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***We Have Come to Stay and We Shall Find All Means to  
Live and Work in this Country:  
Nigerian Migrants and Life Challenges in South Africa***

**Abstract:** In recent times many Nigerians have been singled out when it comes to criminal activities and xenophobic attacks in South Africa, which leads to disruption of the hitherto cordial relationship between South African host communities and Nigerian migrants. Nevertheless, the rate of Nigerians migrating to South Africa keeps soaring. Studies of migration between Nigeria and South Africa, have been scanty, often limited to the study of traditional economic disparity between the two countries with less emphasis on the social-cultural challenges facing Nigerian migrants in the host communities. This paper thus examined the socio-economic and cultural challenges facing Nigerian migrants in selected communities in Johannesburg, South Africa. Data for the study were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with Nigerian migrants in Hillbrow, Braamfontein and Alexandra suburbs in Johannesburg, South Africa.

**Keywords:** migration, host communities, challenges, Nigeria, South Africa

## Introduction

A number of studies have shown that migration can play a decisive impact on the direction and speed of development in both the countries of origin and destination, but lesser emphasis is placed on specific challenges facing African migrants within Africa (Anafi 2003; Black 2004; Atsenuwa and Adepoju 2010). Nigeria as one of the most populated countries in the world is not left out from the wave of immigration and like in many other countries, Nigerians have a long history of population mobility both regionally and internationally (DFID

2004). This study seeks to examine the socio-economic and cultural challenges facing Nigerian migrants in South Africa. Human migration has long been considered an important element of population dynamics which can have significant consequences on the perception and stereotypical public portrayal of migrants in their countries of destination. According to Adepoju (2000) migration has helped shape the nature of both, places that are receiving and places of origin, more than any other phenomenon in human demographics. The scale of migration from Nigeria to South Africa in recent years has increased tremendously alongside movement across national borders within the continent. This has been facilitated by various regional protocols on free movement.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) treaty of 1975/1992 as well as the 1996 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocols affirmed the right of citizens to entry, residence and settlement and obliged member communities/states to recognize these rights in their respective territories (Atsenuwa and Adepoju 2010). These movements and establishment raise new issues, and ultimately induce socio economic and cultural challenges and consequences on migrants. This has continuously produced new opportunities for internal and cross-border mobility (Crush and McDonald 2002). Similarly, the region's reconnection with the global economy was capitalized by a number of counties in West Africa (Morris and Bouillon 2001).

Evidence abounds that some settlements in Johannesburg have been taken over by Nigerian and Congolese migrants not only in terms of population and dominance in the informal sector but also in organized crime (Crush, Williams, and Peberdy 2005; [www.migration.org.za](http://www.migration.org.za)). In 2010, The University of the Witwatersrand, Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) estimated the foreign population in South Africa to range from 1.6 to 2 million, or 3 to 4 percent of the total population of 50.98 million. They also reported that there are between 1 and 1.5 million legal and illegal Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa (FMSP 2010). Figures concerning Nigerians are usually estimated as second to Zimbabweans. The presence of highly developed infrastructure and first-world amenities alongside the stability in the political and economic sphere in South Africa have accounted for the influx of refugees and economic migrants.

The 2003 statistics of documented migration in South Africa shows that 5407, 4832 and 10578 permanent resident permits were issued in 1996, 2001 and 2003 respectively. The six leading countries from which the largest volume of migrants came to South Africa were Zimbabwe, Nigeria, UK, Pakistan, China, India and Germany. Furthermore, 61.9% of the migrants were males whilst 38.1% were females. The age distribution data also indicated that the highest proportion (22.5%) of the migrants were found in the 30–34 age group, classified as very active and desperate for success (Stats SA 2005). Youthful exuberance and the urge to flee one's own country to another are salient and understudied motives for which a lot of West Africans migrate without

properly envisaging the challenges that await them. Ill-prepared migration to affluent countries sometimes perceived as safe haven coupled with desperation, have seen tens of thousands of migrants cast up on remote shores each year for greener pastures. Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 saw the death of over three hundred (300) migrants in one of the deadliest migration sagas in history in the Mediterranean Sea at the coast of Lampedusa, on their way to Italy (Los Angeles times, 2013). Wide variety of migration configurations in the late sixties and early seventies were justified by the deteriorating socio-economic conditions and deepening poverty at that time (DFID 2004). Though poverty is very much evident in recent literatures (Adepoju 2000; Haas 2007), other issues such as the increasing level of unemployment, and graduate students leaving Nigeria without hope of getting suitable jobs, indicate that the country is among many others witnessing a surge in irregular migration.

Statistically, over 200,000 students who graduated from various universities in Nigeria added to the figure of unemployed youth in the country (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics 2010). Similarly, the growing security challenges in Nigeria and strict visa regimes introduced by most developed countries have come to push many Nigerian youth into clandestine migration practices. These among others, have led to the increasing number of travel agencies and cartels capitalizing on the desperation of youth on the wedge of migrating for survival and relatively better environment (Atsenuwa and Adepoju 2010). Similarly, injustice and armed conflict have long been the instigators of African migration to affluent countries. And in today's ever more unstable world, there is the issue of desperation, not disregarding religious militants terrorizing much of the polity in Africa, hence more reasons for the numbers willing to risk perilous voyages for a chance to start over in affluent countries.

These desperations are evident in migrants taking the risks of crossing vast water bodies, dangerous deserts and borders in unseaworthy vessels (International Organization for Migration 2013). Most often, for many ill prepared migrants the circumstances awaiting them become more difficult than those they fled from.

### Notes on Empirical Data Collection

This article is based on ethnographic data collected by the first author (as part of a postdoctoral study done under the supervision of the second author) from three communities (Hillbrow, Braamfontein and Alexandra) in Johannesburg, South Africa where Nigerians are highly populated. Thirty-two (32) respondents (Nigerians) who have lived in South Africa for a period 1-10 years were drawn through snowballing and availability sampling techniques from the formal and informal employment sectors. The age range of the re-

spondents was estimated at 20 and 47 years. Visits were also made to some residential apartments and shops where respondents hang around in the three communities. Respondents were classified in two groups: Group I, consists of those who have stayed in South Africa less than five years (<5) and Group II consists of those who have stayed there more than five years (>5 years). This was informed by an existing structure of informal nomenclature used by Nigerian residents in the communities such as 'Joel', a name coined from Johannesburg and the word 'elder'. These are sets of Nigerians who have lived in migrant communities for over five years and above, they also served as key informants and discussants in the study. Another was those referred to as 'infant J', 'JC', or 'JJC'. These are Nigerians who have lived in these communities for less than 5 years. These terms were used in describing migrants according to the number of years spent in South Africa. The newly arrived migrants were mostly engaged in the informal labour, ranging from street vending, hawking of wares, and waiting in restaurants.

### South-South Migration

The world is growing more interdependent, a fact made particularly evident in the labour market, where a more fluid and larger market has emerged. The percentage of the world's population tagged as migrants has risen from 2% to 3% over the last 50 years – and South-South migration forms around 50% of these stocks overall (Gagnon and Castéras 2012). In 2010, 7.5 million West African migrants officially lived in another country within the region, but only 1.4 million in Europe and 0.5 million in North America (World Bank 2010). Migration brings economic benefits not only to migrants themselves and their countries of origin, but also to the countries of destination, in particular by helping to relieve sectors suffering from labour shortages and solve demographic imbalances between active and inactive populations. Yet, home country populations tend to reject immigration, citing threats to social cohesion and well-being especially of desperate migrants. As a result, migration policies are increasingly restrictive. This happens not only in the North, but also in the South. The history of post-independence Africa, with more emphasis on South Africa, has been punctuated by xenophobic pressures and migrant scapegoating, particularly acute in times of economic turmoil (Adepoju 2009). Migrants in West Africa, in particular refugees and transit migrants, often face deplorable human rights violations in South Africa. They also suffer recurrent discrimination, especially in the areas where there is strong ethnic configuration (Morris 1998). Research and historical events have indicated that if a majority group is in a perilous economic position, they are more likely to feel threatened, especially by the foreigners (Quillian 1995). Discrimination and the tendency of migrants to

live in makeshift communities however have helped breed divisions in society and moreover generate economic and social conflict.

However, analyzing migrant integration in the South requires a different approach from that taken in the North. According to Simon (2011), socio-economic characteristics of the population of the countries of destination and self-selected migrants are different, thus, the myriad problems faced by migrants. This informs a lot about the psychology and *modus operandi* of security. Immigration authorities and even the locals are forced to tackle integration issues because of the tendencies non-integration of migrants have on any nation as observed in the early days of African migration to Europe and America (Gagnon and Casteras 2012). The Nigerian diaspora in South Africa has significantly expanded since the apartheid era that ended in the 1990s. Apart from skilled migrants in South African education sector, four categories of migrants emerged: traders, students, temporary workers, and transit migrants to America/Americas, more of whom fall into the category of desperate migrants.

There are four main factors as posited by Hatton and Williamson (2005), accounting for the current disproportion of migration between Nigeria and South Africa: (1) The financial constraints faced by most West Africans do not enable them to move to the richer countries of the North; (2) The hardening of immigration policies in Europe and America over the last decades has increased migration within Africa itself, of which South Africa is one of the more favourable destinations. The result has been increasing South-South migration, with many migrants stuck in transit; (3) Africa Protocol on less restriction on movement of African nationals within the continent. This protocol facilitates both regular and circular migration; (4) The rapid economic growth of some of the region's economies such as South Africa, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Gabon, has also contributed to the decreasing emigration northward, which has led to influx of migrants towards South Africa (Hatton and Williamson 2010).

### Host's Community's Perception of Nigerian Migrants

The high concentration of low skilled migrants was evident in the migrant settlements of Hillbrow and Alexandra. Observations on weekends (especially in the mornings and evenings) revealed the number of persons on and off a single bedroom flat. A key informant noted that 'it is usually the case, for new comers to live together in large number till they can sort out their accommodation problems'. This was common among young boys and men between the age of 20 and 37. The average number of persons (males) having access to the same apartment was estimated to be between five and seven. The number was about half for young single ladies (between three and four). The vast majority of Nigerians who lived in Hillbrow area of Johannesburg did not envisage that they wo-

uld be living in such a small and crowded apartment while leaving Nigeria. For some they never knew that their relatives who sent them invitation lived in such a settlement prior to their arrival in South Africa. According to an elderly respondent it was like leaving the slum of *Ajgunle*<sup>1</sup> in the city of Lagos in Nigeria to another *Ajgunle* in South Africa. At the same time, others were of the opinion that they were living in a much better apartment in Nigeria, except that in South Africa there was constant water supply and electricity, this opinion which was more prevalent from among the female informers. A common held consolation among all respondents was the fact that a number of successful Nigerians and migrants have previously lived in the same neighbourhood before moving to a high brow area and better residence. This informed the popular slang and greetings '*Hillbrow to High-brow*' among Nigerians. It literally means Hillbrow is just the beginning while High-brow is the destination place. In response, fellow Nigerians will reply '*it's a matter of time*'. Though respondents see themselves in transit, the suburbs of Johannesburg and their features contribute to the increasing vulnerability of migrants and the socio-economic costs they faced in South Africa.

The tendency of African migrants to arrive first in makeshift and low income communities, has helped breed divisions, just like stigmatisation and discrimination in Hillbrow and Alexandra neighbourhoods. The consequences are overwhelming as some Nigerian migrants posit their views thus:

*Leke: ...The host community members see us as thieves, who have come to steal their jobs.....*

*Isosa: ...we are not in any form of competition, yet they attack us, at any slightest provocation.*

*Lemi: The South Africans will always portray us as drug addicts and peddlers*

*Azubiike: ... irrespective of the stigma and challenges 'we have come to stay' we shall find all means to live and work in this country.*

Despite the number of respondents highlighting the lukewarm attitudes netted on them by some members of their host community, it is very important to say that a few respondents especially among those referred to as *Joel*, recognised the fact that there were some nice and accommodating South Africans who understood their plights as foreigners. The issue of Nigerians being stigmatised by host communities was commonly mentioned by group one, the JJC. Nevertheless this is an issue the South African media have also been criticized, as playing a role in building negative perceptions of foreigners especially Nigerians and Zimbabweans (Carling 2006).

<sup>1</sup> *Ajgunle* is one of Nigeria's slums comprising of informal settlements where traders from the hinterlands made temporary abodes during trading trips to Lagos, the former capital territory. It has a multiethnic configuration of low income earners (Agbola, T. and Agunbiade, E.M. 2009)

## Media Stereotypes and Challenges of Social Integration Among Nigerian Migrants

As the practice of Nigerian migrants inviting relatives over to South Africa increased, challenges related to social cohesion naturally surfaced in tandem. The interaction of Nigerians with South Africans was observed to be conditioned and deeply influenced by the widespread belief that all Nigerians were involved in one way or the other in drugs, prostitution and other illicit activities. These stereotypes though, were described by Nigerians working in the formal sector (secondary schools and universities) as gradually changing. It was nevertheless a different situation for Nigerians who were unemployed and have stayed longer in the country. A respondent passionately resented this stereotype saying: 'it is a big problem here in this country; it does not take a minute to be labeled 'a drug baron once identified as a Nigerian'. Lanre, a key informant in Alexandra neighbourhood attributed the association of drug peddling with migrants as a media-hype, biased towards sellers with less emphasis on the buyers. Though none of the interviewees denied the possibility that there could be some bad elements and unscrupulous Nigerians dealing in drugs around Hilbrow, Alexandra and other locations, it was however agreed unanimously that there are other nationals involved as well. Another migrant a lady who is a sales girl noted that:

It even goes beyond Nigerians to other West African migrants especially among youths who engage in all sorts of businesses in the informal sector. A South African guy once came to my shop and asked me if I have got some drugs or marijuana to offer him. And I was furious and shocked at first, only for me to ask him what gave him the impression that I deal with drugs. He replied that someone told him that the shop is owned by a Nigerian. I warned him and told him if some Nigerians deal in drugs, do not mean all Nigerians are drug dealers.

From the above narrative, it can be assumed that there is the tendency for citizens that are host community members to perceive West Africa migrants as a threat. This perception has been described as common wherever migrants live in clusters (Crush *et.al.* 2005). Distorted image of Nigerians in Johannesburg extends also to other nationals, as described by Morris (1998) in his research on Congolese migrants in South Africa. The widespread stereotype held in Johannesburg about Nigerians and Congolese was that they are drug-dealers and crooks who have nothing good to offer to the society. Though there might be some elements of truth in this as often proclaimed by the media, nevertheless, there are genuine and well prepared migrants from Nigeria and other countries. The International Boulevard (2013), an online magazine, which publishes series of interviews with Nigerian migrants in South Africa, highlighted Mr. Adejuwon Soyinka views on what it is to be a Nigerian in South Africa:

...For Nigerians who have migrated halfway down the continent to the comparative prosperity of South Africa, their adopted country can be a hard and brutal place. Nigerians often face racism in South Africa and elsewhere, where they are considered disreputable and dishonest. Official corruption and violence, even against relatively well off migrants, is rampant and often deadly (Adejuwon Soyinka).

Chibuikwe Okeugiri, a construction engineer, who owns a company that he says is worth about ZAR 20 million (South African Rand). He is a successful Nigerian businessman in no small measure, a resident of South Africa, married to a South African citizen. Even with such Impressive credentials, Okeugiri says the fact that he is a Nigerian still makes things difficult for him in South Africa:

You know quite well that a Nigerian is already found guilty before trial in most countries. So, just by the name Nigerian, in a country like South Africa where there is a high level of xenophobia, you are looked at even when you are running a legitimate business as if there are other things sustaining you and not the business you claim you are doing (Chibuikwe Okeugiri).

Going by the dictates of the participants in this study and the media highlight from the The International Boulevard, the implication of such stereotype goes beyond the individual migrant to his/her country. According Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993), stereotypical attributes which portray migrants of different ethnic or racial group as deviants are intensified when there are doubts about the legitimacy of migrants' economic achievements. Media reportage of Nigerians in South Africa is enormous, for instance South African dailies such as The Star, in 1997 had a caption: 'illegal alien: 2,500 held in crack down on Gauteng crime, as police swoops find Nigerians core suspects in drugs and other illegal activities'. The regular mentioning of Nigerians in crime stories, as reported by respondents are consistent with the theory of *makwerekwere*, in which Matsinhe (2011) argued that African migrants are singled out for discrimination because of the perceived differences in outlooks. In 2013, City press captioned: 'from drug dealers to executives, Nigerians are everywhere in Johannesburg'; other contents read: 'Nigerians like to run things', another says 'If you visit any pocket of little Lagos – Hillbrow or Yeoville, Windsor Balfour Park, Johannesburg in general – you will find rows of Nigerian-owned shops where drugs agents operate underground'. Over two-third of the interviewees told tales of woes about how South African immigration officials treat them right from South African embassy in Nigeria down to Johannesburg in South Africa. Nathaniel who arrived South Africa, with a visitor's visa to watch the 2010 FIFA world cup, was of the view that the hatred starts way back at home at the South African Embassy in Lagos: '...My plight here in South Africa started in Lagos where I applied for the So-

uth African Visa, right there on the queue, South Africa embassy officials were hurling racist slurs on all visa applicants'. The Nigerian media and dailies highlighted the plights of visa applicants at the South African embassy. The *Punch* (2009) paints a sordid picture of the xenophobic tendencies awaiting Nigerians in South Africa, prior to hosting the FIFA tournament. Hate crimes against Nigerians living in South Africa was described as 'nothing new', since the dismantling of apartheid. There are studies showing Nigerians and other African nationals living in South Africa as subjects of coordinated xenophobic violence reminiscent of what black South Africans themselves suffered during the apartheid era (see Morris 1998; Neocosmou 2008). For instance, Morris (1998) noted that hate crimes have been since the 1990s, when Nigerian and Congolese nationals were chased out of their homes in Johannesburg, their property looted and their shops burnt. The justification given was that Nigerians were dealing in drugs. But the Nigerian community in South Africa has always denied the allegation. Okon, from the eastern part of Nigeria attributed the hatred to envy: 'all these are mere threats and envy which come up as a result of the business successes of Nigerians as well as the way and manner Nigerians flaunt their wealth'.

### Culture Shock and Unhealthy Rivalry: Narratives of Nigerian Migrants

Like in the richer countries of the North, where there is a longer tradition of immigration and integration policy, local populations in the South do not always perceive the arrival and settlement of foreign workers favourably. In the same vein, culture shock seems to also heighten conflict as emphasised by most recently arrived migrants who have never travelled outside the shores of Nigeria. For instance Obi, an interviewee who has spent seven weeks in South Africa, noted that 'people here do keep to themselves, even when greetings are shared, silence is what you get'. For another, it was the scary nature of Nigerians, their accents, the customary gathering at junctions and speaking of native Nigerian dialects, that the local population reacted to. Some of the outstanding features of culture shock include inability to make any sense out of the behavior of others or to predict what they will say or do (Bock 1970). The experiences of not being able to communicate effectively with others do not help migrants' situation, especially when a person is subjected to culture shock. *Oloton* who was once in such a situation opined that: 'a friendly gesture may be treated as a threat, whereas a serious and sensible question may provoke laughter or uncomprehending silence'. Most migrants do experience changes and adjustment differently from that in their home country. Nkechi a female respondent, from the Eastern part of Nigeria corroborated thus:

... It is a major stress and challenge to adjust to a new society with different social structures, institutions, cultural values, expectations, different food, eating habits, new and unfamiliar beliefs and practices. There are also the challenges of trying to learn a new accent, trying to find employment and perhaps getting qualifications recognized.

In no small measures cultural differences could become a major challenge not only in adapting but also in getting employment, making friends among South Africans and non English speaking Africans. Being referred to as 'migrants' with the fear of being arrested, facing prosecution and eventual deportation brings about a sedentary lifestyle; at least between three to six months of arrival and after expiration of the entry visa. Desperation is fuelled when migrants start running out of money and especially in situations where there are fewer or no relatives to fall back upon. Bimbo narrated his story of how he was forced to look for job after his friend and relative became tired of the burden of caring for him:

...my experiences on arrival was so terrible, I came here thinking I will get a job easily; this thought informed the little amount of money I took along. I was having only a hundred dollars with me, in less than a month it was all spent on feeding and drinking, the second month was hell! I had to rely on my friends and a relative for the next two months. In no time their temper got rise, and I was perceived as a parasite. My relative was much younger and depending on him in here in South Africa was something I would not have imagined myself doing back home in Nigeria. My friend also got bored of me. I was forced to go out everyday looking for job, until I got a job with a restaurant as a cleaner. The problem I am currently facing, was not what I bargained for myself before leaving Nigeria.

Lamidi, a twenty-seven year old Nigerian who arrived South Africa in August 2012; narrated his aspirations prior to his arrival 'I thought I was going to start a carpentry job with ease in Johannesburg, however, he had to resort to washing cars and doing household chores with neighbours. He said:

The day I got the Visa for South Africa, I celebrated with my family members, saying to all 'my suffering has come to an end', because most of my friends told me that I will make more money as someone who is skilled in carpentry, and that the cost of living in South Africa is very cheap. With excitement, I sold all I had to make the journey, only to arrive here and discover that most of the carpentry jobs are handled by registered companies that will not employ foreigners without required work permit. The past year has seen me stranded; washing cars on the street, moving from one house to another, asking for menial work in households to put body and soul together.

From the above, desperate migration represents a situation in which the newly arrived (JJC) are required to cope with situational challenges as well as substantial cultural change. Most Nigerian migrants in Hillbrow and Alexan-

dra, in a new cultural milieu shared common adaptation experiences. First they are regarded as "strangers" in a foreign land and secondly in the short run none can completely escape from the demands of the new life setting as shown in cross cultural migration studies (Abadan-Unat 1986; Kim and Gudykunst 1987). The clustering of relatives and nationals in particular locations is one of the major adaptation strategies of migrants. It was discovered that migrant clustering in particular locations serves not only as a pseudo-home but also as a security medium to avoid deportation or harassment from immigration and police officers.

### Gendered Variations in the Challenges Facing Desperate Migrants

Nigerian migrants of both sexes are confronted with challenges not faced by nonmigrants, especially in regards to leaving behind familial attachment of family members to friends; and the relative security of the known to the unknown. This situation was discovered to be psychologically torturing and make migrants often homesick especially during winter. However rich South Africa as a country seems, the possibilities for improving one's quality of life, requires more than just resilience to adapt to new expectations, mores, values, skill requirements, language and ways of communication, daily habits, and so forth. These desperate migrants face the confusion and often corruption surrounding visas, passports and employment agencies. In one of the narratives of a female hairdresser (Moji), she highlighted the whole process of getting to South Africa as involving 'middle men' and relatives who were in other European countries:

...it all started with the help of my cousin in the Netherlands who introduced me to an acclaimed reputable agent in Lagos. I never had South Africa in mind for once; he kept on convincing me through phones that there are a lot of Nigerians there. He gave me some contacts to make enquiries. I never knew these were contacts of his syndicates; he planned my journey without me appearing at the embassy. I arrived in one of his friends' house; the welcome was shortly outlived when he told me I needed to get a place to stay after two weeks of arrival. Not knowing anybody, I had to quickly make friends with some Congolese around my neighbourhood. They became my saviours when I was almost dying during the July/2012 winter.

Living independently and fending for oneself were new features migrants had to inculcate into their lives especially for most of the women interviewed. Two-thirds of the female discussants asserted to being deserted even by their Nigerian brothers, whom they also described as 'in need'. As illustrated, being a female does not necessarily mean one will find favour from their coun-

trymen: Chika, a female discussant who has only spent eight weeks in South Africa at the time of the study, noted: 'a fellow Nigerian asked me out and after a plate of pizza and a drink, he asked me to pay the balance of R35, giving excuses that he has paid R50 from the total of R85. Generally this kind of situation has prevented Nigerian girls from going out with other Nigerians. And if need be, it must be clarified *abinitio* who takes charge of the bill. For Nneka: 'When a guy asks me out without telling me who is paying for a meal, I do not move an inch. It is becoming an issue. Many a time I have been embarrassed, this is very much unlike Nigerians back home'.

Female discussants also were of the view that older Nigerian migrants are gradually losing their cultural grip on how to cater for women in need, hence most female migrants have developed 'thick skin' to absorb shocks and to protect themselves whenever in trouble. Chinwe (a pregnant woman, though not married), described how she became pregnant for an older Nigerian who has lived in Hillbrow for five years, only for him to relocate to an unknown location in the Eastern Cape of South Africa in order not to face the responsibility of being a father. She said: 'I am now left alone in neglect, but I am determined and full of hope; with the help from my relatives in Europe, I will carry the pregnancy till the child is born. I have learnt to face life challenges in another man's country; I have learnt to live without a male protection and support for the first time in my life'. The narrative shows that women caught up in a web of desperation rebuild their lives alone, or with limited support from informal networks. Situations as such, have the capacity of reinforcing the feeling that they are caught between two cultures and in the web of disappointments. Simi, narrated her suffering thus:

I never knew I was going to meet hard times here in South Africa; the picture that was painted by my aunty was that I will be fine and have a lovely time, better than what was obtainable back home. This was not to be. Getting a job was difficult. When I eventually got one it was in a restaurant after about six months, working from 6am to 6pm. This is a job I would not have imagined myself taking up with a university degree, back in Nigeria. But returning home was not an option now because it will look as if I am lazy, my folks back home will see me as a failure. My aunty keeps assuring me that it is always the case for new arrivals that better days and jobs will come with a little patience.

For Jumoke, a university graduate, she had to descend so low to start a thrift collection business; where she collects money and remits into her boyfriend's account. At the end of the month she is given a day's contribution/fee from the customers who are mainly Nigerians without legal documents to open a bank account. Though a welcome initiative, this young lady regretted taking her boyfriend's advice, leaving her banking job back home in Nigeria, and thinking it won't be difficult securing a similar job. As a contract staff in one of the commercial banks in Nigeria her salary was close to USD1000

monthly. According to Turshen and Holcomb (1993), the contrasts between the place left and the place to which one migrates often may be greater for women than for men because the destination is usually more modernized than the place of departure. Societal expectations, attraction and conviction thus serve as motivation to remain in South Africa. This may ultimately create a temporary advantage for women but not without the greater adaptation challenges based on their fragile nature and male dominated locale of migrants. A female migrant from Edo State, described her coming to South Africa as one of the best decision in her life:

It was much easier coming to South Africa, knowing a couple of guys who lived in Johannesburg for about two to three years. One of them was a former boyfriend. He welcomed me and introduced me to a female friend who accommodated me in Hillbrow for a while; she had a Saloon and I quickly joined her in the business. For me, the infrastructure and assistance were great and lovely.

Nevertheless the above respondent noted that it was not as rosy as she had thought while leaving Nigeria, especially when she had to get an apartment for herself. In her case, having the opportunity to leave Nigeria was like a mission to strike for gold in a mine that has never been exploited, but in this excitement she did not take her health into consideration.

... I arrive in Johannesburg with high hopes of becoming successful, but to my wildest imagination, the weather was just too cold for me. I was freezing and having seizures all the time. Though I knew I was asthmatic, I had a preconceived feeling that the beautiful environment will clear the allergies, but it became acute and the doctor said it was the weather that heightened the experienced difficulties. This has really hindered my hustling capacity and in getting a job. It has seriously made me lazy and impoverished. The worst of all is that once it is winter I am completely indoors.

In another interview with an elderly Nigerian migrant who has been living in Hillbrow for 11 years, 'he classified his wife as one of those in the desperate migrant category.

I have been living in South Africa for a long time, but after having my permit as a skilled person, I made it a point of duty to visit my wife and children at least once a year since 2007. However this year, I invited my wife over to spend the Easter holiday with me. On arrival she made it known to me that she is not going back. I tried persuading her to go back home so that I can make adequate preparations for the children and herself, she declined. I am now being coerced to apply for an extension of her visa for family reunion.

This is a situation whereby the woman in question has abandoned her roles as a mother, leaving the children back home to be cared for by the family

members in Nigeria. The pressure therefore is better imagined. Observation from the study shows that the man lives in a single room apartment. This to some extent explains some of the reasons behind the continuous congestion of residences in Hilbrow, Alexandra and Braamfontein suburb. Similarly undocumented migrants tend to be vulnerable to abuse. In South Africa, studies reveal widespread economic and sexual exploitation in sectors with large number of irregular migrants most especially among unmarried, young and single women faced with difficulties in obtaining public support (Black 2004).

### Desperation and Corruption among Law Enforcement Agents

Statistics in South Africa, in 2005, puts the total number of documented Nigerian migrants at 1,698 persons. Various criticisms of official statistics of migrants in South Africa show that there are more migrants than the records. Cases of visitors who remain in the country easily go undocumented. And in order for this category of migrants to remain in the country, a number of corrupt practices are carried out. In one of the focus group discussions with a set of Nigerians in Braamfontein, this was revealed as a common practice. Among the newly arrived, the persistent check of legal documents by the police officials is 'just too rampant'. This seemed to be a daily routine embarked upon by the South African police force in order to be exploited.

..South African police seems to know us (Nigerians) through our accent<sup>2</sup>, especially when walking in groups. Once identified, the least amount to be parted away is R100, if one is unlucky and in possession of dollars, specifically with a single dollar bill of \$100, it will be collected.

For others, they are forced to pay more, depending on where one is being held and the time of the day. In justifying the corrupt practices and exploitation netted on migrants by the South African police, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN, 2007) alleged that bribe costs range from R300 (US\$41) to R1,500 (\$205) to evade the wrath of security officials. In other cases, the same corrupt officials negotiate and assist migrants in getting immigration papers, which often were said to be counterfeit. The culture of corruption is said to have started back from Nigeria where Nigerian agents and tra-

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<sup>2</sup> The most commonly identified Nigerian languages and accents are those of the Ibo and Yoruba, which contrast that of the Zulu, Nguni or Sotho sound patterns among other languages in South Africa, especially with regards to pronunciation of the letter 'r' as 'errow' by most Nigerians.

velling agencies in connivance with officials of the South African embassy in Lagos demand huge sums of money to issue visitors and work permit visas. Thus Gordon (2010) was of the view that this has created an underground economy which connects a whole lot of vulnerable and exploited migrants and corrupt officials, right from the consulate office down to the country of eventual destination.

There are several analyses of police corruption among migrants as described by South African Migration Project (SAMP 2005), but the documentation was salient on the exact range of fees involved when it comes to migrants' extortion by South African Police. However, the overview of the project on quality of migration services delivery in South Africa was negative. Neocosmos (2008) also linked the poor quality of service delivery in South Africa to the xenophobic attitudes of the personnel in state agencies like the police, detention centres and Department of Home Affairs. They also agreed that state agencies extort money from African migrants partly because of the fear of the unknown on the part of migrants and asylum seekers. Two thirds of these migrants acknowledge using paid agents and immigration officers, usually impostors, whom assist unofficially as middlemen, in facilitating necessary permit to work and to remain in the country. Situations arise whereby the agents and the passports cannot be found after remitting some amount of money to the impostors. Respondents were unanimous in narrating the difficulties therein to officially report to the Department of Home Affairs, because it is by law illegal to deal with touts in securing permits on one hand and on the other, because of the fear of being deported. The analyses above have continually widen the gap for rumours, presuppositions and inaccurate statistics of migrants in South Africa, resulting to paucity of reliable data regarding cross border migration.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that there are a lot of challenges awaiting desperate migrants as highlighted by Nigerians currently living in South Africa. Through their narratives, the study argues that intending migrants without the full knowledge of what to expect in South Africa are more likely to face serious challenges in adapting to a new environment, especially in poor and densely populated neighbourhoods like Alexandra, Braanfoetein and Hillbrow in Johannesburg, irrespective of willing relatives or friends prearranged to serve as hosts. Similarly, for the mere fact that the South African economy seem to have been relatively stable over the years in comparison to other African countries does not translate to complete economic opportunities. The economic situation currently in South Africa is not as buoyant as it used to be in the 1990s

and in the early part of 2000. This should inform intending migrants there awaits more difficulties than what earlier migrants experienced. Nigeria as the second largest migrating nation to South Africa only after Zimbabwe, calls for worry as more and more less-skilled workers constitute the bulk of persons entering the country, competing in the less lucrative informal sector. This trend is a great departure from the 1990s, when more of Nigerian professionals dominated the migration statistics. The influx of unskilled Nigerian migrants in the informal sector and the congested living conditions in Johannesburg (Hillbrow, Braamfontein and Alexandra locations) have brought suspicion about migrants from which Nigerians are often singled out as fraudsters, perpetrators of unimaginable social vices which heightens the acrimony between the host population (South Africans) and foreigners alike. Nevertheless the lukewarm attitude and hostility desperate migrants from Nigeria faced have not in any way hindered their continuous influx into the country. The number of successful Nigerians and migrants of other nationalities, who have established their tents in these poor neighbourhoods and others who still reside therein, continuously motivate and heighten the hope of many Nigerians seeking greener pastures in this country. Lastly the study concluded that South African and Nigerian government(s) should intensify adequate publicity and proper sensitisation to reduce the rate of low skilled migrants. Also, they should prepare the intending and desperate migrants for the numerous challenges ahead, by giving them adequate information about the work and living conditions in South Africa before they embark onto uncertain voyage.

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*Došli smo ovde da ostanemo i naći ćemo način da živimo i radimo u ovoj zemlji: nigerijski migranti i izazovi života u Južnoafričkoj Republici*

U poslednje vreme mnogi Nigerijci su na meti kriminalnih aktivnosti i ksenofobičnih napada u Južnoafričkoj Republici, što dovodi do narušavanja inače prijateljskih odnosa između južnoafričkih lokalnih zajednica i nigerijskih migranata. Ipak, broj Nigerijaca koji migriraju u Južnoafričku Republiku vrto-glavo raste. Studije o migracijama između Nigerije i Južnoafričke Republike su retke i često ograničene na izučavanje tradicionalne ekonomske razlike između ove dve zemlje, bez ozbiljnog udubljanja u socio-kulturne izazove sa kojima se nigerijski migranti suočavaju u zajednicama prijema. Ovaj rad se bavi socio-ekonomskim i kulturnim izazovima sa kojima se nigerijski migranti suočavaju u odabranim zajednicama u Johanesburgu u Južnoafričkoj Republici. Podaci za studiju su prikupljeni kroz dubinske intervjuje i diskusije u okviru fokus grupa sa nigerijskim migrantima u Hillbrow, Braamfotein i Alexandra predgrađima Johanesburga.

*Ključne reči:* migracije, zajednice prijema, izazovi, Nigerija, Južnoafrička Republika

*Nous sommes venus pour rester et nous allons trouver les moyens pour  
vivre et travailler dans ce pays:  
Les migrants nigériens et les défis de la vie en Afrique du Sud*

De nombreux Nigériens ont récemment été victimes des activités criminelles et des attaques xénophobes en Afrique du Sud, ce qui provoque un bouleversement des relations jusqu'à présent cordiales entre la communauté d'accueil sud-africaine et les immigrés nigériens. Toutefois, le nombre de Nigériens qui émigrent en Afrique du Sud continue à augmenter vertigineusement. Les études sur les migrations entre le Nigéria et l'Afrique du Sud sont peu nombreuses, et souvent limitées à l'étude de la disparité économique traditionnelle entre les deux pays, alors que l'accent est mis bien moins sur les défis socio-culturels auxquels sont confrontés les immigrés nigériens dans les communautés d'accueil. C'est ainsi que cet article étudie les défis socio-économiques et culturels auxquels sont confrontés les immigrés nigériens dans les communautés sélectionnées à Johannesburg, en Afrique du Sud. Pour cette étude, les données ont été recueillies par des entretiens approfondis et les forums de discussion avec les immigrés nigériens dans les banlieues de Hillbrow, Braamfontein et Alexandra à Johannesburg, en Afrique du Sud.

*Mots-clés:* migration, communautés d'accueil, défis, Nigéria, Afrique du Sud

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