

AN APPRAISAL OF MIGRATION AND THE ISSUE OF AFRICAN IDENTITY

Oludare Gladys Oluwatosin
Department of Philosophy
Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State
Email: gladysoluwatosin9@gmail.com; Phone: 07030519530

and

Owoyemi Deborah Oluwasola
Department of Philosophy
Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State
Email: owoyemioluwadoladeborah@gmail.com; Phone: 08060708944

Abstract

The issue of African identity is not a strange one at all. In fact, it has been the most relevant discussion in African philosophy. The question of African identity bothers on who is an African? Nkrumah of Ghana said that whoever that is not proud of his colour is not fit to live, when we hear African identity what comes to mind is the colour, the race, the breed and language even our culture plays an important role in showing who we are as Africans. Migration is a process of social change where an individual, alone or accompanied by others, because of one or more reasons of economic betterment, political upheaval, education or other purposes, leaves one geographical area for prolonged stay or permanent settlement in another geographical area. Most times when the people move, do they actually move with their true identity as Africans? When they actually get to their desire destinations, are they actually bold to identify themselves as true Africans? It is in the light of this that this research aims at reviewing the philosophical effects of migration on African identity. The research relies on conceptual analysis approach. This method involves clarification of concepts and critical analysis of ideas and beliefs. The research concludes that migration has two sides which are positive and negative effects.

Keywords: Migration, African Identity, Freedom, choice, responsibility, Existential view.

Introduction

This paper is divided into sections in which we are going to do conceptual clarifications of the keywords. First section explains migration and Identity. In the second section we will explain Freedom, Choice and Responsibility in Sartre's idea. Finally, the paper concludes that Human being naturally is free to make choices but should be ready to take responsibility and be ready to defend their pride as Africans.

Migration is a process of social change where an individual, alone or accompanied by others, because of one or more reasons of economic betterment, political upheaval, education or other purposes, leaves one geographical area for prolonged stay or permanent settlement in another geographical area (Bhugra, 2003). It must be emphasized that migration is not only a trans-national process but can also be rural–urban. A lot of factors will determine whether migrants are settled down or they are being frustrated in the place of settlement. Many of them are frustrated, isolated and even neglected. Rural–urban migration is more likely to be for

economic or educational reasons, whereas migration across nations may be for social, educational, economic or political reasons. Thus reasons for migration, prior preparation to the act of migration and social support will all enhance an individual's coping mechanisms.

According to Bhugra (2004), throughout history, Africa has experienced migratory movements, both voluntary and forced, which have contributed to its contemporary demographic landscape. In many parts of the continent, communities are spread across two or three nation-States, and movement is often not limited by political boundaries. Cross-border migration in Africa is an important livelihood and coping strategy during times of ecological and economic downturn, and is key to understanding, as well as forecasting, the onset and evolution of humanitarian disasters. Over the last decades, deteriorating political, socio-economic and environmental conditions, as well as armed conflict, insecurity, environmental degradation and poverty, have been significant root causes of mass migration and forced displacement in Africa. The globalization process has also facilitated the movement of people across the various regions of Africa, and to other regions outside the continent, as the number of migrants continues to increase. Due to these trends, migration is a major issue in the 21st Century, and poses social, economic and political challenges for policy makers engaged in the management of migration for the betterment of the continent. (Thompson, 1996)

According to Maria Caterina (2014), Identity has increasingly become an important keyword in contemporary human and social sciences. Since the 1980s, research has intensively explored how meanings, expectations, and conflicts are associated with the different localities of individuals and groups; how individuals represent themselves using one or another element that constitutes their identity; how these elements can be categorized; and how multiple identities are compounded and negotiated when they conflict. However, identity is a broad concept that has been defined differently by various disciplines. For this reason, a multidisciplinary approach is a highly complex task that continuously risks to result in misunderstandings caused by different definitions of the concept. One of the main theoretical issues is whether and how identity can be conceptualized by acknowledging individual features and collective identification when both tend to shift over time. Critics have argued that politicizing identity is counterproductive to the pursuit of social change. In multicultural societies, identities adjust one to another and are gradually modified. The negotiation of identity, referring to a gradual transformation of identities within new vital contexts, generates new forms of cultural hybridism. In this paper, our focus will be on migration and identity especially as Africans.

Migration

Historically, migration in Africa is generally categorized into three main periods: migration during pre-colonial, during colonial and post-colonial times. Colonisation and post-independence links with former colonial powers greatly shaped the migration patterns observed today, and will continue to influence future trends. The driving forces, dynamics and patterns of migration vary across Africa's regions. However, over the last fifteen years, migration has increased in all of Africa's regions, and is characterized by a largely young migrant population, that is under the age of 30, and diverse migratory flows. These flows include increasing numbers of migrant women, rural to urban migration, labour migration,

and a rise in irregular migration and large numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons. (Bhugra, 2003)

According to Bauböck (2005), the root causes of migration in Africa are numerous and inter-related. The push-pull framework provides insight into this complex web of factors. Lack of socio-economic opportunities and the rule of law, poor governance, patronage and corruption, political instability, conflict, terrorism and civil strife are major push factors. Pull factors include the real or perceived opportunities for a better life, higher income, improved security, and superior education and health care in countries of destination. The push-pull dynamic is intensified by a number of other factors that facilitate migration. These include the lower costs of migration; improved communication, especially social media and the internet; greater information availability; and the need to join relatives, families and friends. The movement of people - voluntary or forced, legal or undocumented, within or across borders - is a complex process that affects policy making in a wide range of areas.

Another major challenge in Africa is displaced populations, inter alia triggered by conflict, terrorism, and climatic pressure. Africa hosts the majority of the world's refugees. African countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) which are in the top 10 refugee hosting countries in the world, account for 21% of the world's refugees. 10 Africa's displaced population stands at approximately 18.5 million, of which over 27% are refugees, and 67% are IDPs. (Bhugra and Leff, 1997)

Human Migration

Human migration is the movement of people from one place to another with the intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily at a new location. The movement is over a long distance and from one country to another, most times these movements is search for job, shelter or some reasons. People migrate for different reasons; they are either caused by voluntary or involuntary reasons. Nowadays, many people decide to migrate to have a better life like employment opportunities, better education, construction of dams, globalization forced villagers to migrate to cities. Migrants are people who move from one place to another in search of work or shelter. Most of the time migrants are not skilled or educated, therefore they are usually employed as daily wagers, they do not have enough to eat and cater for the needs of their family so they suffer from things like places to live, sanitation hygiene and proper place to live are part of the challenges the migrants face.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Migration

However, having considered migration in concept and style, it has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

- Unemployment is reduced and people tend to get better job opportunities.
- Migration helps in improving the quality of life people.
- It helps to improve social life of people as they relate and interact with their host by learning new languages, understanding their culture.
- It leads to a richer and more diverse culture

Disadvantages

- Loss of life; people take a lot of risks when they migrating through illegal ways so

therefore they lose their life in the process.

- Influx of migrants to a country increases the rate of competition for jobs.
- Large population puts pressure on natural resources.
- It causes disagreements between religions and cultures

African Identity

The issue of African Identity has raised a lot of arguments from inception which raised a lot of questions like who is an African? Do we have a unified language that gives us one identity as Africans? All of these questions and all other have been critically engaged. Our identity as Africans has been questioned by the world because we seem not to appreciate our own cultural heritage which can also be likened to the popular question in African philosophy, do we have our own philosophy? This particular question has generated a lot of arguments among the scholars of African philosophy. Do we have our own philosophy? We can also say do we have our own identity as Africans? Arthur (2010) stated that African identity can be defined as our value system, culture, practices and traditional system beliefs which distinguishes us from other continents which religion, language, our dressing and so on.

Kanu cited Benjamin (2010) observed that for centuries, there have been systematic and ruthless attempts to deny African people the fundamental human right of self-determination and self-identity. The black consciousness movement in Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and South America and throughout Pan- African world was an attempt towards reaffirming the identity of Africa. Africa's long history of migration and population movements is well documented. Since the pre-colonial era, people have moved across the continent for a range of reasons, including the need to seek protection and a desire for socio-economic prosperity. In 2015, Africa had some 21 million international migrants, the majority from other African countries, according to the UN. (Handel, 2007). The post-colonial era engendered new migration dynamics, among them the continuing renegotiation of and fierce struggles over—identity and belonging, as a result of increasing contact between migrants and their host societies. In Africa, as elsewhere, it has been assumed that integration and assimilation would naturally result from the interactions between locals and immigrants. Migrants were expected to adopt their hosts' social and cultural identities (Idowu, 2009)

However, research indicates that migrant-host interactions are leading to different outcomes, engendering new idioms of identity and belonging: migrants are either partially adopting or outrightly rejecting local identities. Migration has a significant effect on the sense and practice of identity and belonging, both for people on the move and for their host populations. Indeed, research indicates that local populations tend to identify more strongly with their own national ideals as a result of migration. Ironically, 'African identity' is a category that is of little significance to the average African for whom more localized communal and ethnic identity are more immediate and readily employed, while it is claimed as area of expertise by the average, often non-African. A lot of misconceptions are on ground about the issue of African identity, it is being argued that Africans do not have a voice, even when Africans have articulated African cultural identities in creative works from the plays of Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo, and John Pepper Clark to the novels Chinua Achebe, Florence Nwapa, Ngugiwa Thiong'o. (Adams, Fons, & Vijver, 2017).

Relating the issue of African Identity with migration, our cultural value system as a practice outside the walls of Africa have been a major challenge that is most of our beliefs as Africans are dropped in the sac bag at the airport when moving out of the country. Whereby we tend appreciate our host value system more our own cultural heritage.

Research has shown that we have not done enough in Africa studies that is in the academics we have not really engaged Africa. If the African cannot speak as a creative writer or as an academia, the person on the street, how then is one to articulate and explore African identity?

Freedom, Choice and Responsibility

For Sartre, each agent is endowed with unlimited freedom. This statement may seem puzzling given the obvious limitations on every individual's freedom of choice. Clearly, physical and social constraints cannot be overlooked in the way in which we make choices. And this does not lead to any contradiction insofar as freedom is not defined by an ability to act. Freedom is rather to be understood as characteristic of the nature of consciousness, i.e. as spontaneity. But there is more to freedom. For all that Pierre's freedom is expressed in opting either for looking after his ailing grandmother or joining the French Resistance, choices for which there are indeed no existing grounds, the decision to opt for either of these courses of action is a meaningful one. That is, opting for the one of the other is not just a spontaneous decision, but has consequences for the for-itself. To express this, Sartre presents his notion of freedom as amounting to making choices, and indeed not being able to avoid making choices.

Sartre's conception of choice can best be understood by reference to an individual's original choice, as we saw above. Sartre views the whole life of an individual as expressing an original project that unfolds throughout time. This is not a project which the individual has proper knowledge of, but rather one which she may interpret an interpretation constantly open to revision. Specific choices are therefore always components in time of this time-spanning original choice of project.

Freedom, from an existential perspective, cannot be separated from responsibility. With freedom comes responsibility. Yet, it is common for many people to seek freedom while trying to avoid responsibility. While, at times, it appears that people may be able to succeed at this, there remains a psychological consequence. This consequence is often not very noticeable, but may find expression through guilt, anxiety, depression, or even anger.

Existential freedom is not the same things as freedom in the political sense we often think of it in America. In fact, political freedom could be view to be a rather shallow, though not unimportant, type of freedom. A person can be existentially free despite not being politically free, and a person can avoid embracing their existential freedom despite being offered great political freedoms in the story of his in the story of his experience in the concentration camps, provides a powerful overview of this distinction. While all his political or social freedoms were taken away, he gives credit for his survival to his psychological freedom. This psychological freedom allowed him to find and embrace meaning in the midst of what appeared to be meaningless suffering. (Owolabi 2000)

Ways of Avoiding Responsibility

There are several common examples of how people avoid responsibility in American culture. Conformity is one good example. Americans pride themselves on being autonomous individuals to the point of idealizing individualism. However, upon closer analysis, Americans find extremely creative ways of giving up their freedom. Americans conform through blind allegiance to various organizations and institutions including political parties and religious institutions. This is not to say that being dedicated to either of these are bad. In fact, often they can lead to very positive outcomes. The problem comes with *blind* allegiance where a person gives up their responsibility to critically think through the beliefs, perspectives, and values of the organization. When this happens, the individual's values are no longer authentic. (Hoffman, 2017)

When a person gives their allegiance to an external belief structure, they may go in one of several directions. First, they often will become very rigid in their allegiance to the organization or structure to which they have committed. This type of conformity can be seen through various forms of fundamentalism -- religious, political, psychological systems, etc.

Second, they may present as being very committed to a belief systems or organization, but they feel very comfortable bending the rules where it does fit their desires. It becomes easy to bend the rules because they are not really committed to the underlying values system. However, when a person is deeply committed to authentic moral or value principles, they are less willing to act in ways which contradict these principles. The principles are authentic.

Another way avoid responsibility can occur through the belief that one is powerless. There can be many factors which are seen to render a person powerless. A person can perceive themselves as a victim of their environment, of various supernatural or spiritual forces, their unconscious, or a victim of their biology/genes. While an existential approach will recognize that all of these factors may influence a person, none of them render a person powerless or completely control them.

The Ability to Choose Freedom

Otto Rank discusses the issue of freedom beautifully. Essentially, Rank states that the degree to which a person is unaware of those forces which influence us, they are controlled by them. Stated differently, the degree which we are unaware of how our drives, instincts, unconscious, and environment are influencing us, they control us. However, if a person chooses not to be aware of these influences, even if done so passively or unconsciously, a choice has still been made. (Hoffman, 2017)

Self-awareness, in Rank's conceptualization, is a commitment people make which can enhance their freedom. Yet, most people choose to live a life of being unaware. It can be frightening to deeply know who we are and the realities of our existence. Yet, it can be even more rewarding. The movie the Matrix provides a parallel to this understanding of freedom and awareness. While many choose to avoid living in the realities of life, a few choose to live more fully in awareness. The existential question then becomes do you choose the blue pill? Or will you take the red one?

Self-Awareness and the Ethical Life

If we accept Ranks views on freedom, the unconscious, and the will, then to live a responsible life is to live a life committed to self-awareness. If the choice made is to merely be a product of our biology, our unconscious, and our environment; then the choice has been made to live an inauthentic and irresponsible life. This commitment is not always an easy one, but, again, the rewards can be great.

The inauthentic and unaware life limits a person in so many ways. First, it limits a person's ability to live an ethical life. Second, it limits the potential for authenticity. A third loss, which is necessarily connected to the second loss, is that we are limited in our ability for intimacy and relational satisfaction. It is only through knowing ourselves that we can be authentically in relationship with others. However, the ironic paradox remains that the only way we can come to know ourselves is through relationship with others (Hoffman, 2017). Self-awareness is needed to live in accordance with these principles. However, the lack of self-awareness is not an acceptable excuse for a person's behavior.

Freedom & Responsibility in Therapy

The process of change cannot begin until a person accepts responsibility. This is one of the difficult challenges of growth. In order to grow, a person must accept responsibility for what they have done to contribute to where they are at in life. If they have no responsibility, then they have little ability to change. (Hoffman, 2017)

When applied to therapy, this could be taken to mean that the therapist must break through the walls of defense in order to help the client take responsibility. This is generally not consistent with the existential approach. Bugental provides some of the best illustrations of this. With his profound respect for the client, Bugental also shows a respect for the client's defenses. Instead of forcing through defenses, they can be used as a guide to help the therapist know when the client is ready to go deeper into an issue. When the defenses are strong, the therapist respects the need for the defense and does not push on that issue at that time. However, when the defenses are lowered the therapist then can recognize that it is a good time to move deeper.

This is not to suggest there is never a time to confront or challenge a client's defenses. Rather it recognizes that before this is done the therapist must recognize the value of the defense. It also suggests that defenses can be challenged or confronted in a softer manner. I like to use the metaphor of the invitation here. The job of the therapist is to continuously invite the client to examine the defenses and the issues which the defenses are protecting, yet always respect the client's desire to not accept the invitation.

The Will and Agency

The will and agency are common words used to describe aspects of freedom in existential thought. 'Will' is a word that most people recognize, but have difficulty defining. One way of defining the will is to state that it is that aspect of the self which chooses or is free. In stating that people have a free will does not necessitate that they are entirely free. Rather, it is affirming that people are at least partially free. Few, if any, existential thinkers will deny that our biology, culture, and environment influence our actions and our will. However, none of

these can take away the reality of some degree of personal freedom. (Hoffman, 2017). The idea of the will is an important point of divergence from classical psychodynamic/psychoanalytic perspectives which generally are much more pessimistic about how free a person can be (some approaches to contemporary or relational psychoanalysis are notable exceptions). This, in part, is due to conceptions of the unconscious. While both theories generally agree that we have an unconscious which can never be fully known, existential theories typically believe that the unconscious can be much more known than what psychodynamic theorists believe.

Agency is a complex term that many struggle with. In essence, a person is acting as an agent when they are exercising their will. Human beings sometimes act in a manner that is completely passive. That is, although they have the potential for will, they do not exercise it. In these instances, they are not acting as free agents; instead, they are merely acting as automatons or products of those forces which influence the individual. (Hoffman, 2017) Therefore, the potential for agency is part of the human condition, but it is a part often not utilized.

Conclusion

Freedom and responsibility are discussed in this paper because they are foundational in understanding the human experience. If we are not free, then the other existential questions take on a very different purpose. Migration which is a product of freedom which indicates that human beings as social being must live and interact with others within and outside their environment. This signifies that we should be able to take responsibility of protecting our identity as Africans wherever we find ourselves; our identity as Africans should be of great importance to us. It would also require a very different approach to therapy. However, if people are free, then issues of meaning, relationship, and human limitation take on a very different meaning.

REFERENCES

- Arthur A. John (2010) African Diaspora identities Negotiating Culture in Transnational, Lexington books, chp2 68-70 retrieved from <https://books.google.com/> books on 06/06/2019
- Bauböck, R. (2005). Expansive citizenship. Voting beyond territory and membership. *Political Science and Politics*, pp 683–687.
- Bhugra D, Leff J, Mallet R et al (1997), Inception rates and one year outcome of schizophrenia in west London. *Psychol Med*
- Bhugra D, Mallet R, Leff J. Schizophrenia and African Caribbeans. *Int Rev Psychiatry* (1999),
- Feagin JR. *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bhugra Dinesh (2003). Migration and depression. *Acta Psychiatr Scand; Suppl*, pp 67–72 12

Bhugra Dinesh (2004) *Migration, Distress and cultural Identity*, Section of Cultural Psychiatry, London UK

Byron G.Adams, Fons J. R.& Van de Vijver (2017) *Identity and acculturation: The case for Africa*, *Journal of Psychology in Africa* volume 27

Handel Kashope Wright (2007) *Editorial: Notes on the (Im)Possibility of Articulating Continental African Identity*, *Journal Critical Arts South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, volume 16-issue 2

Hoffman Loius (2017) *Existential Therapy*, word Press/Theme RCG Forest.

Idowu William (2009), *Post- Colonialism, Memory and the Remarking of African Identity*, *Polikiton* volume 36- Issue 3

Kanu, IkechuckwuAnthony(2013), *African Identity and the emergence of globalization*, *American Journal of Contemporary Research* volume 3 No 6 June
LeffJ.(1988) *Psychiatry Around the Globe*. London: Gaskell, p11

MariaCaterina La Barbera (2014) *Identity and Migration: An Introduction*; called from <https://link.springer.com.chapter> part of international perspectives on migration book series (IPMI, VOLUME 13), 2014

Owolabi A. Kolawole. (2000) *Issues & Problems in Philosophy*, Grovacs Network, Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan Nigeria.

Satre, Jean Paul, *Existentialism*, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy retrieved from iep.utm.edu/satre-ex/ on 09/06/2019

Thompson RH. NY: Holt, (1996), *Theories of Ethnicity: A Critical Appraisal*. NY: Greenwood, (1989) 15 Zenner W. *Ethnicity*. In: Levinson D, Ember M (eds) *Encyclopaedia of Cultural Anthropology*.