

Transnationalism and Migration: The Experience of the Early Muslims

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Abstract

The concept of transnationalism has rapidly migrated across disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, Religion and many more. This concept refers to the social relations and groups that spread across the confines of nation states and the extension of social networks that enable the faux of migration in economic organization and political structure, has been widely integrated and embraced by numerous scholars. This paper explores the transnational experiences of the early Muslims traversing generational units from the migration (*hijra*) of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia (formerly referred to as Abyssinia) and Madinah due to the persecution of the ruling Quraysh tribe of Makkah. Using historical and analytical methods.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Migration, Social, Persecution.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Transnational migration has been a core element of the human experience throughout history. The Islamic tradition is rich with stories of migration and teachings on the importance of providing protection for those seeking refuge. Migration and escape from persecution had played a prominent role in the stories of many great Prophets, such as Prophet Ibrahim's migration to Canaan (Q29:26), or Prophet Musa's migration to Madyan (Q28: 20-28). Migration played a particular role in the life of Prophet Muhammad and his early followers. In 615 AD, approximately one hundred (100) early Muslims sought refuge with the Christian King Negus of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) to escape the persecution of the ruling Quraysh tribe in Makkah. They migrated and stayed in Ethiopia until time was right for them to join the Prophet in Madinah.

The migration to Ethiopia was voluntary and limited in scope (Ramadan, 2008: 59). This was followed by a migration to Madinah, which was led by Prophet Muhammad in 622 AD. The one to Madinah was obligatory and involved the entire Muslim community. No Muslim was supposed to stay behind except for the very weak, women, children and the sick, who could not afford to trek the 270 km distance to Madinah. The Prophet's migration to Madinah played a decisive role in consolidating the unity of the nascent community of Muslims, not only in their faith in Islam but also in the physical sense of exodus to a new destination. That migration moved the centre stage of events in the early history of Islam from Makkah to Madinah and marked a turning point in the eventual success of Islam (Rahaei, 2009: 4).

This paper does not only examine the significance of the two migrations of early Muslims in Makkah but it also narrates the stories of those who sought asylum against the persecution and those who provided refuge.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the historical method of research which involves the studying, understanding and interpreting past events. The purpose of historical research is to reach insights about past events and people. Secondary sources of information used are books, reports, scholarly journals, articles, reports, daily newspapers, magazines and religious books i.e. the Qur'an, Hadith (the Prophetic traditions).

3.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of transnationalism is strongly rooted in anthropology and has been marked by the transnational turn in the social sciences and the humanities and has emerged as one of the major research paradigms in the migration and ethnic studies (Dunn, 2005:15-31; Mügge and De Jong, 2013:380-389).

Transnationalism is a repository concept which is applied to understand and unveil the ties and activities that collectively develop between individual or governmental actors located in two or more countries. Vertovec (1999:445-62) referred to Transnationalism as multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states. Transnational

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activities were identified by Portes (1990:463-77), as periodic source across national borders and require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors. He further stated that these transnational activities are not limited to economic enterprises, but include cultural, religious and political activities.

Transnationalism forms a larger degree of connection between individuals, communities and societies across borders, bringing about changes in the social, cultural, economic and political landscapes of societies of origin and destination (Dunn, 2005:15-21). Cross-border connections between societies resulting from migration necessitate the formulation and implementation of appropriate policy interventions by States. The first reason for this, is that migration policies in a transnational context are likely to produce an impact outside the domestic sphere for which they are primarily intended. Secondly, the success or failure of those policies will also be determined, to varying extents, by realities that lie beyond a single country's border.

In lieu of the above, a transnational perspective on migration is progressively relevant due to the forces of globalisation and their impacts on mobility. With the spread of globalisation and the increasing development of communication, transport, trade and information networks, it is now easier to be connected to two or more realisms across state borders. This transnational perspective has brought about significant changes in the migration pattern as migration across border may be temporary or short termed. Through migration, migrants move from a particular region or city to another or from a country to another through the help of networks. Hence, every migrant can be considered to be an agent and subject of transnationalism engaging in transnational activities.

THEORIES OF MIGRATION

An extensive selection of approaches have been developed for the reasons for migration with an attempt to explain the mechanism and dimensions in transnational migration.

Neoclassical Macroeconomic Theory

This theory designate migration to occur as an outcome of a process of economic development (Harris *et al.*, 1970:126-42) and variations in income. According to this theory, individuals attempt to maximize their income; as a result, they migrate to regions with higher wages. Apart from wage

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differences and employment opportunities, the conduct of migration also includes financial costs such as travel cost; the period of unemployment in the destination country and the psychological costs of leaving family and friends (Bauer and Zimmermann 1998:95-127).

There are a few factors that cause people to migrate from one country to another. There are pull and push factors that encompass in each cause. They include social, political and economic aspects; the effects also vary for both sending and host countries. Push factors occur where someone is currently living and make continuing to live there less attractive.

A push factor could be political unrest, lack of job opportunities, or overcrowding. Pull factors occur in a prospective destination and make the prospective destination an attractive place to migrate to. A pull factor could be better job opportunities or having relatives or friends who have already moved to the location. Push factors, such as natural disasters like droughts, climate, civil wars, and conflict, among others, all influenced human decisions about where to migrate to. Pull factors include higher standards of living, improved employment opportunities, a better educational system and so on, all of which attract people from their country of origin to the host country.

New Economics of Migration Theory

This theory signifies that migration is a family-based resolution and people migrate not only to maximize their income, but also to lessen their migration risks (Stark and Bloom 1985:173-78; Stark 1991:1163-78). Unlike individual, families are in the situation to manage the risk inside their households by diversifying the distribution of household resources. Likewise, in disparity to the neoclassical theory of migration where return migration is considered as a ‘failure’ factor, in the new economics of migration theory the returnees are considered a ‘success’ factor, because they have achieved a maximum advantage with accumulated savings or knowledge (Cassarino 2004:253-79).

This theory is not without criticism because there are three major weak points in the theory: firstly, it centres mainly on the supply side of the labour migration and overlooks the demand side; secondly, from an operational standpoint, it fits better in underprivileged and underdeveloped

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regions than wealthy and urban areas; and thirdly, it is unable to shed light on why an entire family decides to migrate.

Dual Labour Market Theory.

This theory was introduced by Piore (1979:229) and argues that it is not the push factors (low wages) that cause people to migrate, but the pull factors that cause domestic and international migration. A variety of developed countries are in frantic need of unskilled and cheap migrants, because of labour market changes (the high participation of women in full-time and part-time jobs, higher education, etc.) and demographic changes (concerning single parents, divorced and elderly people, etc.). These jobs are positioned at the base of the social hierarchy and are low-paying jobs in which the citizens are not interested. Hence, low-skilled (and mostly undocumented) migrants have often filled such vacant positions.

Migration Systems Theory

Migration systems theory suggests that migration flows obtain an appraisal of stability and formation over space and time, allowing for the recognition of stable migration systems. The word ‘systems’ in this theory refers to the exchange of goods, capital, people, services and information between countries (Boyd 1989:638-70; Fawcett 1989:671-88). This theory integrates the macroeconomic and microeconomic methods and regards migration as a dynamic progression where regions and countries are associated by numerous types of linkages. Thus, migration research involves a broader intellectual discussion that includes: individuals and households (related to the migration decision) and economic, social, environmental and political circumstances.

Massey *et al.* (1993:454) assembled the hypotheses and propositions of this theory: countries within a structure need not be geographically close since flows reflect political and economic relationships rather than physical ones; multipolar systems are possible, whereby a set of dispersed core countries receive immigrants from a set of overlapping sending nations; nations may belong to more than one migration system and as political and economic conditions change, systems evolve, so that stability does not entail a fixed structure.

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Two new theoretical approaches were presented by Castles (2010), Faist (2010) and Portes (2010). The first approach revises migration from the perception of social change and social transformation and presents a theory that asserts that migration is not only affected by the dynamics of national and global transformation, but is in fact a part of these changes. An apparent contrast between the view of Castles and Portes can be observed. Castles (2010:1565-86) examines migration as a part of a social and institutional transformation and global economy, while Portes (2010:1537-63) observes that the impacts of migration on receiving societies are significant, but not deep and suggests that migrants leave the existing social order somehow untouched.

MIGRATION OF THE EARLY MUSLIMS: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

The simple meaning of the word migration (*hijrah* in Islamic terminology) is to move from one place to the other and take up residence there. Today, People have many reasons why they might want to move from one place to another. Besides, factors that determine why a person migrates are related to the place of residence from where migration starts, known as origin, and the place of new settlement, or where migration ends either permanently or temporarily, also known as destination (World Economic Forum, 2017:15). For migration to take place there are usually push factors and pull factors at work. Push factors are the reasons that make someone decide to move. This is peoples' experience of life in one place which gives them good reasons to leave a particular place. Often times, push factors are negative and unfavorable situations operating at a location, which force or compel a person to move away. Pull factors, on the other hand, are the expectations which attract people to the new place. They are usually positive and favourable incentives (Dubey & Mallah, 2015:229).

Consequently, migration, either by push or pull factor could be to make a better living: find better jobs, education, or marriage opportunities. Although, seeking a better living for self and family is indeed a great reason and it is actually encouraged in Islam. However, it becomes a greater cause, when one leaves a place where he is restricted or banned to practice his religion, but brutally persecuted and migrates to a new place where he and his loved ones could enjoy safety and freedom to practise their religion in a more supportive environment. This was the situation of the early Muslims in Makkah.

During the birth of Islam, the polytheists persecuted the Muslims, who proclaimed belief in one God and His messenger, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This resulted in Prophet Muhammad's suggestion to his followers to leave Makkah and seek safety in Ethiopia (formerly referred to as Abyssinia and *Habashah* in Arabic). Many questions were raised with respect to this migration: What were the factors that led to this migration? When did it happen? Why did the Prophet Muhammad choose this city over others? Also, what events took place during the Muslims' stay there? In the following, this study seeks to answer these questions. Answers to these questions are not far-fetched, they occupy the major discourse of this paper. Moreover, a brief account is given on the migration of the Prophet to the city of Madinah that marks the Islamic calendar. A final

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submission is provided regarding the importance of the two episodes in Islamic history as a model for the Muslims living in Nigeria or Diaspora.

FACTORS THAT LED TO THE FIRST MIGRATION (*HIJRAH*)

From the early stage of Islam, Prophet Muhammad started the preaching of Islam to his family members, in his home town Makkah. Thereafter, he extended the invitation to the families and tribes in Makkah, who were majorly idol worshippers. With this development, the polytheists were furious over the revolutionary ideas Islam brought forth. The Prophet taught people to worship one God, the Lord of the universe, to have faith instead of tribal and kinship pride, to provide for the poor, and to acknowledge that all humans are equal regardless of race, geographical contiguity or a specific privilege. Islamic teachings applied to all individuals and this meant that the polytheists would feel propelled to give up their gods, share their wealth and become humble. This is with the realisation that they are not better than others due to specific privileges (Muhammad, 2001:12-17).

The leaders of Quraysh were enraged and worried, having realized that they could not restrict the inflow of people to Islam and the call of Muhammad would cause an immense change in the system that gave them power. Essentially, if the idols were not worshiped or abandoned or destroyed, what would become of them or the keepers of those idols? What would become of their renown status throughout the Arabian Peninsula? The polytheists arranged a meeting and after their serious deliberations, the campaign of persecuting the Muslims and torturing them to leave their religion was approved - each of the leaders began persecuting anyone in their tribe found to be following the religion of Islam (Al- Mubarakpuri, 2002:107). Therefore, that was how the Muslims gradually became victims of physical violence in addition to harassment. The polytheists harmed the weaker Muslims by instigating others against them, denigrating and cheating them. Muslims were also left hungry and thirsty until they verbally professed the polytheists' principal idols i.e. *Lāta* and *'Uzza*. (Razwi, 2009:49).

Sayyid Ameenul-hasan Rizvi (2002) recorded briefly the pathetic scenario of some companions who were subjected to serious torture in the following words:

Bilāl bin Rabāh (a black Africa slave of Umayyah bin Khalaf and the eighth adult person to embrace Islam) suffered the torture of being thrown on the scorching sand

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in the hottest part of the day, naked above the waist, with a heavy rock placed on his chest; days when Ammar helplessly watched his frail mother, Sumayyah, being brazenly stabbed to death, and seeing his aged father, Yasir, dying from torture; days when those with no powerful tribal connections were forced to far-off Abyssinia; days when Prophet Muhammad was himself stoned out of at-Tā'if, bleeding profusely (Rizvi, 2002:IV).

As a result of the persecutions experienced by the early Muslims, the following verses from the chapter of the Qur'an were revealed:

And as for those who emigrated for the cause of Allah, after they had been wronged, We will certainly give them goodly residence in this world, but indeed the reward of the Hereafter will be greater; if they but knew. They are those who remained patient (in this world for Allah's sake), and put their trust in their Lord (Q16:41-42).

And the verse:

Good is for those who do good in this world, and Allah's earth is spacious. Only those who are patient shall receive their rewards in full, without reckoning. (Q39:10)

According to historians, the above verses were revealed specifically as an instruction for the migration to Ethiopia. The threat of the polytheists became so serious that the Prophet decided to have the Muslims migrate to Ethiopia to protect their lives and faith (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:118).

MIGRATION TO ETHIOPIA (ABYSSINIA)

The migration (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Ethiopia is one of the grandest events in the history of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) ordered the two migrations - the first Hijrah of the Muslims to Ethiopia and his own to Madinah, then referred to as Yathrib.

In the middle of the fifth year of prophethood, the persecution of the Muslims, as it was explained in the previous discussion, got worse and no longer tolerable that the Muslims began to seriously think of feasible ways to avert the painful tortures meted out to them (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:118). On account of this, the Prophet reviewed all the regions/cities of the neighboring world for a place to command them to migrate to. Persia was overlooked because the Persians were idolaters, and

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the Romans, though people of the book were known for being tough and tyrannical. The Prophet ordered the companions to migrate to Abyssinia. This *hijrah* was termed the migration to the abode of safety, while the migration to Madinah was termed the migration to the abode of belief (Sidiqqi, 2002:23). Consequently, the Prophet instructed Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia, and said:

Over there, there is a king who does not oppress his subjects; it is moreover a land of the upright. Until the Almighty provides a path of escape from your sufferings, remain there (Topbaş, 2010:318).

The city of *Abyssinia* is situated to the north-east in the continent of Africa. It is exactly opposite to southern-Arabia and with the exception of the Red Sea, no country intercedes it. During that era, a strong Christian sovereignty was established in Abyssinia and the king was referred to as the Negus. In those days, *Abyssinia* was the centre of a very powerful sovereignty in Africa. During that time, the personal name of the Negus was Ashamah, who was a just, intelligent and powerful Christian king. The first batch consisted of a total of sixteen people; twelve men and four women, and gradually, their number increased until it reached eighty-three men and seventeen women other than the children. Thus, this was the first Migration in Islam (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:118).

On getting there, the king of Abyssinia, received and treated them well and they enjoyed peace and safety as guests in his land. The blasphemers of *Quraysh* attempted to sway king Negus by offering him and his bishop's precious gifts. They requested him to send the emigrants to Makkah, but he turned their attempt down when he heard the views of the Muslims, and found them not guilty of the offence they were accused of, by the idolaters of Makkah. Turning to the frowning Makkan envoys and to his bishops who got angry, he mentioned that they might fret and fume as they liked, he strongly believed in what the emigrants said. He said, "I will not hand these refugees over to you. They are free to live and worship in my kingdom as they please under my protection". He then returned to the delegation of Quraysh, the gifts they had brought with them and sent them away. The Muslims lived in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) undisturbed for a number of years till they joined their fellow Muslims in Madinah, which served as the second migration in the Islamic history (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:121-123).

MIGRATION TO MADINAH

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The persecution exercised against Muslims in Makkah increased especially after the migration to Ethiopia, and when the situation had become unbearable for the Muslims, an offer was made by the people of Madinah, a small city to the north of Makkah. The people of Madinah had more interfaith experience, having lived near Christian and Jewish tribes in their area. They were open to receiving the Muslims and pledged their support. In small groups, under the cover of night, Muslims began to travel north to the new city. While the polytheists spared no effort in hindering and debarring them, they reacted by confiscating the properties of those who left and devising plans to assassinate Muhammad. Knowing beforehand that such a move implied unimaginable threats and unthinkable destructive dangers to their whole society (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:197).

After that critical time the plans of Quraysh totally failed. Despite the tight blockade they laid to the Prophet's house, he and his companions escaped the siege and arrived to Madinah safely. The people of Madinah welcomed them and promised to protect their interest as they would protect themselves and their families (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2002:205).

Therefore, the emigration (*hijrah*) to Madinah was an event of great significance, the turning point in the history of Islam. It marked the end of an era of passive resistance to which the Prophet and his followers had been adhering until then. With the emigration to Madinah, the days of suffering, torturing, economic blockade, social boycott and killing were over (Rizvi, 2002:IV). As a result of this, Madinah became the second most important city in Islam, after Makkah. Though Prophet Muhammad never forgot his love for Makkah, he stayed in Madinah until he breathed his last. The Prophet and his followers spared no effort to protect and cultivate Madinah and they turned it into a developed, civilized city. Consequently, the outcome of this event has many inspiring lessons to learn from and translate into practice in all aspects of life, especially for Muslims minorities living in majority non-Muslim countries, whether emigrants or natives, have important lessons to draw from the migration (*hijrah*) occasion.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE TWO MIGRATIONS

The migration of the early Muslims to Ethiopia (Abyssinia) is characterized by many lessons to learn. First, Ethiopia was not a Muslim society but the king, Negus, preserved the rights of the Muslim minority, and gave them protection and freedom of faith. Ethiopia was described as a

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land where no one was oppressed and this was what prompted the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to encourage Muslims to migrate there. Muslims lived in Ethiopia as a minority group yet they enjoyed a secure and safe life, rights and freedom in a non-Islamic environment. This is a great lesson for countries like Europe, America, France and elsewhere around the world where Muslims are minorities.

Also, the story of King of Ethiopia is a small snapshot in time. It teaches about the manners and diplomacy between Prophet Muhammad and the noble rulers of the time. It shows a light on the closeness of the two religions, Christianity and Islam. Prophet Muhammad knew that truly pious Christians were, and still are, but a step away from the religion of Islam. Likewise, the kind of cooperation demonstrated by the Muslims while in Ethiopia was indeed encouraging. In the beginning, when most of the immigrants were still in Ethiopia, the Negus was confronted by a war from one of his enemies. Upon this, after mutual consultation and permission from the Prophet, the Muslims decided that if required, they should also support the course of Negus. As such, they sent Zubayr bin ‘Awwam to the battlefield across the Nile River to gain insight as to the state of affairs, while the rest of the companions prayed continuously to God for the victory of the Negus. Therefore, after a few days, Zubayr returned to inform them that by the Grace of Allah, the Negus had earned victory (Ibn Hisham, 2001:245-250).

Similarly, when Prophet Muhammad and his disciples got to Madinah, they established good relations with other communities living in Madinah. There was a large Jewish community as well as some other Arab tribes who were not Muslims. The Prophet prepared a constitution for organizing relations between these communities. The constitution of Madinah laid down broad principles on which cordial relations would be established between Muslims and non-Muslims. Protection of life and property, and freedom of thought and of worship were guaranteed. Among the principles of the constitution are:

- i. Confirming the Jews in the practice of their religion and in secured possession of their properties.
- ii. That the disputes of each tribe were to be decided according to its own law and customs.

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- iii. That no party to this agreement, whether Muslims, Jews or others will enter into any Treaty or Pact with any outside tribe.
- iv. That if the Jews would make peace with another party, the Muslims would accept the agreement and vice-versa.
- v. That all matters in dispute would be decided finally by the Prophet himself. And, this covenant shall constitute no protection for the unjust or criminal (Muhammad, 2001:51-53).

These five clauses among others, provide the troubled spots all over the world especially the troubled nation of Nigeria with solutions to their security challenges. It is not too much to recommend the Madinah constitution as a panacea to the crisis in Philippine, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Palestine and Kashmir. Each of the five clauses provide revolutionary theoretical framework for virtually all the challenges of insecurity arising from religious and racial intolerance (AbdulRahman, 2011:10).

In the same way, the Prophet was more concerned about justice and equitable dealing with all the groups in Madinah. Justice has since been the hallmark of Muslim rule across the ages and its absence has since been the bane of the world politics. The Madinah constitution emphasized the Prophet's utmost desire for peaceful co-existence among all the tribes and religions in that city. From the perspective of the Madinah constitution, we can now take for sampling the cases of some Muslim territories still suffering under the weight of world power injustice.

Also, out of the Prophet's great love and care for Madinah, he ordered his followers to dig fifty wells for all the people of Madinah. In another development, he declared it as a sacred and inviolable city. Prophet Muhammad and his followers exerted their utmost efforts to defend Madinah against foreign aggression and attacks. They fought all invading forces which attacked and targeted their city, even when aggressors were from their original tribes and cities. In the 5th year of Hijrah, for example, the Prophet and his Companions courageously defended Madinah against the allied tribes led by Quraysh, which had gathered in large numbers to invade the city (Rizvi, 2002:43-54).

In conclusion, with the Hijra to Madinah, Muslims were able to be in commercial and economic activities as they achieved an association of brotherhood in faith. At the same time, the Arab tribes living in Madinah, became more active in their economic lives through the arrangements made by the Prophet. These economic activities, which were continued under Jewish monopoly earlier, were opened to all, with the inclusion of Arab tribes and Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH), also created a market place in Madinah and asked Muslims to participate in trade and contributed to the economy. As a result of sharing all the assets and opportunities that existed between the Muhājirūn who had faced up to many difficulties and the Ansār who had supported them with hosting, and as a result of the distribution of work between them in a short time, Muslims in Madinah had gained a tight association. Thus, they made progress in both agriculture and craft. The Prophet (PBUH) had forbidden the usury to prevent unfair profit and creation of a monopoly, as well as to break the monopoly power of Jews in trade activities (Yiğitoğlu & Göregen, 2018: 236-253). Consequently, there were advancements in the economic relations, due to the permissions that the animals slaughtered by the Jews can be eaten as a result of the idea of bringing vitality to trade and including Jews into the society.

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