

## AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND MIGRATION

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### **Abstract**

*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 as well as historical and linguistic ties, geographical and environmental factors have often coalesced to exert pressure on people, causing them to migrate. Heightened activities of terrorists, violent extremists and radicalized groups in most African countries have equally contributed to increased and widespread forced displacement and drifting of persons, in search of basic safety and security, thereby, leading to a dislodgment of African philosophies of peaceful co-existence, negotiation, communalism, and the sustenance of historical facts of and about African. Migration has had adverse effect on African philosophy of religion, culture, norms and values of life. With constant contact with the Western philosophies made possible by perpetual migration activities of Africans especially youths to European countries, there seem to be a loss of touch with basic African philosophies handed down to Africans from time immemorial. This paper attempts an evaluation of the extent to which African philosophy has gone into extinction as a result of increased migration rate and recommend a restructuring and improvement of Africa's religious and political tolerance, employment creation, a revisit of African history and encouragement of communal living among all African.*

**Keywords:** Africa, African Philosophy, Migration, African religion, Culture, Communalism

### **Introduction**

Africa is the origin of all humankind and is divided into various cultural and political regions. The heterogeneous nature of Africa is reflected in its diverse range of histories, ethnicities, myths, behaviours and philosophies. The African society has similar traditional beliefs which can be seen in their religion, myths, culture, norms, belief system and leadership. Not until the colonial era when educational system, western lifestyle as well as western religion was introduced, Africans have had a unique way of ordering their society strongly, built on communal belief system and religious cum cultural and ethnic tolerance which

made it however, difficult from anyone to disassociate himself from being an African or denounce Africanhood.

Africa philosophy extols peace, unity and oneness as a common and most needed ingredient of human existence. Africa abhors discrimination and prejudice irrespective of socio-political and economic standing of anyone. However, the contemporary bastardization of this African philosophical ideology being demonstrated in the spirit of Communalism, Consciencism, *Igwebuike*, *EBUB* and *Ubuntu* as well as *Ibuanyidanda* and belongingness has driven many Africans especially the youths to European and other western countries and has placed them in uncertainty of whether to return or remain in diaspora where they now feel loved and a sense of belonging.

Migration cases of Africans either through the legal means of seeking to belong to another country or absconding without the notice of the government is now on the increase. 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. 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

Heightened activities of terrorist attack, violent religious and ethnic extremists and chauvinism and radicalized social and political groups in many African countries have furthermore, contributed to increased and widespread forced displacement and drifting of persons, in search of basic safety and security better employment and educational opportunities, thereby, leading to a dislodgment of African philosophies of peaceful co-existence, negotiation,

communalism, and the sustenance of historical facts of and about African. Migration has had adverse effect on African philosophy of religion, culture, norms and values of life. With constant contact with the Western philosophies made possible by perpetual migration activities of Africans especially youths to European countries, there seem to be a loss of touch with basic African philosophies handed down to Africans from time immemorial. Many African migrant have got so accustomed to Western ways of life that embracing African philosophies have become a great difficulty. This paper is, therefore, an attempt to evaluate the extent to which African philosophy has gone into extinction as a result of increased migration rate and acculturation and recommends a restructuring and improvement of Africa's religious and political tolerance, creation of employment opportunities, a revisit of African history and encouragement of communal living among all African.

### **Conceptual Understanding 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)

It is the movement from one country, place or locality to another in search of better economic, financial and other prospects. 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)

From the above view of what migration is, it can be deduced that the act of moving to a different location could be either for recreational purposes and the quest to relocate to a new environment or masterminded by the outbreak of diseases, famine, war and political cum economic instabilities.

The phenomenon of migration has been indispensable to human histories, cultures, and civilizations. For example, the connection between religion and migration is a cross-cutting issue throughout the history of major religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Similarly, during the Age of Discovery (15th-17th century) many Europeans, with the Portuguese and Spanish leading the way, undertook maritime travels and explored the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania. This transoceanic migration led to their discovery of new lands, the expansion of trade relations and the development of the economies of both the countries of origin and destination. Commercial and strategic factors influenced migration in that period as many European countries were competing to colonize strategic regions and territories. At the same time, in order to tackle labour shortages, the slave trade was introduced at various times throughout history.

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (n.d), "Migrants have been essential for the development of many modern states, have shaped labour dynamics around the globe and have been a cornerstone for the global economy." Migrants are people living outside their places of habitual residence' and often countries of origin (many times also away from their families), in a place where they might not understand the language and/or culture. They usually lack their familiar or community support mechanisms and can be exposed to racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Thus, making them vulnerable and easily influenced into adopting the culture, beliefs and philosophies of their receiving countries.

### **Causes of Migration**

Sociologists have long analyzed migration in terms of the "push-pull" model. This model differentiates between push factors that drive people to leave home, from pull factors that attract migrants to a new location. Push factors occur within sending states, that is, those that send migrants abroad, while pull factors occur within receiving states, that is, states that receive immigrants from sending states abroad. Push factors are negative aspects of the sending country, while pull factors are positive aspects of the receiving country. Push factors come in many forms; lack of jobs, poverty and economic factors provide the main motivation behind migration. In fact, according to the International Labour

Organization, approximately half of the total population of current international migrants, or about 100 million migrant workers, have left home to find better job and lifestyle opportunities for their families abroad (International Labour Office of the Director-General, 2008 as cited in International Fed. of Red Cross and Red Crescent society, n.d). Also, civil strife/war/political and religious crises have compelled many people to cross national. These immigrants may be considered refugees or asylum seekers in receiving countries. In fact, these differentiating factors are really two sides of the same coin. In moving migrants must not only find a lack of benefits at home (push factors) but also expect a surplus of benefits abroad (pull factors); otherwise the move would not be worthwhile.

Whereas push factors drive migrants out of their countries of origin, pull factors are responsible for dictating where these travelers end up. In the pull factor, higher standards of living and wages motivate many people to migrate to other countries especially developed countries. Equally, almost all developed countries have found that they need migrants' low skill labor to support their growing economies. While most manufacturing is now outsourced to developing nations, low skill employment opportunities are available in wealthy countries due to growing service sectors. These economies create millions of jobs that domestic workers may refuse to fill because of their low wages and minimal opportunity for professional advancement. Canada is an example of this trend; the country's migrant population has nearly doubled over the past couple of years (Geddes, 2012). Freedom from political and religious discrimination and persecution provide strong push factors for people to leave their home countries, the existence of tolerant government policies with regards to religion, race, political views and so on may make certain countries more attractive to potential migrants.

### **Understanding the Basic African Philosophy**

African Philosophy in contemporary scholarship has been understood to be a *discipline* and recently appreciated as a *movement*. As a discipline, it falls within the precincts and as a part of world philosophical traditions and heritage like the Western philosophy. And as a movement, however, African philosophy is a *factional progressive study* of rediscovering the stolen legacies as well as reclaiming the rightful place of the origin of philosophical enterprise. African philosophy is a philosophy that captures the African realities with regard to ways of life and worldview. It relates basic African norms, value system, religion as well as

cultural heritage which over the years have been applied in ordering the African society.

African philosophy of religion is one based on the belief of peace, love, equity and fairness. It is a religion that is not built on class or social standing. The major ingredient of African traditional religion is peaceful co-existence and tolerance and a general belief in *Chukwu*-the supreme all-knowing father of the Igbo who spare heads the affairs of men on earth and judge all according to their works and the interconnectivity between the supreme God (*chukwu*) and the people. They believe that there is a dual-traffic and interaction between the inhabitants of the two worlds (Metuh, 1981; Manus, 1993; & Isizoh, 1999). In this way, the understanding among the Igbo is that spiritual beings and cosmic forces are highly intermingled. The activities of spiritual beings and forces often directly impinge on the affairs of humans in the human world. African cultural group such as the Igbo is able from their worldview, to explain reality, life and the human environment, and predict space-time events, and finally exert control over their environment. In this way, the force of Igbo Religion and culture as of any other religion, culture or ideological system rests with the cosmology, which undergirds it. In the case of the traditional Igbo for instance, all forms of individual and group religious practices occur within the broad outline of their worldview which can also be seen to be their philosophy (Ejizu, 1987).

There is also a belief that there are dead spirits that come alive either through reincarnation or in form of a masquerade to correct a wrong deed, advice, reprimand and/or expose evil deeds in traditional African society. Thus, the belief in the efficacy of the *mmanu* in Igbo land and other parts of Africa.

African philosophy is one that solve African issues and extols African ideologies. This is in line with Onebunne (2018) position that

African philosophy should be one that can solve African problems and extol African ideologies. Such philosophies that can help to foster peace, improve the spirit of communalism which Africans are noted for, preach and practice such notable concepts like *Ohazurume* and *Ohacracy*, *EBUB* (I am because we are), *Ubuntu* (live and let's live) etc. (p.20)

Traditional African philosophy was a total reflection of the African view on culture, religion, leadership and brotherhood. It was one that advocated peace,

extolled justice, fairness and equity and preached a classless society where the haves complemented the have not.

Some the basic African philosophies of life are been streamlined below:

### **African Communalism and Migration**

Innocent (2013) succinctly captures the meaning of communalism in African worldview when he reiterated that Africans believe that no individual is self-sufficient (*uwa ezuoke*) and thus, need the assistance of others irrespective of height or age.

The individual is not self-sufficient but has many needs which he cannot supply to himself. Hence, human beings agreed to submit voluntarily to a system and were bound to live in unison and solidarity. Through deep experiences as creatures, human beings realized their insufficiency and dependency. They discovered that they need each other to live a contented life. These experiences of life gave recourse to the idea of complementarities as a measure to survive the challenges posed by other vicissitudes of life. Inter dependency, inter-relationship, collectivism and mutual coexistence form the basis for Igbo life pattern. (Innocent, 2013, p.403)

Igbo communalism is primarily portrayed in living together and sharing things in common. This is the bedrock and the result of the wonderful relationship prevalent in the Igbo- African community as well as the purpose of the existence of the Igbo community in particular and of the Africans in general. This is in line with Asouzu's development of the philosophy of "Ibuanidanda" philosophy as an authentic traditional Igbo life pattern which has survived till today. "The concept Ibuanidanda is drawn from the Igbo language and has as its nearest English equivalent the idea complementarity in the sense of "njikoka" (togetherness is greatest) "Igwe bu ike" (strength in togetherness)" (Asouzu, 2007, p.11).

Communalism implies good spirit and preservation of age-long belief of love, unity and oneness. To this point, the concept of Ogbenye as the preservation of communal spirit means that it is the responsibility of the "ogbe" (village) to "nye" (give) "ndi na enweghi" (those who do not have).

This is in line with Asouzu (2007) assertion that:

The community constitutes the point of orientation for almost all human activities and determines human life even if these societies were committed to the insight of mutual complementary relationship between units within any given framework, we see them tending towards extreme measures in view of undermining this commitment (P.350)

From the above, it is seen that what actually energizes communalism are the concepts of extended family (Ime-nne) kindred (Umunna) village (Ogbe) and clan, because at these levels, people live together and share responsibilities. This is because, the Igbo society is communal and not collectivist. Igbo people lay more emphasis on communal relationship among members of the family, community, village and clan than on the autonomy of members; as one is not considered separated but a member of a mystical body where he can only live life in full. Communalism urges all to be their brothers' keepers. Communalism further breeds other concepts like "Uwa ezu-oke" the world is incomplete and "Onweghi onye ozuru" meaning nobody is perfect necessitates collectivism in the life of an Igbo person

Without complementarity, human life would be unbearable isolated struggles that easily lead to self abandonment. We can now understand why the traditional Igbo never cease to sound the clarion call to complementarity and solidarity in times of crisis (Asouzu, 2007, P.105)

This assertion by Asouzu means that the Igbo people live their lives complementing one another. Hence, the concept of "EBUB" egbe gbere, ugo ebere loosely translated as "live and let's live" and "Ubuntu" meaning "I am because we are."

According to Nze (1989) "the relationship existing between the society and the individual in a communalistic society is analogous to that existing between a mother and her embryo, each is connected with the other through the Umbilical cord (p.4). This means is that the individual cannot detach himself from the community. Thus, as he and strives to gratify his personal needs and expand his abilities, he sees all his efforts and aspirations as aimed at maintaining, preserving and sustaining his relationship with other members of the community of which he is a part of.

Communalism is fraternal in the sense that it symbolizes a form of life of a people whose different members are held together by some parental link.

Nobody can detach himself from his community because the community is the vehicle through which all activities are accomplished. Hence, solitary individual is an absurdity in Igbo communalism.

This African belief had been strangulated in recent time by excessive movement of Africans to European lands who in a bid to be accepted and valued in the countries that they have come to reside relegate communal living to the background and adopt European self-centred and egocentric lifestyle. It is evidence that when there is contact of two cultures, the most needed is foregrounded while the less needed is downplayed. This is the situation with African communalistic belief which many migrants have been confronted with. Also, the mentality of an average African man in the notion that everything western is good and should be accepted and everything African is barbaric and must be discarded, it is not doubt that even European who have come to Africa have succeeded in selling their ideologies to Africans and we have bought it wholeheartedly and have carried it everywhere, thereby, allowing the love, peace and unity that had bound Africans in pre-colonial era to go into extinction.

### **African Philosophy of Belongingness and Migration**

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. The Igbo community holds the concept of belongingness so highly that they coined expression like, "onye aghala nwanneya" meaning, no one should forsake his brother, "igwe bu ike," "mmadu bu ibe ya" among others.

Ndi-ogbenye for instance, as a recognized concept among the Igbo people was established as a result of the desire to assimilate all into one autonomous community; one do not have to live alone and there is a general belief that our actions have impact either positively or negatively on others. Hence, there is mandate to live rightly and justly. Through the philosophy of belongingness, Igbo people feel indebted to another. That is the major reason ndi-ogbenye is an acceptable concept among the people

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. Belongingness is a principle of membership applied to a political community. It is what moulds a

community's cultural, historical and traditional values. According to Iroegbu (2005), "...belongingness is derived from the basic sense of unity (community) that exists among the members of the given political community.

It is very disheartening to observe that this African belief that every individual belongs and is accepted into a community has been traded on the altar of excessive migration. Belongingness builds and improves traditional African Unity, excessive migration on the other hand destroys it with the constant contact with western philosophies and loss of touch with African realities and beliefs, bringing about constant struggle to be accepted into the receiving European country and thus, manifesting 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.

### **African Philosophy of EBUB and Migration**

*EBUB* (an acronym for *Egbe Bere Ugo Bere*, which is literally translated: Let the Kite perch, let the Eagle perch, meaning Live and let live). In traditional Igbo society where this concept of *EBUB* is borrowed, perching becomes the *locusoperandi* for the kite and Eagle. Naturally, the Kite and Eagle do not fly nor live together. However, they are permitted to perch together and in this act of perching, we see a kind of relationship of respect and regard, acceptance and accommodation which is possible because they belong to a common world of animals and operate within one human world. Therefore, in African communal ontological existence, the *Egbe* and *Ugo*, represent different individuals and the act of perching that presupposes a locus of operation form a relationship that fundamentally starts with belonging as perching: a form of contact with the other; a contact that spells belonging. The concept of contact is a backdrop of a person's realization of his belonging as a being immersed in one's community.

This is where the belief and acceptance that all fingers are not equal comes into play. But, it is also obvious that irrespective of an individual's socio-economic and political stand in the society, there ought to be respect and acceptance of others who may be of lower societal ranking. However, with the constant contact with European ideologies, contemporary African society have created a class deferential space between the elites and the proletariat and have subjugated them to kites that can never perch with eagle.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Migration 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. It is a process of moving, either across an international border, or within a State. It encompasses any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants. In Africa, a number of socio-economic, political, cultural as well as historical and linguistic ties, geographical and environmental influences have often coalesced to exert pressure on people, causing them to migrate.

From the time of slave trade where many Africans were forcefully uprooted from the African soil and taken to European countries to serve as slaves to the era of colonization and even the modern neo-colonial period in Africa where the European ideologies and philosophies have combined to overthrow African religion, culture, leadership system, beliefs, norms and values, migration whether voluntarily or forcefully has never stopped occurring. Heightened activities of terrorist attacks, high unemployment rates and low infrastructural development, religious and political extremists in most African countries have equally contributed to increase the widespread forced displacement and drifting of persons, in search of safety and security and an improved standard of living, thereby, leading to a dislodgment of African philosophies of peaceful co-existence, negotiation, communalism, and the sustenance of historical facts of and about Africa. The contemporary bastardization of this African philosophical ideology being demonstrated in the spirit of communalism, consciencism, *igwebuike*, *EBUB* and *Ubuntu* as well as *ibuanidanda* and belongingness has driven many Africans especially the youths to European and other western countries and has placed them in uncertainty of whether to return or remain in diaspora where they now feel loved and a sense of belonging.

It is therefore pertinent to advocate a revisit of these African philosophies that have helped Africans together from time immemorial and improve the standard of living in African countries so that those who have lost hope in Africa can return to rebuild Africa's fallen walls of peace, love, unity and oneness.

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