

## **Exodus from Africa: Expectations versus Realities in the immigrant Experience**

#Lydia Asana, \*Wilfred Ngwa<sup>1</sup>

#African Renaissance Ambassador Corp, PO Box 61, Princeton, NJ08542, USA

\*University of Central Florida, 4000 Central Florida Blvd, Orlando, FL-32816, USA

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author, Email:ngwa@aracorporation.org, Tel: (+1) 407-823-4442

## **ABSTRACT**

In this study, the pre-emigration expectations of over 40 Africans are examined in comparison to their real life experiences abroad – in the new Diaspora. It is observed that expectations prior to travel are *significantly* different from the realities of life in Europe and North America. These differences are regnantly underpinned by the migrants' warped perceptions of the receiving countries. The origins of these warped perceptions, which often decisively influence emigration decisions, are discussed. The findings also shed light on the complex factors that influenced individual and collective migrant mentalities. The observations, together with the analyses of the worst moments of Africans in the new Diaspora intimate possible avenues to help Africans help Africa, in curbing African brain drain/waste, and fostering sustainable development on the African continent, through information.

## INTRODUCTION

There are perturbing reports (BBC, 2006; UNHCR, 2007; IOM, 2007; New York Times, 2005), admonishing predictions (IDRC, 2005; UANU, 2007), harrowing narratives (Jobard, 2007; Asana and Ngwa, 2007) and cogent research (El-Khawas, 2004; Collier et al., 2004; Hendrik et al., 2004), all attesting the elevated exodus of humans from Africa (also see table 1) and its ramifications on the African continent. This elevated exodus has also effectuated the evolvement of the African Diaspora, and culminated in the birth of a unique African who straddles continents, worlds and cultures in the *new African Diaspora* (Akyeampong, 2000). In Cameroon and Ghana, where the potential to emigrate is demonstrably very high (Eurostat, 2000), this ‘epidemic’ has even sired new words: *Bush-faller*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger*, respectively. These words, describing the unique African, expediently capture the character of the phenomenon; becoming a *Bush-faller* or *Burger* is ostensibly en vogue in Africa, and this is not about to change.

Recent scholarship on African emigration indicates that the emigration pressure in Africa for the next twenty years will be increasing, and Africa will influence global migration flows for the next fifty years (Hendrik, 2004; Hatton and Williamson, 2002; Hatton and Williamson, 2003). This emplaces the consequential migration and potential migration of Africans at the heart of changing social and cultural identities (Castles and Miller, 1993). There is little doubt that there is urgent need for more studies and research that would avail the development of policies to manage African migration, mitigate the negative effects and turn it into a positive tool for development. In general, studies of the haemorrhaging African migration and the new-Diaspora migrant life experience are

crucial for the development of policies in the broad field of migration, development, and integration.

A number of attempts have been made to capture and explain the different motivations and processes related to the causes of the contemporary African emigration.<sup>10</sup> Lately, some scholars have used the push-pull theory to classify the causes of African brain drain (Stalker, 2001; El-Khawas, 2004; Dzvimbo, 2003). In its most limited form, the push-pull model consists of a number of negative or push factors in the country of origin that cause people to move away, in combination with a number of positive or pull factors that attract migrants to a receiving country. Dzvimbo avers that African brain drain push reasons include, among others, job scarcity, low wages, crime, armed conflicts, political repression, and poor educational systems. The pull factors include, among others, higher salaries, greater mobility, less bureaucratic control, safety of environment, and a higher standard of living.

However, even with such an overarching theoretical framework of analyses, current patterns and trends in international migration suggest that a comprehensive understanding of what drives and sustains international migration processes cannot be adequately captured by any one theoretical perspective. Several authors reviewing the existing theories and models of international migration avouch that there is no integrated theory on the process of international migration, but rather a set of partial theories and models that have been developed from different disciplinary viewpoints (Kritz et al, 1983; Portes and Böröcz, 1989; Kritz and Caces, 1991). Although a large proportion of migration is clearly related to the strife for economic betterment, economic disparities are not enough to inclusively explain international movement.

A less accentuated but equally significant factor that contributes to such cross-continental movements is the *perceptions* that travellers have of the receiving country. Because such perceptions are often formed from a distance, they are sometimes warped or not properly vetted with the realities in the receiving countries (Hoerder and Rossler, 1993). We will call them naïve or ignorant perceptions (IP). Indeed, information or perceptions underpinning expectations that are out of touch with actual living conditions in receiving countries can be a serious impediment to both sending and host countries as too many migrants with insufficient human capital will make the journey. Today, the elevated exodus from Africa including the tragic deaths of thousands of Africans per year (BBC 2006, IOM 2007) may be symptomatic of this. Possible origins and the potential significance of this IP factor on African emigration from the perspective of *Bush-fallers* and their real life experiences in the new Diaspora are particularly examined in this study.

A number of contemporary African immigrant autobiographies have been written on individual experiences in Europe and North America, while other experiences have been reported in documentaries and the media (Zewail, 2002; USA Today, 2006; IMDB, 2005; CNN, 2000). These myriad experiences lack congruity as they lay emphasis on different aspects of the migrant experience. However they provide illuminative perspective on the analyses presented in this work. The focus here, will essentially be on the experiences obtained from over 40 Africans (professionals, Asylum seekers and students) interviewed both in Europe and North America.<sup>2</sup> The interviewees were consistently asked to describe the following: reasons for travel, preparation, departure, arrival, culture shock, comic moments, hardships, failures and triumphs (worst moments and best moments) – if any, comparison between expectations prior to travel and realities

abroad, advantages and disadvantages of living in Africa and living in the West, and recommendations for those planning to travel abroad. The interviews were administered from March 2003 to December 2006. The interviewees were randomly selected, save for ensuring repetitive representation of the following categories: student, asylum-seeker, and professional, all from the single male, single female and family perspectives.

Examining the common responses to these questions would help illuminate the reasons for leaving Africa, patterns of economic and social adaptation abroad, changes in gender and generational roles, issues of cultural and political identity, the impact of international immigration policies, etc.<sup>2</sup> As already mentioned, here, the focus will be on comparing pre-emigration perceptions to the realities of life abroad. Firstly, this will allow determining if these perceptions are warped and their polarity i.e. if the perceptions overestimate or underestimate the pull factors. Secondly, this would indicate if one should take the perceptions into consideration in theoretical analyses of current African emigration. Furthermore, possible leads for curbing the massive flight of human capital from Africa or mitigating the effects of the brain drain and waste will be considered. It is hoped that such research will help in filling in gaps in the African immigration literature. This literature needs to seriously take into consideration pre-migration processes because migrants' expectations and values inform not only the factors driving their movement but also how they adjust to and develop new cultural patterns and identities in the new Diaspora (Deaux, 2006; Foner, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). Moreover, Hermans and Kempen (1998), inspired by Appadurai's work (Appadurai, 1990), call for further research on the role of imagination (perception) and people's responses to discrepancies between the imaginal and the actual. Likewise, a critical analysis of migrants' narratives prior to their

departure will lead to a deeper understanding of the migrants' complex expectations and decision-making processes, and their perspectives can potentially contribute to better humanization of the African brain drain/waste discourse.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The IP factor

From the interviewee testimonies it was observed that sometimes the circumstances that trigger journeys abroad in search of “dreams” are largely negative and destructive, for example: unemployment, low wages, armed conflicts, political repression and persecution, economic injustice and the Einstein Stigma (lack of opportunities to manifest potential). At other times, the circumstances are positive: attractive jobs elsewhere; the skilled worker programs like the US DV lottery, safety of environment, educational systems, higher standards of living. These reasons agree with the push-pull classification of Dzvimbo (Dzvimbo, 2003), also in consonance with Robin's first two characterizing features of a Diaspora (Robin, 1996; Robin, 1997). However, obviously, sometimes, combinations of these push and pull factors work together as seen in other migrant cases (Portes and Böröcz, 1989).

A fundamental assumption of the push-pull theory is that the more disadvantaged a place is, the more likely it will produce migrants. An underlying premise is that people moved to improve their lives. According to the so-called ‘theory of reasoned action’ of social psychologists (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1985, 1988) a person's intention to undertake a certain action (e.g., investment, labour supply, giving up smoking, etc.) is a function of, amongst other factors, the beliefs about the consequences of the action. In

the case of emigration, this implies that the person or family makes a mental map of the costs and benefits that are tied to the decision to emigrate. The decision to migrate becomes a real option in the minds of non-migrants when the present value of benefits exceeds the present value of costs. Such theory is in that respect not that much different from economic theory, albeit that the social-psychological factors that impinge on decision making are far larger and more difficult to explicate. In the cost and benefits analysis the individual or family uses the information available at the time. In this respect, there is need for sufficient and accurate information.

From the results, all interviewees acknowledged a significant difference from the perceptions prior to travel and the realities of life in the new Diaspora. There was consistent evidence for IP. *Bush-fallers* conceded that there was an overestimation or idealization of the advantages of receiving countries, a positive belief of the pull factors. In other words, there is a manifestly warped perception with positive polarity. We were able to identify four sources of these distorted perceptions, or what Hoerder et al. call "myths" and "images" of potential destinations (Hoerder and Rossler, 1993).

Not unexpectedly, one source is the media. As one interviewee<sup>3</sup> put it, 'When we look at the images on TV and magazines, with all the beautiful faces, buildings, flowers all around, divided heavenly highways, we really are carried away. Is there anyway who will not like to live in a beautiful place, wearing a nice suit, driving a nice car on those streets and earning enough money?' Many Africans have a clearly unrealistic image of Europe in their minds, the perception that Europe is "Heaven on Earth" conveyed by the local media which rarely shows any negative thing about life in the West. Most potential emigrants have a warped picture of America in their minds – an America often

reconstructed from Hollywood movies, MTV and glossy magazines, half-remembered history lessons and the Moon Landing, an America of star-spangled banners, dollar bills and Lady Liberty. Although not altogether erroneous, the image constructed in the potential emigrant's mind is that of extravagant living, which is idealistic even for many Europeans or Americans.

Apart from the media, the IP is further fomented by the status of Westerners sojourning in Africa. They are often affluent (with a Western pay-check while living in a low-cost society), exuding opulence and often hire African-help to do the low-paying work. As one *Bush-faller* lamented, it seems Westerners are given better treatment just because they are from Europe or North America – because of the belief that the West represents the superlative:

*I mean, even in our own land they treat us like animals! I remember one experience some time in 1995, where I had to train a new survey team in Tanzania. My boss gave me an old Toshiba PC to work with, while my colleague from the 'snow' (Europe) had a PC 95. And here is the thing: I had to train this colleague who had to be my boss later on; someone who did not even have my qualification. I felt so humiliated...'<sup>4</sup>*

In many villages, Africans revere these Westerners. Part of this awe for Westerners extends from the days of colonialism. This sheds light on why many *Bush-fallers*, in their experiences, finally arrive in the West and are shocked to find a beggar on the streets of Hamburg, or a homeless man in Miami.

Thirdly, the attitudes of temporarily returning *Bush-fallers* also potentially foster IP. For example an interviewee, Ayiefor had this to say:

*'During holidays, we would help our mother on the farm. The produce was just enough for our stomachs and nothing more. My mother could not afford extra pocket money when we left for school. This meant that we were left at the mercy of others... During special seasons like Christmas, when many 'Bush-fallers' travelled home to visit their families, one could see them in very good cars, parading the streets of Buea, near the university, with music in their cars turned to the highest volumes. We students called these cars "moving night clubs". It was so beautiful to stand by the roadside and witness them pass by. Their girlfriends and families were regarded as semi-gods, and everybody wanted to be identified with them. In Buea, it was so easy to identify these 'Europeans' – the way they dress, their type of cars, their hairstyles, and the way those from America, especially, talk, walk, not to mention the way they spend money on beer, girls, at nightclubs and hotels. Who would not love to be one of them, or associate with them?''<sup>5</sup>*

As one can see, this interviewee comes from a relatively poor background, hence with a pull (economic) reason to migrate. However, her IP of life in Europe and America portrayed by returning *Bush-fallers* was a decisive factor in driving her to do everything to become a *Bush-faller* herself. In her particular case, she was later equally shocked to see the state of her husband who had left earlier for Germany:

*“I stood there looking at him; he had grown so pale, so shabby. He had not even shaved for so long. I could not believe it was my husband. I felt pity for him from my innermost heart...When we reached their student hostel, he opened his apartment and we all went into the bedroom...just the look in my eyes demanded explanations. My husband told me that what was really his was the bedroom we were standing in. When I looked around, all I could see was a bed, a wardrobe, a reading table, a bedside cupboard and a small stand, where he kept his books, a very small television, and a laptop. This bed to me could not even accommodate the two of us at once. I did not see where some of my decorations could fit, like the backrests I had brought. I was embarrassed and I felt so bad...”*

Even without returning, prior *Bush-fallers* are creators of stories that circulate back to their native communities and contribute to the construction of imagined worlds and perceptions of potential migrants. Mahler (1995) and Pessar (1995) claim that such sources provide mythical and unrealistic information about the immigrant life in the receiving countries which can perpetuate migration.

Another provenance of IP ostensibly comes from *Bush-faller* remittances to their families in sending countries. For many African households, remittances are a tremendously important source of finance. Remittance receivers are typically better off than their peers who lack this source of income. Having a family member abroad has become synonymous to riches. Such families are regarded with a lot of veneration. However, many *Bush-fallers* often suffer, sometimes working over 22 hours in difficult jobs, to remit money to their sending families. Largely, the types of jobs that *Bush-fallers*

do in the first instance are summed up in the 3-Ds, namely: dirty, difficult and dangerous. In other words, low valued and unstable tasks are constructed for immigrant workers who are not choosy and less preoccupied with security and career paths for a start. Many interviewees acknowledged they often don't tell the whole story about the difficulties and struggles. Even when they do, they only bother to tell their families. Other families only see the money which does not tell the complete story.

Overall, the mediascape for narratives or sources that can warp immigrant perceptions include: migrant narratives sent back home in the form of letters, phone calls and email messages, or embodied in remittances and other material goods, or a physical temporal return; the media; and Westerners sojourning in Africa. Individuals, families and entire communities accept some of these narratives and warped information, reject others and combine them into imagined worlds often far away from their situated reality (Appadurai, 1990). Such imaginings or perceptions can indeed have perlocutionary power and shape future migration actions in decisive ways Sarbin (2004).

The above common sources of the IP, therefore, definitely contribute to the *Bush-falling* craze prepotent in African countries today. This rationalizes why executives of many African companies continue to give up their jobs to travel to Europe or the US, only to spend years just trying to integrate in the society through 'unskilled' jobs. What is also interesting is that this IP is not unique to the African elite or students. It can be dovetailed to the numerous experiences of non-elite Africans interviewed in this study and reported in Western media (BBC, 2004; Westermann, 2004). Fusi's representative story (Westermann, 2004)<sup>6</sup> and the CNN documentary "Exodus from Africa" (CNN, 2000) expose how much an African would go through to reach 'Heaven on Earth'. Also,

interviews carried out by IOM show that very few migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa, arriving Yemen in small over-crowded and un-seaworthy boats, are aware of the risks involved in this perilous journey (IOM, 2007). These risks also include long treks in the scorching desert, thirst, starvation and various forms of assault by shiftas, or local bandits. This is not mere economics. There is a significant degree of IP involved.

Another perspective of IP is also brought to light in the interviewee experiences. It is observed that culture shock comes in different forms. Some of these forms include: food shock,<sup>7</sup> etiquette,<sup>8</sup> fashion,<sup>9</sup> tolerance,<sup>10</sup> religion,<sup>11</sup> language shock,<sup>12</sup> family,<sup>13</sup> porn and nudity,<sup>14</sup> credit card and debt,<sup>15</sup> and price shock.<sup>16</sup> But, in the process of transitioning into life abroad, most Africans are not only shocked, but also embarrassed through the funny things they do.<sup>17</sup> The comic moments illustrate the struggles and discomfort of living away from home. Better preparation or education about life abroad before travel would help circumvent potentially embarrassing situations, and certainly mitigate some of the worst experiences (see below).

Interestingly, the above observations are reminiscent of the findings in the study by Hoerder et al. (Hoerder and Rossler, 1993). The study involved twelve original essays (similar to the over 40 interviewee experiences in this study) that examined the expectations of working class and peasant European migrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The authors analyzed the origins of the "myths" and "images" of potential destinations. They found that pre-migration conditions shaped by cultural values and social, economic, and political conditions in their "societies of origin blended with "myths" and "images" to form migrants' hopes (expectations) for the future. The essays

focused on the "expectations" and actual experiences of European migrants, and affirmed that the migrants' experiences did not match expectations – similar to the above findings involving contemporary African emigration. Such studies also shed light on the complex factors that influence individual and collective migrant mentalities. Besides, the polarity, migrant response, and degree of significance of the difference between pre-emigration expectations and the realities could avail the development of migration policy.

Before proceeding, it should be said that it is not all Africans who are apparently ignorant. For some Africans, things are well thought out, planned, and prepared for. Some are well aware of many of the realities. There are definitely some exceptions. However, overall, the emerging conclusion is that most *Bush-faller* experiences abroad are significantly different from the perceptions prior to travel, and apparently warrant consideration or weighting in any analyses of African brain drain/waste pull factors. But first, significance, here, needs to be put in more perspective and the only way to evaluate it is probably through another study of the impact of the antidote to the IP on the emigration. However, it may be said that the discrepancies between expected and real life experience for many immigrants are significant enough to make some asylum-seekers consider committing suicide, significant enough to leave many *Bush-fallers* homeless or with no hope of ever seeing their family or loved ones again. They are significant enough for students to consider returning to their home countries immediately after arrival, significant enough for professionals to compare it to some form of modern slavery. It is mostly in retrospect (hindsight) that *Bush-fallers* find and focus more intently on advantages of living in Africa. So the crucial question, then, is what this antidote to IP would be. This would be an opening or lead for policy development.

## Help Africans Help Africa through information

It is obvious from the above analyses that IP can only be remedied by providing a veritable picture of things through an extensive awareness campaign in Africa of the realities of life abroad and the risks involved in undertaking the journeys. What would be the nature and impact of such an awareness or sensitization campaign? This may mean sensitization needs to be carried out in a model African country and the impact evaluated. Nevertheless, one can reasonably prognosticate the potential impact.

First potential impact is that lives would be saved through information and sensitization. In this information age, ignorance is ostensibly the worst form of poverty, and as they say, poverty kills. This can not be truer if you consider the increasing number of deaths reported of Africans trying to reach Europe (BBC 2006) and more recently the Oceania (IOM 2007). With predictions of an ever increasing exodus from Africa (Hatton and Williamson, 2002; Hatton and Williamson, 2003), sensitization may be the key to saving up to thousands of lives per year – curbing brain waste. As apparent from this study and the IOM interviews (mentioned earlier), many Africans are clearly ‘ignorant’. They are even ignorant of the negative statistics. While western media, for example, reports about the over 6000 African migrant deaths in 2006 as they attempted to reach Europe, local Africans are hardly aware. So an extensive sensitization may curb African brain waste or at least reduce the number of yearly deaths.

Considering Africa as a whole, it has been said by some pundits that the African brain drain is suicidal (UANU, 2007). Can sensitization curb African brain drain – stop

Africa's suicide? There is the potential that this may very well be one of the viable options to address the brain drain at the source. This may even be considered together with other strategies. At the very least, such sensitization is the most fundamental thing that needs to be done for Africans to get a shot at the situation. To find effective solutions to the brain drain/waste, Africans must first be well aware of it and be educated on the process, characteristics, realities and impact. To find effective solutions, *Bush-falling* should become an object of study, mainstreamed into schools and national development planning agendas. This would develop Africans who have an in-depth knowledge of the subject, its benefits and pitfalls. This will enable Africans own and manage African migration, mitigate the negative effects and turn it into a positive tool for development. Many Africans are unaware of the brain drain stats. The average on-the-street African is not aware of the negative effects of brain drain or how remittances can be better harnessed for development. Sensitization would bring this in to the conversation, and education would equip Africans with the fundamental knowledge and drive to find solutions to their own problems. Instead of studying about western migrations (recalling the lament of the interviewee Binwi above) Africans may benefit more by studying more about African migration, vital for their own development.

Overall, the potential impact of the awareness or sensitization campaign will range from: curbing brain drain, through education and studies fostering a better understanding of how (warped) perceptions cluster together with other brain drain pull factors to affect brain drain, better ownership or management of African migration, to enabling enlightened emigration decisions. Yes, at the very least, sensitization and awareness will allow for enlightened/informed emigration decisions and preparation of

emigrating Africans to not only reduce the migrant deaths or avoid possible pitfalls abroad, but to also excel and be in a position to give back to their country of origin. Such remittances were found to be the most common best moment of *Bush-fallers*. If appropriately used, remittances avail sustainable development which would reduce brain drain/waste. Here, policy coherence is necessary. Policies to control migration (curb the brain drain/waste) and policies to facilitate migration (integration of *Bush-fallers*) should be complementary and avoid contradictions.

Realistically, sensitization and education is not going to stop African exodus. Migration in itself has advantages, as the benefits of remittances advocate. However, migration should be healthy not suicidal. Here, the idea is to try to dam the brain drain/waste at the source in Africa. But once the African becomes a *Bush-faller*, you also want to facilitate his integration to better harness his/her giving-back potential and power. Now, for this to happen, Africans need an elevated sensitization and education. Empowering them through information is the starting point to help them help themselves; this would engender a critical mass of Africans to help Africa find solutions to their own problems.

Actually, the idea of sensitization is not new. The International Organization for Migration IOM has used this approach to stymie human trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Information campaigns targeting the general public were carried out to raise awareness (IOM 2002). Just like such information campaigns are crucial instruments in preventing trafficking in human beings, they may have a significant impact on the massive exodus from Africa or integration and development policy. The campaign may have to be tailored differently in the African context, and may

be combined with other initiatives to make it more effective. The idea of sensitization is also suggested by looking at the worst moments of *Bush-fallers*.

Before looking at this, it was interesting to observe from the experiences in this study that ignorance poverty is not peculiar to Africans alone. Intriguingly, while Africans are apparently ignorant about the realities of life abroad, many Westerners are equally ostensibly ignorant about the realities of life in Africa. Most interviewees quipped about the evidence for this in the ‘ignorant’ questions and stereotypes that characterize some of the worst moments of *Bush-fallers*. Here is what Ibeneche an interviewee in Texas said:

*“Some of the more memorable first experiences in Texas were when some painfully ignorant Americans asked me some of the completely ‘absurd’ questions... Being August 1999, Nigeria had just transitioned in May from a military dictatorship to a democratically elected cabinet. The swearing in ceremony of the new president was covered by several news leaders including CNN, and had in its attendance several prominent leaders, many Americans amongst them. By this token, I was sure that at least some Americans were a little aware of where Nigeria was located. This was not to be reflected by some of the questions I had about Nigeria in the early months following my arrival. By far the most amusing was the question posed by an individual, after I had just revealed that I was from Nigeria. “Oh Nigeria - really? Where in Texas is that?” And then, there were the questions that were so stereotypical that you thought they could only be asked in the context of a film. “So do you all live in trees?” “You have Internet in Nigeria?” “Are there wild animals playing in your backyard?” After a while, I started having a little fun with them. In my response to the last question, I answered, “Oh yes,*

*there are several varieties of animals; only my parents won't let me play with the lions, because they think it's too dangerous." The individual's eyes brightened at my response. Eagerly he quipped, "Really?" I smartly responded, "No." His face fell instantly. I then spent a few minutes trying to explain...''<sup>18</sup>*

This apparent ignorance is not peculiar to the United States, as Binwi, another interviewee, in Europe passionately expresses:

*"Some ask if we speak Africana in Africa, if we live on trees, how long we've been basking in the sun to get this black colour and so forth. The thing is – I don't believe they are as innocent as they claim. I don't know why this funny stereotype is so popular over here. The craziest questions were: How did you come to Germany, was it on a bicycle? Do you have cars in Africa? Of course German (TV) stations portray only negative things about Africa. The wretched one is always an African! Germans believe we spend our time fighting wars. Some of these people can really be awful. The question I keep asking is 'Why do we spend so much time learning all about foreign countries, all that happened in history, when they don't even know where Cameroon is situated?' I feel bad because I did not learn the history of Cameroon in school, but can tell you all about German unification and reunification, Italian unification, the partition of Poland, and all about France and Napoleon Bonaparte. Our fellow countrymen don't treat us well back home, but 'westerners' are treated like gods when they reach Africa. Do we deserve this? At home things are not well, outside same. Where should we turn to?''<sup>19</sup>*

Patently, Westerners also need a form of awareness about the realities of life in Africa, beyond the images on TV. Africa may have its push problems, but there are also positives. Greater understanding and tolerance is also necessary on the part of the *Bush-faller*, as expressed in Ibeneche's experience. These, along with efforts to create a greater awareness about the positives of Africa, would help nourish the development of good relationships in an increasingly global society, and enhance the experience of the migrants themselves and the receiving countries. Overall, the corollary of this IP on both sides pushes Africans to re-evaluate their own countries, as illustrated in the last two lines of Binwi's excerpt above. At the very least, it induces *Bush-fallers* to review their warped presuppositions of Europe and America as 'Heaven on Earth'.

#### Provenance of discrepancies between pre-emigration expectations and realities in the immigrant experience

If ignorance is "ugly" as epitomized by the *Bush-faller* comic moments, *Bush-fallers* also have their good and bad moments. The bad or worst moments to a large part are what interviewees say account for the discrepancies between pre-emigration perceptions and reality. The bad experiences to a most part represent the un-expected realities. Interviewee worst moments include stigma and negative stereotypes, racism or prejudice, loneliness or acute homesickness, weather, joblessness, homelessness, slavery, war, illegal status, and debt or the lack of (credit cards). Other significant implicit or illative worst moments include deportation procedures, and death. Details of these bad moments and lessons from them will be discussed elsewhere. The main reason they are

mentioned here is because some of the worst moments are conjugated with the warped perceptions and are the main reason why migrants say they had higher expectations for the receiving countries until they arrived.

As an example, most *Bush-fallers* arrive in Europe and North America expecting they would land jobs the ‘following day’ as Ndenko’s example exposes.

*“I had done a fair amount of research on where I was going (England), but I think I missed out on some details: like where to turn on the heater when you are left alone in the house, how to do laundry without boiling my sister’s clothes until they lose shape in the washing machine... Most frustrating was finding something to do. I thought the day I walked out to the high street, in Europe, I would just have a job. I was wrong, very wrong... I thought I had so many people around me, but then I realised I was alone on this turf. I was walking the streets alone; I was being (job-) rejected alone. That wasn’t fun. There were so many things I would have loved to have someone give me a hand with, and I just did not understand why there was no one available to do so.”<sup>20</sup>*

Another point evident in Ndenko’s recount is the ‘loneliness’ in facing problems alone even while initially living with family. First he has to come to terms with the problems, a shock in itself even after his pre-emigration research. Then he realizes that he has to deal with his problem alone unlike in Africa where family is always there. All of this illustrates how warped perceptions or insufficient information correlates with the worst moments of the *Bush-faller*. At the same time it supports the need for real mainstream education in Africa on migration relevant to Africa or migration in African

terms – *Bush--falling*. There are also many worse cases of interviewees and derivatives with no family and no pre-emigration research. These seem to have gotten up one morning and decided to reach Europe or North America come what may. With eyes squeezed shut and ears plugged they pressed forward. Some, then, recount how they spent their first nights experiencing some of their worst moments of homelessness:

*“When I arrived Paris, I realised I needed to declare where I would be staying. I did have the address of a Togolese friend of someone I knew, so I called him to tell him I was at the airport. He did not come for 2 days, during which I slept at the airport, in the international zone... I had no money to pay for a hotel... I got phone cards. With one of the phone cards I tried to call my wife (in Africa) to tell her I had arrived... When my wife finally got on the receiving end, I did not tell her I was still at the airport, so she would not be alarmed and worried. I did not tell her, I slept on the couch in the waiting rooms of the airport, using my bag for a pillow. I had some garri, roasted peanuts and other snacks she had prepared for me. This is what I ate. I did not bathe, and I used the toilets in the airport. It was not a good way to begin living in ‘heaven’.”<sup>3</sup>*

*‘I had heard things were better off in Germany, the world’s third best economy. But I did not know where I would end up. At the Köln train station, I was stranded, as the person who was supposed to pick me up did not turn up. As I sat somewhere, the police patrol became too much, and I remembered stories about German police and the Gestapo and the thoughts brought me to my feet. I decided to leave the train station immediately. I took an underground train to an unknown destination, and dropped out at the end point. I*

*carried my bag on my shoulders. By this time it was dark and cold. Even the dresses I put on could not stop the winterish cold penetrating my bones.*<sup>21</sup>

One could go on with examples, but the point is that *Bush-faller* worst moments like these (most of which defy the pre-emigration expectations) can be alleviated through information, education and greater preparedness of Africans before they travel abroad. Recalling the human trafficking precedent, victims of trafficking often have distorted perceptions and insufficient information on the real conditions they will face in the destination country. They base their emigration decisions on what the traffickers tell them. In the current African case, the information may not have been deliberately warped or circumscribed. However, most migrants are unaware of the practical, legal, social and economic consequences involved in moving to another country, thus many die on the way or they experience those worst moments abroad. An HIV/AIDS intensity level information campaign and education programs on *Bush-falling* realities, merits and demerits could very well be what is needed at this time when Africa faces the apocalyptic effects of brain drain/waste.

## CONCLUSIONS

Today, to dream to be a successful African away from “home” is fast becoming an accepted price to pay in order to achieve dreams born from circumstances back on the African continent or pull factors in the receiving countries. This study suggests that there is another factor belying the pull reasons, which apparently needs serious consideration in any theorization of African brain drain/waste. This factor is the ‘ignorant’ or rather

warped pre-emigration perceptions migrants or potential migrants have of the receiving countries. The analyses suggest that intense and expansive sensitization campaigns and educational programs are the viable options for eliminating this factor. Definitely, other issues that impact migration may be appropriately combined with the campaigns for greater efficacy.

The impact of the awareness or education campaign would range from curbing brain drain, through fostering a better understanding of how (warped) perceptions cluster together with other brain drain pull factors to affect brain drain, to enabling enlightened emigration decisions. Furthermore, sensitization campaigns would offer factual information on the possibilities, advantages and limits of legal migration, on the dangers of undertaking those perilous sea journeys. The sensitization campaign would save lives. Hence this is a time sensitive issue. Moreover, information campaigns in both sending and receiving countries would influence public opinion, change common perceptions and misconceptions about migration, mitigate other worst moments like racism, prejudice and stereotypes, as well as foster dialogue and greater engagement with good-will non-Africans on the solutions quest for African brain drain/waste. Africans will be better equipped with the most fundamental gear (information) to own and manage African migration, palliate the negative effects and turn it into a positive tool for development.

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## NOTES

1. The word *Bush-faller* comes from the fact that when an African goes to the 'bush', he/she brings back something good: a man would bring back game from his hunt and a woman food!
2. For further details of most experiences analyzed in this study, see Asana L. N., Ngwa W, 2007, *From Dust to Snow: The African Dream?*, Lulu, Morrisville, North Carolina
3. Interview with Lucas Ambe, Student and Germany Green Card holder, University of Duisburg, Germany.
4. Interview with Joseph Mbongue, Student, University of Halle, Germany
5. Interview with Ayiefor Geraldine and Samuel, Students, University of Flensburg, Germany
6. On a field in southern Germany the body of a black boy is discovered, 20 cm deep in the water-soaked ground. Solomon Mforbei Fusi is a fifteen-year-old from Bamenda, Cameroon. His dreams of a better life end in the wheel of a plane where he had hidden himself at the airport in Cameroon. In preparation for landing, as the plane's wheels came out, his body plunged into the German field, Available at <http://www.black-international-cinema.com/BIC05/XX.BIC2005/HTML/filmprogram/staerkeralsdieangst.htm>
7. Example: "We were served a snack of chocolate, which we all enjoyed; then, came time for lunch... When I tasted it, it was saltless, no pepper, no 'maggi', no oil. In fact, it was tasteless. I couldn't eat." Interviewee, Asana Jenny, Student, Boston, Massachusetts

8. Example: “I had to learn to eat with a knife and a fork in my right and left hand, respectively.” Interviewee Valentine Neaman, DV lottery immigrant, Orlando, Florida.
9. Example: “There are a lot of cultural differences that I have already observed: the way they dress... You will see a professor dressed in a sweater torn under the armpit...” Interviewee Daniel Bayene, Ethiopian Student, University of Leipzig, Germany.
10. Example: “I was appalled at the prospect. At that time, the only time I had ever heard about a homosexual was in the Bible... He brought his smelly mouth towards mine, mumbling repeatedly that he loved me....” Fubienkaa Ngwa, Cameroonian Student, University of Leipzig, Germany.
11. Example: Interview with Germaine Mbongue, Student, University of Halle, Halle, Germany.
12. Example: “I also clearly remember an English professor singling me out in front of the whole class, telling me that if I spelt any words the British way I would be penalized....” Interviewee, Deborah Underhill, Kenyan/British Student, Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.
13. Example: “I would also say that there is a different approach to how children are raised here compared to how it is done in Africa. While I tend to favour discipline when a child does what is bad...Here, they are indulged and left to do what they want. If you, as a parent, try as much as to discipline your child, you risk having your child taken away from you by Child Welfare...” Interviewee Derin Fatola, Nigerian skilled worker immigrant, Toronto, Canada.

14. Example; “My biggest shock arrived when I went to the Cospudener See (lake), and found an area they called ‘Free Body Culture’, where people are stark naked.” Interviewee Fubienkaa Ngwa, Student, University of Leipzig, Germany.
15. Example: Interview with Victor Mbah, DV lottery winner, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.
16. “Africans like me always convert prices of things in their minds into the currency of their country of origin shortly after arrival in Europe or the US. They are mostly horrified at how much they would pay for a loaf of bread.” Interview with Obinna Chinedu, Student, University of Mannheim, Germany.
17. Many comic experiences adorn the lives of Bush-fallers. We cite an example. Jenny Asana recalls: “While still back at home... my husband wrote and told me that he had bought a comforter. When I read that information, I took a deep breath. What was a comforter? What type of thing had he bought to comfort him? Despite my curiosity, I decided to wait and see. Two days after we arrived, I asked, “Where is the comforter you bought?” He showed me a warm bedcover. When I told him what I had thought, we both laughed and he said, “You thought I bought a girl to keep me comforted?” Americans call the thick warm bedcover a comforter...A few days after our arrival, one evening Festus asked us, “Can we have hot dogs for supper?” “Hot dogs, no, thanks!” was our immediate reply. We did not find out what hot dogs were before saying no. It did not take long before hot dogs became the children’s favourite...One evening, Festus’ friends came to welcome us. One lady kept uttering, “Oh boy!” With my narrow thinking, I thought she was making that expression only when my husband said something.

After they left, I asked my husband why the woman was saying “Oh boy”. He explained that it was a common expression in America, which did not mean much. I told him I thought she was calling him her boy.” Interviewee, Jenny Asana, Student, USA.

18. Interview with Ibeneche Chieze, Student, University of Texas at Austin, Texas USA.

19. Interview with, Binwi Akongwi, Student, University of Kiel, Germany.

20. Interview with, Asong Ndenko, Student, London School of Business & Finance, London.

21. Interview with, Kowana Emmanuel, Asylum seeker, Magdeburg, Germany.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES (Interviews conducted by Lydia Asana, and Wilfred Ngwa)

1. Achu Sharon, Student, University of Idaho, Idaho, USA, 31/03/2004
2. Agwuele Toni, Student, University of Leipzig, Germany, 06/05/2004
3. Ambe Lucas and Florence, Student Family and German Green Card holders, Duisburg, Germany, 20/05/2004
4. Ananthakrishnan Revathi, Student, University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA, 31/05/2004
5. Asana Festus and Jenny, Students (family), Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA, 01/09/2003
6. Asong Ndenko, Student, London School of Business & Finance, London, UK, 13/08/2003
7. Ayiefor Geraldine and Samuel, Student Family, University of Flensburg, Germany, 11/7/2003
8. Ayongwa Mercy (29 Year), Asylum seeker, Paris, France, 28/08/2003
9. Bayene, Daniel, Student, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, 17/04/2004
10. Bi Ruth, Student, American University of Paris, Paris France, 08/08/2005
11. Binwi Akongwi, Student, University of Kiel, Germany, 27/05/2004
12. Che Festus, (34 years) DV lottery winner, Albany, Georgia, USA, 08/04/2005
13. Chinedu Obinna Student, University of Mannheim, Germany, 19/08/2003
14. Dak Deng, 27 year old Lost Boy of Sudan, Refugee, Boston, MA, USA, 23/07/2004
15. Dodo Samuel, Student, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, 14/03/2005

16. Ekuwa Ado, 27 year old Female, Asylum Seeker, Duisburg, Germany,  
29/05/2004
17. Emmanuel Ngwa (30 years), Asylum Seeker, Paris, France, 23/07/2004
18. Fatola Derin (32 years), Skilled Worker Immigrant Family, Toronto, Canada,  
12/03/2005
19. Ibeneche Chieze, Student, University of Texas at Austin, Texas USA, 10/11/2003
20. Kowana Emmanuel (33 years), Asylum Seeker, Magdeburg, Germany,  
09/09/2003
21. Kundu Nurpur, American Indian Family, Tucson, Arizona, USA, 15/11/2003
22. Langnuy Edna (Karen), Student, Financial Training School, London, UK,  
06/07/2003
23. Leero Benedicta (20 years), Aupair, Leipzig, Germany, 23/08/2003
24. Mbacham, Wilfred, Student, Harvard University, MA, USA, 10/09/2003
25. Victor Mbah (33 years), DV lottery winner, Baltimore, Maryland, 03/08/2004
26. Mbenkum Beri, student, University of Heidelberg, Germany, 11/04/2004
27. Mbongue Joseph and Germaine, Students, University of Halle, Halle, Germany,  
15/05/2004
28. Mohammed Esam, Student, University of Leipzig, Germany, 22/07/2004
29. Moynihan Edith (39 years), Nurse, London, United Kingdom, 14/05/2004
30. Mukwanka Robinson, Student, Umea University, Sweden, 03/05/2004
31. Linda Taku (25 years), Professional, Dubai, UAE, 11/09/2006
32. Ndi John (30 years), Asylum Seeker, South Africa, 12/02/2004

33. Ndobbo John (34 years) and Esther (26 years), Refugee Family, Orlando, Florida, USA, 10/10/2006
34. Neaman Valentine (34 years), DV Lottery Winner, Orlando Florida, 11/12/2006
35. Nebangwa Peter, (43 years) German National, Stuttgart, Germany, 10/11/2003,
36. Ngwa Fubienkaa, Student, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, 24/04/2004
37. Oyebode Tolu, Student, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida, USA, 05/07/2006
38. Shu Christopher (45 years), DV Lottery Winner, Princeton, New Jersey, USA, 07/07/2006
39. Tsuwi Julius and Alice, Students, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, 19/05/2004
40. Underhill Deborah, Student, Geneva College, Beaver Falls, PA, USA, 28/06/2004
41. Van, Lawmsang, Student, University of Leipzig, Germany, 28/03/2004
42. Williams Martin, Pastor, Leipzig English Church, Leipzig, Germany, 29/01/2005
43. Ziberi and Heriet Bashkim, Student Family, University of Leipzig, Germany, 08/05/2004

## TABLES

**Table 1: African Immigrants to the United States by Country of Birth (thousands) 1981-2000** (*Emigration to the United States virtually doubled in the nineties compared to the eighties, illustrating the rapidly increasing exodus from Africa.*)

Country of Birth	1981-90	1991-2000
Nigeria	35.3	67.3
Ethiopia	27.2	49.3
Egypt	31.4	46.7
Ghana	14.9	35.6
South Africa	15.7	22.8
All other African countries	192.3	383.0

*Source: US Census Bureau. Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2003).*