



**BRAIN DRAIN: MIGRATION OF HIGHLY  
QUALIFIED NIGERIANS TO EUROPEAN  
COUNTRIES (1985-2005)**

**BY**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the extent of migration of Nigerian experts and skilled workers to European countries. In this light, it considers some push and pull factors that help to explain the phenomenon. It also elucidates the impacts of the exodus of Nigerian experts to Europe on the Nigerian socio-economic and political conditions since the mid 1980s. Qualitative method was employed for the study, while data were collected from primary and secondary sources which include electronic sources, academic journals, and government documents. It was disclosed that there were some push factors for the migration of skilled workers. These include: political instability, economic crisis as well as social problems since the mid 1980s. In the same vein, there are other pull factors which include: provision of good working conditions, much higher wages in comparison to what they get in Nigeria, flexibility in the immigration policy for experts and skilled workers adopted by host countries as well as colonial and linguistic attachment. Against this backdrop, the policies of the Nigerian government towards addressing the phenomenon were surveyed. Recommendations are therefore provided to regulate if not eradicate the brain drain, which are expected to serve as open doors for more research in this area.

## ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق حول مدي هجرة الخبراء والعمال المهرة النيجيريين إلى أوروبا. وفي هذا الضوء، تتعرض الدراسة لبعض الدوافع والجاذب لشرح هذه الظاهرة. كما أن الدراسة تلقي الضوء علي آثار هجرة العلماء من نيجيريا الي أوروبا منذ منتصف الثمانينات، علي الساحات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية. وتنتهج هذه الدراسة أسلوب البحث الوصفي التحليلي، حيث إنها تجمع البيانات من المصادر الأولية والثانوية التي تشمل المصادر الإلكترونية والمجلات الأكاديمية والوثائق الحكومية. وقد اكتشفت هذه الدراسة الدوافع لهجرة العلماء النيجيريين منها: عدم الاستقرار السياسي والأزمة الاقتصادية فضلا عن المشاكل الاجتماعية منذ منتصف الثمانينات . ومن بين الجواذب التي تعتمدها الدراسة: توفر ظروف جيدة للعمل، والأجور المعقولة في أوروبا، مقارنة بما يحصلون عليه في نيجيريا، ويضاف إلى ذلك، تسهيل قوانين الهجرة في أوروبا خاصة للعلماء المهرة فضلا عن العلاقات الاستعمارية واللغوية بين نيجيريا وبعض البلدان الأوروبية. ومن ناحية أخرى، تناولت هذه الدراسة بعض سياسات حكومة نيجيريا تجاه هجرة الادمغة. وتقدم الدراسة توصيات للتقليل من هجرة الادمغة على الأقل من نيجيريا، ومن المتوقع أن تفتح نتائج الدراسة الابواب لمزيد من البحوث والدراسات في هذا المجال.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Political Science).

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Abdul Wasiu Amoo Isiaq

Signature .....

Date .....

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*This study is dedicated to my parents,  
Alhaji Amoo Isiaka Adebayo, and Mrs. A. Iyabo Amoo Adebayo,  
who have been following my academic endeavours with prayers,  
financial supports and encouragement,  
which enabled me to have a peace of mind during my entire study period.  
They believed in a Chinese proverb which says,  
“If you plan for one year, plant rice. If you plan for ten years, plant trees.  
If you plan for 100 years, educate mankind”.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDC	Least Developed Countries
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
NIDO	Nigerians in Diaspora Organization
NIDOE	Nigerians in Diaspora Organization, Europe
NIIA	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs
NLC	Nigerian Labour Congress
NPC	National Population Commission
NNVS	Nigerian National Volunteer Service
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
DIF	Diaspora Investment Fund
ANPA	Association of Nigerians Physicians in the Americas
NGOs	Non Governmental Organization

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

Migration has become an issue in International Relations, which is based on the movement of people from one place to another. Human societies are not static and have generally been subjected to natural disasters, wars, and traumas which have caused migration, eviction and search for refuge. Societies in any case are varied in their stability or mobility.<sup>1</sup> Migration, both internal and international, is a common feature experienced by both developing and developed countries. So, International migration is the movement of people outside their country of origin (emigration) into another country (immigration). Migration however, has always played an important role in the economic, political and social development of European society and it is a process which, on balance, has proved enriching.<sup>2</sup> International migration of people has always been complex; the world wide picture today reveals millions of people have been displaced for various reasons, including economic crisis and political instability, occasioned by outbreak of war in the country. There are now about 192 million people living outside their place of birth, which is about three per cent of the world's population.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the period between the 1960s and 1970s marked an historical epoch in the history of African countries as a majority of African nations gained political independence. Nigerians, like other citizens of other countries in Africa, travelled to the Western world especially the United Kingdom and the United States of America,

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<sup>1</sup> John A.Jackson, *Migration: Aspect of modern Sociology* (New York: Longman Inc., 1986), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Collinson, *Europe and international migration* (London: Pinter Publishers,1993), 139.

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), <[www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)> (accessed, 28 February, 2009).

for academic purposes, and they were anxious to return home as soon as they finished their studies to contribute to the task of nation building. However, an overwhelming majority of recent Nigerian immigrants traveling or studying abroad (in Europe or America) are more interested in establishing permanent residency in their host countries.

The turning point seems to be the collapse of the petroleum boom in the early 1980s, and the attendant economic hardships faced by Nigerians. Subsequently, Nigerians started seeking employment opportunities in other countries, while many who did not necessarily study outside the country began to leave.<sup>4</sup> Since 1985, which arguably marked the beginning of the economic crisis in Nigeria due to the failure of the economic policy of the then military regime known as structural adjustment programme, Nigeria has witnessed a gradual but consistent high rates of immigration of its citizens to European countries. This resulted in a high rate of brain-drain of Nigerian intellectuals relocating to European countries for greener pasture. The resultant effect of this exodus negatively affects Nigeria's socio-political and economic development.

A major factor which accelerated the mass emigration of Nigerian intellectuals to European countries is that the receiving countries utilized the opportunity by enticing those highly skilled Nigerians with higher wages than what is obtainable in Nigeria. Ironically, among the Nigerian emigrants there are illegal emigrants too, those who remain abroad until they get documents in order to enable them to legalize their residency soon or later regardless of whatever treatment they receive from their unofficial host countries. In other instances, these Nigerian illegal emigrants may

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<sup>4</sup> Chinedum , Nwajiuba, "International migration and livelihoods in Southeastern Nigeria" in *Global Migration Perspectives*, No. 50 (October 2005).

relocate to countries whose resident permits are easier to obtain or await resident or they await deportation which clearly might be their last option. Obviously, the exodus of Nigerians to the West has a negative impact on Nigeria's political, economic and social development.

In 2002, Nigeria joined the International Organization of Migration (IOM) when the government of Nigeria raised migration management to the top of its political agenda, as it has become one of the pressing issues affecting government in and outside Nigeria. IOM Nigeria is working in line with ministries (such as ministry of Foreign Affairs, ministry of Women development, ministry of works and houses ,etc.) and specialized government institutions to build capacity through operational projects and policy dialogue on migration matters as well as to support the achievement of objectives set forth in the new national, regional and international migration agenda.<sup>5</sup> The Nigerian government also considered the migration issue as being very important, given its effect on Nigeria's society and economy. In this regard, a special assistant to the President on Migration and Humanitarian Affairs has been appointed, who has been working closely with some ministries on issues of Migration in order to turn the brain drain into brain gain for Nigeria.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Ever since the exodus of Nigerians to the West in the late 1980s, 90s and early 2000s, Nigeria's socio-economic status has deteriorated to its lowest level. That was because the expertise that primarily constituted the basis for development ideas and discourse are outside the country as a result of wide spread brain drain. Nigeria's socio-political and economic policy formulation and implementation have faced serious setback as

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<sup>5</sup> International Organization for Migration, [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int), (accessed 18 April, 2009).

those in the current helms of affairs are less qualified for handling tasks which require experts. The brain drain challenges capacity building, retention of skilled workers, and sustained growth on the African continent and Nigeria in particular. Unless the phenomenon is effectively addressed, the flight of skilled professionals and academics from Africa, Nigeria inclusive, will severely undermine prospects of development in any African country specifically Nigeria.

The UN Economic Commission for Africa and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that 27,000 Africans left the continent for industrialized countries between 1960 and 1975. During the period 1975 to 1984, the figure rose to 40,000. It was estimated that since 1990 at least 20,000 people left the continent annually.<sup>6</sup> Generally, between 1990 and 2005 the number of international migrants reached almost 191 million which was 3 per cent of the World population<sup>7</sup>, among which Nigerians are included.

There is no doubt that Nigeria has continued to lose some of its great hands in terms of personnel resources and talents to other nations such as European countries.<sup>8</sup> The rate of Nigerian migrants to the western countries in the past two decades has been alarming. In 2003, Nigerian president appointed Moremi Soyinka-Onijala as Special Assistant to the President on Migration and Humanitarian Affairs. Her office has established a technical committee of government ministries and agencies<sup>9</sup>, which

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<sup>6</sup> Gumisai, Mutume, "Reversing Africa's 'brain drain' New initiatives Tap Skills of African Expatriates," in *Africa Recovery*, 17:2 (July 2003), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat, *Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision* (POP/DB/MIG/Rev.2005), database in digital form, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Stella, Odueme, "Lagos Move At Tackling Brain-Drain Syndrome," in *The Independent Nigerian Newspaper*, 4 May, 2009 < [www.independentnigonline.com](http://www.independentnigonline.com) > (accessed, 4 May, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> The committee consists of the Ministries of Finance, Education, Justice, Science and Technology, Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth Matters, Women Affairs, Health, Foreign Affairs. It also includes the following agencies: the central bank of Nigeria, National Commission for Refugees, NAPTIP, National Population Commission, Nigerian Labour Congress, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), National Planning Commission and the National Human Rights Commission.

currently discusses a coherent policy on migration and development, and how to regulate the migration of Nigerians out of the country unnecessarily. This is to ensure that they may fully contribute their quota to the development of Nigeria. Quite incontrovertibly, it beats any discerning mind's imagination how the youths; many of whom are graduates will go to the extent of endangering their lives in the desperate quest to travel abroad with some hiding in luggage aboard ships while others embark on traveling through the desert to Europe after roaming the streets in search of jobs for years without success.

This study aims to study the phenomenon of brain drain in Nigeria by addressing the following questions:

- i. Why an increasing number of Nigerian emigrants decide to become permanent residents of European destinations?
- ii. What are the pull and push factors that led to migration of Nigerians to Europe?
- iii. What have been the implications on Nigeria's socio-economy, technology, socio-political and cultural development since this expatriate exodus to Europe began?
- iv. How would the current democratic dispensation initiate a "comeback – home" program in order to encourage its nationals to bring back their expertise home?

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study are as follow:

- i. To explore the extent of migration from Nigeria to European countries.

- ii. To explain the push and pull factors for Migration of Nigerians to Europe.
- iii. To highlight the political, economic, and social impacts of migration of professional and highly qualified manpower from third world countries to the advanced countries on the national economies of departing countries, taking Nigeria as an example.
- iv. To review policies and reactions of the government of Nigeria pertaining to the brain drain.
- v. To suggest policies which can help alleviate the problem and enhance its benefits to the departing country.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study aims to examine the related and relevant literature whose primary focus is on the implications and consequences of International Migration for both developed and developing countries. Migration is a voluntary movement from one place to another in search of a better life, perhaps through temporary employment or permanent residence in a perceived better-off new country. The perception of the scholars differs over the issue of migration, thus making it imperative to review the relevant and related literatures on this issue and the implication of emigration of high qualified people on emigrating countries.

Shortly after the independence of Nigeria in 1960, Nigerians have been travelling out of the country with pleasure without being compelled or forced as it used to be in the past, apparently because they were trying to acquire knowledge or professions to uplift their country economically, socially and politically. Most Nigerians who traveled to Europe in the 1970s and early 1980s managed to come back to Nigeria and have contributed their own parts economic, social, political value to the

development of the country. Since the middle of the 1980s with the introduction of International Monetary Fund programme (Structural Adjustment Programme) in the country, the situation had drastically changed that travelling out of Nigeria has taken a negative shape.

Therefore, the causes of migration from developing to developed world, or from rural areas to urban areas are different according to time, area and condition. In the Harris-Todaro model, labour migration is modeled in the context of inter-sectoral (rural-urban) wage inequality. Migration decisions are made by rational self-interested individuals looking for higher paid work in urban areas and migration occurs if the economic benefits in terms of expected wages at urban destinations – accounting for risk of initial spell of unemployment – exceed economic costs of moving and of foregone wages at rural origin<sup>10</sup>. Rationality implies that individuals with better education, skills and labour market experience have a comparative advantage in job search at destination labour markets and, therefore, are more likely to migrate.

Louka and Robert, highlight the possible cause of migration. According to them, migration is not solely driven by income disparities between home and destination countries or between urban and rural areas, but instead it is motivated by other factors. Such factors include but are not limited to: geographic proximity and historical links such as common language and colonial ties which explain between 20 and 30 per cent of the variation of bilateral migration flows between Europe and its partners. A small number of developing countries with high low-skilled emigration rates to the EU are indeed characterized by geographic proximity to Europe or

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<sup>10</sup> Lucas, R. E. 'Internal Migration in Developing Countries', in M. Rosenzweig and O. Stark (eds.), *Handbook of Population and Family Economics*, Vol. 1B' (1997). Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishing.

colonial ties.<sup>11</sup> In an historical treatment, McNeill discusses the pivotal role that the geographical movement of human population has played in the process of socio-economic formation and transformation.<sup>12</sup> Men are bound to travel from one place to another individually or in groups, and the exodus of a large population from one place may have severe impact on the receiving country socially and economically.

Samuel P. Huntington, has different views on causes of migration of the Africans from their native countries to the Western countries. He made it clear by affirming an automatic position that Africa has very little to contribute to the constitution of the world, or that its contributions are negative,<sup>13</sup> so they have to migrate to other civilized world in order to meet up with other world and to be productive. Michael S. Teitelbaum and Myron Weiner, agree on the importance of globalization as a causal factor for migration from the developing to developed countries. The World has become borderless by emergence of globalization and citizens of developing countries can not actually handle the situation but to migrate to developed nations. However, they do not consider that other areas of the world could possibly influence Western countries in terms of creating conditions that generate changes in immigration policies.<sup>14</sup>

Ijaz Shafi Gilani, affirms that there are debates on the issue of migration, that those who believe that migration contributes to the welfare of the departing countries, argue that labour migration reduces unemployment, brings much needed foreign

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<sup>11</sup> Louka T. Katseli, Robert E.B. Lucas and Theodora Xenogiani, "Effects of migration on sending countries: what do we know?" International symposium on international Migration and development: population division, department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Secretariat Turin, Italy, 28-30 June 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Nanda R. Shrestha, A structural perspective on labour migration in underdeveloped countries, *Progress in Human Geography*, 12: 2, 179-207 (1988).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel, P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Michael, S. Teitelbaum and Myron Weiner, *Threatened Peoples, Threatened Borders, World Migration, and US Policy* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1995).

exchange and reduces income and social inequalities.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, countries such as Turkey, the Philippines, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Cuba, Barbados, Mexico, El Salvador, and Nicaragua have encouraged international migration as a deliberate approach to development.

For instance, emigration of workers was seen as an instant solution to Turkey's growing unemployment problem and worsening balance-of-payments position. Turkey entered into bilateral labour recruitment agreements with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1961 and with Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1964. The recruitment of workers required a high degree of cooperation between Turkey and the recruiting country. Although the recruiting country and employers had the final say in selection.<sup>16</sup> In addition, recruitment is on selective bases, that those with high qualifications are needed. A prime reason for this according to Russell is that emigration can provide relatively well-paid employment, especially attractive for governments struggling to keep pace with rapid labour force increases.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, it is generally argued that migration of people from one place to another will perhaps have some impacts on either or both sending and receiving countries. The impact of migration on sending countries is unbearable. Katseli, Lucas and Xenogiani made it clear that, migration affects a migrant's home country in a variety of ways. In particular, shocks related to the migration processes include changes in labour supply as well as changes in productivity. Migration processes also induce endogenous behavioural or policy responses as sending countries tend to adjust to ongoing shocks. Both shocks and responses affect labour resource availability and

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<sup>15</sup> Ijaz shafi Gilani, *Citizens slaves guest-workers: the dynamic of labour migration from South Asia* (Islamabad: Pap-Board Printers,1985),61.

<sup>16</sup> Collinson, *Europe and international migration* ,66.

<sup>17</sup> Russell, S. S. "International Migration: Implications for the World Bank" *Journal of International migration*, Number 54, May. (1995).

productivity,<sup>18</sup> because negative shocks in labour supply appear at early stages of migration, when a large number of people, mostly economic and professional migrants, decide to leave their home country to seek employment and better living conditions elsewhere.

Louka, Robert, and Theodora, also note that, migration might even lead to depopulation or more often to massive departure of labour with specific levels and types of skills (e.g. nurses, doctors, teachers, etc) which at least in the short-run may have severe adverse effects on the stock of human capital. These changes in labour supply, induced by migration, constitute the first channel through which migration affects development.<sup>19</sup>

The consequences of labour migration for sending countries have been the subject of much debate as stressed by Ijaz Shafi. Some critics consider it to be extremely harmful, while others argue that large-scale labour migration can stimulate economic growth in both sending and receiving countries. Basically, the debate was broadly focused on three major issues: labour markets, remittances, and social impact.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Louka, Robert and Theodora, comment that if migration is properly managed, it may generate important gains not only for migrants but also for the host and the sending countries. Developing countries in particular may have a lot to gain in terms of growth, investment, human capital accumulation and poverty reduction. To do so, migration and development policies need to become more

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<sup>18</sup> Katseli, Lucas and Xenogiani, Effects of migration on sending countries, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Gilani, *Citizens slaves guest-workers*, 61.

coherent.<sup>21</sup> This idea is more or less in support of the idea of migration as a process to be of benefit for both sending and receiving countries.

Whalley, Walmsley and Winters, draw attention to effects caused by out-migration to the sending countries. They affirm that emigration from a country affects its aggregate income by affecting the skill price and the level of skill. There are a number of mechanisms, first, there is a general-equilibrium effect on the skill price: a reduction in the population because out-migration makes labor more scarce and thus raises the skill price. The more skilled are the out-migrants the greater the amount of aggregate skill reduction and thus the larger the upward effect on the skill price.<sup>22</sup> Thus, migration causes skill shortages in the departing countries, fuels conspicuous consumption without leading to correspondingly higher levels of economic growth, and further exacerbate income inequalities.

Therefore, Chinedum, Bertrain and Chinyere, argue based on the Nigerian case that international migration is economically induced. Specifically, the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the mid-1980s in Nigeria and much of sub-Saharan Africa, with its severe negative consequences for livelihood, is the major stimulant for migration away from sub-Saharan Africa and into the more developed and economically stable countries.<sup>23</sup> The Nigerian situation in the late 70s clearly shows that migrants only travel abroad for academic purposes and travel back to the country as soon as they finished simply because of the good state of the Nigerian economy. The mid-1980s marked depreciation of the country's currency leading to the

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<sup>21</sup> Katseli, Lucas and Xenogiani, Effects of migration on sending countries, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Walmsley, Terrie Louise and L. Alan Winters. Relaxing the Restrictions on the Temporary Movements of Natural Persons: A Simulation Analysis. CEPR *Discussion Paper* No. 3719, January 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Nwajiuba, Chinedum Uzoma, Nwoke, Bertram E B and Nwajiuba, Chinyere Augusta, "Structural Adjustment Programme and Public Health Issues in Relation to Migration: Nigeria", *Palgrave Macmillan Journal*, Volume 50, Number 4, December 2007, 101-105.

poor state of the Nigerian economy. This is one of the major factors explaining migration out of Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> Since that time Nigerians have been migrating to Europe seeking better life and good hope for their future.

In the last 40 years, Mark R. Rosenzweig remarks that there has been a substantial expansion in global trade and capital movements across countries. At the same time, the gap between per-capita incomes in low-income and high-income countries has not closed. New approaches to eradicating global poverty are called for. One policy increasingly on the development agenda is the encouragement of international flows of people from low- to high-income economies. Clearly such migration will improve the economic circumstances of those who move.

An important question is how increased international migration, and of what type, affects incomes, growth and development in underdeveloped countries?<sup>25</sup>

Bade Onimode, points out that the mechanisms of colonial domination and exploitation of Nigeria had very negative designs for Nigeria like other colonized societies. While going for minimum investment for maximum gain, the mechanisms of colonialism in Nigeria centered around the colonial state and economy. They included military conquest and political coercion through British monopoly of the colonial state apparatus, the manipulation of this political power for unequal trade, Capital importation, cultural penetration through Christianity and colonial education as well as dissemination of the British illusion of the colonial epoch.<sup>26</sup> He reiterates the point that colonialism in Nigeria does not only dedicated itself to the creation of a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Mark R. Rosenzweig, consequences of migration for developing countries, United nations expert group meeting on international migration and development population division department of economic and social affairs united nations secretariat New York, 6-8 July 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Bade Onimode, in Julius Omozuanvbo Ihonvbere, *Nigeria: the politics of adjustment & democracy*, (New Jersey: Transaction publisher, 1994),n.p.