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Table of Content

Persuasive Communication: Rethinking the Ingredients of Emotional and Logical Appeals in Advertising and Public Relations Campaigns. Melchizedec Onobe.	209
Pragmatics: The Influence of Context on Meaning in an Utterance Prisca Godspower Ocholor	219
Fiscal Federalism in Democratic Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward Uwaleke Uchenna Joseph Ph.D & Saratu L. Jim-Suleiman	225
Application of Information Communication Technologies in Education and Training for Sustainable Development K. S. Akpede (cimim)	236
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Trade in the West African Sub-Region ADAM, James Akperan (Ph. D)	245
Ethics and the Socio-Cultural Ambiance of Public Relations and Advertising Practice in Nigeria. Gabriel Ugande (PhD), & Rodney Ciboh (PhD), Melchizedec Y Onobe	261
Filmstrip and Audio - Tape Media Utilization in the Context of English Phonetics Instruction in Nigeria Junior Secondary Schools Samuel Adenubi Onasanya, PhD, Christy Olubunmi Otegbayo M.Ed, & Grace Oby Oputa M.Ed	271
Gender Issues and Corporate Social Responsibility Orientation in Nigeria Orbunde Bemshima Benjamin, & Hemen Awua	278
Archetypal Interpretation and Analysis of Nigerian Video-Film Idachaba, Aduku Armstrong(PhD)	286
Profitability and Liquidity Ratios as Predictor of Firms' Survival Ishaya Luka Chechet PhD & Mr, Solomon Akanet	293
Growth of Interest Rates and Stock Market Performance in Nigeria Post Crisis Era. Lawal, Muhammad Kabir and Olowu, Daudu Yini Malachy	306
A Conceptual Analysis of Migration in the Context of National Security in West Africa Fayomi, O. O.	314

Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Shareholders Wealth in Nigeria Osuagwu, Godwin Onyewuchi	323
Analysis of Government Revenue Effect on Military Expenditure in Nigeria Okpanachi Joshua Phd, & Ahmed Tijjani Abdulkadir	338
Impact of Human Resources Management on Organizational Performance in Nigeria Olowu, Daudu Yini Malachy	346
Restoring Leadership Credibility and Workers Commitment in Nigerian Public Service Organisations. Enonuya E. Oritsebemiwor	359
Local Language Programmes as Vehicles for Mass Mobilization: A Look at Selected Radio Benue Programmes Anthony Iorver Igyuve	371
Broadcast Media and Sexual Orientation of Adolescents in Makurdi, Benue State Nicholas S. Iwokwagh, PhD	378
Social Mobilisation as an Instrument of Nation-Building: The Nigeria Experience Dr. Didymus Tamen	390
The Challenge of Organising, Policy Implementation and Evaluation in Developing Countries: Evidence from Nigeria Atsuwe Cephas Gbande, & Helen Elena Jekelle-Mohammed	401
Nexus between Trade and Development Indices in sub-Saharan Africa: Some Comments Gushibet Solomon Titus	422
Crime Prevention: the Role and Implications of Design in the Prevention of Certain Types of Crime Udo Chikezie Osiogu	438
Persuasive Communication as Psychological Change Process in Advertising and Public Relations Zorte Maamaa, Ph.D	454
Financing of Micro and Small Scale Enterprises and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: An Empirical Investigation. Sam B.A. Tende, Ph.D, & Iheonkhan Samuel Iyere	462
Channel Conflict in the Distribution of Consumers' Goods: The Consumer Perspective. Barde, B. E. & Dr Tende, S. B. A.	474

A Conceptual Analysis of Migration in the Context of National Security in West Africa

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Abstract

Migration, which is a recurrent pattern in human history, is an important part of the agenda of ECOWAS with regard to the formal agreement on 'Free Movement of Persons, Rights of Residence and Establishment' within the West African region. The emphasis is placed on the incorporation of surrounding states within the framework of policies as developed at the level of ECOWAS. Migration is viewed as both a problem and strength for development in both the receiving and sending states. The migratory phenomena are still at the phase of exceptional expansion, that tend to generalize over the region of West Africa that are divided into zones of immigration. The massive wave of migration especially from the Sahelian areas to the hub of economic activities in the urban centres and coastal areas can be attributed to the collapse of agriculture, perennial drought and famine, as well as civil wars and political crisis, which have led to the movements of millions of people from their homes to other countries. In some countries, it also coincided with the unexpected expansion of manufacturing sector activities, which have pulled majority of these migrants from within and outside. Politically, some migrants constitute a political force that threatens the national security of the receiving states. In this age of migration, the patterns of migration within this region shall be discussed under the reason people move and security implications of their movement in the nation-states

of West Africa. The paper will outline the contemporary development of migration as a foreign policy issue among the member states, and assess the implications of these developments for the ECOWAS's identity as an international actor.

Introduction

In Africa, the movement of people, across national, regional and continental borders is a phenomenon that can be referred to as human migration. This phenomenon is historically linked to important features of the socio-cultural, economic and political lives of the people. There is a widespread intra-regional migration within the ECOWAS member States. Migration issues are shrouded by speculations and sentiments. The major motives for current migration within West Africa could be attributed to the lack of job opportunities evidenced by the high unemployment rates, lingering issues of endemic corruption and perspectives for self-development and persecution, conflict and insecurity. Within the West African region, extreme vulnerability which includes illnesses and disabilities, exploitation are experienced by a number of migrants. These are rarely documented and the human security challenges remain largely unaddressed. Also, there are concerns that are related to the generally degrading residence and work conditions experienced by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, which are facing discrimination and regular assaults on other fundamental rights. Hence, migration issues have become the focus of attention among the member States of origin and destination in the ECOWAS region. The migratory flows, features, trends and processes are more complex and diverse consequences in the migrants and the countries of origin, transit and destination within the region. According to Barclay (2009), these consequences impact on the development of opportunities for and

constraints to peace, security, political advancement and socio-economic growth and human development.

Historical Antecedents of Migration in West Africa

There has been the existence of African Kingdoms and other social dynamic Africa social organizations before the arrival of European explorers in the 15th Century. According to MSU (2000), several places in Africa which also include Egyptian and Nubia Kingdoms in Northern Africa, the Ghana, Mali and Songhai Kingdoms in West Africa, the Zulu and Rhodesia Kingdoms in Southern Africa, the Axum and Buganda Kingdoms in East Africa, and other lesser Kingdoms, experience rich dynamic interactions which were obvious through the exchanges of goods, services, ideas and people through migration over a period of time. De Haas (2007), describes the nature of migration as nomadic or semi-nomadic movements over relatively long distances which were common especially among the herdsman. During such period, frequent conflicts between tribal groups over natural resources and the control over trade routes were associated with the regular uprooting, movement and resettlement of people.

Pre-Colonial Era Migration

The Pre-Colonial migration is also referred to as the Bantu Migration. Guthrie (1970), traces the historical homeland of the Bantu language family to the modern-day area of Nigeria and Cameroon, Congo, and Niger. The influx of people into Eastern, Western, and Southern Africa began thousand of years ago with the creation of different dialects, physical types, and social customs through their assimilation of various groups along their migration routes. Also for instance, in Nigeria, Fadayomi and Toure (1992), are of the view that throughout history, Nigerians have been engaged in

migration across borders of the West African sub-region. In the Pre-colonial period, there were intensive migratory movements dominated by long-distance trade and warfare.

There is a disagreement among the historians as to the reasons for migration of the Bantu speaking peoples. Some historians attributed the reason for migration to rapid population growth that resulted in a shortage of land and others point to the development of centralized kingdoms. Whatever the reasons for migration in this era, the migrants left with new skills that changed the economic, social, political practices to their new destinations. MSU (2000), describes the migration as inclusive of growing of crops and domestication of animals, the skill of mining and smelting metal, and methods of forging tools and weapons from copper, bronze, and iron. In addition, the migrants brought with them new ideas of social and political knowledge that resulted in the development of many important kingdoms in the East and Southern Africa.

Colonial Era Migration

There is a difference between colonial-induced migrations. The migration is dependent on the massive movement of people and goods within African colonies and between the colonies and Europe since 1885. Adepoju (2005), notes that “colonial regimes altered the motivation and composition of introducing and enforcing various blend of political and economic structures, imposing tax regimes and establishing territorial boundaries”.

The regimes employed various economic and recruitment policies which included compulsory contract and forced labour legislation and agreements to stimulate regional labour migration during the colonial era. According to MSU (200), these movements resulted in the growth of large urban areas, but they also have a negative

impact on many rural areas where able-bodied men were forced to leave their home areas to work in mines and on large farms, whereby leaving families and communities with a shortage of labour to produce food and other goods necessary for survival. It should be noted that historical evidence suggests that many of the regions of rural Africa suffered economically as a result of labour migration during the colonial era.

Post-Colonial Era Migration

Intra- Africa migration during the Post-colonial period has evolved into a dynamic occurrence, which Konseiga(2005), describes as “a complex grid of relations and interdependence”. The gradual development of this dynamic migration occurrence in the Post-colonial era began with the same reason as the Pre-colonial migration. Adepoju (2005), is of the view that people move between and among different African geographic areas in search of better economic opportunities and living conditions. Currently, while taking into consideration variance in the economic status of individual African countries, people tend to move from countries with fewer opportunities to those with more opportunities largely for employment and other income generating activities. According to Adepoju (2006), return migration, circular migration, labour migration and commercial migration are distinctive features of current migration in West African region. The movement within Africa which also includes inter-régional migration is also influenced by the facilitative and disruptive effects of globalization. Globalisation has impacted on the increased availability of and use of modern transportation and communication systems, which inform the migration process with resultant easier and faster movement of people. The impact of globalization in this period has also excluded virtually an increasing number of people from economic

participation. This exclusion has contributed to high incidence of poverty and other migratory 'push' factors that are believed to have intensified emigration.

Within the West African region, people migrate due to involuntary and voluntary circumstances. The voluntary movements are largely due to forced circumstances such as escape from civil wars (e.g. during the Biafran-Nigerian Civil war), Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Liberia civil wars, other political upheavals like the natural resources struggles in Darfur, in Sudan, political and ethnic persecution and human rights violations as well as severe environmental degradation and natural disasters (e.g. the famine crises in Niger, Republic)

It is pertinent to note that migration within the region is propelled by various reasons which include the quest for security (which may be personal or group), professional advancement in profession, and increment in income through hired labour, trade, commerce, environmental condition, and better living conditions.

Conceptualisation

In the literature on migration, the first scholarly contribution to migration consisted of two articles by the 19th Century geographer Ravenstein (1885), in which he formulated the "laws of migration". Migration was seen as an inseparable part of development, and he asserted that the major causes of migration were economic. Skeldon (1997), describes migration patterns as been assumed to be influenced by factors such as distance and population densities. This is the perspective, in which people are expected to move from low income to high income areas, and from densely to sparsely populated areas and this is the underlying assumption of 'Push-Pull' theories.

The definition of migration is ambiguous. Migration means different thing

to different people. Tavern (1996) is of the opinion that people in different situations may or may not be migrants, depending on the definition accepted. For instance, it is customary to classify persons who move within a political or administrative unit as local movers, but not as migrants. In this definition, a migrant must actually move across definite area boundaries within that country, even if the migrant only moves across a street in the process. In essence, a local mover may go a hundred miles or more within the same large local district and may not be classified as a migrant. Other type of mobile persons who frequently present classification difficulties are seasonal or temporary, contract migrants or guest worker, forced migrants, commuters, and internal refugees

Mora and Taylor (2006), define, migration as the result of individuals and households weighing the utility that is attainable under different migration regimes with the utility from not migrating. A migration regime in this context is defined as a combination of place; the place implies the village of origin in case of non-migration, internal migration destinations, or foreign destinations, and sector of employment incommensurability issues and associated disciplinary divisions.

Mabogunje (1970), who propounded migration system theory, by borrowing from the Systems Theory, defines migration system as a set of places linked by flows and counter flows of people, goods services, information, which tend to facilitate exchange further, including migration, between places. In this analysis, the importance of feedback mechanism is stressed, through which information about migrants' reception and progress at the country of destination is transmitted back to the place of origin. This may further encourage migration. The assumption of this theory is that migration alters the social, cultural, economic, and

institutional conditions at both the sending and receiving countries, which has to do with the entire developmental space within which migration processes operate. Whereas network theory mainly focuses on the vital role of personal relations between migrants and non-migrants, and the way this social capital facilitates, perpetuates and transforms migration processes, migration systems theory goes beyond this point in stressing that migration not only affects and is affected by the direct social environment of migrants, but restructures the entire societal – or “developmental” – context of the concrete spaces in which migration takes place, both at the receiving and sending countries de Haas (2008), notes that the current policy and scholarly discourses do emphasise on migration, remittances and transnational engagement as self-help development “from below” also shift attention away from the relevance of structural constraints and the important role states and other institutions play in shaping favourable general conditions for social and economic development to occur. This raises the fundamental question whether the recent shift towards optimistic views reflects a veritable change in (increasingly transnationally framed) migration-development interactions, the use of other methodological and analytical tools, or is rather the deductive echo of a general paradigm shift from dependency and state-centrist to neoliberal and neoclassical views in *general*. The historical structuralists have criticized neo-classical migration theory, stating that individuals do *not* have a free choice, because they are fundamentally constrained by structural forces. Their argument is based on the assumption that rather than a matter of free choice, people are forced to move because traditional economic structures have been undermined as a result of their incorporation into the global political economic system. Through these processes, rural populations become increasingly

deprived of their traditional livelihoods, and these uprooted populations become part of the urban proletariat to the benefit of those core areas that rely on cheap (immigrant) labour.

Also, there have some criticisms of historical structuralists for being too determinist and rigid in their thinking in viewing individuals as victims or “pawns” that passively adapt to macro-forces, thereby largely ruling out individual agency. de Haas (2008) points out the lack of theoretical rootedness and largely descriptive nature of much empirical work has haunted the improvement of theories. As a result of the general lack of a common theoretical thread, most empirical work on migration—especially from outside migration economics – remains isolated, scattered, and theoretically underexplored. Real progress in the understanding of the factors determining the fundamental *heterogeneity* of migration and development interactions is only possible if more empirical work is designed to test theoretically derived hypotheses and, hence, to improve the generalized understanding of migration-development interactions in order to be able to assess the security implications of migration in the countries of destination of the migrants.

Transnational Perspectives of Migration on Issue of National Security

De Haas (2005), raises the issue of *de facto* transnationalisation of migrants' lives which challenge assimilationist models of migration integration, as well as the modernist political construct of the nation-state and citizenship.. The implication is that of clear-cut dichotomies of 'origin' or 'destination' and categories such as 'permanent', 'temporary', and 'return' migration are increasingly difficult to sustain in a world in which the lives of migrants are characterized by circulation and simultaneous commitment to two or more countries.

There has been an assumption that the

integration of migrants would coincide with gradual loosening of ties with their countries of origin. According to de Haas (2008), this erosion of ties explains much of the prior pessimism on the sustainability of remittances as well as the fact that migrants' contribution to the development of their countries of origin was typically linked to return migration. This assertion has been proved otherwise because many migrant groups maintain strong transnational ties over sustained periods. Their connection with the countries of origin is sustained through telecommunication, holiday visits and pendular or circular migration patterns.

From the perspective of national security of both the countries of origin and destination, Ammassari and Black (2001), state that migration may constrain development of the countries of origin through brain drain phenomenon that adversely affects the quality of human capital. Migration can also cause general labour depletion, rural exodus, and social inequalities and reduced service delivery capacity as well as engender over-dependency on remittance, among other. The argument goes further that economic remittances do not necessarily yield a positive developmental impact as they may be used for consumption rather than investment purposes. In addition, the large flow of remittance could generate spiral inflation.

In the some countries of destination and transit, the migration security risks include the potential undermining of local wages, loss of jobs to migrants and deterioration in working conditions. In African Union (2006), it is argued that migration "can have serious negative consequences for states and migrants' well-being including potential destabilizing effects on national and regional security and jeopardizing inter-state relations and tensions between host communities and migrants and give rise to xenophobia, discrimination and

other social pathologies". In addition, other risk association with migration in the countries of destination and transit is the escalation in the cost of providing public benefits and services to the people. It is argued that these factors have potential and real negative consequences for socio-economic and political development, peace and stability. In the discourses on the issue of national security, it should be emphasized that the challenges to security and its protectors have become complex but nation-states, to a great extent remain the fundamental purveyor of security.

Migration and Foreign Policy

There are links between international migration in its various forms and foreign policy.

Weiner (1993), is of the opinion that international migration has gained prominence on the agenda of heads of governments and various inter-governmental organisations, thereby becoming a important issue of "high politics". It is no longer confined to the realms of humanitarianism, labour market and social integration concerns.

In both developing and developed countries, governments, public opinion, media, and scholars perceive international migration as a threat to national, regional and global stability. Collinson (2000), notes that migration has the propensity to feature prominently in connection with a variety of broader security issues because it fits together closely with a number of deepening concerns about national, regional and global economic, political and strategic environment.

On the contrary, international migration was also considered as the peripheral to analysing foreign policy. It belonged to the domain of "low politics" Miller and Papademetriou (1983) observe that the underlying assumption with regard to the fundamental nature of foreign policy has left

migration matters outside the traditional focus of foreign policy analysis in the way that the foreign policy significance of energy, finance, and political terrorism issues were long underestimated.

But in the mid-late 1990s, according to Hollifield (2000), the discipline of international relations began to recognize the dramatic effects that international movements can pose on the security and foreign policy of states.

According to Castles (2000), migrants are classified into certain categories, and seek to encourage certain types of mobility while restricting others. What then are the states actions at the domestic level in adjusting or influencing movement of people? Weiner (1985), develops three propositions that have relevance to this question and these include the relations between states are often influenced by the actions or inactions regarding international migration. The second proposition has to do with how states affect international migration by the rules they create regarding the means of leaving and going into the country. States in international system take into consideration the actions of other states in determining policies they are to pursue with regard to international migration of people. The third proposition refers to international migrants often become a political force in the country of residence. The level of their relationship with the politics of the receiving country and the political relationship with the country of their origin has become relevant factors in the adoption of policies that affect the two countries.

In furtherance of the nexus between international migration and international relations, Weiner (1985), is of the view that the rules of entry and exit are important variables influencing the direction, composition and magnitude of international migration. Four clusters of variables that shape international migrations are identified which include and are characterized as

differential variables as differences in employment rates, differences in land prices, and differences in degree days. The second group of variables is spatial, such as distance and transportation costs. A third group can be identified as affinity variables, such as religion, culture, language, and kinship networks. And the fourth cluster refers to the access variables which are the entry and exit rules. These clusters are of concern to both academics and practitioners because differential and spatial variables are usually concern of economists; spatial variables are of particular interest to geographers; affinity variables attract the interest of sociologists and anthropologists; and access variables are of concern to the political scientists and students of international relations. Therefore, it is necessary to agree with the assertion that access variables affect both international migration and international relations because the congruence or incongruence of rules between states will influence the patterns of international cooperation and conflict. Also, the rules are often shaped by relations between states.

Conclusion

While considering the overall migration phenomenon and linkages to national security issues, it should be noted that one can not easily draw general conclusions with validity to every situation. Massey et al (1993), suggests a reason which has to do with weaknesses of the theoretical base for the migration-development nexus. Ammassari and Black (2001), state that the difficulty may also be attributed to dynamic and complex processes that characterise both migration and development processes which vary across time and space, and can be considered from very different perspectives, including short-term and long-term. It should be emphasized that migration has both negative and positive impact, despite the difficulty in generalizing the context in which these impacts are

manifested. This impact depends on the political, economic, legal, social environments where the migration takes place, and also the resources, personality and behaviour of the individual migrants. Within the context ECOWAS member states, it should be emphasized that formulation of policies requires adequate statistical data of migrant to their countries and emigrants from their countries, and other reliable information, as well as rigorous analytical policy-oriented research in order to have evidence-based policy formulation. At the regional level, there is need for political commitment, a common position, harmonization of policies and shared responsibility among all member states intra-regionally.

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