

Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship

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The African Diaspora Population in Britain

Migrant Identities and Experiences

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*To my mother, for her innumerable kindnesses, and to Şenay
for her interest (PJA)
To my father, Aaron, Pasi Chinouya (MJC)*

INTRODUCTION

For a number of reasons it is timely to write a book on the Black African population in Britain. The 2011 Census revealed that the Black African population had grown to 1.0 million people, making it the largest Black ethnic group in the country and substantially larger than the Black Caribbean (0.6 million) and Other Black (0.3 million) ethnic groups. Moreover, with the release of nearly all tables from the 2011 Census, this has furnished the authors with a rich repository of data to provide a socio-demographic profile of the Black African group that will remain a key source of evidence until the first releases from the 2021 Census in mid-2023. Further, 2015 marks the beginning of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent and the African Union has declared the diaspora the sixth region of Africa. The African Union has also called for the diaspora to engage in Africa's 10-year Science and Technology Programme endorsed in 2014. It is therefore appropriate to celebrate these events in this way.

The main focus of this book is the population now generally known as 'Black African', with a few exceptions where a wider capture is justified. This term has been used in the three decennial censuses of 1991, 2001, and 2011 and is now salient across central and local government and other statutory bodies. Members of this ethnic group have also coalesced around this term as a satisfactory self-descriptor. The term captures those with African ancestral origins who either self-identify or are identified by others as Black African, but excluding those residents of Africa who are of European or South Asian ancestry and people of North African ancestry. It refers to people and their offspring with these African ancestral origins

who migrated *directly* from sub-Saharan Africa (Agyemang et al., 2005; Bhopal 2004). It thus excludes ‘Black Caribbeans’ (another census category, sometimes referred to as ‘African Caribbeans’ or ‘Afro-Caribbeans’) who are defined as people with African ancestral origins who migrated via the Caribbean.

There are other terms for the ‘Black African’ population, such as ‘African (origin)’ and ‘African British’, but all, including ‘Black African’, are contested and most are technically ambiguous or problematic. The book engages with these debates. Some oppose the term ‘Black African’ as the use of the word black invokes the category of race, though cognitive research amongst community members indicates that the term is acceptable and does not cause offence. Attempts have been made to promote ‘African British’ but these have attracted only limited interest and the term is ambiguous with respect to specific origins in Africa. ‘African (origin)’, sometimes used as a synonym for ‘Black African’, as in the title of this book, also lacks specificity. Moreover, the term ‘sub-Saharan Africa’, widely used by international organisations, continues to be regarded as Eurocentric and racist.

The book’s title also invokes the concept of ‘diaspora’. The concept has traditionally been conceived in terms of a ‘catastrophic’ (Cohen 2008) and involuntary dispersion from a homeland in Africa associated with slavery. The new definition of diasporas has been widened to encompass recent and contemporary African migrations in pursuit of work, education, and asylum from civil strife and diasporas located in countries outside Africa and their interactions with processes of globalisations and associations with the broader concept of transnational communities. This focus on diasporas is particularly appropriate in the case of the predominantly migrant Black African population. The concept as used here focuses on the dispersion or the widely spread situation of a particular migrant group, the circumstances of these diasporic groups or communities, on recent flows of people across spaces and on their transnational activities. This shift in terminology in the 1980s and 1990s—from traditional approaches to *international* migration, invoking unidirectional flows and concepts such as ‘assimilation’ into the host culture, to diaspora studies on *transnational* experiences and communities—reflects growing interest in processes of globalisation as a sociological theme.

Developments in technology, notably the availability of cheap airfares across a widening network of routes and of electronic communications (electronic mail, Skype, the World Wide Web, satellite television, and

methods of money transfer), have all made it possible for these scattered communities to develop and sustain their own particular genres of diasporic identities, economic types, and lifestyles. Accordingly, ‘the rigid territorial nationalism that defines modern nation-states has in this way been replaced by a series of shifting and contested boundaries’ (Scott and Marshall 2005). These are explored, for example, in the book’s discussions on groups, categories, and national and transnational identities, that focus on the complexity, multidimensionality, fluidity, and diversity of diaspora identities.

It is within these broad debates and frameworks that such themes as population change, migration, the labour market, housing, health and social care, education, and social, cultural, and civic life are discussed. In the final chapter, attempts are made to draw out policy-relevant findings. Wherever possible we have tried to accord importance to the substantial heterogeneity concealed in the ‘Black African’ collectivity, though this has largely been limited to the different migrant communities or country of origin groups. The concealment of such contrasting groups as Somalis and Congolese on the one hand and Nigerians and Ghanaians on the other is one of the most important impediments to understanding the Black African diaspora. It is hoped that our analysis will add to evidence-based arguments for more finely granulated categorisation in the decennial census and surveys and to our understanding of the lives and diverse cultures of Black Africans in Britain.

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Use is made in the book of decennial census data that are Crown Copyright from the Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland, and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

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CONTENTS

1	African Communities in Britain	1
2	The Changing Demography and Household Characteristics of the Black African Population	11
	<i>The Size of the Black African Population</i>	12
	<i>Country of Birth and Migration</i>	12
	<i>Components of Change</i>	16
	<i>Age Structures</i>	17
	<i>Population Pyramids for the Black African Group</i>	19
	<i>Smaller Population Groups</i>	19
	<i>Fertility Rates</i>	20
	<i>Marital and Household Characteristics of the Black African Population</i>	24
	<i>Marital and Partnership Status</i>	24
	<i>Household Composition</i>	26
	<i>Household/Family Size</i>	29
	<i>Distinctive Black African Practices</i>	30
3	Patterns of Migration	35
	<i>Age of Arrival of Population Born Abroad</i>	36
	<i>Year of Arrival of Black Africans Born Abroad</i>	37
	<i>Onward Migration</i>	42
	<i>Main Reasons for Migration</i>	44
	<i>Asylum Seekers</i>	44

	<i>Dispersal of Asylum Seekers</i>	47
	<i>Outcomes</i>	48
	<i>Migration for Study</i>	48
	<i>Migration for Work</i>	50
	<i>Family Migration</i>	51
	<i>Undocumented/Illegal Migrants and Trafficked Populations</i>	52
	<i>What Happens When International Black African Migrants</i>	
	<i>Settle or Remain</i>	53
	<i>Homelessness</i>	54
	<i>Destitution</i>	55
	<i>Integration</i>	57
4	Categories and Group Identities	61
	<i>Census Categorisation</i>	62
	<i>Census Practices in Other Countries</i>	66
	<i>Approaches to Classifying Black Africans</i>	
	<i>in Future Censuses and Surveys</i>	67
	<i>Emerging Patterns of National Identity</i>	70
	<i>Identity and Belonging to Britain</i>	75
	<i>Transnational Identities</i>	76
	<i>Religion</i>	77
	<i>Language</i>	78
	<i>Other Identity Dimensions</i>	81
	<i>Stability and Change in Ethnic Group Identity</i>	82
	<i>Who Is 'Black African': Group Membership and Fuzzy</i>	
	<i>Boundaries</i>	84
	<i>Social Categorisation and Group Identification:</i>	
	<i>The Acceptability of a Colour-Based Term</i>	90
	<i>How 'Black Africans' Identify Themselves</i>	92
	<i>'Africanness' versus 'Blackness'</i>	96
	<i>The Heterogeneity of the 'Black African' Group</i>	98
5	Where 'Black Africans' Live	103
	<i>The Spreading Out of the Black African Population</i>	104
	<i>Variations in Patterns of Residence by Communities of Descent</i>	106
	<i>Segregation and Mixing</i>	113
	<i>Measures of Segregation</i>	114

<i>Neighbourhood Ethnic Residential Segregation</i>	
<i>Using Census Categories</i>	116
<i>Analysis of Residential Segregation at Subcensus</i>	
<i>Category Level: Onomap Subgroups</i>	118
<i>Evenness</i>	119
<i>Exposure</i>	119
<i>Concentration</i>	119
<i>Clustering</i>	120
<i>Living in Deprived Neighbourhoods</i>	121
<i>Ethnic Density Effects</i>	126
6 Socio-economic Position	129
<i>Housing Circumstances</i>	129
<i>Housing Circumstances in Black African Subgroups</i>	132
<i>Education</i>	134
<i>Variation in Educational Attainment by Census Subgroups</i>	136
<i>Variations in Educational Attainment by Linguistic,</i>	
<i>National Origin, and Religion Subgroups</i>	136
<i>National Origins</i>	139
<i>Reasons for Variations in Educational Attainment</i>	141
<i>Labour Market</i>	142
<i>Trends in Labour Market Participation by Ethnic Group</i>	142
<i>Economic Activity by Ethnic Group</i>	143
<i>Differences in Labour Market Participation by Gender</i>	144
<i>Occupation and Industry</i>	147
<i>Self-Employment</i>	158
<i>Hours Worked</i>	159
<i>Young People (Aged 16–24) in the Labour Market</i>	160
<i>Black African Subgroup Variations in Labour</i>	
<i>Market Participation</i>	160
7 Generic Health Status	163
<i>Limiting Long-Term Illness</i>	163
<i>General Health</i>	168
<i>Mortality</i>	168
<i>Maternal Morbidity, Mortality, and Initiation</i>	
<i>of Antenatal Care</i>	170

8 Long-Term Conditions and Infectious Diseases	173
<i>Long-Term Conditions</i>	173
<i>Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes</i>	174
<i>Cancers</i>	175
<i>Mental Health</i>	176
<i>Sickle Cell Disease</i>	181
<i>Behavioural and Health Status Risk Factors</i>	182
<i>Self-Reported Cigarette Smoking</i>	182
<i>Alcohol</i>	183
<i>Overweight and Obesity</i>	184
<i>Blood Pressure</i>	185
<i>Participation in Physical Activity</i>	187
<i>Eating Habits</i>	187
<i>Complementary and Alternative Medicines</i>	188
<i>Children's Health</i>	188
<i>Infectious Diseases</i>	189
<i>HIV/AIDS</i>	189
<i>Tuberculosis</i>	193
<i>Sexually Transmitted Infections</i>	194
<i>Social and Community Care</i>	195
9 Social, Cultural, and Civic Life	201
<i>Social Relationships</i>	202
<i>Friendships and Conviviality</i>	202
<i>Interethnic Unions</i>	205
<i>Caring for Family Members, Friends, and Neighbours</i>	207
<i>Moral Conviviality: The Case of Home Associations</i>	207
<i>Broader African Organisations</i>	209
<i>Health and Welfare Organisations and Networks</i>	209
<i>African Churches: Missionary Zeal and Migrant Needs</i>	211
<i>Civic and Political Participation</i>	213
<i>Civic Participation</i>	214
<i>Political Participation</i>	216
<i>Links with African Homelands</i>	218
10 Implications for Policy and Practice	221
<i>What Kind of Ethnicity Data Is Needed?</i>	222

<i>Racism and Disadvantage</i>	227
<i>The Labour Market</i>	227
<i>The Housing Market</i>	228
<i>Health and Health Care</i>	229
<i>Social Care</i>	231
<i>Living in Deprived Neighbourhoods</i>	233
<i>Asylum Seekers</i>	233
<i>Restrictive Immigration Policies</i>	235
<i>The Preferences and Aspirations of the Black African Community</i>	237
References	239
Index	261

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	Migrant flows from African countries and secondary flows from European countries amongst Black Africans born outside the UK: England and Wales residents, 2011	15
Fig. 2.2	Population change, 2001–2011, England and Wales (% of population in 2001)	18
Fig. 2.3	Black Africans: age structure, 2001 and 2011	18
Fig. 2.4	The Black African population in 2001 and 2011, age at 2011	20
Fig. 2.5	Age structures for small population ethnic and country of birth groups, 2011 Census	21
Fig. 3.1	Migrant Black groups in England and Wales in 2011, by age at time of arrival	37
Fig. 3.2	Country of birth (Central and Western Africa, South and Eastern Africa, and Africa not otherwise specified) by year of arrival in the UK, England and Wales, 2011	38
Fig. 3.3	Black African migrants arrived before 1981: countries of birth	39
Fig. 3.4	Black African migrants arrived 1981–2000: countries of birth	39
Fig. 3.5	Black African migrants arrived 2001–2006: countries of birth	40
Fig. 3.6	Black African migrants arrived 2007–2011: countries of birth	41
Fig. 3.7	Applicants from African countries seeking asylum in the UK	45
Fig. 4.1	Responses to the 2011 England and Wales Census question on national identity by ethnic group	71
Fig. 5.1	Percentage change in the size of the Black African population, 2001–2011, local authorities in England and Wales	105
Fig. 5.2	Where African migrants lived in London in 2011: Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Congo DR, Eritrea, and Ethiopia country of birth groups	112

Fig. 6.1	Proportion of ethnic groups in owned or shared ownership, private rented or living rent-free, and social rented accommodation, 2011, England and Wales	130
Fig. 6.2	Percentage of pupils achieving the national benchmark of 5 grades A*–C including English and Maths by ethnicity, 2011	141
Fig. 6.3	Economic activity of males, by ethnic group, aged 16–64, England and Wales, 2011	146
Fig. 6.4	Economic activity of females by ethnic group, aged 16–64, England and Wales, 2011	147
Fig. 6.5	Men and women in low-skilled occupations by ethnic group, England and Wales, 2011 Census	149
Fig. 7.1	Age-standardised rates of LLTI by African countries of birth, London, 2001	167
Fig. 9.1	Participation in civic engagement and volunteering	215

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Countries of birth of overseas-born Black African residents in England and Wales, 2001 and 2011 censuses	14
Table 2.2	Estimated African-born population resident in the UK by sex and country of birth, January 2014 to December 2014 (thousands)	17
Table 2.3	Total fertility rates for non-UK born women living in England and Wales, 2011, rank-ordered by mothers' country of birth in Africa	23
Table 2.4	Household composition by ethnic group of household reference person (HRP), England and Wales, 2011	27
Table 3.1	People seen rough sleeping in the year: nationality and ethnic group, Greater London: 2012/2013–2014/2015	55
Table 4.1	Black African: religion, England and Wales, 2011 Census	77
Table 4.2	People whose main language was an African language, England and Wales, 2011	79
Table 4.3	Factors important to identity amongst Black Africans, Citizenship Survey 2007–2008	82
Table 4.4	Responses to question on how you would describe your ethnic group and cultural background using 'your own words', People, Families and Communities Survey, 2001	94
Table 5.1	African Onomap Subgroups and their total and relative population sizes in London (2004)	118
Table 5.2	The seven domains of the IMD 2010	122
Table 5.3	Cumulative percentage of population living in neighbourhoods at selected percentiles on the IMD 2010 distribution, by ethnic group, 2011 (%)	123

Table 6.1	Persons per room in households by selected country of birth of household reference person, England and Wales, 2011	133
Table 6.2	Lowest and highest attaining linguistic groups within the Black African category, compared with other selected ethnic groups, London, 2008	137
Table 6.3	Socio-economic characteristics of largest ethno-linguistic groups in Newham (KS2 only)	138
Table 6.4	Economic activity of people aged 16–64, by ethnic group, England and Wales, 2011 (percentages)	144
Table 6.5	Economic activity of Black Africans by regions, England and Wales, 2011 Census: proportion of the population 16–64 in employment, unemployed, and economically inactive	145
Table 6.6	Economic activity of Black Africans and White British People aged 16–59 in the UK, by country of birth	148
Table 6.7	Industry: Black African men and women, England and Wales, 2011 Census	150
Table 6.8	Top five industries for women with highest proportion of ethnic group, England and Wales, 2011 Census	151
Table 6.9	Qualified Black African nursing, midwifery, and health visiting staff in England as on September 30 for each specified year: headcount	152
Table 6.10	Newly registered overseas nurses: African Source Countries, 1998–2008	153
Table 6.11	NHS Hospital and Community Health Service monthly workforce statistics, September 2014	156
Table 6.12	Labour market participation of young people (aged 16–24) by ethnic group, England and Wales, 2011 Census	161
Table 7.1	% limited a lot, aged 16–64, and % with bad/very bad health, by African countries of birth: London Borough of Greenwich, 2011	166
Table 8.1	Incidence of psychosis in British ethnic groups	180
Table 8.2	The numbers of HIV-diagnosed persons seen for HIV care in the UK by ethnicity and route of exposure in 2013	190
Table 8.3	Children looked after as on 31 March by ethnic origin, England 2009–2013	196
Table 9.1	Mixing with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds by sphere of mixing: ethnicity, England, 2010–2011	204