

Two Patterns of Migration (Nigeria and the United States): Race, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Immigration

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Introduction

The investigation of contemporary patterns of migration undertaken here, assumes a rather *limited* focus on two modern societies that are at once alike in their heterogeneous configurations, and radically dissimilar in their social composition and orientations. The one is identified with the so-called “Third World”; the other, with the self-designated “Developed World”, to wit: Nigeria and the United States of America, respectively. By coincidence, the former is the writer’s country of birth; the latter, his adopted country of citizenship¹.

Two variants are identified for analytical purposes, to wit: *internal migration* (or what I had designated in an earlier study as the “Igbo Diaspora”² in the case of Nigeria; and [initially primarily] *seasonal labour migration* (in the case of the United States).

British colonialism in the African continent, it could be argued, was a logical outcome of the termination of the anti-slavery crusade that it had spearheaded. The subsequent *Nigerian nationality*³ may be viewed as the final denouement³ of that great crusade. It was – and still remains – an impressive colossus erected upon a fragile foundation, the structural integrity of which had been compromised from the inception by a virtually total absence of internal ethnic

¹ While nominally a citizen of both countries, it would not be an understatement to say that I am in fact, not very happy or satisfied with either. Having spent most of my adult life in the United States, it seems doubtful that I will very happily accommodate myself in contemporary Nigerian Society. In a cynical sense, one might argue, I could be considered an “exile” by choice from modern Nigeria and an immigrant by necessity in the United States. As a [former] Biafran partisan, I am inclined to locate the root of my unhappiness with both societies in what I consider as the sinister roll of the Anglo-American-Soviet axis in the subsequent liquidation of the budding but promising state of Biafra.

² Chukwuemeka Onwubu, “Ethnic Identity, Political Integration, and National Development: The Igbo Diaspora In Nigeria,” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 13, No. 3, Sept. 1975, pp. 399-413

³ Prior to 1914, there existed no political entity designated as “Nigeria”. The immense societal congeries known today as “Nigeria” was a total and complete fabrication of British colonial administration, designed for one purpose and one purpose only: the political convenience and ease of British colonial administration.

coherence. Nigerian nationalism, as such, had been still-born; and all attempts at resuscitation and resurrection have been, and will continue to be, vitiated by the internal dynamics of enduring inter-ethnic antagonisms, mediated by deep-rooted ethnic identity and loyalty. Consequently, a truly authentic Nigerian nationalism has hitherto never really taken root in that West-African societal congeries.

The weakness of Nigerian nationality, ironically, devolves upon the strength and solidity of its fractious, ethnic components. Nigerian nationalism, as such, is at once *indigenous* and fragmented.

Modern United States of America was founded, in the first instance, upon land acquisition and appropriations of dubious legality. Its subsequent augmentation (and development by accretion) devolved upon abrasive territorial expropriation. American⁴ Nationalism, as such, is essentially *received nationalism* because introduced to, and associated with, a societal congeries of non-indigenous peoples – hereafter referred to as *interloper nationalism*.

The strength and solidity of American nationalism, ironically, flows from the fragility of each of the composite congeries. The otherwise centrifugally aligned composite states appear to affirm their common bond in a strong America nationality.

It seems appropriate to proceed, at this juncture, with the explication of some central concepts and usages that will feature in the present undertaking.

Conceptual Framework

By an *ethnic community* here, it will be understood to mean a cultural-linguistic community associated with an *indigenous* cultural rubric, centered on an *indigenous language*.

⁴ This writer has, unfortunately and unwittingly been seduced into using, as a matter of course, the nomenclature, ‘America’, in virtually exclusive but arrogant application to the United States of America. The practice will, however, be continued for the rest of the present undertaking, if only for heuristic purposes.

To be *indigenous* to a specific locale, a community shall have, it is proposed, been continuously associated with that place for *at least* a millennium⁵ (more or less).⁶

By an *Internal (Diasporan) Migration* we shall mean that occurring among, and confined to, people(s) within a *national* societal congeries, and from one composite community to another, whether permanent or temporary. In other words, we define *internal (indigenous) migration* as an *intra-national* diasporic migration.

Finally, we shall understand by a *nation*, a politically defined societal congeries that has been accepted and recognized as such, by the international community.

The Nature of Migration

The history of migration is, in fact, coterminous with the history of human society itself. We take it to be a given, that members of a human community will continue to live in a specific locale if they are, in fact, completely happy and satisfied with their life and activities in the said locale. But the history of human communities tells us that this scenario is the exception rather than the rule. In reality, segments of a society will migrate from their place of on-going domicile to another community whenever there is a sufficiently strong trigger situation at their place of origin, and a sufficiently powerful incentive at the prospective community of destination. Students of migration refer to these factors as “push” and “pull” forces, respectively.

The ancient Israelites, for instance, were unrelenting migrant wanderers under one form of compulsion or the other; many a time, they had had, in fact, to plunder and mercilessly

⁵ Without necessarily sounding capricious in the stipulation of a millennium, we adopt this bench-mark for purely heuristic purposes as well as for reasons of analytical simplicity and ease.

⁶ In some specific instances, we may allow compelling approximations. [For instance, the Caucasian people of modern England may be considered the indigenous inhabitants (natives, that is) if one were to use as a temporal benchmark, the year 1066 and the events at Hastings; that is, if one were to allow the claim that William the Conqueror was the ‘founding’ patriarch of modern English Society]. On the other hand, the modern State of Israel, by the same logic, is, for all intents and purposes, an interloper nationality because having its provenance in the year 1948 – barely six decades ago. The so-called biblical accounts, one can only appropriately characterise as an embellishment of Jewish historical legend.

decimate the members of the community of their immigration, with the self-effacing rationale of following the dictates of their highly partisan God, Jehovah. Sometimes, the migrating population is received with cordiality and open arms; but some other times, they are confronted with violent hostility. The extant question, then, seems to be: “What set of circumstances would mediate one form of reception as opposed to the other?” With this in mind, we proceed to explore the respective conditions that have defined inter-ethnic (primarily Igbo) migration within Nigeria, and Mexican migration to the United States.

The Igbo Diaspora in Nigeria

Notwithstanding the more-than-three-hundred odd ethnic communities that call Nigeria their country, the Igbo, in terms of numerical distribution, count among the three⁷ major ethnic groups that reside in that country. By all historical accounts, the territory they live in is among the most densely populated in the world. Located in one of the least productive regions of the country (in terms of agricultural and mineral resources – at least until the discovery of petroleum in the 1950’s), the Igbo had, by necessity, had to look outside their own indigenous territory for means of livelihood.

In consequence of this situation, they had, from the pre-colonial era, fanned out into the other ethnic regions of Nigeria in search of livelihood. In the process they had, over the years, lived among the members of the other ethnic communities, cultivated their languages and culture, engaged their efforts productively, not only as entrepreneurial activists, but also in a myriad other service and professional occupations. It has been a singular nature of the Igbo that

⁷ The other two are: the Yoruba (located to the Western and North-Western part of the country); and the Hausa-Fulani people (to the North). The Igbo are concentrated in the South-Eastern and South-Western regions of that nation. I had dealt at length with the historical and cultural ramifications of ethnic identity and ethnic loyalty among the Nigerian peoples in the earlier work already cited. [See “Chukwuemeka Onwubu, “Ethnic Identity, Political Integration, and National Development: The Igbo Diaspora in Nigeria”, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 13, No. 3, Sept. 1975, pp. 399-413].

they are willing and prepared to engage in just about any productive activity, no matter how humble or elevated, in order to realise their economic goals and ambition.

A mercantile-oriented people, the Igbo had been living among their Yoruba and Hausa hosts, purveying a wide spectrum of goods and merchandise; they had also, at once been creating and providing a host of auxiliary service industries. During the colonial era, having aggressively availed themselves of the educational opportunities provided by the British and Irish missionaries, they had been recruited in rather disproportionate numbers to staff a host of colonial administrative positions, including: education, civil service, military personnel and administration, the judiciary and police administration, just to name a few, especially in the Northern sector of the country where Western education was not initially as enthusiastically embraced as was the case with the Igbo and their Yoruba neighbours to the West.

By all accounts, the Igbo had relatively prospered in the migrating Diaspora. It would also appear that, their proficiency in the cultivation of the language and culture of their host communities would have facilitated easy assimilation with the latter; but this was not the case. For one thing, the Igbo immigrants invariably always maintained and preserved their distinct Igbo cultural life in their own physically separate Igbo mini-communities. This form of self-imposed “segregation”, so to speak, would ultimately engender hostility on the part of the host communities, especially when the “immigrant” enclaves were perceived to be prospering better than their host communities. Furthermore, as I had explained elsewhere⁸, the diaspora was never considered “home”. Migration, as such, has always been, and will always be, considered *temporary and never permanent*.

A final factor in the hostility that would develop among their host communities *vis-à-vis* the Igbo “immigrants” is the perception of “Igbo domination;” what with the sense of the

⁸ *Ibid.*

ubiquity of Igbo presence in virtually every walk of the host community's socio-political and economic life. It was this state of affairs that would eventuate in the violent, inter-ethnic upheavals that led to the Biafran war of the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Today, in what may be tentatively accepted as "post-military" Nigeria, whereas diasporic migration has widened to encompass virtually the three major ethnic groups *vis-à-vis* one another's ethnic domain, the basic premise that under-pinned the historical diasporic migration still holds: the Igbo are still the major migrants; the philosophy of migration is still un-changed in terms of its conception as a temporary undertaking; the concept of *homeland* or *home-community* still remains the same; and, notwithstanding the public façade, ethnic identity is still deep-rooted; and ethnic loyalty still takes precedence over a Nigerian-centered patriotic nationalism⁹. Further-more, the wide gap still extant in post-war regional development, if anything, exacerbates the problem of ethnic antagonism and ethnic chauvinism.

In point of fact, the one central logic of the otherwise arbitrary post-war creation of thirty-six states was not to enhance and strengthen federalism; the one and only purpose was to breach the territorial integrity of a coherent Igbo ethnic community. The post-Biafran hegemonic policies of Nigeria, so to speak, rather than bringing the peoples much closer together, have, in point of fact, driven the ethnic communities further apart. We now turn attention to the Mexican immigration to the United States.

Mexican Immigrants in America

⁹ In point of fact, underpinning the vicious political shenanigans surrounding the recent presidential election in Nigeria is an undercurrent of ethnic antagonisms. The three presidential candidates, for instance, are all from one ethnic community, to wit: Hausa-Yoruba. See, *The (Bergen) Record*, Sunday, 22 April 2007, p. A-16. See also: *The New York Times*, 15 April 2007, p. N3; *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 11 April 2007, p. A-20; *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 13 December 2006, p. A-4; *The New York Times*, Sunday, 22 April 2007, p. N-3. See also, an advertisement in *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 29 March 2006, p. A-9. "Nigeria: Things are Not Falling Apart."

Forum on Public Policy

The focus on Mexican immigrants in the present investigation is at once convenient and pragmatic. My decision has been influenced in no small respect by much of the political declarations, careless assertions and rhetorical pronouncements in recent years, some contradictory, and so many disingenuous at best, and down right dishonest at worst. When, for instance, politicians in the hue of Pat Buchanan, demand that we “protect our southern border,” one wonders whether “illegal” breaching of the immigration protocol is limited only to the southern border. Much of the furore about so-called “illegal” immigrants in the United States today has its primary focus on Mexican immigrants (“legal” or “illegal”). Whereas there is “illegal” immigration from the four corners of the country, for some *strange* reason, the hue-and-cry has been directed to “our southern border”. And, although waves of immigrants pour into the United States from different countries of South and Central America, much of the anti-immigration sentiment and hostilities have been directed primarily against “Hispanics” (that is to say, specifically Mexicans). All forms of canards, all assortments of virtual or non-existent misdeeds, all conceivable manner of complaints and fabrications have been concocted in a calculated attempt to poison the mind of the American people against the immigrants from Mexico.

The modest effort here does not seek to duplicate, or detract from, the more comprehensive studies of the issue of immigration in the United States, by experts in the field¹⁰. I simply wish to examine more closely the manner in which many a detractor has sought to manipulate public opinion in reaction to the presence of certain immigrant groups in our society, to wit: Hispanics in general, and Mexican immigrants in particular. We shall examine the issue as posed for a selected number of municipalities and communities. Our argument and analysis

¹⁰ See, for instance: Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America, A Portrait*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press (Third edition), 2006.

will there-from be extrapolated to the national debate. We shall also consider the relative merits of the self-designated *sanctuary* communities and their contributions to the immigration debate. We shall proceed by considering the fundamental issue of legality and illegality in the immigration debate.

‘Legals’ and ‘Illegals’ In the United States

There are two points which cannot be controverted by anybody on any side of the immigration debate, to wit: (i) Only Native Americans (the so-called “American Indians”) are the *only* non-immigrant community in the United States; (ii) African-Americans¹¹ are the only forced immigrants in the United States. Therefore, notwithstanding their legal status, the rest of the citizens of the United States are immigrants or descendants of immigrants; in other words, every body else is an interloper.

As William Hogeland¹² very aptly pointed out, not very long ago, even our so-called “Founding Fathers” including the “First Father” and the so-called Pilgrims of the seventeenth century landing fame, were “illegals”. For one thing, they were not necessarily invited by the Native-Americans; nor were they the beneficiaries of any *bona fide*, good-will granting of lease by the latter. Furthermore, even assuming that they (the ‘Founding Fathers’) were received by the Natives with open arms (which they were not) they consistently and systematically violated and contravened the stipulations of the mandate of limiting territorial boundaries established by King George in 1763, and expropriated with impunity the lands reserved by the King for the Natives. The joke of it all was that these ‘founding fathers’ would develop an ironic propensity

¹¹ We can make a distinction here between African-Americans (that is, descendants of Africans transported here as slaves), and Africans-In-America (that is, Africans who migrated to the United States on their own accord, as well as their descendants. This writer falls under the second category).

¹² William Hogeland, “Our Founding Illegals”, op-ed column in *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 27 December 2006, p. A-27; Also, *The New York Times*, Tuesday, 19 December 2006, p. A-30.

for intolerance against subsequent “illegals” who followed George Washington’s lead, as witness the latter’s seeking a court decree to evict squatters on the land he had presumed to have himself acquired *properly* by law¹³.

Perhaps, the final iron in labeling any Mexicans in the United States “illegal”, especially in States such as California, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado, is that these lands were abrasively expropriated from Mexico in the first instance, following the Mexican War, provoked incidentally, by the United States, consequent upon the annexation of Texas by the latter. Thus, the only logic that confers legitimacy on the claim of interloper nationalists to the “legal” citizenship of the United States and not to the so-called “illegal” Mexican immigrants is, in the final analysis, *the law of the jungle*. And those of our interloper compatriots who are demanding that we “protect our southern border” must needs be reminded that the land belongs to Mexico; and the people they would like to keep away from the land with a seven-hundred-mile border fence are Mexicans, the *rightful* owners of the land.

Cases In Point

In December of 2006, in the town of Pahrump, Nevada, an anti-immigration campaign orchestrated by a 67-year old retiree, resulted in the adoption of an ordinance, the so-called “English Language and Patriot Reaffirmation Ordinance”, the singular purpose of which was to make life less comfortable and bearable for the Hispanic (that is, Mexican) immigrants, who spoke little or no English. As one of the supporters had explained, “they come in here, they *take away* (emphasis added) the services that belong to *real Americans* (emphasis added) and they don’t respect our flag.”¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The New York Times*, Monday, 18 December 2006, P. A26.

Forum on Public Policy

In Arizona, anti-immigration vigilante groups have taken the law into their own hands. Heavily armed, they have been patrolling the areas in the vicinity of the border-crossings, attacking and harassing Mexican immigrants; many a time kidnapping and robbing them; and sometimes fatally injuring them. As one of the leaders rationalised: “they are *flooding* (emphasis added) across, *invading* the place (the U.S. that is)...they’re going to bring their family, their wives, and they’re going to *bring their kids* (emphasis added). We do not need them.”¹⁵

In some localities in states such as N.Y. and N.J., the anti-immigration sentiment runs deep. In Suffolk County, New York, for instance, some residents protest the congregation of Mexican day labourers at street corners waiting for contractors to pick them up. Among other things, local authorities adopt so-called “anti-loitering” ordinances, and prohibit land-lords from renting living facilities to “non-legal” residents.

In a recent editorial *The New York Times* decries the frequent harassment and abuses inflicted upon Hispanic immigrant day labourers – the so-called “corner men.” Rather than the non-productive, frequent crackdown, *The Times* urges these local authorities to “consider hiring sites as the next positive step-one that promises not only to be practical and humane, but also effective.”¹⁶

In Morristown, N.J. the anti-immigrant crusade led by Mayor Donald Cresitello has split the community apart. His proposal to have his entire police force deputised as immigration law enforcers, has only earned the alienation of his police chief who is vehemently opposed to the idea he thinks will only earn for the police the distrust of the community, thereby undermining crime investigations. Among all the evil transgressions that the Mayor imputes to the Mexican immigrants are that: they urinate on residents’ lawns; pass out in their back yards; and an

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, Sunday, 3 December 2006, PP, N.J. 1, N.J. 10. Also, *The New York Times*, Friday, 9 February 2007, p. A-12.

¹⁶ *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 28 March 2007, P. A-18.

assortment of petty crimes and misdemeanors. He does not conceal his desire to run the Mexican day-labourers out of town.

In a recent editorial, *The Times* suggests, among other things, that the Mayor and his municipality ‘establish a hiring centre where contractors could pick up these immigrant day-labourers, with toilet facilities, that should be monitored to obviate worker misconduct and deter some unscrupulous contractors from callously expropriating their immigrant employees.’¹⁷

The story of Morristown and immigration is replicated in about eighty towns and municipalities nation-wide, including: Hazleton, Pennsylvania; Farmingville, N.Y.; Hampton, N.Y.; Danbury, Connecticut; Riverside, California, just to name a few.¹⁸

But one should not be under any illusion that all Americans are (or that every American community is) against illegal immigrants. Our attention now turns to those communities where the issue of immigration (“illegal” or “legal”) is approached in a different manner.

Sanctuary Cities

On the other side of this contentious debate are a number of municipalities and communities that have had the wisdom and courage to see and recognize the injustices being inflicted upon these immigrants, and have been disposed to do something about them. They have thus declared their communities “Sanctuaries”, and, as such, “Safe havens” for all immigrants (“legal” or not). Rather than hop on the band-wagon of those zealots of the ruthless policing against “illegal” immigrants, they have gone out of their way to accommodate, and endeavour to make life less precarious for, these people. Across the nation, the number of these sanctuary cities (and those on their way to becoming one) is estimated to be around fifty, and

¹⁷ *The New York Times*, Sunday, 8 April 2007, P. N.J. 15.

¹⁸ See, for instance: *The New York Times*, Saturday, 16 December 2006, PP. B-1, B-5; Sunday, 17 December 2006, PP. N.J. 1, N.J. 9; *The New York Times*, Tuesday, 13 March 2007, P. A-13.

include, among others, communities such as: New Haven, Connecticut; New York City; Newark, Trenton, Hackensack, and Paterson, New Jersey.¹⁹

Among the strictures imposed by these sanctuaries on their officials and residents are: (i)

No city police officer or employee shall inquire about immigration status during a routine course of his or her work; (ii) No resident shall be denied city services or benefits because of immigration status; (iii) Police officers will continue to co-operate with the Federal authorities in investigating and arresting immigrants suspected of criminal activity; (iv) Police officers may check the immigration status when investigating criminal activity.²⁰

The critical question facing the student of immigration is the extent to which the political rhetoric of the debate reflects the reality of Mexican immigration in the United States.

Separating Facts from Fiction

It is true that, today Mexicans constitute the largest group of immigrants in the United States, as has been pointed out by Portes, Rumbaut and others.²¹ And, of the estimated twelve million Mexican immigrants, about half (or six million) are estimated to be “undocumented,” employed in low-wage jobs.

For a better part of the Twentieth Century, Mexican migration to the United States was known to be temporary and “fundamentally apolitical.” The few immigrants, who subsequently naturalised, we are told, automatically lost their Mexican citizenship as well as the right to ownership of land; and the Mexicans at home usually despised them, referring to them by the derogatory term of *pochos*.²²

¹⁹ *The (Bergen) Record*, Thursday, 1 March 2007, PP. L-1, L-2. See also *The New York Times*, Monday, 5 March 2007, PP. B-1, B-6.

²⁰ *The Record (Ibid)*.

²¹ Portes, Alejandro, and Rumbaut, Ruben, *op. cit.*, P. 134. See also, *The New York Times*, Tuesday, 19 December 2006, P. A-30.

²² Portes and Alejandro (*ibid*) PP. 134-35).

But all that changed, occasioned by two events in the final two decades of the 20th century, to wit: (a) the enactment of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which gave legal residence to some two million formerly “illegal” immigrants; (b) Given the impetus of the first event, there was increased desire on the part of more Mexican migrants not only to seek to settle down permanently in the United States, but also to bring their families; further-more, these migrants started moving farther inland, away from border regions of the United States. In addition, given the economic incentive of monetary repatriation, the Mexican government modified its policy to allow for dual citizenship, thus facilitating regular interaction between the expatriates and their families back in Mexico.²³

This also spurred the Mexican Government to adopt the *Dos por Uno*, plan, by which it matched by two dollars every dollar remitted by the expatriates for philanthropic purposes, as for economic development.²⁴ The immigrants were also politically empowered by the Mexican government by being granted the right to vote in Mexican elections while still residing in the United States.²⁵ Ironically these policies had the over-all effect of promoting, at once, both assimilation and political activism (in the U.S.) and trans- nationalism.²⁶

This reversal in the traditional reluctance of Mexican immigrants to naturalise in the U.S. was given further impetus by the anti-immigration initiatives, such as the one adopted by California (proposition 187), as it was by the overly restrictive (Republican Congress) legislations in 1996, the so-called Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, which

²³ *Ibid*, PP. 134-35.

²⁴ *Ibid*, P. 135.

²⁵ *Ibid*, P. 136.

²⁶ *Ibid*, PP. 138-39.

essentially curtailed the benefits and rights that had otherwise accrued to legal (non-citizen) immigrants.²⁷

A closer examination would indicate that virtually *most* (if not all) of the allegations, assertions, complaints, and assortments of transgressions adduced in the vilification of Mexican immigrants are either pure and deliberate fabrications, or direct products of ignorant minds. Contrary to popular myth and legend, Mexican immigrants do not “take [a single job] away” from any of the so-called “real Americans.” *Per contra*, they are more likely to be engaged in those highly labour-intensive jobs that are invariably low-paying and that entail unusually long hours—be these as fruit pickers in the agricultural sector, or in meat-packing facilities, or other assortments of low-end occupations that few (if any) so-called native born Americans would touch.

They are, virtually without exception, very hard-working people, who rarely complain about anything or any condition that may prevail in the work-place. As one observer points out: “Mexicans more than live up to the truism that immigrants work hard...Their driven work ethic is the unspoken factor in many debates about their impact on the labor market. It can lead them to accept jobs in unacceptable conditions.”²⁸

Also, contrary to popular myth, a recent study had concluded that these immigrants are virtually, completely not associated with any form of criminal activities as many a detractor has alleged. On the contrary, most of these people are very law abiding.

Some Reflections

It would seem, then, that the *public* reasons the anti-immigrant groups offer for their hostility towards the Mexican immigrants are, in fact, widely at variance with the real reasons.

²⁷ *Ibid*, P. 142.

²⁸ *The New York Times*, Thursday, 19 December 2006, P. A-30.

For, given that: Mexicans are not the only “illegals” that come from ‘south of our border’; certainly, the same level of hostility is not directed towards, say, [white] Cubans, or Ecuadorians, or Nicaraguans, to name a few; the *real* reasons have to be located in something intrinsic and singular to the Mexicans themselves. By the process of elimination, one has to focus on the factor of “race”. When some of our politicians harangue about ‘protecting our southern border’ while ignoring the much wider open borders to the North, East and West, they are essentially urging our government to close the border to those immigrants (“legal” or not) who ‘do not look like us’; in other words, Mexicans. And by whatever disguise we choose to clothe it, this is racism pure and simple. Otherwise, for immigrants and descendants of immigrants to be railing against “illegal” immigrants seems to me silly at best. It is racist xenophobia predicated upon interloper nationalism.

In point of fact, as noted earlier, the so-called immigration ‘problems’ which many politicians are fixated on, may be traced to the conditions and policies created by the United States²⁹. The extreme poverty that prevails in Mexico is not completely the making of the Mexican people, quite un-affected by the global economic policies of the United States. Mexican migration to the United States – at least initially – had not always proceeded on a permanent basis. The recent inclination of many Mexican migrants to settle in the United States with their families has been, in large part, a direct consequence of the more stringent immigration legislations which severely limit the flexibility that had allowed them before, to move back and forth between the United States and their home in Mexico.

The ever widening income disparity between U.S. workers and their Mexican counterparts – even among those employed in *outsourced* American corporate outfits – creates

²⁹ See Portes, Alejandro, and Rumbaut, Ruben, *op. cit.* See also, *The New York Times*, Wednesday, 20 December 2006, PP. A-1, A-26.

added incentive (pull force) for emigration to the North of their home border. Furthermore, the exponential growth of sub-standard and sub-minimum wage jobs – whether in the agricultural sector or in the domestic, household undertakings – that most native-born Americans find uninviting, simply exacerbates the problems.³⁰ Where and what, then, is the solution?

Two Patterns of Migration: The Igbo in Nigeria and Mexicans in the United States,

Conclusion:

As I am finishing this paper,³¹ a nationwide immigration demonstration is underway in major American cities – the second mass demonstration of its kind in as many years. While not as massive as the first one in May of 2006, it nevertheless drew hundreds of thousands of immigrants (“legal and other-wise) and their supporters, thus guaranteeing this to be a major issue of the 2008 presidential campaigns.

In Nigeria, people (especially from the Igbo region of the country) are still reeling from the trauma of an election that the international community has decided was unabashedly completely rigged, thus proving once more that the system of governance in that country is a travesty of democracy. Perhaps, there may be no perfect solutions acceptable to all the parties in the two migrating situations. But certain difficult but necessary policy innovations or changes could somehow ameliorate the problem.

In the case of Mexicans (external migration), for instance, economic globalisation policies that acknowledge and respect the *equal* humanity of the so-called Third World peoples

³⁰ Paul Krugman, a *New York Times* columnist, for instance, argues that “low skilled immigrants depress the wages of less-skilled native-born Americans...” (*The New York Times*, Friday, 31 March 2006, P. A-19). To which I should rejoin: up-grade those “low-skilled jobs” and pay reasonably *living wages*, and those jobs will no longer go begging for takers.

³¹ Tuesday, 1 May 2007. Exactly one year ago, the first demonstration of its kind drew millions of people in major metropolitan centres across the nation.

could be an appropriate starting point. Furthermore, Americans³² should acknowledge their parochial world-views, especially in their dealings with non-Caucasian peoples and cultures; and, by extension, they should cure themselves of their deep-rooted racialism and xenophobic nativism. Erecting an impregnable fortress of a wall along the entire length of the southern border, I suspect, will hardly bring about a meaningful resolution, and, as such, will not make the present problem go away. And the rather condescending guest-worker solution proposed by President Bush may instead exacerbate the problem of what *The Times* columnist, Bob Herbert, properly characterises as *indentured servitude*.³³ For, as long as a wide disparity exists between the levels of economic development in both countries, more and more Mexicans will continue to seek the realisation of their life dreams in the United States.

In the Nigerian situation, whereas the issue of internal migration does not, at the moment, appear to be problematic, the basic seed of inter-ethnic discord remains entrenched. And, as happened over a generation ago, the likelihood of another inter-ethnic explosion, though, not now imminent, may not be completely ruled out, whenever, in the future, some groups *perceive* themselves as the undeserving victims of socio-political and economic domination. At this point, the *ipso-facto* marginalisation of the Igbo, especially with respect to the capricious allocation of the country's resources and assets for economic and political development, leaves the Igbo one major recourse, to wit: independent entrepreneurship through augmented diasporic migration.

The paradox of extreme mass poverty in Nigeria, one of Africa's richest countries, is quite analogous to the precarious situation of the legendary Tantalus who, while surrounded by [fresh] water, was at once pining away from extreme thirst. And the intractable nature of

³² The implicit reference here, of-course, is to White (Caucasian) Americans.

³³ Bob Herbert, "Indentured Servants In America", in *The New York Times*, Monday, 12 March, 2007, P. A-23.

corruption does not seem to be helping matters either. The exponential growth of the gap between the haves and the have-nots is, perhaps, singular, of all known corrupt societies of our modern times. The unprecedented acquisition of wealth and the audacious flaunting of the same, by the few goes beyond excessive greed. It is, perhaps, better nominated as an unabashed display of unregulated avarice. All of this does not bode well for a harmonious cultivation of a common patriotic nationality, especially in a society where a typical ethnic villager lacks a meaningful conception and consciousness of a Nigerian nationality.

And while this proposition may seem far-fetched and rather cynical at the moment perhaps the most realistic-if difficult step towards obviating a future inter-ethnic explosion,³⁴ is for all the major players on the scene to acknowledge that the fundamental premise of a Nigerian nationality of *one country* and *one people* has never been – and perhaps, never will be - tenable.

Both the Nigerian Igbo diaspora and the Mexican immigrants in the United States share a common fate of being common and convenient targets of constant vilification by their host communities: in the case of the former, by their presumptive compatriots; in the case of the latter, by the interlopers whose ancestors had expropriated their land and attendant resources in the first instance. They also share a common fate of being driven into migration by intractable mass poverty in their own communities of origin. Furthermore, both peoples share as well, the reputation of being hard-working people inclined to engage in just about any type of occupation – no matter how humble – in order to earn a living. Finally both peoples (initially) lack the knowledge of the language of the communities of their migration. But here is where the similarities between them end.

³⁴ As a matter of fact, there have been, over the past few years, a significant number of inter-ethnic skirmishes, most of them with fatal consequences (if on a relatively small scale).

For one thing, the diasporan Igbo, unlike the Mexican immigrants in the U.S., invariably endeavour to earn a complete mastery of the language of their diasporan communities, even from the first generation of migrants. Again, unlike the Mexican immigrants in the United States, for the Nigerian diasporan Igbo, migration has always been, and always will be, considered a temporary undertaking. There has always been, and there always will be, the obligation to return *home*³⁵ to their indigenous Igbo community. Also, by contrast the Igbo tend to be an inordinately ambitious people; thus no matter how lowly or humble a station they start in life at, there is always some striving to reach to the top, the remoteness of the probability notwithstanding.

One of the sharpest contrasts consists, perhaps, in the fact that, the Igbo migration entails a greater freedom of movement, because being completely *internal*; the typical Igbo migrant, as such, is not burdened with the extra-territorial border-crossing hassles and harassments that his Mexican counterpart has had to deal with.

In a very broad perspective, the problems facing the Igbo in modern Nigeria, as with those of Mexican immigrants in the United States are essentially global. As such, both require global resolution. Both problems had their provenance in the ruthless exploits of colonialism,

imperialism, and neo-colonialism. The problem of the Igbo in Nigeria is rooted in those factors that necessitated the creation of Biafra. It was the same problems – global imperialism – that brought about the eventual liquidation of the latter. The Mexican problem was brought about by the Nineteenth Century abrasive foreign policy of the United States and will require, perhaps, a Canadian-American type resolution. In other words, the economic climate in Mexico – as in the rest of the South American Societies – must needs be brought close to par with that

³⁵ Chukwuemeka Onwubu, *op. cit.*

prevailing in Canada; and the United States has a *moral*, if not *legal*, obligation to take the lead towards the realisation of this state of affairs.

By an irony of political fate in both instances, the United States seems to have its fingers in the porridge: not only did it play a major (if covert) role in the Biafran affair; but it is also the case that it has been, and currently still is, a major player in the economic and political life of Nigeria.

In the final analysis, the issues defined for the two migrant communities are those of the haves and the have-nots; the issues of the so-called *North* and *South*. For global stability, it would seem morally (if not *legally*) incumbent on the “Have’s” to rise to the occasion of making amends for what they have misappropriated and expropriated from the “Have-Not’s”.