

Chapter 1

The Migration History of Black Africans to Britain

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the history of migration of black Africans into Britain and a backdrop for subsequent chapters. An understanding of the migration history of Black Africans is important as it helps us to understand the nature and extent of their entrepreneurial and transnational activity. The conveniently splits into three sections covering three phases or waves of migration covering the period between the 1960s to the beginning of the 21st century. The chapter shows that the reasons and motivation of migration is different with each of the phases of migration. The first phase (1960s – 1970s) consisted of restrained migration from a few African countries namely Nigeria and Ghana and was driven by the desire to acquire education. The second phase (1980s – 1990s) consisted of limited migration from an increased number of countries and still driven by education and some limited refugees. The third phase (Mid 1990s onwards) consisted of unrestrained migration largely driven by economic reasons.

INTRODUCTION

An understanding of the migration history of Black Africans is important as it helps to understand their motivation for going into business, nature of their businesses, the challenges and other experiences they have in starting and running their businesses. It also helps to understand their attitude toward entrepreneurship. As noted by Barrett et al. (2002), the legal or immigration status of migrants, “... *is in itself a key determinant of whether self-employment is viable or even possible as a career choice*” (p.11) and hence the ability to engage in transnational entrepreneurial activity. Migration history plays a considerable part in determining levels of economic activity and has implications for the participation, nature and extent of entrepreneurial activity by Black African entrepreneurs (Domboka, 2013). For instance, migrants who came to the UK for study purpose, asylum seekers, refugees and other categories of migrants, for instance, are limited in terms of employment and forbidden from starting their own businesses (www.gov.uk). The history of migration of Black Africans to Britain is presented in three phases. The

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objectives of this chapter are therefore to provide readers with an understanding of how the history and phase of migration affected diasporic entrepreneurship and transnational experiences of black African entrepreneurs in Britain and, to how immigration status of an individual has implications for entrepreneurship in general and transnational activity in particular.

BACKGROUND

To understand the history of migration of black Africans into the UK, it is essential to consider this history by looking at the different phases or waves of migration, the reasons and motivation at each of these stages and the implications for diasporic entrepreneurial and transnational activity.

Phase One: Migration in the 1960s – 1970s

The migration history of Black African people into the United Kingdom (UK) is different from that of other migrants in a number of ways. Black African migrants started coming into the United Kingdom in small numbers in the 1960s and 1970s – a time when most African countries gained their independence. They according to Daley (1998) came mainly for education purposes. Most of Black Africa was colonized by the British and as a result, the UK became and remained the key destination for migrants from black African countries as language was not a significant barrier because English is used as the main medium of communication and official language for business in the former British colonies. This is unlike other migrants, for example, the South Asians and Afro- Caribbean who according to Phizacklea & Ram (1995) came for employment purposes. In the post-war years, Britain recruited low-skilled workers mainly from its colonies and former colonies in the Caribbean and in South Asia (Phizacklea & Ram, 1995).

As a result, post- independence Africa has maintained close ties economically, politically, linguistically and culturally with her former colonial power – the relationship that has been maintained through membership of the Commonwealth – a grouping of the UK and its former colonies. This relationship created privileges for travel, study, work and business (Shimeles, 2010). It is out of these special relationships with the former colonial power (which colonized much of sub-Saharan,) that many of the migrants found the UK as a favoured destination.

The Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrants were among the first Black African migrants to come to Britain in their numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. This according to Zeleza, (2002) and Daley, (1998) was sparked by post-independence political instability in countries like Uganda, Ghana, Somalia, and Angola and in Eastern and Central parts of Africa though it is not clear why only the Nigerians and Ghanaians were the only ones who migrated in large numbers. The migration of the 1970s by the Nigerians was also a result of the boom in the oil industry in that country which made it affordable for them to come and study in the UK. A high proportion of them remained in the country through marriages. Unlike those that migrated in later years, Daley (1998) noted that “... *the first arrivals fared better, often being granted full refugee status, and were better equipped educationally and economically*” (p1705). The gendered nature of the early education system compounded by the patriarchal nature of the African culture resulted in the greater numbers of the student population being male, and hence it was men who largely migrated to the UK for educational purposes. According to Daley (1998), the gendered nature of the early education system introduced by the Europeans in Africa resulted in the greater numbers of the student population being male, and hence it was men who largely migrated to the UK for educational

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