MIGRATION AND RELIGIO-POLITCAL INSECURITY

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Abstract

Several experiences in Africa in recent times, from the religious to the socio-cultural, have threatened the value of life. The timeline of the deadly attacks of the Boko Haram insurgents and other religious crises in Nigeria and her bordering countries during the last ten years is alarming. These crises, religious, ethnic and political, have led to the loss of property, and above all, a decline in the value of human life. Navigating from the religious to the political scene reveals even more. The 1966-67 genocide orchestrated by the military and political figures against Biafra during the Biafra-Nigeria War, has had great implications for Igbo migration since the end of the Civil War. The Asaba massacre, Onitsha Apostolic Church massacre, rapes, etc., are evidences of how wanton crimes were committed against humanity in Biafra. Again, on November 20th 1999, the President of Nigeria ordered the invasion and subsequent destruction of Odi community in Bayelsa State by the soldiers of the Nigerian Army. It was an invasion that was genocidal and a gross violation of the rights of the victims, principally to life. The question raised and attended to in this piece is the implications of these religious, ethnic and political crises on migration. The methods of research employed in this paper is the historical and hermeneutic methods of investigation. The paper found out that migration, in Nigeria especially, as in many parts of Africa, is strongly connected to religious and political violence.

Keywords: Violence, Conflict, Migration, Insecurity, Religious, Political, Peace

Introduction

It has been observed that as at 2019, one person is forced to leave his or her environment every two seconds, often with nothing but the clothes on their bodies, to other places in search for safety, and that currently, the global total of forcibly-displaced people is over 68.5 million (Giovetti 2019). These movements have been caused by a community of factors like drought, which leaves families without access to clean water, often leading to them turning to dirty water as their only alternative for bathing, drinking, and growing crops. Another cause is flood. In fact, the report published by Cornell University in 2017 has it that events prompted by climate change such as drought and flooding could account
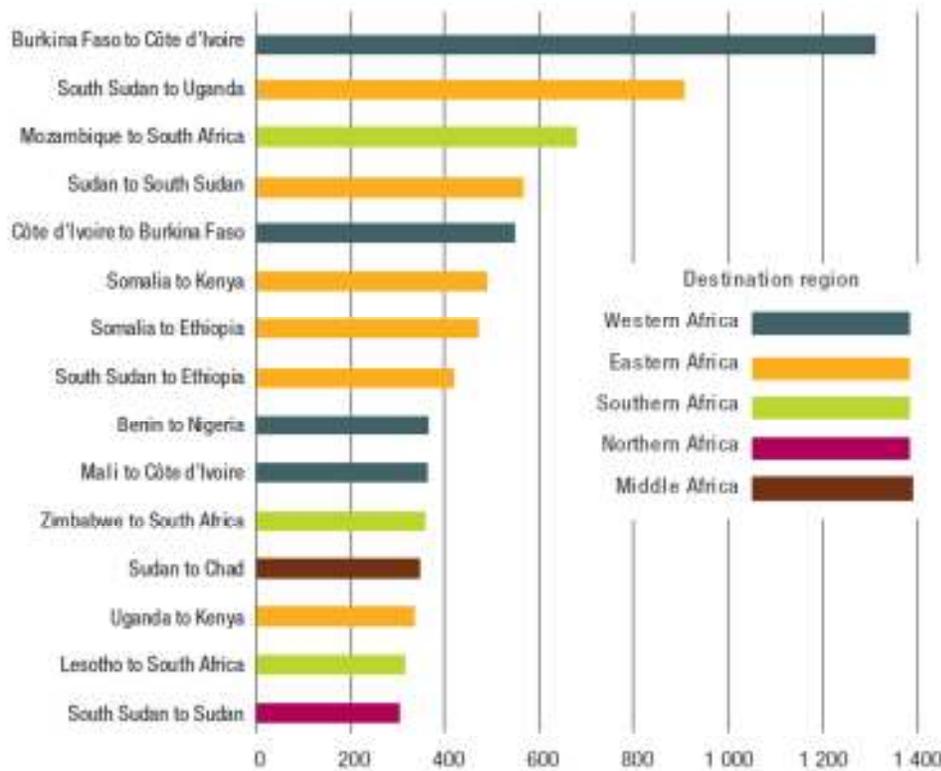
for up to 1.4 billion forced migrations by the year 2060. By 2100, they estimate that number would surpass 2 billion. Earthquake is also a factor. In 2015, a devastating series of earthquakes hit Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (7.5-magnitude) and Nepal (7.8-magnitude and 7.3-magnitude, respectively). These drove hundreds of thousands of residents from their homes.

While taking cognizance of these causes of migration, this work focuses on the relationship between migration and religio-political conflicts in Africa. It, therefore, responds to the question: Is there any relationship between religio-political conflicts and the movement of people, especially Africans from their native homes to foreign lands in search for safety? This research does not in any way concern herself with temporary movements of people as a result of violence with the hope of returning back, it rather concerns herself with those movements that are permanent as a result of conflicts among African nations, communities or villages.

Insecurity of Life and Migration in Africa

However, the most common factor for forced migration around the world is conflict between nations, communities or villages. Very recently was the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar which saw nearly 75% of Muslims in the country fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh in the wake of violence in their own home country. In the Middle East, the deadly civil war in Syria has caused millions of forced migration to leave to different parts of the world through land, seas and air in search for safety. The UNHCR (2019) reported that the number of forcibly displaced people both within countries and across borders as a result of persecution, conflict, or generalized violence has grown by over 50 per cent in the last 10 years; there were 43.3 million forcibly displaced people in 2009, and the figure was 70.8 million by the end of 2018. Today 1 out of every 108 people in the world is displaced. More than two-thirds (67%) of refugees in 2018 came from five countries: the Syrian Arab Republic (6.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.3 million), Myanmar (1.1 million) and Somalia (0.9 million). The instability and violence that have made Afghanistan a major source of refugees for over 30 years has continued, with the country being the second top origin country in the world with 2.5 million refugees. These countries mentioned are conflict zones, and their constituting of two third of refugees in 2018 points to the reality of the relationship between migration and conflict. *Most migrants from Africa are* people fleeing violence in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and beyond, embarking on journeys to South America either by boat or plane and then, on foot, making the long and treacherous trek north through Colombia and Panama on their way to the United States.

Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017a.

From the above chart, migration from South Sudan to Uganda, Somalia to Kenya, Somalia to Ethiopia, South Sudan to Ethiopia, South Sudan to Sudan are migrations motivated by violence. UNHCR (2016) reports that for over 2 decades, Uganda has been a host country for refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo where the majorities are currently settling in the refugee camps of West Nile region and Western Uganda due to the escalating rebellion, civil war and armed conflict in their home country. The Democratic Republic of Congo has the highest number of displaced people on the continent of Africa, with nearly 6 million people forced from their homes by various conflicts. South Sudan has been continuously plagued by war-induced migration during its short existence.

Shire (2018) in a poem titled 'Home' expressed the strong connection between violence and migration.

"No one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark

you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well
your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly

it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land

no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.

no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father

no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up

how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs

maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off
or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs

or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.

I want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans

drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important
No one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
I don't know what I've become
but I know that anywhere
is safer than here".

Shire's poem is a persona experience of how war has made a foreign land better than home. The story of her experience in Somalia reminds me of how Time Magazine casts Africa: "No where is a continent more miserable. Africa has become the basket case of the planet, 'the third world of the third world', a vast continent in free fall" (p. 41). Africa has posed a fresh problem for the external

world because their interest in it has now become "merely charitable- a matter of humanitarianism, a moral test for the West" (p. 42).

The faces of greater percentage of Africans register destitution, frustration and despair. The repression and the general insecurity that has pervaded Africa has forced thousands to flout all international border laws to get out of the continent. Some pass through the deserts of North Africa, preferring to face wild beasts than return home, our young girls in huge numbers are moved to Europe rather than face economic backwardness (Dagin 2005). If you have tried to go to the American Embassy, you would see the huge number of Africans struggling to leave the continent as though they were given an ultimatum.

Conclusion

Without consulting a soothsayer, one knows that Human insecurity has attained high levels in Africa, with very high incidents of conflicts and instability intensifying across swaths of Africa, including particularly in conflict zones such as Nigeria, Sudan, and Somalia. Currently, Africa is the continent with the highest number of UN peacekeepers – 17,000 strong in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This paper has studied the relationship between the rising conflicts in Africa and the issue of Migration. Apart from the cases of hunger, poverty, disease, flood, etc., that are affecting the lives of many Africans, and which have determined the movement of many Africans to other countries of the world, within and outside Africa, this paper argues that the issue of insecurity is at the heart of a good percentage of the migration of Africans out of their home lands. And if the issue of migration becomes an issue of concern for the governments of Africa, especially, as it affects the movement of the young, strong, talented, intelligent, etc., out of Africa into different worlds that creates the opportunity for self-realization, then the issue of insecurity must be tackled first.

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