

MIGRATIONS, MODERN DAY SLAVERY AND AFRICAN IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES: THE TREND AND THE DANGER

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Abstract

There is nothing wrong in people migrating from one place to another for various reasons. Usually, people have pressing issues that compel them to leave their natural environment to migrate to another new environment which may not be very friendly to them. Migration from one nation to another in contemporary Africa now seem different because a whole new lot of packages are now involved especially danger. The African continent, ordinarily, is a blessed continent because it has numerous mineral and human resources. Freedom to mingle and travel from one part of the world to another is not forbidden. In fact, freedom is one of the basic characteristics of the African continent. There is no gainsaying that Africa, just like some other continents in Africa have challenges facing it politically, socially, culturally, and economically. One of the challenges disturbing Africa in recent times is the trend in individual travels or migrations from African nations to some foreign nations in search of greener pastures. Migration can be caused as a result of war, political disturbances, economic instability, and cultural clashes amongst so many other things. This paper tends to look into the current trend in migration attitudes going on. It also tends to look at the dangers on the people and on the African identity. Before the coming of the white people, African engaged in migrations. Today, many have been exposed to various societal ills especially women and children as a result of migration. Thus, in recent times when nations are looking for what will elevate their status and identity, African continent cannot afford to allow indecent use of migrants across the world to ruin African identity across the globe. Hence, this paper will be looking at migrations, modern day slavery and its dangerous impact on African people and on the African continent. Africa have suffered drastically during the colonial rule and after. It has been called bad names and thus, African patriots, historians and nationalist have continued to strive to solidify African identity.

Key Words: Migrations, Slavery, African identity, Trend, Danger

Introduction

Associated with Africa's early history is the issue of migration. The history of migration begins with the origins of mankind in the Rift Valley in Africa, from where between about 1.5 million and 5000 BC *Homo Erectus* and *Homo Sapiens* spread initially into Europe and later into other continents observed Koser

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(2007:1). In other words, migration is a common phenomenon in Africa and in fact elsewhere in the world. For example, long distance trading, pasturing and grazing due to drought have been part of African exercise for many years. Because migration is considered an age-long practice in Africa, it makes the concept migration a familiar phenomenon. History has recounted, time and again, how people migrated and settled in places they later made their permanent abode. Life situations and environmental occurrences prompt people to migrate from one place to another. Some of these situations include conflicts, poverty, war, terrorism acts, political and economic instability amongst so many others things. Over time, the African continent has gone through various phases of life.

In recent times, people migrate for many reasons but basically for the quest for better living. Globalization has come in to alter things as well. It has brought nations closer together and it has the capacity of uniting the world trade but then it has its very negative aspect as regards migration. Today, people are worried concerning migration effects. They are not worried on migration per se but on illegal migration trending these days which is dehumanizing people and also jeopardizing African image. Migration will always occur because of many life and natural occurrences which are beyond human control. Baker, Aina, & Aina, (1995:30) said that before European colonization, Africa was the scene of great movements of peoples. And as Boulby & Christie (2018:7) stated, migration also known as human mobility is an essential component of globalization. It is illegal migration and the crimes attached to it that are worrisome.

Illegal migration in Africa in recent times, to a greater degree, can be linked to failed governance situations in African nations for obvious reasons. People constantly complain in many nations of Africa that their governments have failed them. Poor management of human and mineral resources, lack of transparent, accountable and efficient system by the leaders have been blamed on why people seek to leave their nations to migrate to other nations for better and organized economic and political system.

It has also been argued time and again that responsible leaders have the responsibility of providing for the youths with adequate employment. It is their duty to always be on the lookout for young minds who are highly talented and recruit them into the governing system for effective African developmental policies. Conducive and well planned African societies coming together will

make Africa strong and safeguard her image and identity but unfortunately there is hardly any solid integration and bond between African youths and the governments in this regards. Little are invested on people with potentials, ideas and better opinions in Africa hence they quest for travelling abroad. Ill-functioning societies across the world combined with individual greed leads to various crimes in the world. Whatever conditions the leaders put the society in; they usually turn round to hunt them. Rigged elections to select leaders, vote buying and selling during elections, 'god-fatherism' etc. are some of the things that kills a society and which leads to modern day migration trend among African youths.

The end result is usually the degradation of Africa's strong value system. Thus, at the long run, many lives are wasted. Again, apart from the leaders and their governance strategies, African culture is not very favourable to the womenfolk. Many traditional, cultural and social rules make things difficult for the feminine gender. Women's position in Africa is clearly and practically different from that of their men folk. Apart from what is written down in papers, in African societies women are not given the same opportunities and are not treated equally like men. These prevents women especially the younger ones from maximizing their natural talents and potentials hence the desire to migrate. For instance, land is not given to women to farm on in most parts of Africa but in attachment to their husbands, brothers or fathers. Thus in most cases, most of them swear to migrate to other nations for better life opportunities.

What is Migration?

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another. Baker et al. (1995:1) said that the displacement of people and of individuals is by no means a peculiarly modern phenomenon nor one that pertains to Africa alone; history teaches us that all people have come from regions that are sometimes very far away from those they occupy today. In the observation of Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long & Sigona, (2014:2), by the early 1980s refugee and migration issues had become a globally salient issue. Migration can either be internal or international. Many factors prompt people's need to migrate from one place to another. In Africa, many things justifiably caused migration of people through the ages. It is commonplace to see people who are internally displaced due to flood disaster, drought, war, insecurity, famine to migrate from one place to another place. It is also common to see farmers or herders migrate to another

town in order to survive. Most times things that cause migration are unfavourable conditions.

Nowadays, it seems that migration is on the increase. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees laments on the rate of migrants who are refugees and asylum seekers. Libya, Liberia, Kenya, Cameroon and Nigeria are some African countries with stories of migration in recent times. Prompted by internal conflicts, terrorism threats, crude oil spill problems for people from the Niger Delta area, etc., migration have become rife. Towns are said to have migrated and settled in places they found comfortable. For example, the people of Onitsha are said to have migrated from Benin and settled in their present place of abode called Onitsha-Ado. Often times, host countries or societies where migrants settle are believed to be places that are very conducive for them. Migrants are categorized into various classes which can be voluntary or forced migrants observed (Koser, 2007:16,18). Koser further observed that highly skilled migrants are a growing proportion of people who move for largely economic reasons.

Slave trade in Africa

The very act of slavery and slave trade is an age long practice in Africa. Slaves were commonly seen serving their masters in homes and palaces. In fact, slaves were domestically used to mark individuals' status. Some of these slaves are set free after they have been proved to be extraordinarily loyal and faithful to their masters. Slave trade in Africa is divided in various forms and that is basically for commercial and for domestic use. Slaves were used in ancient periods to do farming works, build forts, monuments and places. Klein (1999:1) said that slaves were not seen as unique in the work they performed - peasants, serfs, even clansmen and kinsmen were often in conditions of servitudes. Slavery was common in Africa but the most devastating and imprinted in history was the trans-Atlantic slave trade. When Europeans took interest in African slave system for many economic reasons abroad, African slave trade system changed and became an international business. But then, these foreigners would not have gotten the number of Africans they got if not for the help of the African middle men who operated along the coast. In other words, the Portuguese, Dutch and British traders triumphed businesswise on transatlantic slave trade because of the help offered them by the African middle men who collected slaves from the interior and sold to them.

Farrell (2011: xviii) note that the first study of the Atlantic slave trade began in the 1780s at the very height of its momentum when some 75,000 slaves were arriving in the ports of America each year. Africans were captured forcefully in their fatherland most times by their brothers, the African middlemen, and plunged into slavery of no return in faraway lands of the American and the Caribbean. These Africans taken to the Americans and European nations worked hard and produced satisfying results in the tobacco and cotton plantations basically around 15th and 19th centuries. This trade caused and is still causing a lot of suffering and setback for African continent. It is an experience Africans will forever regret and wished never to experience again because of its numerous disadvantages. African promising men and women were forcefully taken away from African environment because they were needed for the industrial revolution going on in Europe. It is an experience that still reminds them of the loss of their able bodied men and women who would have developed the continent. History has recorded the horror associated with this trade and the massive benefits Americans accrued out of it before its abolition. Slave trade was later abolished around 19th century but it lingered on until the first quarter of 20th century. Martin and O'Meara (1995:127) note that the suppression of slave trade and the development of legitimate trade frequently encouraged significant economic and social change in African societies. In many parts of Africa though, slavery and legitimate commerce co-existed for decades.

In recent times, there is a resurgence of slavery and slave trade in modern shape. This involves human trafficking which entails deception and enticement of young people with promises of better life abroad. Thus, young people are seen migrating to other nations facing various harsh conditions. Some who made it to these destinations, in most cases, become slaves to some madams or masters. They made money for their bosses that brought them to these foreign cities such as Italy, Malaysia etc. using their bodies. This heinous crime dents the identity of Africa because, often times, the Africans involved in this crime are caught, deported and in the world news. In recent times, the Libya episode of slavery and mass deportation of Africans were huge. Modern day slavery includes human trafficking; forced child labour, sex trafficking etc.

In modern Africa today, basically, young men and women are the ones that are largely involved in the migration to other nations. These young people defy laws and border measures and still find means of travelling secretly to other nations. This often involves great risk to life and most often, women rate highest in

number. This does not only pose risk for the people involved but also for the identity of the nations they come from. In summarization, migration involving trafficking of young women, men and children are common these days. But then, even though greater emphasis is laid on the women who are deceived into migrating to other nations to illegally improve themselves, on the other hand, many of these young people really planned the travelling themselves and were not pressurized or tricked into it.

Modern Day Slavery and Its Negative Impacts

In recent times, there has been a high number of migrants from Africa to different European nations. Many youths of African origin are in foreign countries in United Kingdom and America doing one sort of work or the other. Some of these works are legitimate while some are illegitimate. What is really alarming is the rate in the number that is leaving Africa especially through illegitimate means though sometimes migrants bring in new ideas and good economic thoughts into the new environment they came into. Most of them sometimes refuse to come back to their African native communities to join hands in developing them. Modern day slavery in form of human trafficking have caused great concern in contemporary Africa and globally. This is affecting African identity and reputation negatively. Also, globalization and modernity have contributed enormously in expanding migration today. According to Andre (2016), the concept of globalization took place between 1870 and 1914 but was popularized in the late 1970s and coincided with the technological revolution and the rise in digital technology use that started to peak at that time.

Migration in the general sense is not bad because it is often done with the priority for a better life situation. Most times though, it is the bad situations in a given place that propel people to migrate. Migrants usually influence the population of an area by increasing it also. They can affect the economic situation of the places they migrate to either positively or negatively depending. In general, the United Nations, humanitarian organizations and many other concerned bodies around the world have condemned illegal migration and the inhumane treatment associated with it. For example, United Nations Human Rights stated that,

Slavery, servitude, child sexual exploitation, forced marriage, servile forms of marriage, child marriage, enforced prostitution and the exploitation of

prostitution are also trafficking-related practices that are prohibited under international human rights law (2014:5).

Due to the numerous negative examples associated with migration, migration is most times seen as threats and problems to foreign countries. This is one of the reasons why there are border controls and security checkpoints across borders in other to checkmate excessive and illegal migrations. United Nations former secretary general Kofi Annan once lamented on the challenges of migration in Africa. In *Migration Realism*, Kofi Annan (2015) stated thus “ it is time to accept that human migration cannot be stopped. Action is needed on fronts to manage the flows of people in ways that benefit migrants; countries of origin, transit and destination”. Indeed migration can bring many complications to the host country such as labour shortages, depletion on the number of great minds and brains that can improve the state of their nations, economic problems and it impinges on human rights. There are migrations caused because of unavoidable conflict and war situations, thereby turning once comfortable people into internally displaced people, asylum seekers or refugees. In essence, illegal migration into foreign nations for easy money making ventures across the Mediterranean Sea, desert or sometimes through legal entries for prostitution or drug pushing acts must therefore be discouraged. There are a number of negative effects which host countries suffer from as a result of migration - decrease in population and brain drain. That is to say that it causes bright people with good ideas living their countries to go to other countries to look for greener pastures.

African Identity and Migration Impact

Migration is good if embarked upon for safety of life and property and when it is to improve one's education. Adler & Gielen (2003:1) have observed that the impulse to migrate is inherent in human nature. But then, the conducts and attitudes of Africans when abroad matters. By their conducts, good or bad, Africans have the capacity to influence people's opinion across the world and this will boomerang on African image and identity if care is not taken. Identity is the recognized character and image which a person or nation has and which speaks a lot of what a person or continent is. Encarta dictionary (2009) have defined identity as a name or essential character that identifies somebody or something. It went on further to define it as that essential self, a set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as belonging uniquely to himself and which defines his character. Thus, just as human beings build up and protect their identity, nations and continents have their own identity to protect. African

identity is build up by the services and mannerisms the people display abroad. International migration of Africans to different nations of the world has dire consequences on African continent for many reasons. It exposes the people and the continent. In contemporary Africa, migration that is now trending is not very favourable to human life, and to African identity and image. In recent times, illegal migration has imposed great danger to human life and to the continent.

Nowadays, we hear of mind-boggling news of the reality of what is happening across the borders. Many African young people engage themselves in perilous journeys in great numbers across the borders to cross the Mediterranean Sea risking their lives. Sometimes their lives are wasted in these journeys. While in Africa, these young people are sometimes made to believe that money is easier to make outside Africa. Africa has all the necessary ingredients - mineral and human resources - for a hardworking youth to make it. On the other hand, globalization, the process that ensures easy money flow and materials and information has brought about so many things along with it. Koser (2017:28) again said that international migration is an important dimension of globalization, and has become increasingly embedded in changes in global economic and social structures. Those people who engaged themselves in illegal migration and illegal work abroad are sometimes captured and returned to their various African homes. These people often see themselves as being lucky having experienced the hardship abroad.

In most African nations for real, there are millions of unemployed youths with majority of them being graduates. Thus, low job prospect is one of the factors that drive some of these people to migrate from Africa to European countries such as Italy to find money. That is why governments and international communities, having seen the dangers of the trending migration is causing seeks daily for remedy. Governments and concerned humanitarian bodies are concerned of the illegal entries, and often seek for border control and border security. Leaders of African countries are to blame and needs to reevaluate their policies. Why is it that young graduates are neglected when it comes to awarding contracts of some sort ? For instance, in road building contracts, engineers are employed from abroad while African engineers stay behind. Thus, migration is not only done for prostitution and menial jobs abroad but is also done by young graduates who are looking for employment. Nowadays, talented and brilliant young African graduates migrate abroad through every possible means to work as medical doctors, engineers and nurses. In African countries, most of these

young doctors, nurses, lecturers and lawyers, engineers, despite their intelligence and dexterity and willingness to serve their fatherland were poorly paid by the governments. In Nigeria for example, the payment of minimum wage has been an obstacle and a herculean tasks. Sometimes delay in the payment of doctors, lecturers etc. salaries has caused incessant strikes. These strikes often create periods of inactivity and lack of productivity in the nation. This is one of the reasons why it is important for any country that wishes to excel to look into these problems and do something about them. Bright brains migrate daily to developed countries across the world leaving less productive and aged people in the continent. This again brings setbacks to the continent, sets back its development speed and tarnishes its image and identity.

Benefits of migration

Migration no doubt has its own benefits. It promotes economic growth in host countries and increases population data. It also leads to increase in labour production especially for the new industries in the host communities because of new hands coming in with zeal to work productively. Sometimes migration help maintain a balance in population. Migration has its negative and positive impacts to the society though. It is therefore very important for nations to have the knowledge of how to manage their borders and more importantly provide the necessary structures and economic comfort ability for her citizens. This will no doubt reduce negative impacts and maximize the positive development of that host nation. Migration which is the movement of people across countries can either be permanent or temporary depending. It can also be forced or voluntary. But usually there is a reason behind every decision taken to engage in migration. Immigration and emigration have been described as two major components of migration.

Many factors naturally drive people away from their host environment to seek rest and wealth in foreign lands. There are many other factors that prompt migration. These can be boldly categorized into political, social and economic. Breaking it down, uncontrollable conditions such as poverty, economic depression, political instability, crises, high rate of insecurity etc. prompt migration. Young people are usually the ones that feel these crises more and then desire to travel in search of better life opportunities. There is an internal part of migration whereby people leave the rural areas for the cities for better living. Natural disasters - flood, drought, wildfire, hurricane etc. cause migration to take place. Other crises - conflict, terrorism attacks, corruption in high degrees also

cause this migration. Thus, Uwakweh (2017:17) observed that in contemporary times, however, there is an ongoing refugee explosion.

Dangers Associated with Illegal Migration

There are many African graduates who migrate legally to foreign countries to seek for employment. Though it leads to brain drain in the continent and on the various African nations, this is still not as dangerous as those who migrate illegally to seek for better living. People who migrate illegally in search of greener pastures endanger their lives. Boulby & Christie (2018:7) observed that Europe, due to its geographical proximity, safety and economic stability, is a favoured migration destination for communities from Africa and the middle east. There are many sides to modern slavery. For example, many young people are owned by other individuals and all the gains they make go to these people who use them as objects. Many people are slaves in other people's hands around the world facing forced labour while their payment goes to their masters. Many disadvantages and dangers are greatly associated with illegal migration that is trending now amongst African youths. Some of the dangers are that people sometimes lose their lives or self-esteem in the process. Most of these young people face dehumanizing lifestyles that destroys their health and self-esteem. Most of them are even made to take secret oaths with their masters and no matter what bondage and slavery they are subjected to, they usually find it hard to lament to concerned authorities. Another danger is the loss of lives and untimely death.

Illegal migration have led to most young people losing their lives while some become injured and handicapped for life because of the treatment they go through. Most of them lose their freedom and are always in hiding because their papers are hardly ever in their hands but in the hands of those they work for. The physical abuse the women go through when they engage in illegal migration and prostitution outside the shores of Africa are grave. The untold hardship and abuse causes diseases and untimely aging and death. It leads to brain drain. Many young people, whether on illegal or legal migration, offer their best services abroad. Sometimes they meet disaster such as genocide in these foreign countries they run to such as witnessed sometime ago in South Africa. Genocide is an internationally condemned act and an international crime declared since 1951.

United Nations Efforts in Combating Illegal Migration

Migration is so widespread and popular nowadays due to globalization and civilization. Migration can be regional, internal and international depending on circumstance. A new trend in international migration which negatively destroys the youth and dents African image and identity is the migration to engage in illegal lifestyles in order to make money. Kara (2009:3) stated that there are several reasons for this insufficiency despite increased media attention, sex trafficking remains poorly understood and the organizations dedicated to combating sex trafficking are underfunded and uncoordinated internationally. Naturally, this new developments is not in Africa's character and it highly detrimental to its image and identity worldwide. Quest for brighter lifestyle have become, all of a sudden, the chief driver for migration in contemporary Africa. Nevertheless, a greater amount of blame goes to African governments who man the affairs of their nations as mentioned earlier. There are also some elements of African culture which are depriving to women and which leads them to migrating from their main countries to seek refuge and comfort outside their home countries. African culture that is unfavourable to women is the clear practice of gender discrimination. Gender inequality in Africa leads to underdevelopment in a way. In Africa, land is hardly given to women especially single women to cultivate. Also many banks hardly give loans to young women who are not married. According to Wilson et al,

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is an activity that reduces humans to commodities. It has been characterized as a 'modern form of slavery that is one of the fastest growing forms of crime throughout the world' (2008:145).

Youths hardly have anything that motivates them in Africa. While in most western countries, jobless youths are provided for to maintain sanity in the system, African leaders hardly have anything to offer young graduates. Thus, the level of confusion and depression emanating from the way the system treats them prompts African youths, especially young women to migrate to other nations of the world and engage in illegal works such as prostitution, drug pushing, human and child trafficking of all sorts, for better living. It is the duty of any good governments in African nations to re-evaluate these consequences and provide a favourable ground for her people as well as ensure good security system. This will checkmate unwholesome attitude of the youths getting

engaged in an illegal migration which involves young women and men being carried away.

Whatever the reason for migrating to other nations, illegal migration and illegal jobs such as human trafficking, child trafficking, prostitution, drug pushing and so on remains a taboo and is considered a crime against humanity. Many humanitarian bodies frown at this development and have strategized plans on how to eliminate this heinous crime that is degrading to mankind. The United Nations Human Rights in the book *Human Rights and Human Trafficking Fact Sheet No. 36*, note that,

International human rights law is clear that all victims of trafficking, children as well as adults, who are not residents of the country in which they find themselves are entitled to return to their country of origin (2014:24).

Recommendation

Migration has always been a part and parcel of mankind. Adler et al, (2003:1) said that migration has been a major source of human survival, adaptation and growth across the centuries and millennia. Uwakweh (2017:17) note that in contemporary times, however, there is an ongoing refugee explosion. People will continue to migrate from one part of the world to another for diverse reasons. However, there are migrations which are legal and the ones which are illegal according to human rights law. It is recommended that the illegal forms of migration must be stopped completely because they impose severe sufferings to mankind. On the other hand, African leaders are advised to do what is right by putting all the structures and policies that will make their nations workable and make the environment favourable for people especially for the young people who seek better life outside Africa.

More so, there is need for an awareness to be created constantly on the need to shun modern day slavery which involves prostitution, human, trafficking, drug pushing outside Africa because it is constantly denting the image of Africa. Africa's identity is at stake in this contemporary time. The world is watching and record is being taken of the number of African men and women deported because of ill-conducts abroad. Also, records are being taken internationally of the number of uncountable men and women who die every day because of illegal migration. In the long run, illegal migration and jobs being done abroad by Africans will tarnish Africa reputation and make its identity worth nothing.

Caution must be taken on this. Consequently, concerning women's rights, the United Nations National Assembly calls upon governments to:

Strengthen measures aimed at advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls by, inter alia, enhancing their participation and leadership in society, including through education, economic empowerment and promoting an increase in the number of women assuming decision-making roles in both the public and private sectors (2016:8).

Conclusion

African citizens, whatever they do, must realize that the identity and heritage of African continent matters. Identity of where one comes from brings respect to the people. African governments must be up and doing in maintaining a balanced environment to minimize migration of their best brains from the system. The paper has looked at the trending migration in contemporary times which is ravaging African young men and women in recent times abroad. Migrating to work in other people's lands is bad enough but worst when the work being done is illegal because it affects the image and identity of the nations involved. It is time for African leaders to emulate what is good and amend their economic systems which is usually the major reason for young men and women, educated or not, seek to migrate to other nations to engage in trade or business of some sort. Abroad professional workers such as doctors, nurses, lecturers etc. are paid well while youths who do not have work are well catered for to reduce crime rate in the system. African nations must emulate this, by investing in human development which will reduce migration of the best brains to other countries. Migration again is considered in this paper to be good if it is for vacation, trade/business, health related issues and security reasons. Migrations caused by terrorism and war should be encouraged and victims assisted. For such people, adequate security measures and food should be provided for.

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