THE RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The movement of people from one country to another in search of greener pasture, peaceful settlement and so on, has become very rampant in the world today. These same reasons have triggered internal migrations as well. Lives have been lost in the bid to circumvent immigration laws of countries by immigrants. The current spate of wars, political crises, natural disasters and hunger has led to increase in illegal migration in the world. Nigeria is not left out. We hear of boundary clashes and insurgencies, which have resulted in illegal emigration to other countries basically in search of job opportunities and better living conditions. Nigerians have severally been repatriated from foreign lands. Recently, over five thousand Nigerians were repatriated from Libya. Nigeria has also played host to migrants from neighbouring countries, and has experienced internal migration in several parts of the country. The frequently asked questions are: "what role can religion play in curbing the spate of illegal migration and refugee crises in Cross River State, Nigeria? The research discovered that religion can be a veritable partner to government in resolving this ever-increasing menace that has become an embarrassment to the state and nation. This work adopted qualitative or explorative research method. It employed the content analysis approach in examining available printed materials on the subject matter. In view of its peculiarity, oral interviews were conducted on specific groups and individuals. This work proposes the involvement of religious organisations in preaching and teaching on the dangers of illegal migration, the provision of vocational training for our teaming youth population to reduce emigration, and the provision of counselling and resettlement programmes for the repatriated and those in refugee camps across the country. The work also encourages the government to evolve modalities to curb the spate of violence and bloodshed that has fuelled refugee crises in Cross River State and Nigeria in general.

Introduction
Migration and refugee crises are burning issues in the world today and have constantly challenged the governments of nations the world over. As the world grapples with the problem of terrorism, economic melt-down and recession, so the challenges of migration

and refugee press hard. These phenomena have become serious issues of great concern as they affect human/religious life and the economy of nations. They have also created a state of insecurity worldwide. Migration has become a serious political issue which has attracted and engulfed the attention of national governments and international organisations. In Nigeria, the new term that applies to people previously called refugees is Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The term has become prominent in this 21st century Nigeria. It arose as a result of the activities of *Boko Haram* and insurgency in Nigeria which have caused many communities and groups to relocate to 'safer grounds', outside their original home.

In the period spanning the 16th and 20th centuries, there were lots of moving and settling by the peoples of the world more than in any similar period in human history. The migration preceding this period were collective acts, more or less, voluntarily undertaken by the members of a group; but many of the more recent migrations differ in, at least, two significant ways. They have been either voluntary individual acts or enforced group movements, entirely against the will of the people who are being moved. The two types of migration began almost simultaneously after Europeans arrived America in the late 1400s and they have continued in one form or another up to the present day (Encarta) and in several other countries across the globe.

The big question is: why are people voluntarily or forcefully leaving their homelands to settle in other places other than their birthplaces? Why do people prefer to be called refugees or internally displaced persons? A close examination of the above questions reveals several factors as contributing to these refugee crises. These factors include: seeking alternative residences as a result of devastation caused by natural and manmade disasters, change in climatic condition, need for employment, boundary disputes, demographic issues, search for religious or political freedom, and so on.

Interestingly, when these people move out to new locations, they move with their culture and religion. On arrival in the new place, when they are received and have settled down in a receptive, friendly and peaceful environment, they begin to manifest their cultures and religions in those places. They explore and utilize the available avenues to display or practice their religions and cultures. However, the experiences in *Bakassi* and *Boki* in Cross River State are peculiar ones; the history is different, and the circumstance leading to their displacement is also different. These peculiarities stimulated the need for this research.

Defining the Concepts

Religion: Defining religion is an uphill task. This is because there is no universally acceptable definition of the concept. Many have defined it based on their experiences in a particular religion. Others define it from their field of specialisation or the perspectives of their academic inclination. Other reasons that account for the difficulty in defining religion include the variety of humankind's religions with different beliefs and practices, and their variety in structure, organisation, etc. Looking at religion from different perspectives, one would discover that some definitions focus on transcendental entities. Some definitions equate morality to religion; some portray religion as something negative because it prevents humans from exercising the free will, though religion positively enforces moral laws.

Despite the challenges in defining the term "Religion", there must be a definition that will act as a boundary marker for this paper. It is also necessary to acknowledge the efforts of scholars in the field who have attempted to define religion. Edward B. Tylor says it is the "belief in Spiritual Beings" (in Yinger 4). For Paul Tillich, religion is "that which concerns us ultimately." Robert Bellah sees religion as "a set of symbolic forms and acts which relates man to the ultimate condition of his existence" (Yinger 6).

However, this paper adopts the definition propounded by Clifford Geertz, which is a functional definition that emphasises the role that religion plays in society. According to him "...a religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic". This shall serve as our working definition.

Migration: Migration is the movement of people, animals or birds, especially of large groups from one place, region, or country to another, particularly with the intention of making permanent settlement in a new location. To enable us understand the term "migration", we need to know what it is. There are two types of migration – animals/birds and human. This article will concentrate on human migration. Human migration is known to have existed as part of human activities as far back as six million years ago. Human migration is usually done with the intentions of settling permanently or temporarily in a new location. The movement is often over long distances and from one country to another. But internal migration, where people move from one region to another, is also possible. And, in fact, this is the dominant form globally.

The concept, *migration*, is the crossing of the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period of time. It includes the movement of refugees, displaced

persons, uprooted people as well as economic migrants. Internal migration refers to a movement from one area (a province, district or municipality) to another within one country. International migration is a territorial relocation of people between nation-states. Two forms of relocation can be excluded from this broad definition: first, a territorial movement which does not lead to any change in ties of social membership and, therefore, remains largely inconsequential both for the individual and the society at the points of origin and destination, such as tourism. The second is a relocation in which the individuals or groups concerned are purely passive objects rather than active agents of the movement, such as organized transfer of refugees from states of origins to a safe haven.

The dominant forms of migration can be distinguished according to the motives (economic, family reunion, refugees) or legal status (irregular migration, controlled emigration/immigration, free emigration/immigration) of those concerned. Most countries distinguish between a number of categories in their migration policies and statistics. The variations existing among countries indicate that there are no objective definitions of migration. It is an important factor in the destruction of natural boundaries between languages, cultures, ethnic groups, and nation-states. Even those who do not migrate are affected by movements of people in or out of their communities, and by the resulting changes. Migration is not a single act of crossing a border; it is rather a lifelong process that affects all aspects of the lives of those involved. Actually, these definitions when closely examined differentiate between migrants and refugees. Migrants should be understood as people who decide or chose when and where to go, even though these choices are sometimes extremely constrained.

Refugee: The word "*Refugee*" originated in France in the late 17th century. It was used in 1573 in the context of granting asylum and assistance to foreigners escaping persecution there. (Robert 1641). Ironically, it was first used about a hundred years later in reference to the Huguenots, persecuted Calvanists, from France who streamed into England immediately before and after the revocation of the Edict of Nantees by Louis XIV on October 18, 1685.

Although defining *refugee* is a challenging task, it is very important in this paper. Refugee has from its historical roots attained a legal and administrative category, and this status has been greatly enhanced in our times (Zolberg, Suhrke, Aguayo 3). Refugee has also "acquired a diffused meaning in ordinary parlance." However, a proper understanding will guide, direct or streamline our discussion in the rest of this paper. It has earlier been made clear that there is a difference between migrants and refugees.

As far back as 1953, Jacques Vernant observed that "in everyday speech, a refugee is someone who has been compelled to abandon his home." According to him, such refugees

include victims of an earthquake or flood, as well as of war or persecution..., the emphasis has been on victimization by events for which, at least, as an individual, he cannot be held responsible (5). The definition may not be valid today considering the complex nature of the situation in Cross River State "refugee." However, this definition is so inclusive, covering a wide range of concepts – oppressed, suppressed, malcontent, and poor persons whose movements can be attributed to conditions commonly considered as "push" factors that produce migrations. Zolberg and others consider this definition as unsatisfactory due to the distinction given in the press of many western countries between 'genuine' and 'false' refugee" (4).

Another definition given by Protocol Relating to the states of Refugees and approved by the United Nations in 1967 described refugee thus:

> The term refugee applies to 'any person' (but only that person) who is outside the country of his nationality...because he has or had well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and is unable or, because of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of the country of his nationality (5-6).

This definition provides for the set of persons constituted on this basis, and they are generally known as "statutory refugees" according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Unfortunately, this definition covers specific people but not those people who genuinely need refuge and assistance, because many would not qualify. Therefore, this definition does not reflect current realities. What it means is that this definition is provided for the purpose of policy implementation at the international level. If refugees are identified simply as a people who have been recognised as such by the appropriate UN agency or the authorities of a particular state, research conducted based on such meaning will only give credence to it and excludes possible alternative policy that might give status to others whose need is even greater.

Furthermore, a draft resolution prepared by the institute of International Law for its 1936 session defined a refugee as "any person who, by reason of political events in his state of origin, has either left the territory of that state, whether voluntarily or under expulsion" (Vernant 6). Similarly, the principal contemporaneous study of refugee stated that the refugee "is distinguished from the ordinary alien or migrant in that he has left his former territory because of political events there, not because of economic conditions or because of the economic attractions of another territory" (Simpson 4). However, the definition of refugee was broadened to accommodate African refugees. The document was formalised

in 1969 in the Convention on Refugee Problems in Africa negotiated by the OAU. That definition states:

> Those people in need of a new state or residence, either temporarily or permanently, because if forced to return home or remain where they are they would – as a result of either the brutality or inadequacy of their state – be persecuted or seriously jeopardise their physical security or vital subsistence needs (7).

According to the organisation, the term "refugee" shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality (Goodwin-Gill 281). This expands the UN criteria for refugee status emphasising on state permits and include instances where a country cannot adequately protect its citizens from, say, ecological disaster or economic crises.

The idea by Vernant, Simpson and Goodwin-Gill and others provides us better description of the nature of refugees that exist in parts of Africa including Nigeria, which this paper is considering–especially the Bakassi and Boki people of Cross River State of Nigeria experiences.

Migration Antecedents in Cross River State, Nigeria
There is the case of a farm settlement or outpost–agglomeration of Ukpa people from various families for the purpose of farming in a farm colony since it was too distant to make a round trip for a day. Although they resided in the farm settlement, they remained loyal to their major family units in Ukpa before the introduction of tax by British administrators. The introduction of tax and the brutal manner of its collection resulted in the separation of this colony from their mother unit. In the words of Cann, "'kpenyakpenya' broke away from the rest because of unfairness by the parent units in the collection of tax" (18). Some of the members of the brake-away communities migrated to rural areas outside their original places of residence (86). This was a common phenomenon of the colonial period of Bekwarra history. Tax evasion was a form of reaction at the individual level. Those who attempted to evade payment of tax and were caught were promptly prosecuted in the native court. To avoid being persecuted and sent to prison, taxable adults had to pay taxes. To pay their tax, some had to emigrate as seasonal immigrants to the neighbouring communities of Boki and Ikom where they sold their labour for money with which tax burdens were met. From this seasonal migration experiments, the idea of mass migration to places as far as Yoruba, Nassarawa and Taraba States, respectively, developed (Ajor 86-88).

Another factor contributing to labour migration in Bekwara was forced labour. For example, where there were industries or mines or plantation, agriculture generally required such a manner of labour. Furthermore, forced labour was required for construction work. In the 1930s and 1940s, forced labour was used for the construction of Ogoja–Makurdi road classified as a Trunk B Road (Schute 2). Forced labour was one of the contributory factors for the migration of Bekwara peasant farmers between the 1940s and 1960s from Bekwara to places outside their homes for the purpose of farming (Okon 86). According to Tapela, the movement of the peasant farmers to other areas had a direct link between modern imperialism and labour migration (43).

In Nigeria, the people who settled at Akwa in Bakassi were those who fled from the war between Natanga and Nabonda people. When they fled from the war, instead of migrating to Calabar like other Efuts, the descendants of Mbaro Ekaku migrated to a place along the Akpayafe River in Bakassi (Odiong 21). Personal adventure took Nakanda Nkwa from Ekpa Efa, who left Akwa to Calabar on personal adventure where he met Obong Effiom Edem, the Great King Duke Ephraim who gave him an area of land which is now called Ikot Nakanda (22). According to Bruce Connel, "The people of Amoto claim unequivocally that they migrated to Bakassi from Eniong as a result of tribal war. Also, in search of settlement, the Iboku people, due to a great conflict between them and the Arochukwu people, resulting in a war and consequently the Iboku settlers particularly those who settled at Ibom migrated (28). They went in groups in different directions to establish their settlements in various parts of south-south including the present Cross River State in Nigeria.

Causes of Migration and Refugee Crisis
1. Response to the lure of a more favourable region or because of some adverse conditions or a combination of conditions in the home environment. Historic and pre-historic migrations were stimulated by a deterioration of home conditions resulting from poor economic and political environments.
2. Among the natural causes are changes in climate stimulating a search for warmer or colder lands, volcanic eruptions or floods that render sizeable areas uninhabitable, and periodic fluctuations in rainfall.
3. Social causes are generally considered to have prompted many more migrations than natural causes. Social causes include demographic issues, for example, an increased population leading to an inadequate water and food supply.
   a. Conflict Situation (such as war), as in the forced movement of the people of Bakassi and Chibok (in the wake of attacks by Boko Haram) to other parts of the country that were relatively peaceful.

b.   Search for religious and political freedom, as in Southern Cameroon; migrations of the Huguenots, Jews, Puritans, Quakers or Society of Friends in the early church years. Today, the indigeneous people of Southern Cameroon are migrating to parts of Cross River State as a result of insecurity and political crises in their country.

c.   Desire for material gain as in the 13th century invasion of the wealthy cities of western Asia by the Turkish Tribe; or greater economic opportunity in the face of large scale technological change, as in the early 20th century great migration of African Americans from the farms of Southern US to the factories of the northeast.

The emergence of commercial industrial cities also gave rise to an important kind of migration in Nigeria. In the 20th century, this sort of movement was very significant in 3rd world countries including Nigeria. Increased demand for labour and search for white collar jobs resulted in the movement of people from rural to the urban centres. The establishment of Abuja as the new capital of Nigeria resulted in the movement of (people) workers and families from Lagos and other parts of the country to Abuja the new Federal Capital Territory. Oppressive government and government policies also fuel internal migration. Many left Zamfara State at the introduction of Sharia Law, to escape the repressive Islamic government of that state.

Religion, Migration and Refugee Crises in Cross River State
The positive role that religion should play in resolving the problem of migration and refugee crises in Cross River State must be examined based on the following factors affecting migrants and refugees. These include:

Religious/Spiritual Status: These persons must be looked at as Africans, people whose religion is part of their lives. Their faith is part of their daily living, whether or not expressed through organised religion. Moreover, religion is clearly a catalyst for much of social services that are done in many communities today. Therefore, integrating spirituality into what we do with people would help enhance the process of assistance.

Economic Status of Migrants and Refugees: The migrants and refugees are people who left their homes, communities/nations as a result of adverse economic conditions or a combination of conditions in their home environment. They are in search of economic opportunities.

Social Status: The lives of migrants and refugees may have been affected by forces including demographic challenges. For example, an increase in population leads to an inadequate food supply. They may have come out of crises situation like war and famine. The pressure and psychological trauma may also influence their behaviours. Furthermore, they may have experienced political or religious instability at home. They may, therefore,

require or be searching for religious and/or political freedom. For instance, the people of Amato claim unequivocally that they migrated to Bakassi from Eniong as a result of tribal wars" (Connel 23).

Identity Conflict: Identity conflict comes from the state's inability to culturally and linguistically assimilate newcomers, and the host community or nation may reject an identity transformation. On the other hand, there is sometimes resistance of migrants to change of identity in order to maintain their status quo. Religious organisations must watch out for such assimilation and integration problem. The divergence between the culture of the homeland and that of the new community or strangers is likely to clash.

Challenge by External Forces: Migrants and refugees have common enemies: poverty, insecurity, marginalisation, and so on. These enemies can be traced to economic underdevelopment, political instability and the improvement in communication and transportation. A United Nations report in 1986 affirms:

> Economic underdevelopment as a fundamental cause of contemporary refugee flows. Recognizing that the majority of these flows originate in the developing world, it is argued that economic imbalances and overall poverty in the "South" is conducive to political instability and recession that often compel people to flee (Zolberg 259).

In other words, these factors are the forces that challenge migrants and refugees and, therefore, encourage potential refugees from developing countries to seek asylum in the hope that they will get sympathetic hearing in their host communities/countries.

The Role of Religion
Religious organisations have great role to play in helping to alleviate the suffering of migrants and refugees. In an oral interview, Eyo Ekpenyong Effa narrated that this refugee camp has witnessed regular visits by religious organizations who presented various gifts to help alleviate the sufferings of the inmates. They have helped to encourage better management of asylum policies, relief assistance and search for workable and lasting solutions in the form of permanent settlement in a host community or repatriation. Our research reveals the vulnerability of Cross River State in experiencing migrant and refugee flows because of its boundary with Cameroon. Bakassi began having the crises when a certain part of the peninsular was ceded to Cameroon by the World Court. This action resulted in the displacement of the people who lived thereby making their living through fishing and farming difficult.

Also, to be noted is that the political crises in Cameroon, between the North and South, have caused some Cameroonians to individually and collectively flee to Boki communities in Cross River State.

In such a situation religious bodies like churches should establish their branches in these areas. One Okon Effiom, when interviewed, said that one of the churches which have shown concern to the refugees in Bakassi is the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria at Ekpri Ikang. They have opened a branch or Mission Station in Bakassi; and that church offers pastoral care, counselling and prayers regularly for the refugees and displaced people of the area. Their worship centres can serve as community centres and self-help organisation for the helpless refugees. These centres can also serve as refuge for new arrivals.

Religious groups should provide help in cases of emergency as well as serve as social centres and information network centres for the displaced persons (refugees). Speaking with a Reverend Minister, Eno Okon Ita, he affirmed that the premises can become centres where the norms and values of the Christian faith are taught and preached and pastoral counselling provided to reduce the psychological trauma being experienced by the refugees.

The role of religion in strengthening the relationship between strangers and their host communities will be another means of alleviating the sufferings of the migrants/refugees. Religious practitioners should recognise that religion is a human activity. If religion should endeavour to give meaning to peoples' lives in the face of death, suffering and fear, migrants and refugees will struggle less with the human problems facing them. Religious organisations are known for their role in providing society with the means of coping and adjustment. What has happened in parts of Cross River State came as a result of certain unforeseen and unpredictable forces which rendered the people powerless, defenceless and poor. These forces must be confronted by all including religious bodies.

This work proposes the involvement of religious organisations in preaching and teaching on the dangers of illegal migration, providing vocational training for our teaming youth population, organizing counselling and resettlement programmes for repatriates and those in refugee camps in Cross River State.

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Oral Interviews:

S/N	NAME	AGE	STATUS	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE INTERVIEWED
1	Rev. Eno Okon Ita	47	Church Leader	Bakassi	21/07/2018
2	Eyo Ekpenyong Effa	62	Security Personnel	Ekpri Ikang	16/07/2018
3	Okon Effiom	55	Civil Servant	Bakassi	21/07/2018