

THE CAUSES AND MAGNITUDE OF BRAIN DRAIN IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS WITH A PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO AAU: "GO WEST, YOUNG MAN, (GO)"¹

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1. Introduction

I wonder whether we are not a bit too late to discuss the issue of brain drain at this point in time. I hope therefore we are not engaged in a post-mortem examination of brain drain, but rather at least in posthumous recognition of brain drain as a serious problem. Anyhow, we could still say better late than never and continue the discussion.

A close scrutiny of the literature review reveals, among other things, that brain drain is regarded as a phenomenon with both good and bad aspects. In other words, some consider it as a boon/an advantage and others as a bane/curse (Gosh, preface:1982). Those who regard it as a disadvantage have developed what they call nationalist model of brain drain.

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According to this model, human capital is an indispensable factor to the economic development of Third World Countries, and therefore they (Patkin and others 1968:69) maintain that:

The flow of highly qualified manpower results in the loss of the emigrating country. Hence, the external diseconomies involved in the loss of such people is very great ... the loss of strategic manpower affects education, research and training, infrastructure building, creative talent, present and future technology and the entire intellectual climate of a country, and, creates a growth-retarding backwash effect. The loss of critical manpower that can formulate and influence policies is a serious loss for a developing country.

Therefore, according to the nationalist model, brain drain is regarded as a process retarding income, welfare and growth by taking away the most needed human capital. In fact, proponents of this model strongly advocate that the receiving countries should pay compensation to the Least Developed Countries.

On the other hand, those who subscribe to what is known as the internationalist model (Grubel and Scott, 1966:127-133) regard brain drain as a welfare-income generating mutual process. Therefore, according to them, brain drain is beneficial both for the sending country as well as for the

individual professional. Thus, it is regarded as a blessing in disguise.

Even though critical views have been expressed by others on the two models, nonetheless the writer of this paper is sympathetic towards the nationalist model, and maintains that this model appears to be quite appropriate for the treatment of the subject of brain drain in higher education institutions of Ethiopia. Because a poor country like Ethiopia can ill-afford the brain drain of its professionals.

2. Types and Causes of Brain Drain

Brain drain has been categorised into internal and external. Internal brain drain or brain circulation is the migration of professionals within a country mainly from one organisation or sector to another. Such migration though not as harmful as external brain drain still weakens the capacity of the sector or the institution. External brain drain, however, is the migration of professionals that take place mostly from the Least Developed Countries to the highly industrialised countries of the West.

The causes of brain drain are designated as "Push and Pull" factors (Oteiza 1968:120-134 and Peterson, 1969:288-297). What are known as "Push" factors are those depressing or unattractive factors that exist within the individual country of origin that obliges the individual to immigrate to the highly

industrialised countries. In general, the "Push" factors constitute political instability, political persecution, lack of intellectual freedom, poor working condition, poor salary, lack of better career expectations etc. while on the other hand, the "Pull" factors are those that attract or tempt the individual to emigrate in search of greener pastures. These include political stability, freedom from political persecution, attractive working conditions, high salary, better career expectations etc.

Besides, there are some "Push" factors that appear to be typical of Addis Ababa University. These include unsatisfactory salary scale, and the non-existence of housing accommodation for Ethiopian academic staff. In general, there is dissatisfaction regarding the AAU salary scale. The pay scale to put it mildly is far from being attractive compared to other sectors. The pay differential between the private sector is a major source of frustration and disillusionment. Furthermore, the comparative disadvantage suffered by the Ethiopian staff vis-à-vis their counterparts in other African countries is quite glaring. For instance, according to one source (ASSU, 1997) the Ethiopian academic staff annual pay for a professor in 1997 was about 8 percent of his counterpart in South Africa and 12.5 percent of that of Zimbabwe. Worse still is the existing pay differential between Ethiopian and expatriate staff. For most Ethiopian staff the justification that is usually given by authorities for the pay differential is not only unconvincing but it smacks a discrimination of a sort.

To be frank, it has a dampening impact on the morale of the staff.

Furthermore, it is quite common for a number of other African Universities to provide housing for most of their local academic staff. However, here at Addis Ababa University, it is the exception rather than the rule. It should be noted here that the problem of housing is very acute particularly for the junior staff. That explains their reason why most of them are obsessively preoccupied with building a ground plus one apartment. In addition, as all of us know recently the University has introduced housing subsidy allowance for academic staff with the rank of lecturer and above or equivalent (AVP:2000). Though still a token, it is a welcome development. Unfortunately, however, it has excluded assistant lecturers and graduate assistants from being beneficiaries. Whatever the official line of thinking may have been or whatever the justification for the exclusion, the sum of money to be saved is such a pittance, that it is not worth the loss of the good will of the young academics. After all, we should not lose sight that the future of AAU belongs to the young.

3. The Magnitude of Brain Drain in AAU

During the last twenty years either by omission or commission AAU has been a victim of both internal and external brain

drain. It should be pointed out that getting data regarding external as well as internal brain drain in AAU is hard to come by. There is not as such a systematically kept record. In the absence of such a record what the writer has tried to do is to piece together fragmented data from various sources, the major one being the Personnel Office of the University. Therefore, it has not been possible to present a full picture of brain drain in AAU.

External brain drain in AAU had its genesis during the Derge regime when many Ethiopian academics began to leave the country because of political instability as well as for fear of political persecution. According to one study (Seyoum, 1992) done in the early 1990's out of a total of 135 Ethiopian academic staff who were teaching in the University in the early seventies almost half of them had left the country by the mid-eighties. The finding is supported by the Academic Vice President's annual report of 1983/84 academic year. According to the report 61 percent of the academic staff were juniors. The report goes on to add that more than 300 academic staff members had been sponsored for study leaves, but only 22 or 7 percent returned.

Moreover, according to a press release by the AVP, of the 600 who were sent abroad for further studies in the last 20 years only 200 returned. The report further states that out of the 200 that returned 68 percent left the University to join other organisations. It is not therefore difficult to estimate the big

loss AAU sustained through the years in terms of external brain drain. In general, every faculty, every department had suffered a loss. For instance, in a recent booklet that the Department of Mathematics issued it has listed down the names of 17 of its staff members that it lost. Interestingly enough, all of them hold the doctoral degree, and all of them currently teach in U.S. Universities. What is more tragic and sad than for an institution like AAU to witness the exodus of its best and brightest minds to foreign countries like the U.S. that did not spend a single cent on the education of these academicians?

Lately, AAU has started to suffer also from internal brain drain. The proliferation of NGOs and Private business organisations seem to have offered greener pastures for some who wanted to terminate their contract with AAU. Moreover, with regard to medical doctors the mushrooming of private clinics may have provided lucrative business. In fact, that is what the annual reports of the personnel office indicate. The reports, among other things, list down the names of academic as well as administrative staff members who left the university for various reasons, as shown in the table below.

Academic Staff Members Who Left AAU Between 1985 E.C. and 1992 E.C.*

Year/E.C.	REASON		Total
	Contract Termination	Unknown	
1985-86	9	2	11
1986-87	6	3	9
1987-88	7	9	16
1988-89	Data not available		
1989-90	11	13	24
1990-91	11	12	23
1991-92	12	10	22
	49=46.7%	56=53.3%	105

** Data do not include those who passed away, retired or dismissed*

From the above table, it is possible to report that a total of 105 staff left AAU within a period of six years either by terminating their contract or without giving any reason. However, the report does not include the 42 academic staff members who were summarily dismissed. May be it is because it is a taboo issue. Be that as it may, anyhow, AAU had lost on an average

of 17 instructors per year. In addition, a breakdown in terms of faculties shows that the big losers were medicine (22) followed by Science (19), technology (15) and FBE (13).

The loss from these four faculties account for about 66 percent of the total. Furthermore, out of those who left, those with doctoral degree constituted about 44 percent. This no doubt is no small loss. It was also a loss of the most qualified and the most experienced. It is also worth noting that the exodus was on the increase between 1989 E.C. and 1992 E.C. during which period AAU lost 69 of its staff members in a matter of three years. Therefore, this should be a matter of great concern for all.

4. Concluding Remarks

In the early seventies, during the Biafran conflict, it was said about Nigerians that "If you go to the South Pole you are sure to find a Nigerian cousin." I wonder whether or not today the same can not be said of an Ethiopian cousin.

I hope what I have said so far about brain drain in AAU is not all doom and gloom. Anyhow, I would like to conclude with a note of optimism. At least to minimise the rate of brain drain in AAU does not call for a miracle. What it takes is simply the goodwill of those who are responsible for the existence of AAU as an academic institution. And to those who fell victims of brain drain and living abroad I say 'east or west home is best'.

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I would also like to add that however comfortable life in the West may be, a house is not a home. At the beginning I started with the slogan, "Go West, Young Man (Go)". I would like to end with the slogan, "Come Home, Young Man, (Come)."

In case, however, everything that I said above falls on deaf ears then I have a dream for the future. I have a dream that fifty years from now when AAU celebrates its Diamond Jubilee the problem of brain would have been a thing of the past, for by then educational technology may have replaced the indispensability of the teacher.

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