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Return migrants in Nigeria

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Institute for Public Policy Research

Challenging ideas – Changing policy

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About ippr

The Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) is the UK's leading progressive think tank, producing cutting-edge research and innovative policy ideas for a just, democratic and sustainable world.

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The re-migration project

This case study of return migration from the UK to Nigeria was conducted as part of ippr's re-migration research, exploring emigration among the UK's immigrants. Case studies were also conducted in Pakistan, Ghana, New Zealand, 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.

Literature review

Demographics

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with an estimated population of over 140 million people, comprising over 250 ethnic nationalities. It is located in West Africa, a region which is characterised by a history of extensive migration that pre-dates European colonial rule. Nigeria is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and a key member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

While about a third of West Africans purportedly live outside their locations of origin, and the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons has further given latitude to this interflow of people across the region, most migrants who leave West Africa mainly go to European countries with which they have historical (mainly colonial) links and share a common language (Hernández-Coss and Bun 2007). Nigeria is equally a source and destination country for migration within the West African region (Adepoju 2004).

There is a general research consensus on the paucity of credible documented data and empirical evidence, with varying and quite contradictory statistical indicators outlined across different studies. For example the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website (FCO) states that 'there is a large Nigerian community in the UK, estimated to be between 800,000 and 3 million'. However, these figures may not account for the presence of people living in the country illegally; those who exist on the fringes of formal documentation; and UK-born people of Nigerian ancestry. Hence, the estimates might well be below the actual reality: the UK is widely regarded as host to the largest Nigerian community in the country's diaspora, including many third generation migrants.

Nigerian migrants are predominately Ibo, from the South-East, and Yoruba from the South-West, alongside smaller numbers of Edo, Ogoni and others (Hernandez-Coss et al 2006).

Waves and patterns of migration

In the pre-colonial and early colonial period migration across the region was motivated by the pressures of poverty, and the quest for new land for settlement and arable farming (Adepoju 2004). The dynamics of these movements changed in the latter part of colonial rule. Occurring parallel to the rural-rural and rural-urban migrations, a cluster of Nigerians from the elite and skilled sectors of the population started migrating to the UK in pursuit of further education and professional development. These Nigerians would later take over from the colonial administrators at the outset of Independence (de Haas 2006). This constituted a first wave of migration that continued into the Independence period and the 1970s, as more people went in search of the opportunity, and subsequently established a community of Nigerians in the UK.

The Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970 also persuaded many Nigerians to leave for the UK, and to some other developed countries. However, the pattern of migration flows from Nigeria reveal a greater tendency for movement to the UK, with which it has colonial and other historical links, as well as a common language and time-nurtured networks (Schoorl et al 2003).

Independence brought with it a batch of student returnees from the UK, who arrived to occupy positions that had been opened up in the Nigerian public service by the departure of the administrators of colonial rule. There was also a crop of entrepreneurs and professionals who took advantage of the oil boom in the country during the late 1960s and 1970s.

There was a significant downturn in the Nigerian economy in the 1980s due to an adopted Structural Adjustment Programme and shocks in the oil market, loss of jobs and livelihoods, the advent of successive military interventions in the country, and burgeoning political tensions. These factors caused another wave of migration as many people started seeking more favourable opportunities in the UK (Hernández-Coss and Bun 2007). During this difficult period, Nigerians also migrated to the United States; and anecdotal evidence indicates that the United States has the world's third largest Nigerian community after Nigeria and the UK. Some of these immigrants are highly-skilled

professionals who had attained degrees from Nigerian universities in the 1960s and 1970s, although their degrees were not recognised in the US. Many of them took up menial jobs and went back to college to attain higher degrees that would give them better opportunities there (Ette 2005)

Factors in the migration of Nigerians to the UK

An interplay of several factors has triggered the outflow of Nigerians to developed countries, and specifically the UK, in the past few decades. While an earlier generation sought the acquisition of professional skills in the 1960s and early 1970s, at which time the future appeared quite bright, the political and economic deterioration of the late 1970s and 1980s led to the consistent shrinking of opportunities for a better life for many citizens in Nigeria. With aggregate per capita GDP falling by 1 per cent every year since the 1980s, making Sub-Saharan Africa the lowest income region in the world, the lack of prospects of economic growth, closure of democratic space and restriction of social freedoms through the incursion of the military into government, exerted pressure on citizens to seek a better life and opportunities elsewhere. These have been some of the strongest 'push' factors determining the decisions of Nigerians to emigrate to the UK.

Other factors motivating migration include drops in income, currency devaluation and rising costs of living; unemployment (largely among graduates) and the increase in the dependency burden of household wage-earners; the rigid employment systems of the Government; and professional isolation (Fadayomi 1996).

As the 1980s wore on, Nigerians went to the UK as students, to seek professional development, and as skilled migrant labour. Post-colonial migration became increasingly diversified, with a new set of economic migrants searching for alternative opportunities joining the migrating hordes. This group applied for refugee status, making Nigerians the fifth largest group of asylum-seekers in Europe (Carling 2005).

In the United States many Nigerians who originally intended to return home after their degrees decided to stay due to harsh economic conditions and repression in their home country. Many of them continued to acquire more degrees in the US. Being enrolled in a course is a tactic to keep their status legal. Returning home is a last resort as these immigrants feel they will be more valuable to their families at home if they stay abroad. This also encourages the illusion that life in the US is easy but this is far from the truth for most Nigerians there. However, despite initial difficulties, many Nigerians in the US now succeed in the medical professions, work for Fortune 500 companies, are lecturers and have college degrees from Ivy League institutions.

The motives for migration vary with gender, as men largely appear to form the bulk of labour/economic migrants, and women seemed to migrate for reasons of family reunion and family formation (marriage migrations) in the UK (European Communities 2000).

Some of the 'pull' factors that have motivated immigration from Nigeria include the prospect of higher income and greater job mobility/professional career development (Fadayomi 1996), particularly through the UK Government's Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP). The value placed on the quality of degrees attained in countries such as the UK, by multinational corporations with needs for highly skilled human resources has equally been a pull factor for Nigerians who may want to return home. Considerations of the potentials for acquiring high-level skills in the UK, and the massive recruitment drives of several UK agencies and universities for the admission of fee-paying Nigerian students, have further facilitated the pull of Nigerians, and spawned a whole industry of immigration services and consultancies. The UK's National Health Service also has a strong need for medical and nursing personnel from Sub-Saharan African countries; Nigeria provides a significant supply of these workers (de Haan 2006).

Impacts of Nigeria-UK migration

The majority of Nigerians in the UK are highly educated, and work in financial services, ICT, the medical and legal professions, education, civil society, and as entrepreneurs (Hernández-Coss and Bun 2007). Yet, there is a significant population of migrants who are either unskilled/semi-skilled workers

or (highly) skilled workers functioning in positions that are irrelevant to their qualifications and earn them lower wages than their skills could command, which leads 'brain migration' to become 'brain waste' (Salt 1997 World Migration Report 2003).

The utilisation of Nigerian migrant labour, however, does mainly bring benefits, to both the UK as country of destination, contributing to economic growth and development, and to the immigrants and their families. With increasing shortages in skilled labour in certain sectors of the economy, and the need for the replacement of workers who are entering retirement, it is projected that more migrant workers (about 1.2 million) would be required in the economic and social services sectors of the UK (World Migration Report 2003), a sizeable proportion of which could practicably be made of Nigerians.

On the other hand, the emigration of highly skilled nationals from Nigeria drains it of valuable human resources, and leads to a significant loss of skills available for development, particularly in the critical sectors of health, education and technology. This situation, referred to as 'brain drain', results in the recruitment of expatriates by some African countries to fill the skills vacuum and an estimated expenditure of US\$4 billion is spent annually on the recruitment of about 100,000 skilled workers across Africa (Selassie and Weiss 2002). These workers are only there for the short term and do not contribute to sustainable development (World Migration Report 2003).

Yet, migration can be a tool for development through the transfer of human capital and skills acquired abroad – in a process of brain circulation – back to the country of origin (European Communities 2000). In 2003, for example, the Nigerian Federal Government began facilitating a project to encourage Nigerian medical practitioners in the UK and the US to invest at home. The doctors in question had plans to return and build 'comprehensive hospitals', in Lagos, Kano, Abuja and Port-Harcourt to begin with. The coordinating group, American Hospital Corporation, was to contribute US\$60million. The project was to start in 2006 but with the end of the Obasanjo administration in 2007 and a newly elected President in place, the current status of the project is unknown. The number of Nigerian doctors working in Europe and the US in 2003 was between 3500 and 5000 (Onuorah 2003).

Migration has also enhanced trade between the UK and Nigeria, and the remittances being sent home by workers have been identified as strongly aiding development initiatives.

Therefore, the literature review reflects the twin sides of Nigeria to UK migration, both the positive and the negative.

It is now becoming clear, mostly through media reports, that there is a new wave of return migration to Nigeria. The Move Back Club (MBC) has been at the vanguard of attracting many Nigerian professionals in the diaspora back to their country of birth, according to *This Day* newspaper, MBC was established four years ago in 2004 to aid Nigerians who want to return home, by providing networking forums and information on job opportunities for returnees. Most of the highly skilled Nigerians who return have vast international experience and have worked for Fortune 500 international businesses. They usually take up well-paid technical positions in the Nigerian telecommunications, banking and financial sectors (*This Day* newspaper, 2008).

This new phenomenon may herald a reverse of the 'brain drain' and the influx of new skills and resources injected into the Nigerian economy and society. However, it remains to be seen whether this trend will increase or wane.

Methodology

Interview selection process and demographics of participants

Twenty interviewees were selected from several organisational databases and through networks of Nigerian ex-UK residents. A CAPPS Research Associate was tasked with compiling a list of 20 people based on the following demographics:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Occupation
- Level of education
- Length of time in the UK
- Age of departure for the UK
- Duration of return to home country
- Nationality

The resultant group represented different ethnic groups and regions of Nigeria, different walks of life and varied in age from 25 to 58. Some candidates who had dual nationality and some who had lived in a third country after leaving the UK were interviewed in order to compare the views/experiences of those with dual nationality with those of single-Nigerian nationality and to provide a comparison between migration to the UK and other countries. For further details on the interviewees please see appendix 1.

The interviewees were initially contacted by phone and interviews were conducted face-to-face by CAPPS researchers in Lagos. Lagos is Nigeria's commercial capital and without question the most cosmopolitan city in the country, a melting pot of cultures where people from all over the country converge. Many Nigerians like the ones in this case study choose to live in Lagos when they return to their home country because of its business potential and urbane appeal.

Interview structure

A generic discussion guide was used as a structure for the interviews. Interviewees were asked to recount their experiences under the following areas:

1. Migration history
2. Moving to the UK
3. Living in the UK
4. Social networks in the UK
5. Studying or working in the UK
6. Leaving for a third country
7. Returning to Nigeria
8. Socio-economic conditions in home country
9. Social networks in the home country
10. Identity, links and ties to the UK

Research findings

Views of the UK before migrating

Several respondents felt quite familiar with the UK prior to travelling there due to the remnants of British colonialism that are still apparent in contemporary Nigerian culture, society, infrastructure and administrative systems. The Protestant Church, the educational curriculum and television programming – which were mostly based on Britain’s – introduced British literature and culture to many of the respondents early in life, building their expectations of life in the UK. In addition they gleaned information from interactions with UK expatriates in Nigeria, the media, literature and from short holidays in Britain. However, this knowledge proved at best superficial.

‘When I thought of the UK I thought of the Royal Family. I thought everybody was rich and went to fancy schools and that they were posh.’ (Mimi, 25 years old, female, film producer)

‘To be really honest I didn’t have much of an impression. They just spoke with a different accent.’ (Yemisi, 27 years old, male, graphic designer)

Quite a large number of the people interviewed, particularly the younger ones, had visited the UK with their parents on holidays before they moved there to live or study. According to one interviewee, going to the UK was like a reward for his ‘working hard at school during the year’ (Edward, 32 years old, engineer/architect). Another interviewee explained that she travelled to the UK during the summer to buy clothes as this is ‘what people did in those days’ (Bisola, 57 years old, dentist), while another said, that to her, the UK was the land of ‘milk and honey’ where she could have the lifestyle she saw on TV (Faye, 32, commercial manager).

Views, however, seemed to change based on people’s needs, maturity and experience. Many interviewees when in their early teens had seen the UK as a ‘fairly tale world’ which offered sweets, cinemas and clothes, but by the time they were in their twenties, their interest had changed to the advantages of the educational facilities, infrastructure, nightlife, entertainment and the cosmopolitan exposure it offered. Older respondents in their fifties and above seemed to like the UK for the ‘peace of mind’ that it offered them, the amenities, infrastructure and the ease of local transport. The shopping was viewed an advantage by all age groups.

It was evident from our interviews that many well-to-do Nigerian families have an established pattern of regular visit to the UK during the summer holidays and close family ties in the country. This is a pattern that seems to have been established over a long period of time.

In conclusion, most interviewees saw the UK in a positive light, mostly as a place that offered them opportunities to pursue diverse interests and meet individual needs. Beyond what they had learnt via secondary sources, they were not very knowledgeable about life in the country prior to going to the UK. However, the colonial link between Nigeria and the UK helped to shape their views, perspectives and expectations.

Reasons for moving to the UK

Based on the 20 interviews conducted, the pursuit of education, better economic prospects and infrastructure were the primary drivers of migration from Nigeria to the UK, especially in the immediate pre- and post-Independence era, but also during the late 1980s and ‘90s onwards. When interviewees said they came to the UK in search of a better education, they were referring to both academic education and work training, and in some cases exposure to the way of life in a developed country.

More than half of the candidates interviewed attained university degrees from UK institutions. The deterioration of the Nigerian educational system, the lack of adequate facilities and dilapidation of infrastructure were key triggers for the mass migration of Nigerian youth to the UK from the mid-‘90s to date. One interviewee explained that he left the University of Lagos for the UK because the university was shut down for six months between 1990 and 1991 due to teacher strikes. Another

explained that his parents were afraid to put him in a Nigerian university because of violent student 'cults' (gangs and fraternities) that were widespread in Nigerian universities in the 1990s.

Many of those who had Permanent Residence status or citizenship in the UK often chose to return to Nigeria at some point, while some who stayed behind permanently did not initially plan to do so.

The interviewees left Nigeria for the UK at differing stages in their lives. Some did so in their pre-teenage years, some left as teenagers for A-levels or undergraduate study, while others went for post-graduate study or vocational development in their twenties or thirties. A small fraction of the interviewees shuttled back and forth between Nigeria and the UK during their primary school years because their parents were in either education or employment in the UK.

It also emerged that the choice of the UK as destination was largely based on the colonial link which had seen Nigeria adopt British administrative and educational systems, as well as a pattern of regular travel between the two countries. The UK training of the post-Independence Nigerian workforce in law, medicine, public administration, engineering, military and other vocations in the '60s and '70s created a group of British educated and British trained Nigerians who studied and lived in the UK for varying periods of time. Some returned to Nigeria and some settled in the UK, or at least planted roots and networks there, making the UK 'a home away from home', as one interviewee put it.

Well over half of the people we interviewed had parents, children, siblings or extended family members who had studied or lived in the UK at some point. If one family member or family friend had studied, lived or had links in the UK, that person would often influence and/or facilitate the travel of another family member or friend to explore their goals in education, residence, lifestyle or work experience in the UK. Several of the younger interviewees stated that the decision to move to the UK was mostly made or influenced by their families. One interviewee recalls that it was a given that he would study in the UK. Another explained that her elder brother 'was already in the UK so it made sense' for her to follow in his footsteps. One stated that her father had been at school in England and had established social networks and financial links there, thus it was the natural destination of choice as he could use these networks and links to her advantage.

Ease of visa and immigration processes

Most of our interviewees said they experienced few problems in obtaining a visa if their documents were in order. Though the process could be laborious, any problems that did emerge were not insurmountable. However, an individual with dual citizenship said it took a year to get her passport and she was requested to present evidence to prove she was born in the UK, which she found distressing.

There was a general view that in the '70s, '80s and even early '90s, it was easy to obtain a UK visa, but it became more difficult from the mid-'90s when the military stranglehold in Nigeria created economic and social hardships that caused many to flee the country in search of better prospects and visa-related fraud escalated. During the era of military dictatorship in Nigeria, most countries including the UK and the US tightened immigration controls as they were overwhelmed by the deluge of visa applications.

'I do remember that getting a visa increasingly became an issue for the people who came after me.' (Fred, 35 years old, male, production designer)

About a quarter of the people interviewed had dual Nigerian and British citizenship, mostly because they were born in the UK or because they had lived in the country for more than 10 years and naturalised. All the interviewees in this category stated that they had few problems in being granted British citizenship and obtaining British passports once they had fulfilled the requirements and had the right set of documents. However, an interesting trend that emerged was that most interviewees stated that they obtained UK citizenship not out of a sense of shared identity, cultural affinity or national allegiance but mostly for ease of global travel. The UK passport granted them visa-free access to European and other countries, which as Nigerian passport-holders would not be the case. When asked if they felt British, only one interviewee answered positively while most were emphatic in saying

'no'. They often claimed their Nigerian nationality as their main identity, irrespective of how long they lived in the UK.

'The British Passport: more a functional travel document, less an indicator of shared identity, cultural affinity or national allegiance' (inferred by the majority of the interviewees who had dual nationality)

'I moved back to be close to my family on both my mother and father's side...Nigeria is my home...there are lots of opportunities here...' (Mimi, 25 years old, film producer, dual citizen)

'All along it was clear in my mind that I was British and Nigerian. I did not see a conflict between the two.' (Tony, 57 years old, human resources, dual citizen)

Views on different aspects of British life

The British education system

Overall, most interviewees seemed to generally enjoy their study in the UK. Though many complained about never feeling a part of UK society, most of them praised the educational system, facilities and infrastructure. One 28-year-old female interviewee, Teni, explained that a British education 'puts you in a position where you can stand on your feet'. A 31-year-old man, Emeka, described the education he received as 'second to none'. He was particularly impressed with his primary and secondary school experience. Others spoke about the freedom of expression and thought that were encouraged in UK tertiary institutions which they felt contrasted with the more pedantic educational strictures in the Nigerian system.

However, one female interviewee, who attended a comprehensive school in the UK in her earlier years but completed her secondary school education in Nigeria, argued that the standard of education at primary and secondary level in her native country was much higher than in the UK. She implied that private schools in Nigeria are much better than the grammar and comprehensive schools in the UK.

Generally, few of the interviewees complained about the school environment and most recounted fond memories of their university days. One interviewee, a 27-year-old graphic designer who did his A-levels in Cambridge, defined that city as a 'proper university town'. He appreciated its sense of history and acknowledged the fact that it exposed him to another side of life that he would not have experienced had he stayed in Nigeria.

In general, most of the interviewees appreciated the sense of culture and history provided by the UK and its people. Beyond a few references to racist comments, most students seemed to have felt a full part of both the academic and social scene in their schools.

Living conditions and finances

Most of the interviewees lived comfortably in the UK, as they were either based in school halls of residence or living with family or friends. While most were concentrated in London, others lived in cities including Reading, Leeds, Manchester and Cambridge. School/college location and presence of a family support structure often informed their choice of residence.

It was common for the interviewees to live in boarding houses until their A-levels, then in halls of residence in the first and second years of university, after which they would move out of student accommodation to rent apartments or share houses with friends from college, or stay with family. Almost all the people interviewed for this case study had relatives living in the UK at the time and these relatives served as a support group for them in the UK. Interestingly, many of the interviewees also stated that, as students, they mostly received funds from their parents and other family members in Nigeria, rather than them being the ones to send back remittances. This depended on the financial status of the family in question, however.

Social disconnection and identity crisis

An interesting discourse emerged on the negative relationship between going to school and living in the UK at a young age, and maintaining social networks in Nigeria and identity formation. While most

of the interviewees valued the education they received, a small fraction thought in the long run it was a disadvantage to send children to the UK at an early age. Fred, who was sent to the UK at the age of 8 and returned to his home country at age 32, said 'I would not educate my kids away from me until they were old enough for me to know that they knew their identity and they were sure of who they were.' Bisola, a dentist who spent her early life in the UK and had sent all her three children to university there, admitted that she felt socially disadvantaged in Nigeria because of her long stay in the UK. She explained that she did not 'know that many people' in Lagos. She did not want the same experience for her children so she had them attend primary and secondary school in Nigeria before they were sent to the UK to university.

The sentiment that those who go abroad to study have an advantage over those who do not was refuted by another, Tony, 57, who shuttled between the two countries before he was 7 years old. He admitted that his social network in Nigeria was only small and it 'took some time' for him to build it up when he returned to Nigeria as an adult. He explains that 'networking is a very important part of human business' in Nigeria.

Family and friends

All the interviewees reflected on the strong Nigerian community in the UK; often, their social activities tended to be primarily within these circles. Most interviewees had either nuclear or extended family members who lived in the UK and/or friends from their home country who were also studying in Britain, making up their core social circle.

While most interviewees often replicated or at least based their social activities in the UK around social networks they carried over from Nigeria, many were proud to mention that they had a multinational group of friends. Some mentioned that they went out of their way to make friends from different countries because they realised that being exposed to different peoples and cultures was an asset. As one interviewee said, 'Why go somewhere else and hang out with Nigerians?' Those who did not actively make friends from other cultures or regions stated that they regretted this. Interestingly, most interviewees spoke mostly of making friends from European countries, other parts of Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, but very few mentioned making British friends.

Social integration

Most interviewees stated they never really felt British and did not feel a sense of belonging or acceptance within the British community. However, none of the interviewees said that they made a deliberate attempt to integrate, either, and their involvement in community affairs was often limited to Church or student activities. No particular reference was made to distrust for neighbours but very few participants said they would leave their keys with them, for example. In most cases, they stated that they were not familiar with their neighbours beyond cordialities and some did not know their neighbours at all.

Racism and discrimination

The issue of racial discrimination hardly came up during the interviews. Candidates did not volunteer information about incidents of raced-based hostility or discrimination until they were directly asked. Even though most interviewees could recount a few examples of racial hostility during their stay in the UK, they admitted that they were few and far between, and it never really deterred them from living in the UK. The stories of racism that were described usually involved name-calling, racial stereotyping, racial profiling and occasionally, physical abuse. Some male interviewees referred to the experience of being pulled over by police often when driving; another mentioned an attack by young white males after a night out, and a 32-year-old female interviewee mentioned that during her student days an older white male would regularly tell her to 'go back to Africa' whenever she walked past him.

None of the interviewees felt that the UK was a racist society but one stated that he felt that there was often an assumption of 'intellectual superiority' by the British when dealing with black people from Africa. Another described 'subtle' racism, in which black people's capabilities were underestimated and they were given less responsibility. This interviewee, now 57, worked for a multinational organisation in London in the late 1970s. A woman (58) who lived in London in the 1950s

and '60s recounted that when she arrived in the UK at the age of 2, she remembered feeling protected by her teachers at school and even 'a bit spoilt'. Everyone had to be nice to her or they would be severely punished. By the time she left the UK in 1964, there were more foreigners moving into London. She stated that towards the time of her departure, she could see that racism was beginning to 'set in'.

Where there were direct incidents of racism, most interviewees stated that they ignored it and focused on why they were in the UK. As one interviewee put it, 'there are always enough good people to make up for the few idiots' (Fred, 35 years old, production designer). Another interviewee, who lived in London throughout his stay in the UK, said he regarded London as a 'neutral place' because everyone is from somewhere else. He said he would only worry about racism in other parts of the country where there is less diversity (Emeka, 31 years old, shipping/finance).

None of the interviewees considered racism to be a main reason for leaving the UK, or indeed a central feature of the UK living experience. However, they reflected that race-based discrimination was more accentuated in the work place than in student environments – as we expand upon below.

Working in the UK

Elusive work permits and glass ceilings

The work environment offered a particular set of challenges in terms of opportunities and racial discrimination. Several interviewees felt that although they were treated well in the work place, progression was much more difficult and people assumed they could not hold positions of responsibility. 'The glass ceiling was seemingly impenetrable', one interviewee said. Another stated, 'it became clear that there were limitations to what I could achieve and how high I could go' (Faye, 32 years old, commercial manager).

Several of the male interviewees stated that these were deciding factors in their choice to return to Nigeria as they could not get good jobs that matched their qualifications and opportunities for growth were limited. Interestingly, several of the female interviewees stated that they moved back because their partners were unable to find stable career prospects in the UK.

Most of the interviewees ended up leaving the UK not long after they graduated from university, or worked for less than five years before returning. Almost all returned to Nigeria, while a very small fraction went to a third country. One male interviewee insisted that it is best to be in one's home country 'and be all that you can be' (Tony, 57 years old, human resources). He makes the point that it would have been a lot harder for him to set up a business on his own in the UK than in Nigeria. Another interviewee, who was frustrated and unable to get a professional job partly because of his nationality, had no regrets. He described Nigeria as 'still very virginal...there are a lot of things that have not been done yet' (Edward, 32 years old, engineer/architect).

Interestingly, while there were complaints about the difficulty of well-qualified Nigerian passport-holders to obtain work permits, British passport-holders of Nigerian heritage that were interviewed (who often got better jobs) also tended to move back to Nigeria after a few years. The interviewees that match this profile worked for large companies such as NatWest, Shell and BT. One dual citizen who lived in the UK from her teens and worked for companies including Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank and Abbey National, chose to return to Nigeria in her late twenties; she said: 'I have a life here [in Nigeria], I am not just living, I am part of something. Here I belong, I exist' (Faye, 32, commercial manager).

There is evidence to show that the interviewees who had dual citizenship and had been in the UK educational system for at least 10 years were more likely to get well-paid, responsible jobs in the City of London than those who did not fulfil these criteria. Many of the interviewees who had planned to live in the UK and work for some years when they first arrived changed their minds later as they came up against challenges and realised that there were easier and sometimes more lucrative opportunities in their home country. For non-British-passport-holders, the difficulties in getting a work permit and a satisfactory job in the UK became key deterrents to staying. Most people considered working in the UK as good experience but not an advantage in the long term.

Leaving the UK for Nigeria or a third country

Factors encouraging return to Nigeria

Moving back to their home country was always a possibility for most of the interviewees. Only one candidate admitted that while he was still a student he considered settling down in the UK permanently, but later changed his mind towards the end of his degree. Family obligation and culture often influenced decisions and many of the interviewees implied that their parents expected them to return home after they completed their studies. One interviewee recalled that his father flew to the UK to personally ask him to return home because he was the first child and the only son of his parents, something that is highly significant in African culture. He was planning to relocate to the US at the time but submitted to his father's wishes and returned home.

Other pull factors for returning home included the ready availability of family support structures and domestic assistance. Growth of the Nigerian economy and the proliferation of multinational companies paying international salaries also meant that qualified returnees could earn well (sometimes in foreign currency), have more disposable income and have a better standard of living. All the interviewees also felt that their professional value would be higher as with their foreign degrees, and in some cases, international work-experience, they would be highly sought after by companies in Nigeria.

On their return, most tended to live with family members free of charge and would then get their own apartments when they secured jobs that payed enough. According to these returnees, their re-immersing into Nigerian life and culture reduced the financial and administrative pressures they had experienced in the UK. They did not have to worry immediately about rent and bills. As one interviewee lamented, 'in the UK you have to pay for everything!' (Teni, 28 years old, female, entrepreneur). These social benefits in Nigeria reduced the need for financial capital, so that many of the returnees could settle in, settle down and find their feet at minimal cost.

The social life in Nigeria was also said to be a key attraction for returning. Returnees mentioned the pleasure of being with friends and family and how frequent social events and gatherings often made life in Nigeria more enjoyable and fulfilling than their life in the UK. One talked about the importance of 'human contact' and how the constant exchange of social pleasantries made one feel valued. Opportunities for self-development and holding a meaningful status or position in society also increased their sense of worth and value. As one male interviewee put it, 'here I meet and rub shoulders with people in high places who I would otherwise not have met in the UK. Here, I am somebody' (Dennis, early thirties, lawyer).

While many female returnees also moved for career prospects or to pursue dreams of running their own businesses, which would have been difficult in the UK, most stated that they moved back to be with their partners, friends and family members. Men were more usually motivated by the economic advantages of moving back and the need for making themselves socially relevant.

Push factors for leaving the UK

Limited opportunities for career progression, the high cost of living, the difficulties of attaining work permits (for non-British passport holders), increasingly stiff competition with EU citizens in the labour market, and the lack of a sense of belonging in British society were all push factors for leaving the UK.

Many interviewees also mentioned that their social lives were limited and they were 'bored in the UK'. Several said that people in Nigeria tended to have fuller lives with minimal pressures, while the UK provided the opposite. For mothers, child care was a significant factor: in the UK child minders are expensive, whereas in Nigeria it is possible to afford 24-hour live-in nannies, while grandmothers, cousins and extended family are also ready and willing to take care of children at no cost.

There was near consensus on the weather. Almost all the interviewees complained, sometimes strongly, about the British weather. One said 'I've always hated it; I get so many allergies out there', adding that it is always sunny in Lagos and she can go to the beach anytime she wants; another said 'it always depresses me, I never want to go out'. Another stated that one did not have to dress up in 'layers and layers of clothing' before going out in Nigeria and that this created a sense of freedom.

Relationships also played a key role for women, who would either return to Nigeria to stay with their partners who had opted to go home, or in some cases would return in order to get away from their partner in the UK if the relationship had turned sour. Anna, 32, said ‘home is always a good place to nurse a broken heart’.

As mentioned above, and particularly for male interviewees in their late twenties and thirties, it was felt that the opportunity to realise their potential in the UK was limited given the existence of ‘glass ceilings’. They also complained about the inability to save money because their outgoings always surpassed their income due to the high cost of living in the UK. As such, they had less disposable income which also limited both their social life and their ability to create financial stability, factors that eventually persuaded them to leave for home.

The third country option

Everyone that was interviewed had some desire at one point or another to move to a third country. Most toyed with living in other parts of Europe, Canada and some, even, Japan, but the US was the most popular country of choice. But although most of the interviewees did in fact visit the US, hardly any moved there to live even if they said it was an option.

Two of the interviewees who had left the UK to live in the US for study did not enjoy the experience. They both preferred the British lifestyle. Edward, 32, described Americans as ‘cool but cold’. He found it difficult to make friends with the students at his university in Boston because they were distant and cliquish. He says the experience made him grow up and survive without a support group which he had in the UK. The other interviewee, Mimi, 25, complained about ‘black on black racism’, a term she used to describe the animosity between African Americans and Africans in Washington DC. She felt that the UK, especially London, was more inclusive whereas everyone had to identify with a specific group or ethnicity to survive in the US. Another interviewee described the US as being ‘too loud and too fast’ (Yemisi, 27 years old, male, graphic designer). All these people eventually returned to Nigeria.

The general trend that emerged confirms that Nigerians are often more accustomed to the UK culture and can be overwhelmed by the contrast when they get to the US and find it almost impossible to adjust. They often return either to the UK or to Nigeria.

Interviewees’ perceptions of socio-economic issues and conditions in Nigeria

All the candidates that were interviewed for this case study come from comfortably-off families in Nigeria. Most of them represent a second or third generation in their own families of people who studied in the UK and almost all have links and networks within the country. The option of returning to Nigeria is quite attractive given the family structures and financial support available to them there.

Weak infrastructure, crime and unpredictability

Most interviewees complained about the weak infrastructure, which makes daily logistics, planning and conducting business difficult in Nigeria. The key areas which many found frustrating include lack of constant electricity supply, lack of water supply, erratic telephone networks and occasional waves of crime. Most homes use diesel or petrol powered generators for their electricity supply, and several interviewees lamented the amount of money this costs and also the difficulty in obtaining diesel, which has become scarce. Bad-quality roads, traffic jams in Lagos, noise and air pollution were other key challenges to their comfort and quality of life in Nigeria. However, with the advantage of foreign degrees, well-paying jobs and family support, it is easier for them than others in Nigeria to survive in such conditions. One interviewee, a graphic designer, explained that although he has been confronted with many challenges in running his media/content development business under the conditions mentioned above since he returned in 2004, ‘it is possible to deal with the frustrations’ (Yemisi, 27 years old).

Rich culture, vibrant social life, disposable income and social capital

While the issues and challenges described above are experiences they would never have had in the UK, the interviewees still state that they would rather live in Nigeria and suffer these inconveniences

and go to the UK for holidays. The key reasons for this are that in Nigeria they retain the benefits of closeness to family, the dynamics of communal/associational life, the depth and regularity of social relations and activities, cheaper labour and domestic support services, fewer administrative burdens, fewer bills and more disposable income which helps to attain a lifestyle which would be impossible for them in the UK.

Several interviewees also inferred that while money is important in Nigeria, the social capital there becomes a basis of economic activity as well as an informal social bartering system. Human relations have their own value, and social capital is the currency. They felt that it was easier to get things done such as start their own businesses, raise financial capital, and find help and support with the presence of this social capital, without having to have so much monetary backing.

The opportunities in Nigeria for social recognition, career progression and security of identity were also said to be confidence-boosting, whereas in the UK they felt they always had to either prove their value or, as lawyer Dennis put it, 'prove their Englishness' before being accepted either in the workplace's inner circle or in the community. In Nigeria, they felt they could be themselves and still make progress.

Social networks in Nigeria

Duration and disconnection

The social networks of Nigerian returnees vary. Some of the interviewees in their late fifties feel that their social network is limited because of the years they spent in the UK. They had a harder time adjusting and making friends when they returned home than the younger generations. Most of the interviewees in their twenties and thirties have settled down quite easily with no problem integrating. Many of them have kept the friends they had in school before they left for the UK and have made new ones at work since they returned home. They also have friends in Nigeria with whom they studied in the UK. Faye, 32, said 'I have the same set of friends I had before I left Nigeria, many of which moved to the UK and are now back in Nigeria. We have come full circle.'

Identity and links to Britain

Interwoven identities, distinct loyalties

Most interviewees, including those with dual citizenship, often claimed their Nigerian identity as being foremost. Though they reflected British influences in their spoken accents, taste, values, comportment and views about some issues, many still counted and portrayed themselves as Nigerian first. Interestingly, many of the interviewees tended to switch between British and Nigerian accents when speaking. Some were conservative and guarded while others were ebullient and outspoken in their interviews.

While many would claim one nationality as their main identity, the interviewers noted that, to a degree their identities often seemed interwoven, as many of the interviewees outwardly tended to switch aspects of their identity to suit the mood, topic or environment they were in: several of the interviewees tended to interchangeably display outward traits of both Nigerian and British identities as situations and circumstance demanded. Fred, 35, explained that he never fully embraced Nigerian or British culture, but created his own way of life by combining both.

In terms of 'feeling British', for those who were born in the UK or came to the country at a very young age the UK was all they knew in their pre-formative years and thus they grew up with a strong sense of Britishness in their identity. One interviewee, Emeka, 31, went to boarding school at the age of 7 and said that 'sometimes he felt British' especially when it came to supporting sports teams. But for the most part, the interviewees claimed a strong Nigerian identity.

It is safe to conclude that most of the interviewees do have a strong affinity for and connection with the UK. Many remain fond of the country, are nostalgic about the lives they lived there, the experiences they had and the opportunities and advantages it afforded them. However, for most people, even for dual citizens, all the above sentiments do not seem to have culminated into a form of national allegiance, patriotism or a sense of being or feeling British.

Financial and social links

Almost all of the interviewees still keep financial and social links in the UK. A few have investments there, while many still have and operate their bank accounts and credit cards as well as keep in touch with friends and family who live in the UK. Most of the interviewees see the UK as a good place to learn and be exposed to the world's cultures and so some are educating their own children there or intend to do so. Several still travel to the UK for holidays or other purposes as regularly as every three to six months. Some interviewees stated that they always chose to pass through or spend a few days in the UK on their way to other countries. As one put it (Tony, 57), the UK is his 'jump-off point to the rest of the world'. A 29-year-old stated that sometimes she boards a plane to the UK for the weekend 'in order to have her sanity return'. For the majority of the interviewees, the UK seems to be like a holiday home, a place to escape to but not to reside in long term.

Returning to the UK

All the interviewees with dual citizenship stated that they would never consider moving back to the UK permanently to live unless they were forced to by circumstances or had a lucrative offer they could not refuse. The same applies to most of those who had only Nigerian passports. A very small number indicated a willingness to return, mostly due to the challenges of living in an under-developed country rather than because they felt a strong affinity for daily life and living in the UK. Almost all the interviewees, however, stated that they liked going to the UK, especially London, for holidays, shopping and relaxing. Some said this with a sense of nostalgia, but others were more pragmatic than emotive in their views.

Mimi, 25, said: 'I would consider moving back to the UK for my kids', wanting them to be educated in the UK from an early age like she was.

Re-engaging ex-UK residents

While some interviewees were uncertain about how the UK could engage Nigerian returnees to positively contribute to UK-Nigeria relations or the UK's development, many felt that the returnees were a highly untapped resource that could benefit both Nigeria and the UK. They felt that Nigerian ex-UK residents could help to provide a better understanding of issues, dynamics and challenges of migration both to the UK government and to Nigerian people. One mentioned that they could help to broker business ventures between both countries; another said they could help to curb fraud and crime; while another mentioned they could act as cultural ambassadors that would facilitate better understanding between the peoples of both nations.

One interviewee suggested that regular social and brainstorming events could be held during which issues could be discussed between the UK High Commission in Nigeria and ex-UK residents, as a forum for tabling issues of common interest and working out solutions. Consultations could be held with ex-residents at times when relevant policy decisions needed to be made. Another suggested that ex-residents of the UK could achieve a lot by joining forces with the British Council to provide scholarships to underprivileged but gifted Nigerian students and also by providing orientation training for people going to live or study in the UK as this would help them understand the laws, norms and values of the UK better and help them to settle in easier (Teni, 28 years old, female, entrepreneur).

Conclusion

Migration from Nigeria to the UK is well established, spanning more than five decades so. It is likely to continue as more people seek opportunities for better education, exposure to a different culture and life experience. Access to better facilities and infrastructure as well economic prospects in the UK remain strong attractions for many Nigerians, but at the same time the stronger community relations, social interaction, social capital and employment opportunities in Nigeria remain strong pulls for Nigerians to return to their home country. These are augmented by Nigeria's new era of democracy, opening economy and the value placed on Nigerians with foreign degrees by employers, which lead some Nigerians to return there soon after they complete their education in the UK. Furthermore, they find the Nigerian environment more conducive and enabling in terms of professional career prospects and work-life balance.

This on one hand is a positive trend for Nigeria's own development, but on the other indicates a loss of valuable skills which the UK could have harnessed for its own purposes. Furthermore, the 'glass ceiling' that several interviewees alluded to discourages some skilled Nigerians from building careers in the UK, another potential missed opportunity for the host country. Thus, Britain could usefully review how it might benefit from the valuable human resource capital among skilled Nigerians.

The mobility of Nigerians between the UK and their home country also offers an opportunity for the cross-fertilisation of skills and ideas which could be of both economic and social benefit to both countries, and means of building on this could be explored. Harnessing and engaging Nigerians who lived in the UK and have returned to Nigeria to settle could be an advantage for the UK if its High Commission were to maintain a database and develop a mechanism for continued interaction and exchange. Returnees could act as a bridge between both countries to facilitate cooperation in both socio-cultural and economic matters.

As stated by the dual citizens interviewed who claim their Nigerian identity foremost, the British passport for them serves mostly as a functional tool for ease of travel, as opposed to a symbol of national allegiance. This reflects a dissonance between notions of citizenship and identity and leaves space for further research as to why this group of British passport carriers may not feel any allegiance to the country nor claim their UK citizenship as a part of their identity.

Finally, the interviews reflect that not all Nigerians who visit the UK for short or long-term purposes intend to stay as permanent residents. As such, immigration policies that enable ease of circulation in movement of people and skills between both countries may be of benefit to both the UK and Nigeria.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation(s) in the UK	Period(s) lived in the UK
Didi	29	Female	Yoruba/Jamaican dual citizen (born in UK)	British civil service (office administration)	1979-1992 1997-2006
Tony	56	Male	Yoruba dual citizen (born in UK)	Engineer at NatWest Bank and Shell Oil Company	1952-1954, 1956-1959, 1971-1975, 1982-1985
Joan	83	Female	Yoruba	Nurse, civil servant secretary	1953-1964
Mimi	25	Female	Hausa/French dual citizen (born in UK)	Student	1991-2001
Fred	35	Male	Yoruba dual citizen (naturalised in the UK)	Advertising and marketing (business management)	1980-2005
Sarah	58	Female	Yoruba	Student	1953-1964
Bisola	57	Female	Yoruba	Student	1968-1975
Osa	30	Female	Edo	Student	2002-2005
Emeka	31	Male	Igbo dual citizen (naturalised in the UK)	Business computing systems, Deutsche Bank	1986-2006
Edward	32	Male	Yoruba	Student	1992-1999
Teni	28	Female	Edo	Student	1989-1992, 1998-2006
Yemisi	27	Male	Cross-River	Student	1998-2004
Faye	32	Female	Yoruba	Commercial Manager	1990-2006
Dennis	30-35	Male	Yoruba	Lawyer	
Anna	30-35	Female	Yoruba	Media	
Ebilah	30-35	Female	Ibo	Oil and gas	
Johnson	30-35	Female	Yoruba	Oil and gas	
Olagbaju	30-35	Female	Yoruba	Lawyer	
Offiong	25-35	Female	Calabar	Public health	
Iro	25-35	Female	Benin	Lawyer	