FRANK-COLLINS NNAMDI OKAFOR

The Zest for Migration and National Development in Nigeria: Bridging the Gap between Illusion and Reality

The problem created by the mass movement of Nigerian youth outside the country in search of greener pastures cannot be overemphasized. More worrisome, however, are the losses suffered by the country because of the unbridled zest for migration held by those still within the country who hope that one day they will also migrate. This paper takes a critical look at the situation with special attention to what engineers this zest in young Nigerians, as well as the special problems it creates. It concludes that the Nigerian nation loses a great deal in terms of the contributions that might be made to the development of the state by those young people who wait hopelessly and helplessly for the day their dreams may materialize. It also offers the best ways out of these direstraits for the Nigerian state and other states in this kind of situation.

Key words: zest for migration, national development, Nigeria, remittances.

Migracijska vročica in nacionalni razvoj v Nigeriji: Kako premostiti razkorak med iluzijami in resničnostjo

Problema, ki ga povzročajo množične težnje mladih Nigerijcev po iskanju boljšega življenja izven dežele, nikakor ne smemo podcenjevati. Še hujše so izgube, ki jih dežela trpi zaradi nebrzdane izselitvene vročice mladih, ki upajo, da se bodo nekega dne lahko izselili. Članek kritično osvetljuje vzroke, ki mlade Nigerijce ženejo v tujino, hkrati pa obravnava tudi probleme, ki izvirajo iz tega gibanja. Zaključuje se z ugotovitvijo, da nigerijska država izgublja družbeni prispevek mladih, ki brez upanja in nemočno čakajo na dan, ko se jim bodo uresničile sanje. Ponuja tudi rešitve tega kritičnega položaja, ki bi jih Nigerija in podobne države lahko s pridom uporabile.

Ključne besede: migracije, nacionalni razvoj, Nigerija, nakazila migrantov

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1. Introduction

The rate of migration has greatly increased in recent years and has affected the lives of many nations, including Nigeria. The only seeming exception with respect to Nigeria lies in the high level of the numbers of emigrants and the strength of the appetite for migration that has been inspired in the citizenry. This appetite, or zest, for migration may be defined as an unquenchable desire among Nigerians to travel and reside overseas.

An estimated 5,000 Nigerian professionals leave the country annually (IOM in Hernández-Coss & Chinyere Egwuagu 2007). "Nigeria has 100,000 immigrants in the United States alone" (Emeagwali 2007, 3) while 21,000 Nigerian doctors were practising there (UNDP 1993). Approximately 90,000 Nigerians living in the UK are highly skilled (Hernández-Coss & Chinyere Egwuagu 2007, 2). No doubt, the number has dramatically increased since these dates. While other factors could be responsible, globalisation with its concomitant community of mankind has been pinpointed as the single most influential reality responsible for these overwhelming human movements. Little wonder that Düvell (2003, 1) believes that globalisation simply means an increase in mobility and migration, while Castles and Miller (in Hirano 1997) call our own times "the age of migration". They categorized the following general tendencies of migration movements today: globalization, acceleration, differentiation and feminization.

Castles and Vertovec (2005, 1) also emphasize that the movement of people is an integral part of globalization. In their view, economic and demographic change, growing disparities in incomes, in welfare and in human security, and improvements in technology are driving massive increases in mobility. Hundreds of millions move each year for short periods as tourists or business travelers. Others in their millions move for longer periods as students, temporary workers or mobile professionals. About 200 million are counted as long-term international migrants – those who have lived outside their countries of birth for at least a year. Not everyone moves voluntarily. For example, there are some 14 million refugees, two-thirds of them in situations of long-term exile with little chance of resolution. About half a million people seek asylum each year. An estimated 25 million people (more than half of them in Africa) have been displaced internally by violence and persecution, while another 10 million a year are forced from their homes by development projects. Thus, there are voluntary and involuntary migrants, with the former forming the focus of the study.

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74 The implication of the above reality, one may say, is that a good percentage of people, especially those with homes in Third World countries, live outside these countries. Hence, Hirano (1997) with the aid of an estimate by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) considered that 80 million people resided outside their countries of birth and citizenship in the year 1990. Other authors estimate that there were 100 million migrants in 1992. As of 2005, there were over 76.3 million African migrants, a figure that is by no means a small one, and the migrations are both legal and illegal (African Union 2005). The illegal dimension involves those who travel with fake and expired travelling documents as well as those without any documents at all.

Obviously, the movement of people across borders is not frivolous. It promises new opportunities and has become extremely lucrative, even though it may be dangerous in some cases. For instance, in 2006, recorded remittances sent home by migrants from developing countries exceeded US$ 200 billion, more than double the amount recorded for 2001 (Nisha 2007, 17). The recorded cash remittances to Nigeria in about the same period, according to the submissions of Hernández-Coss *et al.* (2007), amounted to approximately US $ 2.26 billion while remittances in kind (electronics, cars, etc.) were valued at US $ 0.510 billion (this is based on the assumption that 50 per cent of the remittances to Nigeria were not recorded). According to Vanguard (2011), the total remittances to the developing nations like Nigeria in 2011 was US $ 351 bn [billion] while the top global recipients of remittances in 2011 were India ($58 bn), China ($57 bn), Mexico ($24 bn) and the Philippines ($23 bn). Other large recipients include Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Vietnam, Egypt and Lebanon. Nigerians abroad remitted over $10 bn, or precisely $10.045 bn, that same year. Thus, Nigeria was declared the highest in this respect of all African countries and the seventh biggest recipient of money remitted to the home country by citizens living abroad.

Although migration is generally a global issue, its impact on the Nigerian nation, especially young Nigerians, is overwhelming. It is a fact that most Nigerians, especially young people, aspire to travel outside the country. This urge and dream have been a very strong challengie to the competing instincts of patriotism and nationalism. The rush for conventional visas, visa lotteries and other means (both legal and illegal) for leaving the country is not only alarming but also a testimony that the internal socio-economic and political conditions of the nation stimulate the zest for migration in Nigerians.

Nigerian young people keep schematic travel charts, showing the time-lines from the deceptive date of visa application to the projected date of departure. They

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also queue up for days and nights outside certified and sometimes uncertified visa and travel agents in search of relevant travel documents.

Cases abound of a good number of young Nigerians who have been maimed, subjected to inhuman treatment, arrested and even prosecuted when travelling by illegal means to foreign lands. Thousands have also died in ships and detention camps overseas as illegal migrants. For example, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in August 2008 alerted the world to the several deaths that occurred among the migrants in Libya trying to cross over to Europe. According to this source, over 25 persons died while about $ 200–300 dollars were required to make arrangements for those who were stranded. There is no doubt that most of them were Nigerians.

These difficulties have not in any way reduced the clamour for this seemingly endless dream, while more and more illegalities are perpetrated in the process. However, this is not to suggest that Nigerians are the only people who suffer en route to foreign countries. In 1630, for example, a group of English Puritans emigrated to New England, hoping to start their own religious community in what is now Massachusetts. The settler William Pond, Jr. crossed the Atlantic Ocean with this group. In 1631, he wrote the following letter to his parents, describing the hardships he faced on the journey and once he reached the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He stated that:

> Diseases had killed a number of the settlers and had spread to the Native Americans, decimating their population. The settlers had not been successful with their farming efforts and food supplies had run dangerously low (Pond 1651).

Pond entreated his father to keep sending provisions from England so that he and his family might survive.

The quest by Nigerians may be better understood by examining the shocking events of the recent past, when some Nigerians attempted to sell international passports and other documents for travel to the Republic of Lomar, a state that Perouse de Montclos (n.d.) informs us "existed only on the web". This is ridiculous and confirms desperation that go with this vain dream.

While this quest cuts across all classes, ethnic backgrounds, academic qualifications, socio-economic exposures and genders, the female dimension – the quest for overseas marriages and prostitution – forms the most interesting aspect. Noteworthy is the fact that many young Nigerian women pray for foreign-based partners just as many mothers long for overseas-based in-laws. Both have

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a common intention: the urge for overseas migration, even if only for temporary baby-sitting. However, this group of female Nigerians fails to understand that, whatever way one looks at it, the journey and life and work in another country involve many risks for women migrant workers, especially those in irregular situations: harassment, intimidation or threats to themselves and their families, economic and sexual exploitation, racial discrimination and xenophobia, poor working conditions, increased health risks and other forms of abuse, including trafficking into forced labour (Nightingale 2002).

In spite of these difficulties, it is embarrassing to note that in 2004, for example, Nigerians were the fifth largest group of asylum seekers in Europe (Carling 2005), even when there was no internal condition in the form of major crises within the country that might have naturally motivated this emigration. Since the Civil War (1967–70) and excepting the evil régime of General Abacha (1993–98), Nigeria has never had any period of critical political persecutions and killings.

While a good number of Nigerians (mainly young people) have left the country, it should be added that an even greater number of them are also still trapped in the prison of this untamed ambition. The danger is simply a double consciousness because they are neither in one place nor in another. With time, they constitute not only a problem for themselves but also a burden and loss to the entire Nigerian society. The implication is that it diminishes the societal contributory functions expected of this group, as it fails to make proper and adequate contributions to national development, based on the belief that they will be leaving the country very soon.

This paper therefore attempts a critical study of the reality of the zest for migration in Nigeria, the factors that drive it and its implications for the Nigerian nation and the globe at large. Using a methodology of personal experience, observations, interviews and documentary evidence, the article strives to highlight the rate at which this threat is advancing and its inherent danger if left unchecked. It also offers some solutions.

2. The Conceptual Basis of the Zest for Migration

The study is premised on the general conceptual framework of the corrupting influence of uncontrolled appetites. Obviously, when one is overwhelmed by

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possibilities of certain outcomes that are likely to bring great changes from the status quo, there is every likelihood that the attitude of the person expecting these outcomes (henceforward: expectant) will change either positively or negatively, as the case may be. If the attitude is on the negative side, the person may begin in time to prepare for the worst, to minimize the anticipated negative impact. On the other hand, if the expectation is good, chances are that the expectant may begin to celebrate in advance, whatever the anticipated outcome. Some people are even prone to behaving in such a manner even before such outcomes materialize. However, the extent of the display of these emotions will depend on the nature and character of the individual. The implication is enormous, namely: a desperation for its realization. In the course of this emotion, there is every tendency that the expectant will forgo other obligatory commitments to the present.

In the case of the zest for migration, the simple logic is that expectants may fail in their obligatory duty to their native country, and this may not be in the interest of the nation's development. National development in Nigeria is supposed to be a collective effort of the whole population. When, because of a hope for unrealizable migration, a part of the population refrains from making the necessary input to this development, national development suffers.

3. International Migration in Nigeria

According to Thishia (2007, cited in Dimude 2007), the historical emigration of human populations from Nigeria began about 1500 years ago when the Atlantic slave trade started. In the colonial period, many Nigerians migrated to countries such as United States, France, Soviet Union, etc., principally for higher education and with the clear intention of coming back immediately afterwards (Dimude 2007). Following the decline in oil prices and economic problems in the post-1981 era, Nigerians started emigrating from their native country in search of greener pastures. Their destinations included Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Black et al. (2004) is of the opinion that with time, Italy, Spain, Ireland and other countries also became the destination of Nigerian emigrants. In recent years South Africa has attracted a good number. However, whether the recent attacks on non-South Africans, including Nigerians, in that country will serve as a discouragement, remains to be seen.

The opportunities for student visas and the ongoing lobbying for Nigerian students by foreign educational institutions, the asylum benefits, the sports

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78 opportunities, etc., have not helped matters. It should be noted that the trend has even reached the level of exploitation of spiritual loopholes. For example, Awolowo and Idemudia (2006) discovered in a special study that many Nigerians exploit the yearly pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem to achieve their purpose of settling outside the country.

Globalization has also aided this phenomenon. According to Onu (2003), globalization has widened the scope of the international migration phenomenon. This is because globalization has created many opportunities in international employment, easy movement across national boundaries, and the movement of capital and expertise.

4. Causes of International Migration in Nigeria

Very many factors are responsible for the seemingly unquenchable quest for international migration in Nigeria.

Insecurity of life and property created by the menace of the Nigerian Civil War and the criminalization of the state forced many Nigerians outside the country in search of refuge and security. For example, most of the Ndigbo were displaced, dispossessed, and left at the mercy of fate and their own personal survivalist instincts. Thus, many of them had no option other than to find means of escaping to safer havens overseas. Some left as refugees and asylum seekers with bitterness against the Nigerian state.

Another side effect of the Civil War was the emergence of unprecedented economic hardship and a high level of poverty. The situation was helped neither by abrupt changes in government policy that created more difficulties and hardships, nor by the poverty of ideas that led to policy inconsistencies by successive Nigerian leaderships. The Structural Adjustment Programme of 1986, for example, was simply without any consideration for individuals. Many hitherto comfortable Nigerian families lost their money and other means of livelihood. Consequently, any Nigerians with youthful energy had to exploit all avenues to make ends meet. Travelling abroad for greener pastures became one of the most attractive options in this regard, cf.:

> [m]igrants using the Lagos axis are predominantly male traders seeking alternative employment ranging from menial through skilled to professional work, in some African countries as well as in Europe and America. Many of these migrants now go by sea, as air travel is not only expensive but also more prone to immigration control (Nightingale 2002, 3).

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Moreover, the successes recorded in terms of remittances by the first group of Nigerians that travelled abroad became an inspiration for those that were still at home. The total remittances to Nigeria, for instance, are about US $10 billion (see 1. above). With time, Nigerian professionals had to join the bandwagon as voluntary migrants and laid the foundation for subsequent international migration on economic grounds. Hence, with the temptation of the remittances and their success stories well-known to everyone, young Nigerians needed no other prompting to inspire them to trans-border migration.

Another incentive for migration is that immigrants now work in groups and networks, assisting new arrivals and thereby saving them from the difficulties inherent in changing their domicile. This is made possible because:

> /…/ usually, there is a reception network of family or friends who also secure an initial job or trade for the newcomers. Once the new migrant is settled, he/she will in turn, try to help others come and would rarely contact Nigeria's diplomatic mission for fear of being exposed (Abella 1997 cited in Nightingales 2002, 4)

The state terrorism of the military years and the legal hunt for members of the military opposition using the state apparatus forced some Nigerians into self-exile. The evil regime of late General Sani Abacha for example, made sure that whatever that was left of pro-democracy groups in the country ended up in foreign lands or ran the risk of state-led extermination. Some members of these groups relocated permanently or temporarily even after the death of Abacha in 1998.

The quest for higher education overseas among Nigerians also had its own input in this respect. This derives from the fact that foreign certificates are of greater value than domestic ones in Nigeria. On the average, Nigerian parents prefer sending their children and wards to foreign institutions believing it is the best way to prepare them for effective future roles in society.

A good number of Nigerians abroad are in various higher institutions of learning, in search of one qualification or the other. The availability of student visas has been helpful in this respect as it becomes easier now for a reasonable number to migrate using further studies as their main purpose.

It is disheartening to add that an ugly situation is exacerbated by the attitude of some parents, who push their children into migration to the extent that some have incorporated the message of travelling abroad into their rebukes whenever their children misbehave or act against existing family norms. The actual rebukes include: "I know that why you do not want to leave this country like your friends

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is because you aim to kill me in this house;" "Why not follow your friends overseas and leave this house for me?"; "Does this mean that you cannot find your way overseas like your schoolmates?" "Is it not a curse that none of you can travel abroad to help the family meet its basic needs?"

It could be said, therefore, that of all the reasons cited as responsible for this transborder movement, the quest for economic wellbeing is the most important, because the dominant group involved has the energy and sometimes the right academic credentials and expertise to engage in any form of overseas jobs, as long as they produce good returns.

Nigeria has a *laissez-faire* emigration policy, leaving it up to individuals to decide for themselves whether to accept or reject employment offers abroad. This policy is due, perhaps, to the inherent difficulties of making policy applicable beyond the limits of national borders and sovereignty. Consequently, no administrative structures or measures are in place to hinder and/or to facilitate the movement of citizens outside the country beyond the normal emigration requirements for all travellers (Nightingale 2002). Thus, travelling is an individual decision in Nigeria.

5. Discouragements to the Zest for Migration in Nigeria

Apart from the many encouragements to international migration in Nigeria, there are also discouragements to the venture. Successive governments in the country have tried to discourage the citizens from such moves through radio and television jingles and clips. For example, the Buhari/Idiagbo military interregnum in Nigeria made an appeal to the nationalistic instinct of Nigerian youth in the famous Andrew Episode on the NTA Network in the 80s. In the programme, the young Andrew, depicting a typical Nigerian youth, was strongly dissuaded from running away from the country at the point of his departure. That was a masterpiece. Recently video clips of what some misguided Nigerian youths suffer in the hands of security agents abroad have also been shown from time to time. In some other cases, Nigerians who were going through hard times in foreign lands were interviewed and the information disseminated, with the aim of instilling in the minds of Nigerians that it was "not all roses" abroad. Of particular interest was the case of some Nigerians in South Africa, where even those from well-to-do families in Nigeria roam the streets of Johannesburg without shelter nor food. Personal experiences of people who were repatriated also help in curbing the excesses of this ambition, no matter how deeply it may be felt.

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6. The Zest for Migration and National Development in Nigeria: An Analysis

I don't belong here, you know. This place is fucked up. Nothing do work here. Poverty is really showing people pepper [i.e., making life very hard] here and I don't want to *tanda* here and waste my time and life. Overseas is the ultimate, men! This place is fucked up!

That was the feeling and dream of one Mike Okoye (not his real name), an Awka resident and one of the young Nigerians whose dream has been to leave the shores of the country for greener pastures abroad. One striking thing about this young man is that he visualises himself as one who is already in the United States. He carries himself with the highest dignity and pride typical of a "been-to" (a term used for those that have travelled overseas). He shows displeasure with whatever he has to do in Nigeria. It may be added that the young man in question is a jobless graduate, seemingly penniless and typical of young Nigerians.

A critical analysis of the aforementioned situation shows that in situations like this there is nothing whatsoever that could make a young man like Mike have a change of mind. This scenario in all its ramifications manifests what Nigeria is going through in the hands of this seemingly unquenchable appetite for migration among her young citizenry.

The hope of leaving the shores of the country at the earliest opportunity has made it difficult for many young Nigerians to find employment and assume other local responsibilities in the country, or to involve themselves in any meaningful actions that may contribute to national development. They believe that engaging in such a thing would be a waste of energy and time, since very soon they will no longer be around. There are cases of those already working who resign their positions in preparation for a journey that never materialises. Some had nursed this ambition for several years without its materialisation and over those years, they contributed neither to their own improvement nor that of the nation. At times, in the process of this version of the "American Dream," some became socially maladjusted and a problem for society. From being a potential "been-to", they roam the streets as miscreants and in some cases may become criminals. As the number of this group of people is enormous, and a good number of them are skilled and vibrant, the implication is that the nation is denied the necessary skilled and even unskilled workforce needed for national development.

Closely related to the above is the fact that the Nigerian government and communities spend great amounts of money taking care of these maladjusted

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people, who end up either in psychiatric hospitals or in reformatories. A visit to some health institutions confirms that the rate at which Nigerian youngsters fall prey to the menace of this dream and its concomitant frustration and mental imbalance is not only embarrassing but also calls for public attention.

It is interesting to note that apart from those Nigerians who refuse employment in the hope of travelling abroad, there are those who work and save their money for such trips. They are interested neither in any form of investments within the country nor in their local obligations, as they jealously guard whatever amount they have earned and saved for this purpose. They fulfil only those payment obligations at home and abroad that can guarantee their travel. Some may be in good positions in government, public or private sectors and earning good salaries, but still believe that the best place to live is overseas and they keep on hoping and waiting for the right opportunity. Even when the savings are substantial enough for reasonable investments in their own country, they still believe it is better spent elsewhere.

In addition, the country has lost a lot of money in the hands of Nigerians who because of their strong aspiration to travel abroad, evade taxes and other dues and levies that are needed for one developmental purpose or another. Their savings are strictly reserved, specifically for relevant travelling imperatives such as agency fees, flight tickets, travelling documents and the Basic Travelling Allowance (BTA), etc., that may never be used. Governance thrives on a two-way system, whereby the government provides from the general purse while the citizenry complement this by making their contributions through taxes and other necessary levies from time to time. It is a symbiotic alliance. One may even add here that at times this money is lost to confidence artists who capitalize on the desperation of these young Nigerians.

It may also be added that national service and nationalism have also suffered from the appetite for migration in Nigeria. Some of the most competent young people fail to contribute their quota of national service. Some see services such as, e.g., the National Youth Service as a waste of time, since they feel that they no longer belong in Nigeria. Recent recruitments into the Nigerian Army and the Police show that those who apply are not the best the nation can produce and the implications are enormous. Hence, the wrong people are employed in sensitive positions, resulting in greater indiscipline, corruption and lack of performance.

The lack of protection of national facilities by young Nigerians stems from the fact, among others, that many of those that should help in this regard feel so disenchanted with the Nigerian nation and that they no longer belong, that there

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is no need to protect what is no longer relevant to them. Some have even gone to the extent of vandalizing and destroying public property, in the hope that in the near future they will not be around to feel the impact of the damaged facility.

No doubt, the appetite for migration has influenced the level of academic and technical attainment in Nigeria. Secondary education seems to be the highest level to be attained by a good number of Nigerians, as they wait in hope for better lives abroad, even when they have the opportunities of furthering their studies locally. Some of them have even dropped out of school thanks to false visa expectations. As it is with high school education, so it is with technical apprenticeship. The young people feel that it is a waste of resources, energy and time to start something they cannot finish since leaving the country is only a matter of time. Thus, the nation inherits a good number of school dropouts and their concomitant recurrent problems. The implications of this quest requires further study.

7. Conclusion

The impact of the appetite for migration on the Nigerian nation is certainly overwhelming and has denied the nation contributions to its development from its citizenry, especially the young ones. The youth are the uncontestable future leaders of the country; but when their zeal and nationalism are untapped and diminished by the circumstances of the country's inability to take good care of them, a greater danger faces the Nigerian nation when they migrate. The fruits of their vigour and youthfulness are therefore realised in the countries to which they migrate.

There is therefore an urgent need for attitudinal change on the part of both the government and the citizenry, and this will also entail some efforts and sacrifices on both sides.

The government should therefore look critically at those factors identified as responsible for the zest for migration especially among young Nigerians, with a view to finding means of resolving them. To this end, practical economic policies that will lead to employment should be put in place to reduce the number of the unemployed in the country. Poverty alleviation strategies that should go beyond the achievements of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) should form the priority of the various levels of government in Nigeria.

A spirit of patriotism and nationalism should be inculcated in the young people through public enlightenment programmes, which should be extended

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to school curricula so that as they grow up they do so with great love for their country. Parents should also encourage their children and wards to stay around and work hard with the promise of making it at home. Overseas is "not a bed of roses," after all.

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