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# Return migrants in Ghana

by Linnet Taylor

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**ippr**, 30-32 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7RA. Tel: +44 (0)20 7470 6100 E: [info@ippr.org](mailto:info@ippr.org)  
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## The re-migration project

This case study of return migration from the UK to New Zealand was conducted as part of ippr's re-migration research, exploring emigration among the UK's immigrants. Case studies were also conducted in Ghana, Pakistan, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. These countries were selected in order to ensure the research reflected a cross section of return experiences and a mix of migration profiles.

Each research team case reviewed existing relevant literature and data on return migration to the country, especially from the UK. They conducted 20 life history interviews with returnees. All the studies aimed to recruit a range of respondents that broadly reflected the profile of returned and onward migrants from the UK in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, employment status, reason for migrating to the UK and reason for migrating to the case study country.

The case studies provide a qualitative insight into migrants' motivations and experiences of return, and do not seek to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics and impacts of return to these countries.

The interviews explored the following areas:

- Participants' motivation for moving to the UK
- Participants' experiences of living, working and studying in the UK
- Participants' motivations for and experiences of leaving the UK and returning to home country
- Participants' life in their home country since returning
- Participants' sense of identity and links to the UK.

## Introduction

### A brief history of Ghanaian migration

West Africa has historically had a high degree of mobility among its populations (Anarfi 2003), with scholars, traders and other travellers moving between the region and other parts of the continent, most frequently North Africa. A thousand years ago the ancient kingdom of Ghana, situated somewhat to the north of the present nation, dominated the trans-Saharan gold trade, exporting gold to Sudan, Egypt and Europe. However, with the expansion of the European imperial powers in the 15th century, much of this highly productive South-North mobility gave way to the international slave trade. West Africa lost 6.3 million people over the 400 years of slave trading, with the Gold Coast (an area comprising modern Ghana, Togo and Benin) losing an average of 5,000 of its population each year (Bump 2006).

The Gold Coast became a British colony in 1874, and acquired a substantial population of European immigrants as Britain tapped its resources of gold and cocoa over the next century. This foreign population peaked at just under 300,000 before World War II. Ghana was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to become independent, in 1957, and its initially strong economy attracted immigrants from elsewhere in Africa. By 1960, foreigners composed 12 per cent of the population (Bump 2006). Migrants came from the neighbouring countries for seasonal agricultural work, while tribal and cultural ties extended across borders to Togo and Benin, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. Ghana's borders were, and remain, highly porous to regional migrants, who often do not consider themselves to be migrating internationally (Anarfi *et al* 2003).

The country slipped into economic crisis in the mid-1960s, becoming a sending country for the first time since the era of slavery. A balance of payments deficit, shortages of raw materials and spare parts, and diminishing financial returns for farmers led to rising unemployment and increasing levels of crime and smuggling, and combined to make the country less attractive to foreigners, half of whom left during the 1960s (Nugent 2004). This outflow was increased by Ghana's deportation of all undocumented migrants in 1969, and by the establishment of ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) in 1975, which greatly relaxed visa requirements among member states. Compounding these economic and political push factors was the hiring of Ghanaian professionals by newly independent African countries such as Botswana and Uganda.

In the 1980s the outflow intensified as jobs in agriculture across West Africa and in Nigeria's booming oil industry attracted the less educated as well, so that by the early 1980s around 300 Ghanaians were arriving in Nigeria each day (Anarfi 1982). By 1980, around 2 million Ghanaians, mainly from the southern part of the country, had emigrated (Anarfi *et al* 2003), comprising nearly 15 per cent of the population.

This migration was fairly balanced with regard to gender. Women tended to dominate flows to neighbouring countries (Anarfi *et al* 2003), while larger numbers of men migrated greater distances. After a traumatic expulsion of Ghanaians by the main receiving country, Nigeria, in the early 1980s, more migrants began to look beyond Africa to Europe (Van Hear 1998). Ghana suffered under a structural adjustment programme from the mid-1980s onwards, so that by the 1990s, the resulting social effects were creating ever-higher migration flows as far afield as the United States and Canada, which by 2000 had overtaken Europe as destinations for Ghanaians (Eurostat 2001).

Ghanaians continue to migrate within the country, mainly from the northern region to the south. More than 50 per cent of Ghanaians migrate internally (Development Research Centre on Migration and Poverty 2003), to escape rural poverty by seeking jobs in the industrial sector based around the capital and ports (Anarfi *et al* 2003). Both seasonal and more long-term migration occurs, with 64 per cent of internal migrants moving to join family members in the city. International mobility is an option for those with more resources, and thus often originates in the south of the country.

Skilled human capital is the best-known story of modern Ghanaian migration: in 2005 a survey by the World Bank (2005) judged Ghana to be the second hardest hit by brain drain out of all countries with a population of more than 5 million (surpassed only by Haiti). 50 per cent of Ghana's graduates live

abroad (Ghanaweb 2006), while the health sector is particularly hard hit, with around 70 per cent of the doctors trained there now living outside the country (Migration Information Source 2008). Today, Ghana's net migration rate is negative (-0.58 per 1,000 population [CIA World Factbook quoted by Bump 2006]), meaning that the country is still losing emigrants faster than it can attract returnees.

Ghanaians are the UK's largest and most established African diasporic group (Higazi 2005). There are no reliable figures on how many Ghanaians live in the UK, but the 2001 census counted 55,000, an increase of 72 per cent since the last count. Orozco (2005) estimated that there might be as many as 300,000, largely based on money transfers. There are also significant diasporas resident in the US (currently the most popular destination for Ghanaians), Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. Ghanaians are increasingly mobile: according to a recent survey over 70 per cent of the country's population would move abroad if they could, with one in four saying they would migrate illegally if necessary (Ghanaweb 2007). Circular migration (repeat migration to the same place) is very common: a recent study found that urban, educated Ghanaians were the group most likely to migrate multiple times (Reed *et al* 2005).

Migrants are returning home, however. Ghanaians no longer primarily migrate expecting to stay, as was true in the 1960s and 1970s, but tend to remain highly mobile, and account for most of Ghana's in-migration (Anarfi *et al* 2003). Numerous studies have been undertaken on return migrants to Ghana (Ammassari and Black 2001, Kabki 2004, Smith 2005, Orozco 2005) but no national figures enumerating returnees have been produced since 2000.

Today, migration is both a national problem and a source of optimism in some sectors. Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the Government's account of its plans for reducing poverty, addresses migration only as a negative, and the Government has no formal strategy for engaging its diaspora in development. However, the sheer numbers of educated Ghanaians living outside the country offer some hope for the future, if the country can devise ways to attract them home and benefit from their skills.

### **A note on research methodology**

This study used a snowball technique to find return migrants, which has advantages and drawbacks. The main reason for using such a method is that it provides almost the only way to locate returnees, who are not enumerated in official statistics and are therefore next to impossible to find via random sampling procedure. Snowball sampling can, however, result in the restriction of a survey to a certain geographic area or type of returnee. The two main areas in which returnees were surveyed were the Greater Accra and the Ashanti regions, the two largest urban areas of Ghana and the primary areas of both emigration and return (Anarfi 2003). They thus provide a fairly cross-sectional sample of returnees, since migrants tend to return to areas with greater economic opportunity.

Anarfi (2003) found that returnees largely mirrored national demographics overall, and thus an effort was made to find a balanced sample with regard to gender and age. Fifty per cent of respondents are female and 75 per cent are under the age of 40, with some older returnees and retirees. The respondents had returned at times ranging from 1975 to 2008. A representative ethnic mix was a more difficult question: tribally, Ghana is very diverse, with around 100 recognised ethnic sub-groups (see Ghanaweb). We did not attempt to achieve a representative sample in ethnic terms, as no records are kept as to the ethnicity of emigrants or returnees.

The average interview for this survey lasted 70 minutes. Respondents were generally interviewed at their homes or places of work, and were offered the chance to remain anonymous. Several elected not to be photographed, though they described their preference as a matter of Ghanaian custom rather than a desire to hide their identities.

Perhaps the most important point to make about the methodology of this study is that the small sample size necessitates an almost purely qualitative approach to analysing the data. However, the respondents frequently commented on what they understood to be common experiences among Ghanaian migrants to the UK. These tended to correspond with similar answers across respondents of the same age group, or with the same reason for migrating, so that by the end of the survey the 20 interviews could be argued to give a picture of a broader reality among Ghanaian migrants. While there is no way to prove this, and we should be judicious about the use of anecdote, these commonalities across different accounts are striking, and merit consideration.

## The interviews

The 20 migrants interviewed for this project offered a wide range of migration experiences that reflect the changing economic and social conditions in Ghana and the UK over the last half-century. The respondents ranged in age from 26 to 73, and had migrated between 1962 and 2007. The majority of the Ghanaian respondents had migrated to the UK and returned to Ghana. Only one had moved from the UK to another destination country (the Netherlands), although several mentioned that they would consider re-migrating from Ghana to the US later on. This may reflect the ongoing shift from the UK to the US as the main destination for Ghanaian migrants, and reveals a dynamic where some follow old colonial links to Britain but, in doing so, gain the knowledge and capital to migrate further afield. Most were interviewed in Accra or Kumasi, although most of the migrants were not from these cities originally. This was because most returnees tend to cluster in urban centres where they can use the skills, education and resources gained abroad.

### Choosing to migrate

#### 'I wanted to be part of it'

Reasons for migrating tend to operate on various levels. At the heart of the decision are generally economic push and pull dynamics: there is a high historic and continuing wage differential between Ghana and Britain<sup>1</sup>, which allows some professionals to more than double their earning potential by migrating to Britain and led to one respondent taking a 60 per cent pay cut when returning to Ghana. Migrants often work in jobs for which they are radically over-qualified, since manual labour abroad becomes a highly profitable solution to specific financial needs, thus leading to de-skilling. It also, in combination with a lack of opportunity in Ghana, means that it still makes financial sense to migrate.

A variety of related factors are almost as important, however. One is to do with education: of the 20 respondents, 12 migrated in order to further their education, and the others undertook study while they were there. All agreed that an educational qualification (most commonly a postgraduate degree) from Britain is worth more to Ghanaian employers than a Ghanaian qualification. Another economic reason cited by respondents was the desire to raise their living standards in Ghana. All the migrants worked in the UK and saved money, and many used their earnings to invest in a house or business in Ghana.

Much of educational migration, then, is due to a 'pull' dynamic that is further strengthened by the efforts of British universities. A respondent who was one of the first in his family to migrate, remembers reading advertisements in the Ghanaian newspapers from universities and colleges in the UK who were explicitly recruiting Ghanaian students. Among those who have migrated to study, there was clearly more awareness of certain British colleges who recruit in Africa.

Related to this cohort dynamic, there is also social pressure to migrate.

*'I wanted to have the experience, the exposure. I had heard a lot about the UK... Other students were travelling, and I wanted to be part of it.'* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)



Francois

All the migrants interviewed had emigrated at a transitional stage in their lives – either at the end of their adolescence to take their first degree, or after their undergraduate degree and before their first job, at the point at which they were thinking about starting a family and needed more resources to do so comfortably.

This highlights another hallmark of Ghanaian migration: transnational families. Respondents had often lived apart from immediate family members for years, even decades, and accepted this conflict between

1. Real wages (nominal wages divided by the cost of living index) declined steadily in Ghana during the period 1962-2008, during which the respondents migrated. They have risen in the UK over the same period.

family and livelihood as normal. Three quarters of the interviewees had close family members who were settled in Europe or the US, and all had extended family settled in either place. This transnational family dynamic means that Ghanaians grow up visiting aunts, uncles and siblings abroad, learning to see a transnational family life as normal and acceptable. Several of the older interviewees had sent young children, born in the UK, home to Ghana to live with extended family so that they would ‘grow up Ghanaian’.

Thus many Ghanaian migrants have been living in transnational families for generations, even though all the respondents indicated that they found it hard to be separated from loved ones over the long term. This situation has led to both a mythologising of return and to the normalising of a transnational existence, where some migrants use their savings to build a house in Ghana that they visit yearly but never quite move back to permanently.

The strong colonial and post-colonial links Ghana still has with the UK make it easier both to imagine migrating and actually to do so, since for many decades Ghanaians enjoyed favourable status in terms of access to visas. Today, this availability of visas is changing, a disjuncture that is highlighted in many of the interviews.

## Choosing the UK

### ‘London Bridge is falling down’

Britain has been the first choice of Ghanaian migrants for the past half-century. Many migrants mentioned the importance of a shared language and educational system, which make it easier to operate there than in other destination countries. These deep-rooted, though ambivalently-expressed, cultural links to the UK also mean that educated Ghanaians in particular have constructed an ‘imagery’ about Britain before they first go there, one that has been encouraged by the rise of the Commonwealth and British input into development in Ghana, by favourable visa regimes, and enduring educational practices. This imagery acts as a conduit, providing both the route and a set of available migrant identities, and provides an important counterpoint to the economic rationale for migrating.

Most of the respondents indicated that Britain was the easiest place to imagine migrating to, and the place they believed would be most culturally familiar. Most of the migrants interviewed had not considered any other destination, so ingrained was the idea of migrating to Britain. Many spoke of learning about Britain in school as a factor in their decision to go there:

*‘You know, in the books you learn: [sings] “London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down” – you’re culturally indoctrinated already, as a child.’ (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)*

This set of values and beliefs about Britain’s relationship with Ghana has remained essentially constant, while the relationship between the countries has changed greatly over time. Each interviewee’s explanation of their migration history seems to turn on the earlier migration of a family member, which in turn presumably occurred because of other family or ethnic links to the UK. Where this is less important, as for example with one respondent whose only family link was a cousin who had returned to Ghana, there is a cohort of schoolfriends who have migrated. Thus each migration stands in relation to others, and the decision to migrate to Britain can be seen as both an individual and a group choice.

## Planning the move to Britain

### ‘People now go for specific objectives’

According to the migrants surveyed, planning took place on several levels ranging from the institutional (scholarships, visas and official leave) to the personal (childcare and financial needs). Many planned to migrate for tertiary education only, but work opportunities resulted from gaining a qualification and kept them abroad for longer – and enabled a greater degree of social integration – than they had

anticipated. Others migrated with an objective that changed after settling in. In one case, a one-year master's degree turned into a three-year doctorate and a career full of international travel.

Planning was a common theme in all the interviews, with almost all the respondents able to enumerate their original goals and each subsequent change in horizon. Within the sample, those who planned least had the least successful experiences either socially or overall. Almost none emigrated with no plans at all, and in one case where this occurred the experience was disastrous in every way.

There is a clear variation in types of planning across the different cohorts of migrants interviewed. The earlier group undertook a very different journey to that of the later migrants. For most of those who emigrated before the 1990s, migration involved voluntarily cutting themselves off from home and family for an indefinite period. Letters took months to travel between Ghana and the UK, phone calls were impossible at first and still difficult later, and until the invention of the internet migrants were almost completely cut off. While all the interviewees had a certain degree of flexibility in their plans, these earlier migrants aimed for a longer stay than the later ones – between five and 10 years – and spoke of less certainty about how or when they would return. In contrast, the more recent migrants were less cut-off, went with plans to study and return within two to three years, and were more likely to do so. This may be due to more restrictive visa regulations, or influenced by the fact that this younger cohort believed they would have the opportunity to migrate again if work or family beckoned. Notably, the oldest migrant has only revisited the UK once, 22 years after re-emigrating to Ghana, despite having family living there throughout the period.

The interviewees could be divided into four main types of planned migration.

- First, those who planned to go for education and then return. For these migrants work was generally incidental, a way to finance their existing plans.
- Second, there were those who planned to go for education and to start building a career, then return, for whom work was more targeted. The most recent graduates were allowed a year's work after finishing their studies under a new postgraduate student visa scheme, and took advantage of this.
- Third came those who planned to go for education and work opportunities, and to stay indefinitely. For these earlier migrants, emigration was open-ended for reasons described above.
- Fourth, there were those who had no specific plans. These migrants either had dual nationality, and thus did not need to define their plans in order to get a visa, or migrated in response to an invitation rather than for a specific purpose.

These divisions offer a longitudinal cross-section of the migration process, describing a progression from a time when all Ghanaians were welcomed but migration represented a huge commitment of time and resources, through the introduction of visas and the gradual tightening of immigration controls, to present conditions, in which visas tend to be conditional on a few tightly circumscribed goals – a place at a UK university or having a close family member living there are virtually the only ways for ordinary Ghanaians to migrate.

One common feature across most of the interviews was the notion that as well as planning to migrate, you have to plan to return. This is partly a feature of the newer type of migration experience:

*'People now go for specific objectives, not permanent immigration, particularly professionals. They go to make money for a project, or to get experience in their field.'*  
(Nana, female, 37, banker, Accra)

Beyond this, though, there is a common belief that migrants who do not plan their return may find themselves stuck in the UK, not using their education and out of step with their cohort back home in Ghana.

*'Too many stay and find themselves stacking shelves, despite having an MBA. You cannot belong in Ghana if you stay away too long – people are embarrassed to come home.'* (Ama, female, 27, administrator, Kumasi)

Many said they had planned the birth of children according to their migration plans. One interviewee recounted his decision to bring his children home to go to primary school in Ghana, saying that if he had not done so while they were young, the effort of bringing them home would have made him less likely to return. Another, an accountant who has moved between the UK and Ghana all her life, gave birth to two children on separate visits to the UK, then returned for her third because she felt it was important for her children to 'be the same'.

Everyone interviewed migrated because of, and via, their social or professional networks. Most had prepared for their migration by taking shorter trips to visit family prior to the longer-term move. Some were taken along on trips to the UK by older family members as children or adolescents, and thus learned the ropes of international travel gradually. Those who had not, generally migrated with a job offer or a place at university, where the employer or international students' association took the place of family in assisting them with the move and the settling-in process. One respondent who went because of her husband's job placement had a noticeably harder time settling in and finding work than the others.

Family ties, therefore, appear to be the strongest factor in preparing migrants for the move. Migrants spoke of their family in the UK as a refuge during the first difficult months as they adjusted to the new country, while those who moved to pursue education usually had housing on campus at first and found they did not have to integrate as abruptly. Preparation, then, is at a minimum where migrants are young and their commitments flexible. Few migrated after starting their family, and those who did tended to leave their children in Ghana to minimise the amount of preparation needed. Given the difficulty of finding out about institutions and requirements in the UK this could be seen as a rational decision, particularly when migrants lack family in the UK and communication between the countries is slow at best, and impossible at worst.

## Expectations and reality

### 'Paradise'

The interviewees all related having highly, even unrealistically, positive expectations about moving to the UK. Some of the expectations were:

*'...paradise – what is shown in the movies. Everything is there, there's nothing wrong.'*  
(Daniel, male, 32, lecturer/architect, Kumasi)

*'...a world of opportunities. Unbelievable... heaven.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

*'Before I got there I felt it was a place where you could easily achieve all your dreams. A fantasy. Down here, you think everything is so easy, you can make a lot of money, that everything is easily accessible, citizen or not.'* (Martha, female, 28, programme administrator, Accra)

Many migrants mentioned films as a source of information about the UK. Those with immediate family living there tended to have expectations that were more grounded in reality, although still highly positive.

Understandably, the UK did not live up to these migrants' expectations. The weather, the food, the demands of an English-language-only environment<sup>2</sup> with unfamiliar accents, and above all the social aspects of British life represented a profound cultural disjoint for most of the migrants interviewed. One contested the idea that migrants could even imagine what Britain is like, since it is so dramatically different from Ghana. Others said that they suffered almost unbearable culture shock. Migrants



2. Although Ghanaian officialdom and the country's educational system operate in English, most Ghanaians negotiate everyday business in indigenous languages, the most widely spoken being Twi.

generally said it had taken them a substantial settling-in period of between one and two years to feel comfortable.

For those who grew up moving between the UK and Ghana their eventual move to the UK was less of a shock, but still left them feeling lonely and lost for a while. Ghana has a high degree of neighbourhood interaction, social life revolves around extended families, and the work-life balance tends to tip in favour of home life and family. Most of the migrants, even those who knew what to expect, had difficulty adjusting in the UK to a society where work often seems to be prioritised above home life. One voiced a common theme when she talked about the pressure of British life compared with Ghana's:

*'...in London it was so stressful. If you were within [Ghanaian] circles – with your own – it was all right but if you moved outside you could tell that there was so much stress all over the place.'* (Mercy, female, 29, educational adviser, Accra)

Many mentioned loneliness, particularly the older generation who moved into a Britain with a much smaller Ghanaian community, where study, work and worship all had to be done without the company of compatriots.

Perhaps the greatest source of difference and disappointment (apart from the weather, which was mentioned unfavourably by every interviewee) was the state of everyday social interaction. In Ghana people greet each other in the street, know their neighbours and until recently would not think twice about disciplining each other's children. These high levels of social capital are partly a reaction to Ghana's inefficiency in policing, keeping track of, and providing basic services to its people. They are also what keeps Ghana one of the most functional societies in West Africa, and are consciously nurtured and preserved by Ghanaians. In comparison, the UK initially seems cold and antisocial to many Ghanaian migrants. Some were surprised that the British did not appear to judge each other's actions in public:

*'People don't care what others do, you can walk and eat, and no one will say anything.'* (Benjamin, male, 44, consultant, Accra)

*'[The] first time I went to the train station, there was a woman smoking, and I thought "she can't do that!" But no one cared.'* (Daniel, male, 32, lecturer/architect, Accra)

The idea that 'no one cared' was not freeing for these respondents, but instead made them feel cut loose and abandoned – something it took years to get over in some cases. These migrants seldom arrived with any pre-existing social group beyond a couple of family members, and found that the cost of living in Britain meant they had to find their own housing and pay their own bills, something that was surprising to those who had been part of a large extended family until they migrated. For the majority of migrants, leaving Ghana also represented moving out of the family home for the first time, something that added to the social difficulties they experienced.

The move from a group to an individual culture seems to have been as great a wrench as the geographic move these migrants made, but on top of this came the stress of adjusting to the British work culture. A common belief was that the British were too weak to work hard – possibly a belief that lingered from colonial days, when British overseers managed Ghanaian workers:

*'I believed people in Britain were lazy... there is a general perception in Ghana that British people are weak.'* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)

He was surprised to discover that they worked hard all day, something many of the migrants described as a shock.

*'In the UK everything is about time and punctuality. Work is on the clock – "don't be late".'* (Felix, male, 28, Accra)

Every migrant came back with a positive opinion of Britain's disciplined work practices, although they had found them difficult to adjust to:

*‘The British have standards... If you work in Britain, you really come to terms with business... Discipline, punctuality. If you have a one-hour break, it’s a one-hour break. In Ghana people go on break and they come back two hours later. You can’t have visitors at work. You have an appointment at a particular time.’* (Samuel, male, 61, retiree, Accra)

The differences in social and work customs compounded each other for many interviewees: the long work hours and the focus required for their studies meant they had a hard time finding friends. Most felt that the UK was not easy, and that they had to work to succeed and to access opportunity. They suggested that other migrants should be warned not to expect to have a good time socially, and treat their migration as a temporary opportunity rather than a chance to settle.

Expecting to find the streets paved with gold is the oldest myth of migration. However, it is clear from these interviews that it takes myths to create sufficient drive to migrate and find opportunity. Moving from Ghana to the UK takes an investment of time, money and effort that is hard to imagine for those living in richer countries. This expenditure might not be possible without expectations that verge on the unrealistic. Adjusting to reality was almost universally traumatic, but most of the migrants developed what could be described as a set of double standards, allowing them to engage with Britain on its own terms, while still valuing and wishing for the friendliness and relaxed culture of Ghana.

This ability to adjust, in fact, seemed to be one of the factors determining the time the migrants would spend in Britain. Those who never came to terms with the differences tended to find Britain cold, expensive and unfriendly. They understandably did not build a life there and came back quickly to Ghana.

## Dealing with the immigration authorities

### **‘It’s easier to stay and become undocumented’**

The participants experienced different visa regimes according to the era of their migration. The earliest went through an abbreviated immigration process with longer lasting visas than the more recent migrants, for whom it was impossible to obtain one that allowed more than a year’s stay. Since 1985, children born in Britain to migrant parents have not been awarded British citizenship, and today transnational family life is starting to be challenged both by the cost of flying and by the desire of Britain and other developed countries to keep out what are known as ‘third country migrants’, that is, those not from the European Union. Visas are becoming scarce for Africans outside the highly-skilled category, and schemes such as the introduction of visa deposits will soon make it next to impossible for those who do not fall into the highly skilled category to visit the UK.

The migrants interviewed believed the UK’s immigration system to be strongly biased in favour of the well-off, making it impossible for the less-educated to negotiate. One suggested that Britain was profiting from the failure of unqualified applicants, since the High Commission accepted applications (and fees) from the eligible and ineligible alike:

*‘A lot of people are ignorant about the process of applying for a visa, they pay their money without knowing whether they will be eligible. They should triage people’s applications, rather than taking a lot of non-refundable money from people.’* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)

Those at the poor end of the migrant spectrum often felt unfairly penalised by the system, and punished when they had acted in good faith. Those with families in the UK felt that they were losing ground to elite migrants, who are welcomed under the new points system. One felt that she had been successful in getting a student visa because she ‘had the correct bank statement’. Most successful visa applicants had close family living in the UK who either advised them on how to get a visa, or had been brought as children for repeated visits by a UK resident family member. Meanwhile those going it alone often had problems relating to lack of information. For them, there was a sense of being at the mercy of the system. They could find no independent source of information, apart from private

visa services in Ghana who overcharged massively in return for making sure the application was correct.

The recent proposal, still active at the time of these interviews, to charge families in the UK a deposit of £1,000 to have their relatives visit from non-EU countries (Johnston 2007) was highly criticised by these migrants, since it would have made the current system of transnational family life virtually impossible. The deposit scheme would have been highly successful in restricting visits by the type of migrants interviewed in this project (middle-class, educated professionals who only want to visit family and are unlikely to overstay), as £1,000 represents a huge amount in the income of a transnational family that also pays for frequent flights to Ghana and probably remits to family there. However, all the migrants interviewed felt that it would make no difference to purely economic migrants who were prepared to overstay their visas.

*'People will always find a way to pay if they really want to go and work, so it will just affect those who only want to visit family.'* (Bernardine, female, 26, graduate, Accra)

Overstaying was a common theme: everyone interviewed knew Ghanaians who had overstayed their visas and become undocumented in the UK. Some felt that migrants overstayed because there was a lack of information, the High Commission was difficult to deal with and the entire experience was so disempowering that people opted out rather than remaining legal migrants:

*'It's easier to stay and become undocumented than to deal with them. Many people overstay because they don't have faith they'll be treated fairly by the visa authorities.'* (Theresa, female, 27, unemployed, Accra)

Those who most clearly connected their own migration with development impacts at home, however, supported the tightening of visa restrictions because they felt it showed willingness on the part of governments to think about reducing brain drain.

Overall, however, the participants judged that today's increasingly restrictive regulations are contributing to overstaying and undocumented status. One articulated the paradox:

*'With the implementation of all these really harsh laws, that is why you have so many people ending up in detention, because they go to all sorts of lengths to get there. If you think about it, when they get there, what are they doing? They just want to work. You know, they are your barbers and your cleaners and your street sweepers. The kind of people that you actually need in an economy. So if it was a little more open, people would still go, but they would come back. They wouldn't want to stay.'* (Ayesha, female, 31, executive and business owner, Accra)

## Studying in the UK

### 'They aggressively recruit people from this country'

Studying in Britain emerged as the most productive and least problematic experience among the migrants. Most colleges provide some targeted assistance to their foreign students, and even where this was lacking, most migrants found a ready-made community of other international students that made them feel less isolated. The interviewees had almost all been recruited by specific institutions, often through the British Council, rather than searching independently by course or area. Most had studied in or near London: those who had not were either seeking a specialised course or were following a spouse who had been offered a job in Britain and therefore applied to a local college after arriving.

A common theme here was the comparative speed and efficiency of the British system. Most praised the lecturers, the style of teaching and the coursework approach, which they felt were more engaging and motivating than in Ghana. They also valued being asked to research and interpret material on their own, rather than taking down lectures and reproducing them wholesale for exams. All felt that the individualism was a benefit, and that studying was easier in the UK than at home:



*'For my first degree, all we normally do is to cram. But in this case I had to research, read it, understand it, and at the end of the day I had to put forward my point of view. It wasn't something I was used to, so initially I found it a bit difficult.'*

(Bernardine, female, 26, graduate, Accra)

*'The study there is ... much easier to assimilate. The lecturers are more patient, and their method of teaching is state of the art. Where a teacher in Ghana would like to see more failures, a teacher in the UK would like to see more passes.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

Access to teaching was another reason to come to Britain, as can be seen from the account of a statistician who originally studied for her MPhil in Ghana. She had to give up after gathering her data and writing up a significant portion of her dissertation because her supervisor would not take the time to read her work. She applied through the British Council and got a place at Southampton University to study for an MPhil. Halfway through, her British supervisor suggested that she could use her data to get a PhD in only a couple of extra years, so she changed her course and achieved a doctorate instead.

Access to libraries was another pull factor. Ghana's library facilities are insufficient for postgraduate research, and many who had studied graduate degrees cited this as a key factor in their decision to study abroad. The lecturers interviewed need PhDs to advance in their careers, and although both are happy to have returned to Ghana, they acknowledged that they would have to emigrate again for their doctorates – if only to write their literature reviews. Several others also mentioned libraries as the primary reason to study abroad.

Although no one had a problem with the opportunities to study offered by the UK, there were many difficulties associated with the financial aspect of studying abroad. Almost all the interviewees had studied subjects related to business, with the exception of a single social scientist. This was broadly indicative of the choices of non-EU students overall (see Higher Education Statistics Agency, figures for 2007). Thus most of the interviewees' study had been privately funded, and represented a huge expenditure for them and their families.

Overall, those who had studied with private funding felt there was a disjuncture between the intense recruitment of students in Ghana by British universities and colleges, and the arrangements for foreign students who actually come here. Fee structures were one point of contention: for non-EU students fees are double or more those paid by residents of the UK or EU, and nearly all the interviewees felt the disparity was too great. One felt that students' options were unrealistically curtailed by visa requirements:

*'They aggressively recruit people from this country to go to university in the UK. Aggressively. But you can't expect people to go there, pay huge amounts of foreign fees and not do something to support themselves – something they are qualified for, not menial work.'* (Aysha, female, 31, executive and business owner, Accra)

Some felt that some UK institutions were mainly interested in recruiting African students as a source of cash. In one case, an interviewee was in her second year of her business degree when her college was de-listed as an institution permitted to take foreign students. However, the college authorities did not tell their foreign students, a large portion of whom (hundreds, in her estimation) then lost their visas and were deported because of the mistake. She is having difficulty appealing the immigration court's decision from Ghana, and feels that the system has given the college free rein to profit from African students at the students' expense.

An accountant told of a similar experience at the postgraduate level. Practical experience is a requirement for students studying for an Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) qualification, but once she started the practical element of her course, the authorities instantly revoked her visa because she was working. Her case went all the way to the appellate immigration court, and the case took a year to process. Finally it was resolved in her favour and she received a longer visa. She felt that the court battle was both unnecessary and demeaning for someone who had

travelled with the correct documents all her life, and who had provided the authorities with no cause for suspicion.

Despite these difficulties, education remains a key element of these interviewees' migration experience. It has been transformative in terms of their options in Ghana: all said that employers seek workers with UK qualifications. This was more important for the business and finance graduates, for whom their migration has made a great difference in their employability. None who was able to work was unemployed at the time of interviewing, and all felt they were progressing with their careers despite the tough job market conditions in Ghana. One attributed the success of those who study abroad to the pressure created by the risks and investment of migration:

*'You have made a long journey, you don't want to waste it. You feel you have to do something with the opportunity.'* (Seth, male, 39, technology consultant, Amsterdam)

## Working in the UK

### 'There, to get one pound, you have to earn it'

The work-study interaction was a common element in most of the migrants' stories. For many study represented their entire ambition in migrating: work came later as a financial necessity, either to pay for their courses or to earn back some of their investment after graduating. Between them, this group of 20 migrants had worked in many fields considered by the dominant contemporary migration debate to be ones in which migrants are taking jobs away from UK residents. This includes the service sector in particular, where the interviewees had worked in customer service, call centres, in the hospitality industries, as building site labourers and as hospital porters. Yet all of them viewed their jobs as temporary and contingent, only done to fund their study and eventual return to Ghana. None had difficulty finding work, and most worked legally, regretting only that their visas restricted them to 20 hours a week:

*'In a developing country, I'm not sure how they expect the fees to be paid.'* (Iris, female, 30, educational adviser, Accra)



Iris

This dynamic varied a little by generation: while more recent, younger, migrants had worked in order to study, older returnees had studied in order to work. One moved to the UK in 1962 with an offer of a job as a draughtsman with a local London authority, which included a qualification. For him, the opportunity to earn money in the UK was more important than anything else: he used it to support his family at home (as most of those, old or young, who worked in the UK also did). He migrated without a plan for return, but for more recent migrants their work has been targeted to position them for a career in Ghana afterwards.

One of the principal ways working in the UK can transform Ghanaians' job prospects at home is the difference in work cultures.

*'There [in the UK], to get one pound you have to earn it. Here we relax too much.'* (Abraham, male, 73, retiree, Accra)

More recent migrants were kinder about the Ghanaian work culture, saying that the greater flexibility and sociability at work were not a drawback. The UK's culture of punctuality and commitment to work made a deep impression on everyone who had worked there. Some felt there was 'more pressure' in the UK. Others saw it as keeping people from their home commitments, causing them to eat on the run instead of with their families. Many, however, felt that assimilating the pressure to perform, a stronger work ethic and higher goals were the main benefits of migrating. In particular, several referred to no longer operating on 'Ghana Mean Time' being a benefit in their careers.

Some migrants remembered noticing greater equality in the UK workplace. Several, male and female, remarked that there were less gendered working practices in the UK than in Ghana, and one was particularly struck by the lack of preoccupation with status in the workplace.

*'[In the UK] everybody's treated equal. But in [Ghana] it's not like that... see in the university, if it was here, the vice-chancellor would be treated differently from the cleaner. But it's not like that. Obviously your paycheques are different, but there should be equal opportunity for everybody.'* (Ama, female, 27, administrator, Kumasi)



Abraham

One migrant interviewed was surprised to find that, despite being a Ghanaian in an all-white workplace, his success did not lead to trouble. When he was promoted after three months over native British colleagues and his salary tripled, they were happy for him. He was shocked:

*'An African would never accept this [promotion of an immigrant over native-born workers]. But these [people], they were happy – hey, congratulations, they had a cake.'* (Abraham, male, 73, retired, Accra)

Overall, the respondents felt that the jobs they had done abroad did not compare to those they would look for in Ghana. One worked as a manual labourer to fund his graduate studies, and is now a university lecturer in Ghana. At £6.50 an hour he found the manual work wages good but the work demeaning. He felt that Ghanaians would never be prepared to do menial work in their home country to fund their studies, as it would be 'socially unacceptable'.

The interviewees all felt differently about the degree to which their UK work experience had positioned them for their work in Ghana. Professionals generally felt that there was a fine balance to be maintained between getting meaningful work experience in Britain and entering, or remaining on, the career ladder in Ghana. Several mentioned the danger of being trapped into less skilled work in the UK while one's cohort at home moved on. One described the difficulty of managing this dynamic:

*'Too many stay [in Britain] and find themselves stacking shelves despite having an MBA. You cannot belong in Ghana if you stay away too long – people are embarrassed to come home. The longer you stay there the more difficult it will be to settle back home... all my mates, all those I finished university with, those who stayed home, you realise that they are now managers in institutions. I was never a manager. You come here and want to be a manager but they will never employ you as a manager. No way, you don't have the experience.'* (Ama, female, 27, administrator, Kumasi)

## **Binational, bicultural lives**

### **'I'm too Ghanaian to be British'**

All the interviewees displayed strong cultural ties to Britain that predated their migration, although each expressed this in a different way and relative to their generation. Some were highly ambivalent about Ghana's connection to Britain, but this ambivalence only served to highlight the unavoidability of the relationship. Although Britain emerged in these conversations as the land of opportunity, there was also a constant underlying discourse of colonialism (the phrase 'our colonial master' was used by several of the older migrants), post-colonialism and the conflicts of status and identity inherent in this.

The Ghanaians interviewed spoke of the British bias of their school system: most could still sing traditional British songs ('London Bridge is Falling Down' was a favourite) and had grown up curious about the place that was presented as the mother-country when they were children.

To accompany these complex feelings and ties with Britain, complicated transnational lives took shape in which parents lived separately from their children, husbands from their wives and sisters from brothers. Families are often split between Ghana and the UK for reasons of childcare (many interviewees spoke of fostering arrangements related to migration) and work. These Ghanaians had adapted to preserve their family and marital coherence across great distances as a matter of course, and seemed to have learned not to focus on the difficulties or damage inherent in doing so. This extraordinary resilience may also be related to the strong extended family structures each interviewee described, which may make fostering less of a wrench for children who have already developed close relationships with cousins, aunts and uncles. The matrilineal aspect of Ghanaian families in the Akan

constituency may also contribute to this closeness, since a woman's children see their maternal first cousins as a sibling relationship.

The case of Julie, a senior accountant, illustrates the difficulties of managing a life lived in Africa and the UK simultaneously. She grew up between Ghana and Britain as her father studied for his doctorate, then migrated herself for her education. She married a Ghanaian who had been living in the UK since the late 1980s, but has spent long stretches building her career in Ghana. Her children were born in the UK, but have always lived wherever she was. Her family has only lived in the same country for seven out of the last 17 years, with three-year stretches of separation broken only by holidays to visit the UK. It is impossible for any family to take this kind of separation in its stride, but all the interviewees who had experienced it spoke of it as a fact of life. Julie consciously chose to be a Ghanaian who visited Britain rather than a British citizen who felt Ghanaian:

*'I'm too Ghanaian to be British... everyone has asked why don't you just get a passport? But I didn't want to give up my Ghanaian citizenship.'* (Julie, female, 42, senior accountant, Accra)

Besides the effects on families of living a transnational life, several of the interviewees were ambivalent about the broader societal effects of large-scale migration to the UK and the transformation of dual identity into constant migration and its resulting cultural remittances. Beyond the 'brain drain' aspect of professional migration, they spoke of gradual but perceptible changes in Ghanaians' behaviour that they saw as seeping in from the UK. Benjamin in particular suggested that respect for elders, standards of dress and behaviour, and traditional etiquette were being observed less, and that greater informality was taking hold. This reflects the surprise of many migrants at the freedom of behaviour in the UK, where 'no one cares' when people eat in the street, smoke in the railway station or do not go home to their families at lunchtime.

## Impressions of Britain

### 'The lights don't go off in the UK'

None of the migrants had an exclusively good or bad impression of Britain. All were able to enumerate the factors which made it difficult to adjust, and for some these came to constitute genuine problems. For instance, the cost of living and the restrictions on work were a significant issue for the graduate students in particular, and, combined with the fact that almost all the migrants interviewed were remitting as well as surviving, financial problems loom large as bad memories. The weather was also a problem for almost everyone, and food was frequently mentioned, particularly among the older generation who found themselves in a considerably less multicultural Britain. These three categories cover about 90 per cent of the dislikes interviewees expressed.

The dislikes conveyed in the interviews, however, are unlikely to represent some migrants' actual feelings about Britain. In general, the less educated migrants and the older generation had the toughest and most isolating migration experiences, and suffered the greatest hostility and racism (see below), but were the most reluctant to directly criticise Britain. One older migrant expressed a desire before the interview not to 'step on anyone's toes' by discussing what he disliked about the country. The more educated ones may have felt freer to talk, and were more ready to discuss the racism they suffered and the cultural conflicts.

There were some references that were almost universal. Most liked the 'discipline and punctuality,' mentioning the benefits of living in a more punctual culture. Functional systems were high on everyone's list:

*'Some things that were difficult to come by in Ghana were for granted in the UK – hospitals... water, electricity; the lights don't go off in the UK. Basic things are for granted in the UK that are not for granted in Ghana.'* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)

*'I liked the ease of doing things. Your bank card goes missing, you pick up the phone and they stop it right away. BT gets you a phone in three days. Trains are*

*punctual. You can go on the internet, it works. ... what you can do in 10 minutes you have to take 30 or 40 minutes to do here.'* (Daniel, male, 32, lecturer/architect, Kumasi)

The faster internet connections were a commonly mentioned positive feature of life in the UK, and those who had studied there all mentioned the availability of good libraries.

Some of the migrants' positive impressions were quite personal, and involved becoming aware of broader, even global concerns: several liked the built environment, and felt that public space was better used in the UK than in Ghana. They found themselves inspired by the availability of free space and parks: returning to Ghana made them notice the lack of urban design there.



*'There are no parks. The kids have nowhere to play in these communities, and there is no policy effort to create parks.'* (George, male, 31, arts marketing consultant, Kumasi)

This concern with the environment led to a discussion with the same respondents about climate change. They had found that their time in Britain sensitised them to environmental concerns they had not previously been aware of: for one, this increased awareness led him to move on to the Netherlands in search of a greener lifestyle. Another was awakened to what he described as a 'green consciousness':

*'[Now] I'm interested in climate change, new technologies to help African countries leapfrog the polluting stage and become green in advance of richer nations.'* (George, male, 31, arts marketing consultant, Kumasi)

## Racism in Britain

### 'Just because you are black people think you are illegal'

As described above, the older migrants were generally less willing to express negative views of the UK, whereas the younger ones felt less constrained and were more likely to relate experiences of racism and hostility. Often it would take until the end of the interview, long after the formal questions about racism had been answered, for the real picture to emerge when the context felt less accusatory. In the end almost every migrant revealed an awareness of racism, either through personal experience or as something that happened to people they knew.

Racism took various forms for these migrants. It was generally their first experience of discrimination based on their place of origin: One said:

*'I didn't know I was black until I moved to England. You don't know you're different [until you] get there, and then you stick out.'* (Julie, female, 52, senior accountant, Accra)

Some expected – and experienced – sharp and open hostility, some were hit by experiences of racism where they had felt they were immune, and others experienced a long, slow drip of latent racism expressed through hiring practices and overall social exclusion. One of the first group recounted her experiences studying in Brighton and later Southampton during the late 1990s. In both cities people would spit at her and other African students in the streets.

*'It was mostly the children. When we went into town to shop, at the train station, or when we walked through the streets. That was when they displayed their displeasure at seeing us. [On one occasion, young boys threw stones at the group of African students she was with, while their parents watched.] 'We were expecting the parents to say something about it, but they did not. I concluded that these people did not know anything.'* (Philomena, female, 51, statistician and lecturer, Accra)

Another common story of open racism was that white British people were unwilling to take a seat on the bus or train that had been vacated by an African. One interviewee related that:

*'On the bus, you stand up for an elderly person – it's our culture – and they don't want to sit on the same chair you had.'* (Daniel, male, 32, lecturer/architect, Kumasi)



Another respondent felt that the recent preoccupation with undocumented migration and asylum-seeking in the UK influenced her experience of racism there:

*'They thought everyone there was an illegal immigrant, almost everywhere I went... just because you are black people think you are illegal, that you are taking advantage of the system.'* (Martha, female, 28, programme administrator, Accra)

Landlords were a problem across the generations of migrants. In the early 1960s one migrant was rejected by several landlords who openly admitted that his skin colour was a problem. In 2005, Martha experienced something similar. Although her landlord did not refuse to rent to her, she relates that:

*'When we went to get accommodation we had to produce a lot of documents because we didn't have a credit rating... my landlord said he'd had experience with blacks spoiling things at his apartment, so he would always call and check what was happening there. Which I thought was ridiculous.'* (Martha, female, 28, programme administrator, Accra)

Some were surprised to find racism in their workplace when they had thought they were immune, in one interviewee's case because of her education and the professional context. She was a dual national, born and educated in the UK, and was working in an investment bank:

*'There were some inequities, which I felt were as a result of my race... It played out in different ways, where I thought OK, well, I said this 30 seconds ago, and nobody seemed to have heard it. The same thing was repeated by somebody else and it was like, "yes, great idea!" For me it was actually the first experience of racial discrimination, I was shocked. I think I just started crying. I was really immature about it, but I had never experienced that.'* (Nana, female, 37, banker, Accra)

Like many of the Ghanaians interviewed, Nana remembers feeling that she was growing a thicker skin over the years and becoming able to shake off experiences of racism. Overall, she says, she did not feel disadvantaged because she was not a white British person. However, she had the opposite experience at an older, even more traditional investment bank, where the senior executives, though all white, were much more prepared to accept her than the more junior workers were.

*'[Among the senior executives] acceptance was 100 per cent, whereas with some of the [junior] employees they had an issue with a black girl – "what do you want here?" Acceptance for them seemed to be much more difficult than it was for the partners.'* (Nana, female, 37, banker, Accra)

Others experienced racism more as a constant background which was acutely manifested in hiring practices. Two of the interviewees applied for a huge number of jobs without getting a single interview, gradually realising that employers were rejecting them because their names marked them out as African. One recounts that she wrote 500 applications without getting a job. At one point she started using her maiden name in the hope of getting an interview:



*'I come from the South of Ghana where our grandparents were forced to take European names ... I decided to write an application as Julie [English name]. Same job, same CV. So I wrote the application, and Julie [English name] always got the interview. And then when Julie [English name] goes for interviews, she's black, and she doesn't get the job. So I told my husband, I think I'd rather go as Julie [Ghanaian name], so that they don't take me at all. If they're prepared to take me as Julie [Ghanaian name], then I'll get it.'* (Julie, female, 52, senior accountant, Accra)

Another, male, interviewee had the same problem. He jokes that he did not get to see any workplace racism because he could not get any work. He applied to 500 accountancy jobs but was not offered a single interview. He and Julie both ended up finding jobs through patronage systems – using the networks of older, more established natives – rather than via open applications. He became a minicab driver although he was a qualified accountant, but eventually

the head of the minicab company discovered he was an accountant and recommended him to his brother's accounting business, where he was offered work because of the connection. From there he got work with a larger firm, and from then on could apply in the open market because he had references. Julie got around employers' unwillingness to interview her in a similar way, working far below her skill level until they recommended her for a different job with a contact. After relating this story, though, she pointed out that racism was just as prevalent, on a tribal basis, in Ghana.

*'The same happens here [in Ghana]. You look at the name – Oh, he's from this tribe – no chance.'* (Julie, female, 52, senior accountant, Accra)

A lack of recognition of one's abilities was a constant theme, cutting across generations and types of migration.

*'Being recognised for who you are is more than money. That is what you don't get in the UK. You can get money, but you don't get recognised.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

*'There is no promotion from white people.'* (Felix, male, 28, unemployed, Accra)

Several others echoed this, saying that one of the hardest things about migrating is not being recognised for who you are or what you can do.

*'Even as a dual national, one is not given recognition for one's work, one's contribution to the team.'* (Nana, female, 37, banker, Accra)

Despite this, the workplace was seen by most of the professional interviewees as a place where they could change the degree of racism they suffered by becoming known and gathering a social network based on factors other than common migrant origins. Many did get promoted to managerial positions despite initial ambivalence from colleagues, and made friends at work.

Skin colour was raised more often as a dividing or bonding factor than either nationality or ethnicity. Theresa felt more comfortable when she moved from South to North London because she found a large Jamaican community there and felt this decreased her sense of difference. Most of the interviewees refer to being 'black' when they talk about discrimination, rather than being 'Ghanaian' or 'African'. This would seem to indicate something fairly intuitive: that the British discriminate more on the basis of skin colour than on perceptions of ethnic origin. One relates:

*'At work I was the only black. Later on a West Indian came in, and there were two of us... they put me in the office with her. And I asked, "why did you put me in the office with her?" and the manager said, "I thought you'd feel comfortable." I'm not a very nice person sometimes, so I said, "Is it because she is brown like me? You know we don't have anything in common, just the colour of the skin."'* (Julie, female, 52, senior accountant, Accra)

Almost no one, however, reported racist incidents or pervasive discrimination in the educational context. Most of those interviewed who had studied in the UK had done so at universities that were used to hosting international students, and that had a significant African population. The incident closest to racism described by former UK students was a student's account of losing her visa because of her college's failure to keep its African students informed of its change in official status. There was a strong consciousness of context among the respondents:

*'People weren't hostile, it depends on the type of contacts you have. I went into a university full of foreign students – it was a different type of environment.'* (Seth, male, 39, technology consultant, Amsterdam)

Even though this respondent did not directly suffer racism, he was aware it existed and saw himself as privileged to be able to stay away from the environments where it mainly happened. Within this sample, education itself seems to be the most identifiable factor in decreasing discrimination. One interviewee, explaining why she felt that she had not been subjected to the racism that her friends experienced, pointed out that:

*'...when you live in a good neighbourhood, you get lots of educated people and they see things in a different light. And at the Open University I worked with people who were educated.'* (Ama, female, 27, administrator, Kumasi)

## Locality and belonging

### **'In Britain you can dial 999 but in Ghana you can always go to your next door neighbour'**

As with the decreased degree of discrimination noted above, those who had come to Britain to study also reported having an easier time finding their place within British society. They moved in circles that included many Africans, often connected with other Ghanaians through family or church, and found a balance of British and migrant friends. They often lived in shared houses in immigrant areas, finding close friends more easily than those who came to work. One typical experience was recounted by an interviewee who studied for a Masters in Development Management at a London university, and lived in East London, a predominantly immigrant area.

*'At some point I wanted to move out because it felt too much like home... you can walk in the market and hear people speaking Twi, you go to some of the stalls and they're playing Ghanaian music.'* (Mercy, female, 29, educational consultant, Accra)

Her neighbours were Polish – 'nice people', British-Israeli, and Ghanaian. Many of the ex-students, however, reported that they had not connected with their local community beyond their universities.

Among those who came to the UK to work, there were a wide range of experiences regarding connecting and belonging. Most found a Ghanaian community, generally through family and church. However, some found they felt most at home with an expatriate community of Africans and Europeans rather than through seeking out other Ghanaians. Many respondents developed a high degree of integration into their neighbourhood, but almost all felt the level of trust among neighbours was lower than it was in Ghana. Some responses, however, bear out the idea that local ties in Ghanaian society may be stronger partly because of what are commonly referred to by economists as 'market failures': a lack of social protection and emergency services.

*'In Britain you can dial 999 but in Ghana you can always go to your next door neighbour.'* (Bernardine, female, 26, graduate, Accra)

There are parallels between the strong neighbourhood understanding and cooperation respondents describe as existing in Ghana and that described by many older Britons as existing during WWII and the early post-war years. It was hard for the respondents to adjust to a society where the disadvantaged rely on formal assistance. Some of the commonly reported feelings of isolation and risk may have been due to not having to make those bonds with neighbours on arrival, and to finding that the neighbours did not need to make those bonds with them. Therefore, the high levels of social capital in Ghanaian neighbourhoods may be a response to 'market failures' as well as an established way of behaving.

One respondent gave an insight into the segregation inherent in multicultural Britain when he described his life in Clapham, South London, in the 1990s:

*'The neighbourhood was nice, very multiracial, but there are groups, like villages, that tend to keep to themselves. You do things within your village. Seldom do you have someone from an outside village coming in. Only when there is a marriage, with a West Indian married to a Ghanaian, or a Ghanaian married to a white person... other than that, not at all.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

Another related a similar experience:

*'There are a lot of people who live in communities – they eat Ghanaian food, they don't make friends with British people. They could actually be living in Ghana, in Brixton, Streatham... They don't know anybody. They never get involved with the*

*community. They live a Ghanaian life... some don't even speak English.'* (Julie, female, 52, senior accountant, Accra)

The respondents had highly varied opinions regarding the notion of belonging. Broadly, there were three types of experience in this area. Some felt they did not come to belong at all, either in their local community or in the country as a whole. Then there were those who connected with their local community through volunteering or having young children in school, but did not feel they belonged within the country as a whole:

*'It's a mindset. I've definitely gotten involved in things, in the community. I do a lot of community work, and when I'm doing it I can be British... but you know that at the end of the day you're Ghanaian.'* (Julie, female, 52, senior accountant, Accra)

Lastly, there was a group of older migrants who, although they may not have found a sense of belonging locally, felt connected to the country by deeply embedded cultural ties:

*'The sense of belonging, of Britishness, had been with us many years ago when we were studying... You know, in the books you learn [sings] "London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down" – you're culturally indoctrinated already, as a child. As you're growing, you're listening to the BBC. As you grow, you want to see Big Ben, London Bridge, you want to see all those things. You're singing "London Bridge is falling down" – you don't have a clue what it is... so it's been there. So when you get to go to the UK and get the real feeling, then I think it's more. If you look at most Ghanaians who have been over there, they feel the UK is just like a second home. If you tell him to go and buy something...the first thing he will think of is to contact the London guys and see. Automatically it comes.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

Voting, paradoxically, did not seem to map onto participants' sense of belonging. As Commonwealth residents, Ghanaians are free to vote in both the UK and Ghana, and nearly all the migrants interviewed had done so. None felt it unusual to vote in the UK, nor did anyone mention it as a factor in their sense of belonging. Voter turnout tends to be high in Ghana (BBC News online 2004), and Ghanaians may see it as a natural activity to undertake while resident abroad. The majority voted in both countries, and some had joined political parties, or mentioned that they had considered doing so. The oldest migrant interviewed, who migrated in the 1960s, was even a polling agent in his London neighbourhood, but despite this reported having had little sense of belonging.

The complex nature of belonging is also embodied in migrants' feelings about student migration. The British educational system may be the strongest remainder of colonial ties: it has given shape to the Ghanaian school system, but according to the respondents, employers in Ghana consider it much stronger and the qualifications gained more meaningful. Many migrants, particularly those in their mid-thirties and younger, reject the idea of British identity but still wish to be associated with the educational system and to get work experience in the UK. These migrants felt loneliness and displacement for very real reasons. However, these emotions appear also to have served as a way to separate Britain from home – a strategy to stay focused on work, and to keep oneself from becoming too embedded in UK society to return. Several articulated that they isolated themselves by migrating to work or study in a way that ensured they would be more focused and directed. One said of her experience studying in the UK:

*'I think that it's better when you are away from home, then you are sure that you have made very good use of your time in a very rapid fashion.'* (Philomena, female, 51, statistician/lecturer, Accra)

Another related that he purposely kept himself from forming too many social ties, in order to stay focused:

*'It's not easy, you have to be very serious. You don't have to form bad friendships. I knew what I was doing, I was very, very serious.'* (Samuel, male, 61, retiree, Accra)

All found the isolation difficult, many naming it as a shortcoming of British society, but on the



Philomena

whole the respondents tended to mention the planning, saving and focused study they achieved by migrating, and saw those things as positive skills to have acquired. Migrating, then, was seen as putting oneself in a difficult position in order to achieve things one could not achieve at home, and cultural difficulties may have been a key factor for those who succeeded.

## Change over time

### **‘No matter how long you live in the river, you can’t become the crocodile’**

Overall, these interviews show a generational shift from the colonial and post-colonial version of British/Ghanaian identity to a newer model based on multiple migrations and a more complex form of transnational identity. The older generation had certain rights and expectations regarding living, working and studying in the UK that were based on explicit and well-defined relationships between the countries. The oldest did not need visas to migrate for an indefinite period. This model, however, has now given way to a newer model where visas are harder to attain and more expensive, and migrants tend to have specific goals and the expectation of a defined length of stay. At the same time, the increase in transnational families means that more Ghanaians have close relatives in the UK or were themselves born there – something that has become recognised with the reestablishment of dual nationality by the Ghanaian government in 2003.

The way migrants’ lives have been changed by their mobility can be expected to vary according to generation. However, some developments seemed to be common to most of the interviewees, even across generations. Some were personal traits arising from migration such as tolerance and patience with difference. Punctuality and attention to detail were also commonly mentioned as attributes gained from life in the UK. All agreed that migrants were changed by their experiences:

*‘You can’t live in Britain for years on end without changing.’* (Abraham, male, 73, retiree, Accra)

But most felt that these changes did not make them feel British:

*‘No matter how long you live in the river, you can’t become the crocodile.’* (Benjamin, male, 44, consultant, Accra)

The change from a colonial to a post-colonial and finally to a globalised mindset among migrants has made Britain just one choice among many. Statistically, migration from Ghana to the US overtook migration to the UK during the 1990s (Bump 2006), and possibly in response, Ghana has recently changed the structure of its educational system to be more like the US system, making it more recognisable to American colleges. New generations of Ghanaian students may relate to the US in the way that their parents and grandparents did to the UK.

Like most countries today, Ghana is part of globalised currents of change in cultural values. Gender emerged from the interviews as one dimension of this change, and migrants’ transnational lives as a location in which this is being manifested. The older generation interviewed often expressed feelings that women’s roles and behaviour were becoming more liberated and that male roles were consequently losing their anchoring.

*‘A lot of marriages break down in the UK, more than when we are at home. If there is a problem in Ghana, there are people from whom you can seek advice, and calm down. In the UK, you live with your problems.’* (Samuel, male, 63, retiree, Accra)

This respondent felt that Ghanaian wives in the UK are profiting from a system that privileged their story over their husbands’:

*‘UK law favours the wife in disputes, and it tends to ask the man to leave the house if there’s a problem. Most of our women are taking advantage of that.’* (Samuel)

He related this back to the way the British do not come together to enforce standards of behaviour, and the feeling (disconcerting for Ghanaians) that no one is watching, nobody cares.

*‘It is so lonely that the law has to protect you.’* (Samuel)



Samuel

The interviewees often offered the opinion that return was becoming more frequent, driven by factors to do with international labour market dynamics (fewer good jobs are available to immigrants and the less-educated in particular have a harder time finding work) and the scarcity of visas for long-term stays. Some felt these factors had altered people's expectations:

*'More Ghanaians want to return today. There's a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment in return now than there was before. People now go to the UK with a game plan, they don't go to escape hardship. Especially educated people, very few want to remain illegally. For people there illegally it's very hard to get work, a nightmare trying to get by, as opposed to 15 years ago. People now go for specific objectives, not permanent immigration, particularly professionals. They go to make money for a project, or to get experience in their field.'* (Nana, female, 37, banker, Accra)

## Migrants and development

### **'Write off our debts, let us be free and then we can start again'**

The participants had a nuanced understanding of the way economic development, or the lack of it, was influencing their migration and that of others. They saw development as both a driver and a result of migration. One interviewee, a professional living in the Netherlands, was building a house in Ghana and wished to spend more time there, but did not see himself as able to move home permanently because of the lack of infrastructure. Referring to the frequent power cuts and slow internet speeds, he pointed out that he could not function as effectively there as he could in Europe. He saw living in Ghana as something that required investment in things such as generators in order to get over the difficulties in doing business.

*'You have to either be there and make the investment of money, patience, and time, or just live elsewhere.'* (Seth, male, 39, technology consultant, Amsterdam)

He connected this to the need to involve international migrants as development consultants, since they have an interest in helping to create the infrastructure that would allow them to live at home in Africa.

This led to a discussion of the mechanics of collaboration. The interviewee quoted above felt that the Ghanaian government does not yet organise its citizens to promote development via its diaspora, failing to offer them information on how to engage, consult and create change. His friends, all professionals, have moved to Singapore, China, and other far-flung countries, but not back to Ghana.

*'There isn't a link back. We have all this capability, but no one's asked us to contribute. The framework, the setup is lacking. Informal networks exist, but formal ones would be better. When I go to the United Arab Emirates I register with the British embassy and I get invitations to events: it acts as a continuing reference point. The Ghanaian embassy doesn't have that kind of contact with its expats so there's no information on how to help out, how to work for Ghanaian development.'* (Seth, male, 39, technology consultant, Amsterdam)

Another interviewee felt that Ghanaians were not being as proactive as they should be about their own development:

*'In Ghana one of our problems is that we want people [outside] to develop and bring it down to us. But in the UK what I learned is that they seek it out, they discover the knowledge, whereas we sit and wait for others to do it and bring it down.'* (Bernardine, female, 26, graduate, Accra)

She felt that migration was slowly causing this to change, however.

A lecturer from the National University in Kumasi felt that his country was hamstrung by debt, and suggested that debt relief would be the best way to promote development there, and encourage the kind of infrastructure-building that would encourage professionals living abroad to return:

*'Write off our debts, let us be free and then we can start all over again.'* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)

Brain drain was a common theme: many felt it could be remedied – indeed, the majority of the interviewees themselves represented the return of skilled human capital to Ghana. They pointed out that one of the few ways to gain financial capital, though, was still through migrating and that the Ghanaian economy was not yet strong enough for medium or large-scale entrepreneurs to succeed without migrating to earn money first. Respondents felt that more could be done, and in a more formal way, to rationalise the structures of UK work permits in a way that would allow graduates to profit from their migration and position themselves to return home.

*'There really are so many people in Burger King who [go to] school on the web, and I think that they [the UK government] should check to make sure that when the students finish studying they come down to work in their countries.'* (Bernardine, female, 26, graduate, Accra)

Many felt that allowing ex-students to work was one of the most important potential contributions to development and halting brain drain (a provision that the UK government has in fact started to institute). But they also felt that it was important to limit the work period, to force people to plan their return.

## Leaving the UK

### 'The spirit went out of me'

The notion of 'return', like that of 'migration', is increasingly hard to define. The interviewees ranged from one-time migrants for whom 'return' was a real concept, to lifelong dual nationals who had moved frequently since they were small children, and had never seen themselves as returning, since they had no exclusive sense of national identity. Some did not return, but moved on elsewhere. Thus it is next to impossible to generalise about the experience of return.

Having said this, there was a noticeable divide between these two groups based on their sense of a need to leave. One of the many who had talked of the drive and ambition needed to succeed as a migrant in Britain, related that:

*'I knew it was time to return because the spirit went out of me.'* (Abraham, male, 73, retiree, Accra)

A younger migrant who went to take his Masters degree, similarly felt he had reached a point where return felt right, although in his case it was because of a strong desire to put the skills he had acquired towards Ghana's development. He returned although he could have stayed to work.

Dual nationals described a slightly different decision process, based more on family considerations than a sense of need. One migrant's husband found a job in Ghana, and she moved to be with him. Another had considered moving to Ghana for some time, but she felt her decision was made when she became pregnant:

*'It's difficult to bring up a child in the UK with no help – nursery fees are expensive.'* (Ayesha, female, 31, executive and business owner, Accra)

She and her husband had decided to come back the previous year when they got married, but having a child intensified their desire to leave. Many of the female migrants mentioned childcare as a strong reason for returning to Ghana: the extended family structure, cheaper schools and more flexible working conditions made it easier for them to bring up a family in Africa than in Britain.

*'I have a nanny who's very good... I pay her 80 dollars a month, and she's very happy with that... my daughter's fees in nursery school are £400 a term. In the UK my friends are paying £1,000 a term. I enjoy my life in Ghana more. I think I have a better quality of life.'* (Ayesha)

Just as with the original choice to migrate, there were pull and push factors in migrants' decisions to leave the UK. The pull often involved development:

*'After school you think, you've paid all that money to study, why do you still want to sit here ... when you can come back and do something better, and get more recognition ... of what you have actually done. The money's definitely different, you can't compare, but what you can make here – I'm content with it. So I thought more and more I had to go, I had to go.'* (Mercy, female, 29, educational adviser, Accra)

Some migrants lost their right to stay in Britain, even among this predominantly educated group. Usually because of administrative mistakes and lack of information, these migrants lost their passports as a result and have not been able to get them back from the immigration authorities. A loss of status was an important effect of this kind of return. Deportees reported suffering socially in Ghana as a result of perceived failure:

*'Ghana never accepts migrants back. No one cares when you aren't successful.'* (Aba, male, 36, consultant, Accra)

Many interviewees spoke of Ghanaians they knew in Britain who found it impossible to return because they had not been using the British education they had acquired. One articulated this pressure to succeed when she described the Ghanaian MBAs she knew who stacked supermarket shelves because they did not want to return to a career ladder where they had missed too many rungs.

The powerlessness of deportees in the face of immigration law is understandable but worrying. There were many stories of the difficulties of communicating with the British High Commission in Accra – the names of particular officials, even, came up time and time again in the interviews. One person remembered the sense of general hostility and disbelief from immigration authorities:

*'When you get to Heathrow there is such a lot of fear. And at the British High Commission here, my goodness. It's siphoning out people who legally want to stay. The reply is always "you won't come back." But people do come back.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

Several respondents had stories of enforced return due simply to official incompetence and unaccountability. In one extreme case a migrant lost her house in the UK and all her savings when her husband, offered a job as a lecturer in the UK, had to return to Ghana to change his visa status – something which should have been simple with the evidence of a job offer in Britain. She waited with their young son in Britain, expecting her husband back within days. However, the official at the High Commission charged with changing his visa seemed suspicious that he was applying for a five-year stay, and delayed stamping his passport several times until two months had gone by and he had lost the job. They missed two mortgage payments in Britain, lost their house, and ran out of money. Ama had to return without even being able to ship their possessions home. After she arrived, they were passed on to a different official at the Commission, who told them the delay made no sense and immediately granted them the visa. However, they could not afford to go back.

Besides actual deportation, the most common push factors mentioned by the interviewees were general discomforts such as the British weather and the cost of living. Racism was an important factor for many, though. The experience of being one of only a few black employees in a company made some return home sooner than they would otherwise have done, despite the difficulties this created with a transnational family:

*'I wanted to work in Ghana. I knew there would always be a glass ceiling in England. Maybe if I'd stayed another ten years I could have been chief accountant, but I didn't want to stay that long.'* (Julie, female, 42, senior accountant, Accra)

The most recent migrants reported having returned to Ghana for economic opportunities. The hospitality sector in particular has begun to grow and to offer good jobs. They were also influenced by missing the lifestyle in Ghana ('more comfortable, more relaxing') but came back primarily

because there were better jobs available. They felt that there was an optimal time in one's career, after education and before becoming too embedded in the British labour market, to make the move.

Returnees are often retirees. Ghana's health system is improving after a long period of under-funding due to structural adjustment, but still does not offer anything resembling the standard of care available in the UK. Despite this, the older migrants interviewed had decided to return for their retirement. One 63-year-old returnee described his reasons for wanting to retire in Ghana:

*'You can afford to retire in Ghana on a UK pension. If you stay in the UK you end up in an old people's home... Every Ghanaian is aware that at a certain stage you have to come back [to retire]. You can afford to get an aide here, you can afford to pay.'*  
(Samuel, male, 61, retiree, Accra)

For him, and for another retiree interviewed, the presence of extended family was also key to their decision to retire in Ghana, both in terms of care as they aged, and for emotional reasons. The latter is now 73, and referred to his age as 'three-score and ten', with a sense of biblical irony that pointed out the shorter lifespan of the average Ghanaian. This clear sense of his own mortality pointed out the competing factors he had weighed in his decision to return – family, pension and home help against the British healthcare system.

## The experience of returning to Ghana

### 'My views were greatly influenced by the culture in Britain'

Many of the interviewees were not originally from the capital, Accra, but had moved there upon returning to Ghana. Cities offer migrants the opportunity to use the skills and resources they have gained abroad, and provide a springboard for future migration. Most were also part of families that were spread out around the country, and were thus able to reintegrate into their extended family even though they had not moved home to their original town or village.

No one reported administrative or bureaucratic difficulties with return. This may have been because almost all those interviewed had returned under their own steam, without engaging with the authorities at all, and because the lack of public services in Ghana means that there is minimal paperwork for someone arriving home after living abroad. None could name any official processes that had to be followed by returnees, and almost all described a fallow period during which they had to search for jobs and housing without anything but their savings and the assistance of family.

Almost none had received any official assistance in moving back. Most had saved and planned during almost their entire time abroad in order to be able to return, and had remained active in the lives of their families. Many had remitted, though few had built a house in Ghana prior to returning. The younger migrants in particular had received family help in returning, often in the form of a place in the family home, childcare and financial support while they looked for a job in Ghana. One migrant had come back as part of an International Organisation for Migration return scheme, but said that the organisation had offered no help beyond a plane ticket, and had not checked his whereabouts or what he was doing since he had returned.

It was difficult for most of the returnees to come to terms with living in a developing country again. Problems included a dysfunctional health service, political corruption and the weak media. Several mentioned the recent power crisis and accompanying rationing of electricity, resulting in 12-hour blackouts. However, several felt there had been huge changes for the better:

*'When I returned in 2006, things had totally changed ... the roads were better ... telecommunications were much better. Before I left, if you had to make a call you had to go to the call centre, mobile phones were very expensive and you wouldn't use them to make foreign calls. Now it's cheaper to make a call from your cellphone than a call place.'* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)

These changes, however, also made it harder for returnees to settle back in. Most felt it took 18 months to feel at home again, some even longer. In Accra in particular, one of the world's fastest-

growing cities, the degree of change startled some of the returnees. One migrant from Kumasi related that he could not find his way around his own neighbourhood initially because it had been built and rebuilt so much during his absence.

The changes were also emotional. One returnee held on to her house in Britain for five years, she was so uncertain that she would ever be fully re-settled in Ghana. She remembers that she wanted to leave 'every weekend'. She could not fit in socially, and pined constantly for her London friends. She still speaks wistfully of them, and misses the conveniences of British life – being able to get a takeaway pizza or go to the cinema. She also took a 60 per cent pay cut by returning, but finds the cost of living much lower in Ghana. It took her nine years to settle in:

*'When I came to Ghana I just didn't fit in very well. My views were greatly influenced by the culture in Britain.'* (Nana, female, 37, banker, Accra)

Several returnees found that they were impatient with the speed of life in Ghana when they returned from abroad:

*'When I came home, I was always angry with people doing things at a very slow pace. So I didn't feel very comfortable working with people who were irresponsible...who had a lackadaisical attitude towards everything they had to do.'* (Philomena, female, 51, statistician and lecturer, Accra)

Overall, as with many other issues, interviewees' opinions on fitting back in at home can be divided according to age. Some of the older returnees had never been made welcome in the UK or felt comfortable there, and while they had achieved a modus vivendi they did not miss their British friends. These migrants said that they had fitted in easily when they returned, and felt as Ghanaian as they had before. Younger migrants, however, were more likely to express that they felt different upon return. They felt themselves marked out by their migration, as if they had acquired a new, mobile kind of Ghanaian identity. They did not see this as a loss, but visualised their future as international and did not feel they fitted in with those who did not see themselves that way.

These younger migrants easily formed social links with others who had travelled. While their older counterparts were only too happy to fit back in at home, these internationalised Ghanaians saw themselves as part of a national cohort of those who knew the outside world, who had had different experiences and acquired different goals. Few were more comfortable with British friends than Ghanaian ones, but many talked about their social group as an international one, composed of fellow migrants, from Africa in particular.

The exceptions to this were those who had been deported. These migrants spoke of themselves as isolated, rejected and suspended from their Ghanaian existence, whether by choice or by conscious exclusion:

*'My family were not interested in me after I first got arrested.'* (Aba, male, 36, consultant, Accra)

Among those who achieved their aims, however, it seemed the process of re-integrating and building a life in Ghana was highly rewarding. These migrants, particularly the younger ones, had not just used migration as a way to survive, but as a way to transform their prospects entirely. They left as hopeful students, but had returned to find themselves in an elite minority both financially and in terms of their careers:

*'The culture's quite different, the working ethic is quite different. So when you come back your attitude is different, and employers know that over here... you are always on time, so when you bring that attitude here it really tells in your work and how you perform.'* (Mercy, female, 29, educational adviser, Accra)

The older migrants in particular, and those of the younger ones who did not have a happy experience, talked of their migration as if they had visited a strange land but had made it safely home. For them, it was a trial to be endured as much as an opportunity to be tapped. Their lives had taken a massive

and demanding detour, although a profitable and interesting one, and they were relieved and happy to be home in the familiar world of Ghana. They spoke of the social, cultural and economic differences between the UK and Ghana as irreconcilable, and were clear that Ghana was the real world while the UK was an outwardly functional but difficult place where they were never accepted, always on their guard, and always foreigners.

In contrast, the majority of those who had emigrated in the last decade or so seemed less interested in the differences between the countries, and more focused on keeping the international contacts and opportunities in their lives post-return. Technology, in particular, has begun to close the gap between life in Ghana and life abroad. For example, one migrant who recently returned after gaining his MA in the UK described how he keeps in touch with friends and with professional contacts there by phone, email, and online networking tools. He uses all these to keep information flowing about ideas and opportunities, to organise visits and to attend conferences, thereby keeping his life and his opportunities international.

This seemed by far the most common attitude to the differences between life in Ghana and life in the UK among the migrants interviewed. In the family sphere, Ghana was the place they were most comfortable. But in the other spheres of their life, particularly where their careers were concerned, they saw themselves as international and refused to be cut off by their return.

## Networking between Britain and Ghana

### **‘We have all this capability, but no one’s asked us to contribute’**

Participants were asked whether they felt that there was untapped potential for networking among migrants who had lived in Britain. In general, they replied that organised networking opportunities would be useful for business and for information, but felt that it would be hard to engage Ghanaians in such an exercise because of the scale of migration flows and the huge variation in people’s interests and reasons for migrating. Some also felt that there would be value in a network of former migrants who could prepare those about to move to Britain for the social disjuncture they would face.

Some migrants, however, had strong views on how such networking might impact development in a context where the Ghanaian government was not focusing on its diaspora as a resource. Those working in development-related fields, in particular, felt that networking between migrants and governments would be good for Ghana, since their experience of the Ghanaian government was that it did not offer educated migrants information on how to engage, consult and create change.

*‘There isn’t a link back. We have all this capability, but no one’s asked us to contribute. The framework, the setup is lacking. Informal networks exist, but formal ones would be better. A more organised diaspora would be able to influence policy in Ghana away from a donor culture that brings in its own resources and people, and leaves Ghanaians with the level of skill and knowledge out of the picture, unable to tap into the jobs available.’* (Seth, male, 39, technology consultant, Amsterdam)

Others felt that networking would not encourage the undecided to migrate:

*‘If you are going to better your education, if you have the money, then I would encourage you. But if you don’t have the money, to go and hustle, you may go and meet your death. So I won’t encourage you.’* (Abraham, male, 73, retiree, Accra)

## The future of UK/Ghana migration

### **‘A different kind of empire’**

Of all the migrants interviewed, not one had wanted to stay in Britain permanently. They spoke with great emotion of the joy of coming home after migrating, of the pleasure of the Ghanaian way of life, the warmth and friendliness, and the closeness of community and family. Even those who came home more or less by accident found that it had not been a mistake:



*'Now I've settled perfectly in Ghana and I think things are much, much better than we expected them to be ... Maybe we will move when my husband has to do his PhD. But we will definitely come back home.'* (Ama, female, 27, administrator, Kumasi)

Some people expressed the opinion that visa policies were trapping some Ghanaians in Britain. If overstayers received an amnesty, they suggested, and were given the chance to work legally for a short period and make some capital, they would return home.

*'Once you've gone out there and made the money to get started, there's no point staying.'* (Francois, male, 33, lecturer, Kumasi)

Of those interviewed, only the younger migrants had considered going on elsewhere after their time in Britain. The rest had decided to come home, and had applied themselves single-mindedly to their aim of getting back to their families. Younger migrants, however, were more likely to think of themselves as having become international, and were becoming increasingly orientated towards the United States, which they saw as having a more welcoming immigration policy and more opportunity for people of colour. These migrants seemed to have transferred wholesale the sense of possibility and optimism, which characterised their initial migration, to the US and Canada. Virginia or Toronto now represent the opportunity and new hope that London once did. Overall, the interviewees expected to keep moving for jobs, educational opportunities and family reasons.

However, even those who had moved on (or planned to) from Britain to another country still aspired to return. Although the 'myth of return' is prevalent in the migration literature, there is a case for believing that migration has become more circular, and for the highly educated in particular now more resembles a continuing form of mobility. This, in turn, is influencing the possibility and likelihood of return. All the migrants had kept strong ties to home, most had bought or built a house there while they were away, and all but the oldest generation had kept making regular visits to Ghana, consciously keeping their Ghanaian identity intact rather than attempting to integrate fully in Britain.

One migrant, a technology consultant, presents a case of ongoing migration beyond the UK to Europe. He moved to the Netherlands from Britain with his Dutch-Ghanaian wife, and has a rationale (a mix of national values such as environmental consciousness, and local conditions such as good schools and safe neighbourhoods), that sounds long-term, even permanent. However, he and his wife are still hoping to return. They have built a house in Ghana, and are making regular trips. His business, an international consultancy, could be conducted from Ghana were there sufficient infrastructure there to allow him to run an office and stay in touch with Europe and the Gulf states, where most of his business is. He sees living in Ghana as something that requires investment to get over the difficulties in doing business – keeping a generator, for instance, to deal with power cuts – and which currently makes it hard to work transnationally. This interviewee wants to apply his skills to help Ghana build its infrastructure and become a place where its educated diaspora can work, but does not believe this will be possible in the short term.

*'You have to either be there and make the investment of money, patience, time, or just live elsewhere.'* (Seth, male, 39, technology consultant, Amsterdam)

Most of those interviewed, however, were already living a contingent, transnational life. They were resolutely based in Ghana, but recognised that some aspects of professional life necessitated going abroad. None of these younger migrants questioned that they would remain based in Ghana, no matter the difficulties. They were realistic, but hopeful about the country's future capacity to meet their needs and those of their children.

The migrants with school-aged children felt that theirs would not be the last generation to migrate. One, part of a long-term transnational family, took a fatalistic attitude, saying that she expected her children would travel to the UK for their education, and that she was preparing herself for continuing family dislocation. Yet Ghana would be her permanent base and, she hoped, her children's. Another related that his children were travelling internationally, but that he had faith that they valued the Ghanaian way of life enough to come home to stay when they had satisfied their initial curiosity and ambition.

To sum up, the Ghanaians interviewed were all glad to have returned, and felt strongly that others would like to do so. They felt the chief reasons many of their Ghanaian friends were staying in the UK related to a combination of lack of choice and need for capital. They acknowledged that there were serious drawbacks in trying to do academic research or international business from Ghana due to the lack of infrastructure, but they also felt that international investment and the availability of technology were starting to provide ways around these problems. For them, the idea of home and their rootedness in their national and local identity were non-transferable, and living elsewhere left them feeling that they were missing a piece of themselves. They all voiced concerns about the increasing restriction of visa availability, for a variety of reasons ranging from the existence of transnational families to the likelihood of trapping overstayers in poverty who would otherwise aspire to return home and start businesses. Overall, their feelings about Britain mirrored their ties with their transnational extended family members – a long-distance relationship that demanded immense investment and effort, but was nevertheless rooted in a deep sense of mutual history and (often reluctant) affection.

Interviewees were generally highly optimistic about the potential of migration. Having lived through multiple waves of migration, those in middle age feel that the tide is finally turning and that Ghana is at last creating good jobs to offer its youth.

*'More and more people coming [home] have different things to offer. Those people also offer something towards the development of the country... Eventually they will all come back. And coming back here, it creates an integration between [Britain] and here. It expands the English empire, one way or another, from the old empire to a different kind of empire. This time it is an empire of mutual understanding.'* (Haruna, male, 52, accountant, Accra)

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