GHANAIANS ABROAD

MARGARET PEIL

This paper focuses on emigrants from Ghana, which has lost large numbers of qualified people over the last 20 years. Ghana is following the pattern of Ireland and Scotland—small countries with too few opportunities for a growing population. It is legally more difficult to emigrate today than in the last century, but large numbers of Ghanaians do so every year. Several aspects of Ghanian emigration are considered: the development of inter-African emigration; Ghana’s economy and educational system as basic causes of emigration; the choice of destinations; the consequences, in terms of national, family and individual costs and benefits; and the ways in which emigrants maintain their links with fellow Ghanaians, at home and abroad.

Africans emigrants are found in large numbers in many industrialized countries (i.e., as taxi drivers, restaurateurs, factory workers, sportsmen, entertainers and professionals). Reports on their activities in the European popular press are almost universally negative and often misinformed; hostility against them is growing. Yet, aside from occasional references to the brain drain and alien expulsion exercises, the international migration of Africans has seldom been studied.\(^1\) Summaries of the literature on emigration have much more to say about Asians and Caribbeans than about emigrants from tropical Africa.\(^2\) This is partly because (aside from Algerians in France) the number of Africans in most European countries, the Middle East and North America is relatively small compared to emigrants from Mexico, the Philippines, Turkey or India/Pakistan, and because their frequent lack of official papers, formal employment and permanent settlement make them hard to count and study. Few apply for citizenship, and some move from one country to another or spend time at home rather than settling permanently in a host country.

The data presented here come from a variety of sources. A survey was carried out in Madina, a fast-growing town on the edge of Accra, in 1993. Sample census and interview data from Madina showed considerable international experience among residents and stimulated further study of the frequency and spread of Ghanaian emigration. The survey data are

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1. For a notable exception, see D. Killingray (ed.), *Africans in Britain.* (Frank Cass, London, 1995).
supplemented by information from published reports, the weekly *West Africa*, the new monthly *Ghana Today* and discussions with Ghanaians at home and abroad. *West Africa* regularly reports on Ghanaians abroad as well as providing an historical record of events at home. While some of the information is anecdotal and most of it lacks statistical rigour, there is enough data to present an overall picture of a large-scale exodus.

There are large numbers of Ghanaians in London, Amsterdam, Hamburg, New York and many other cities, plus a wide dispersion of individuals and small colonies in such diverse places as the Virgin Islands and Papua New Guinea. Many have jobs which do not use their education or training, but their income often provides a considerably improved standard of living and lays the foundation for a better life back home. It is doubtful if any government is efficient enough to keep out emigrants who will take whatever work they can find and do not want to stay permanently.

*Inter-African emigration*

West Africans have a long history of migration in which national borders are relatively unimportant. Many people have relatives on both sides of international boundaries and border guards are easy to avoid. People have traditionally moved to improve their lives—either as groups or, when travelling alone became safer, as individuals. Passports and visas are expensive and may be hard to get; until recently they have not been needed for movement to neighbouring countries. An example of 'traditional' emigration is Ghanaian fishermen, who work along much of the West African coast and along major inland rivers as far as Mali. As transport has become more efficient and the standard of living has risen, it is now possible to move long distances—beyond neighbouring countries to the industrialised world.

In the early post-independence period, professionals from Ghana and Nigeria served in less developed nations (e.g., as judges and port supervisors in The Gambia and university staff in several countries). Trained people were welcome, temporarily, but opposition to 'aliens' increased; in hard times they may be expelled to provide for local people. Citizenship in Africa has tended to be defined by ethnicity, so place of birth is less important than ancestry. Citizenship in a host country is hard to get and seldom sought—links to 'home' are claimed even by second or third generation emigrant families whose members have never visited it. Family

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4. The demand for Ghanaian passports has been as high as 4,000 per week. See *West Africa*, No. 4021 (1994), p. 1835.

networks and business contacts influence the direction of migration and the work obtained on arrival; marriage is often within the ethnic group.  

West African governments have reluctantly recognised freedom of movement by permitting citizens to live anywhere, initially within the CEAO (Communauté Economique d’Afrique Occidentale—the Francophone states) and then within the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) are for up to 90 days. Thus, the emigration of Ghanaians within the ECOWAS area is permitted, if not encouraged. Since overstayers are seldom caught, they have not been slow to turn tolerance into legal right. A national survey of 2,908 ECOWAS emigrants from Ghana in 1991 found that three-quarters gave work-related reasons for leaving; a third expected better living conditions and nearly half chose their destination because family or friends lived there.  

The interchange between Ghana and Nigeria is well-developed, depending on which economy is in better shape, since West African traders and craftsmen settle wherever their business seems likely to prosper. Many Ghanaians have also moved to Côte d’Ivoire because of its thriving economy and open attitude toward immigrants. A quarter of the Ivorian labour force are aliens, though more are from Burkina Faso than from Ghana.

Custom gives southern Ghanaian women more economic autonomy than many African women, but requires them to be self-supporting. This facilitates independent emigration and allows them to reap the rewards if they are successful. Their number is certain to increase with rising educational levels, though as they are still under-represented in higher education their opportunities are more limited than those of men (see below). Marriages easily break down, as evidenced by census data and the high proportion of women living on their own in Ghanaian cities. Since uneducated women have few opportunities other than farming or trading, some look to full- or part-time prostitution to provide capital for other activities. After a short period abroad, many hope to find a suitable husband and settle into the approved roles of trader, wife and mother.

A potentially dangerous emigration stream is the movement of Ghanaian women to Côte d’Ivoire, especially Abidjan, where many combine trading and prostitution. Although AIDS is still a relatively small problem in Ghana, it is widely thought that AIDS is being brought by women returning home. Anarfi estimates that about 80 per cent of the 10,000 prostitutes in

Abidjan are (or claim to be) Ghanaian. Most had at least one child before emigrating and few stay more than five years. About 40 per cent of the Ghanaian women in his sample and 20 per cent of the men were from one area in Eastern Region, which has been sending emigrants to Abidjan since the 1950s. The second major source is Ashanti Region; few come from the north or from regions bordering Côte d’Ivoire. Remittances are relatively small, but make a significant contribution to the family economy at home through investment in land, housing and consumer goods. Ghanaian prostitutes are also working in Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Europe (France, Germany, Netherlands). Their families expect prostitutes to practise far from home; when one capital city gets over-crowded, they move on to another.

By the 1970s, the top jobs in most African countries were filled by relatively young returnee nationals and local university graduates. Opportunities declined, and many scholars sent abroad failed to return because jobs at home paid so little. With few opportunities for good jobs at home, large numbers of people voted with their feet, preferring to work where the wages are higher.

Pressures for emigration

Immigration was more common than emigration in the build-up to Ghanaian independence in 1957, but most immigrants left as the economy declined in the 1960s. Aliens who remained (including some ethnic foreigners who were born in Ghana) were pushed out by the politically-inspired expulsion exercise of 1969–70. The government hoped to take people’s minds off economic decline by blaming all its problems on aliens and providing more jobs for Ghanaians. Unfortunately, the economy continued to deteriorate, and the exodus of Ghanaians was well-started by the mid-1970s. Low crop prices and rapid inflation over the last 25 years have encouraged many Ghanaians to emigrate; wages are still relatively below the 1970 level. Rising educational levels and aspirations have increased the pressure for both men and women to leave home.

Ghana has become a major exporter of educated people and also of less-educated but well-trained artisans. There are no precise figures on the incidence of emigration, partly because much of it is undocumented, but there is considerable evidence of large numbers of Ghanaians earning their living abroad and that far more are emigrating than are returning. (Inter-censal growth is less than the fertility/mortality growth rate of 3.4 per

cent would provide.) It has been estimated that two million men and women, mainly from southern Ghana, left for Nigeria or Côte d’Ivoire between 1974 and 1981. This was about a tenth of the population at that time, and a considerably higher proportion of the adult labour force. Some think that as much as a fifth of Ghanaians are now living abroad. While these are probably over-estimates and partly depend on the status of children born abroad, it is clear that the exodus has been substantial. Toronto alone has 20,000 Ghanaians.

Most emigrants are adults, especially young people who leave as soon as they can afford it. The insecurity of the project and short intended stay mean that any children are left at home. Those who settle may send for a wife, children and even siblings, but marriage to someone met abroad is a fairly common alternative. Since citizenship is based on ethnicity, many children born abroad are considered, by their parents at least, as Ghanaians, though they would like the children to have a choice. The case for dual citizenship is being actively pursued, since this would provide security abroad while maintaining links with home. Regulations denying citizenship in a host country to children of aliens are obviously disadvantageous to immigrants, but do increase their orientation toward ‘home’.

Ghana had a far better supply of bureaucrats and professionals at independence than most African nations. Emigration for higher education goes back to the last century. The first Ghanaian university was founded in 1948 and there were British-trained Ghanaian Ph.D.s teaching there by the mid-1950s. Student emigrants went further afield after independence, as more scholarships became available in Eastern Europe and Russia as well as North America, where Kwame Nkrumah had studied in the 1930s. From the 1960s, three universities produced doctors and engineers as well as teachers and civil servants. Ghanaians continued to favour British higher degrees, whereas Nigerians often took up opportunities in the USA or did their higher studies at home.

Rising costs and a declining cedi made emigration for education more difficult in the 1980s and 1990s. Scholarships are hard to get, but families make considerable sacrifices to further their offspring’s chances. When the quality of local secondary education dropped drastically due to lack of resources and teacher emigration, some parents found work abroad so that their children could be properly educated. The Madina sample reported below included university students in Benin, Germany, Russia and the USA.

Most Ghanaians face very difficult economic conditions. Many urban adults need two jobs to survive, since food may take up to 65 per cent of income, but villagers also find emigration attractive. Food supplies declined in the 1970s because of a shortage of farm labour and periodic droughts. Yet farms are too small for a rapidly rising population, and even with recent price increases the income from cocoa (the main cash crop) is too low to support a large family. Thus, rural school leavers also go abroad to help their families.

About three-quarters of children enrol in primary school and two-fifths in secondary school; about two per cent get higher education. Few school leavers find formal sector employment; the civil service is smaller than before the ‘successful’ structural adjustment programme was launched in 1983. Industrial employment is also growing much more slowly than the number of job-seekers. One reason why emigrants are more likely to be southerners than northerners is the lower level of education in the north; there are more opportunities for the better-educated southerners, and it is easier for them to get financial support for emigration.

Hardship at home and a strong desire for a higher standard of living provide incentives for both men and women to seek work abroad. Both young school leavers and established professionals want more than they can earn locally; women deserted by men who are ‘fathers but not husbands’ and workers who are declared redundant try their luck. In the 1970s, many headed for Nigeria, where an oil boom was transforming the economy and more workers were needed. It was hard for aliens to enter the overcrowded trading network in Lagos, but Ghanaians worked as teachers, secretaries, skilled artisans and construction workers, taking jobs that Nigerians were leaving to move into more lucrative businesses.

When the Nigerian economy faltered in 1983–4, Nigerians noticed how many jobs were held by aliens and demanded that they go. Over a million Ghanaians were expelled and went home, at least temporarily. The Ghanaians government urged them to return to farming, but many went back to Nigeria if they could or looked for other countries where wages were higher than at home. Dei’s 1983 study found 298 returnees from Nigeria in a Ghanaians village of only 3,450 people. By 1989, 35 per cent of them had left again, to return to Nigeria or try Côte d’Ivoire, Libya,

Liberia, or Ghanaian towns. That several returnees founded successful local businesses with the profits of emigration encouraged more young people to follow in their footsteps.

Political insecurity also generated some emigration, though government changes in Ghana have been less violent than in Nigeria. Displaced and aspiring politicians, army officers and government officials who fall foul of those running the country sometimes seek asylum abroad. The return of democracy made it possible for exiles to return home, but as the military and civilian governments involved many of the same leaders may refugees still feel safer abroad. Many people whose emigration has little to do with politics continue to try for refugee status. There were 2,400 asylum applications to Britain by Ghanaians in 1991; about 99 per cent were rejected. About one in five Ghanaians seeking to enter Britain each year, for whatever reason, is denied entry.21 Many others tried Germany, where there are about 5,000 Ghanaian ‘refugees’.

Professionals have left in large numbers. Rado estimated that between half and two-thirds of Ghana’s ‘experienced, top-level professional manpower’ went abroad from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s.22 Between 1975 and 1981, Ghana lost about 14,000 qualified teachers, including nearly 3,000 university graduates, and the exodus was expected to continue.23 Many Nigerian secondary schools were largely staffed by Ghanaian teachers at this time. While those who were expelled from Nigeria in 1983–4 returned home (at least initially), higher professionals often went further and stayed longer. ‘Some 60 per cent of Ghanaian doctors trained in the early 1980s are now working abroad.’24 A military leader is reputed to have suggested, only half in jest, that less thorough training might keep more of them at home. Well-qualified Ghanaians are also working in the ECA, ADB, FAO, ILO, UN, UNCTAD, WHO, and other international organizations and NGOs. Unemployment among recent university graduates is a serious cause for concern. The one year of compulsory service only delays entry into an over-crowded job market.25

Table 1 shows the levels of officially recognized emigration to the United States from Anglophone West African countries in the last half of the 1980s. As the size of the national population rises, the proportion of

25. A recent study by the University of Ghana Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research found that science graduates were no more likely than arts graduates to find work within six months. One specialist course at the University of Science and Technology produced 27 graduates for three available jobs.
TABLE 1
Immigration to the United States from Anglophone West Africa, 1985–9, by population and occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population 1990 (millions)</th>
<th>Immigrants to USA 1985–90 per million</th>
<th>Per cent professional, technical and executive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3,802</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2,657</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>6,609</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>17,656</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


emigrants drops and it becomes more selective. Ghanaians and Nigerians were less likely than other West Africans to go to America (largely because of the much closer ties of Cape Verdians and Liberians to the USA), but they sent a higher proportion of well-qualified people. Many who acquired qualifications in North America remained to practise there.

With improving conditions, some Ghanaian academics returned home in the 1990s, but salaries are still very low (the President only earns about £4,000 per year), and additional income is needed to educate the next generation, build a family house, etc. Those who can find work abroad are in a much better position than those who stay at home to carry out their responsibilities. Those who settled in universities abroad or found employment as doctors, lawyers or administrators in North America or Europe have tended to stay away unless called home for a high-level appointment. Many emigrants complain that return will not further their careers; the government is not interested in helping them, and the financial loss would be considerable. A third of 2,169 returnee emigrants in the 1991 ECOWAS study said that their employer, sponsor or the government had financed their return, but some were quickly disillusioned with the resources available to them and the local bureaucracy. A quarter came home because their objective had been obtained; this tends to mean that they had acquired capital to establish a business.

*Education and occupation as factors in emigration*

Who is most likely to emigrate, and how do gender and education affect the choice of destination? The study of Madina, mentioned above, provides an example of the international experience of southern Ghanaians.

27. Twum-Baah, ‘Motivation’.
Madina was founded in 1959 and had only 2,000 residents in 1966.\textsuperscript{28} It now has at least 45,000, from very poor to relatively wealthy. Almost all are migrants, from all parts of Ghana and many neighbouring countries. A 1:15 sample census carried out in early 1993 provided data on where residents were born, grew up and lived before moving to Madina. Six hundred adults chosen by quota from the census sheets were interviewed. Men and the elderly were oversampled (as having more experience to report); students and women petty traders were undersampled. There is a complete migration history for all those interviewed, so the timing and length of stay abroad can be assessed. They were also asked about the location of their siblings and children and how often they saw them. One third of those interviewed had lived abroad themselves and/or had siblings or children abroad.

Table 2 shows that men and women with primary or no schooling are somewhat more likely to emigrate than those with middle, secondary and vocational schooling, but almost all remain in West Africa. Those who leave after middle school occasionally emigrate long distances; this needs further study to see how much their extended families abroad help to make this possible, since they would only qualify for unskilled work. With declining opportunities, those with secondary or vocational schooling are only slightly more likely to emigrate than those who only attended middle school.\textsuperscript{29} They can take on jobs often available to immigrants, but may find it hard to get the necessary papers.

Men are more likely than women to emigrate at most distance and educational levels, though sometimes the differences are small. Gender balance is greatest for those with secondary, vocational or middle school education and least for university graduates. Men and women graduates reach Europe in almost equal proportions, but very few women go further.

Male university graduates are considerably more likely than women or less-educated men to emigrate and they go further; few Ghanaians with less than secondary education leave West Africa, whereas nearly a quarter of the male graduates and a seventh of females are in Europe or further away. Male graduates are about equally distributed between Europe and North America; females are far more likely to be in Europe. Men who emigrate to North America often find wives among the Caribbean or African American community rather than sending home for a Ghanaian wife. Insofar as these wives prefer to remain in North America, their husband’s return to Ghana is likely to be delayed. No women with more than a middle school education was reported in Nigeria (which has its own


\textsuperscript{29} Seven to ten years of schooling, the most common qualification in Madina and southern Ghana, and now called junior secondary.
TABLE 2
Geographic distribution of siblings and children by gender and education (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>N. America</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than Middle</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than Middle</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

problems of secondary and graduate unemployment), but three male graduates were working there.

Many new occupations have appeared in Ghana in the last 40 years and the opportunities for training have expanded. Most people are flexible in shifting occupations whenever an opportunity appears, learning as they go. Thus, the first job may give little indication of an eventual career. A few years working abroad may provide the basis for a successful business later on. Siblings and children abroad included factory workers in England, Italy, Japan and Senegal, a film actor in Italy, a lecturer in Australia and an accountant in Israel.30 The Asante are particularly known for running businesses abroad; siblings and children of Madina residents are running businesses in Belgium, Britain, Burkina Faso, Italy and the United States. These are potential sources of goods to be sold in Ghana and of Ghanaian businesses.31

Most of the women abroad were active participants in the labour force, depending on their level of education. Those in Togo have little education and are usually trading, as they would at home. Adomako’s study of prostitutes in The Netherlands provides case studies of the movement of ‘unattached’ women.32 Few have much education, and many speak little English. They travel on tourist visas or with false documents provided by kin or procurers. Some are living in virtual slavery, having been tricked by the offer of travel and nice clothes. Others sign a bond to cover their

30. There are about 14,000 Ghanaians in Italy, only a few less than Somalis, for whom Italy was the colonial power. ‘Determined in Italy’, West Africa, No. 4041 (1995), p. 417.
31. A man who had cooked in Norway is now an importer of cars, spending about half of each year in Madina. A technician is building up a business in Ghana in preparation for retirement from his California job. P. Kennedy’s Ghanaian Businessmen (Weltforum Verlag, London, 1980), reports on several manufacturers who previously worked in British factories.
expenses (sometimes including a temporary marriage to obtain papers) and spend years working off their debt. Some who have escaped the first two categories find a pimp for greater security; he may use their earnings to support drug addiction. The few who have regained their independence tend to lack proper papers, so they are vulnerable to demands for bribes. The money earned is very good by Ghanaian standards, though the prostitutes often see little of it. Most return home when/if they can, but some establish marriages with ‘a good man’ and settle down abroad. Male Ghanaians in The Netherlands sometimes pay for Surinamese papers to get a job.

The most successful emigrants are usually well-educated and/or have marketable skills, especially academics, professionals, musicians or sportsmen. The build-up of Africans in various cities has made it possible for bands and individual performers to settle abroad, providing the kind of music Africans want. One Ghanaian performer started by winning a contest in Denmark, then moved on to Germany and settled in Switzerland. The European demand for top football players provides another opportunity. Ghana’s Black Stars (the national team) include several professionals with European teams.33

Ghanaian pastors have followed their flocks. The chaplain to Ghanaian students, sent to London in 1974 by the Ghana Presbyterians, founded the Ghana Union and the Anglo-Ghanaian society (see below). Anglicans, Catholics and Seventh-Day Adventists also have Ghanaian pastors in London and other cities with large Ghanaian populations, and there has been a rapid expansion of Pentecostal churches founded by Ghanaians for people who want to worship in their own language. Some pastors who trained in Britain or America stayed on: others trained in Ghana and emigrated to carry out their ministry. A few congregations are large enough to have their own church building, and some independent churches have branches in other European countries and the USA.34 Ghanaian evangelists are active as far afield as South Korea and the Philippines.

It is impossible to measure the extent to which education ‘pays off’ for emigrants because of the large number of ‘don’t knows’ in the Madina data and also because many emigrants have commercial activities as well as wage employment. Emigrants may not tell their kin about their work because some jobs which provide a good income by Ghanaian standards have low prestige in Ghana.35 All of the male graduates whose occupation was known were professionals, teachers, administrators or students. Only one woman graduate had a professional job; one each was a secretary,

35. Two months of washing dishes in Birmingham can pay more than ten months as a technician for the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation.
manual worker and businesswoman and two were students. Males with secondary or vocational education had a high proportion of unknowns, but some were reported to be in semi-professional, professional or administrative jobs; others were in business or manual work. Women at this level can get clerical work, but most prefer trade/business because it is more flexible and rewarding.

The Madina occupational data can be supplemented by a small study in Avatime, a village in Volta Region. In 1983, 32 men and women who had recently been expelled from Nigeria were interviewed. Most of the men were skilled, over 26 years of age and had lived in Nigeria for at least two years. The women were somewhat younger; two-thirds were unskilled and most had lived in Nigeria for less than two years. Artisans had found jobs in line with their training; the only women who used their skills were teachers and traders. These Ghanaians had been highly concentrated geographically; only a third (mostly men) had worked outside Lagos. Although many did not like the Yoruba among whom they had worked, about half intended to return because their prospects were so much better than in Ghana. They would be more careful to have official papers the next time, but they could not afford to stay at home.

Distribution

While there are concentrations of Ghanaians in many cities, as early settlers are joined by family, kin and friends, Ghanaians have emigrated to a very wide range of countries and sometimes live far from the capital city. In Africa, they are mainly in Togo (where family ties from pre-colonial times are strong), Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, but there are some in most countries, from Libya to South Africa. Informed estimates suggest that there are about a million Ghanaians in Côte d'Ivoire and perhaps half as many in Nigeria, in spite of the expulsions of the 1980s and its declining economy and political instability.

Ghanaians have a long history of travel to Britain for studies or work; there is a large community in London and smaller ones in Birmingham, Nottingham, Bristol, Liverpool and other British cities. Many lawyers and doctors who trained in the UK stayed on. A study of twelve months of ‘Letters to the Editor’ in the weekly West Africa found that two-fifths of the letters from Ghanaians came from emigrant Ghanaians living in 22

36. L. Brydon, ‘Ghanaian Responses’.
38. Observers vary on the number of Ghanaians in Nigeria; some claim that large numbers are still seen in Lagos; others argue that most have left. The Madina data suggest that many are still there.
Table 3 refers only to adults (over 15 years of age). The wide range of countries demonstrates the possibilities open to Ghanaians. There seems to be no major emigration stream for moves outside Africa; individuals take whatever opportunities they find, according to their education, training and contacts.

Six per cent of those interviewed and four per cent of Madina residents in the census (including children) were immigrants to Ghana, having been born in Togo, Benin, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, the USA, Côte d'Ivoire, the UK and Indonesia (listed by the declining number of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Returnees/immigrants</th>
<th>Siblings/children abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>109 (38)</td>
<td>57 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td>11 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>8 (8)</td>
<td>7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>22 (4)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>20 (15)</td>
<td>17 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherb</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherc</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otherd</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Abroad' DK</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The numbers in parenthesis are immigrants to Ghana who were born abroad, some of Ghanaian parents.


c. Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Switzerland.

d. Australia, Burma, Canada, India, Israel, Japan, Saudi Arabia.

countries. Sierra Leoneans came second and Nigerians only third. Nearly half of the Ghanaians' letters came from the UK, where *West Africa* is published; a quarter came from Western Europe (especially Germany), about a fifth came from North America (from Atlanta to Alaska), and others from as far afield as Japan, Australia and Malaysia. A new monthly, *Ghana Today*, started in May 1993. Published in London, it has correspondents in Ghana, Netherlands and Canada and sales representatives in Austria, Berlin, Israel, Ontario, Switzerland and Tokyo.
cases). The countries with the largest numbers of residents born abroad (accounting for 84 per cent of the aliens or descendants of Ghanaian emigrants), are from neighbouring Francophone countries which are poorer than Ghana. Some immigrants had lived in more than one country before their arrival in Ghana, and some had siblings who had chosen other West African countries or moved to Europe. Not all were uneducated labourers; one was a former diplomat who had settled in Accra as a businessman. Several aliens said that they would have stayed at home if they had enough education for a government job, but without education, trading or the Ghana army provided a better life than farming at home.

The increase in destinations outside Africa is evident: four times as many are living in Europe or the USA as have returned from there. Men outnumber women in every geographical area, but the gender gap is much smaller for current emigrants and shorter distances. Most Madina residents who had lived in other African countries were born abroad, except for returnees from Nigeria. Togo and Nigeria are major destinations of siblings and children, but twice as many women have gone to Côte d’Ivoire as to Nigeria. Work in Côte d’Ivoire and Togo is usually in the informal sector and less attractive to men than to women. On the other hand, male kin are four times as likely as females to live in the USA. Women may be less likely to return than men; some who marry abroad prefer to stay near their children and grandchildren and men have better access to land and political leadership roles at home than women do.

Twelve per cent of the Ghanaian-born respondents in Madina, far more men than women, had emigrated and returned. Some had gone for courses, but many had worked abroad, sometimes in more than one country. As an extreme example, an administrator had worked in Kenya, Somalia and Senegal. Most of those who lived abroad before 1970 were either students or soldiers. Ghanaian soldiers served in East Africa, India and Burma during the Second World War; they now assist UN peacekeeping activities in the Middle East and Africa.

The number who go and stay abroad is directly related to educational output and economic need, but there was less bunching of people leaving in the early 1980s than was expected given the economic hardship of that period. The evidence suggests that emigration streams are growing, almost regardless of Ghana’s economic recovery, because the basic patterns have been established and contacts are available. While 18 of the returnees had gone abroad in the 1970s, 29 had emigrated in the 1980s. Few stayed less than two years or more than nine years. The mass expulsions from Nigeria in 1983–84 seem to have had little effect, though this may be due to the location of the sample on the outskirts of Accra. Almost no one

39. The sex ratios are 355 for returnees and 127 for Ghanaian kin abroad: 355 men per 100 women and 127 men per 100 women.
reported coming home at this time. Several stayed through the period of expulsions and others went to Nigeria in the late 1980s. Expulsion is seen as just bad luck—no reason not to try again, in Nigeria or elsewhere. The precise location of some siblings was unknown. They may be moving from one country to another or merely failing to communicate, since regular letters are not a Ghanaian custom. Letters should be accompanied by money, and those who cannot afford to send money also neglect to write. A few fathers and siblings travel abroad to collect funds from emigrants who have neglected to send money or to visit home. If the family has no address, such visits can be avoided.

Men are more likely than women to go where they have no contacts. Whereas most of the women with Madina contacts living in Europe were in Britain, Germany or Italy, there were male emigrants to Russia (three students), Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland and France (one a retired soldier). Only men had gone to Israel, Japan, Libya and Saudi Arabia. It was relatively rare for several family members to emigrate to the same city; the most common destinations for these were Lomé and London. Opportunities may spread family members widely across the world. An extreme example was an elite family with a son in an American university and the other two children settled in Accra. The husband’s brothers included two doctors in London and a lecturer in Saudi Arabia; the wife’s extended family included a lawyer in London, a surgeon in the USA, an administrator in Saudi Arabia and a housewife in Zimbabwe.

Consequences

Though Rimmer claims that ‘the loss in the 1970s of so much of the country’s labour force must have led to negative growth in agriculture’, on the whole the effects of widespread emigration appear to be positive for the individuals concerned, their families and for the country. Many people are not needed at home; farms are too small to provide employment for a rapidly rising population. This is particularly true of Eastern Region, which has been a source of emigration for at least forty years and where it is hard to find new farm land. Those who settle abroad usually intend to return home eventually, and thus maintain contacts with their families and with other Ghanaians abroad. Successful emigrants gain knowledge, experience and capital which they bring back when they settle at home. The Ghanaian housing industry depends on overseas remittances, and funds from overseas help to pay school fees and health charges. This does not mean that Ghana does not suffer from its brain drain, or that

40. Staying Poor, p. 213.
individuals do not regret their separation from family and friends, but many return while they still have much to offer.42

A large-scale study of returnees to Ghana found that many reported multiple gains. Half thought they had benefited in living standards and experience. A third said that their families (nuclear and/or extended) had gained financially, a quarter thought that their enhanced skills and knowledge would benefit the country and a tenth that local community development would be improved. Nearly half could not state specifically how their community or country might benefit, but most denied that there was no benefit. Emigrants leaving for ECOWAS countries saw the major advantages as bringing foreign exchange (53 per cent) or durable goods (32 per cent) into Ghana and/or reducing pressure on resources at home (30 per cent).43

Anarfi interviewed emigrants in Abidjan and relatives at home.44 He found that although many of the emigrants were from low status households, migrant households at home were more likely than non-migrant households to invest in housing and land and had more consumer goods. Thus, although most agreed that the main gains went to the emigrants, families also benefited—unless the emigrant came home with debts or ill-health and needed family help.

Ghanaians tend to remain strangers, wherever their destination, because they do not intend a permanent stay. They maintain contacts with other Ghanaians and with their families at home, and save for their eventual return. They seldom ask for citizenship, and even their children identify Ghana as home, though usually to a lesser extent. Only about four per cent of African professionals in the USA acquire permanent residency and even fewer become American citizens.45 Since they must work to survive, they contribute to the local economy through taxes and production without demanding welfare or permanent rights in the host country—a bargain in economic terms.

Visits home provide a good income for the airlines. Holiday flights to Ghana are full of emigrant visitors, often bringing their children to meet their kin. Emigrants living in Europe may fly home for a week or two every year; those living in North America tend to go less often and stay somewhat longer. Relatives at home often benefit from the emigrant’s higher income even though they only visit Ghana at long intervals. While some spend their money on consumer goods for their families abroad,

44. Anarfi, ‘Socio-Economic Implications’.
elderly parents and siblings at home often get at least occasional help. Children may be sent home for schooling, though they often attend an overseas university rather than a resource-poor Ghanaian one. In addition, relatives are accommodated when they arrive on buying trips, especially in London. Goods are thus available in Ghana which the shortage of foreign currency would make unobtainable.

Table 4 shows that nearly half of the returnees interviewed in Madina had been away more than five years, yet they had eventually come home—usually while still under 40 years of age. (Large-scale emigration is too recent for many people who returned as pensioners to appear in the data.) Only a third of male siblings and children and a fifth of females living abroad do not visit home at least very four years, though some of the men had not been seen for over ten years. As with internal migrants, the differences between men and women are related to resources and distance. Men usually earn more, so they can afford to visit home more frequently than women. However, far more of the female siblings and children are living in nearby countries and thus can visit home more easily than men living in the USA or Europe. The well-educated, who should be earning more, are not more frequent visitors than the poorly-educated. This is also related to distance travelled, but people in good jobs in Europe should be able to afford the air fare for a visit more than once very five years. They may be held back by the high expectation of their relatives that lavish gifts will be forthcoming, but many are also saving and investing in a house in Ghana; they will return when the house is built and furnished.

In recent years, the Ghanaian housing industry has depended on remittances from emigrants. Diko and Tipple found that many Ghanaians in London focus their savings on building a house in Accra or Kumasi which will provide both status and income when they return.46 About a year after the house is finished, they leave their low-level jobs and

return in triumph. The £2,000–3,000 they spend each year on this project is far more than they could earn in a higher-level job in Ghana. One estate on the outskirts of Accra has numerous ‘burger houses’—so-called because the money to build them came from Hamburg. Whether they build in their home village or in a large city, emigrants can afford the inflated prices of building materials better than people on local salaries, and a house proclaims both their attachment to home and their success abroad. Houses can be used by their families and/or rented out for a return on investment until they are wanted when the emigrant returns; the urban rental market would be much worse if these houses were not being built. Housing completion is an important reason for delaying the return home, though visits may be necessary to ensure that the work is being properly carried out.

The number of second generation Ghanaians abroad is increasing—children often settle in the country in which they grow up, though many still maintain links with ‘home’. Emigrants and their descendants can be of considerable use to their home communities as well as to their families, continuing a long tradition of community development by successful migrants. They contribute personally to collections for ‘hometown’ development and use their contacts abroad for resources to serve the needs of those at home. Europeans and Americans who are interested in ‘Third World’ issues can be co-opted into small-scale projects of considerable use to the beneficiaries.47

Since the effects of emigration remain largely positive, ways will be found to continue it. Zolberg argued that increasing restrictions on ‘economic’ migration will encourage determined emigrants to flout the law.48 Control through the use of identification cards in Europe presents a threat to many emigrants who are living there illegally, though there are many ways of avoiding apprehension.49 Strict regulations on refugee status have lowered opportunities for Ghanaians, since few can truthfully claim to be persecuted at home. Ghanaians often have enough education to get legitimate jobs if there is no discrimination, but large numbers take their chances on illegal entry when a visa and work permit are hard to get. They arrive on visitor’s or students’ visas; get help from relatives, friends with legitimate residence and/or ‘fixers’ (who often take the money but do nothing); or marry a citizen in order to stay on.

As regulations are more strictly enforced in various European countries, large numbers of illegal immigrants and aspirant refugees are being expelled. Two thousand Ghanaians were deported in the first five months

of 1994, compared to 2,194 in the whole of 1993 and 1,882 in 1992. About a quarter were deported from Germany, seven per cent from Britain and substantial numbers from Netherlands, the United States, Italy and Switzerland.50 Quite a few of these people will try again if they can get the resources to do so, since they have not yet achieved their goals.

Life abroad

Communities of Ghanaian expatriates have their own churches, welfare and ethnic associations and restaurants in the major cities of Europe and North America as well as in many African capitals. Social and business contacts are useful, since many carry on business activities on their own account or for relatives as well as the wage employment which provides their major income. Wherever the numbers warrant it, there are a range of social activities to remind the emigrants of home and raise funds for development projects.

For example, London’s Anglo-Ghanaian Society meets at least twice a year for social events and sometimes has speakers from the Ghanaian High Commission. The Ghana Union, established in 1978, organises independence celebrations and other activities, such as talks on investment and citizenship issues. Dances are popular; a dance and fashion show in London with Ghanaian bands based in the UK, Germany and Accra attracted 4,000 Ghanaians. The University of Ghana and most of the prestigious secondary schools have alumni associations with at least yearly reunions which raise funds to help their former schools. In addition, there are at least 18 hometown or sub-ethnic associations in London, some of which meet monthly for socialising and fund-raising. The over-representation of southerners is evident in that there is only a Union of Northern Ghanaians and a Brong Ahafo regional association, whereas one coastal town of only 6,000 people has an association in London.51

Major ethnic groups have chiefs and other officials in major cities. These have thrones, robes and paraphernalia as at home, though they are elected by the emigrant community for a fixed term rather than by ‘king-makers’ as in Ghana. Thus, when the Asantehene visits New York, he is well looked-after by the Asante chief there. Major ethnic festivals and funerals are also celebrated abroad. An emigrant may fly home for his mother’s funeral, but he will hold another when he gets back. For those who cannot go home, videos are made and shown at the funeral celebration in Los Angeles or London. The ethnic association pays funeral expenses and collects a percentage of the ‘contributions’ made by participants. All these activities help tie children to ‘home’ and initiate host-country spouses into Ghanaian culture. Welfare services are also important. The Ghana

51. West Africa (January–December, 1994).
Union in London runs a service to advise Ghanaians in trouble and raises funds for Ghanaian projects. Leaders are active in immigrant problems and race relations in London. To improve the chances of adolescents finding employment, a press was acquired with German church funds; the training programme is supported by the local council and the European Commission.  

Emigrant associations also play a part in Ghanaian politics at local and national level. Opposition parties were formed abroad when they were not allowed at home; they recruit support from emigrants, both during periods of military rule (when it is safer to demand democracy from a distance) and when a civilian government is unpopular or seen as less than completely legitimate. Much of the negotiation of mergers and programmes in the build-up to civilian government in 1993 was carried out in London, and the major parties still run events to keep emigrants aware of the issues. Little is known of the effect emigrant kin may have on voters at home, but it is assumed to be a worthwhile investment.

The pull of local culture and school friends provides a problem for parents, who often want their children to identify as Ghanaians. Identification is especially problematic if one of the parents is not Ghanaian; it is easier to use Ghanaian languages and customs in the home if both parents are Ghanaian. The London Ghanaian Parents' Association provides weekly classes in language and culture; there is also a Ga Language School, with classes every two weeks. A Ghanaian 'village', Aklowa, has been established in the Hertfordshire countryside to teach school children (British as well as Ghanaians) about Ghanaian music and food. It is often thought important for children to spend time at home, learning to know their relatives, language and culture. They may go home only for holidays, but many spend at least some of their school years there. Fostering is a well-established custom in Ghana, so there is no stigma in growing up away from one's parents. Placing children with grandparents, aunts or uncles can help student parents by relieving them of the necessity of finding and paying foster parents abroad. It is also safer; the children become firmly Ghanaian. There have been several court cases in Britain when long-term foster parents tried to adopt African children rather than allowing them to rejoin their parents. Children who grow up abroad find it hard to settle if suddenly transferred to a totally new culture when their parents return home. The Madina census included children born in the USA, Nigeria and Indonesia. Some had returned with their parents, but others were being fostered by grandparents. How well children settle into this arrangement depends on their age at arrival, the economic and social position of the person who fosters them, the size of

52. Rev. Ben Tettey, personal communication.
their parents' economic contribution and their own personality. Many children settle well into what is a fairly common social position; others are neglected and/or become delinquents.

Conclusions

The Ghanaian diaspora is wide-reaching and probably growing, in spite of European regulations designed to make it more difficult. Following the pattern of many small European countries in the last century and the Philippines today, Ghanaians are taking up opportunities in various African countries, Europe, North America and further afield to improve their standard of living, achieve success in local terms and support their families and communities. There is a widely-acknowledged brain drain of well-qualified professionals who find that the Ghanaian economy is too poor to provide adequately for their needs, but many skilled workers and school leavers also try their luck abroad.

The short and long term effects of the loss of large numbers of well-qualified people need further study. Like the Philippines, Ghana is producing more specialists in many fields than it can afford and needs the remittances of emigrants for further development. Ghana still has considerable local expertise, but foreign consultants are sometimes preferred because it is easier to ignore or deviate from the recommendations of someone who is thought to be ignorant of local conditions.

Emigrants are building on a long history of movement within the West African region, where boundaries were easily crossed without formal papers, to work as farmers or in the informal sector. Today's emigrants use family and hometown contacts to get the help they need. With 10 to 20 per cent of Ghanaian citizens abroad, this is a mass movement, not limited to the well-educated. Large numbers of less qualified young people dream of the day when they can afford to try their luck, and are willing to endure hard times in better-off countries rather than face unemployment, small-scale farming or bare subsistence in the informal sector at home. A major complaint of recent emigrants to ECOWAS countries is that conditions are no better than at home; emigrants want economic rewards, not just to see the world.

The expanding educational system will ensure that Ghana continues to produce more educated people than she can employ, but public demand makes it impossible to cut secondary or higher education down to anticipated need (even if this could be accurately forecast). This is not just a question of 'the wrong education'. The technical training now required as part of junior secondary schooling will not handle the problem. School leavers are flexible and learn quickly; there are just not enough jobs and not enough farm land, and wages are too low for the cost of living. It is significant that northerners, who on average have less
education and are considerably poorer than southerners, are less likely to emigrate. Southerners’ higher aspirations are fuelled by educational success and contacts with kin abroad.

The destination of emigrants varies with gender, education and contacts. The least educated go mainly to ECOWAS countries, though there is a steady traffic in young women to serve in bars and clubs in European capitals. Other emigrants may also be exploited because they lack official papers, but Ghanaians also exploit gaps in immigration controls. As the diaspora spreads, contact networks will expand opportunities for the next generation to work abroad. Women travel less far and earn less profit from emigrating, but this must be seen in the context of their limited opportunities at home.

Though there are many hardships to overcome, the returns to emigration are generally positive. Emigrants send less money than their parents and relatives would like, but they can be called on in emergencies and a small amount of foreign exchange goes a long way in Ghana, where $1 is worth over C1,000. Remittances and investments in land and housing make an important contribution to their families and communities. Returnees frequently bring home both capital and skills, which are beneficial to their careers and to national development. Their absence probably lessens unemployment at home. They are productive members of the labour force abroad and most go home to retire, so elderly Ghanaians are not a drain on the resources of their hosts.

Immigration regulations are being tightened in many countries. This is primarily designed to stop large-scale movement of under-qualified people and refugees from ‘developing’ countries. Many industrial countries are also over-producing graduates and professionals, who do not want competition from immigrants. Thus, future cohorts of Ghanaians may find it much harder to emigrate, even though they are better educated than the present generation. Many will use permeable borders and contacts to evade the regulations, at least for a few years. They can arrive on a visitors’ visa and survive without a work permit. Since most Ghanaians intend to return home, they are less of a threat than emigrants from countries where permanent settlement abroad is more common. They will not need welfare services in old age, and their pensions will go much further in Ghana.

Industrialised countries obviously cannot take in unlimited numbers of the world’s poor, but there cannot be international mobility of capital and a stop to the international migration of labour. More affluent countries could make a considerable contribution to world development by more open immigration policies. Permits for temporary residence and employment would satisfy much of this demand, to the benefit of both sides. Attempting to outlaw immigration, while politically popular in countries
with economies in recession, merely drives emigrants underground and undermines minimum wages. A few years abroad can up-grade an individual's ability to handle change and provide a basis for successful business or professional practice at home; while abroad, their remittances are probably as useful for local development as inter-governmental aid. Less aid might be needed, and less debt accumulated, if immigrants from countries such as Ghana, legally admitted and permitted to work, are allowed their time abroad.