

“What is Your Race?” Eritrean Migrant Encounters with Racial Identification Questions in South Africa

AMANUEL ISAK TEWOLDE

Abstract: Even though there is extensive work on migrants in post-apartheid South Africa, their encounters with racial identification questions on bureaucratic forms and their reactions thereof is understudied. This paper addresses this gap by interviewing Eritrean migrants to examine how they reacted when they encountered racial identification questions on official forms. The results reported here form part of a larger study involving forty-six participants that explored various themes. Participants reported they encountered race questions on forms and interpreted racial identification questions on bureaucratic forms as constructions that are at odds with forms of self-definition prevalent in their country of origin. Interpretations of South African racial categorization system as incompatible with their sense of identity reveals the limits of such categories, particularly in the context of increased migration flows to the country.

Key words: Eritrean, refugees, asylum seekers, racialization, South Africa, bureaucratic forms

African Migrations to South Africa

After the advent of democracy in 1994, post-apartheid South Africa has attracted a large numbers of asylum seekers and economic migrants, especially those from the African continent.¹ Most African asylum seekers fled, *inter alia*, political upheavals, repression, and civil wars.² Increased migration to South Africa has, however, created an environment in which some citizens accuse migrants of various social ills such as crime and of taking away jobs from citizens.³ Yet it is hard for migrants to find employment in the formal sector, so they resort to making a living in the informal economy as hawkers and other types of entrepreneurs.⁴ So on the one hand, migrants find themselves in a country with a progressive constitution that provides migrants rights and protection. Refugees and asylum seekers have a right to work, study, and conduct business.⁵ Yet migrants also find themselves in a post-apartheid socio-political context in which they are excluded and othered from national belonging both by legislation and political discourse.⁶ The post-apartheid state adopted an exclusionist citizenship in which national belonging is based on indigeneity, and migrants, particularly of African origin, are often seen as undesirable.⁷

Amanuel Isak Tewolde is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His main areas of interest include race, ethnicity and migration, and social development. His current research focuses on informal social protection measures within immigrant communities in South Africa. The author acknowledges financial support from the Centre for Social Development in Africa.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v18/v18i3a3.pdf>

Many studies have examined migrant experiences in post-apartheid South Africa in reference to the causes and nature of xenophobia.⁸ Others have studied topics related to refugee livelihoods, migration policy, passing strategies by migrants, migrant wellbeing, and human rights.⁹ Despite this, research is scant on migrant encounters with racial identification questions on official forms or what meanings they gave to race questions on bureaucratic forms. This article is a response to the paucity of such research and explores experiences of Eritrean migrants and their interpretation of the South African racial categorization system.

The main arrival of Eritreans in South Africa started when over six hundred Eritreans were sent by the University of Asmara to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate studies between 1999 and 2001.¹⁰ Of these, some migrated to other destinations while others remained in South Africa.¹¹ Following the students, other Eritreans have also arrived in search of asylum due to repressive political leadership at home.¹² There were 1,978 recognized Eritrean migrants in South Africa by the end of 2017.¹³ Most make a living as owners of grocery and clothing stores as do their Somali and Ethiopian counterparts, although there are some university students and others in various professional jobs.

A few studies focus on Eritrean migrants in South Africa. For example, Araia examined Eritrean forced migrants' journeys to Johannesburg and their constant ambitions to re-migrate to Western countries as final destinations. He found a significant role of migrant diasporic networks in facilitating these journeys.¹⁴ In her study of an Eritrean human rights movement based in South Africa, Hepner explored the impact of the movement on political reform back in Eritrea.¹⁵ Tewelde also studied how Eritrean refugees described their lived experiences in South Africa.¹⁶ He found that participants characterized their existence both in negative and positive terms. Studies on Eritrean refugees in South Africa, however, did not examine encounters with the racial classification system and how they make sense of race-based social organization in South Africa. This study addresses such a gap. The article's main research question is: how do migrants make sense of race questions on official forms, and what does their experience reveal about the relevance of racial identification questions on bureaucratic forms for refugees in post-apartheid South Africa? Drawing on the informant experiences with South African racial categories, the article maintains that their interpretations of the South African racial categorization system as incompatible with their sense of identity reveals the limits of such categories, particularly in the context of increased migration flows to the country.

Migrant Encounters with Race Questions

Migration scholars have studied how immigrants originating from countries with different social differentiation systems navigate racial categorization systems in host countries. Most of the studies are focused on migrants in the United States. Rodríguez examined how immigrants from Latin American countries with different social classification systems answered questions of race on the U.S. census.¹⁷ She found that the majority checked “other,” thereby distancing themselves from established U.S. racial categories. Rodríguez also noted that many of them wrote in their country of origin as their racial identity, effectively redefining the assumptions on which U.S. racial categories are based. In her study of how Brazilian immigrants in the U.S. responded to race questions on the census, Marrow found that the second generation was more likely to select a common U.S. racial category than their first-generation counterparts who

predominantly checked “other.”¹⁸ In Brazil, racial identity is often linked to one’s social-class status rather than purely to phenotype, and the categories “white” and “black” carry some different social meanings than in the U.S. Reinforcing these findings, McDonnell and Lourenço also showed that first-generation Brazilian women in the U.S. felt confused when “asked about their self-defined racial identification” on forms while describing U.S. racial classifications as irrelevant to their sense of self.¹⁹ Vargas-Ramos’ study of responses to questions of racial identity on official forms also showed that mainland and island-born Puerto Ricans who were integrated in mainland society selected a common U.S. racial category.²⁰ Newly-arrived islanders, however, preferred to self-define in terms of their Puerto Rican heritage rather than U.S. racial labels. Similarly, Morning’s study of Indian migrants in the U.S. found that the foreign-born or less acculturated were more likely to resist U.S. racial categories than those more acculturated.²¹ The above studies show the centrality of generational status and levels of integration/acclimation in shaping whether immigrants adopt or resist forms of identity categories in the host country.²² The present study was conducted in a different racial context and builds on such international literature.

The literature on racialization of migrants in South Africa is scant. A few studies have examined encounters of migrants with the South African racial classification system and their patterns of self-identification. For example, Vandeyar examined how African and Asian immigrants experienced racial ascription as “Black” and “Asian” finding that migrants largely emphasized ethnic heritage rather than race to define themselves in everyday life.²³ Abdi also found that Somali migrants defined themselves in terms of their religious identity as “Muslim” and distanced themselves from self-identifying as “Black.”²⁴ But such studies have focused on migrant social interactions with local South Africans. This study is interested in examining encounters of refugees with race questions on bureaucratic/official forms rather than on everyday interaction.

In order to make sense the ways in which Eritrean refugees navigate the South African racial classification scheme, it is important to contextualize their experience by discussing the different systems of social differentiation in the country of origin and the host society. The difference between the South African race classification system and the Eritrean ethno-linguistic social differentiation system is linked to their different histories. South Africa is characterized by a long tradition of race-based social divisions.²⁵ In Eritrea, the predominant mechanism is culture/language based social classification.²⁶ It is therefore within this context of differing social classification contexts that the experiences of Eritrean refugees in South Africa can be understood. Berry noted that:

A complete study of acculturation would need to start with a fairly comprehensive examination of the two societal contexts: that of origin and that of settlement. In the society of origin, the cultural characteristics that accompany individuals into the acculturation process need description, in part to understand (literally) where the person is coming from and in part to establish cultural features for comparison with the society of settlement as a basis for estimating an important factor to be discussed later, that of ‘cultural distance.’²⁷

Race-based Social Classification in South Africa

The official classification of the South African society into four major racial categories emerged after 1948 when the National Party took power. This government introduced various racist laws to differentially allocate economic resources, social status, and political power by classifying the South African society into supposedly distinct racial categories.²⁸ Those constructed as white benefited disproportionately from such race-based distribution of opportunity.²⁹ Other racialized groups such as Coloured, Indian, and particularly Black South Africans were excluded.³⁰ After the advent of democracy in 1994, the same four racial categories have still been used by various government and non-government institutions to redress race-based allocation of opportunity in the past. Black South Africans are now given preferential treatment in various sectors.³¹

Posel noted that the persistence of historical racial categories on official forms in post-apartheid South Africa actually has enhanced race-consciousness.³² Some scholars have criticized the use of historical racial categories in contemporary South Africa. For example, Alexander argued against the continued use of racial categories on forms citing that such practice further entrenches social divisions created by the apartheid state.³³ Reinforcing Alexander’s argument, Maré also argues against the continued racialization of the South African society through official classifications and calls for their termination.³⁴ Goldberg argued that despite the ideology of non-racialism espoused by the African National Congress (ANC), the post-Apartheid state still “reinstat[e] the very racial configurations it is expressly committed to challenging” by continuing to classify South Africans in terms of historical racial categories.³⁵ South Africa can therefore be described as a “racial state.”³⁶ According to Goldberg, one of the characteristic features of a racial state is that it “define[s] populations into racially identified groups...” such as through “...census taking, and bureaucratic forms.”³⁷ It is within the context of a racial state that Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers and other migrant communities in post-apartheid South Africa find themselves.

Social Differentiation in Eritrea

Eritrean migrants in South Africa originate from a society where the official social classification system is derived from nine ethno-linguistic groups rather than race-based categories.³⁸ The nine linguistic groups recognized by the state are: Rashaida, Saho, Tigre, Tigrinya, Afar, Bilen, Hedareb, Kunama, and Nara. The group boundary marking the ethnicities is language and culture as opposed to physical appearance, and the Eritrean state does not collect race-based data as there is a wide range of phenotypic variation within members of most ethnic groups.³⁹ There are no official categories of skin color in Eritrea. Ethno-linguistic differentiation in Eritrea, therefore, does not point to differences in physical characteristics. Among the Tigrinya ethnic group, for example, people might refer to skin color to describe individuals rather than as being members of a particular racial/skin color category.⁴⁰ There are a wide range of color descriptors used to describe individuals skin tones.

The Tigrinya ethnolinguistic identity refers to a sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group while an Eritrean identity refers to a sense of belonging to a civic national identity that transcends affiliation to one’s linguistic identity. One of the dominant forms of self-identification is a supra-ethnic national identity as Eritrean.⁴¹ The origin of an Eritrean national

identity consciousness comprising a multi-ethnic body emerged when the Italians occupied the region by the end of the nineteenth-century and created a territory to the north of Ethiopia which they named Eritrea.⁴² The Italian colonial state administered an ethnically/culturally heterogeneous Eritrean society characterized by identification systems based on religion, region, culture, and language.⁴³ Even though the Italian colonial state (1889-1941) effectively introduced racial apartheid in Eritrea by excluding indigenes from various rights and privileges allocated to settlers, it did not introduce race to hierarchize the different groups as members of most ethnic groups in Eritrea are phenotypically diverse.

In post-colonial contemporary Eritrea, a dominant form of identification is based on a common national identity.⁴⁴ A national identity is tied to the government's nation building efforts in light of an ethno-linguistically, religiously, and regionally differentiated society. An overarching supra-ethnic civic national identity refers to a common national identity that transcends a sense of belonging to sub-national affiliations.⁴⁵ The government's nation building policies are intended to strengthen social cohesion among the disparate linguistic groups and to minimize religion and regional based affiliations.⁴⁶ Despite the government's efforts to get society to coalesce around a common national identity, ethnic and regional based identities are still salient.⁴⁷

Another form of identification prevalent among the Tigrinya ethnic group is *Habesha*.⁴⁸ Habesha, also claimed by some members of the Amhara ethnic group in Ethiopia, is often associated with superiority.⁴⁹ Those who claim Habesha identity see themselves as different from other Africans.⁵⁰ However, despite the myth of Habesha superiority, the Tigrinya and other ethnic groups which claim it are not phenotypically homogenous. In Eritrea, hierarchical social relations tend to be based on perceived cultural distinctions rather than referring to racial groups, which do not exist in the country.⁵¹ For example, some Tigrinya look down on other cultural groups as less civilized and backward while seeing themselves as more civilized.⁵² Dirar argues that such attitudes has roots in the Italian colonial period where Tigrinya Eritreans saw themselves as more civilized than Ethiopians.⁵³

When Eritreans immigrate to the racially organized South African socio-cultural context, therefore, they bring with them notions of self-definition that are different from those prevalent in South Africa. Many migrant groups originate from countries where social differentiation systems are different from South Africa's race-based social classification framework. Bailey describes such an encounter as "clash of social categorization systems."⁵⁴ Warner also notes that "all immigrants experience conflicts of social identity when confronted by the necessity of remaking their [identities]."⁵⁵

Racialization Theory

This study adopts 'racialization' as an analytical framework to make sense of encounters of study participants with racial identification questions on official forms. Racialization can be defined as ascribing racial labels to individuals on official forms who never self-identified in racial terms before. This is in line with Omi and Winant's definition of racialization as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship or group."⁵⁶ Reference to "different types of human bodies" is central to the process of racial classification.⁵⁷ Such conceptualization reflects the social reality of some countries, such as the U.S. and South

Africa, where phenotype-based social organization is dominant. Racialization theory is informed by a social constructionist paradigm in which racial categorization is culturally and historically specific rather than existing as a biologically objective and universally uniform system.⁵⁸ According to Omi and Winant, racial categories are not only formed and adopted but also resisted and transformed by individuals/groups.

Some scholars have critiqued the concept of racialization and argue that it be removed from the conceptual toolbox of scholars. For example, Miles and Brown argue that since there are no biologically distinct races, the continued use of the concept reifies supposed human differences that do not exist in reality.⁵⁹ Miles and Brown further contend that “social scientists have prolonged the life of an idea [racialization] that should be consigned to the dustbin of analytically useless terms.”⁶⁰ St. Louis also argues that “given the fallaciousness of the race idea, racialization reinforces the [idea] of biological processes of constituting racial groups as real.”⁶¹ However, this study argues that the concept racialization is useful in capturing the political and social reality of ascribing phenotype-based labels to members of a society. Racialization as an analytic concept is therefore useful in making sense of the ways in which Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa confront official forms that require classifying themselves racially.

Methodology

As the aim of the study is to explore how participants experienced and made sense of race questions on bureaucratic forms, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was adopted to gather and analyze data. Smith et al. recommend IPA as a useful approach to examine how a social phenomenon is experienced and understood from the perspective of research participants.⁶² In conducting IPA research, the primary focus is identifying the participants’ experiences of a particular phenomenon and how they make sense of it.

This paper forms part of a larger project involving forty-six participants. Subjects were recruited using snowball and convenience sampling and the research sites selected were Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg. The researcher explained the project, which was to examine their encounters with South Africa’s racial classification system and what meanings they attach to their encounters. Participants signed consent forms and the researcher assured them that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the interview if they wished to do so. Pseudonyms were used when referring to participants and certain identifying characteristics have been removed from this article to maintain anonymity.

All study participants were Tigrinya, the largest Eritrean ethnic group in South Africa. Open-ended interview questions elicited participant encounters with race questions on various official forms and what meanings they gave to their experiences. Interviews were in Tigrinya, the first language of the researcher and study participants, usually lasting about one hour. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Analysis of data focused on identifying instances of encounters with race questions on forms and the meanings participants attached to their racialization by official forms. Participants were asked about their encounters with racial categories in South Africa and how they reacted to being asked to self-classify in racial terms on forms. Nine participants (over 20 percent) of the participants reported they encountered race

questions on various administrative forms and interpreted racial identification questions on bureaucratic forms as constructions that are at odds with forms of self-definitions prevalent in their country of origin.

Encountering Racial Identification Questions

Those participants who reported confronting a race question on bureaucratic forms related that they were largely baffled and confused by the experience. All of such participants were first-generation refugees or asylum seekers who migrated to South Africa as adults. They comprised university students, employees at various institutions, and traders. Most of them have lived in South Africa between six and twelve years. The participants resided in neighborhoods inhabited largely by Eritrean, Ethiopian, and other African migrant communities. Participants were socially connected to Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in the areas they resided.

Selam, a 28-year-old who has lived in South Africa for eight years related her experiences with racial identification questions on university admission forms. Selam resides in an ethnic enclave where Ethiopians, Eritreans, and other migrants of African origin predominate.

When I was filling out registration forms last year, there was this question that asked about my race. It asked me to select [a race], from a list... and what surprised me was that it said it was compulsory to answer the question and that it shouldn't be skipped. After that, it asked for my nationality. For me it was an uncommon question, you know. Many of us here in this country come from different countries; we do not really know what to do when answering race questions.... I mean, why would they think that all students self-identify in terms of the racial categories found on such forms? Many of us here in this country are from different countries. We do not really know what to do when answering such questions of race, you know.⁶³

As a post-graduate student, Selam has come across race questions on multiple occasions. Even though she has lived in South Africa for eight years, she still resisted to self-classify and interprets the practice as "uncommon." Selam stressed the irrelevance of the South African racial classification system to people originating "from different countries" due a mismatch in practices of self-identification.

Lemlem, a third-year university student, also recounted her experiences of encountering race questions on scholarship forms. Lemlem lives and socializes in her predominantly Tigrinya community. She has lived in South Africa for seven years:

Yes, I have encountered such [race] questions. I came across race questions on many forms. For example, you are asked a question about your race scholarship forms. It requires you to check one of the races on the list. Then I asked myself, "Where is my identity reflected on these [race] choices?" because the available choices are only relevant to South Africans only. They don't represent my identity. My identity isn't represented [on the boxes]. But you cannot leave the boxes unanswered because it is compulsory to tick one of the boxes. I don't have any other option; you are not free to choose the true identity that describes you. They

ask you to tick Black, Coloured, Indian, and White... I only truly self-identify as Habesha.⁶⁴

Lemlem emphasizes the restrictive and prescriptive nature racial identification questions on various administrative forms. Questions of race on bureaucratic forms were experienced as coercive and irrelevant. Lemlem instead pronounces Habesha as her authentic self-identity.

Merhawit, a 29-year-old who works at a government department, has been living in South Africa for ten years in a neighborhood where there is a visible concentration of Ethiopians, Eritreans, Somalis, and other Africans. As a form of resistance to imposed racialized labels, she constructs an Eritrean identity:

I was completing performance assessment forms two months ago and the race question was there. It asked I should select from one of the races whether I was White, Black, Coloured or Indian...So, ya, I have had that experience. For us foreigners it can be difficult to select a race, so it really made me uncomfortable to answer such a question. This is because I am not a South African. Such questions are relevant to South Africans only. Because it reflects their history and their culture, but it [race] is not relevant to me... I self-identify myself as Eritrean. The racial categories in this country do not really describe my self-identity. They do not even reflect who I am.⁶⁵

Here again, local racial categories are interpreted as constructions that are at odds with identities which non-South Africans brought from home. Differences in ‘history’ and ‘culture’ are invoked by Merhawit to justify the irrelevance of racial categories to non-South Africans. Her prolonged stay in the country for ten years and her socio-economic integration into formal employment in South Africa did not seem to have a bearing on her adaptation to local norms of racial self-identification.

A 32-year-old businessman, Semere, related that when he was confronted with racial identification questions on an immigration form, he described race classification questions on administrative forms as incompatible with the self-definitions of non-South African migrants living in the country.

A few weeks ago, I went...to apply for my permanent residence permit and they handed me a form to complete, and on that form I was asked, “Are you Black, Indian or Coloured?” Then I asked myself ‘Why are they asking me to choose one race? Why don’t they ask me about my country of origin?’ For example, rather than asking me about what race I am, why didn’t they ask me about which country I am from?’ To me such questions are confusing and especially for us foreigners because we are not South Africans...I see myself as an Eritrean rather than Black, White, etc.⁶⁶

For Semere, two identity categories collide at the moment of encountering racial categories on forms: the national identity with which he identified and South African racial categories from which he distanced himself. Even though Semere has lived in the country for eight years, his social integration into the host society is limited as he inhabits and interacts socially with members of the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities.

Liya is a 27-year-old stay-at-home mother. She encountered a question on hospital forms that asked for her race when she was admitted to hospital to deliver her baby. Liya's social interaction with South Africans is minimal and instead she lives within and is socially connected to the Eritrean community. She has lived in South Africa for seven years.

I went to this hospital...as my delivery day was approaching. So the nurse handed me a form; the nurse explained to me that I should complete the form...so the form asked me about my personal information, such as age...etc. Then next on the form, it asked me to select my racial category; then I was stuck and could not answer. I see myself as Tigrinya, Habesha and as an Eritrean rather than as one of the races I was asked to select on the form...I approached the nurse and asked her if I could skip the question that asked about my race because I didn't know which one to choose. The question had options such as "Are you White, are you Black, are you Indian?" etc. But I didn't know which one to choose. The nurse insisted that the question shouldn't be skipped and that it was compulsory that I select one race. It is really confusing. I don't know why they asked me such a question.⁶⁷

As a way to distance herself from South African racial identity labels, Liya constructed three identifications: ethno-linguistically Tigrinya, culturally Habesha, and nationality Eritrean. The expression of these three identifications emerged in the context of imposed racial labels on bureaucratic documents. The compulsory ticking of a race box for migrants highlights the coercive and assimilative aspect of bureaucratic questions that do not reflect self-identification practices of non-South African communities.

In the above examples, first-generation migrants resisted racial identification questions on various administrative forms. Some constructed a cultural Habesha identification, others invoked an Eritrean nationality identification, while others mobilized a combination of cultural (Habesha), ethno-linguistic (Tigrinya), and nationality (Eritrean) identifications as a way of asserting their identities. All of the participants resided and were socially connected within Eritrean and Ethiopian communities. Despite their prolonged stay in the country, participants still resisted identifying with South African racial categories. Participants' encounters with various bureaucratic forms was principally due to their documented status in the country. Undocumented migrants tend to have less contact with administrative forms and hence fewer encounters with race identification questions.

Discussion

Cornell and Hartmann argue that in racially/ethnically organized social systems, individuals usually experience identity conflict between "assigned" identity labels imposed on individuals and "assertive" identifications preferred by individuals.⁶⁸ The assigned racial identity participants experienced when required to identify their race is captured by Omi and Winant's definition of racialization.⁶⁹ This is relevant to the experiences of imposed racialization by the "previously racially unclassified" participants through administrative forms that extend a South African racial classification system to non-South Africans. This extension of racial meaning to Eritreans met with resistance.⁷⁰ However, participants' agency to assert their own identities was constrained by the limited choice of options. Rodríguez noted that when immigrants face

imposed racialization on official forms, they are pressured to adopt racial labels available in the host country at the expense of their ethnicity/culture-based identification systems.⁷¹ In the case of South Africa, migrants from Africa have been othered and excluded by the post-apartheid state.⁷² Their positioning as undesirable has prompted African migrants to carve out ethnic enclaves in larger cities, and this separation strategy has prompted participants to reject identification with South African categories.⁷³

Berry’s concept of “cultural compatibility” or “cultural distance” is also useful in understanding why participants were uncomfortable with race questions on forms.⁷⁴ Berry argued that if migrants are unfamiliar with a host country’s identities and norms, adapting takes more time. This is especially the case if social classification systems in the host society and country of origin are dissimilar.⁷⁵ In addition to cultural distance, the host society’s ethos of reception also appears to have shaped the attitudes of participants toward South African identities. This is why length of stay in South Africa did not seem to have helped participants adapt/acclurate to South African categories. Xenophobia, exclusion, and the othering of African migrants have driven Eritreans, like other Africans, to form ethnic enclaves in major South African cities and this has prevented acculturation to identities of the host society. Berry argued that lack of “contact” and “participation” in a host society prompts migrants to hold onto their own identities due to marginalization and othering of the host society.⁷⁶

The findings of this study support existing literature on migrant racialization experiences and their reactions in the U.S., such as Rodríguez’s study of Latin American immigrants, Morning’s study of Asian Indian immigrants, Marrow’s and McDonnell’s studies of Brazilian immigrants, and Vargas-Ramos’ study of Puerto Ricans.⁷⁷ Such studies found that immigrants in the U.S. who originated from countries with different social categorization systems resisted the American racial classification system. Furthermore, the authors suggested that the generational status of the immigrants they studied shaped their rejection of American categories: first-generation immigrants generally distance themselves more from host-society’s identity categories.⁷⁸

In relation to the literature on race in South Africa, the present study’s finding is novel. Scholars of race in post-apartheid South Africa have examined the continuity of racial classification; however much of the scholarship on race has been focused on South African nationals and experiences of migrants with racial classification did not feature in their analysis.⁷⁹ In the South African context, Vandeyar’s work on African refugees and Abdi’s study of Somalis also found that their participants distanced themselves from identifying in terms of South African racial categories. However, the focus of their studies was on every day social interactions; the present study’s focus and its finding was on interactions with bureaucratic forms.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The study set out to explore the ways in which first-generation Eritrean migrants experienced and reacted to race questions on official forms in South Africa. Participants problematized the South African racial categorization system by interpreting it as a system that is at odds with identities they brought from home. Such resistance by refugees speaks to the limits of South African racial categories in the context of increased migration flows to the country. Scholars

studying race in South Africa have focused on citizens and migrants' encounters with race have rarely been explored. This paper, therefore, urges scholars to also incorporate migrant communities in the analysis of race in post-apartheid South Africa.

In light of migrant resistance to being classified in racial terms, will the South African racial categories expand or transform to include other identity categories that reflect identity claims of migrants? South Africa might follow the U.S. in incorporating other forms of social categories. U.S. racial categories expanded to include categories that reflect immigrant demographics, as well as other previously unrecognized identities. In light of identification preferences of emerging migrant groups in post-apartheid South Africa, the state needs to reconsider the traditional racial categories which only reflect the history of South Africa and do not acknowledge the present. Such expansion is important for visibility and recognition of new communities in post-apartheid South Africa.⁸¹

More research is needed to explore the ways migrants from other geographic origins react to racial identification on forms to determine if resistance to the South African racial classification system is shared by other migrant groups. Future researchers can also examine how second-generation migrants react to racial identification questions on forms.

Notes

- 1 An asylum seeker is “someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed” (UNHCR 2017b); Adjai 2013; Chinomona & Maziriri 2015.
- 2 Tshishonga 2015.
- 3 Gordon 2010; Matsinhe 2011.
- 4 Crush et al 2017.
- 5 Department of Home Affairs 2018.
- 6 Neocosmos 2006.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Handmaker and Parsley 2001; Crush 2001; Harris 2002; Warner and Finchilescu 2003; Neocosmos 2006; Mngxitama 2008; Gordon 2010; Abdi 2011; Matsinhe 2011; Chinomona and Maziriri 2015; Langa and Kiguwa 2016.
- 9 Jakobsen 2006; Sadouni 2009; Crush et al. 2017; Crush and Dodson 2007; Polzer 2008; Matsinhe 2011; Batisai 2016; Smit and Rugunanan 2015; Greyling 2016; Landau 2005, 2006.
- 10 Mekonnen and Abraha 2004; Hepner 2015.
- 11 Mekonnen and Abraha 2004.
- 12 Ibid.; Hepner 2015; Tewolde 2017.
- 13 UN Data 2017.
- 14 Araia 2005.
- 15 Hepner 2013.
- 16 Tewolde 2017.
- 17 Rodríguez 2000.
- 18 Marrow 2003.
- 19 Ibid.; McDonnell and Lourenço 2009, p. 243.
- 20 Vargas-Ramos 2014.

- 21 Morning 2001.
- 22 Berry 1997.
- 23 Vandeyar 2011.
- 24 Abdi 2015.
- 25 Posel 2001a; Posel 2001b.
- 26 Bereketeab 2002; Dirar 2007.
- 27 Berry 1997, p. 5.
- 28 Posel 2001a; Posel 2001b.
- 29 Race is a socio-historical construct and its use here does not refer to biology.
- 30 Frederickson 1981; Norval 1996; Christopher 1997; Posel 2001a; Posel 2001b; Winant 2004; Erasmus 2001; Seekings and Nattrass 2005; Steyn 2008; Farred 2000.
- 31 Posel 2001b; Louw 2004; Seekings and Nattrass 2005.
- 32 Posel 2001a, pp. 109-110.
- 33 Alexander 2005.
- 34 Alexander 2005; Maré 2014.
- 35 Goldberg 2002, p. 216.
- 36 Goldberg 2002.
- 37 Ibid., p. 110.
- 38 Bereketeab 2002; Dirar 2007, p. 258.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Kaplan 1999.
- 41 Kibreab 2000; Bereketeab 2002; Dirar 2007; Iyob 2005.
- 42 Bereketeab 2007; Dirar 2007; Iyob 2005.
- 43 Bereketeab 2007; Dirar 2007, p. 164.
- 44 Iyob 2005.
- 45 Bereketeab 2002.
- 46 Bereketeab 2007; 2012.
- 47 Bereketeab 2007; 2012, p. 15.
- 48 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Tigrinya (found in Eritrea and Ethiopia) and Amhara (found in Ethiopia) ethnic groups usually claim a Habesha identity as a collective identity of shared language and culture. Habecker 2012; Pankhurst 2001.
- 49 Habecker 2012.
- 50 Habecker 2012; Pankhurst 2001.
- 51 Weldehaimanot 2009.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Dirar 2007.
- 54 Bailey 2001, p. 670.
- 55 Warner 2012, p. 69.
- 56 Omi and Winant 1994, p. 14.
- 57 Ibid., p. 55.
- 58 Omi and Winant 1994.
- 59 Miles and Brown 2003.
- 60 Ibid., p. 90.

- 61 St. Louis 2005, p. 36.
62 Smith et al. 2009.
63 Interview with author, Durban, 20 March 2015.
64 Interview with author, Cape Town, 06 June 2015.
65 Interview with author, Durban, 23 March 2015.
66 Interview with author, Johannesburg, 3 August 2015.
67 Interview with author, Durban, 26 March 2015.
68 Cornell and Hartmann 1998.
69 Omi and Winant 1994, p. 14.
70 Ibid.
71 Rodríguez 2000.
72 Neocosmos 2006.
73 Berry 1997.
74 Ibid., pp. 23, p. 5.
75 Ibid., p. 23.
76 Ibid., p. 5.
77 Rodríguez 2000; Morning 2001; Murrow and McDonnell 2003; Vargas-Ramos 2014.
78 Berry 1997.
79 Goldberg 2002; Posel 2001b; Maré 2014.
80 Vandeyar 2011; Abdi 2015.
81 Itzigsohn, Giorguli and Vazquez 2005, p. 53.

References

- Abdi, Cawo. 2015. *Elusive Jannah: The Somali Diaspora and a Borderless Muslim Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- _____. 2011. "Moving beyond Xenophobia: Structural Violence, Conflict and Encounters with the Other Africans." *Development Southern Africa* 28.5: 691–704.
- Alexander, Neville. 2006. "Racial Identity, Citizenship and Nation-building in Post-apartheid South Africa." A lecture delivered at the East London campus, University of Fort Hare, 25 March. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/2006-racial-identity-citizenship-and-nation-building.pdf> (accessed February 5, 2018).
- Araia, Tesfalem. 2005. "Routes, Motivations, and Duration: Explaining Eritrean Forced Migrants' Journey to Johannesburg." Masters thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Bailey, Benjamin. 2001. "Dominican-American Ethnic/Racial Identities and United States Social Categories." *International Migration Review* 35: 677–708
- Batisai, Kezia. 2016. "Interrogating Questions of National Belonging, Difference and Xenophobia in South Africa." *Agenda* 30.2: 119–30.
- Bereketeab, Redie. 2012. "Re-examining Local Governance in Eritrea: The Redrawing of Administrative Regions." *African and Asian Studies* 11: 1-29.
- _____. 2007. *Eritrea: Making of a Nation, 1890-1991*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press

- _____. 2002. "Supra-ethnic Nationalism: The Case of Eritrea." *African Sociological Review* 6.2: 137–52.
- Berry, John. 1997. "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation." *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46.1: 5–34.
- Bloch, Alice. 2010. "The Right to Rights? Undocumented Migrants from Zimbabwe Living in South Africa." *Sociology* 44.2: 233–50.
- Chinomona, Elizabeth and Tafadzwa Maziriri. 2015. "Examining the Phenomenon of Xenophobia as Experienced by African Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Johannesburg, South Africa: Intensifying the Spirit of Ubuntu." *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management* 26: 20–31.
- Christopher, A. John. 1997. "Racial Land Zoning in Urban South Africa." *Land Use Policy* 144: 311–23.
- Cornell, Stephen and Douglas Hartmann. 1998. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Crush, Jonathan. 2001. "The Dark Side of Democracy: Migration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa." *International Migration* 38.6: 103–33.
- Crush, Jonathan and Belinda Dodson. 2007. "Another Lost Decade: The Failures of South Africa's Post-apartheid Migration Policy." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 98.4: 436–54.
- Crush, Jonathan, Godfrey Tawodzera, Camron McCordic, and Sujata Ramachandran. 2017. *Refugee Entrepreneurial Economies in Urban South Africa* (rep. i-40). Waterloo, ON: Southern African Migration Programme. SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 76.
- Department of Home Affairs. 2018. "Refugee Status & Asylum: General procedure: Application for Asylum." <http://www.dha.gov.za/index.php/refugee-status-asylum> (accessed 2 December 2018).
- Dirar, U. Chelati. 2007. "Colonialism and the Construction of National Identities: the Case of Eritrea." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1.2: 257–63.
- Erasmus, Zimitri. 2001. "Introduction: Re-imagining Coloured Identities in Post-apartheid South Africa." In Erasmus Zimitri (ed.), *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Farred, Grant. 2000. *The Midfielder's Moment: Coloured Literature and Culture in Contemporary South Africa*. Westview Press: Boulder.
- Frederickson, George. 1981. *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldberg, D. 2002. *The Racial State*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Gordon, Steven. 2010. "Migrants in a State of Exception: Xenophobia and the Role of the Post-apartheid State." *Contemporary Social Issues in Africa*. Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa.
- African Studies Quarterly* | Volume 18, Issue 3 | May 2019
<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v18/v18i3a3.pdf>

- Greyling, Talita. 2016. "The Expected Well-being of Urban Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Johannesburg." *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences* 19.2: 232–48.
- Habecker, Shelly. 2012. "Not Black, but Habasha: Ethiopian and Eritrean Immigrants in American Society." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35.7: 1200-19.
- Harris, Bronwyn. 2002. "Xenophobia: A New Pathology for a New South Africa?" In Derek Hook and Eagle Gillian (eds.), *Psychopathology and Social Prejudice*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Hepner, Tricia R. 2015. "Generation Nationalism and Generation Asylum: Eritrean Migrants, the Global Diaspora, and the Transnational Nation-state." *Diaspora* 18.2: 184–207.
- Itzigsohn, José, Saucedo Giorguli, and Obed Vazquez. 2005. "Immigrant Incorporation and Racial Identity: Racial Self-identification among Dominican Immigrants." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28.1: 50–78.
- Iyob, Ruth. 2005. "From mal d' Africa to mal d' Europa? The Ties that Bind." In Jacqueline Andall, and Derek Duncan (eds.), *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*. Bern: European Academic Publishers.
- Kaplan, Steven. 1999. "Can the Ethiopian Change His Skin? The Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) and Racial Discourse." *African Affairs* 98.393: 535–50.
- Kibreab, Gaim. 2000. "Resistance, Displacement and Identity: The Case of Eritrean Refugees in Sudan." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34.2: 249–96.
- Jacobsen, Karen. 2006. "Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Urban Areas: a Livelihoods Perspective." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19.3: 273–86.
- Landau, Loren. 2006. "Protection and Dignity in Johannesburg: Shortcomings of South Africa's Urban Refugee Policy." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19.3: 308–27.
- _____. 2005. "Urbanization, Nativism and the Rule of Law in South Africa's Forbidden Cities." *Third World Quarterly* 26.7: 1115–1134.
- Langa, Malose and Peace Kiguwa. 2016. "Race-ing Xenophobic Violence: Engaging Social Representations of the Black African Body in Post-apartheid South Africa." *Agenda* 30.2: 75–85.
- Louw, P. Eric. 2004. *The Rise, Fall and Legacy of Apartheid*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Maré, Gerhard. 2014. *Declassified*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.
- Marrow, Helen. 2003. "To Be or Not To Be (Hispanic or Latino): Brazilian Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States." *Ethnicities* 3.4: 427–64.
- Matsinhe, David. 2011. "Africa's Fear of Itself: The Ideology of Makwerekwere in South Africa." *The World Quarterly* 32.2: 295–313.
- McDonnell, Judith and Cileine de Lourenco. 2009. "You're Brazilian, right? What kind Of Brazilian are you? The Racialization of Brazilian Immigrant Women." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32.2: 239–56.

- Mekonnen, Daniel R. and Samuel Bizen Abraha. 2004. "The Plight of Eritrean Students in South Africa." <http://www.ehrea.org/7has.htm> (accessed 12 December 2018).
- Miles, Robert and Malcolm Brown. 2003. *Racism* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.
- Mngxitama, Andile. 2008. "We are not all like that: Race, Class and Nation after Apartheid." In Hassim Shireen et al. (eds.). *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Morning, Ann. 2001. "The Racial Self-identification of South Asians in the United States." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27.1: 61–79.
- Neocosmos, Michael. 2006. *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Norval, J. Aletta. 1996. *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*. London: Verso.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From The 1960s to the 1990s*. (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Pankhurst, Richard. 2001. *The Ethiopians: A History of Peoples of Africa*. (2nd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Polzer, Tara. 2008. "South African Government and Civil Society Responses to Zimbabwean Migration." *SAMP Policy Brief No. 22*. South African Migration Project.
- Posel, Deborah. 2001a. "Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-century South Africa." *African Studies Review* 44.2: 87–113.
- _____. 2001b. "What is in a Name: Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and their Afterlife." *Transformation* 47: 50–74.
- Rodriguez, E. Clara. 2000. *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sadouni, Samadia. 2009. "'God is not Unemployed': Journeys of Somali Refugees in Johannesburg." *African Studies* 68.2: 235–49.
- Seekings, Jeremy and Nicoli Nattrass. 2005. *Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Smith, Jonathan, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin. 2009. *Interpretative Phenomenological analysis: Theory Method and Research*. London: Sage.
- Smit, Ria and Pragna Rugunanan. 2015. "Transnational Forced Migration and Negotiating Emotional Well-being: The Case of Women Refugees in South Africa." *Social Dynamics* 41.1: 184–203.
- Steyn, Melissa. 2008. "Repertoires for Talking White." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31.1: 25–51.
- St Louis, Brett. 2005. "Racialization in the Zone of Ambiguity." In Karim Murji and John Solomos (eds.), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tewolde, Amanuel. 2017. "How Eritreans in South Africa Talk about their Refugee Experiences: A Discursive Analysis." *South African Review of Sociology* 48.3: 3–20.

Tshishonga, Ndwakhulu. 2015. "The Impact of Xenophobia-Afrophobia on the Informal Economy In Durban CBD, South Africa." *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 11.4: 163–79.

United Nations Data. 2017. Table with data on refugees.

<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNHCR&f=indID%3AType-Ref> (Accessed 6 August 2017).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2017a. *What is a refugee? The UN Refugee Agency*. <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/> (Accessed on 31 July 2017).

_____. 2017b. *Asylum-Seekers. The UN Refugee Agency*. <http://www.unhcr.org/asylum-seekers.html> (Accessed on 31 July 2017).

Vandeyar, Saloshna. 2011. "Immigrant Students' Shifting Identifications in South African Schools." *International Journal of Educational Development* 32.2: 232–40.

Vandeyar, Saloshna and Vandeyar Thirusellvan. 2012. "Renegotiating Identities and Reconciling Cultural Ambiguities: Socio-cultural Experiences of Indian Immigrant Students in South African Schools." *International Journal of Social Sciences* 33.2: 155–67.

Vargas-Ramos, Carlos. 2014. "Migrating Race: Migration and Racial Identification Among Puerto Ricans." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37.3: 383–404.

Warner Cindi and Gillian Finchilescu. 2003. "Living with Prejudice—Xenophobia and Race." *Agenda* 55: 36–44.

Warner, Oswald. 2012. "Black in America Too: Afro-Caribbean Immigrants." *Social and Economic Studies* 61.4: 69–103.

Weldehaimanot, Simon. 2009. *Eritrea: Constitutional, Legislative and Administrative Provisions Concerning Indigenous Peoples*. Country Report of the Research Project by the International Labour Organization and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on Constitutional and Legislative Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Geneva, Switzerland.

Winant, Howard. 2004. *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

