

## DIASPORA POLITICS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND ECONOMIC PATHFINDER IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AFRICA

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### **Abstract**

*The author dissected the topic diaspora politics, advocating for some sociolinguistic, economic and political pathfinders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa. The term diaspora is defined from a multi-disciplinary approach – sociolinguistic, political, economic, religious, cultural and philosophical angles. The concept diaspora has its origin in an ancient Greek word, which means “to scatter about”. A diaspora is a scattered population. The diaspora scatter from their home land to places across the Globe, spreading their language and culture as they move. The paper tries to answer the question 'is there a threat to the languages of the diasporas?' The writer posits that the term diaspora was associated with Jewish history, which is the dispersion of Jews among the Gentile nations, referring to the Jews who lived outside the biblical land of Israel. The paper also discusses the origin and development of the concept diaspora with the various theoretical issues, such as colonization, refugeeism, migration, assimilation, language change and endangerment, slavery, nostalgia, spiritual anguish, and language education policy. The author lists and discusses types of diaspora based on the causes such as imperialism, power struggle, economic recession, political crises, war, labour migration, religious conflict, job insecurity, decolonization, natural disasters, expulsion, population explosion, genocide, deportation and persecution. The paper concludes with the*

*characteristics of different Diasporas of the world, such as African, Asian, European, American, World War II and the Cold War Diasporas. The paper then discusses the pathfinders to diasporan challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa.*

### **Introduction**

The topic is dissected and analyzed from sociolinguistic, political, economic and cultural perspectives. A diaspora is a large group of people, with a similar heritage or homeland, who have since moved out to places all over the world (Diaspora-Dictionary Definition: Vocabulary. Com (2018).

The term diaspora according to vocabulary.com (2018) comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “to scatter about”. The Diasporas scatter from their homeland to places across the globe, spreading their culture as they go. The Bible refers to the Diaspora of Jews exiled from Israel by the Babylonians. However the word is now also used more generally to describe any migration of refugees with their language and culture.

Diaspora means “to scatter” in Greek. The term now is used to describe a community of people who reside outside their country of origin or ancestry, though they maintain active links with it. A diaspora includes both emigrants and their descendants. While some people lose their attachment to their ancestral homeland, others maintain a strong connection to their countries' growth and development in areas such as economy, politics, agriculture, governance, language, education, culture, trade, business, communications, science and technology. Baser and Swain (2008) see the diasporas as peacemakers because they engage themselves in third party peace mediation in homeland conflicts. The number of people living outside the country of origin has almost tripled from 76 million to more than 232 million. More than 3% of the world's population now lives outside the country of origin (Themes,2018).

### **Diaspora History**

The term Diaspora is derived from the Greek verb "diaspeiro", meaning "I scatter" or "I spread about". In ancient Greece the term meant "scattering", used to refer to citizens of a dominant city-state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire (Tetlow, Elizabeth, et al.2005). Its use began to develop from this original term when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (Kantor, Mattis 1992). After the Bible translation into Greek, the word diaspora was used to refer to the northern kingdom exiled between 740-722 BC from Israel by the Assyrians , and the Jews exiled from southern kingdom in 587 BC by the Babylonians (Kantor, Mattis 1992). It subsequently come to be used to refer to the historical movements and settlement patterns of the dispersed indigenous population of Israel (Barclay,John 2004). In English the term, when capitalized "Diaspora", refers specifically to the Jewish Diaspora. When uncapitalized it refers to refugee or immigrant populations of ethnicities living away from an established or ancestral homeland (Merriam Webster,2011). The wider application of diaspora evolved from the Assyrian two-way mass deportation policy of conquered population (Galil and Weinfeld 2000).

The concept diaspora, according to OUPblog.mht (2018), came into widespread usage, in the Jewish case, when scholars in Alexandria translated the first five books of the Hebrew Bible into Greek around 250 BC. The noun "diaspora" and the verb "Diasperein" described a condition of spiritual anguish accompanying the dispersal of the Jews (Deuteronomy 28:25). Diaspora is the dispersion of Jews among the Gentile nations referring to all those Jews who lived outside the biblical land of Israel. According to the Oxford English Dictionary online, the first known recorded usage of the word diaspora in the English language was in 1876, and was in the evangelization among the national protestant churches. The term became assimilated into English by the mid- 1950s. The concept diaspora carries semantic sense of displacement of the populations who have a hope or a

desire to return to their ancestral homeland. It may result in a loss of nostalgia for a single home, as people re-root in a series of meaningful displacements. In this sense, individuals may have multiple homes. Diasporas have resistance to language change; they also maintain traditional religious practices and culture. Diaspora is therefore not a serious threat to language survival, though it exposes many languages to stiff competition with the host languages of the host countries.

### **Later Development and Conceptual Issues**

In the twentieth century, many other globally scattered groups began to use diaspora to describe themselves. Among the first to do so according to Kevin, Kenny (2018) were the Americans and people of African descent. The concept diaspora, in sociolinguistic term, has come to be associated with the words such as exodus, slavery, Babylon, migration, colonization, displacement, expulsion, refugee, relocation, repatriation, decolonization, alienation, Zionist movement, escapade, exile, etc. These words could be regarded as linguistic cognates for the term diaspora. For the Africans, exodus provided a central theme, while Babylon is a central symbol in the lexicon of diaspora. Babylon, to the Jewish elites, conjures up images of sorrow, despair, slavery and alienation. Since World War II, the idea of diaspora has proliferated to an extra-ordinary extent. One of the reasons for this is decolonization, which forged transnational bonds of solidarity among globally scattered populations, especially those of African origin. Decolonization also led to the expulsion and forcible emigration of many groups, like those of Asian origin (e.g ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and Vietnam or South Asians in East Africa). The popularity of diaspora arose from the international recognition of refugees especially by the United Nations. Today the UN agencies classify 15million people as refugees, another 15million as internally displaced, and 305 million as stateless persons (Kevin, Kenny 2018).

### **Migration Diaspora Issues**

Migration is the vogue now. Migration has made globalization to have a tremendous impact on technological advancement, and has created low-cost means of communication and transportation that bind people more closely together (Themes et al., 2018). Migration has also made far-reaching impacts on global educational advancement. Migration has exported diverse cultures to all parts of the world. Languages have also been carried across the globe by the immigrants. Migration from economic point of view, weave the world together (Themes and Co. 2018). The massive scale of contemporary international migration leads the proclamation of an "Age of Diaspora". The UN declared 18th of December as "international migration day".

There is the desire to return home either literally or physically, as in the case of the Zionist Movement or the relocation of African-origin people from the Americas. The knowledge of impossibilities or difficulties of relocation has political, cultural economic and religious implications. Back to Africa, movement is constrained. Governments' efforts at linking up with their diaspora world-wide are note-worthy. Governments are establishing new network or linkages on commerce, culture, languages, economics, education and technology, to top the skills knowledge, ideas and expertise of their diasporas, for the development of the homeland. This engagement or drive led to the establishment of departments and divisions of government that handle diaspora affairs. America, China, India, Nigeria have special agencies dealing with issues like dual citizenship, economic benefits and voting rights of diasporas (Barclay, John 2004).

### **Causes of Diaspora Migration**

The following causes of Diaspora migration have been identified:

imperialism, colonization, decolonization, deportation, expatriation, expulsion, economic recession, job insecurity or unemployment, insecurity of lives and properties, trade,

business opportunities, labour challenges, war, ethnic crises, political crises, invasion, religious conflicts and natural disasters like famine, flood, earthquake, etc.

### **Diaspora Concept of Dispersion**

Diaspora has come to refer to involuntary mass dispersions of a population from its indigenous territories. The following examples of dispersions have been identified:

- The expulsion of Jews from Israel
- The fleeing of Greeks after the fall of Constantinople.
- The African trans-atlantic slave trade
- The southern Chinese or Indian during the coolie trade
- The Irish during and after the Irish famine
- The Romani from India
- The exile and deportation of Circassians
- The emigration of Anglo-Saxon warriors and their families after the Norman conquest of England (www.oxfordlearnerdictionaries.com).

### **Types of Diaspora**

The following types of diasporas have been identified by Brubaker, Rogers (2005):

-Labour migrants who maintain emotional and social ties with their homeland.

- Trans-ethnic and trans-border categories, such as Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophone communities .
- Religious categories, such as Muslim and Catholic diasporas
- Dixie, white, liberal, gay, queer and digital diasporas .
- Evacuees: Evacuation from a place due to Hurricane Katrina. Evacuees may not have the opportunity to return, yet have desire to do so .
- Professional Communities of individuals outside their homeland, such as science diasporas (Burns, William,2013), medical diasporas, corporate diaspora of the Media,etc.

## **Theoretical Issues**

### **a. African Diaspora**

There are many theoretical issues that surround the concept of diaspora.

One of the largest diasporas of modern times is that of Sub-Saharan Africans. During the Atlantic Slave Trade 9.4-12 million people from West Africa were transported to the Americas as slaves. The issue here is that this slave population influenced the culture of British, French, Portuguese, and Spanish new world colonies. An Arab controlled slave trade, for instance, dispersed millions of Africans to Asia and the Islands of the Indian Ocean (Jayasuriya et al. 2003). Other theoretical issues are the free movement of people, visa free passport, independence, colonial rule and genocide. All these affected diaspora migration, in no small measure.

African Union allows free movement of people and goods under a visa free passport and encourages migrants to return to Africa (Monks, Kieron 2016). For instance, in Africa a new series of diaspora formed following the end of colonial rule. As countries became independent numerous descendants of Europeans emigrated. Uganda expelled 80,000 south Asians in 1972 and took over their businesses and properties. The 1990 Civil War in Rwanda (Rwanda Genocide) between rival ethnic groups Hutu and Tutsi turned deadly and produced a mass efflux of refugees.

### **b. Asian Diaspora**

The theoretical issues here are mainly those of conquest, expulsion, political corruption, starvation, population explosion, British recruitment of mercenaries, power struggles, enslavement, torturing and killing. The earliest known Asian diaspora is the Jewish diaspora. This was due to the Roman conquest, expulsion and enslavement of the Jewish population of Judea. Chinese diaspora of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1949 was caused by wars, political corruption and starvation in mainland China (Kalaydjieva, Luba et al. 2001). Indian diaspora constitutes a

diverse, heterogeneous, global community, representing different regions, languages, cultures and religion. Nepalese diaspora was caused by population explosion, British recruitment of mercenary soldiers and resettlement after retirement in the British Isles and Southeast Asia. Regional power struggles among several kingdoms in Siam regions led to a large diaspora of ethnic Lao. Siam destroyed the Lao capital, capturing, torturing and killing the Lao king.

### **c. European Diaspora**

In the European diaspora, the Greek culture, language, and religion were spread around the Mediterranean basins. In the Greek diaspora, the Greek tribes from the Balkans and Asia Minor spread people of Greek culture, religion and language around the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins. Greeks founded more than 400 colonies (Bhaumik, Subir 2007). There was the Greek colonization in Asia and Africa which led to migration. The Spanish financed expedition headed by Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492. About 240.000 people left Europe for the Americas in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century . In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century over 50 Million Europeans migrated to North and South America (Axtell, James 2009). In the Irish diaspora of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, over 60% of Ireland's population emigrated to Britain, the US, Canada, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand. Colonization and the creation of colonies were the other major issues.

### **d. World War 11 and the Cold War Diasporas**

In these two types, the main theoretical issues are Nazism, Persecution, Retaliation and Cold War. The diaspora during World War 11 and the Cold War went through racist oppression, brutality and persecution. For instance, Nazi Germany deported and killed millions of Jews, while many millions were enslaved, including Ukrainians and Russians. Some Jews fled from persecution to Western Europe and the Americas. After World War II, the Soviet Union and Communist-controlled Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia expelled millions of

ethnic Germans, in retaliation for the German Nazi Invasion. During and after the cold war-era, huge populations of refugees migrated from conflict ridden countries. Upheavals in the Middle East and Central Asia, some of which were related to power struggles between the US and the Soviet Union, created new refugee populations which developed into global diaspora. In Southeast Asia, many Vietnamese emigrated to France, and later million to the US, Australia and Canada. The Afghan diaspora resulted from the 1979 invasion by the former Soviet Union

#### **e. Nigerian Diaspora**

The Nigerian diaspora is caused by political crises, religious conflict, socio-political and religious expansionism like the Jihad. Other causes are insecurity of life and properties, job insecurity, ethnic cleansing, economic recession, undemocratic governance, military coops and breach of human rights or human rights abuse. Each of these causes has led to migration of the affected Nigerians to Europe, America, France, Germany, Russia and to other West African Countries.

Ethnicity and religion according to Olaoye (2018), are two factors that have led to the following major socio-political upheavals, which caused many Nigerians to migrate:

- The Sokoto Jihad of 1804 caused many inter-ethnic and religious crises, and led to both internal and external diaspora.
- The 2001 ethnic clashes in Taraba, Plateau, Nassarawa and Benue States, led to both internal and external migration.
- The Ijaw and Itsekiri Crisis
- The Ijaw and Elaye of August 2000
- The TIV and Hausa Crisis of June 25<sup>th</sup> 2001
- The Jos crisis of 2009/2010
- The Kaduna sectarian crisis of 1999/2000
- The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-eastern Nigeria

- The Niger-Delta Insurgency
- The Fulani herdsmen and farmers' clash in Northern Nigeria.

### **Pathfinders**

For the Diaspora of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa to wear a new toga of humanitarianism, humaneness, modernity and peace-enthronement, the following pathfinder initiatives should be advocated by African governments:

- Establishment of more pro-active Ministries of Diaspora Affairs. These ministries should be well funded and staffed with very well qualified experts in some of these areas: Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Sociolinguistics, Medicine, Accounting, Geography, History and International Relations.
- African diaspora ministries should pass laws restricting religious and sectarian crises.
- African countries should establish Diaspora Inter-state offices.
- Removal of the difficulties associated with relocation of diasporas.
- Establishment of Visa free passport for intending repatriation of diasporas, or those who want to return to their ancestral home.
- Provision of scholarships for diaspora children's education
- Strict restriction on immigration in order to avoid brain drain.
- Removal of threat to language survival.
- Provision of political franchise for diasporas
- Creation of transnational bonds of solidarity among globally scattered population, especially those of African origin.
- Encouragement of globalization which has impact on technological advancement.
- Creation of easy means of money transfer from one

- African country to another.
- Establishment of interafrican free trade zone and common African currency .
  - Establishment of special agencies that deal with dual citizenship, and economic benefits.
  - Encouraging trans-ethnic and trans-border interactions among diasporas from Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone communities.
  - African Union should allow free movement of people and goods under Visa free condition.

### **Conclusion**

The Diaspora/diaspora has come to be associated with mind boggling physical and psychological trauma. Diasporas go through horror in the countries to which they migrated. There are conceptual and theoretical issues that plague migrants. There is the feeling of nostalgia, and very few migrants have the opportunity of home-coming. Diasporas experience cultural, religious, socio-political and linguistic challenges. Although they try to have resistance to change, they are nonetheless influenced by the host countries' cultures, religions, languages and socio-economic and political systems. The possible panacea to some of these global problems is the establishment of African diaspora ministries and governments' agencies that are charged with the responsibilities of creating succour for diasporas in difficulties, and also developing international linkages for monitoring purposes. The above listed pathfinders are therefore considered as sine qua non for a success-prone African Diaspora.

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