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ESCAPING ON UNCERTAIN TIDES TO UNCERTAIN JURISDICTIONS: EXPLAINING ROOT CAUSES OF A PERSISTENT TREND ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

Thousands have died in their quest to cross the Mediterranean to some countries in mainland Europe. These voyages have been attributed to many believable reasons: escaping violence or economic hardship according to reports by transnational non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations. Can we attribute these voyages, wholly, to economic factors and conflicts? What is the root cause of these travels that defy rationality? I argue in this paper that accounts by migrants is just like showing us a storey building standing at its basement. And that the root cause of escaping on uncertain tides to uncertain jurisdictions is fundamentally the politics of political leaders and stakeholders. The nature of politics in most Sub-Saharan African countries is chasing people away. How the grounds can be prepared for good politics will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The headlines are frightening and the facts are easy to comprehend but for their sourness. Should we restructure African states along lines that are consistent with the plight of migrants or can we look beyond stories and concentrate on political reality? “Migrant sea route to Italy is the world's most lethal” (Dehghan, 2017), “More than 8,000 lives lost crossing the Mediterranean in the two years since Alan Kurdi's death” (Ensor, 2017). “Over 40 people 'die of thirst' in Sahara Desert” (British Broadcasting Cooperation [BBC], 2017). Disregarding real reports, migrants still try their luck as though it is a game of football where losing means they have another chance. This is no game but migrants still travel on uncertain tides, sustained by the strength of less seaworthy vessels and their fortitude within. Many works attribute their forced movement mainly to economic and political reasons – failed development, uncontrollable inflation, ineffective institutions, ethnic, political or religious conflict and poverty among others (Bakewell 2008; Collier 2013). Is this the whole story? What fuels these economic, political and developmental reasons?

Conventionally, migrants are seen as people who move from one country to the other for a settlement that is often permanent, yet some are temporary. Some of them are forced to leave, whilst others leave their former jurisdiction voluntarily. In this essay, migrants are to be seen as emigrants who forcefully migrate from one political community to other owing to the politics of a said political community. Migrants who settle permanently are those who see the benefit of staying at their current location to outweigh the benefit of keeping close ties with family and friends in their initial location (Akopkari, 2000). Both categories – permanent and temporary – show the element of force in their migration. Those who settle permanently will never go back because conditions that precipitated their movement is something they never want to engage. Those who settle temporarily either come back to their former residence or plan to come back in order to better the conditions that they left behind. If one has enough food and wine in her house, why will that person go to another's house in search of food and wine? That person will be forced to leave her initial zone if she seeks something that is non-existent at her current place.

BAD POLITICS: EMIGRATION FUEL

Dependency theorists may be right by opining that the external influence of the international political economy retards the growth of developing states. But they fail to recognize that domestic politics determine domestic outcomes. Good politics is the irreducible foundation of developed states. Citizens are forced to leave most African states because of bad politics. And as a result of bad politics, institutions and systems of governance that are to engender economic growth, political

development and social transformation are also weakened. Politics concerns “all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and conflict in the course of taking decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources” (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007). According to Leftwich and Hogg (2007), there are two levels of politics. At the first level, rules – institutions that are humanly devised to constrain human interaction – are made to guide the actions and inactions of political actors and the citizenry. And at the second level where there is contestation regarding the rules of the political game, political elites or those who affect the making of binding authoritative decisions are made to engage in political activities according to the codes of the political game or are made to adhere to the provisions of the institutions or rules that emerge from political processes. Therefore, we can talk of good or bad politics manifesting at two levels – at the level where rules of the political game are made and the level that demands the playing of games within the rules according to the tenets of the rules of the game. Clientelistic networks and neo-patrimonial corruption are used to explain how bad politics give rise to unfavourable economic, political and social conditions that support emigration on tumultuous tides.

Clientelism: Foiling developmental coalitions

As emphasized above, the first level of politics involves the making of rules of the political game. For these rules to be instituted, there is the need to build proper coalitions. Coalitions are formed when elites and leaders from public and private sectors, modern political authority and traditionally established systems coalesce their effort and set clear rules regarding how conflicts will be negotiated, and how state resources will be managed for development. Coalitions can be developmental or fraudulent. Developmental coalitions support the making of legal frameworks that support economic activity, resolve conflicts amicably, ensure egalitarian economic opportunities, establish processes for equitable redistribution of state resources and provide a fair playing field for political competition. Developmental coalitions further ensure that state resources – power, taxes, human capital, social capital etc. – are properly managed for the state to move from an undesirable state to a desirable state. The country that most migrants escape to is Italy. Although suffering a deep recession, “Italy is recovering” according to OECD economic survey (2017: 10). Recognising that there are still administrative irregularities and economic hiccups, the report acknowledges that Italy's government has “made significant progress on tackling structural impediments to growth and productivity” (ibid.). The concerted effort by elites from various sectors of the political community has contributed to the inroads that they are making. Mario Monti's technocratic cabinet did its part after taking over in 2011 to provide medicine for the ailing economy but could not build sufficient rapport with the electorate, and connection with elites in Italy because of the technical composition of the cabinet. But subsequent governments and the current cabinet of Paolo Gentiloni are trying their best to build developmental coalitions with political actors, businesses, cultural and other interests which is ensuring the gradual healing of the economy and the subsiding of internal infighting. Government and all stakeholders are making efforts at building strong state institutions that can deliver sustainable development. In 2012, the Governor of Sicily filed a lawsuit against a journalist for defamation (Freedom House, 2017). In spite of the controversy surrounding this suit, it is significant for one reason: major political elites are dissociating themselves from unworthy coalitions as they want to be seen as building significant coalitions that will contribute to progress. Before the recession in 2008, 23.08 million people were registered to be working in Italy as of October 2008 according to Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) (The Local, 2017). In September 2017, Istat reported that 23.06 million people are registered to be working. Strong institutions and tailored policies have paid off, and living standards and the economic environment has improved significantly (Nadeau, 2012). These economic and political improvements are a result of good politics which cause the citizenry to tarry regardless.

Coalitions that exist in most African countries are fraudulent, with their activities shrouded in conspiracy. These fraudulent so-called “partnerships” exist to milk the states of its resources. They are not established for the public good but to feather the nests of those involved. Flatly, the collusive coalitions that exist in most African countries have clientelistic elements inseparably characterising the total fabric of their formation. These networks are formed to benefit participants and those connected to these participants only. The rules they set up to guide their negotiation do not inspire the making of binding decisions that ensure equity and egalitarianism. Businesses that are inundated with contracts and traditional areas that enjoy development projects are those that supported the government to win political power or those that are helping the

government to cover its trails of unworthy deals. The wider citizenry, businesses, traditional authorities, other political elites and coalitions which are outside the clientelistic clique are only contacted when there is need to show political sympathy or gain political capital to win elections. In November 2017, US investigators accused Chad's President Idriss Derby of receiving \$2 million from former Senegalese Foreign Minister and Hong Kong's Ex-Home Affairs Secretary in order to grant a multi-million oil licence to a Chinese oil company (The Independent, 2017). Why would the President of a country, one who is the embodiment of the aspirations of the people of Chad, engage in such a frivolous transaction? It became evident in April 2004 that Nigeria's Ex-President Goodluck Jonathan's daughter received 80 luxury cars as traditional wedding gifts, others were speculating that the cars were 175 (Myjoyonline, 2014). Why somebody connected to the President? Two weeks before elections in March 2015, President Goodluck Jonathan met key religious and traditional leaders in Adamawa State and asked for their support. What will these traditional leaders demand and what will the president promise? In August 2016, Ghana's Ex-President John Dramani Mahama gifted Boling-Lana Mahamadu Abdulai, a paramount chief in the Northern Region (Abudu Regent), a Toyota Fortuner in an election year for the ridiculous reason of facilitating his movement (Adogla-Bessa, 2016). After leaving the North as of that time, the President received several endorsements from chiefs in that area to an extent that, he was enskinned a sub-chief in the Tatale Traditional Area after a warning from the National House of Chiefs that traditional leaders must desist from endorsing political party candidates (ibid.). What a coalition! And sometimes when they are confused as to how they should loot the state, clientelistic elites engage in superfluous conflicts which plunges the whole state into unnecessary chaos. Those are not wars or civil conflicts. They are fights over how to steal the resources of the state. Generally, people cannot thrive when clientelistic coalitions abound. They will leave these countries which are not favourable for their personal development and economic progression. These networks create fear and panic that have no justifiable bases. And if people are not able to break into these fraudulent networks, they look at other places where they will be well off. Therefore, clientelistic networks that are formed to just benefit a few chase many others away. People do not care running away from these conspiracy-filled environments, and in spite of the United Nations High Commission on Refugee's (UNHCR) report and many other detailed reports that an estimate of 3,538 out of 216,054 people died or were missing crossing from one shore to the other, the number of people embarking on this deadly voyage increased by 369.8% to 1,015,078 and out of that, 3,771 people journeyed to the lifeless side (UNHCR, 2017). It is better to die in the cool of the sea than to shamelessly die in one's own land as a result of bad politics.

Neopatrimonialism: Corrupting obedience

Again, I argue that neopatrimonial corruption in many African states chase many people away. The second level of politics, as discussed earlier on, is adherence to the rules of the political game. Political leaders and elites in many African countries do not adhere to the rules that make them rule. Most of the things they do, regarding the management of state resources for development, are not consistent with supreme frameworks that constrain and regulate social, economic and political interaction. State resources – authority, money, human resources – are expended in a parochial fashion. A neopatrimonial state is one whose leaders and officials do not see or deliberately disregard the distinction between the public realm and the private realm (Wade 2006). Serving national interest and the public good is out of question.

No doubt, Africa is the richest continent as far as mineral resource endowment is concerned. According to the 2017 World Mineral Production book by the British Geological Survey, excluding the data for Central African Republic, Africa produced 46.9% (59,319,239 Carats) of the world's industrial diamond (126,600,000 Carats) in 2015. It can also be inferred from the same source that 20.7% (645,072 kilograms) of the world's gold (3,110,000) was produced in Africa as of 2015. But if you have cats in charge of fried marinated fish, they will eat them up. Political elites and stakeholders (cats) are not able to manage the resources of the state (fried marinated fish) according to provisions of laws that be. They corrupt due process and become state made wealthy people. Botswana is one of the few African countries that is using its diamond endowment to enrich the state. But Nigeria which is blessed with the largest oil industry in Africa remains one of the most impoverished polities in the Sub Sahara, and states in which oil deposits are found is nothing to write home about. The UNHCR reports that as of October 2017, the most common nationality of those travelling across the Mediterranean Sea is

Nigeria, forming 11.3% of total migrants. Since 1951 when it started drilling oil with test wells in Owerri area, no government in Nigeria has been able to turn the fortunes of the people around as yet. Rather Nigeria is constantly plunged into conflicts because political elites are confused as to how they will loot states resource. This headline says a lot, “Abacha loot: Switzerland to return \$320m to Nigeria” (BBC, 2017). In April 2017, Nigeria's National Intelligence Agency Director-General, Ayodele Oke, was found to have warehoused a total of 13 billion Naira (\$41.3 million) for engaging in secret operation without the President's knowledge (Soyombo, 2017). In the southern part of the continent where a polity leads in gold production, its president, Jacob Zuma, failed to uphold the constitution and used £11 million to renovate his Nkandla private residence. With all these lootings, secrecy and outright disregard for supreme laws, how much will be left to support small-scale enterprises, strengthen the economy, develop developmental infrastructure and ensure equitable development of all areas in the political community? Owing to neopatrimonial politics, the state will be marking time regarding democratic development, the economy will stagnate, poverty, unemployment, and inequality will soar.

THE WAY FORWARD: FOUNDATION OR CHANGES?

Definitely, something must be done to curb the normalisation of bad trends that have formed part of our dominant political culture. Scholars and aid agencies have advocated restructuring and building strong institutions, political elites having the good of the people at heart, creating developmental policies, leaders acting decisively to ensure the manifestation of proper vision among others (Magstadt, 2013: 305 – 332; Ohno, 2004; World Bank, 1989). But how do we get all these if we do not have developmental leaders to begin with? Is a vibrant civil society and organizations within them important? We should have good leaders before we proceed because good leaders can create regimes and institutions that will engender development. Civil society and its organizations should be vibrant in order to contribute meaningfully to good politics and good state-society relationship. If state-society relationships - do not change, the story of the state and society will remain the same. How do we get developmental leaders? What should the civil society do? Does the international community have a role to play?

Leaders chosen

Leadership is important in every state because it affects its governance systems and development. Considering the state of politics in most African states, leaders who are elected or appointed to leadership positions is very crucial. Leadership is a serious business and it is not just anyone that should be allowed to practice, trial and error. Developmental and transformative leaders are needed because they can serve the national interest, build developmental institutions and mobilize people and resources to achieve set national goals. The way leaders are selected must be changed if a restructuring of the economy and society is desired. Ridding our politics of clientelism and de-politicization of ethnicity in the face of ethnic politics helps in socio-political cohesion and eventual development. Ayatse and Akuva (2013) found that “ethnic sentiment has gradually crept in to find a place in every facet of Nigerian political activity”. The Ghana Centre for Democratic Governance's (CDD) findings indicate that 84% of Ghanaian registered voters vote based on personal and material benefits from politicians (Ullo, 2016). If the games within the rules in politics feeds on this solidarity, political discourse is riddled of nationalism and everything becomes who gets what from the state. Politicizing ethnicity can be dangerous and if all resort to gain resources from the state becomes futile, it sometimes turns into violent conflicts between major ethnic groups like what happened in Rwanda from 1990-1993 between the Hutus and Tutsis, the Nigerian Biafran war from 1967-1970 and the painful Sudanese Civil War from 1983-2005. Ghana is gradually becoming an ethnopolitical state as Ewe's and Ashanti's have consistently served as 'world banks' for the National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party respectively (Bossuroy 2011). Politicking should be based on addressing and proposing solutions to issues that affect the state as a collectivity because no state can thrive on sectarian politics. If the various ethnic groups choose national leaders based on competence to be infused into the administration of the state, they can more easily coalesce to support developmental programmes and projects for the public good.

Demands Made From the Political System

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary”, wrote James Madison in Federalist 51 (2008, [1788]). Those in government are from us, human beings, and are bound to err. Private behaviour is not used as court evidence because left to our own means, our folly will be incredible. That is why the civil society and organizations within them – the media, pressure groups and think tanks among others – should demand accountability and transparency from the government. Freedom of Information laws are a step in the right direction. These are laws that allow access to government information because public things must stay public. If the laws are non-existent, civil society stakeholders must demand its enactment. If they are existent, they must not be left in a vegetative state. Demands from the political system should not be things that will benefit a particular sector or area over the other like budget increase, skewed infrastructural development and the like. It should be things that will cause political actors and state elites to strictly adhere to the provisions of regulatory frameworks that support collective improvement in current conditions.

The International Community

The international community is fond of issuing sanctions or demanding that sanctions be issued if some countries are not complying with some conditions that support human development. Others support huge donations and grants. These methods do not have solution capacity as the situation in Central African Republic, South Sudan, Mozambique, Ghana, Nigeria and many others remain, if not worse. Sanctions and donations are just like taking psychotropic drugs; the problems remain. Rather, the international community should support the building of leadership capabilities that will cause states to harness their human, administrative and extractive capacities. If the leadership capabilities of a state are built, proper visions will be formed and decisive actions, taken. The international community should also support developmental coalitions in African states that are forward-looking. The warm relations that existed between Zaire's former despot, Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, and the United States of America should not be encouraged. Forward-looking coalitions are needed, not those that cause havoc and strife.

CONCLUSION

Clientelistic networks and neo-patrimonial corruption are the root cause of citizens embarking on journeys whose certainty is determined by uncertainties. Economic, political and social explanations for emigration are valid but for its depth. Owing to bad politics, most African states cannot move from their current status to provide opportunities for people to thrive. With development-minded leaders selected, enabled civil society and relevant input from the international community, the necessary foundation will be laid for good politics to unfold and African citizens will voluntarily travel in fastened plane seats not lifejackets.

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