

MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT AS EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO CULTURE CONTACT AND CULTURE SHOCK: THE NEXUS FOR THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

More than ever before, there have been records of migration and displacements in many parts of the world both in developed and developing nations, leading to economic, social, religious and even political problems. These situations have been exacerbated by the increasing waves of conflicts and terrorisms at some major flash points of the world like Syria, Ukraine, Taiwan, Russia, Sudan, Somalia, Cameroon, DR Congo, Nigeria, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran, among other nations leading to mass exodus of migrants/refugees to other parts of the world, especially the European countries. The effects of this massive exodus of migrants, no doubt, metamorphosed into culture contact and culture shock. Human beings strive to understand their environment through culture which is dynamic and, in the process, changes their mode of life and the way they reason. The present ways of reasoning ultimately alter the physical and thought processes in many ways. These existential threats emanating from migration and displacement and its nexus to theatre, therefore, are what this study seeks to interrogate.

Keywords: migration, displacement, culture contact, culture shock, environment, theatre

1. Introduction

The discourse which this study seeks to investigate, borders on migration and displacement that, culminate into culture contact and culture shock. Many factors have impelled people of ages and periods to migrate from their original abode to countries other than their own. The causes of migration are varied and personal. It could be caused by natural disasters, wars, terrorism, banditry, religious intolerance, man-made problems or just for the sake of looking for greener pastures. The reasons could be negative or positive. Whatever is the case, migration is a universal phenomenon as well as a

continuous one. By its nature, migration is unlikely to end as far as human society exists and as long as civilization persists. In fact, the society is currently experiencing massive migration and immigration arising from wars, trade imbalances, and terrorisms due to unpopular policy somersaults of most advanced nations.

Jayapal estimates that, “about a billion people today are on the move across the world and about 214 million people live in a country other than the one where they were born” (1). Just as Nabilkhan posits that, “in 2008 there were 15.2 million refugees and 827,000 asylum-seekers.” Statistics has shown that approximately 279,548 refugees and an additional 69,228 asylum seekers has migrated to the United States of America. This is an indication that the US has much more to offer in terms of better life than any other country in the world. For people living in the world’s poorer countries, United States is very attractive. Currently, however, plan is on board by the US to transfer some of their asylum seekers to Rwanda perhaps for political or economic reasons.

Shah (2008) provides a statistical record showing that migration record is estimated at 191 million migrants worldwide. Out of this, 115 migrants (20%) live in advanced countries; 20% in US alone; 33% live in Europe while 75% live in 28 other countries. The number may have doubled by now.

Several reports have ethnocentric focus on globalization as the root cause of migration. For instance, Shah (2008), Jayapal (2016), and UNHCR (2008) believes that, globalization have increased the gap between developed and developing nations. This gap among countries coupled with limited opportunities for employment that would have provided adequate wages for many families have spurred migration from developing to developed countries. Truly as more restrictions are placed on migration by some advanced countries, the more the surge.

Fact Sheet (2016) avers that, “globalization drives migration, in that advances in communication and transportation technology have driven globalization forward, allowing us to live in a world where distances between countries and travel time are no longer as significant an obstacle” (1).

Interstate and intrastate wars have been other major causes of migration worldwide. However, UNHCR (2008) report shows a remarkable shift of intra-state conflicts over inter-state conflicts. The study also indicates that, the refugees’ movement since the 1990’s are caused by internal conflicts. While the continuous genocide record within the same period has contributed remarkably to the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). For instance, in Nigeria, the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has tripled since 2015 while the number of deaths and destruction of properties are hard to explain. Suffocating and highest traffic of migrants drifting to most European countries are as a result of the devastating influences of conflicts in Syria, Bahrain, Iraq, Nigeria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ukraine, DR Congo, Turkey, Sudan, among others in which many of the migrants have died due to hunger, ship wreck, suffocation, floods, diseases among other calamities. In some cases, most migrants have been out rightly killed by their unfriendly and supposed hosting countries. Currently the mass media is awash with the news of Nigerians who had already moved to the United Arab Emirates and Libya but are being deported for breaking some visa protocols. The United Kingdom is also threatening likewise.

Poverty is another burning issue that causes migration. Jayapal (2011) thus believes that “poverty in migration families is increasing, even as states around the country try to cut off services” (8).

Migration has also been associated with social, political and economic reasons. As such Nabilkhan posits that, developing nations knowingly and inescapably suffer from economic crisis and migrate abroad to seek for better condition of living. Because these opportunities are not forthcoming, they migrate abroad where available work and cost of living is not so high, and where they can improve their social situations.

Politically due to civil wars or threat of civil wars within nations and other conflicts between nations, peaceful co-existence has become scarce and automatically there is no normal life. Some people willingly chose to migrate to other countries so as to overcome economic crises in their domain

resulting from war. This has been the situation in Syria, Iraq, Cameroon, Nigeria (due to ISIS, Boko Haram, ISWAP) etc. as currently being experienced. The latest hit is Ukraine where millions of their citizens and non-citizens have fled the country for safety due to the invasion of Russia to that country. The same applies to Taiwan where China is subjugating and imposing their authority over the nation as part of their territory.

On the economic level, most workers from majority of the developing countries are grossly underpaid while in some instances, there are not enough jobs for the youths. The next line of action for them will be to migrate for greener pastures to more fertile areas. Specifically, a large number of medical doctors, nurses, and other health personnel in Nigeria, for instance, had left and are still leaving the country for better paid jobs due to poor condition of service and emolument coupled with the continued economic crunch. These existential threats to migration and displacement and its nexus to the theatre is what this study tends to interrogate.

2. Consequential Effect of Migration and Displacement

Culture is a universal phenomenon and no living culture is ever static (Aime Cesaire, 290). Towing this line of universalism, Das submits that, “the continual and dynamic process of change now regards culture to be everywhere, under continuous creation, fluid, interconnecting, diffusing, interpenetrating, homogenizing, diverging, hegemonizing, resisting, reformulating, creolizing; open rather than closed; partial rather than total; crossing its own boundaries; persisting where we don’t expect it to; and changing where we do” (1).

The commonest definition or perception of culture is that it is a way and life of a people. Though culture is a universal phenomenon, it however, differs from one society to another. The thought patterns, attitudes, modes of communications, celebrations, etc. exhibited by an individual or individuals within a geographical orbit, express the cultural quotients of a community or country. This shows that to a great extent that people’s attitudes and behaviour is a major determinant of their culture. Anigala describes culture as, “the totality of the individual in relation to all the forces acting upon him and his reaction to them which include physical environment, supernatural force and the social context” (13). Anigala’s concept of culture shows that many factors are at play which culminates into what culture means.

To anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists alike, culture according to Triandis, “is a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, norms, role definitions, and values that is organized around a theme that can be identified among those who speak a particular language, during a specific historic period and in a defined geographic area” (1). Triandis definition goes to show that culture is like a thread that, weave people together and gives impetus to live their lives better and stronger. In line with this pattern of sharing, LeVine considers culture as, “the shared organisation of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community, and the meanings of communicative actions” (1).

Culture is also a vast phenomenon that encompasses many things. In this respect, LeVine further stresses that, “culture orients, grounds, supports, and frames our lives” (1). Cultural beliefs help mirror our worldviews and equally provide an understanding of how people act. People from diverse backgrounds see culture differently based on how life is lived in their milieu. Therefore, LeVine inputs that, “culture is our default context, or baseline; and this helps one understand why others sometimes consider your ways to be foreign, and vice versa” (2).

Culture serves some purposes in the lives of the people. For this reason, Amadi believes that, “the distinct cultural attributes of a people, ensure their place and survival in history; it also serves as springboard for the development of ‘rounded’ characters within a geographical environment” (61). Culture influences the individual’s participation and contributions to the process of harnessing the material and non-material resources of the society. In the process man’s soul and mind is developed. Culture, hence, becomes an indispensable element of the society, since without it; the individuals may

lose trace of their roots or identity. To this end, Turner views culture as, “the experience of individuals and the collective experience of its members as embodied in myths, rituals, symbols and celebrations” (33).

Against this background, culture becomes the personification that the individual becomes as a result of the various forces that collate to exert pressure on him and his response to them. As people move from one cultural setting to another, there appear to be change in the physical environment, and, or how they aspire to survive. This new found way of survival may affect their society and surrounding leading to culture contact and culture shock.

3. Culture Contact and Culture Shock

Culture contact gives birth to culture shock. Put in another perspective, culture shock is the resultant effect of culture contact – individual(s) moving away from their original abode to a new culture either voluntarily or involuntarily. On the other hand, Farlex views Culture shock as “the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to migration or a visit to a new country or to move between social environments.” He stresses that culture shock is when a person becomes perplexed and unsettled as a result of change in environment (American Heritage of the English Language, 2011). Farlex’s view denotes the initial anxiety and apprehension people experience when in contact with a new environment and culture different from theirs.

Culture shock is also the feeling of uncertainty, confusion or anxiety that people experience when visiting, doing business or living in a society that is different from their own (Investopedia, 1). This, therefore, means that culture shock could emanate from one’s inability to understand the tradition, means of communication and standard behaviour across diverse cultures. It pre-supposes that, language and native language for that matter, plays a vital role because culture flourishes on native languages.

Culture shock is when a person is confused and worried in a new environment or faced with a foreign culture (Kermerman Webster’s College Dictionary, 2010). Therefore, the negative impact of migrating across different cultures amount to culture shock. The implication is that migrants eventually come to realize that their new-found culture is completely different from theirs.

Culture shock is the gamut of one’s reaction to an unusual environment which he/she could no longer comprehend. Sociologically, it refers to the expression of isolation, rejection, etc. experienced when one culture superimposes or juxtaposes with another. This was commonplace during the colonial era when primitive tribes were confronted and subjugated by imperial forces with their own culture, norms and belief systems.

Sociologists have adduced some concepts to help society understand the sociology of culture. These concepts according to Mondal include ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, culture shock, xenocentrism, xenophobia, cultural diversity, universality of culture, popular culture, and elite culture. He explains these in detail when he sees ethno-centricism to mean comparing one’s culture as super to others; cultural relativism to mean using one’s culture as a benchmark for other cultures; cultural shock as the negative tendencies one feels when exposed to another culture; xenocentricism as the ranking of other cultures higher than one’s own; xenophobia as the cultural fear of foreigners, perhaps coming to take up jobs. It could also be ethnic, racial, or religious intolerant; cultural diversity is the differences in culture and cultural practice; while universality of culture is the attempt to meet human needs despite cultural differences.

4. Indices of Culture Shock

Symptom or indices of culture shock according to experts include frustration, isolation, insecurity, sadness and inability to find solution to matters of life (Triandis and LeVine, 2016). Symptoms of culture shock can be noticeable when one has a feeling of frustration, irritability, anxiousness, depression, and often withdrawn against alien culture and unfamiliar environment (Rhinesmith, 2000 – 2016).

Consequently, symptoms of culture shock have been identified by Mondal (2015) to include: depression, vulnerability to powerlessness, preoccupation with one's health, pains, aches, stomach-aches, and being homesick among others.

5. Effects of Culture Contact and Culture Shock

There are usually two sides to the coin. The same applies to migration with its attendant positive and negative effects. Contributing to the negative aspect of migration, Anh posits that, "overpopulation is the most serious effects of people moving from one place to another. This ultimately leads to shortage of space to live and work as well" (1). When the population of immigrants increases, it also results in food shortage. He gave China as an example with the biggest population in the world arising from the influx of the Vietnamese, Cambodians and the Laos to that country.

Anti-migrant sentiments (xenophobic attacks) affect migrants including remittances that would have accrued to their country of origin, thus, increasing poverty. The entire world suffers from anti-migrant effects thereby leading to more devastating effect of poverty. More worrisome is the death toll arising from anti-migrant hates. Anti-migrant attacks in South Africa, for instance, have left over 50 people dead and thousands fled the country for fear of their lives. Such an unprovoked, misguided, and misplaced aggression was utterly condemned by the international community; especially Nigeria that sacrificed both human and material resources to help South Africa fought apartheid to a standstill when it mattered most. Shah further expresses the view that, migration could lead to other negative tendencies because migrants are usually exploited for slave labour; migrants become willing tools used for socio-political discourse hinged on racism; many migrants die trying to escape from their present predicament; while tensions and hostilities may arise as migrants are seen to have come to usurp available benefits meant for the locals.

Migrants' country of origin suffers from brain drain as a result of these younger's leaving to other countries, especially if they possess higher competencies than the host country. On the other hand, this scenario becomes an advantage to the countries of destination where the migrants have been and are still contributing to the growth of their economy through their labours and skills.

Many advanced countries like the UK, France, Canada, United States of America, Germany, among others have come to depend heavily on migrants for their labour markets, though not without some stringent measures that has left some migrants trapped or drowned while trying to cross to these countries.

Invariably, it is equally noteworthy, that many migrants are contributing immensely to their families and home countries economically through wages ranging from \$100 to \$200 or more at a time. In such circumstance, Jayapal posits that, in 2005, "global foreign remittances totalled more than \$300 billion – about three times all aid provided by donor nations to developing countries and twice as much as even direct investment remittances to India, Mexico, China and the Philippines all totalled more than \$20 billion to each country" (2).

For the migrants, many of them endure the hardship of exploitation on the consolation of having to enjoy some social welfare benefits, liveable wages, and access to credit. The implication of this is that many took such risk because of their desperate conditions in their home country (UNHCR 2008 Global Trends). Some people think migration should be encouraged because it helps their economy to grow as migrants are willing to take up jobs established citizens cannot do. While on the other hand, others think migrants are taking away jobs that would have been done by the natives.

6. Solutions and Implication for the Theatre

At present, there is a global concern on how to find solutions to the increasing number of migrants worldwide. The European Union (EU), for instance, has met severally to find solutions to this ugly and spiral trend. Migration has no doubt, changed the phase of culture globally. To this end, LeVine stresses that, "culture orients, grounds, supports, and frames our lives; cultural beliefs are built

into our worldviews, providing a reference point for understanding what we observe, and a guide for how we act” (1).

Speaking on the systemic issues surrounding urban poverty, Jayapal adduces some problems and solutions under immigration. While blaming the United States for much of migrations caused by her foreign policies such as NAFTA and for kick-starting much of global wars like in Iraq or inflaming it as in Ukraine currently, she believes that, migrants are contributing every day just like everyone else. She therefore emphasized the need for assistance as failure to do so impel a nation to loose its collective values and spirits (9).

In dealing with culture shock, there is the dire need to develop friendship with the host country and the home front. This is because it is hard to maintain cordial relationship with people from other climes. As such migrants should intimate and share their stress with their own people in order to find solution to their predicament.

To adjust to new lifestyle, migrants should endeavour to know what they missed most which they enjoyed at home. They can achieve this by improving their language proficiency by watching television and plays, listening to radio and reading as many books as possible in their host country. There is also needed to seek medical advice should they have headaches and stomach aches arising from emotional problems. It is important that they maintain regular life styles by eating right. They should equally be familiar and respect the culture and customs of their host county and jettison their preconceived notions about their new environment.

Theatre has a role to play in all of these. As a mass communication and mass transformation medium, theatre is a major purveyor of culture by raising, according to Nwamuo, “the conscience and consciousness of the people and inspiring in them the need for change” (41). This he said would bring an egalitarian society with an equal opportunity for all. He sees communication as one of the bedrocks of development.

Information and communication are important ingredients in directing the affairs of man. The duo was used even by the colonialists in directing, conditioning, assimilating and controlling the temperaments of their subjects with a view to remain loyal, faithful, obedient and subjective to their administration (Udomisor, 107).

Theatre and other media of communication can be extensively deployed to collect, collate, store, process and disseminate news, data, pictures, facts and messages, opinions and comments needed to make positive changes at local, national and transnational levels.

Having a retrospective view of the nature of information and communication, Koroma avers that, “news output from the media including other sources such as the theatre is an attempt at national development; since news dissemination is meant to instil or create awareness among the masses and arouse them to positive action” (27). The implication of this is that, the theatre by providing information assists in forming public attitude and causing attitudinal change in the migrants. Egbon also noted that, “communication as a universal phenomenon helps man to achieve quality life, improve his productivity, personal expression and rekindle his aspiration (52).

Schramm argues that, change can only take place when people are willing to change (49). Availability of information makes this possible as people move from one country to another exchanging their cultural heritage. To him these diverse exchanges bring about positive change in the society. By its educative nature, theatre makes available diverse social, political, cultural and religious issues people may not be aware of thereby closing the ungoverned spaces of ignorance (Shalwitz, 1).

Famous writers like Hegel, Marx, Engels, Aristotle, Shakespeare, at the foreign scene, and Azikiwe, Achebe, Soyinka, and Macaulay at the home front have all spoken favourably about the powerful influence of the arts in propelling the economic, social, religious, political, and cultural development of the society. Thus, Lenin further lends his credence and posits that, “literature by itself should not be an enterprise for commercialization but as a tool to chart the course of revolutionary struggles” (53). This implies that, theatre like all other arts should be deployed for the progress of the

society and not in any way be commoditized for individual gains. It is rather to fight social ills in the society.

Okoli describes great writers as those that work for the progress of the society. He sees them as “crusaders, pathfinders and revolutionists who inspire confidence and extricate men from enslaving traditions, religions, dogmatism and political dictatorship” (72). To him theatre or the arts mirrors the society and enable men and women to act in a particular way. To bring the importance of the arts into perspective, he gave an exemplum of how Balzac comparing himself to Napoleon Bonaparte claimed that, “he would accomplish with the pen, what Napoleon started with the sword” (73). This buttresses how powerful the theatre or other arts are in moulding the society. The pen and the poet, Okoli reasons, have the potentials to shape and reshape the destiny of the society. That with the heroic symbol of power and rugged will, the pen, in its ambivalence, is capable of spreading knowledge and enlightenment or sowing discord and panic” (74) as the case may be.

Obiechina argues that, “the writer should take the position against the oppression of the people in all forms of brutalities and of unwarrantable violence against the masses. Should be vocal against national hypocrisy, against those who pretend to love the country but are busily stealing the public goods and converting the country’s numerous resources to their private use. Such a writer should also be dedicated to the promotion of a healthy, virile and life-sustaining culture – using his medium to fight decadence, falsification of values, degradation of cultural institutions and the emasculation of peoples’ way of life”(6).

The pen can transmute the social ideology and aspirations of the people and translate them into actions of revolt, liberation or enslavement; rebuilding or destruction. The power of the pen or the poet can arouse in men some pleasure, sentiment or to some acts capable of evoking hatred and catastrophe (74). The essence of all these is to create a stable, just and an egalitarian society where justice reigns.

To Okoye, the artist and indeed the arts, “is a father-creator of the total man and his pre-eminent theme for the full liberation and creative control of human energies” (10). He contends that the artist gives hope in the midst of wonders besieging our lives. That whether in our hope, joy and invariably in our sorrow or fear; and all that that binds humanities together, the poet has a big role to play (11). This implies that, literature creates an orderly society where all men live peacefully and harmoniously without restraint. Literature or the arts conveys irrefutable, condensed experience from generation to generation and together with language, can protect the soul of the nation; they do more than protect the soul of the nation so that the light of its soul can shine forth with ever-increasing clarity as the process of physical, mental, moral and emotional purification grows among the body politic. To this end, the arts thus can bring freedom to the body and the enlightened freedom of the soul.

Finally, Obiechina reasons that, “the Nigerian writer must help to create order out of chaos, not in the sinister sense in which fascists invoke order as an excuse for trampling on the rights of the people, but from a deep-seated concern to give the people inner confidence which arises from a feeling of confidence and stability without which there can be no social progress” (4).

7. Conclusion

Culture is a universal phenomenon and no culture is static. It changes as the society itself changes even in complexity. More to this, no culture is superior to another, and anyone or people claiming cultural superiority are but living in self-deceit or ignorance. Culture does not grow like a plant, nor can it be destroyed by an earthquake. It lives and dies with the attention man pays to it and the role which it is allowed to play. There is, therefore, no person without culture; nor can there be culture without a people. Culture is that which confers on a people their otherness, and their distinctive style of living. To this end, Egbeke Aja avers that, “culture is man-made not God-given” (6). This suffices that we can create and recreate our culture and even change same at will. Thus, cultures are rules and reactions which are specifically designed to guide people’s aspects of life. Reliving the cultural renaissance of the ancient Ohafia society, Aja further submits that:

They endeavoured to tame and subordinate their physical environment; as they attempted to provide for their economic and security needs; as they devised norms, values, and principles that governed patterns of social relations to the problems of life and death as they institutionalized the notion of good and bad, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood, and pattern of stable and shared expectations (6).

The implication of the above is that as people move from one geographical region of the world to another, there is cultural exchange which could have far reaching economic, political, social and even religious consequences to both the migrants and the country of destination. Culture is what makes a people thick either for good or bad depending on other people's perception. For this reason, it is being reiterated that no culture is superior to another and thus, should be respected. Theatre, therefore, as a tool of education, information, communication and entertainment is at a vantage position to conscientize, sensitize and mobilize migrants to face the vagaries and/or opportunities in their new-found culture and displacement.

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