate how political entrepreneurs in Africa can and do manipulate the laws and concept of citizenship for instrumental gain.[5] Yet ever-increasing population flows both within and across African countries raise the challenge of incorporating, not only existing forms of ethnic and religious diversity, but new ones as well. In a region where political membership and exclusion are dynamic and fluid concepts, how are we to understand why some immigrant groups incorporate seamlessly into their host societies whereas others become easy scapegoats?

I argue that immigrant exclusion in urban West Africa is a function of the economic competition that characterizes relations between immigrant and indigenous traders, and of the bargains that immigrant community leaders strike with local police to become monopoly providers of immigrant security. Factors that facilitate individual immigrant assimilation threaten indigenous traders who compete with immigrants for access to scarce resources; they also jeopardize the positions of immigrant

[5] These examples also corroborate the claim in this book that while legislation on citizenship and immigration does exist in Africa (see Herbst 2000: chapter 8), it remains easily manipulable and manipulated on the ground.

community leaders who seek to protect their power and influence over a distinct group. As a result, cultural overlap between immigrants and hosts offers no advantage to immigrant integration and may, in fact, exacerbate immigrant exclusion.[6] When violence erupts, cultural overlap may lead to greater insecurity.[7]

In this book I develop and test this argument with a systematic comparison of two immigrant groups in three host cities. This work builds on the aforementioned literature on citizenship in Africa by focusing on the perspective of immigrant groups and host societies before the violence breaks out. In so doing, it offers micro-foundations for understanding immigrant exclusion in urban West Africa, and challenges three widely held assumptions about anti-immigrant politics.

### Anti-Immigrant Politics Is also a South-South Issue

Academic scholarship and news media alike have focused overwhelmingly on South-to-North migration and on the problems immigrants face integrating into Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This has conveyed the impression that immigration is a South-to-North phenomenon and that its politics revolve, naturally, around economic competition. The reasons for this emphasis on South-to-North migration are twofold. First, industrialized democracies are better equipped to record data about their immigrants. They have the state capacity to police their borders and register their migration flows. Second, major media sources are based out of these industrialized democracies and thus report on issues that are salient to them. South-to-North migration may have indeed been the

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[6] The term "immigrant" is difficult to define and identify in the African context, where the concept of a sovereign nation is but a few decades old. Where citizenship status seldom protects against social or political violence, immigrant is less a legal depiction than an identity defined by ethnic origin. Here "immigrant" is used interchangeably with "nonindigenous ethnic group."

[7] The vocabulary used here assumes a key difference between "assimilation," which it uses to mean "the ability of a group to pass as another group," and "integration," which it uses to mean "the incorporation, or acceptance of the group, as it is."

predominant type of migration flow in the 20th century, and our focus on this phenomenon may have merely reflected reality; but because of lack of data on South-to-South migration, we may never know for sure.

This body of work views economic competition as one source of immigrant exclusion: immigrants from the developing world offer cheaper, more mobile labor and pose an economic threat to their hosts' labor force. The empirical work underlying this hypothesis is voluminous, yet inconclusive. Public opinion research has found that opposition to immigration increases during periods of economic recession (Burns and Gimpel 2000; Lapinski et al. 1997). Yet other studies yield more ambiguous results. In their analysis of the American National Economic Surveys (ANES) of 1992 and 1996, Burns and Gimpel found that individuals who expressed worse personal economic outlooks were more likely to *favor* increased immigration in 1992. Citrin, Green, Muste, and Wong found no significant relationship between personal economic assessments and attitudes toward immigration policy (Citrin et al. 1997).

One source of ambiguity in these aggregate trends in public opinion toward immigration is that host societies exclude some immigrant groups, but not others: not all immigrant groups pose a salient economic threat.[8] And it is economic competition among rival groups that produces hostile attitudes (Forbes 1997; Olzak 1992; Quillian 1995). Olzak, for example, analyzes the frequency and cause of ethnic conflict across major American cities between 1877 and 1914, at a time when immigration from Europe and Asia peaked. She finds that factors that raise competition between ethnic and racial groups, such as the desegregation of the labor market, also increase rates of collective action. She draws from Barth's early insight that two populations in overlapping niches will engage in competition and exclusion

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[8] The literature on intergroup conflict informs us that groups tend to reject other groups when the latter pose a perceived threat to the former's relative position in society (Blumer 1958; Lieberson 1980; Quillian 1995; Sniderman et al. 2000).

(Barth 1969). The most recent work on immigration in industrialized democracies confirms that economic scarcity is a precondition to immigrant conflict in Europe (Dancygier 2010).[9]

The research in this book challenges the assumption that immigration and immigrant exclusion are a North-South phenomenon by focusing on South-to-South migration and analyzing the extent to which the economic-competition argument travels to the developing world. Today, we know that half of all international migrants settle in the developing world, including 10 percent in Africa. Contrary to popular belief, these are not refugees: in 2005, an estimated 17 million voluntary immigrants lived in Africa, compared to slightly more than 3 million refugees. And in some cases, these numbers are growing more rapidly than in Europe. Over the past twenty years, for example, West Africa has seen higher growth rates in its annual migrant stock than has Western Europe (see Figure 1.1 ).[10]

We hear about these migrants when violence breaks out, as it did in the townships of South Africa in the spring of 2008. Otherwise, South-to-South migration is a phenomenon that touches a sizable and growing community of people about which we know very little. When anti-immigrant violence does not erupt onto the front page of *The New York Times*, however, African countries are still hosts to increasingly diverse societies, posing both a challenge and an opportunity to the region. The opportunity lies in the economic potential that migrants bring; the challenge, in the economic competition they represent. In a region already struggling to develop economically and to integrate existing forms of racial and ethnic diversity, these issues are particularly salient.

[9] Dancygier (2010) offers a theory of immigrant conflict in Europe, where economic scarcity combined with immigrant electoral power yields immigrant-native conflict, whereas economic scarcity combined with immigrant electoral weakness yields immigrant-state conflict instead.

[10] Data on the number of refugees and international migrants is from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2008). United Nations Global Migration Database (UNGMD). Available at: http://esa.un.org/unmigration/.
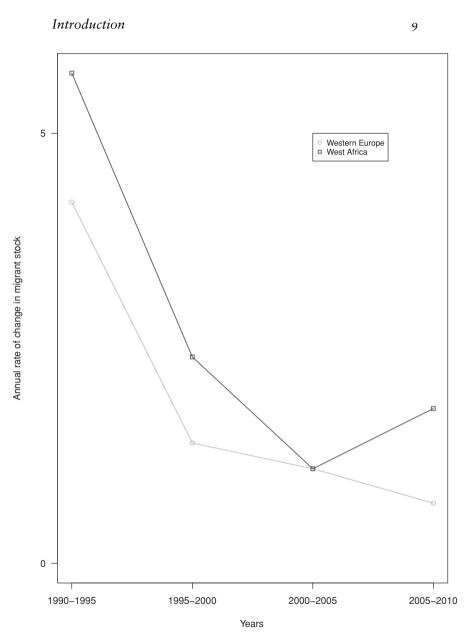
FIGURE 1.1. Growth in migrant stock in Western Europe and West Africa

### South-South Anti-Immigrant Politics Defies the Clash of Civilizations

The alternative explanation for immigrant exclusion in industrialized democracies is a cultural one. This *clash of civilizations* argument identifies cultural difference as the culprit underlying immigrant exclusion.[11] The literature on social identity addresses this cultural-threat hypothesis. According to this theory, cultural, rather than economic, threats drive intergroup hostility. Individuals aim to evaluate the groups to which they belong positively, and this sometimes leads them to evaluate other groups negatively (Brewer 2001; Sniderman et al. 2004; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986).[12] In this perspective, concerns about national identity drive immigrant exclusion because immigrants represent a threat to the hosts' national culture.

Public opinion surveys corroborate this hypothesis. Burns and Gimpel (2000) compare public opinions toward whites, Hispanics, and blacks and find that racial prejudice overwhelms economic concerns in predicting anti-immigrant attitudes. Lapinski and colleagues also consider divergent responses for different nationality groups. They find that, between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, Americans held most favorable views toward Irish, Polish, Chinese, and Korean immigrants, followed by Vietnamese and Mexican immigrants, and finally by Iranian, Haitian, and Cuban immigrants (Lapinski et al. 1997: 2).

More recently, research that focuses on identifying the causal effect of cultural factors on immigrant exclusion further corroborates the cultural-threat explanation. In the Netherlands, Sniderman et al. (2004) use surveys with embedded experiments to assess the relative importance of economic versus cultural threats in determining individuals' attitudes toward immigrants. They find that concerns over national identity (cultural threats) determine exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants more than

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[11] This term was famously used by Samuel Huntington in the context of post–Cold War global politics.

[12] In-group attachment or bias, however, does not necessarily lead to hostility toward out-groups (Allport 1954). Negative evaluations of out-groups is one strategy individuals use to ameliorate their in-group evaluation.