Psychotherapy and Politics International
Psychother. Politics. Int. 7(2): 95–107 (2009)
Published online 7 April 2009 in Wiley InterScience
(www.interscience.wiley.com) **DOI:** 10.1002/ppi.188

Understanding and Treating African Immigrant Families: New Questions and Strategies*

AUGUSTINE NWOYE, The University of Dodoma, Tanzania

ABSTRACT *In her very important article published in Family Process, Falicov (2007) recognized the need for expanding the dominant Western notions of the family, community and culture and to adopt new theory and treatment considerations for working with transnational immigrants. Unfortunately, her discussion, despite its originality and significance, was largely limited to addressing the problems and challenges faced by well-established immigrants, who present with symptoms precipitated by relational stresses and difficult choices. This article draws attention to another category of immigrants – the Green-Carded African Immigrants in Europe and North America, whose special concerns and problems were left unaccounted for in Falicov's contribution. It aims to broaden and extend the current Western frameworks for understanding and treating the psychological needs and challenges of transnational immigrants. In this regard, it is argued that in addition to such currently existing Western models for working with established immigrants in Europe and North America (Falicov, 2003, 2007), successful work with Green-Carded African immigrants must begin by taking into account their journey motif; their narratives of hope and significance and failed constructions, and the cosmopolitan perspective of these immigrants. The article clarifies these issues, introducing new concepts and strategies for working with African immigrant families in Europe and North America. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: African immigrant families, clinical family practice, journey motive, visa lottery

INTRODUCTION

My initial inspiration for this presentation came from reading a very incisive and perceptive article contributed in the *Sunday Nation* (a weekly newspaper published in Kenya) by one John Makeni, titled 'Chasing greener pastures: mixed tale of Kenyans who won the Green

* A revised version of a sub-plenary address presented at the IFTA World Congress in Porto, Portugal, 26–29 March 2008.

Correspondence to: Professor Augustine Nwoye, Department of Psychology, The University of Dodoma, P.O. Box 259, Dodoma, Tanzania.
Email: muonwoye@yahoo.com.

Card'. The article was intended to uncover hidden contradictions that go with the experience of winning and implementing the American visa lottery. The writer (Makeni, 2007) considered it necessary to institute such a timely discourse influenced by his view that, although the American Green Card visa may appear, on the surface, to be an investment in the right direction, it often turns out to be something of a grave disappointment for many. He offered as a reason for this anomaly the view that, although one can say that the American Green Card promises some relative advantages such as 'allowing the holder to move around and legally work and live in the United States without fear of deportation', and to 'access loans, and after five years can petition for American citizenship', there are some discriminatory conditions that go with it, which tend to nullify its benefits. According to him, among such negative baggage is the idea that: '*a green card holder in the United States cannot work for either state or federal governments – including the civil service and the police. But can join the US military'* (italics added) (p .4).

For Makeni (2007), this aspect of its connotation warrants the need to issue potential immigrants with a warning intended to make them to become more vigilant, as most American visa lottery winners in Africa tend to dream of enjoying a better life in the United States by means of the Green Card.

Makeni (2007) speculates that the basis for the lofty image of the Card and the United States is fuelled by the misleading impression of the nature of life in America circulating in many parts of Africa today. In his view, however, the idea of the United States of America as a land of opportunities where big dreams are realized must be deconstructed and placed side by side with the huge contradictions that in reality tend to go with it.

PSYCHOLOGY OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS: A FOUR-DIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

My presentation is an attempt to follow up on the above views by Makeni (2007). My plan is to generate a four-dimensional perspective for understanding the psychologies and perturbations of the Green Carded African immigrants. Such a four-dimensional framework is proposed to draw attention to the complexities of the inner worlds of these immigrants and to widen the scope in the literature for gaining a proper appreciation of the tensions and challenges that confront African immigrants who come into Europe or the United States, not as students/minors, refugees or asylum seekers, but as so-called 'lucky' beneficiaries of the official government-sponsored visa lottery.

The central aim is 'to open clinicians' eyes' to perspectives they might not consider in the context of bringing therapeutic interventions to African immigrant families. Specifically, I hope to create, in the discussions to follow, a new map to guide us through the inner worlds of the African immigrants in Europe and North America.

In engaging in this process, I plan to clarify each perspective as soon as it is mentioned, as follows:

1. African immigrants and the notion of the journey motif

Under this heading, I wish to highlight that most winners of the American visa lottery do not migrate into the United States because they are the least successful in their home coun-

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

tries. Most of them are graduates and others are known to be moderately successful people in their various life occupations who undertake migration in search of the place of opportunity to contribute something valuable to humankind. Hence their journey motif is driven by a quest for being substantial and the need for self-affirmation and resolution. In particular, they are propelled by the sense of America as an ideal country for rediscovering opportunities for introducing a significant difference in their lives.

This means that their principal urge to migrate essentially derives from an attitude of openness to possibilities of improving their personal significance in the world. In this regard, their characteristic orientation can be sourced from the essential human longing for determination of truth of what the best their lives could amount to, and they search for a place where that self can be realized. Prospective African immigrants, in other words, appear to see their migration, first and foremost, as a kind of investment project for enhancing their lives.

The above comments mean that, for many African immigrants, the American Green Card visa migration does not necessarily mean that those involved do not have a job or house, or car, or landed properties in their home countries. It mainly means that they are driven by the quest for the experience of betterment in their lives. And they seem to be influenced in this spirit, perhaps, as Makeni (2007) speculates, by the ongoing images and beliefs about the US embedded in public conversations in various parts of Africa, promoting the misconception that 'the United States is a place where there are no beggars' (Makeni, 2007, 4), where everyone has a job and a good shelter and other basic necessities, where the sky is the limit for the industrious and the talented and where there is equal opportunity for all. It needs to be mentioned that although it might be alleged that the above asssumptions are based only on one single contribution by Makeni, there are many unwritten accounts circulating in many communities in Africa, all of which tend to support these speculative beliefs captured in Makeni's report.

Operating under the regulative influence of such lofty assumptions as the above, most winners of the Green Card Lottery see no reason to hesitate resigning from their former jobs even as doctors or professors to take up the ones that, they assume, await them in the country of migration. And most of them do not hesitate to sell off their properties/various assets, and engage in further fund-raising exercises targeted at gathering enough money to enable them process their visa.

To further ensure that all is well for the entire process, some of them even go borrowing, promising to pay back as soon as they settle and restart their lives in the United States. Hence, although there is still little research on this, the general trend among people in Africa would tend to suggest that many of the well established members of the population who happen to win the visa lottery, such as teachers, engineers, doctors, nurses, professors/lecturers appear to frame their decisions for the migration under the influence of the idea that when they cross over to the American system (a system they believe is more perfect than the one in their own countries) they should be able to regain placement in their former job positions or to something much better.

These indications suggest that it is the motif of the great upward drive that is at the base of the African immigrants' search for, and embracing of, the American Green Card visa. And their preoccupations for the journey lead to a picture of their beliefs and values that reflects an inner sense of purpose in each of them.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

What is, however, disturbing and puzzling in studying the psychology of the African winners of the American visa lottery is the fact that the data on which they base their inferences about the assumptions and possibilities of improved life in the country of their destination, do not arise from any concrete provisions documented in any section of the advertisement for the visa lottery. They draw their conclusions mainly from the *unsaid* or the *assumed* messages in such advertisements. Hence the impact of isomorphic perception or the tendency for going beyond the information given is seen to influence their decisions in this regard. This is particularly the case when one remembers that the usual procedure (mentioned in Makeni's article) is that after one is notified of having won the visa lottery, the beneficiary is expected to pay a mandatory fee of about $2,000 for processing the visa to enable the winner to effect the relocation. The burden for obtaining the air ticket for the journey also falls on the shoulders of the same winner.

But, perhaps, their grounds for this naivety may lie not only in 'the myth of the glorious America' in public discourse in Africa, but also in their African cultural assumptions regarding the ethics of responsibility of the host to the guest. This requires that the host, in accepting the guest, must be ready to feed, shelter and cater for the guest within an acceptable period of time intended to promote the guest's soft landing experience in the host's country. In the African context, for example, the host is typically required to attend to the basic needs of the guests in this way, before expecting the latter (the guests) to participate subsequently in promoting the economy of the host's household. Hence, there is a proverb among the Igbo of Nigeria the equivalent of which is found in many parts of Africa, that 'after feeding a guest for one or two days, s/he becomes ready to be given the hoe, the next day'.

The problem, however, is that this ethic of host responsibility to the guest involving a short period of 'adoption-lag' into the host's family, taken for granted in African culture and tradition, has no place in the provisions of the American Green Card immigration policy which states that, on arriving into the United States, the immigrant is basically on his or her own and ultimately would require a period of *five years* before applying to become a citizen (Makeni, 2007).

Based on the above considerations, it will therefore, not be far from the truth to speculate that, the journey motif propelling most African immigrants to America, in particular, is erected on a misleading belief that there exists a mutual recognition of ethics of reciprocation of care between the immigrants and the country they have chosen to migrate to, and to serve. In other words, that it is based on naïve assumptions and beliefs right from the beginning.

2. Positive expectations of dividends of migration

Here, the main idea is that all African immigrants that step into Europe or North America by virtue of winning the permanent resident card are persons with great hopes and ambitions, motives and expectations and potential creative growth. They are people who took the decision to migrate to the United States, for example, on the basis of their conscious and unconscious expectations of the United States as a land of opportunities for refurbishing their personal destinies. This means that certain narratives of significance shape and influence the lives of these immigrants. And the existence of such narratives goes to point

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

to the fact that some important inner systems of forces are at the root of their desire for the migration: their interior realities of hopes and aspirations, and expectations of the United States as a place of last resort for the reconstruction and realization of their hitherto broken dreams and lives. In this way, they see their migration in a positive light, armed with the conviction that the move will be decisive in yielding dividends of a comparative advantage in their lives.

Thus for the African immigrants, the Green Card migration is conceived of, essentially, as a movement of gain rather than of loss. Not only that – their relatives and other extended family members happily welcome the migration and construe it as a joint project targeted at promotion of growth and improvement in their lives too. In concrete terms, the great expectation of such relatives is that they should be able to share in the abundance of dollars and other benefits to accrue from such a project.

Based on these positive calculations, the African immigrants depart for the United States and other similar destinations with a sense of the enormous stakes involved. But the crucial question, in each case, becomes the extent to which these longings and aspirations can be satisfied with the benefits of the migration?

3. The problem of failed constructions

The key issue here is that most African immigrants come into the host country embroiled in the above situation only to discover the existence of a great mismatch between their lofty pre-migration aspirations and the reality on the ground. And for those of them caught in this disturbance, the result is depression, destabilization, disorientation and cognitive dissonance; and for some, the agonizing regrets and guilt for investing in the Green Card project in the first place.

According to Makeni (2007), this disabling embarrassment will be experienced by a good number of them. The reason for this, according to him, derives from the fact that the United States is a country that despite the big name it has in Africa, is yet another place 'where everything was not perfect' (p. 4) where one would be 'shocked to learn that there are beggars', where 'there are wooden houses like in Kenya' and where 'there are many Kenyans and other African nationals with green cards that are homeless, unemployed and languishing in US jails for breaking the law' (p. 4).

And yet those, according to Makeni, are among the thousands of fellow immigrants, escaping from broken dreams in various countries, to migrate to a country (the United States) where they thought they would be 'an inch away from poverty – or riches' (Makeni, 2007, 4).

Based on these ironies, Makeni (2007) concludes that although some immigrants with the American Green Card who decided to join the military may have a success story to tell about their life in the United States, for many more others their search for the American dream through the Green Card project must end in disappointment.

The reason for this, according to him, is that when they, the immigrants, do finally arrive, they would immediately discover that the Green Card visa policy is a project intended to serve America and its need to find workers for jobs from which the citizens would shy away or consider as *infra-dig*, such as:

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

- washing dishes in hotels/restaurants;
- cleaning supermarkets at the end of the day;
- serving as night and day guards at various firms and companies and at car parks;
- serving as gatekeepers and home guards at various levels;
- sweeping the streets;
- taking up cleaning jobs at the airports/railways;
- serving as nursing assistants in nursing homes, group homes or hospital, doing menial jobs,
- serving as cab drivers in various cities;
- working as garbage collectors at various levels in the city;
- playing Father Christmas at supermarkets;
- peaking fruits and eggs in various farms, and
- serving in the US army, for those below 35 years of age.

These are the jobs mainly available for African immigrants, some of whom are doctors and other medics of long standing experience who, in finding no appropriate job placement, end up as assistant librarians or assistants in pharmacy stores. Some of the professors among them are denied tenure but recruited as adjunct professors in various institutions.

Of course, the surprising irony of the situation, according to Makeni (2007), is that despite this possible unfortunate state of affairs, which can befall winners of the visa lottery, today more than in the past, millions of people in many parts of Africa continue with their usual high hopes and throng to the United States through the Green Card Visa. Hence, in his view, at the present moment, 'through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, the US State Department offers 50,000 permanent resident visas annually to countries like Kenya that have low rates of immigration to the United States' (Makeni, 2007, 5). By this statistic, Makeni (2007) means to show that thousands of African immigrants every year spend a lot of their efforts and resources, some selling their assets to get the mandatory fee of Ksh 100,000 (nearly $2,000) for processing a single visa to relocate to a place where most of them are bound to meet with untold hardships.

Furthermore, and perhaps the most perplexing, is that 'despite being told it is not so, many of those interviewed for Makeni's newspaper story insist on believing that if they win a green card, the US government will automatically give them an air ticket, accommodation and a guaranteed job' (Makeni, 2007, 5). But the United States Consul General in Nairobi, Mr Richard Appleton, who (Makeni, 2007) had contacted, clearly states that this image is a misconception. In his own words: 'None of that is true. There may be some non-governmental programmes that help new immigrants and even some state and local government programmes which assist the lodging and job identification, but new immigrants are largely on their own' (p. 5).

Based on such a bleak view of things, it becomes easy to see why for many of these immigrants, the Green Card visa will end up becoming a source of frustration rather than satisfaction *vis-à-vis* their earlier grand calculations for undertaking the migration.

4. The challenge of transnational demands and commitments

Here, I wish to note that over and above the possible negative outcomes for the immigrants just highlighted, there are others they face arising from the burden of family fragmentation

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

in which they are embroiled. In this connection, the tension they must bear is that even while out there, they still are disturbed by a sense of invisible loyalties for maintaining their two homes, one in the host country and the other (often consisting of parents, siblings, relatives, and in-laws) left behind in their home countries.

Some of the immigrants, in particular, suffer the guilt of the unwise decision they made to leave some of their nuclear family members (such as wives and children) behind, planning to come back for them within the shortest time possible, but which plan must now remain in abeyance almost indefinitely. For others, the distress is not grounded on the wrong decision to migrate. What nags them is the thought of the anger of relatives from whom they had borrowed money they cannot repay as pledged so soon after their migration. Before they migrated they had anticipated that within a year or two of arrival they would be able to clear these debts. But for a good number of them, this time span would not be sufficient to yield the dividends to make the repayments possible. The result is guilt persecution, shame persecution, belittled self-esteem and enormous embarrassment and humiliation for those concerned.

On the other hand, for many others, the crises of what to tell relatives who are expecting immediate financial gains and support from the 'deal' of migration is part of the stress to endure. The negative implication of this practice is to put pressure on African immigrants to internalize the regulative belief that they carry the destinies and welfare and survival of a lot of their transnational relatives on their own shoulders. But the main burden or challenge in this comes not when the wealth with which to service it is available. It is only a danger when, like in the case of some African immigrants, the conditions of possibility in the host country for meeting these transnational expectations and obligations are not there.

The above, then, are the kinds of inner tensions and frustrations that most of the Green Carded African immigrants carry along with them in their day-to-day lives in their country of migration. Having examined them, we will next be concerned with an attempt to deconstruct some of the key Western perspectives that currently exist for understanding and working with African immigrants in Europe and North America found scattered in Western journals. The paper will conclude with recommendations highlighting new emphases and strategies that need to be introduced into the family therapy literature for understanding and working with African immigrant families in Europe and North America.

EXISTING WESTERN MODELS OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF IMMIGRANTS

Three major theoretical frameworks often drawn upon in the Western literature to explain the psychological task of migration will be reviewed. They are identified for closer examination in this discussion based on their popularity and high frequency of representation in the related literature. They include:

- the attachment and loss theory credited to Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980);
- the psychoanalytic theory of migration (Grinberg and Grinberg, 1989; Akbar, 1995, 1999a, b); and
- the refugee trauma framework (Papadopoulos, 2001; Sveaass and Reichelt, 2001).

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

We will review them in turn to clarify their claims and to show why they do not fully fit as comprehensive models of explanation for understanding the psychology and challenges of African immigrants and their families.

THE ATTACHMENT AND LOSS THEORY

Bowlby, the originator of this framework, explains how instinctive behaviour leads to the development of an emotional attachment between the mother and child, providing an understanding of the response the child makes if the bond between mother and child is broken or interfered with in some way. This bond, according to him, is mediated by specific behaviour patterns – not simply by the mother's role in satisfying the infant's physiological needs (Joffe and Vaughan, 1982).

Furthermore, according to Bowlby, the bond serves as a model for social interactions that form the basis of the child's sense of self, which persists into adulthood. The original theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1980), and its modern counterparts (Fisher, 1989; Ward, 2001; Ward and Styles, 2007) emphasize the importance of early experiences in determining the stability and degree of successful adjustment of the self in new places.

Extending the theory to the theme of physical and psychological impacts of being exposed to a new and often strange place, Garza-Guerrero (1974) asserts that 'as a result of migration a person may experience multiple loss, which includes loss of family, friendships, language, cultural heritage, and, importantly… *familiar environment*' *(*quoted in Ward and Styles, 2007, 319*)*. Hence to survive the impact of migration, the attachment framework proposes that the migrant must generate a new identity to facilitate living in the new culture.

What is argued in this presentation, contrary to the above perspective, is that grief processes in migration for the African immigrants are not inevitable (Nwoye, 2005). They occur only in situations where the migrants failed to confirm their expectations of the new host environment as more containing and a means of personal enhancement in their lives.

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC MODEL

Some psychoanalytic writers have made their own contributions in the context of explaining the psychological task of migration (Blos, 1962, 1967; Mirsky and Kaushinsky, 1989; Mirsky, 1990; Akhtar, 1994, 1999a, b; and Mirsky and Peretz, 2006). Most of them tend to liken the psychological meaning of the native culture as comparable to that of the primary caretaker serving as the repository of childhood attachments and internal parental representation. Understood in this way, the experience of migration, in their view, posed the task of mourning for comforting familiar objects (human and cultural) left behind in the course of the migration.

Akhtar (1994, 1999a, b), a major contributor in this regard, further introduced the idea that migration entailed a 'third individuation', as it posed the challenge of separation-individuation not unlike that during the first three years of life and again in adolescence (Blos, 1962, 1967).

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

The above trends suggest that, for the psychoanalytic writers, the psychological task of migration is essentially an individual (migrant's) responsibility. In such a model the host country has no responsibility or contributions to make to facilitate such a process.

What is proposed in this paper is that the host, the country of destination for the migrants, owes to the latter some soft landing services (at least temporary lodging and other services and structures) and a short adoption-lag (the probation period) within which the immigrant can apply for citizenship status and be integrated into the normal workforce of the host country. It is argued that it is the absence of these factors that instigates the spirit of failed constructions, frustration, despondency and depression on the part of the migrants.

THE REFUGEE TRAUMA FRAMEWORK

Much has been written in the Western literature on the notion of the 'refugee trauma' (Papadopoulos, and Hildebrand, 1997; Papadopoulos, 1999, 2000b, 2001b, 2007; Sveaas and Reichelt, 2001) and some Western professional workers have tended to approach African immigrants' issues in the tinted and deficit glasses of that discourse.

Commenting in this regard, Papadopoulos and Hildebrand (1997, 209) have complained that the usual way professionals tend to conceptualize refugees (and by extension the African immigrants) was within a 'pathology or deficit model'. In their view, the damage here is that, influenced by such a discourse, most observers including the media, politicians, and the general public tend to freely apply the concept of the trauma discourse to the extent that all assume that, more or less, all African immigrants, including the refugees, are 'traumatized'.

However, construing African immigrants in the image of the traumatized is quite unfortunate. It tends to draw only sympathy to the negative aspects rather than empathy and attention to the strengths and promise of these immigrants as valuable people with the potential to contribute something substantial to the development of the host country. In this way, emphasis on their strengths and possible contributions to the host country becomes subjugated and overshadowed by the prevailing attention to the trauma discourse.

My main *concern* here is that shaped by this image, counselling work with these immigrants tends to focus on questions about what they may have suffered in their countries of origin rather than in trying to understand and exploit in a positive the strengths of these immigrants (Papadopoulos, 2007). Hence my main criticism is against the deficit model as a framework for understanding the challenges and promise of African immigrants. In my view, such a model largely encourages the placing of emphasis on the macro-level background of life of these immigrants with attention focused on the difficult nature of things in their countries of origin. A trend that ends up degenerating into 'becoming the main theme of the therapeutic focus' (Papadopoulos, 2001a, 412), short-changing the task of addressing their needs and frustrations in the host country.

What I argue is that working with such a model is a limited option that, like the other two models earlier reviewed, must be rejected, as they tend to lead therapeutic work with these immigrants into wrong directions.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR CLINICAL WORK WITH AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

An important theoretical framework, which relates very closely to my four-dimensional perspectives for understanding the psychologies and anticipating the problems and distress of African immigrants in Europe and the United States, is the ritual theory approach developed and popularized by Turner (1981). The basic tenet of Turner's theory is that social dramas (like frustration narratives in African immigrants) occur out of anomalous life situations. Applied to the situation of African immigrants, Turner's theory assumes that migration to Europe or North America with high hopes of success that end in failure and frustration stands for a condition of *breach* of expectations in the lives of these immigrants regarding their migration. The result is a crisis of disappointment in affected migrants leading to their loss of innocence of the idea of Europe or the United States as a place of last resort for their personal enhancement.

Healing in this model refers to the capacity of care-givers to draw on new specialist knowledge and strategy, to bring redressive action to bear in support of the immigrants in order to enable them to restore a measure of control in their individual lives. For potential immigrants, on the other hand, healing will come through indirect action, entailing intervening at a larger systems level to promote the revision of immigration policies that would discourage cycles of frustration and turmoil for Green Carded African immigrants.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED FAMILY PRACTICE

Three levels of family therapeutic practice are proposed for working with clients from the African immigrant population.

The first is at the individual level, in which there may be need to coach clients on how to manage disappointments and hopes not fulfilled, including interiorization of blame and guilt in some, for opting for migration in the first place. The second is at the family relationships level, where the pain of role reversal may occur between husband and wife, causing strain on the husband and wife subsystem; including, in some cases, their inability to act as a unit in the difficult task of parenting children in a multi-cultural environment (Falicov, 2007). And the third is at the larger systems level, directed toward social action that will change the discriminatory and, therefore, oppressive immigration policies in various migrant destination countries in Europe and North America. In this way we would be able to unmask the relationship between the self and hidden political realities.

The above proposition means that, specifically, family work with African immigrants must go beyond the approach that deals only with relationships, to the type that can give attention to the interior motives, inner longings and failed constructions of these immigrants. Hence borrowing Karl Tomm's great observation, one can say that, in Western family therapy, emphasis is placed on the idea that 'Family relationships are probably the most complex and intense relationships that people have in their lifetime' (Tomm, 2000, 1). This view, important though it is, has omitted to take into account the fact that among African immigrant families the crises of family relationships often emanate from factors not internal but external to the family systems, initiated, as it were, from larger systems policies impacting negatively on family members' aspirations and happiness.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

The same limitation goes with the approaches to family therapy that emerged in the 1980s, namely: The Milan systemic approach (Boscolo et al., 1987), the collaborative language systems approach (Anderson, Goolishian and Winderman, 1986), the solution focused approach (De Shazer, 1985; Berg and De Jong, 1986), and the narrative approach (White and Epston, 1990). What is argued is that they will all be unsuitable, left on their own, for working with the larger needs and problems of African immigrants, which go beyond their inner search for alternative meanings by which to live.

Influenced by these understandings and borrowing and quoting verbatim Karl Tomm's prophetic observation: 'I would say that one of the big challenges facing the field now is how to address larger social issues of unequal power and social injustice' (Tomm, 2000, 1), particularly those derived from negative foreign policies on African immigrants. This means that there is need to open space to reflect critically upon our work and to think more broadly, particularly now that we are bracing to work with the challenges and problems of transnational families.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Now, let me, by way of conclusion, call attention to a number of strategies that must be put in place to further the successful execution of some of the above proposed practices.

The first is the obligation that we, African family therapists, have to enable prospective immigrants to achieve inward purification of inflated assumptions about the nature of life in Europe and North America. This we must do as a preventive action to attack the problem from the root. It is argued that continued failure on our part in this regard will amount to a sign of our difficulty to recognize our own powers to change people's destinies for the better through appropriate social or preventative, not medical-model, actions focusing on single-symptom alleviation or relief

Another is the task that IFTA has, to engage in the phenomenon of *redressive mentoring* in the context of its consultative status within the United Nation to facilitate international cooperation on standards-making and problem solving (Kaslow, 2007), particularly as regards the plights of the African immigrants influenced by subtly discriminatory/oppressive immigration policies in some countries. In this way we can become facilitators of social equity. This will entail an advocacy role on the part of IFTA. Focusing on this, IFTA will be expected to take appropriate action to draw the attention of the American State Department, for example, of the noted lack of inclusion of vital data in their Visa Lottery Manual for proper guidance and information of prospective candidates.

In particular, I propose a need for a section in that manual whose job is to provide clear warning statements to prospective candidates against the urge to sell their property while planning to migrate. It is noted that this particular caution is already entrenched in a related policy manual by the Canadian Immigration Department. And we urge other countries to borrow a leaf from the Canadian example.

REFERENCES

Akhtar S. A third individualization: immigration, identity, and the psychoanalytic process. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association 1994; 43: 1051–84.

Akhtar S. Immigration and Identity. Northvale, NJ: Jason Arnson, 1999a.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

Akhtar S. Immigrant, the exile, and the experience of nostalgia. Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies 1999b; 1: 123–30.
Anderson H, Goolishian H, Winderman L. Problem determined systems: toward a transformation in family therapy. Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies 1986; 5: 14–19.
Berg IK, De Jong P. Solution building conversations, co-constructing a sense of competence with clients. Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 1986; June: 376–91.
Blos P. On Adolescence: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation. New York: Free Press, 1962.
Blos P. The second individuation process in adolescence. Psychoanalytic Study of the Child 1967; 22: 162–78.
Boscolo L, Cecchin G, Hoffmann L, Penn P. Milan Systemic Family Therapy. New York: Basic Books, 1987.
Bowlby J. Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment. London: Hogarth Press, 1969.
Bowlby J. Attachment and Loss, Vol. 2: Separation. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
Bowlby J. Attachment and Loss, Vol. 3: Loss, Sadness and Depression. London: Hogarth Press, 1980.
De Shazer S. Key to Solutions in Brief Therapy. New York: WW Norton, 1985.
Falicov CJ. Culture in family therapy: new variations on a fundamental theme. In Sexton T, Weeks G, Robbins M (eds) Handbook of Family Therapy: Theory, Research and Practice. New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003; pp. 37–55.
Falicov CJ. Working with transnational immigrants: expand meanings of family, community and culture. Family Process 2007; 46, 2: 157–71.
Fisher S. Homesickness, Cognition and Health. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989.
Garza-Guerrero AC. Culture shock: its mourning and vicissitudes of identity. Journal of the American Psycholanalytic Association, 1974; 22: 408–29.
Grinberg I, Grinberg R. Psychoanalytic Perspective of Migration and Exile (translator Festinger N). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
Joffe LS, Vaugham BE. Infant-mother attachment: theory, assessment and implications for development. In Wolman BB (ed.) Handbook of Developmental Psychology. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982; pp 190–207.
Kaslow F. Marking IFTA's Twentieth Anniversary, Prague, Czech Republic, May. The International Connection, Magazine of The International Family Therapy Association 2007; 20(2): 3.
Makeni J. Chasing greener pastures: mixed tale of Kenyans who won the green card. Sunday Nation, 11 November 2007.
Mirsky J. Individuation through immigration to Israel: psychotherapy with immigrant adolescents. Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy 1990; 29: 47–61.
Mirsky J, Kaushinsky F. Migration and growth: separation individuation processes in immigrant students in Israel. Adolescence 1989; 24: 725–40.
Mirsky J, Peretz Y. Maturational opportunities in migration: separation-individuation perspective. International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies 2006; 3: 51–64.
Nwoye A. Memory healing processes and community intervention in grief work in Africa. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy 2005; 26(3): 147–54.
Papadopoulos RK. Working with families of Bosnian medical evacuees: therapeutic dilemmas. Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry 1999; 4: 107–20.
Papadopoulos RK. Refugee families: issues of systemic supervision. *J*ournal of Family Therapy 2001a; 23**:** 405–22.
Papadopoulos RK. Refugees, therapists and trauma: systemic reflections. Context: The Magazine of the Association for Family Therapy 2001b; 54: 5–8.
Papadopoulos RK, Hildebrand J. Is home where the heart is? Narratives of oppositional discourses in refugee families. In Papadopoulos RK, Byng-Hall J (eds) Multiple Voices: Narrative in Systemic Family Psychotherapy. London: Duckworth, 1997; pp. 206–36.
Sveaass N, Reichelt S. Refugee families in therapy: from referrals to therapeutic conversations. Journal of Family Therapy 2001; 23: 119–35.
Tomm K. Addressing our Own Practices of Power. Dulwich Centre Publications 2000; 1. Adelaide.
Turner V. Social dramas and stories about them. Critical Inquiry 1981; 7(4): 141–168.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi

Ward C. Migration, Metamorphosis and the Residual Link: Resources of British Women to Re-invent Themselves. Unpublished PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia, 2001.
Ward C, Styles I. Lost and found: reinvention of the self following migration. International Journal of Psychoanalytic Studies 2000; 5: 349–67.
Ward C, Styles I. Evidence for the ecological self: English-speaking migrants' residual links to their homeland. International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies 2007; 4(4): 319–32.
White M, Epston D. Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends. New York: WW Norton, 1990.

DOI: 10.1002/ppi