Africa - Israel - Africa Return-migration experiences of African labour migrants

GALIA SABAR*

Abstract

This paper analyses homecoming experiences of African labour migrants who lived in Israel and returned home. Using qualitative research methodologies, I discerned what factors - material and non-material - determine the relative success of the return process. Focusing on these factors' effects, I offer a new understanding of labour migrants' homecoming experiences: those who are "content," "readjusting," or "lost. Following Ulrich Beck's (2006) analysis of cosmopolitanism, I suggest that these categories portray significant new life spaces that are neither what they left nor what they came from, and are dynamic, fragile, and constantly changing. In some cases the influence of economic assets on the returned migrants' homecoming experience was indeed crucial, in many other cases the challenges of reconnecting oneself with home, family, and existing social norms and customs was much more influential on their homecoming experience including on their sense of well-being. Furthermore, some of the non-material goods such as individualization, personal responsibility, and long-term planning proved useful, others such as trust, particularly in relation to family, were detrimental.

Keywords: African labour migrants, return process, homecoming, Israel.

Introduction

> *Living in Israel enabled me to have a fresh look on systems of governance, on education. In this manner, Israel is a well-organized country... there are some difficulties… but it's organized. Here there is balagan [Hebrew for chaos]. Even taking a loan from the bank is difficult because it's corrupted... After years in Israel you become smarter, you see how things should be done but you also become more gentle and when you return – they abuse you, they cheat you because they think you are weak… In Ghana you have no chance, unless you are the son of some famous man or a minister's brother.*
>
> *(Naana Hooldbrook, Cape Coast, Ghana 2005).*[1]

Naana Hooldbrook lived eighteen years in Israel. Like most African labour migrants, he made his living as a cleaner, despite holding a bachelor's degree in chemistry. During this period, Naana took on several leadership roles in the African labour migrants' community, most notably as founder and president of the "African Workers' Union" (AWU). Due to restrictions imposed on non-Jewish migration to Israel, throughout his stay in the country his – as well

* Galia Sabar is the Chair of African Studies at Tel Aviv University, Israel.
E-mail: gsafrica@post.tau.ac.il.

[1] All names with * are pseudonyms. Some of the interviewees, mainly those who held official roles in Israel within their own communities, specifically asked that their full name appear. I have respected their request.

as all other African labour migrants' – status remained illegal, thus preventing him from visiting his home.[2] In 2004 he was deported to Ghana. There, the skills he had acquired in Israel proved useless. His family members, who had grown used to the regular income that he sent them, took his small savings and deserted him. The most prominent leader of the African migrants in Israel, the "almighty Naana," became a *boga loser*, a pejorative title given to those whose immigration experience has proved a failure.[3]

Naana was one of many African labour migrants who began arriving in Israel in the early 1990s as an outcome of larger geo-political events.[4] Initially, most were men, but gradually relatives and friends joined them.[5] Almost all entered the country on tourist or pilgrim visas, and by overstaying and working, became illegal. As such, regardless of education levels, all worked menial jobs in households and restaurants.[6]

In spite of their illegal status, the migrants managed to create communities that served as social, economic, and psychological anchors.[7] At the heart of these communities were independent African churches that offered a complex of religious, social, educational, and emotional services (Sabar 2004). In early 2000 there were about 20,000 African men, women, and children.[8] However, in the beginning of 2002, following massive deportation of non-documented migrant labourers including Africans, thousands returned home, leaving behind a few hundreds, mostly single mothers and their children. Before this

[2] Although a democracy, Israel has a strict labour-migration policy more comparable to that of the Gulf states and countries in Southeast Asia than to prevailing regulations in most Western countries. Israel does not allow residence without a work permit, has severe restrictions on right of family reunification, and does not guarantee automatic access to housing, social benefits, or medical care. See Kemp 2000, 2004; Rosenhek 1999.

[3] The term *Boga* seems to be Pidgin Twi for the city Hamburg in Germany, one of the early and major destinations for Ghanaian migrants. Over the years it became a generic term for all migrants who have returned home.

[4] For a detailed analysis of the origins of international labour migration to Israel see: Rosenhek 1999, 2007; Willen 2007.

[5] The earliest African migrants came from Nigeria, Ghana, The Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and were followed by South Africans and others. Since 2006 over 60,000 Africans, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea, have migrated to Israel seeking asylum. Their story is beyond the scope of the present article.

[6] Occupying jobs considered socially inferior is not exclusively typical of labour migrants in Israel; nevertheless their hourly wages were relatively high. From 1990-1995, they earned between $4-6 an hour; from 1996-2000, $7-9 per hour; and from 2000-2005, $9-11 per hour. This hourly payment was always almost twice the minimum wage (Sabar 2008: 146).

[7] On community structures and major organizations see: Harel 2005; Kemp 2000, 2004; Sabar 2004; Kanari 2005.

[8] As almost all had no legal papers, there are no official numbers. Data provided here are based on AWU document, local African churches, as well as by members of *MESILAH*, the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa municipality migrant labourer aid and information centre.

[9] According to the Israeli Bureau of Statistics 50% of African labour migrants saved ₪300 per month. 34% saved between ₪300-500 per month and 17% saved more. Between Jan 1999 - June 2000, for example, 40% of them sent up to $1000, 17% sent between $1000-1200, 25% sent between $2000-3000 and 16% managed to send over $3000 (Israel Bureau of Statistics Annual reports 1999-2000; Sabar 2008: 146).

deportation process, most African migrant labourers sent home between $200-300 per month as well as containers of goods such as electronic appliances[9]; after 2002, these economic remittances were drastically reduced.

Although African labour migration to Israel has been the focus of several studies in the past two decades (Kemp 2000, 2004; Kanari 2005; Sabar 2004; Schnell 2007), only one studies the full migration cycle, from life in Israel to the return to countries of origin (Sabar 2008). Following other researchers who have focused on social remittances within the process of return migration (Baldassar 2001; de Haas 2006; Duval 2004; Lamont and Small 2008; Levitt 1998; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011; Newland 2007), I too shall analyse the homecoming experience with special emphasis on social remittances, what I also refer to here as "non-material" assets.[10]

Data was collected through qualitative research methodologies and analysed using the constant comparative method. This enabled me to discern what factors determine the relative success of the return process focusing on non-material assets, mainly values, ideas, ways of life, and social networks and their effects on the migrants as well as on their families and friends.[11] All those interviewed were asked similar questions regarding two major foci: a retrospective look at their experiences as labour migrants in Israel and an examination of their homecoming, from their daily routine to their feelings and aspirations. I inquired about the insights they had gained while living and working in Israel and in what ways, if at all, they had changed. I tried to examine how these non-material assets affect, for better or for worse, migrants' trajectories of social inclusion/exclusion processes back home. Furthermore, in an attempt to better understand the term "home," I asked to whom and to what they had returned, and how their non-material assets have interacted with the structure of opportunities they have encountered and with other significant variables. Note that unlike many other labour migrants in the west, African labour migrants in Israel were not able to perform what others have termed "return visits" (Baldassar 2001; 2007; Duval ; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves

[10] My analysis draws on Peggy Levitt's concept of "social remittance," first coined in 1998 and subsequently in *The Transnational Villagers* (2001), where she calls attention to the fact that in addition to money, migrants export ideas and behaviours back to their sending communities. She observed four types of social remittance: norms, practices, identities and social capital.

[11] The findings presented here draw on fifteen years of research on African labour migrants in Israel, and a more recent study in West Africa among returning labour migrants (Sabar 2008). The major goal was to explain and reflect how their social world works as they explain it through those cultural tools with which they interpret reality and locate themselves within it. Hence, long-term field study of their homecoming experience conducted in West Africa included fifty in-depth interviews, as well as hundreds of hours of participant observation. It should be noted that I had previously known most interviewees in Israel maintained ties with some of them, and met very few of them for the first time. Due to space limitations only small fractions of the data will be presented here. The data collected was carefully analysed using the Constant Comparative Method (Elor 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Hence, the long-term field research based on several qualitative research methodologies and the analysis method used enabled me not just to reflect the migrants' subjective self-perception but also to offer broader understanding and highlight new understandings.

2011) due to their illegal status. Hence their ways of facilitating relationships that may be meaningful upon their permanent return as well as their knowledge of the home they left differ from those explored in most other studies of social remittances.[12]

Rethinking the return-home experience

> *We are all bogas… people can see immediately we are bogas…We walk and talk differently, we even dress differently…we, the Israeli bogas, even look differently than German bogas or Italians… you expect from bogas to be rich, to behave in a different way… to have a nice car, big house and a good business… The worse fate is for those who return with no money. Then they are called boga loser… people will run after them and say: boga loser, boga loser… the worse is the looks people give you… They look badly and behind your back say: "this is a boga loser… He failed."… It is better to die then return as a boga loser. (Charity, Accra, Ghana, 2005)*

Charity, 34, lived and worked in Israel for five years until her deportation in 2003. In Israel, she studied computer programming and theology, driven by her dream to establish a congregation in Ghana or America.[13] Elsewhere I have analysed the process whereby migration had enhanced a process of individualization, i.e. reinforced her desire to navigate her own life and enabled her greater economic autonomy vis-à-vis her family back home (Sabar 2007). Even her unmarried status was justified in terms of freedom granted thanks to the distance from her family.

Deportation, though expected, found her unprepared. Back in Ghana, she resumed living in the family compound, losing her scant savings in a "loan" to a family member that was never to be paid back. A year after her return, I found her still searching, admitting she had not yet managed to realize any of her goals. It was clear that returning to Ghana with limited economic resources, having sacrificed her savings to family loyalty, was the main source of her agony. Implicitly, however, it seemed that her dead-end feelings stemmed from her realization that her personal and social development in Israel had been transformed from an asset to a deadweight and even a detriment upon return. She feared family members' jealousy and her social depiction as a *boga loser*, which to her was an unbearable stigma.

Recently much has been published on African labour migrants who returned home either voluntarily or by force (Ammassari & Black 2001; Anarfi & Jagare 2005; DeVreyer et al. 2008; Gubert & Nordman 2008; Mezger 2008;

[12] On return visits and their effect on social remittances and the homecoming experience see, for example, Arowolo, 2000; Baldassar 2001, 2007; Duval 2007; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011.

[13] In the late 1990s, computer programming courses became popular with many African labor migrants. Most courses lasted between 3-8 months with one or two meetings per week. Theology training, however, was offered mainly in Jerusalem and demanded higher levels of commitment, between one and two years. Most Africans who opted to learn theology and be trained as priests choose Pentecostal training programs.

Mezger & Beauchemin 2010; Owusu 2000; Tiemoko 2003, 2004; Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2008). Some studies refer to returning migrants as agents of change in traditional societies; however, many still focus on narrowly defined economic factors. Most existing research on remittances and their effect on economic processes claim that although the sums remitted are large, their contribution to the development of macroeconomic processes is subsidiary. This is because receivers invest most of the money in social events such as weddings and funerals, or in covering their family's daily expenses—investments labelled by most economists as non-productive and non-developmental (Adler 1985; Hermele 1997; Kabki, et al. 2004; Massey & Taylor 200; Mazzucato et. al. 2006; Newland 2007; Thomas-Hope 1985).

Using financial means as the dependent variable, the accepted categorization for many years identified four return types: "failed," "conservative," "retired," and "entrepreneur."[14] Recently, these categories have been re-examined with the understanding that migration processes must be placed within a larger context that seeks to redefine economic developments as well as examine social, cultural, and personal capital and its meanings and implications (Adepoju 2004; Black et al. 2003, 2003a; DeGenova 2002; Duval 2004; Hermandez & Coutin 2006; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011; Sabar 2008; Vertovec 2003). Although these social remittances are harder to define and quantify, they are crucial for expanding our understanding of migration itself as well as the various homecoming trajectories.[15]

Based on the existing understandings of social remittances combined with Davids and Van Houte's (2008) notion of mixed embeddedness as the key concept for analysing the impact of social remittances on return migration, I suggest that there is no one dominant variable that shapes the homecoming experience. Nor is there one that has exerted the greatest influence on returned migrants themselves, their family, and their country of origin.[16] Hence

[14] This basic subdivision follows Francesco Cerase's (1974) model based on Italians who returned from the USA. It was applied—with modifications—to the African context by others, e.g. Black, King, & Tiemoko 2003a; Black & Castaldo 2009. According to them, "failed return" refers to those labour migrants who failed to save money, most of whom were forcibly deported. "Conservative return" designates those who planned their return during their migration period; many of them return following retirement ("retired return") and enjoy a permanent income through pension or savings. The "entrepreneurs" include those who returned home after saving money, learnt a profession and achieved personal progress. This group is usually seen as contributing considerably to economic growth and development. Yet their ability to bring about significant change is hampered by their rather small size compared with the other three groups (McCormick & Wahba 2001; Gubert & Nordman 2008).

[15] Adepoju claims that social networks formed within the context of international migration link migrants and non-migrants together in a complex system of relationships and commitments which in turn promote economic and political development in Africa (2004). For a similar analysis included in a study of migrants of Congolese origin, see Goldschmidt 2004.

[16] Davids and Van Houte study is based on several micro studies that have followed mainly Dutch returnees to their countries of origin and were carried out in diverse contexts as Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guinea and Suriname. Their main aim was to explore how returnees

the conceptual framework of this study of return migration was based on identifying a mix of material and non-material assets brought back by the migrants. This load determines the individual's ability to relocate him or herself and feel at home. For this reason I offer a different understanding of labour migrants' homecoming experiences: those who are "content," "readjusting," or "lost." For the "content" migrants, the Israeli "cargo" proved to be an asset, providing self-confidence and impetus for change. For the "readjusters," it offered a sense of potential that they did not yet know how to utilize. For the "lost," it served as a burden and barrier to social reintegration.[17]

Findings

The contented

Richard*, a 56 year-old contractor and owner of a building materials shop in Kumasi, migrated to Israel in 1987. Over twelve years, he helped eight members of his family come to Israel, including his wife. Following the change in Israeli attitude towards labour migrants, and spurred by his increasing longing for his family, he returned to Ghana on his own initiative.

Throughout their stay in Israel, Richard and his wife sent money back home, mainly to support their children and their extended family, but also to finance their house, which Richard's brother built for them. Yet Richard established his business only upon his return, using financial savings and skills acquired while working for an Israeli construction company:

> *In Israel I learned how to plan and how to save… I'm not sure that here people don't do it but when I left, I never had enough money to save. At the time I did not know the concept of planning and saving. … now I use it all the time to run my business and also to manage my life. ... Israelis are excellent businessmen; they know how to make money… to keep it and spend it right… they don't just brag and spend like Africans… I know I learned this in Israel… (Kumasi, Ghana 2005)*

Richard's story, then, represents in his mind a successful migration experience as well as a successful homecoming process. Beyond financial assets, Richard highlights the value of new management skills and new personal and social assets. Against the Ghanaian way of life, which he considers exhibitionistic, wasteful, and short-sighted, he juxtaposes the Israeli model. For him that included time management, long-term planning, saving, diligence, and personal responsibility.

In analysing the reasons for his success, Richard refers to family ties:

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become re-embedded in their contexts of origin, taking into account economic, cultural and social embeddedness and different factors that influence these processes.

[17] It should be noted that the borders between these trajectories were not fixed and the move from one to the other occurred. Nevertheless, in the findings that will be presented, I have tried to reflect – at the specific moment of the research – the migrant's position as he or she has opted to place him or herself.

You have to understand that the family thinks that when you go abroad you make a lot of money … They think that if I send $1000, it is OK if they spend it on clothes or on a funeral and not do what I asked. They think I'll send more… they don't understand how hard we work… they usually don't do it [i.e. spend the money] because they are bad but they feel that because they assisted us to travel - they deserve this money… some families are better and others are terrible… I know some families who ate all the money and when [the migrants] returned they had nothing… It is a disaster to return with no money... People say you are a failure… you have no life.

Although Richard has been able to rely on his family, he is well aware of the downside of kinship. This awareness leads him to keep a safe distance from his extended family, to be suspicious and cautious and, above all, to maintain individual discretion: "I opened my business only when I came back. I didn't let anyone else do it for me because I didn't trust anyone... I wanted to do my own similarly to what I had seen in Israel." He regarded himself as solely responsible for his money, actions, and future.

Richard's ambivalent attitude towards his extended family is not unique. Most people interviewed in Israel and back home described complex relations with their families, who could be helpful, supportive and enlivening while simultaneously exploitative, ungrateful and oppressive.[18] This complexity can be seen when Richard mentions issues of trust and relates it to his personal growth from Africa to Israel and back:

… they [the Israelis] all gave me keys to their homes, they trusted me. This is a good feeling… I learned from Israelis to trust people. Here it is so different; you don't trust people, even not your family…

Although Richard cherishes the trust he was given in Israel, he trusts no one back home. His attitude towards his countrymen, both as a migrant living in Israel and as a successful "*boga*" in Ghana, therefore reflects his individuation through an anti-congregational prism.

Readjusting

Edu: "I can no longer live the way I used to live"*

Edu and his wife were in their early 40s when, in 2004, they were deported to Ghana after eight years in Israel. Like others, they worked in house cleaning, though Edu, who studied video-editing and photography in Israel, also worked as a photographer. Upon return, they rented a house in Accra, where Edu tried to establish a video-editing business. A year later, Edu defined himself as "still observing" their new situation, asking for advice, and weighing his

[18] On the dual nature of family ties with special emphasis on the "dark side of kinship" within migration studies, see: Geschiere, 1997 and Geschiere and Francis, 1998; Sabar 2010. In relation to Italian migration to Australia, see: Baldassar 2001, 2007.

next steps carefully:

> *Sometimes, after many years abroad, you change and you think that others have also changed… Many Ghanaians returned and behaved like Israelis… they trusted people, they believed what people told them…they crashed, they were destroyed. People cheated them… you need to get back into the system very slowly. To learn what has changed... To look around, not to do things too soon (Accra, 2005).*

Edu's "tool kit" – his term – expanded during his stay in Israel, causing a change of attitude towards time, work, money and life-style priorities. Similar findings were presented by P. Levitt & Lamba-Nieves (2011). According to them, living away from home transforms migrants' general attitude and 'vision' in several ways or as their informants called: their new 'outlook' on life.[19] They claim that what people wanted for themselves and the ways to achieve it shifted dramatically.

It is clear that Edu's new perspectives, based on a new code of self-knowledge and pragmatism, are an outcome of his migration experience. When talking about deportation – the most significant experience to forced returnees – Edu refused to equate deportation with failure, asserting that doing so was an excuse for returnees' lack of planning, reckless spending, and distorted priorities, as well as sheer naïveté:

> *Some people thought that life is full of flowers. They are people who did not plan. They come from poor families and when they made money… they just wasted it. They did not think of the future. Deportation for them meant a huge failure. If you work in Israel for three years you can save enough money to build something small when you go back… some Ghanaians came back after many years with money and ideas. Some are successful… but those who sent their money home or put their money in building a house and did not think of a business or a new profession… they failed.*

Edu's new criteria for success are most clearly demonstrated in his attitude towards house construction, considered by most returning migrants and their families as the main mark of success.[20] Edu admitted that he did not want, and, in fact, was no longer able to live in the family home. Still, he strongly criticized returned migrants' social expectations: "first to build a big house, then to buy a car and also to get lots and lots of shining golden jewellery." He repeatedly referred to the sad fate of people who fell into this trap, ran out of money, and found themselves back where they had started.

Edu also juxtaposed his relationship with his extended family to his experience of personal responsibility. Throughout his stay in Israel, he sent money

[19] They quote for example Samuel Sánchez, a 42 year old migrant who says: "people who have been here [in the US] do not have the same mentality. One learns many things here . . . we see the world differently, there is a different culture" (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves 2011: 13).

[20] Tiemoko reports of similar findings regarding African labour migrants who returned home after years in London and Paris. See Tiemoko 2003: 5-6.

home: "This was the right thing to do as family is your safety net." However, unlike many other interviewees, Edu set clear boundaries, which he delineated through his growing awareness that his duties and obligations lay mainly with himself and his nuclear family. Edu, like Richard, is assisted by no one because he trusts no one. Having learnt that trust requires a certain understanding, Edu sees no contradiction between his mistrust of his family and his conception of himself as a person who has become more honest and loyal following exposure to trustful relationships: "Around here… it will take a long time for people to change the way they are thinking." His fiscal assets enabled him to set up his business and rent a house; however, money alone was not enough to be successful. Edu's migrant experience reinforced his independence and induced the realization that one is rewarded according to actions.

The Lost

Naana Hooldbrook: "I feel trapped"

Naana's story opens a window on a group of returned migrants whom I term "the lost." These include people who returned home to a familial, social, and personal void. Their new values and insights became irrelevant, or worse, a heavy load. Naana openly reveals the contradictory concepts and forces at war inside him that place him in a liminal state, feeling neither here nor there and deserted. As one who had left Ghana "in order to escape the vicious circle of poverty," returning did not just mean starting over, but rather sinking into a "terrible situation where it is impossible to survive":

> *I knew it would be hard to go back. I heard from others who returned before me... but I still made big mistakes in Israel... Instead of thinking about my own future, I thought about my family back home... I come from a very poor family so I send all my money to them. When I returned they were very angry and left me… Instead of sending them money all the time I should have thought more about myself and keep some with me… My extended family is very poor and still depends on me... We are like people who are hanged on a fence together. If one of us wants to move he needs to move all the others with him – otherwise he will not be able to move or he will be choked to death…*

Similar to other researchers' findings regarding the decisive role played by the African family in both migration and return processes (Black et al. 2003a; Tiemoko 2004**)**, many of my interviews also demonstrated that families were the main actor, though a negative one, in return migrants' lives. Charity speaks of the huge "loan" she gave her relative and the expectations of her. Edu and Richard speak about the walls they were forced to erect between themselves and their families' demands. Rejected by the relatives he had supported for years, Naana views both family and society as oppressive, opposing any attempt at enterprise and conspiring against him.

Naana's complaints against extended family and Ghanaian society as a whole are linked with his criticism of the state. The state is a corrupt exploita-

tive body that does not cater to citizens' needs. Displaying a combination of disgust, anger, and helplessness, he draws a picture of an unbridgeable gap between his acquired "Israeli" skills and Ghanaian realities. Although the speedy diminution of his savings is a major obstacle, it seems less significant for him than the loss of his human and social capital. His Israeli experiences have turned him into a delicate person, unable to cope where delicacy is considered a weakness.

Naana, like others, overtly criticized the suffocating dependence patterns inherent within his extended family and agreed with Charity's statement that "you have to separate yourself in order to succeed." Many explicitly revolted against social constraints and implicitly aimed for self-fulfilment while praising life modalities that are based on modernity. And yet, much of their daily conduct and their decision-making processes were more complex and combined different, sometimes even contradictory, modalities of thought. It was clear that many had difficulties in resolving these divergent social attitudes.

By way of conclusion

Following Ulrich Beck's (2006) analysis of cosmopolitanism, which entails constant crossing of boundaries between different spaces of meanings that are never either/or realities and that must include both the macro (political, economic) and the micro level of identity construction, I suggest that the returning migrants' life stories portray significant new life spaces. Those spaces, which are neither what they left nor what they came from, are dynamic, fragile, and constantly changing. As such, the returning migrants' self-development trajectories are not fixed in time and space and can be transitional, thus turning, for example, the discontented to contented and vice versa.

In many cases in this study, the influence of the economic variable (including savings, source of income, and owning a house or business) on the returned migrants' homecoming experience, especially on their ability to relocate or embed themselves in their old environment and make progress, was indeed crucial. In many other cases, however, the presence or absence of economic capital was minimal compared with the challenges of reconnecting oneself with home, family, and existing social norms and customs. While most returnees had at least a meagre savings, their ability to make use of this savings upon return varied based on their level of prior preparation and on their families' expectations and demands of them.

Returning migrants brought with them a wide variety of other social remittances, some of which proved useful, e.g. individuation, personal responsibility and long-term planning, and others detrimental, such as trust, particularly in relation to family. In this study, none of the interviewees fully trusted their families to do what was best for them, and this created a source of stress and sorrow. Trust, even by those who valued it, is in Ghana a kind of weakness that the returnees could not afford. Richard and Edu, the more financially

successful returnees, attributed some of their success to their caution and ability to create a boundary between themselves and their extended families, whereas Charity and Naana partially attributed their troubles to their inability to create this boundary.

Our findings show that non-migrants appear to judge the "success" of returned migrants almost entirely on their current financial achievements. Thus, the returnees view themselves as money bags; the social skills they developed in Israel appear not to have value, indeed, even to be a burden, unless put towards financial betterment. Naana's carefully cultivated social connections and stature shrivelled upon return; Charity's independence and clarity of purpose disappeared along with her savings. It seems that only from a position of some financial stability and social distance can the returned migrant consider his experience a source of inspiration, a means to challenge what is taken for granted.

Hence, the findings show an implicit relation posed between self-development and individualization within the context of migration. By limiting one's investment in the collective, one can expect a more satisfactory homecoming experience. It should be noted that individualization need not be detrimental to the collective, as arguably if one person can help himself, he can then help others. Thus individualization – in a degree difficult to measure or quantify – can be an essential social remittance.

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