

# THE RELIGIO-ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IGBO YOUTHS MASS MIGRATION FROM NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

This research work discussed the religio-ethical implications of Igbo youth's mass migration from Nigeria: the tantrums, challenges and lessons. This study was guided by the following objectives: to examine the reasons behind the mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths, the impact of mass migration on the religious beliefs and practices of Igbo youths, the ethical challenges emerge as a result of mass migration among Igbo youths, and the social and cultural consequence of mass migration for Igbo community in Nigeria. The study recommended some remedies to stop the exodus. The study employed the survey research design. Questionnaires and interviews were used for data collection and analyzed using probability sampling technique. The findings revealed that the factors responsible for Igbo youths mass migration includes: human rights violations such as child marriage, sexual exploitation particularly for women, violence and unpaid labour. It confirms that the migration of Igbo youths is a reality by the respondents to the questionnaire. It is concluded in this study those Igbo youths mass migration is clearly a strategy for economic emancipation. Igbo youths leave in order to get established and pave way for other family members in the cities. It is therefore recommended that education and awareness, developed educational programs that emphasize the importance of preserving cultural heritage and understanding the religio-ethical dimensions of migration can reduce mass migration amongst Igbo youths. This can be done through workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns targeting both the Igbo community and the host societies. Interfaith dialogue can foster interfaith cooperation between different religious communities to promote understanding and respect for diverse belief systems. This can help mitigate tensions and conflicts arising from religious differences.

**Keywords:** Religion, Migration, Ethics, Youths, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

The recent times have witnessed astronomical rise of Igbo youths emigration from Nigeria whose productive inputs to national economy may have translated to serious job gains and revenue boosting. These movements are not without diluting religio-social implications. Causes of youth migration according to Akifenwa (2021) are not limited to structural barriers, economic hardship, unemployment, bad governance and other vices that have been identified as factors responsible for youth migration to Europe. She blamed bad leadership for issues like kidnapping and structural barriers. (Nwosu, 1. Efeng, M. Ogbonnaya, E. Macpherson, 2022) stressed that migration is a major aspect of human nature. According to them, there is a serious correlation between poverty and migration according to section 4.8.1 of Nigerian National Migration Policy (Adepoju, 2015).

The religio-ethical implications of Igbo youth migration is not far-fetched. The most important is the local churches near collapse when the growing populace of the worshipping community leave in their numbers. Their home church become bereft of youthful workforce who will impact the coming generation of the witness and functions of the Church. Socially, the bulk of irregular migration in Nigeria occurs amongst the youths aged 18-35. Members of this age cohort tend to be mobile, as most the unmarried and have energy to relocate unlike older people who are more likely to be married with more commitments and less energy to withstand rigours of migration (Adepoju & Hammar, 1999) Ikufeyijo, 2012). The path of these irregular migrations is mostly through either the Sahara desert or the Mediterranean Sea. This sort of travelling is very dangerous and revolves all sorts of life challenging and changing moments. According to Brewer, Florin and Furrows (2018), the Mediterranean Sea has become one of the most popular routes for irregular migrants in recent times. Nigerian youths due to very harsh and unpalatable nature of the economy occasioned by bad administration, have chosen the leeway off to make ends meet in Europe. Again, one of the most daunting religio-ethnic impacts is the importation or inclusion of foreign cultures into their mother countries. This involves a large chunk of youths of Igbo origin. Nwalutu, 2016. Ojeme, 2016 corroborate that over 20,000 youths involved in the Mediterranean Sea crossing were reported to be from Nigeria.

The migration of the youth is also precipitated by the recruitment of foreign labor by Global North countries where the twin factors of an aging population and declining birth rate are at play (Akinyemi & Ikuteyijo, 2009). Other pull factors that affect youth migration, especially at the international level, include prospects for getting a better education, increasing earning power, and improving living conditions through access to better infrastructure and public amenities. The bulk of Igbo youth migration in Nigeria occurs among youth aged 18 to 35. Members of this age cohort tend to be mobile, as most are unmarried and have the energy to relocate, unlike older people, who are more likely to be married, with more commitments and less energy to withstand the rigors of migration (Adepoju & Hammar, 1996; Ikuteyijo, 2012). Reasons for mass migration of Igbo youths can involve acute hardship, such as wilderness trekking and crossing waterways in unsafe vessels. Therefore, this study aims toward the reasons behind the mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths, the impact of mass migration on the religious beliefs and practices of Igbo youths, the ethical challenges emerge as a result of mass migration among Igbo youths and the study finally explored the social and cultural consequences of mass migration for Igbo community in Nigeria.

## **Migration**

Migration can be defined as the process of going from one country, region or place of residence to settle in another. The duration of this new settlement varies, but for the purposes of this paper the focus is on individuals who relocate either semi-permanently or permanently to another country. Also, urban-rural migration within the same country is not being discussed here. Migrants may move en masse or singly. For example, people who migrate for economic or educational reasons may move singly and at a later date be joined by their families, whereas people who move due to political reasons may move

en masse but with or without their families. Although not all people who migrate are from ethnic minority groups, it is of note that a significant proportion is. The multicultural nature of British society is supported by the 1991 census. Ethnic categories were first used in the UK in the 1991 census, at which time over three million people, or approximately 5.5% of the general population, were from ethnic minority (non-white) groups. Of these, 30% described themselves as black, black African or other and 28% described themselves as Indian; however, by the 2001 census the categories of ethnic ascription had increased and the proportion of ethnic minorities had increased to 7.9%. The minority ethnic population in the UK grew by 53% between 1991 and 2001, from 3 million people to 4.6 million people respectively. Indians were the largest minority group, followed by Pakistanis, people of mixed ethnic backgrounds, black Caribbeans, black Africans and Bangladeshis.

The history of migration to Britain highlights some of the reasons why people migrate. Significant migration to Britain started in the nineteenth century. Irish immigration has been marked by periods of influx and efflux to and from Britain, as people have come to either settle permanently or work temporarily with ultimate return to Ireland as a goal. Eastern European Jews came at the latter part of the nineteenth century to escape both religious persecution and poverty, with additional numbers arriving in Britain both before and after World War II. In the 1960s, employers, especially in urban areas, recruited people from the West Indies to fill low paying jobs which were less attractive to the local population. People from the Indian subcontinent migrated to Britain for educational and economic reasons, the peak of which occurred about the same time as the West Indian migration. Asian people expelled by Idi Amin's government came from Uganda in the late 1970s. The 1980s saw a change in the immigration laws limiting the numbers of people allowed to relocate to Britain (Today, people from around the globe choose to migrate to the UK as well as other developed countries, both legally and illegally, for better educational and employment opportunities, to escape persecution, to relocate after catastrophic events, including terrorism, disasters and war, and/or to join relatives who migrated at an earlier time.

Migration can be classified in a number of ways; e.g., by the reasons for the migration, the social class and education of the migrating people, the duration of relocation and the geographic distribution of the resettlement. Further, a distinction can be made in the classification of migrants according to whether their contact with the 'majority' or 'dominant' culture is deemed voluntary. Migrants can be classified as immigrants and sojourners when the change in their location results in contact voluntarily, whereas refugees are deemed to change their location involuntarily. For example, immigrants choose to migrate, and thus be in increased and regular contact with the 'majority' culture in preparation for migration, for potential economic and/or educational advancement, whereas refugees are forced to migrate, and thus be in contact with the 'majority' population involuntarily, to escape persecution. Additionally, rural-urban migration has been associated with economic and educational reasons for relocation,

whereas migration across nations has been associated with economic, educational, social and political reasons.

The process of migration has been described as occurring in broadly three stages. The first stage is pre-migration, involving the decision and preparation to move. The second stage, migration, is the physical relocation of individuals from one place to another. The third stage, post-migration, is defined as the "absorption of the immigrant within the social and cultural framework of the new society". Social and cultural rules and new roles may be learnt at this stage. The initial stage of migration may have comparatively lower rates of mental illness and health problems than the latter stages, due to the younger age at the initial stage of migration and the problems with acculturation and the potential discrepancy between attainment of goals and actual achievement in the latter stages. It is worth noting that the stages are often not discrete and merge into one another.

### **Reasons for Mass Migration Phenomenon among Igbo Youths**

Risks faced by mass migrants of Igbo youths are exacerbated in the case of youth, especially those under 18 years of age, particularly when they are in irregular situations and face threats of exploitation, trafficking, exclusion, detention, and deportation. Young migrants, especially girls and young women, are vulnerable to human rights violations such as child marriage, sexual exploitation, violence and unpaid labour. Many young migrants face deskilling and precarious employment in so-called 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and degrading), despite having higher educational or skills-training qualifications. Moreover, during the migration process young people can lose their social networks and may also be without parents or family members to provide guidance and care. Due to their age and developmental stage, young migrants are more vulnerable to migration experiences. They may be particularly affected by xenophobia and discrimination, and suffer further marginalization due to lack of fluency in the local language, new and different cultural norms, and insufficient information about laws and regulations in their new country. To overcome these risks and enhance their development potential and contributions to their countries of origin and destination, young migrants need to be able to realize their rights without discrimination, including their right to education, health, work, family life, and participation in decision-making and community life.

However, apart from large population among the Igbo, limited social and economic opportunities have strong relationship with Igbo-outmigration. As Nwolise (2004) observed, since 1970 there is hardly any meaningful federal presence in Igbo states. This arguable level of marginalization coupled with insecurity of lives and property, joblessness, hunger and starvation are sufficient justifications for permanent or semi-permanent geographic movement of the Igbo away from their homeland. The suffocating economic and political effects of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war on Easterners, especially the Igbos, have also been pointed out; East is an ecological and economic wasteland from which victims stream to other viable areas of Nigeria (Uwalaka 2003).

Even though the Igbo are known for their migratory tendencies believing that travelling bestows more knowledge on an individual than old age, the tendency was amplified by the Nigerian civil war and the attendant loss of sources of livelihood within the region.

Migrants of Igbo extraction are credited with sustained primordial linkages than any other group in Nigeria; notwithstanding their level of acculturation at destination, they still maintain contacts with home, although the regularity varies among individuals. As Nwolise and Olebunne (2010:296) noted:

There are no Igbo people located anywhere outside Nigeria as Aborigines of other areas. This is unlike the situation where there are millions of Hausas in Niger, Chad, Senegal, Mali etc and Yorubas in Benin Republic. However, there are millions of Igbo sons and daughters found in different parts of the world.

### **The Impact of Mass Migration on the Religious Beliefs and Practices of Igbo Youths**

Whatever one's view, as religion came to be accepted as an important mediator between immigrants and society, sociologists began once more to incorporate it into their thinking and models. Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) offered concrete empirical examples of how religion was used instrumentally by immigrants to advance their interests in the United States, and Hirschman (2004) argued that religion offered immigrants most especially the Igbo youth three critical benefits: refuge, resources, and respect. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) viewed religious practice as source of social capital and an important variable determining the path of assimilation within a segmented social structure. Stark and Finke (2000) went so far as to posit the existence of "spiritual capital," which they defined as "the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture" (p. 120). In the context of immigration, spiritual capital has been posited to yield tangible benefits to Igbo youths mass migration in the form of assistance as well as intangible benefits in the form of faith and forbearance (Ebaugh 2003; Hagan 2008).

The challenges faced by Igbo youths are also common among other Nigerian peoples outside their traditional homes. This paper argues that ethnic based discrimination is pervasive and a defining attitude in relationship building in Nigeria with over 380 ethnic groups (Oтите 2000). The discriminatory employment standards arises as one of the major challenges Igbo youths face; those that struggled to get employed are still discriminated against in the work place. To safeguard the Igbo youths jobs themselves, they put in extra efforts to keep their jobs. The advantage is that in the course of such rigor the-victimized gradually masters the work process and becomes such an expert that the protected would eventually consult for mentoring and skills update.

Using Canada for example, any Igbo youths that found him/herself in this country, may face the under listed challenges, which were categories in different styles. Across the

provinces of Canada, we tend to see the following categories of migrants: economic migrants, family class migrants and temporary migrants (i.e. visitors/students/workers). Economic migrants generally have stable or substantive financial resources and have relocated for self-perceived better business or economic opportunities. Migrants in this category tend to be from TB endemic countries and may potentially travel frequently between Canada and their region of emigration. This raises a host of inter-jurisdictional issues between the rights and obligations of migrants and healthcare workers in Canada. Namely, what obligation do physicians, public health professionals, and public health agencies in Canada have to relay information about migrants' TB status back to their countries of origin? On the one hand, the privacy and confidentiality of such migrants with TB must be upheld if they are non-infectious and have access to treatment, such that one might argue against disclosing a person's TB status. Moreover, it is not clear how such information will be used by a foreign country and what constraints may be placed upon a returning individual. For example, provincial public health authorities in Canada will often not allow a client with TB to fly back to Canada if they know the client is not on the required medication. On the other hand, as members of a global community struggling to curtail and eliminate TB, the duty to protect others from the harm of TB infection and potential disease is also paramount. Currently, if the person with TB is adherent to treatment, we do not routinely alert overseas colleagues in order to uphold their privacy; however, we advise persons with TB that it is best to complete their treatment prior to traveling. However, if we believe adherence may be an issue, we tend to err on the side of providing countries information when we know that a person with TB will return home; we trust that our colleagues in these other countries will do their best to protect individuals from stigma and discrimination often associated with TB and that they will provide the best level of care that is available locally.

Jurisdictional challenges also exist within Canadian borders, both between provinces and between the provinces and the federal government. Constitutionally, decision-making authority regarding public health and healthcare is the purview of the provinces in Canada (with some exceptions not directly relevant for this paper), while the federal government retains power regarding the matter of immigration. As such, federal policy regarding TB screening for migrants lies with the federal government, while the provinces are responsible for caring for those migrants living with LTBI or active TB disease. Challenges may still exist when there is discordance between federal policy and provincial capacity, e.g. if federal immigration policy changes place a greater services burden onto provinces without requisite funding. It is the experience of the authors that the provinces and the federal government generally work and are in frequent dialog in a spirit of solidarity for the health of migrants and the protection of the general Canadian public. As such, the provinces and the federal government in Canada work together to ensure that federal laws and policies do not prejudice migrants with health issues, including TB, and vice versa.

## **The Social and Cultural Consequences of Mass Migration for Igbo Community in Nigeria**

- **Social Consequences**

Migration can have positive and negative impacts on both host and origin countries. Migration can lead to increased cultural diversity in a host country. Migrants may experience forms of segregation, discrimination or cultural clashes. Assimilation occurs over time, as migrants settle in their host country.

Migration has a profound impact on the lives of the Igbo youths households, but also their societies are shaped by the cumulative effects of labor mobility and consequently remittances. Migration can also have an impact on larger social phenomenon, such as democratic institutions, environmental degradation and gender norms, either through the transmission of values and knowledge or through the resources provided by remittances.

- **Cultural Consequences**

The loss of one's social structure and culture can cause a grief reaction, as has been described by Eisenbruch (1991). Migration involves the loss of the familiar, including language (especially colloquial and dialect), attitudes, values, social structures and support networks. Grieving for this loss can be viewed as a healthy reaction and a natural consequence of migration; however, if the symptoms cause significant distress or impairment and last for a specified period of time, psychiatric intervention may be warranted. Eisenbruch has defined cultural bereavement as "the experience of the uprooted person - or group - resulting from loss of social structures, cultural values and self-identity: the person - or group - continues to live in the past, is visited by supernatural forces from the past while asleep or awake, suffers feelings of guilt over abandoning culture and homeland, feels pain if memories of the past begin to fade, but finds constant images of the past (including traumatic images) intruding into daily life, yearns to complete obligations to the dead, and feels stricken by anxieties, morbid thoughts, and anger that mar the ability to get on with daily life".

The expression of such bereavement is influenced by many factors, among which are social, cultural and economic. In a study of the palliative care experience of Bangladeshi patients and their careers in east London, recent migration, linguistic barriers, religious beliefs and financial issues impacted the ability to optimize pain control in patients and the grieving process of family members; burial of the deceased in Bangladesh and social support from family and friends were potentially helpful in the grieving process. The importance of culture in the expression of grief was highlighted by a case report of bereavement in an Ethiopian female refugee. Her symptoms of grief were complicated by her inability to perform her culturally sanctioned purification rituals because of her relocation. Compounding her problem, she was erroneously diagnosed at various times due to the use of Western derived diagnostic criteria and a lack of appreciation of the cultural differences in the presentation of grief by clinicians. The symptoms of cultural bereavement may be misdiagnosed due to problems with language, culture and the use of Western diagnostic criteria in non- Western peoples. Schreiber noted that traditional healing and purification rituals as well as supportive psychotherapy, after the correct diagnosis was made, were essential in the treatment of this patient's syndrome.

## **Theoretical Underpinning**

Network theory propounded by Bruno Latour 1981 was adopted for the study as it explains migration dynamics at the micro level, including how connections among actors influence migration decisions. For instance, it explains how individual migrants are linked with friends or family members and provided with information about job opportunities, both before and after arrival at their destination. Other theories may explain the interactions between push and pull factors and their influence on the decision to migrate but fail to account for why migration persists even after these factors have diminished. The movement of people from one place to another often leads to the establishment of a process of “cumulative causation” (Brown & Bean, 2006) or what Massey (1987) has termed “chain migration.” The study of networks, particularly those linked to family and households, permits understanding migration as a social product—not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, or as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction (Boyd, 1989). Because most migrants do not know about the relative price of labor between their own country and country of destination, they rely on information from friends and relatives, which often signals opportunities in the labor markets of destination countries (Sassen, 1995). The network theory is relevant to the explanation of how potential trafficked victims are recruited. In most cases, this recruitment is done through close social networks of friends, relatives, and other acquaintances.

The network also provides an important means through which migrants acquire social capital, that is, the repertoire of resources such as information, material assistance, as well as social support that flow through social ties (Brown & Bean, 2006)—which could either be kin, communities, or institutions like churches, mosques, or other professional or religious groups. Network theory is especially useful for analyzing irregular migration because it helps us to understand how migrants get to be introduced into processes, as well as how relationships are sustained over time.

### **Political Economy Theory of Migration**

The political economy theory of migration encompasses a larger framework than the network theory: it explains the interplay of factors affecting migration flows and, thus, is considered to be a more holistic macro-theory. In some literature, political economy theory of migration and international migration theory are equated because they share similar features (Brown & Bean, 2006). The political economy theory of migration highlights three principal categories of international migration, namely micro, meso, and macro levels. The micro level focuses on factors influencing individual decisions to migrate, analyzing how potential migrants weigh up the various costs and benefits of migrating (Boswell, 2002). They include the values an individual places on migration as well as his/her expectations of the benefits accruable from such a venture. The micro level is all about the individual migrant.

The meso level of explanation locates migration flows within a complex system of links between people. Two concepts are particularly important for meso theories, namely systems and networks. Migration is assumed to occur within a migration system, and this could be explained in terms of how people are linked by economic, political, and cultural ties as well as by migration flows. Thus, the conditions generating movement



are understood as the dynamics of relations between two or more people, rather than a set of objective indicators. The social networks include both social as well as symbolic ties which could either be strong or weak. The contents of such ties, however, include transaction obligations and reciprocity. It also entails the control of information among the group as well as access to the resources of others (Brown & Bean, 2006).

The macro level, which is the context in which migration occurs, emphasizes the structural, objective conditions which act as push and pull factors for migration. This could be explicated in terms of economic, political, and cultural settings. In the case of economic migration, pull factors would typically include economic conditions such as unemployment, low salaries, or low per capita income relative to the country of destination. Pull factors would include migration legislation and the labor market situation in receiving countries. The macro level also encompasses political variables such as laws aimed at regulating spatial mobility and other national or international migration norms. Macro level push factors would include involuntary displacement, which could be due to state repression, fear of generalized criminal violence, or civil war (Boswell, 2002; Crisp, 1999; Taylor, 2000; Usher, 2005). The situation in some parts of Nigeria like Jos and Maiduguri, as well as outside the country in other parts of West Africa (e.g., Liberia), and especially in the Middle East, where violence has displaced many individuals, and families could serve as points of reference for push factors on the political platform.

### **Empirical Studies**

Various studies have been conducted in the past on the factors affecting migration. In the study by Oltman and Renshon (2017), the authors state that socio-political, economic and ecological factors are the main driving factors behind migration. The economic disparity between developed and developing countries is of the contributing factors that push migrants from poor countries to migrate to developed countries. On the other hand, economic aspects in developed countries such as need for labor also lure migrants seeking better employment opportunities.

Arenas (2021) investigated human capital portability and international student migration. The study was geared to evaluate the reforms that lifted the requirements to take the Spanish end-of-high school exams for foreign students from a subset of countries. The research indicated that multilateral diploma recognition can significantly increase international student migration without large costs in student migrant quality and with positive effects on average student quality. Shih (2016) elucidates that international students have historically been an important dynamic in the discourse about international student enrollment in US universities. Friedberg (2000) adds that the national origin of an individual's human capital is a crucial determinant of its value. Thus, the education and job experiences attained abroad are substantially valued less than domestically acquired human capital. This is why migrants earn less than natives in many instances. Migrants minimize this impact by acquiring additional education experience in the country of migration to boost their earning appeal.

Nejad and Young (2016) investigated migrants' self-selection according to the institutional quality. These were based on political and economic differences. The study found that economic freedoms have a significant pull factor for potential migrants. The article also indicated that potential migrants are highly pulled by improvements in legal systems and property rights. Gautam (2021) explored the impact of regional and global trade integration on international migration and its effects on the home country and found evidence of the negative effect of migration on the home country's economic institutions, especially those with fragile political institutions. To buttress the relevance of a working social system, Schulzek (2012) inferred that the availability of better welfare benefits is one of the major factors that drives migration. From another dimension, Charsley and Shaw (2006) elaborated on the role of encouragement by family members seeking to reunite with migrated relatives has been quoted as a major reason for migration.

Dail (1988) suggests that social factors play a role in individuals' decisions to migrate to other countries. Migrants from developing countries such as South American countries are often pushed by social factors such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, education and housing to migrate to countries such as the US. Carbajal and Calvo (2021) also explains that the social factors pushing migration are based on the human desire to achieve better quality of life. Migrants are pushed by social factors such as the need for better education for themselves and their families. For instance, the US offers graduate programs that attract young migrants from around the world (justiceformigrants.org 2017).

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study was inspired by the survey research design, which emphasizes the collection of data in the naturalistic setting. The study, therefore, attempted to make sense of the reasons behind the mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths and the impact of mass migration on the religious beliefs and practices of Igbo youths. This was accomplished by the collection of a variety of data using personal experience, life history, and interviews, which described the meanings and problematic moments in the lives of the research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Except as otherwise stated, where quoted in this chapter the language as actually used by participants (including slangs, colloquial speech, proverbs, etc.) is retained in its original form.

### **Location of the Study**

The study was carried out in Igbo south-eastern part of Nigeria that comprises five (5) states: Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The choice of these cities was informed by their characteristics in relation to religio-ethical mass migration of their youths. Igboland (Standard Igbo: Ala Igbo), also known as Southeastern Nigeria (but extends into South-Southern Nigeria), is the indigenous homeland of the Igbo people. It is a cultural and common linguistic region in southern Nigeria. Geographically, it is divided into two sections by the lower Niger River: an eastern (the larger of the two) and a western one. Its population is characterized by the diverse Igbo culture and the speakers of equally diverse Igbo languages.

**Study Population**

The study targeted youths who were unemployed, those in their final year at a tertiary-level education institution (i.e., public universities and public and private polytechnics), and those engaged in Nigeria’s compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Igbo youths who fell in one or more of these categories were prone to view migration as a survival strategy in light of Nigeria’s high unemployment and bleak economic prospects for wage earners. Also included were youths who had already been involved in migration and had returned to the country either voluntarily or via deportation. In this study, youths who fall into these categories are collectively referred to as “Igbo youths susceptible to migration.”

**Sampling and Data Collection**

The probability sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. To select participants for focus group discussions, a pre-survey questionnaire was administered to Igbo youths susceptible to migration (as defined above). Separate focus group discussions were held for males and females, and in all 5 focus group discussion sessions that comprises the five states were held. The inclusion criteria included participants Reasons behind the mass migration, and on how mass migration impact on religious beliefs and practices. The focus group discussions were facilitated using both vignette and free listing methods to obtain data on the attitude of Igbo youths toward migration. Some of the thematic outlines of the focus group discussions included economic opportunities, education and skill development, exposure to new belief systems, and so on.

To reach the returned Igbo youths migrants, the snowballing or referral method was used. The referrals were at both individual and institutional levels. At the individual level, persons who knew youths who fell under the category of returned migrants referred the researcher to them, while some other returned migrants were sourced through the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Offences (NAPTIP). The returned migrants constitute the hard-to-reach or “invisible” population since, unlike the other categories of Igbo youths who were more accessible, the returned migrants had to be located through referrals. A total of 10 returnees were captured for data collection, plus an additional 700 youths who had not yet left the country but were susceptible to migration.

**Result and Discussion**

**Table 1: Respondents' mean on Reasons behind the mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths**

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
1.	Economic opportunities	400	232	68	100	800	3.16	Agree
			696	136	100	2,532		

		1600						
2.	Education and skill development	98392	5001500	99198	103103	8002193	2.74	Agree
3.	Political instability and insecurity	5992396	150450	4182	1010	8002938	3.67	Agree
4.	Family reunification and migration networks	2561024	4991497	3060	1515	8002,596	3.24	Agree
5.	Socialcultural factors	59236	5861758	98196	5757	8002247	2.80	Agree
	<b>Grand Mean</b>						<b>3.12</b>	<b>Agree</b>

The result in Table 1 indicate reasons behind the mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths. Items 1,2,3,4 and 5 with mean scores 3.16, 2.74, 3.67, 3.24 and 2.80 respectively, suggesting that mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths agree on the reasons for their mass migration. The Grand mean of 3.12 Agree on the reasons behind the mass migration phenomenon among Igbo youths from Nigeria.

**Table 2: Respondents' mean on Mass migration impact on religious beliefs and practices of Igbo youths**

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
1.	Exposure to New Belief Systems	5872344	89267	56112	6868	8002791	3.48	Agree
2.	Adaptation and Syncretism	106424	64192	5941188	3636	8001840	2.30	Disagree
3.	Religious Conversion	87348	5621686	79158	7272	8002204	2.75	Agree

4.	Community Support and Identity Formation	389 1556	251 753	98 196	62 62	800 2567	3.20	Agree
5.	Reinvention and Innovation	299 1196	418 125 4	56 112	27 27	800 2589	3.32	Agree
	<b>Grand Mean</b>						<b>3.01</b>	<b>Agree</b>

The results in Table 2 revealed that items 1, 3, 4 and 5 demonstrate mass migration on religious beliefs and practices of Igbo youths, as indicated by their respective mean scores of 3.48, 2.75, 3.20 and 3.32. The Grand mean agree on impact on religious beliefs and practices of Igbo youths from Nigeria.

## Discussions of Findings

### Reasons for Mass Migration Phenomenon Among Igbo Youths

Economic factors play a significant role in driving mass migration. Many Igbo youths perceive limited employment prospects and economic opportunities in their local communities. They often seek better-paying jobs and higher standards of living in urban centers or even overseas. The allure of economic prosperity motivates many to migrate in search of better livelihoods. Unemployment rates, lack of access to credit and capital, and insufficient infrastructure for businesses in rural areas contribute to this economic motivation. Political instability and insecurity can also drive mass migration. Instances of conflict, ethno-religious tensions, and inadequate governance in some regions of Nigeria create an environment of insecurity. The fear of violence and the desire for a stable and secure future prompt many Igbo youths to seek refuge in safer regions or even emigrate to other countries. Political factors are intertwined with economic factors, as political instability can hinder economic growth and development in certain areas. Infrastructure and social services, or the lack thereof, are also contributing factors to mass migration. Limited access to basic infrastructure such as healthcare facilities, road networks, electricity supply, and clean water diminishes the quality of life in certain regions. Young people may migrate in search of improved living conditions and access to better infrastructure and social amenities.

### How does Mass Migration Impact the Religious Beliefs and Practices of Igbo Youths?

Migration exposes Igbo youths to diverse religious beliefs and practices. They may encounter new religious traditions or variations of their own faith that are practiced differently in the new location. This exposure to religious pluralism can lead to a broadening of perspectives and a reevaluation of their own religious beliefs. In the process of migration, Igbo youths may adopt practices from other religious traditions or synthesize elements of different faiths into their own belief system. This adaptation and syncretism can be influenced by their interactions with individuals from different

religious backgrounds and the desire to integrate into the new cultural and social context. On the other hand, migration can also strengthen religious identity among Igbo youths. Being away from their homeland and familiar religious practices may create a sense of nostalgia and a desire to hold onto their traditional beliefs more strongly. In response to the new environment, they may actively seek to preserve and practice their own religious customs as a way to maintain their cultural identity. Mass migration can also lead to changes in religious participation patterns among Igbo youths. Relocating to areas with different religious demographics and institutions may result in reduced access to familiar religious spaces or communities. This can either lead to decreased participation or a renewed commitment to seek out and engage with religious communities that cater to their specific needs and traditions.

### **Conclusion**

Migration is clearly a strategy for economic emancipation. Young people leave in order to get established and pave way for other family members in the cities. This has far reaching consequences on the family, agriculture, rural communities and urban centers. The tide will continue for as long as disparities exist in between the rural and urban centers. An effective intervention can be arrived based on a proper understanding of the development of the problem and the strategies that would improve living standard in both places. This calls for a systems approach in studying the trend and then offering solutions to the people.

The religio-ethical implications of Igbo youths' mass migration from Nigeria are complex and multifaceted. The clash between traditional practices and new belief systems, the loss of cultural heritage, and the challenges of social integration all contribute to the dilemmas faced by these migrants. It is crucial to recognize the significance of preserving cultural identity and promoting intergenerational dialogue to address these issues effectively.

### **Recommendations**

- a) **Community Engagement:** Encourage community-based initiatives that support Igbo youths in maintaining their cultural and religious practices while integrating into their host societies. This could include cultural events, language programs, and mentorship opportunities.
- b) **Education and Awareness:** Develop educational programs that emphasize the importance of preserving cultural heritage and understanding the religio-ethical dimensions of migration. This can be done through workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns targeting both the Igbo community and the host societies.
- c) **Interfaith Dialogue:** Foster interfaith dialogue and cooperation between different religious communities to promote understanding and respect for diverse belief systems. This can help mitigate tensions and conflicts arising from religious differences.
- d) **Policy Considerations:** Advocate for policies that protect the rights and cultural expressions of migrants, while also promoting integration and social cohesion. This includes addressing discrimination, ensuring access to religious services, and supporting cultural organizations within the host countries.

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