

The Role of Xenophobia in Obligating Decisions toward Transnationalism and Return Migration

by

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Abstract

Does xenophobia really force migrants into assuming transnational status or returning home? In both cases the responses of international migrants are mixed, especially where their primary or ancestral home is in the less developed part of the world. It would depend on the extent of migrants' awareness of what constitutes xenophobia as well as the presence of it. Xenophobia is both real and imagined and needs to be fully understood before a migrant's decision to move or adopt multiple residences may be associated with it. Similarly, the idea of transnationalism is frequently clouded by mixed personal attitudes towards citizenship and belonging within the context of home and host countries. There is evidence throughout the world that the dehumanizing effects of xenophobia are real. There is also evidence that groups of people have been forced by discriminatory actions to leave the host country and return home. But at individual levels, do labour migrants return home simply because of xenophobia in the host country? Due to the association between migration and returns to and from employment, this paper will examine the extent to which international labour migrants from Africa are obliged to return home or accept transnational residence because of xenophobia. In the process, we will examine the dynamics of xenophobia and transnationalism. We will also discuss the effects of these decisions on future development in the host and home countries.

Introduction

Xenophobia has become increasingly worrisome since 1989 as the world became more globalized and international migration (documented and irregular) increased. In Africa the attitudes of nationals to immigrants have shifted from relatively accommodating positions that existed up to the early 1980s to increasing hostility. Studies by the Southern African Migration project (SAMP) in southern Africa in the 1990s and 2000s revealed disturbing evidence of hostility towards immigrants, especially Africans and irregular migrants. The fatal attacks on migrants by South Africans in 2008 bear testimony of the extent to which nationals may go to express their disdain of those that are considered foreign. While this situation has improved considerably in the United States of America (USA), Canada and parts of the European Union (EU) due to several factors which include intervention by workers' unions, the psychological fear of discrimination still persists among blacks from Africa. Silent and violent conflicts between African immigrants and indigenes that fear that their jobs are being 'stolen' by migrants occasionally reach unbearable proportions when migrants may wish they were back in the ancestral home. Conflicts may arise over language, concepts, performance in school or at work, criminal investigation, race, etc. In this paper use is made mostly of tertiary information and presented in the form of a discussion. There is hardly any data that addresses the subject of return migration of Africans and xenophobia.

Notwithstanding higher incomes in host countries, migrants may return to economies that are not so good for several reasons. They include migrants' preferences for specific locations at certain time of their lives, high purchasing power of the host country currency in the migrant's home economy, higher returns to human capital, accumulated in the host country, in the home economy and higher rate of return on self employment activities in the home country (Dustmann, 2003). Galor and Stark (1990, 464) observed that international migrants may be pressured to return home when economies decline in host countries, as has been the case since the inception of the global recession in 2008. They also add xenophobia or "social pressures by alienated indigenous population (and) psychological pressures arising from prolonged absence from home". However, they conclude that return migration is strongly determined by the ability of migrants to save while working in host countries. To this we may add the pressure of families at home for migrants' return. But as Tiemoko (2004) observed in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, these returnees would have made substantial financial transfers to their families for investment before implementing the return. As most returns are expected to manifest successful accumulation of wealth and skill at the destination, xenophobia-induced returns may be interpreted as "return of failure" (see Grieco, 2004). The psychological effect of accepting failure would more likely than not motivate migrants to find innovative methods of surviving within hostile populations until savings have been optimized.

We will argue that, much as xenophobia may force nationals into living in a state of transnationalism, it is not powerful enough to influence voluntary return migration. Transnationalism marks what Lie (1995) identifies as the shift from the "inter-national" to "trans-national". It involves the shift from a conservative idea of the nation-state to a world state with borders that are not quite clear. Hence transnationalism goes beyond the position where migration is perceived solely within the realm of a movement into a national territory. Lie identifies the diaspora as the best reflection of this. Within the diaspora migrants have two homes, the host country as the new home and the country of origin as the ancestral home. Until

recently, the 'diaspora' was to historians a field quite distinct from the geographers' perception of migration. Diaspora has traditionally been perceived through the eyes and minds of Jews who suffered immensely over a significant period from trauma while forcibly living in exile and nursing hopes of return to their land of birth (or forefathers' birth). Even while Cohen (1997) subsequently introduced other significant dimensions to the concept, his 'classical notions of diaspora' refers only to the captivation and banishment of Jews from Jerusalem and their subsequent ordeal and re-establishment in a foreign land (Babylon). Meanwhile, the intensity with which historians, political scientists and anthropologists have investigated slave trade of Africans to the Americas contributed to the inclusion of the African diaspora within the realm of classical diaspora. The brutal treatment meted out to approximately eleven million African men and women who were enslaved, with African cooperation, in the 17th to 19th Centuries leaves us forever mindful of the negative effects of this event on African development. An estimated two million of these slaves died at sea while being shipped to exile. Several of the survivors and offspring experienced torture, rape and other abuses in American plantations (Okpewho, 1999).

Changing perceptions about diaspora have been recognized in the Oxford English Dictionary which has traditionally associated it with dispersion of Jews. Its 1993 edition adopted a contemporary stance by defining diaspora as 'any body of people living outside their traditional homeland'. This new position was recognized earlier by Conner (1986) when he defined diaspora as a 'segment of a people living outside the homeland'. This represents the change of classical scholars' perception of the concept, and forms the basis of this paper. After all, the constitution of a diaspora is neither new nor the occurrence of remotely historic events alone. Events such as the Jews experienced in biblical times have recurred in different forms over centuries until now. The effects on the victims are no less traumatic than it was for the Jews. Indeed, interpretations of global diasporas by Sheffer (1986) and, even more so, Cohen (1997) expose the numerous dimensions within which diasporas may be investigated. While Rassool (1999) interprets classical diaspora as a mass movement, based on socioeconomic and political crises, with the intention to seek new cultural identities in the host country, Sheffer (1986) describes modern diaspora as the residence and action in host countries of ethnic minority groups who maintain strong sentimental and material ties with their home countries.

The classical perception of diasporic communities as homogenous, undifferentiated entities (Smart & Nehusi, 2000; Zavitz & Allahar, 2002) is simplistic even where the Jewish diaspora is concerned. Biologically and often socio-economically, communities forced into exile consist of people that are more or less heterogeneous. This often fuels intra-ethnic conflicts based on personal ambition for recognition within host communities. Though a seemingly complex subject, the diaspora is about identity and could frequently be associated with transnational conditions, given that people in diaspora are caught between two or more cultural identities. In effect, diaspora is increasingly being equated with recent trends in migration. While theories of migration are mostly based on voluntary decisions to move, political and economic events since the 1970s in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) have increasingly forced professionals and non-professionals to flee their country of birth and eke out a living in foreign countries, sometimes under hostile conditions. Though Cohen (1997) considers Weiner's (1986) conceptualization of labour diaspora simplistic because of its inclusiveness, Weiner's interpretation may be more realistic in view of the future effects of mass movements in SSA. In view of the expanded definition of the diaspora, the sum of individual and family migrations could be conjectured as

mass movement. From the foregoing, the definition of diaspora may appear vague and confusing. However, this is partly due to a desperate attempt by modernists within the academia to attract recognition to the fact that the psychological and physical abuse that migrants experience within the framework of contemporary global societies are not necessarily different from those of biblical Jews.

The new diaspora has therefore evolved within contemporary migrations. But tiny details remain to be solved in order to determine what constitutes the new diaspora. While recognizing the coercion, etc. involved in many 'voluntary' decisions to emigrate in SSA, the process of resettlement must be within a reasonably period of time. It may be recalled that the definition of migration assumes greater precision when expressed in de jure terms. The de jure definition of migration is premised on threshold duration of residence. A person should have stayed at the destination for a minimum time (e.g. 2, 3.....n months) to qualify to be a migrant. In this regard, the diasporic community should have been formed over a threshold period to qualify for contemporary diaspora status. This has been recognized by others such as Cohen (1997), Anand (2003) and Hugo (2006). Hugo (2006) assumed a definition of diaspora that includes a threshold of two generations. The NELM has recognized the important contribution of the new diaspora to poverty mitigation in SSA and other developing regions through remittances of money and goods. Thus, contrary to what classic diaspora was initially, the new diaspora provides immediate opportunity for exiles to maximize income, saving and remittance. There is also opportunity to obtain new and improved skills in host countries; and under favourable conditions, migrants in the diaspora may be encouraged to return and invest in the development of the ancestral home. African governments have increasingly acknowledged the need to prioritize international migration for exactly this reason. From a recent survey of the position of African governments on international migration by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), it was obtained that 53% African governments are promoting voluntary return of skilled migrants.

Transnationalism therefore implies that emigrants do not "divorce" themselves from the ancestral homeland. In describing the diaspora of Creole teachers, administrators, pastors and traders who moved from Freetown, Sierra Leone to resettle in Lagos, Abeokuta, Port Harcourt and Calabar in Nigeria in the early 20th Century, Dixon-Fyle (1999) noted that while they seemed determined to stay in Nigeria permanently and increase their influence within an upper middle class structure through colonization (which was again aborted by the British) they maintained close bonding relationship with (and occasionally envisaged returning to) Freetown. Similarly, people of the new diaspora never really cut off ties with the country of birth and initial socialization. In this regard, African governments are increasingly considering and implementing offering dual citizenship to their nationals who live abroad. Many of them have been compelled by economic and political factors to become naturalized citizens of their destination countries. It was initially perceived that emigration involves the separation of persons from the cultural processes of the ancestral home. It was assumed, as Handlin (1951) did that natural and time-formed social capital is abandoned in this migration process. But it is now widely acknowledged that this does not really happen. Examining some of the weaknesses in pre-1970 migration theories, Mabogunje (1970) was the first to point out the significant involvement of the family in the migration process up to the final decision to move. Since then the new economics of labour migration theory (NELM) has contributed much to our knowledge that emigration in Africa

occurs with full participation and blessing of families who are left back home. It is in this regard that the execution of remittance is arranged to be included in the redistribution of labour migrants' incomes (Lie, 1995; Taylor, 1999; Campbell, in press).

Short duration migration has the advantage of freeing migrants from sentimental attachments to the host country and its people. There is absence of any desire to invest in the host country because the economic and emotional costs of short-term stay are low. This reduces incentives to build social and economic capital there. Practically all plans would be channeled towards maximizing financial returns to the home country, and this includes the physical self. There is therefore no conflict within the self over citizenship, belonging and, hence, xenophobia. Return would be the focus and, bar drastic political and economic changes at home, the migrant would return. The problems of association with indigenes are within the domain of long duration migrations where plans were made to stay in the host country up to the point of attaining permanent residence or natural citizenship. Hence international migration is not simply an origin-destination (uni-directional) move. It takes the form of several and diverse moves, including circulation, business migration and re-migration. Hence, while we assume permanence in the migration process, the definition of permanence should be within threshold timing only. The threshold itself is not fixed nor has it been determined. The United Nations defines international migration as having occurred when migrants have spent one year at the destination (Campbell, 1988; Findlay and Gould, 1989). Various researchers have used thresholds that range from one to six months. The discriminatory use of birthplace and place-of-previous residence methods also complicates the situation. The important things are the migration decisions and social networks that migrants build and how these affect the multiple moves that they execute.

Xenophobia and Transnationalism

Ethnocentrism has played a major role in exodus of nationals from their birthplaces to countries of refuge. An example of this is has occurred repeatedly in Rwanda where people of the Tutsi ethnic group have been forced into exile in Uganda, Europe, etc. to escape the violent aggressions of the Hutu. Both Tutsi and Hutu have been victims and aggressors of ethnic conflict on various occasions during the past Century. Reportedly, Tutsi political domination of Rwanda and Burundi has on several occasions showed signs of contempt for the Hutu by forcefully confiscating their land and cattle and crushing any resistance. The diaspora Tutsi always maintained that they were the traditional rulers of Rwanda, with a hint of divinity punctuating this claim, and the Hutu have fiercely refuted it (see Sigwalt, 1975; Nsanze, 2002). Perhaps the most controversial political issues related to this are the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 when an estimated 800,000 people, mostly Tutsi, were slaughtered (Lemarchand, 1998). The Tutsi diaspora have developed various methods to influence political change in Rwanda, including the use of information technology. They also assist families at home through remittances and have assisted agricultural development in Uganda. In South Africa and Uganda racism and fear of its backlash has forced thousands of victims of various colours to leave and seek residence elsewhere, mostly in Europe and the United States of America (USA). Meanwhile, the ethnocentric excesses of the Creoles and Americo-Liberians in Sierra Leone and Liberia, respectively, did not translate into exodus of the indigenous populations. Instead, it gave rise to brutal reprisals during ethnic-based civil wars in these countries in the 1990s (Kandeh, 1992; Abraham, 2001; Whitaker, 2005).

Brain drain and irregular emigration of the unskilled in Africa were primarily influenced by poor political and economic conditions and blatant violation of the basic human rights. Frequent military coups, rampant corruption and the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ravished the economies of several countries throughout the continent. Institutionalized human rights violations by political dictatorships or by violent civil/ethnic conflict in the country of emigration was common. Both occurred to a large extent in several African countries and they are currently being addressed especially through regional integration mechanisms. Several governments in SSA instituted political measures that relegated citizens from subjects to objects and various actions by unscrupulous politicians reduced many economies to permanent states of poverty. In countries where governments perceived the educated as obstructionists who belonged or sympathized with opposing ethnic groups, the virtues of being educated were systematically stifled, creating a situation where it seemed unlikely that the government ever recognized the occurrence of the brain drain. Professionals, whose exit gave rise to this concept, were swiftly replaced with poorly qualified party stalwarts. In the 1990s the economies of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi were adversely affected by years of ethnic conflicts which had devastating effects on education, health, nutrition and morale of the general population.

Xenophobia and Return Migration

Hundreds of thousands of Africans have been forced to leave their countries of immigration (or new home) to return to their ancestral homes. Examples of this are mass expulsion of irregular migrants from Ghana and Nigeria. In the wake of high unemployment and inflation rates in Ghana in the 1960s, the civilian government of Busia identified immigrants as the primary cause of the economic problem and introduced the Aliens Compliance Order in 1969. This order directed that all irregular immigrants in Ghana were to legalize their stay within two weeks or leave the country. Many of the families targeted had lived in the country for generations and even benefited from government grants, subsidies, etc. They or their parents or grandparents had entered the country decades earlier when border controls hardly existed and, until 1969, had never been treated differently from documented migrants. This is similar to the tolerance of 'irregular immigrants' by France until the early 1970s, when about 80% of all migrants were not documented (Bosniac, 1991). It was therefore impractical for those in Ghana to see themselves as illegal immigrants, let alone be expected to correct their residence status within a short time. The large number of people in this category also made it difficult for them to attain legal residency within the stipulated two weeks. Though it is unclear how many "irregular migrants" were deported from Ghana, it is estimated to be between 213,750 and 1.5 million (Adomako-Safah, 1974; Adepaju, 1984, 2002; Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1995; Akyeampong, 2006). Reportedly, quite a few of these deportees of Nigeria descent experienced considerable difficulty tracing their original families. Further actions were taken by the Ghanaian government to exclude non-citizens from owning certain businesses, such as those that accrued returns of 200,000 pounds sterling or more (Ahojja-Patel, 1974). But the economy did not revive after this and it eventually collapsed by 1975 and it took another twenty years for the economy to recover.

The government of Nigeria similarly implemented a parliamentary Act in the early 1980s by which about one and a half million irregular migrants (mostly Ghanaians) were expelled from the country in 1983 and 1985 (Adepaju, 1995; Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1995). Nigeriens comprised 180,000 of the deportees while 120,000 were Cameroonians, 150,000 Chadians, 5,000 Togolese

and 5,000 Beninoise. A shift from diversified to an oil-based economy diverted valuable skills from agriculture to the urban sector. Rapid cityward migration put increasing pressure on the job market while agriculture failed. Cocoa output reduced by about 154,000 tonnes between 1970 and 1976 and the country was reduced from exporting to importing agricultural products (Joseph, 1978). By 1982 the resultant increase in inflation and unemployment led the politicians to scapegoat irregular immigrants for mass expulsion. It should be noted that about 77% of all West Africans living in Nigeria then (including highly skilled professionals) were irregular migrants. They included university professors, teachers, lawyers, accountants and medical professionals. The question worth examining is whether or not the actions of the Ghanaian and Nigerian governments were xenophobic. The same may be asked about the Jehovah's Witnesses that were persecuted and expelled from Malawi in the 1970s. Starting in 1967, 18000 members of the religious sect, Jehovah's Witnesses, were persecuted in Malawi and some of the leaders were expelled from the country when they defended their colleagues who refused to purchase party membership cards. Some members were assaulted, imprisoned, tortured, murdered and suffered arson attacks. Further persecutions in 1972 caused about 21,000 Jehovah's Witnesses to flee and seek refuge in Zambia where they were forcibly repatriated (see *World Directory of Minorities*, Online, 2008). Meanwhile Mauritania and Libya forcibly expelled thousands of irregular migrants between 2002 and 2008 (*Refworld*, 27 May 2009).

In order to determine whether or not these actions were xenophobic, it is expedient to examine what constitutes xenophobia. Xenophobia is a human rights problem and it exists in several societies throughout the world. It needs to be exposed and treated the same as is done with race. The similarity between xenophobia and racism has often been a subject of debate. As Banton (1996) observed, English writers would prefer to use a broad definition of racism which is inclusive of xenophobia. On the contrary, the French and, more so, Germans prefer to keep racism separate from xenophobia. Moreover, several countries in Africa include people of various races and it would not be fair to let xenophobia be forever hidden within race. A classic definition of xenophobia presents it as "a negative attitude toward, or fear of, individuals or groups of individuals that are in some sense different (real or imagined) from oneself or the group(s) to which one belongs" (Hjerm, 1998: 341). This summary of the concept, by implication, includes the effect of race; and this raises the question of whether xenophobia and race are mutually independent. As Banton (1996: 8) and Vorster (2002: 304) noted, the two are motivated by the same factors and are therefore related. A comprehensive evaluation of xenophobia as a concept has been done by Campbell (2003). We shall therefore take an alternative route which is to examine the concept from the perspective of racism. Jon Dewey defined racial prejudice as "the instinctive aversion of mankind to what is new and unusual, to whatever is different from what we are used to, and which thus shocks our customary habits" (cited in Sullivan, 2004: 194). Probably because of the hint of Darwinism in Dewey's explanation of racism, Sullivan went to some length to explain why he found it disturbing that Dewey should link racial prejudice with habit. But, as Sullivan concedes, Dewey's view of the subject is not altogether unique (see page 195 of the paper). Moreover, it is similar to the general observation that xenophobia is a morbid fear of people whose culture, language and behaviour are different.

Under conditions where development within the economic, social and political sectors are controlled by one group only, people of the dominant group are likely to develop a superiority attitude and their behaviour would be prejudicial towards the minority group (Heaven et al.,

2001). From this perspective, xenophobia may be seen as a sociological construct whereby individuals within the in-group work towards sustaining the state of socioeconomic dominance that they hold over the out-group. Any attempt by a person(s) in the out-group to attain equality with those in the in-group could be thwarted by any means possible. It may be assumed that the level of prejudice inherent in in-group members may be maximized when the social or ethnic majority is numerically the minority, as was the case in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Ethiopia and South Africa. The level of discrimination associated with in-group and out-group identity was tested by Amiot and Bourhis (2005) among college students in Canada and their results showed no significant difference between the level of discrimination expressed by group members regardless of whether the outcome of resource distribution was positive or negative. They however found that distribution of salaries within and between groups trigger discriminatory attitudes. Also, within the social dominance theory is the assumption that the level of group membership influences individuals' propensity to participate in collective action (Deaux et al., 2006). But as Deaux and colleagues found, this assumption should not be applied across all groups. For instance, in the US social diversity beliefs among non-migrant whites apparently has no significant influence on ethnic identification and participation in collective action.

From a political economy standpoint, the expulsion of migrants from Ghana and Nigeria may or may not be considered xenophobic. The extent of unfairness varies given the differential levels of discrimination involved. When the expulsion occurred in Nigeria, the government ensured that those with high skills be allowed fairly good time to regularize their stay in the country. Moreover it is alleged that many irregular migrants were protected by nationals, which partly explains the second wave of deportation in 1985. However, there was no such assistance shown towards the irregular migrants in Ghana. The level of unfairness inherent in the Aliens Compliance Order in Ghana is manifest in its failure to recognize that some of the "irregular" migrants were descendants of individuals and families who migrated to Ghana several decades previously and, in the absence of current border regulations then, were effectively not living in the country irregularly (even though they were not documented). The least humane action for the government to have taken was to permit all irregular migrants fairly good time to regularize their stay. The government could have facilitated this through the media. This was not done and public sentiment was not evident, as it was in Nigeria; hence making the Ordinance appear xenophobic.

Conclusion

While violent acts of discrimination against immigrants in Malawi, Gabon and South Africa have necessitated return migration, there is hardly any evidence that skilled and unskilled migrants have voluntarily returned home because of xenophobia in or outside Africa. International migrants have demonstrated on several occasions their resilience in the presence of national challenges within the host country. The options include naturalized citizenship, amnesty and integration, marriage, concubineage, bribery and collegial affiliation. Short-term migrants live and work in host countries with many psychological and real challenges. But for transnational populations, the challenges are magnified by the realization that, even where immigrants have naturalized, there is hardly a sense that they have been truly accepted by the indigenes as part of their society (and this is regardless of the migrant's ability to speak the language of the host country. The assimilation of transnational populations remains a question even to the second and

third generations of migrants. This therefore invokes the question of the evolutionary perspective to xenophobia. It is the continuous questions over citizenship in the new home (destination country) that heightens fears about the presence of xenophobia. Additional problems involve questions about their acceptance by non-migrant nationals in the ancestral home when/if they do return.

Several West African governments have introduced incentives to encourage brain circulation. Much of it is associated with anticipated investment by people in the diaspora. Examples include offering contract positions and facilities similar to those of expatriates, duty-free importation of everything on return, easy access to agricultural land and other property for development, re-integration programmes, dual citizenship and opportunities for those in the academia to apply their skills. What skilled returnees may not be prepared for is the negative attention these preferential offers may attract from non-migrants compatriots who despise this 'discriminatory' treatment of returnees who now appear elitist. Within this environment transnational migrants may do well if they were to rationalize the return process carefully before implementing it. The ECA data reveals that African governments are committed to the economic rewards of brain circulation while priority to xenophobia is low. There is therefore no reason for migrants in diaspora to prioritize non-economic factors, such as xenophobia, among those influencing the decision to return. Similarly, where the economic gain of return is promising, returnees may ignore the effect of xenophobia in the ancestral home. In view of absence of data on this subject and the need to find out how it compares with the economic motivations for return, there is need to embark on research that would contribute to developing theories and policies on the role of xenophobia in especially obligating return migration of transnational populations.

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