

Modern Migrations from an African Perspective: A Missiological Appraisal

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We begin our article with the following questions: Why is it that these modern migration walls and anti-immigration laws only target the southern continents and peoples from those regions? Why are migration walls not erected also in the northern boundaries of the Western Hemisphere as in the southern continents?

To discuss these questions, our article is divided into two parts. In this first part, we shall discuss African migrations and the burden of history. Thereafter, we shall dwell a great deal on the biblical meaning of migrations, which centers mainly on ‘risks and vulnerability’, as against the modern attitudes to immigrants in the Northern Hemisphere which prioritizes building of walls of separation and promulgation of anti-immigration laws. We shall compare the biblical significance as well as the meaning of migrations in other world religions with the modern attitudes and reactions to migrations and immigrants. In all, however, the sharp contrast between the biblical and other holy Scripts’ conceptions and witnesses to migrations in relation to the modern day anti-immigration laws and building of walls of barriers against immigrants, will be emphasized.

In the second part, our attention focuses on the African significance and consequences of the anti-immigration laws and walls promulgated nowadays on daily basis in the countries of Northern Hemisphere. We shall probe into the root causes of the present-day African migration palaver and proffer some ways towards arresting the problem.

Let us begin with stating the problem inherent in modern migrations as it affects the African context, with particular attention to Nigeria.

The Problem

Since the dawn of modern migrations of young Africans to Europe and America, Nigerians are no doubt among the most affected countries in the continent. Today, many Nigerians and other African youths – men and women are roaming about in the streets and every nook and corner of the countries of Western Hemisphere and elsewhere, without any tangible thing doing. Most of these young men and women are university graduates. Some of them are graduates of other tertiary institutions. Some were successful business men and women before the situation that forced them into foreign migrations started to rear its ugly head in their home countries.

Rightly or wrongly, some have described this emerging phenomenon as ‘brain-drain’ of the continent future talents. This school of thought suggests that something urgently, should be done to checkmate this ugly situation. However, with the rise of neo-oppressive governments in many African countries: religious bigotry, violence, ethnic cleansing, in short, lack of purposeful

governance and selfless leadership in many African nation-states today, the continent can only brace-up for continuous migrations of its young generation talents to Europe, America and elsewhere.

In all these, however, our young women are the most heat victims. A good number of them have become victims of ‘mafia’ groups, traffickers of prostitutions. Our young men are not even, spared. A good number of them are accused of being traffickers in ‘hard drugs’ by the government of the host country. In fact, most of the crimes and social disorder in countries of the Northern Hemisphere today are often, attributed to the presence of foreigners, non-White immigrants. So that in most cases, immigrants brought before any law courts are already pronounced guilty in public courts and sometimes by the Police before the actual judgment.

Worse still, the opinion of many ordinary citizens in these industrialized countries of the Northern Hemisphere centers around the fact that these young African immigrants and others are taking over from the citizens the few existing scarce employment opportunities in the host country. In this regard, it is no longer secret, that African immigrants are victims of new forms of job discrimination. They are also the most under-paid workers in the West. Often they work like slaves in factories and other places without pension and work-risks provisions. However, this is another story.

In addition, with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in recent times and Africa seen as a breeding ground of some of these radical Muslim fundamentalists, people are scared from having African immigrants (especially, Muslims) in their neighborhood. The behavior of the present President of the United States of America (USA) towards non-Western immigrants in the country since he assumed office in January 20, 2017, is an egregious example.

This is the image of being an African (especially, Nigerian) immigrant in most of the advanced countries of the world today. Most of our people are now ashamed to display with pride their National Passports at international borders and Airports. Most of them are even ashamed to mention the name of their country of origin even at casual meetings with friends from other countries. Our citizens in foreign lands now carry the narratives of the anti-immigration negative baggage of Africans in the West.

Extremists in the right-wing political parties in the West, who highlight these negative aspects of immigrants, are becoming more popular nowadays in their respective countries. In many Western countries, these extreme right-wing parties, who propagate a kind of ‘neo-fascist’ ideology, are beginning to attract majority votes from the masses during elections. This has heightened a new kind of hostility and hatred towards immigrants in the West and elsewhere. There is no doubt that with this new development, we are beginning to experience a kind of neo-xenophobia and resurgence or rather a subtle return of extreme ‘racism’ in the 21st century!

Unfortunately, Africans are the most vulnerable victims of xenophobia and racism. It is for this reason that one is at pain to observe that African leaders and elites are more or less doing nothing to address this rising phenomenon. Even when Nelson Mandela had called our attention to this situation and its African dimension some years ago, we are yet to make the question of

modern African migrations a priority in our national and continental deliberations and policies. This has made some people of good consciences to begin to ask questions: Africa, *Quo Vadis* in this 21st century! Should we fold our arms and watch the return to culture of ‘neo-fascism’ or ‘neo-Nazism’ in the 21st century, and the continued humiliation of our people and continent?

1. Modern African Migrations and the Burden of History

Libya was one of the first African countries Nelson Mandela visited in 1991 when he was released from the Robben Island Prison where he had spent 27 excruciating years under the defunct Apartheid Regime in South Africa. He went to Libya to thank the maximum leader, Gaddafi and his people for their support to the Blacks of South Africa during the struggle against the Apartheid racist separatist regime in his country. While in Libya, Mandela witnessed in the first person, the emerging plights of migrating young Africans, traversing the dreaded Sahara Desert on foot, and the Mediterranean Sea in balloon ships, under dangerous conditions and in an unspeakable inhuman treatment. In Libya, Mandela visited detention camps and centers of African immigrants *en route* to Europe. He saw in first person, what these migrating young Africans were undergoing already in Libya, what awaits them in traversing the Mediterranean Sea and on arrival at the Coasts of Western Hemisphere. Speaking to Newsmen later in Tripoli, capital of Libya, Mandela cried out to the consciences of the world in the following timeless words:

“These young Africans are coming to you not for alms or your so-called charity, but for support in their struggle for freedom and fight against injustice.”

By this, Mandela wanted to remind the world that the causes of modern migration from Southern continents to the countries of the North Atlantic world or the West are not different from those of fifteenth and nineteenth centuries’ European migrations to the Global South. Because the European migration to the southern continents in the 15th and 19th centuries, were in large part, as a result of the need of a people struggling for survival and freedom in Europe.

During those early centuries’ migrations from the North to the South, the people were running away from oppressive regimes of the then European feudal powers and palaces, the never-ending wars among the Princes and the Kings of the Medieval Era and civilization in Europe. There was also the ecological factors, the harsh arctic and extreme cold weather that had made the people to leave fatherland in Europe and seek greener pastures in the southern continents.

These were among the major factors responsible for the continued aggressive plunder of African Crude Oil and other natural and mineral resources by Europe since the time Vasco da Gama surrounded Africa for them in 1498. Since then they have come to discover that they cannot survive as a people even in their own land, without the crude Oil, and other natural and mineral resources from Africa. Since they would not succumb to negotiating with Africa, as that would mean, the so-called superior race, bowing before a people they had classified as their inferior. They felt the need, therefore, to hold firm control of these African products regardless of

the feelings of Africans who owned the land in the first place. Because, for the invaders, those African products were their birthright meant to warm Europe, especially during the winter season and provide raw materials needed for the industrial and technological revolution already under way.

In other words, the European incursion into African continent since 15th century, till date, have more to do with the plight of a people struggling for survival and freedom in their homeland in the West. Unfortunately, the movement of African products to Europe on its own part, has since then, been “one-way traffic.” African boundaries, markets and resources must remain open to Europe. On the contrary, Europe is not bound to open-up its boundaries and resources to African people. Moreover, any manufactured good from Africa is forever, forbidden in Europe. ‘It is like, I own you and your house, but you have no access to mine.’ Period!

However, there is need to emphasize once more, that human migration has remained a fact of history even before the 15th and 19th centuries’ European incursion into Africa, and the causes of it have almost remained the same. Migration has been described as, “an irrepressible human urge.”

Most of recent studies and legal criteria on modern migrations are often loaded with ideological interpretations and factors. Often they provide a tragic distortion of the essence and causes of migration in human history, including ours today. Most of the studies are yet to engage in serious reflection about the way in which modern history of the encounters between the Global South and the North, beginning from the fifteenth century onwards, impact on the massive displacement of peoples from the southern continents, majority of whom today are living in situations of despair and hopelessness.

Again, between 1500s and 1900s, the global migration was from the North to the South. That made the southern continents major centers of cultural as well as missionary engagements, with their consequences of exploitation and domination of the South by the North. In recent times, however, the trend has changed, at least on the surface and as regards to human mobility only. Because while the centers of power and domination have remained in the North with its structures of exploitation and control, the people of the southern continents have continued to experience on daily basis, entrenched structures of impoverishment, political instability, conflicts, wars and other industries of misery. That means that the present-day south-north human mobility rules out structures of dominance or control on the part of the migrating Africans. This is unlike the European immigrants of the 15th and 19th centuries who wielded power over their hosts. Modern African migration and the African immigrants in the Northern Hemisphere, epitomize the biblical sense of migration – risks and vulnerability.

Moreover, the presence of African immigrants in the West today – the relative economic poverty and political powerlessness of the migrating Africans, gives us the picture of the nature of the emerging global world, the complex interaction and interdependence between the global and the local, a dynamic process that renders the constructs of “margin” and “center” fluid and interchangeable. African migration typifies this central paradox. In its historical relationship with the North Atlantic world, African migration shows how our global world is today, marked by

complex interplay of domination and weakness, paternalism and marginalization. The global world – its center or centers are also on the margins. Example of this tension between the “center” and the “margin” of the global world today can be seen in the recent controversy within the worldwide Anglican Communion. Another example is the debate that ensued between the African Roman Catholic Bishops and their Western counterparts at the recently held two Synods of Bishops on the Family convoked by Pope Francis in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The African Catholic Bishops present at the two Synods in Rome stood on their grounds and upheld African family and marriage values as against the relativistic Western liberalism that pushed to change the long held traditional moral and religious values of the two institutions – family and marriage. At least, the Anglican Communion experience and that of the Roman Catholic Church, is recognition that, quite often, the tail is wagging the dog.

Again, on its own, human mobility is a fact of human history and it is not a sin. Human mobility is part of God’s plan for humanity. Migration as part of human social ecology is never intended by the Creator to be treated by human beings as if it is antithetical to His original plan of salvation for all humanity and the created universe. For thousands of years, the unpredictability and precariousness of normal life made migration and relocation the norm in human existence. Myriad factors, from little-understood ecological changes (including occurrences of famine and natural disasters) to overly aggressive neighbors and the perennial round of military violence, oppressive regimes, state-sponsored or feudal regimes’ oppressive attitudes, exploitation of the poor and their land by the powerful ruling-minority and elites, wars, etc., necessitated recurrent movement. Mobility was essential for survival. Long before the development of large-scale agricultural cultivation of land (c. 5500 B.C.E.) allowed the formation of high-density populations, permanent settlement with requisite social hierarchies and formal political structure remained an exception in human experience. For as long as human beings have inhabited the planet, relocation, displacement, and population transfers have marked the human condition.

Migrations in the Bible and Other World Religions

The “spirit of migration” permeates the biblical record and defines biblical religion. The image of the sojourner, indeed of life as a sojourn (splendidly depicted in *Psalms* 121) is a dominant theme, to such an extent, in fact, that the greatest peril to religious vitality and experience of the divine comes not from the trauma of violent displacement or the precariousness of exile and exodus. Rather it comes from the false sense of security derived from “having ‘arrived’ at the full and final expression of power and domination – man’s inhumanity to man, which is an antithesis of what migration is meant to serve. In other words, an immigrant is a seeker of solace, peace, truth, justice and liberty, and so not a threat to anybody or host community. Even those who question the historicity of the biblical story are forced to acknowledge that exile and exodus shape “the subtext of the narratives and rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible to the point of ‘narratological’ obsession.” Not only do we encounter every major form of migration in the biblical account, but also the biblical story and message would be meaningless without migration and mobility.

Therefore, the interface between human mobility and divine purposes in the biblical story is unmistakable and compelling. According to Jehu J. Hanciles, an African theologian from Sierra Leone, “The inextricable link between migrant movement and the *missio Dei* (the mission of God) arguably confirms the historicity of many events. It is also strongly paradigmatic of the biblical God’s intimate involvement in human affairs.” In other words, to claim that the God of the Bible is a God of mission is to accept that he makes himself known to human beings through ordinary, culturally conditioned experiences, such as migration. In fact, few experiences are more basic to the human condition than migration. Migration and exile form bookends (of sorts) to the biblical record. The earliest chapters record the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 3:23), the call of Abraham by God to depart from his fatherland to an unknown place (*Genesis* 12), the election of the people of Israel by God and the Exodus event – the journey from Egypt through the deserts to the Promised Land (Exodus 15:22-27). Moreover, the last book of the Bible contains the magnificent vision of the apostle John, who is exiled on the island of Patmos (*Revelation* 1:9).

In fact, for some theologians, the book of *Genesis* might well have been named the book of “migrations.” The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden – the first recorded migration – sets in motion further consequential migration events linked to human need and divine action. Cain is condemned to be “fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (*Genesis* 4:12); and a major ecological disaster imposes refugee status on Noah, along with his family and any number of living creatures. This ordeal ends with the divine proclamation “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (*Genesis* 9:1), a “global” mandate that forms a background of the “tower of Babel” episode (*Genesis* 11). The latter event, so evocative of divine intervention in history, highlights the actions of a specific group of migrants who settle in Babylon (*Genesis* 11:2). It also furnishes a compelling interpretative framework for global migration: “from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (*Genesis* 11:9). Here too we encounter, through a subtle rhetorical usage, not a fearful and insecure deity who regards humans as a threat but a God so elevated and exalted that he must *descend* to catch sight of efforts that, from a human standpoint, represent a pinnacle of accomplishment.

Furthermore, we should not forget that the whole of New Testament is full of migration narratives, beginning with the humble story of the birth of Jesus in a Manger at Bethlehem when Joseph and Mary were returning home for the Census. The most dramatic migration, however, was the flight to Egypt of the Holy Family, Joseph and Mary with the Infant Jesus, who sought refuge in Egypt (Africa) to escape the bloody threat of Herod, looking for the Child, described as a newly born King by the three Wise Man from the East, to kill. Persecutions of the Apostles and members of the early Christian community after the event of the Pentecost (*Acts* 2), and the Martyrdom of Stephen (*Acts* 7), their dispersion to various parts of the then known world, signaled a new page in the life and mission of the nascent Christian community of the New Testament. That is the first meeting-point of migration and mission in Christian missionary movement. Without that persecution and consequent migrations of the Apostles and early Christians, Christianity’s global outreach could not have been so challenging and successful as to spread to all corners of the world.

In our own time, however, there is a growing recognition of the role of migrations in Christian expansion and missionary activity. We are yet to engage in serious reflection about the way in which recent transformations within global Christianity itself (and even Islam as world religion) were aided by global migration. As said before, between 1500s and 1900s, the global migration was from the North to the South. That made the southern continents major centers of missionary engagement. But in recent times, the trend has shifted. The present migration from the South to the North points to the West as a major frontier of religious interaction and missionary engagement. The dynamic of international migrations in missionary enterprise is not new to the history of Christian mission. As we have shown already, the Bible bears witness to the inextricable connection between migration and mission and sees such linkage as a prominent factor in the history of Christian expansion. The fact that this connection is largely, overlooked in modern scholarship has something to do with the unwarranted distinctions created by the North-South geopolitics divide and their modern mechanisms of impoverishment of the countries of the southern continents, especially, in their dealings with Africa.

In all, however, the Bible teaches us that migrations follow the roots of salvation history and its fulfilment at the appointed time. Without human mobility, there will be no mission. People move with their faith and culture. We should bear in mind that the dispersion and multiplication of the races described in *Genesis* chapter 10 (mentioned earlier in this article), is behind the “tower of Babel” narrative. The “tower of Babel” signifies *anti-migration*. A central aim in the building project is to forestall further movement: “otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (*Genesis* 11.4). The Babel project stands in opposition to the diasporic scattering of the nations and peoples in a way that allows them to experience the God of Heaven through a multiplicity of contexts and a diversity of cultural experiences. As the Apostle Paul declared centuries later, “from one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live (i.e., cultural environment), so that they would search for God” (*Acts* 17:26-27). ‘Cultural diversity is a strongly biblical idea; the notion of a single global culture is not.’

In other words, it is within the particularity of culture that human ideas, human genius, and human creativity find their fullest expression. It is also within the particularity of cultural existence that God of Heaven is revealed and encountered. All human cultures are, of course, deformed by human sinfulness and are in need of redemption; but no culture or cultural system has a greater capacity than any other for facilitating responses to, or experience of, the divine. From a Christian perspective, it is not necessary to abandon one’s culture (or switch cultural traditions) in order to experience salvation through Jesus Christ. God has no favorite culture! As the prophet Amos reminded the people of Israel, “they were no dearer to God than the Africans” (*Amos* 9:7). So integral is cultural specificity to God’s plan of universal salvation that it endures until the end of the ages when “a great multitude ..., from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, [stand] before the throne and before the Lamb” (*Revelation* 7:9).

Babel, in essence (like building walls against immigrants from Africa or elsewhere), is a metaphor for cultural absolutism. It stands for monolithic human social projects that perpetuate a singular experience and attempt to impose the name and language (or culture) of one group on all

others. It exemplifies the secular ideal: idolatry of human achievement (“let us build”), the quest for power, for immortality (“a name”), and hegemonic advancement of one cultural group (“one language”) at the expense of messy, cacophonous, cultural diversity.

Furthermore, the “tower of Babel” declaration, “let us build ... a tower (“a wall”) with its top to the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves” (*Genesis* 11:14), also represents the *antithesis* of mission and redemption. The biblical concept of “mission” – which basically, denotes actions and events (not always self-evident) related to God’s plan of salvation – implies movement, sending, boundary crossing, and translation. It originates in divine initiative: the acts of self-disclosure, self-revelation, and ultimately the self-emptying of the incarnation whereby God is made manifest and encountered within specific cultural contexts. Insofar as it involves human agency, mission inevitably requires cross-cultural movement, or the crossing of boundaries, in which the primary experience is of vulnerability and risk, a readiness to live on another’s terms – features typified by migration and resettlement. Structures of domination and violent subjugation may facilitate mission up to a point; but they ultimately epitomize the spirit of Babel. They are emblematic of the finality, reliance on human structures, triumphalism, and false sense of security that imperil the continuing experience of God’s power and salvation available to all humanity.

Other major world religions also witness to the veracity of migration as part of human history. For example, Buddha, the founder of Buddhism had to leave his native land, India because of persecutions he and his followers suffered there at the beginning of his movement. He settled in the Far East of Japan and China where his new movement and religion was later to take strong root.

The founder of Islamic religion, Muhammed, at the beginning of his movement was exiled from his homeland, Mecca. Moreover, when his first followers were persecuted in Mecca, they took shelter in Ethiopia, where they received an unprecedented African hospitality. For this, Muhammed forbade Muslims from attacking or invading Ethiopia. In fact, Ethiopians were the only Christians who originally enjoyed a friendly relationship with Islam. Therefore, the Quran forbade jihad against the Ethiopians, calling them “a humble people of priests and monks.”

Conclusion

All this implies that there is need for a new kind of relationship based on mutual equality and respect between Africa and the world. A new kind of relationship capable of addressing seriously the present problem of poverty and political instability in African countries that form the root causes of massive displacement of peoples through modern migrations.

The reshaping of the global world through the complex interaction and interdependence between the “global” and the “local” has rendered the growing anti-immigration laws and building of walls of separation against African immigrants and others in the North Atlantic world a defunct and meaningless effort. The old heartlands exemplified domination and territorial control, national religion, cultural superiority, a fixed universal vision. In acute contrast, the

emerging global south, with Africa as its poster child, embody vulnerability and risk, religious plurality, immense diversity of people of faith experience and expression, as well as structures of dependency. These disparities necessarily translates into new forms and models of relationships among diverse peoples and different religious and cultural geographical regions of the globe. What is not in doubt is that the future of the global world will be decided not by the growing anti-immigration laws or building of walls of separation by governments in the North Atlantic world. Rather, mainly by the outcome of new initiatives in the interaction and interdependence between the “old centers” and the new “margins” of the global world. This will lead the two centers into a meeting-point in uncharted waters.

2. Africa and the Antics of Modern Anti-Immigration Laws and Walls

Moreover, why is it that no African state or nation, not even the Nigerian state wants to come to the aid of these helpless Africans in foreign lands? Again, does it mean that there are no governments in the countries of origin of these African victims of racism and xenophobia? Why are African Embassies not intervening at all on behalf of brutalized and humiliated Africans in foreign lands? Why are African Missions in foreign lands incapable of standing up for their co-nationals experiencing racist and xenophobic humiliations and brutalization in their countries of mission? Why are African leaders not necessarily worried about their people who are terrorized on daily basis home and abroad?

Again, no nation or state worth its name would ever fold its arms and watch its citizens or nationals brutalized and humiliated in foreign countries without intervening angrily. It is only in African nations and states that complacency and stoicism have become almost like a second nature to the people and their leaders. Our citizens and fellow Africans in Diasporas are the most vulnerable victims of xenophobia and racism in the world today. Yet, nobody, nation or state seems to be concerned. The question is: Where lies the problem? Why are things this way for the Africans home and abroad?

As we noted in the first part of the article, the answer to this problem is located within the ambient of the burden of history of modern Africa. Since the African encounter with the West, beginning with the time of the voyage of Vasco Da Gama in 1498, the continent has never been the same again. The African person, land, culture and world-view have been under serious attack since then. The African narrative and relationship with the world were shaped and continued to be shaped by those past events of our checked history. This is what has formed and has continued to inform the world perception and dealings with Africa and its people. It is also the driving force and narrative behind the anti-immigration walls and laws in the West, which generally, target the people of African descent.

There is also another side of the problem: It is the fact that often times the evil aspect of anti-immigration walls and geopolitics of North-South divide is kept hidden in modern geopolitical narratives. What those at the centers of power emphasize is their politics of doing charity and humanitarian philanthropic assistance to the poor Africans and immigrants. The story

people of the Northern Hemisphere, former colonial masters of Africa would like to tell themselves is the story of how they are doing charity to the people of Africa. None of them wants to make a link between the present northward African migration, poverty and the unending political instability of many African states with the present European affluence and world power.

Present generations of people of Northern Hemisphere may own up the history of industrial and technological revolutions as their heritage. However, none of them is prepared spiritually and psychologically, to link up that history of Western industrial and technological revolution with the plundering of Africa by the former Western colonial masters. The history of industrial and technological revolution in the West has no meaning without linking it to the colonialization and continued plundering of Africa by Europe. In the words of Chimamanda Adichie: “just as an average Briton, French, Belgian, could claim industrial revolution and philosophy of Enlightenment as his heritage, so should he see the link between the Western affluence today with what is happening in the Congo, Nigeria, Cameroun, indeed the whole of Africa.”

The present affluence of Europe is historical linked with what is happening in Africa today. Although the present leaders of Africa are responsible for African situation today, the fact remains, however, that the history of present Africa is tied and linked directly to the present European affluence and world power. As Walter Rodney had masterly demonstrated in his *Magnus opus* titled: “*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*,” “the poverty of Africa is the affluence of Europe.” Period!

In other words, to tackle the problem of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa is widely seen as an attack on one of the major sources of power and wealth of the West. African poverty and underdevelopment are the major sources of European wealth and power. This is why for the Western power, Africans must never be allowed to control their own affairs. The whole politics of charity to the poor Africans by the West is just anything but a narrative created to camouflage this “original sin” of the West in their dealings with Africa.

This is the major reason why Africa and its people have been at the crossroads of world history and narrative since its encounter with the West in the 15th century till date. The African problem is its history with the West. Until this historical problem – the prevalent narrative of European – African encounter is addressed and resolved, the route to redemption is still very far to come by.

The Nigerian Dimension

Since the dawn of modern migrations and European anti-immigration laws, Mediterranean Sea has become a kind of cemetery for the migrating young Africans and families. A good number of these young people and families are from Nigeria.

Pope Francis has, from the beginning of his pontificate remained the most visible world leader that denounces without reservations in words and actions, the plights of immigrants today.

One of the first places he visited after his election as Pope was the immigrant detention center in the Mediterranean Sea coast of Italy. This was after the incident of shipwreck that killed over 200 African immigrants, most of them from Eritrea, former Italian colony in the horn of Africa.

The fact that most of the ships conveying African natural and mineral resources from the continent to Europe and America pass swiftly and safely through the canals of the Mediterranean Sea, without any harm or shipwreck, must give us a cause for concern. Because the same thing cannot be said of those ships (balloons) being used in carrying human beings – African youths across the same Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Europe. Some of the surviving immigrants have testified that often those balloon-ships conveying Africans across the Mediterranean Sea, are forced by law enforcement agencies operating in the Western coasts to end up in shipwreck. This is another matter altogether. But it means that there is more to the shipwrecks of the balloon-ships conveying African immigrants across the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Europe than the eye could meet!

Again, since the beginning of modern migration palaver, the *clandestine* movement of young Africans to Europe and America, Nigerians are no doubt among the most affected in the continent. A good number of our young people attempting to cross Mediterranean Sea to come to Europe have drowned in the sea without name or face. Those who eventually made it to Europe through Libya, Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea route are languishing today in various detention centers for migrant refugees scattered in different European countries and Libya.

Today, many Nigerians and other African youths – men and women are roaming about in the streets and every nook and corner of the countries of Western Hemisphere and elsewhere, without any tangible thing doing. Most of these young men and women are university graduates. Some of them are graduates of other tertiary institutions. Some were successful business men and women before the situation that forced them into foreign migrations started to rear its ugly head in the country.

Rightly or wrongly, some have described this emerging phenomenon as ‘brain-drain’ not just of Nigerians but the entire African continent future talents. This school of thought suggests that something urgently, should be done to checkmate this ugly situation.

However, with the rise of neo-oppressive governments in many African countries: religious bigotry, violence, ethnic cleansing, in short, lack of purposeful governance and selfless leadership in many African nation-states today, the continent can only brace-up for continuous migrations of its young generation talents to Europe, America and elsewhere.

In all these, however, our young women are the most heat victims. A good number of them have become victims of ‘mafia’ groups, traffickers of prostitutions. Our young men are not even, spared. A good number of them are accused of being traffickers in ‘hard drugs’ by the government of their host country. In fact, most of the crimes and social disorder in countries of the Northern Hemisphere today are often, attributed to the presence of foreigners, non-White immigrants. So that in most cases, immigrants brought before any law courts are already pronounced guilty in public courts and sometimes by the Police before the actual judgment is

delivered. In matters of this kind, Africans are “naturally” the most vulnerable. In such a situation, Nigerians, of course, are naturally, expected to occupy the front row.

Worse still, the opinion of many ordinary citizens in those industrialized countries of the Northern Hemisphere, centers around the fact that these young African immigrants and others are taking over from them few existing scarce employment opportunities in the host country. In this regard, it is no longer secret, that African immigrants are victims of new forms of job discrimination. They are also the most under-paid workers in the West. Often they work like slaves in factories and other places without pension and work-risks provisions.

In addition, with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in recent times and Africa seen as a breeding ground of some of these radical Muslim fundamentalists, people are scared from having African immigrants (especially, Muslims) in their neighborhood. The behavior of the new President of the United States of America (USA), Donald Trump towards non-Western immigrants in the country since he assumed office in January 20, 2017, is an egregious example. Already some Nigerians who travelled to the United States of America since President Trump assumed office are complaining of how they were discriminated against and humiliated on arrival at the American Airports. These are Nigerians with valid documents and American Visa. Nigerians also experience almost similar thing most of the time on arrival at the European Airports and other places.

This is the fatigue and image of being Nigerian (African) immigrant in most of the advanced countries of the world today. Most often, some of our people are ashamed to display with pride their National (Green Color) Passports at international borders and Airports. For most citizens it is like a burden to carry a Nigerian identity in foreign lands nowadays. Most of our citizens are even ashamed to mention the name of their country of origin even at casual meetings with friends from other countries. Our citizens in foreign lands now carry the narratives of the anti-immigration negative baggage of Africans in the West and elsewhere.

Extremists in the right-wing political parties in the West, who highlight those negative aspects of immigrants, are becoming more popular nowadays in their respective countries. In many Western countries, the extreme right-wing parties, who propagate a kind of ‘neo-fascist’ ideology, are beginning to attract majority votes from the masses during elections. This has heightened a new kind of hostility and hatred towards immigrants in the West and elsewhere. There is no doubt that with this new development, we are beginning to experience a kind of neo-xenophobia and resurgence or rather a subtle return of extreme ‘racism’ in the 21st century!

Again, in all these, Africans, especially, Nigerians are the most targeted group and victims of modern xenophobia, new forms of racism and slavery.

Enduring Consequences of Modern Migration Walls

As we tried to demonstrate in the first part of our article, the growing anti-immigration sentiments in the countries of the Northern Hemisphere is antithetical to God’s universal design

for humanity. The growing anti-immigration laws, currently being enacted in many countries of the North, the hegemonic Global North kind of building walls of separation (“Babel tower”) through severe immigration laws against peoples of the southern continents, in particular, against African immigrants, is another way of avoiding responsibility in addressing the root causes of modern migrations. The fact is that many African nation-states created through the colonial arrangement of the European Berlin Conference of 1885, are still struggling to overcome the concomitant consequences of ethnic and religious conflicts triggered off by the arbitrary colonial partitioning and boundaries. Most of African political leaders and heads of states with dictatorial tendencies against their own people, still receive from the centers of power in the Global North, a tacit support for the continued existence in Africa of these oppressive colonial arrangements and structures. It would appear that the flow of natural and mineral resources from Africa to the advanced countries is considered more important than the lives of Africans.

This is one of the root causes of the northward migrations of young Africans today. Since political independence of 1960s, many African states have never really chosen their own leaders themselves. Although façade of political elections are said to be conducted, the fact remains that the choice of who wins political elections in many African countries today are not determined by the people’s elections but through proxy control of centers of power in the Northern Hemisphere. They put their stooges as winners of political elections in many African states.

Both the choice of candidates and results of African elections themselves are already forgone issues before the actually election takes place in the continent. African people are not the ones that determine who becomes their leader. African leaders are generally, imposed by foreign powers through local spinoffs. As a result, many African states are quasi governed by foreign sponsored and selected stooges as local leaders, most of whom are there simply to protect the colonial interest of their masters from the Northern Hemisphere.

This means that since political independence of 1960s, most African states have not really gotten a government or leaders that are people-oriented. African states and governments are not bottom-up structured but rather the other way round (top-bottom). This is why many African states have governments devoid of human face; leaders who do not care to listen to the cry of the masses in critical situations such the modern migrations walls and xenophobic attacks against Africans in foreign lands.

This explains also the reason for the seemingly permanency in African political landscape of sit-tight Heads of States, civilian elected Presidents “turned” dictators. It is also the reason why some African countries have world’s most notorious autocratic political leaders as Heads of States or Presidents, people who have no respect to the nation’s Constitution, rule of law and order. They are there just to plunder the countries natural and mineral resources for selfish gain and to satisfy the foreign interest of the former colonial masters and modern centers of power.

In other words, foreign interest, bad governance and incompetent leadership have created disorder, anger and hunger in many African countries. Many of our young people disillusioned by the whole situation, who do not see any bright future for themselves living under such hard reality, tend to seek green pasture in Europe or America through migrations.

As is often said, people tend to follow the products of their land wherever they are taken to. Since the products of African soil have been exploited all these while and exported to the countries of the North till date, the present generations of Africa, by insisting on the ‘northward’ migration and self-determination of indigenous African populations, are demanding justice and fair play from the plunderers of their resources and land.

Luke Mbefo, a Nigerian Spiritan Catholic priest and theologian, describes the situation that pushes the young Africans to migrate to Europe or America as a new form of slavery and servitude:

“For an African without sufficient skill and qualification to decide to abandon his fatherland in pursuit of low-grade jobs in Europe or America in the hope of cheap money would amount to a new form of enslavement, a “slavery in reverse gear.” It is an enslavement that is now freely chosen rather than unwillingly imposed.”

However, more than their search for any type of low grade jobs in foreign land, which they do out of frustration, the young African immigrants are also asking for support in their struggle for survival and freedom from the oppressive African ruling elites and their sponsors from the world centers of power. These are the powers at home and abroad, whose ineptitude and insensitivity in their leadership style, had forced these young Africans into the “new form of slavery” in foreign lands.

It is the story of the prevalent geopolitics implanted in Africa that is at the root of the tragedy of modern African migrations. Until these historical injustices are addressed, and resolved in creative way the world would have to prepare for more tragedies of modern migrations from the southern continents, especially, Africa to Europe, America and elsewhere.

Africa and the Politics of Humanitarian Charity

Recently, the renowned Nigerian author and novelist, Chimamanda Adichie, gave a stirring speech on modern migration to mark the World Humanitarian Day. The speech has been celebrated as pointed, meaningful, and elegantly delivered. Adichie used her parents experience as internally displaced people – refugees during the Biafra – Nigeria War (1967-1970). She called the world to be more compassionate and justice-oriented in charting policies and new cause on people from troubled lands who seek refuge away from home:

“Nobody is ever just a refugee. Nobody is ever just a single thing. And yet, in the public discourse today, we often speak of people as single things. Refugee, immigrant. We dehumanize people when we reduce them to a single thing.” (Chimamanda Adichie).

The idea of detention centers built all over Europe for the migrating young Africans and others, leaves much to be desired. Because it complicates the whole thing as it promotes human traffic and makes modern African migration a lucrative business for some “Mafia groups”, who may be operating under a deceitful name of “philanthropism.” It creates also bad name for those good and authentic Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), whose members really spend

their lives and time daily in alleviating the sufferings of the displaced people. These state sponsored detention centers for the immigrants in Europe is beginning to be viewed, rightly or wrongly by many, as a means of making money for some “charlatan charitable organizations.” Moreover, only heavens knows the humiliation and abuse of human dignity these immigrants experience in the European detention centers.

Make no mistake about it. This is not an attack on the NGOs. No. We are only condemning the activities of the charlatan charitable organizations. Because on the part of the authentic NGOs, most of them are taking a great risk going to dangerous zones to help the victims of wars and hunger. Their work is very essential to our modern world infested with unprecedented cases of injustices against the poor of the earth.

I was a beneficiary myself of the good work of the charitable organizations, just like many others of my generation from Eastern region during the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970). I am alive today, thanks to great extent, the good works of those charitable organizations and the churches that worked in Biafra-land during the tragic Nigeria-Biafra War. The Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (WCC) organized effectively, collection of relief materials for the Biafran victims during the War. The charitable activities that saved my life and those of many others during the war, was efficiently, carried out through the heroic works of the Catholic Church’s – *Caritas Internationalis* and Red Cross of the World Council of Churches. We need not add also the central role the Vatican and the WCC played in negotiating at the international and local levels for the end of the war.

The churches and their charitable organizations defied the Nigerian government embargo and blockade against the people of Eastern Nigeria (Biafra). When the blockade was put in place, the charitable organizations devised another means, through night Airlifts to fly relief materials to Biafra during that most critical period of the war when many Biafran children were dying on regular basis because of Kwashiorkor (malnourished) and starvation as a result of the federal government embargo and blockade against the people of Biafra. Some of Biafran children suffering from kwashiorkor were air-lifted and flown to Gabon, Ivory Coast and few other places for refuge and treatment. This is how most people of my generation in Biafra survived the war.

Suffice it to say, that one of the children from Biafra brought to Gabon during the war, got adopted by the late President Omar Bongo of Gabon. That child is the present President of Gabon. However, most of the children returned after the war to Nigeria from Gabon and Ivory Coast where they were sent as refugees and often kwashiorkor patients. Most of them are today experts in different fields of human endeavors. Some of them became my classmates later in secondary school and in the Seminary. Some are priests today, serving the society and the church, thanks to those charitable organizations and churches that saved our lives through relief material they brought to us in Biafra during the war.

Perhaps, this testimony may serve as an answer against all those today who are calling for the “killing of religion” in Nigeria! Moreover, it is a testimony of numerous benefits awaiting a society built on culture of healthy hospitality to immigrants.

Unfortunately, the Federal Government of Nigeria, at the end of the war, instead of thanking the churches for their assistance in saving my life and lives of other survived starved Biafran children of my generation during the war, decided to expel all the foreign missionaries from Eastern Nigeria and confiscated all the church schools. The school apostolate of the churches in Eastern Nigeria was too effective before the Civil War. It became one of the effective ways the people of Eastern Nigeria were introduced into the western civilization and way of life. Such that within a very short time, the people of Eastern Nigeria were able to meet up with other regions of the country who had encountered the western civilization before them. This was before the war. However, after the war, the Federal Government of Nigeria appeared to have no longer valued the services of the churches in Eastern Nigeria. This is another story, altogether!

However, in spite of all these, there is need to point out that the charitable organizations only provide temporary relief. When confronted with the unfair trade agreements of the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and tariff) and World Trade Organization (WTO), the Structural Adjustment Program (SAPs) – one option of IMF, the World Bank “open market economy” – ideology of development as natural law, the exploitative capitalist system, the churches and NGOs are powerless. They spend themselves and their resources in providing temporary relief to the suffering masses. But what emerges at the end is the triumph of the capitalist nations’ program – the one particular notion of the individual – the middle class individual living in the advanced countries, who should be allowed to have access to all markets and to take advantage of the weaker economies of the African countries.

These are the geopolitical-economic structures governing the world today. Africa in its vulnerability and powerlessness is number one victim and most exploited of this system. Africa today lives at the margin and mercy of the Multi-Nationals, Bretton Woods Financial Institutions, indeed centers of power in the Northern Hemisphere. All these have contributed in no small measure in bringing about the current massive displacement and dispossession of Africans and others from the southern continents. Again, these are the factors at the root of the present northward migrations from Africa and other countries of the southern continents. This is the crux of the matter!

Conclusion

The fact is that tackling the problem of modern migration palaver must go beyond the usual philanthropic approach. Because in final analysis, nobody becomes somebody through “food handouts” of charity. Charity without justice is questionable. Because, in the final analysis, a beggar has no self-respect. We must do charity to the poor and oppressed. But the ultimate aim must be our efforts to help the person regain his human dignity and freedom.

The same thing applies to African nations, called to be protagonists and masters of their own destiny in dynamic partnership and mutual relationship with all others in the community of nations. The self-respect for the African nations (including African churches and individuals)

will keep on being elusive until there is a certain level of self-reliance. The foreign aids destroy not only local economies, but also creativity and originality. In addition, it alienates the individual or nation, since a beggar has no choice, but to dance to the tune of him who provides the nourishment for the stomach.

It is high time the world centers of power begin to support real African political leaders who mean well for the people of the continent. There is need also for a rethink of the current growing anti-immigration laws by governments in most of the advanced countries. This means also that there should be courage on the part of world centers of power to take a second look and fine-tune the present world order – the economic systems behind the geopolitics of the North-South divide. Because it has not helped the matter at all. Rather, it has brought about, what Pope Francis has rightly described, as an entirely new form of slavery, xenophobia, racism, religious acrimonies, bigotry, and unjust geopolitical and economic systems in the West and other places too, especially, against the Africans.

Therefore, instead of promoting those anti-immigration laws and creating detention centers or walls for the immigrants in the West, all hands must be on deck to correct the imbalance of the North-South economic divide that has divided the world into First, Second, Third, and even Fourth worlds. Those who control world centers of power should do all in their capacity to bridge the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and between African states and the rest of the world. Until these injustices against the poor countries of Africa and others are sincerely, addressed, the world could only expect more migration crisis than it had ever witnessed.

CONCLUDED

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