



## **Return Migration, Reverse Culture Shock: a Critical Analysis of Their Patterns and Particularities Amongst Migrant Nigerian Elites**

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**Abstract:** Migration has remained a constant element of 21st-century changes (Appadurai, 1999; Gillespie, 2000; Georgiou, 2001). The prospects of a continuation are certain with growing gains in technologies of communication, transportation, and the increasing ease with which the world can integrate and function. The place of Nigerian migrants as reflected in some patterns and particularities (Georgiou, 2001; Adeniyi, 2008) of its elites reveals key characteristics useful for the understanding of discourses around migrants' return and reverse culture shock (Naficy, 1999). While the coming home is often imagined, a few have proceeded to actualizations, and subsequently opening up new pedestals for the understanding of travelling and dwelling (Morley, 2000). This paper attempts a critical analysis of identifiable features and concludes that the revelations will ceaselessly grow in substance. The paper uses critical discourse analysis to evaluate the experiences of some elites, as rendered in formal and informal interviews, while also spicing it up with secondary data, obtained from media reports, and related literature. It eventually ended with a recommendation on the need for concerted development efforts to enable a realization of the likely higher quality lifestyle, which the elite might have left behind in the West.

**Keywords:** Elites, Migrants, Nigeria, Return Migration and Reverse cultural shock

### **1. Introduction**

Migration is a critical aspect of twenty-first-century changes. With growing sophistication in technologies of communication, the distance now amounts to nearly nothing in human interactions. The place has been replaced by placelessness. The world has gradually become decentered, deterritorialized, and much more integrated. Growing technologies are importantly helping the synergies and the integrations. Movements of people across distances are becoming more frequent. Settlement and resettlement are easily the order of the day. The quest for better economic life is often the main propelling factor, even if there are other reasons like adventure, escape from family pressure, tourism, life shocks, medical and educational reasons, amongst others. When movements take place between citizens of developed or industrial nations, reasons often revolve less around economic fulfillments or the need for a better life. It is probably more for complementary factors, for expansions, and mutual supports. But when movements are between developing to a developed nation, it is predominantly for economic reasons or a better life. Incidentally, the bulk of the direction of exodus in this variant is to the west.

Western industrial societies, including the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Ireland are often the destinations of migrant peoples in search of improved economic life. These nations are recipients of a burgeoning stock of people in search, or not just for better now, but for an improved tomorrow. Nigeria produces a great number of migrant populations in the west, owing to long years of failure of leadership, maladministration and corruption.

The migrant population comprises both the regular and the irregular. The regular migrants are the documented variants who left or are leaving legally. Amongst this are the elites, moving to create a better economic, educational, or career path for themselves, or their offsprings. The irregular ones are those who pervert legitimate processes, by forging

documents, and who try to fake identities to migrant. They also often use illegal and most times dangerous routes to achieve their relocation aim. In migration however the regular Nigerian migrant, the focus of this study, assume the regular identity of the average migrant.

## **2. Literature Review**

Adeniyi, (2008) points out that, "An average Nigerian is keen to migrate. It is always the next ambition of the disappointed, or the adventurous citizen (See [www.nigeriaworld.com](http://www.nigeriaworld.com)). To them, all forms of movements, temporary or permanent are tagged "travels". This is not necessarily in the generic sense of movements, but an expression that describes positive dislocation (Momodu, 2007). The migrant seeks to move probably to begin a new economic life elsewhere; preferably at any of the Western countries. The prevalent migration interest may be a result of years of frustration or years of non-achievement. It is not always a result of individual incapacity or lack of requisite qualification but because of years of successive leadership failure. Migration here, Castles and Miller wrote, "is often a way to escape crushing poverty, or even death due to malnourishment" (1993: 139). Many also see migration as an immediate response to some pain or momentary disappointment. Instances of this are victims of robberies, rape, road accidents, bewitchments, and house demolitions (Ajibewa and Akinrinnade, 2003). Frustrations in the workplace, in marriages, over childlessness or joblessness also lead to pushing. This is because of the assumption that a new environment could be soothing. These factors are somewhat subsumed in the overarching economic reasons".

Upon movement, Nigerian elites consciously or unconsciously imbibe the traits of the average migrants. This is especially so when the location is in the west. They are now exposed to an alternative state of life, which provides ample room for comparisons. They regret the state of the world that is departed, with a deep sense of disappointment. The textbook state of development in their residence provokes questions on why the nation left behind has not grown. The predictability of the social system therein thrills, eventually imbuing them with a greater sense of knowledge.

They feel a sense of the solution, a can-do spirit and a magisterial ability to provide remedies. These they contemplate while imagining return. The feeling exists against the background of assumptions that they will eventually return. Many who do not have to wait for the actualization resort to circular movement, a back and forth living between source country and residence. That turns to be a compromise position between those who do not wish to return, to lose the assumed comfort of western countries, but needs to keep in touch with the source country. Eventually, therefore, there are three categories of migrants, for the sake of this paper. The first involves those who migrate and fails to look backwards thereafter. They integrate into the host society and rule out a return, thoughts of it, or any emotional relationship with the source. The second category is those already mentioned above. These resort to "circulation" between "homeland" and host-land, trying to get the best of both worlds. They do not want to lose touch with their place of residence, while also exploring possibilities of the original country. A few even get into top government positions or are appointed into committees, ministries, departments and agencies as technocrats or as advisers. They do these while sustaining their relationship with location. The third categories are those who return. These have probably had a complete feel of the west, and are now done with it. Some might be interested in returning to practice expertise they learned abroad, while some might be responding to family pressures.

Others are returning as a result of factors like old age, marital reasons, disappointments or death of relatives, besides reasons around fatigue with alleged overt or covert racism. The intention of some was actually to migrate and acquire the citizenship of another country. Once that is secured, a sense of fulfilment dawns and then the return journey; ill-health might also be a reason. Point is that the average Nigerian migrant prefers dying at home. Rather than experiencing hospice abroad, dying and getting buried yonder, they would rather prefer coming nearer home for the final days and then death. Importantly, however, this study examines the patterns and particularities, the contexts and contents of post migrant Nigerians, while negotiating and/or renegotiating integration in the original county of origin. To do this, I shall discuss the method applied as follows.

## **3. Methodology**

This research relies on primary and secondary data. The primary variant was done through interviews with returned migrants. The interactions with them were quite meaningful through the production of information from their statements, dispositions and projections. About five number returned migrants, comprising three males and a female were

interviewed. Their ages ranged between thirty-five and sixty, and they were either moderately educated with a first-degree minimum or a doctor of philosophy. Of the five, three had lived between the United States of America (USA) and Canada, while two returned from the United Kingdom (UK). They were mainly now settled in Nigeria with regular, gainful employment, either as professionals (teachers, lecturers, medical personnel), or doing their own private business.

The participant observation method flowed from my experience as a returnee, as well. Having lived and schooled in the United Kingdom, and doing a lot of back and forth for more than a decade, my experience living and working in Nigeria provides a comparative experience on life before and life in the present. It creates a ground to see things from two contrasting worlds: one in an industrial society, where life is predictable and the other in a developing social system, where conditions are somewhat unpredictable. Objectivity was possibly achieved in the process, through a critical examination of disparities in my experience of living in the two places. Secondary data was sourced from media reports, both online and offline, from exposures to sundry literature on migration, on diaspora studies, and government (official) sources. They were, as well, critically contextualized for reasons around objectivity, and to be as factual as is possible, in the reflection of true conditions of things. I shall, therefore, now return to the proper analysis of the pattern and particularities of former Nigerian migrants, within the framework of differentiated contexts.

### **3.1 Returned Migrants: Multiple Experiences, Plural Integration Approaches**

“The migrants may as well be professionals and the non-professionals. The first comprises medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, lecturers, pharmacists, and engineers. Included also are workers who migrate for better economic life, for better job experience, or improved security (Parnwell, 1993; Maier, 2000). Because of their social status, and largely concerned with their reputation, migration amongst this group is usually legal. They are the regular set of migrants. Their determination to emigrate also leads many to accept a lower status job in the first instance on arrival in the host society. In some cases, a contemplated temporary job may become permanent. Some initially gain a work permit or a leave to remain through which they might also become citizens. A few may well turn out to be "circular" migrants (Adeniyi, 2008).

The non-professionals have different skills, some of whom are university graduates. Migration amongst them is a desire that should be met (Smith, 2006). Amongst this category is those who overstay their visa requirements. It is also amongst them that those with forged passports and identities (Stalker, 2001) could emerge. They are sometimes, however, able to remain, first living as illegal/irregular migrants, then eventually legalising their stay through several processes. Some of these processes are the application for asylum, bogus marriages, ([www.bbc.com/Africa](http://www.bbc.com/Africa). accessed 04.12.06), or patient navigation of complex statutory requirements.

Generally, these migrants face diverse challenges. Apart from alleged discrimination in the host country, the more entrenched native black population may as well be prejudiced (Christian, ed, 2002). Their accents become an issue adding communication problems to their trials. Loneliness takes its toll, following the immediate loss of communal attachment. This is usually evident in the more traditional African society. In most cases, the migrant does most things her/himself, given the absence of a likely usual family, paid unpaid, or underpaid assistance. While these changes are continuing and sapping, friends and families at home may now be restless, should the desired economic advantage that could aid remittances be difficult (Adeniyi, 2006). The migrant who is to meet their needs is a disappointment! Meanwhile, the migrant home qualification may be irrelevant. The concern is no longer with career or job satisfaction, but with "survival". Perhaps desperate, as is plausible, they, therefore, make do with what Stalker (2001) called "dirty, difficult and dangerous" jobs.

In moving, they settle in different countries of the world with the Western industrial societies predominating amongst destinations as a "natural" endpoint (Braziel and Mannur, ed, 2003: 285). These dominant destinations include the United States of America (USA), with cities like New York, Washington, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, and Florida being the most preferred. Also favoured is the United Kingdom (UK) with a high preference for London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds. Canada is another destination point with Ontario and Toronto as major receivers of the migrants. Then France is one more host-land with Paris as a point of attraction. Berlin, Frankfurt, and Verda Bremen in Germany is yet another dominant receiver of the migrants (Castles and Miller, 1993; Stalker, 2001).

They also go to other Western countries like Sweden, Norway, Greece, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Austria, Switzerland, amongst others. Non-Western societies like China, Singapore, South Korea, are alternatively attractive to them. Then countries that Akyeampong (2000), called "non-traditional points of migration", including Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Taiwan, and Japan as well fascinate them. A few of them who cannot reach Europe detour to other African countries with better economy or with greater stability of politics, like South Africa and some North African countries like Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Morocco. The Middle-Eastern country of Dubai is another striking option because of its financial prowess.

Interestingly, Nigerians are sometimes going to destinations under local or tribal preference (Odi, 1999; Zachary, 2005). For instance, while the Igbos which is a major tribe in the country of over 250 million tribal groups are fond of the USA with Huston, Dallas in Texas as a major settling point, the Yorubas, another major ethnic group prefer London, England. Reputedly commercially minded, the Igbos also easily associated with notable trading countries like the United Arab Emirate (UAE), and the rising industrial societies of Asia and the Pacific Rim including Japan, Singapore, South Korea and China (Odi, 1999:2; Zachary, 2005:1). As earlier hinted, the Igbos are known to moving because of the 1967-70 succession war, as it pitched them against other dominant Nigeria tribes. It has ever since created "re-assimilation" problems of a sort, irrespective of the "no victor, no vanquish" declaration of the federal government, following their loss of the war (Odi, 1999:2; Zachary, 2005:1). As an instance of a vibrant diasporic presence, the Igbos in America have an annual celebration day, the "Igbo day", where they gather to celebrate their local culture, with prominent natives back home also visiting upon invitation.

The Yorubas move mainly in pursuit of educational accomplishments, while the third major tribe, the Hausas travels also to further business interests. They also travel for religion and cultural reasons, especially as it relates to the Islamic faith. This they share with oil-rich Saudi Arabia and the stable monarchies of North Africa ([www.nigeriamasterweb.com](http://www.nigeriamasterweb.com)). Educational attainments of the migrants sometimes define destinations. While the well-educated duped "highly skilled", by some Western countries, prefer the sophisticated societies of the West, the less educated are indiscriminate about the destination. For them wherever a currency stronger than the Nigeria naira is available is satisfactory. This is all to say that there remains a high level of flexibility on the character of migration".

It is, therefore, important to observe at the inception that the migrant ability to return is most often a myth. S/he regularly imagines it, dreams of it but can most times not actualize it. It is the reason why many dwell abroad for decades, always hoping to return in the next year that never comes. Next year continues endlessly until old age, and then death. Many reasons often account for this. One is the disappointment faced abroad, for some, reflected in their ability to keep pace with the personal progress of peers back home. Some contemporaneous at original residence would have made some progress in substance and material possessions, to the amazement of travelled mates who would have spent years grabbing with the problematic process of integrations, naturalization, or of gaining the citizenship of host society. This circumstance often constitutes shame for the migrants who would then feel somewhat better continuously staying abroad than actually returning. The second reason is the exposure they have acquired in the west. This exposure presents a level of confidence, a doing spirit, and some feeling of superiority over those in the source country. It presents a status of intelligence in sundry aspects of life, which they do not want to lose by returning. The desire to continuously savour encourages them to be foreign residents even if the conditions of existence therein are not just unfulfilling, but dissatisfying.

One other reason is the interest in providing a better environment for the growth and development of the children. The feeling is that the circumstances of origin are difficult for children to grow in. It may not have mattered if they had not been exposed to the patterns of the host societies. But the exposures reveal a near optional functioning of systems and institutions, consequently forming the basis of the desire to integrate into it and to also grow offspring therein. Child development then takes years to accomplish, leading to further years of dwelling, and then old age, and sometimes death, and finally discountenancing the wish to return. However, some migrants do always return. What traits do they show upon return? How are they able to integrate or how can't they? These and other issues, which this paper privileges, will now be discussed in the following.

Culture shock is understood as the surprises and difference often encountered by a person while in a new place or society. It is the strangeness of the stranger or the otherness that is revealed in the stranger's psyche, or conducts, while visiting, integrating, or re-integrating in a system. Culture shock enables the revelation of differences, and provides a transition to

smooth dwelling, possibly. Culture shock might be momentary or long-lasting, depending on the pace of adjustment. It can also be individualistic, within a person, or collective amongst a group. Degrees or intensity of culture shock may as well vary, just as the level of the pattern of absorption might be. Factors like previous exposures, level of smartness, level of scholarship/education, exposure to guide, level of material comfort and similar others might singularly, or differently combine to determine its contexts, in terms of adaptation, or re-adaptation.

Culture shock envisages disparities in cultures of people and the likelihood of the non-initiate being jolted upon encountering it. And the sense of amazement may peter out with time or might be off-putting to warrant a withdrawal. The case of the former is more often anyway, than that of the latter, which is like an extreme reaction, and might be sure. Migrants are often associated with culture shocks as reflected in differences in culinary, in customs and exchange of pleasantries, and to the more fundamental issues of economics, politics, education, social and infrastructural life. Nigerian migrants are regularly in the category of dwellers that pull through shocks, integrate into most western societies, and occasionally return to experience the opposite: Reverse culture shock. What then is this? It is the new experience of returning Nigerian migrants, associated with re-integrating in Nigerians, and to which I will next turn.

Reverse culture shock happens when the migrant feels a strangeness upon a re-encounter with his/her original culture. It takes place when the returning migrant finds integration tougher because s/he has been used to the life elsewhere and now finds the old life lived in former origin problematic. Reverse culture shock is the amazement or the astonishment that comes with trying to re-learn, consciously or unconsciously, an old life. It is the kind of blow that is different from the one initially encountered upon initial migration abroad. This one comes when a place once lived becomes uncomfortable and sometimes unacceptable as a place to be in.

Reverse culture shock is a converse, an antithesis to the culture of a hosting country. It comes when moves reveal contrariness, some opposing trait to the ways of a host country. It is evidenced in the actualization of new practices and a jolt upon experiencing a former one. It is in the challenges of adaptation, in the face of new knowledge, new learnings, and amid the feeling of pride from travelling and dwelling in another environment. The pride comes through the rendition of travel experiences, and more so when patterns and particularities in an old land, are probably inferior to the country to which the migrant is exposed to. The pride is in the possession of dual citizenship like it is with some and in the flexibility of transnational movements, or the likelihood of circulation between an original home and a new country of residence. Are there instances for the manifestation of reverse culture shock?

It might be useful to note again that this study is not bothered about the experiences of tourists, or short stayers, who spend only a few days or a few weeks, or a few months, and then return. The study assesses the post-migrant experiences of those who live long enough in Western countries, spending years upon years, and who experienced relative long term integration before return. It might as well be problematic assigning a definite number of years before these experiences can be well situated, but the years in view are considerable enough to reflect traits that are obvious enough to help the gauging of the subject matter of reverse culture shock.

Returned migrants who had been exposed to the educational systems of western countries are regularly awed by the rich history of western institutions. The fact that some of the schools, especially universities have existed over centuries; the confounding memories of structures and the sustainable benefit of maintenance; the painstaking interest in subscribing to set standards; and the seamless with which programs and schedules run, besides the deep level of funding; and their histories of inventions, and crisis-free administrations; amongst others are facts regularly recalled. It is more the case when the returnees hardly can see the semblances of those around.

Even the best around is arguably years away from the standards pre-occupying the retentions of the returned migrants. Though valid reasons might account for this, what bothers the migrant is not the reason, but the crisis from a lack. It may trigger ideation on what can be done, or a readiness to bell the cat or contribute to the low mood of the migrant. That last point may be intangible, but mood variation is a common trait of the returned migrant, and it creeps in at intervals, when differences in life before and life now show, and in this case in the educational sphere, for those who are enthusiasts.

The health sector also provides another area of interest. It seems trite that the level of sophistication of this sector in the west is far ahead of the migration source country. Great strides have been achieved in matching the recommended doctor/patient ratio. Response time to emergencies is fast. A basic facility like the ambulance is largely efficient. Hospitals and clinics are never too far from the average resident. There are big and small clinics and hospitals. And there

are different kinds of consultants, in different fields of medicine, with the most modern equipment, invention and innovation to work with. The thrilling medical attention, even if not a guarantee for life, becomes memorable for a returned migrant in need of medical attention. The subtle regret comes in when the facilities in the source country are compared with those of lived nation, and discovered not to compare. The facilities in the source country are mainly the reverse of the picture of a lived country, earlier painted above.

The regret and the reverse culture shock increases if the returned migrant would have to travel back to the former host nation, in search of proper medical attention, either for the self or for a loved nation. The back and forth, in thoughts and the search for good medical attention, do not only destabilizes the psychology of the returned migrant but disrupts or elongates re-integration. The post migrants that survive live to manage the comparative living exposures. Those who do not, become victims of the exposure to the world of the industrial society, and that of the developing, non-industrial nation, that a country like Nigerian represents. Coping strategies usually also depend on the character and skills of the concerned post-migrant. Stronger, more creative, and more suave persons are better able to manage this ordinarily stressful situation more than those with the opposite character flavor.

Other infrastructures and utilities like transportation, electric power supply, health and safety, recreation outlets and such others are also worthy of note. In the area of transportation, the seamlessness can be awesome for the migrant, who is newly exposed. Available in all its variants, rail, air, road, and water, the near-perfection of each of these sectors is also miles ahead of the situation where the migrant just returned. The connections are multiple, just as the state of the variants. Management is relatively superb, while they keep improving as well. With that, inter and intra-city movements are functional, eventually rubbing off on other sectors of the society. Now confronted with the underdeveloped state of these sectors in the source country, the post migrant struggles for adjustment. In some cases, s/he would have forgotten the downsides of this sector, and would now have to grapple with its intricacies. An interviewee recalled as follows:

“I returned to Nigeria with high hopes but suddenly became an object of derision, because I did not arrive with cars and all that. It was a pleasure hopping from one taxi to the other, but soon they began calling me names that I have no car. I had to arrange to get one, and even after that, I was derided for buying a small car, after all the years abroad. Meanwhile, the car would have been a wise decision abroad because of its cheap insurance and cheap fuel. Even my close relations started asking questions, wondering if all was okay. Believe me, I succumbed to the pressure and bought a bigger car, and then a bigger one, but could not now travel between cities with it, for fear of armed robbery and kidnappers. It was a problem getting anywhere else with other means of transportation, besides flying. The roads are not good, the cars are rickety, and the drivers lack basic manners. They are reckless and careless. I suddenly discovered that road transportation in Nigeria is a closer route to your grave. It is shameful”

Marked differences also abound for the returned migrant in the areas of some seeming intangibles like ethics, manners, character and the knowledge of a world larger than the one now returned to. These intangibles confront different other areas like salutations, eating, relationships, income generation and spending patterns, driving and overall lifestyle changes. Some of them stick despite return, while some others ware out with time. It may not be easily possible that all of them would peter out. This means that not a few of the foreign learned traits often remain with the post migrant. There is therefore a tension between the old and the new self, and the worldview, and character traits of the old and the new self. The dialectical interconnection between the two selves results in the synthesis of exposure, of being more knowledgeable (rightly, or wrongly), which may also translate to better regards, pride, and prestige for the educated elite returnee in context.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The certainty of movements, dislocations and relocations is certain in late modernity. It will continue to be so for a long time to come. The problem however lies in the objective of movements. For the subjects in view, movements are caused by economic reasons, largely. This core reason points to a problematic source country. And it eventually also asks for concerted efforts at developing the homeland. What organized efforts can post migrants bring to the homeland? How can they bond to make meaningful contributions, and not be affected by the fault lines of home, like religion, ethnicity, and regionalism, amongst others? How do they rise above these lines, having been witnesses to greater levels of multiculturalism and difference in a different clime? They can, given the proper mobilization, a deliberate government effort, and the will power of the concerned.

It should happen as one part way to development. And other than helping development, parties involved will also gain a considerable psychological edge, through their acceptance, a sense of relevance, and then steady them to deal with the crisis of culture shock. Again, I stated in another research: "Though Nigerians are associated with the loneliness and trials of migration, an unusual drive to beat the odds is propelling for participants. They still cherish home, especially with the possible presence of families and friends therein. The discouraging state of Nigeria, combined with the regular nudge of loved ones behind to continue the struggle in migration, coupled with their (the homeland people) simultaneous interest in embracing similar migration opportunities, adds to the drive. This compelling situation brings in a sense of urgency. The urgency is one for professional or financial success, as a precursor to sustenance and remittance. The objectives become strong enough to ward off the crisis of dislocation" But the new urgency is one for development, which this research believe can be brought about if the post-migrants work more closely together.

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