

BELONGINGNESS AND MIGRATION

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Abstract

Over the years, many developing African countries including Nigeria have witnessed a mad drift of her citizens to European and Asian countries. Major reasons that have influenced this incessant drift are traced to high poverty rates, unemployment, famine, unfavourable government policies, lesser business opportunities, increase in crime and insecurities, gross underdevelopment, extreme inequalities and inadequate social amenities in their countries of origin. Migration is a process of social change where an individual, alone or accompanied by others, because of one or more reasons of economic betterment, political upheaval, education or other purposes, leaves one geographical area for prolonged stay or permanent settlement in another geographical area. This rush has resulted to underdevelopment of the country of origin, loss of social support, loss of cultural values and identities, loss of family history or root, stress of adaptation as a result of racial discrimination, and most especially, a deviation from the African concept of belongingness which is notably, a binding force on all Africans irrespective of their socio-cultural, religious or political alienation. This paper evaluates the effect of migration on the African concept of belongingness with the aid of the critical assessment method and historical review and finds out that cross-national migration has done more harm than good to Africans as it has pulled her off from her basic philosophies of life such as belongingness, communalism, Ubuntu, EBUB, Ibuanyidanda etc. and has hung her in the air of quest for American unrealizable dream. The paper therefore, recommends an urgent improvement in Africa's economic, political and educational standards and a revival of the above mentioned African philosophies.

Keywords: Belongingness, Migration, Communism, Africa

Introduction

Migration is a complex issue that has always been an integral part of human existence. Historically, in Africa, a number of socio-economic, political, cultural (including historical and linguistic ties), geographical and environmental factors have often coalesced to exert pressure. Migration is the movement of people from one geographical location to another, involving permanent or temporary settlement. The region where people are leaving is referred to as the source region whereas the region to which people are entering is known as destination region. This type of migration could be movement from one locality within a country to another or a moving away to a totally different country. Chukwuedozie and Onokala (2013) rightly assert that migration is not a new phenomenon as people from time immemorial have always had reasons to move from one geographical location to another:

The process of people migrating to other areas in search of a better life is not a novel one. What has however gained currency is the increasing voluntary movement in quest of better quality of life by low-skill and low-wage workers as well as high-skill and high-wage workers from less developed rural areas to more developed urban areas, especially among the poor in the developing countries (p. 1).

This age-long drift from one location to another can be traced to the equality and/or an unbalanced economic, social and political situations existence between developed and developing nations. And to further compliment the view of Chukwuedozie and Onokala (2013), Gimba & Kumshe (n.d) reiterate that the rate of rural-urban migration is alarming in recent years and its effects are not only felt by the destination regions alone but also felt by the source regions-as facilities in the destination regions are overstretched, the source regions are virtually deserted, thereby, leading to underdevelopment of the source region.

Belongingness on the other hand is an African concept of to-be or to belong. It is a belief that all irrespective of socio-cultural or religious background belong to a particular community and therefore, is accepted and appreciated as a member of such community. Belongingness has been a fundamental aspect of African philosophical and communalist engagement. Belongingness, we must note, has been a basic cultural trait within the exigencies of African philosophy. In African worldview, belongingness touch virtually every aspect of human life especially as a being in a community setting characterized by a communal living, having and sharing.

The incessant migration of many Africans may be traced to the loss of faith in this age-long belief of belongingness masterminded by gross breakdown of communal living, accelerating security challenges, heightened unemployment rate as well as political and economic marginalization of the haves and the have not in our contemporary society. With the loss of touch with the basic ingredients of belongingness such as care, acceptability, *igwebuiké* among others, many Africans especially young people have been forced to migrate to European and Asian countries where they believe injustice and inequality is limited. Sadly, this rush has resulted to underdevelopment of the country of origin, loss of social support, loss of cultural values and identities, loss of family history or root, stress of adaptation as a result of racial discrimination, and most especially, a deviation from the African concept of belongingness which is notably, a binding force on all Africans irrespective of their socio-cultural, religious or political alienation.

The onus of this paper is therefore an evaluation of the level of harm incessant migration has had on African developing nations as people tied to the principle of live and let's live, *egbeberegobere* and *igwebuiké* and belongingness. It is also a call for Africans to return and rebuild her broken walls instead of running away to other countries only to be treated as second class citizens.

Concept of Migration

According to the National Geographic Expedition (2015), migration is the movement of people from one geographical location to another to settle either permanently or semi-permanently:

Migration (human) is the movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. An example of "semi-permanent residence" would be the seasonal movements of migrant farm laborers. People can either choose to move ("voluntary migration") or be forced to move ("involuntary migration"). Migrations have occurred throughout human history, beginning with the movements of the first human groups from their origins in East Africa to their current location in the world (para. 1)

The major causes of rural-urban migration is identified as; search for better wages, education, political and social stability, better technologies, employment and business opportunities. Others are poverty, unemployment, crop failures and famine, inadequate social amenities and facilities in the urban centres such

as pipe borne water, electricity, good roads, hospitals, schools, vocational centres.

IOM, Glossary on Migration (2004) reiterates that migration encompasses the movement of all kinds of people:

A process of moving, either across an international border, or within a State. Encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants (as cited in International Fed. of Red Cross and Red Crescent society, n.d, para. 1)

Migration is certainly not a recent phenomenon; on the contrary, it has been part of the human history since its very beginning. People have migrated from one continent to the other, from country to country or internally, inside the same country.

While migration has been beneficial in one aspect, it has equally been destructive on the other hand. People move with the intention of living a more promising life, have access to basic life amenities and advance the developmental and infrastructural conditions of their countries of origin. Many remit money, foodstuffs, cars etc. to their families, introduce new innovations to their communities and assist in improving the infrastructural and technological standards of their countries while away and for these purposes, many parents, relatives and communities do not object to either the temporary or permanent migration of their citizens.

Forlornly, as more and more people arrive in the urban centre and continue to flood other developing and developed countries, there will be insufficient jobs for them and the unemployment rate will increase; there will be more workers chasing too few jobs and this will lead to straining the resources of the government. Migration either within or outside the country brings pressure on the environment where such migrants have come to settle. This is because, as migrants arrive from rural areas or their home countries, they live on the streets and makeshift sub-standard accommodation before establishing themselves. During this period, the lack of basic amenities can result to pollution of the environment where the migrants have come to live and in extreme cases, they are prone to diseases because of their low standard of living. The high rate of population growth in the urban centres also lessens the quality of life because it destroys resources, such as water and forests, needed for sustenance. Rural-

urban migration leads to overpopulation of the urban centres thus encouraging and raising the rate of crime in the society. Many people who migrate to other states or countries end up experiencing opposite of what they had expected. Many get frustrated and take up any available job not minding its legality and morality. The effect of migration is not only felt by the receiving countries alone, the countries of origin of the migrants are equally affected. The population decreases and many homes are left desolate as many migrants refuse to return to their home countries. Lack of manpower to execute tasks especially in the rural areas also deepens underdevelopment, poverty and increased lack, thereby, encouraging lawlessness and leadership by the wealthy.

Understanding the Concept of Belongingness

Belongingness is a principle of existence in the sense of being and sharing membership in reality or with a being. Belongingness has been a fundamental aspect of African philosophical and communalist engagement. Belongingness, we must note, has been a basic cultural trait within the exigencies of African philosophy. In African worldview, belongingness touch virtually every aspect of human life especially as a being in a community setting characterized by a communal living, having and sharing. Ejenam (2007) opines that belongingness is a principle of membership applied to a given political community. It is what moulds a community's cultural, historical, and traditional values. It is a principle of membership. Being, in order to actualize itself, makes effort to belong; it must flow out. And this is what belongingness is all about. It is a principle that makes one a member in a given community. It is, therefore, a synthesis of the reality and experience of belonging. To belong is to be a part of being. According to Iroegbu (2005)...belongingness is derived from the basic sense of unity (community) that exists among the members of the given political community. According to Ejenam (2007), belongingness is a fundamental concept in every African nation:

It is both a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem, that means, that they are very fundamental such that we cannot speak of social justice in Africa without it. Belongingness makes all members real and participating members in the community. It is a sense of belonging, (p. 391).

The traditional African society was an accommodating one guided by the fact that all humans were equal and had opportunity to become an effective member of the community wherever they found themselves. As a member of a community, the citizens owe it as a duty to respect the laws of the land and

tolerate one another. This concept advocated peace where people learnt to relate with one another. Some of the ingredients of belongingness as extolled by Africans are knowledge, faith, humility, care, patience among others and these virtue help ensured that peace was also restored in times of conflicts. The concept of belongingness is very basic, and finds a potent basis and sustenance in communalism; as a theory of justice, expressing the active role of the community and the individual. In belongingness, there is every inclination for the other to grow and this specific expectation is stringed unto caring. Belongingness is not only associative, it is also multi-dimensional and once the light of belongingness is not shining, there would not be growth, and that being will, no doubt, start to decline. In belongingness the expectations of the past, present and future are tied.

According to Onebunne (2018), "Belongingness is a fundamental quality in understanding being. No being can be understood in terms of its completeness but in relation to other beings" (p.31). It is the human emotional need to be an accepted member of a group; be it family, friends, co-workers, a religious group and cultural group.

Belongingness has the character of identification with and within a community especially with regard to African communalism. It is a principle of membership. Therefore, being in order to actualize itself makes effort to belong; it flows out, it goes on. Belongingness to this extent is a continuum, an ongoing process. It is the synthesis of the reality and experiences of belonging. Being no doubt is the foundation of belongingness. Being expresses itself thru belongingness. This being is human being. Belongingness is a fundamental fact of being. Once a thing is, it belongs to a being, group or community. There are ingredients of belongingness such as knowledge, hope, care, and patience. Equally, solidarity is a definitive property of belongingness.

Iroegbu (2005) reiterates his basic stands on belongingness when he writes that on the *Political Significance of Belongingness* thus:

Belongingness holds that our existence as human beings, as well as our integral participation in the society in which we find ourselves, are to be defined by our being given sense and substance of belonging. There should be solidarity of belonging and a belonging of solidarity in the way and manner in which we are to live and relate to one another as fellow

citizens of the world. This sense of belonging or belongingness has two basic aspects: Being tuned-on...Being "on-going" ... Thus if we belong, we are. If we don't belong, then we are not.

Belonging is the most important good we distribute in society, as it is prior to and informs all other distributive decisions.

Effects of Migration on African Philosophy of Belongingness

Some 215 million people or 3 percent of the world's population are believed to live outside their countries of birth (United Nations 2009). Migration whether rural-urban or international is an ever-growing phenomenon that has important development implications for both sending and receiving communities or countries. Migration is a decision that impacts the welfare of the household, the home community, and in the end the whole economy in various ways (Azam & Gubert, 2006).

The process of migration has been described as occurring in broadly three stages. The first stage is pre-migration, involving the decision and preparation to move. The second stage is migration, the physical relocation of individuals from one place to another. The third stage, post-migration, is defined as the "absorption of the immigrant within the social and cultural framework of the new society". Social and cultural rules and new roles may be learnt at this stage (Bhugra, 2001). Migration involves the loss of the familiar, including language (especially colloquial and dialect), attitudes, values, social structures and support networks. Belongingness is one of the essential philosophies of African. There is a general notion in African communities that every member of the community irrespective of their socio-economic complete others. No one is an island living alone with no need for his brother. This notion, sadly, have been relegated to the background with excessive immigrating cases whereby, international immigrants get accustomed to the self-centred European philosophy. EBUB (egbeberegobere) and Ubuntu (I am because we are) are both concepts of co-existence, love and human relational interaction in African traditional society and setting. They are, however, conceptual ingredients of belongingness expressed in the act of perching as in EBUB and act of relationship as Ubuntu expresses. Hence, as belongingness builds and improves traditional African Unity through these concepts, excessive migration on the other hand destroys it with the constant contact with western philosophies and loss of touch with African realities and beliefs. Migration brings about constant struggle to be accepted into the receiving

community or country and thus, manifest in different forms such as war, religious extremism, xenophobic attacks, segregation and violence which are alien to conventional African core value systems expressed in togetherness, extended family-hood and relatedness as professed by some of our African philosophical-historical figures.

Belongingness is purely and truly, an African concept expressing devotedness, brotherhood as well as appreciation of the human person first. It is naturally built on the culture, tradition and belief system of every African person. It is in the nature of the African man to support and help in sustaining other members of his family and community hence, the belief in *ogben'enyè*, communalism, and *igwebuikè*. But, with the current increased migration trend, the fundamental core African value systems of tolerance sustained through the act of belonging has been bastardized on the altar of global intolerance and inherent racial violence. Beyond structural safeguards, we need a vision of society that is inclusive with new identities and narratives that inoculate societies from demagoguery and demonization of the "other" while improving the well-being of everyone. One possible alternative to the "acculturative" strategies of assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization is "voice" and "dialogue." Voice can give expression to group-based needs and issues without resorting to segregation or secession.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The increase in both rural-urban as well as international migration can be traced to the recent relegation to the background and contemporary bastardization of the concept of belongingness among Africans. Political and economic instability, gluttony and selfish quest to own and control all the sectors of the economy by the bourgeoisies and unavailability of opportunities, and basic amenities to the proletariat who labour high with little wages have all contributed to the absconding of many people especially the youths from their communities and countries of origin to more developed countries in search of greener pastures. Many who have had a taste of the good prospects in foreign lands have even denounced their countries of origin, thereby, accepting to be slaves in foreign lands than in their communities and countries of origin. We believe that the only viable solution to the problem of excessive migration is one involving inclusion and belongingness. The most important good we distribute to each other in society is membership. The right to belong is prior to all other distributive

decisions since it is members who make those decisions. Belongingness entails an unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference but to ensuring that all people are welcomed and feel that they belong in the society. We call this idea the “circle of human concern.” Widening the circle of human concern involves “humanizing the other,” where negative representations and stereotypes are challenged and rejected. It is a process by which the most marginalized out groups are brought into the centre of our concern. To reduce the ongoing rural-urban drift and international exodus, basic infrastructural developments must be considered and there must be an equitable distribution of power and resources and an encouragement of an inclusive government of both the young and the old.

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