

Migration, Emigration, and Immigration

African Cartoonists Draw the Lines

dele jegede

In the minds of many, cartoons evoke fun, amusement, or hilarity. As a medium of communication, the cartoon has the power to convey in a few deft strokes of the pen or brush what an editorial writer would labor to express in hundreds, even thousands, of words. The cartoon attests to the power of the graphic medium to deliver witticisms that may evoke in the viewer a spate of convulsive chuckles or bouts of laughter. Undoubtedly, the capacity of the cartoon to communicate with brevity, speed, and poignancy boosts its appeal and universality. Sadam Issa (2016) explains that this process is known in scholarly circles as the “pictorial turn,” as some readers favor its capacity to convey complex issues in simple terms. Yet, cartoons, especially editorial cartoons, command more than fleeting giggles. They elicit in the viewer long, thoughtful pauses that result from brooding over the broader and deeper implications of the issues broached by the cartoon.

As a tool of speedy communication, the cartoon is a potent platform for catalyzing global discourse on issues of consequential appeal, like global warming, interminable wars, religious extremism, and global economy. Important and integral to these flash-points is the complex tinderbox of migration, emigration, and immigration, which is the central focus of this cartoon-driven essay. The underlying curatorial thrust here is the assumption that, as artworks, cartoons are fraught with meanings, even those that the artist did not input, infer, or confer. Inherent in the multidimensional capacity of the cartoon is the power to reflect back to the reader whatever meanings are projected onto it.

For this reason, I have abstained from critiquing, overreading, or overtranslating the cartoons examined here, in the hope that readers will be able to see them not as mere illustrations of the salient points under consideration, but as major contributions to a global issue. Drawing copiously from the works of notable and

award-winning African cartoonists—from Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Egypt, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Benin Republic, and Nigeria—this essay attempts to pry open the triple quandary of migration, emigration, and immigration. How do these cartoonists perceive the issue? What solutions do they proffer? What are the waves of underlying and interconnected issues that make immigration to African and industrial democracies an inevitability? Finally, how have the immigration policies of America and the European Union exacerbated the situation?

THE CARTOON: POWER AND INK

Originally, a “cartoon” was the preliminary, preparatory drawing used by fifteenth century European painters to transfer images onto various surfaces, such as a large wall or a ceiling, for full development (Harrison 1980). The cartoon was taped and then traced directly onto the desired surface, sometimes through holes punched on the outlines of the drawing. Italian Renaissance painters, including Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael Sanzio da Urbino, favored this method for carrying out stained glass designs or fresco paintings. Over the years, the meaning and deployment of “cartoon” changed, as did the methods employed by artists in executing large commissions on diverse surfaces. Today, the cartoon—be it strip, political/editorial, gag, illustrative or even animated—has evolved and shed the preparatory capacity that begat it.

Our current usage of cartoon as a graphic idiom for parody and satire dates back to 1843. John Leach, who was apparently disgusted upon seeing the abysmal quality of the drawings that were submitted as entries for the frescoes for the new House of Parliament in London, savaged them in the newly established British weekly magazine *Punch*, which quickly distinguished itself as a source for acerbic cartoons. Before *Punch* amplified the searing edge of cartoons in public commentaries, the British painter and satirist William Hogarth (1697–1764) had created graphic parody as an effective medium for social engagement, while in Spain and France, Francisco Goya (1746–1828) and Honoré

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1 Mike Asukwo
 "Visa Office"
Business Day (Nigeria) July 2006.
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



Daumier (1808–1879), respectively, deployed cartoon for assailing social practices that they deemed inimical to collective harmony.

The cartoon is an elusive conundrum that can deny as well as affirm. It is an evasive codifier that possesses the unsparring capacity to confuse or elucidate, depending on the predisposition of readers. Far from being an innocent or even innocuous visual medium that is indexical of prevailing social repartee and cafeteria chat, the cartoon reserves the power to admonish, mesmerize, cajole, or instigate. It is a living metaphor for all manner of conundrums, real and imagined. It is a powerful artform that masks its sting under simple and effective lines and or mesmerizing color. As a multifaceted medium, it has the capacity to arouse mirth and indignation in equal measure. When the cartoon is used as an instrument to appeal to corporate emotion, the results might be

disastrous. Since cartoons have the power to elicit responses from a broad spectrum of audiences across diverse geocultural spaces, their messages are susceptible to being misread, misunderstood, or ill-digested, depending on the geographic locale within which such messages are decoded or the sociocultural or religious prisms through which such cartoons are filtered.

Societies are known to have been thrown into spasmodic pangs of turmoil on account of a cartoon or two, even if the cartoons originated in a different locale. An example was the publication of the "Muhammad Cartoons" in September 2005 by *Jyllands-Posten*, Denmark's largest newspaper (Lindekilde, Mouritsen, and Zapata-Barrero 2009). By early 2006, the ensuing mayhem had led to over 250 deaths globally, many in faraway places such as Maiduguri, Nigeria, where fifteen people were killed while eleven churches



2 Franklin Oyekusibe
 "Departure"
 Unpublished cartoon from artist's portfolio
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



3 Sanouni Imad
 “Illegal Immigration: Life of Despair”
*Africa Cartoons, Encyclopedia of African Political
 Cartooning* (<https://africacartoons.com/?s=immigration&submit=>) December 15, 2018
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

were razed. In January 2015, the world was traumatized when armed Islamists invaded the editorial meeting of the cheeky, satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, murdered twelve people, and inflicted severe injury on many others.

THE CARTOONISTS

Cartoonists are often perceived as jokers. In actuality, such a perception is nothing but a trivialization of a challenging and exacting enterprise. The image of cartoonists as satirists belies the seriousness that creating cartoons entails. The art of manufacturing “jokes” is indeed a serious, even perilous, business, particularly in countries where press freedom is nominal or altogether nonexistent. In Africa, cartoonists are customarily subjected to harassment by the state, with attendant discomfiture and even

exile. Examples abound. In 1998, the Cameroonian cartoonist Paul-Louis Nyemb Ntoogué (Popoli) was forced to flee his duty as the editorial cartoonist for *Le Messenger*, as President Paul Biya simply had had enough of the cartoonist’s graphic ire. As reported in the RSF (Reporters Sans Frontières) on February 17, 2006,, the Algerian cartoonist Ali Dilem was sentenced to one year in jail and slapped with a fine of 50,000 dinar (about \$420) in 2003 for his cartoons, which were considered uncomplimentary to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. In South Africa, the ace cartoonist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) was locked in a legal tussle with the then-president Jacob Zuma in 2008. At issue was Zapiro’s unrelenting depiction of Zuma as a pervert. And in Nigeria, the first example of the persecution of a cartoonist occurred in 1966, when the pioneer cartoonist Akinola Lasekan (1916–1972) was sent to jail for



4 Abdelghani Dahdouh
 “Illegal Immigration”
*Africa Cartoons, Encyclopedia of African Political
 Cartooning* (https://africacartoons.com/wp-content/uploads/illegal_immigration_abdelghani_dahdouh.jpeg), Nov. 9, 2018
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



5 Silham Zebiri
 "Specter de L'Immigration Clandestine"
*Africa Cartoons, Encyclopedia of African Political
 Cartooning* (https://africacartoons.com/wp-content/uploads/specter_de_immigration_clandestine_siham_zebiri.jpeg), August 3, 2016
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

publishing a cartoon that was deemed violative of a new military government decree that prohibited all political activities. Indeed, that singular assault brought an end to Lasekan's career as a cartoonist. Lasekan was the first cartoonist in the West African sub-region. In 1944, he began cartooning for the *West African Pilot*, which had been founded in Lagos by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937.

African cartoonists recognize and capitalize on the power of their medium and the immediacy of impact that their caricatures or political cartoons have. They have variously exerted this power in tackling the issue of emigration to other geo-political nation spaces. The focus of the cartoons under consideration here is uninvited or unapproved emigration, the type that is undertaken, and often on a massive and persistent scale, when people are compelled to flee from a set of adversities in their home states. A large number

of those depicted in these cartoons appear to have reached the limit of their endurance, preferring to risk their lives by embarking on journeys to unpredictable shores.

AFRICAN CARTOONISTS AND THE HUMAN DISASTER

The cartoonists whose works are under consideration here explore the same theme (of migration, emigration, and immigration) but bring their individual perspectives and styles to bear on the way that they portray their reactions. While some employ color to emphasize the saliency of their standpoint, others rely solely on transmitting the depth of their anguish with the use of pen or brush and ink in simple, evocative lines. The strength and poignancy of



6 Tayo Fatunla
 "Europe's Sweep of Refugees"
Cartoon Movement (<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/23350>), September 2015
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



7 Talal Nayer
 “Xenophobia”
Cartoon Movement (<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/27475>, February 17, 2016)
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

most cartoons derive from the masterful deployment of the simple line. As a critical element of art, the line is incredibly versatile; it can be at once expansive and contractive, munificent or stingy. In the hands of a cartoonist, the line could be soft and poetic, or brash and aggressive. It could evoke moods of pensiveness, elicit anger, or induce bouts of incredulity. The line is a mischievous character that is constantly summoned to assail, cajole, satirize, incite, criticize, mollify, or inspire critical thinking on a local, national, or global scale. Mike Asukwo, one of Nigeria’s celebrated cartoonists, reveals in his line cartoon “Visa Office” (Fig. 1) the absolute contempt in which some security officers at an embassy visa office hold applicants. Their unbridled disdain for the applicants can be seen in their dialogue.

It is particularly instructive that the cartoons discussed here are drawn from all over Africa. This affords us the opportunity to feel the empathy and, indeed, anguish that the cartoonists experience, since all of them, regardless of cultural affinities, religious or political persuasions, are unified in their critical reaction to the stereotypical disdain with which Euro-American agencies handle the immigration-induced humanitarian crises that have erupted in recent years. At core is what migration means for each of the cartoonists whose pieces are featured here. In his cartoon “Departure,” the Nigerian cartoonist Franklin Oyekusibe makes the subtle but powerful connection between emigration and corruption (Fig. 2). A cursory reading of this cartoon is likely to focus attention on the discussion—or, as often happens in cases of illegal migration,

8 Talal Nayer
 “Boats of Death: Illegal Immigration to Europe”
Cartoon Movement (<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/13000>), January 9, 2014
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



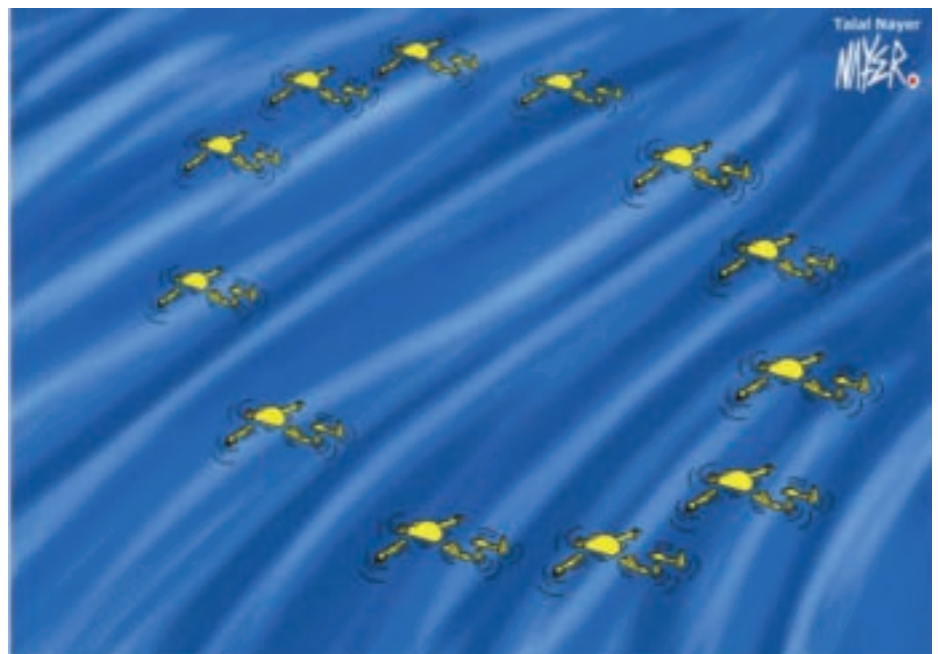


9 Tayo Fatunla
 "Fortress Europe"
 politicalcartoons.com, September 2015
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

negotiation—going on at the departure lounge, as seen in the left part of the cartoon, where an immigration officer is in a discussion with a traveler. Oyekusibe in a few deft strokes conveys the umbrage of the Nigerian traveler as the immigration officer engages in small talks with the elderly traveler. But to focus on this group, whatever the issue they may be discussing, is to miss the import of the cartoon completely. For a closer perusal of the lower right corner of the cartoon reveals the center of attraction, which is hidden in plain view. It shows a more sinister undertaking: the “underhand” business involving passenger luggage. Corruption thrives in several African nations precisely because those who are designated to checkmate it are themselves deeply involved in perpetrating it. There is correlation between the crises of immigration in Africa and the tragedy at the visa offices, immigration centers,

and, crucially, the seas and seashores.

If Oyekusibe’s cartoon is couched in the subtleties of immigration and corruption, the Moroccan cartoonist Sanouni Imad employs metaphor to emphasize the consequences of corruption within nation-states. One of the factors propelling emigration is economic marginalization, especially of able-bodied youths in African home states. Oyekusibe’s cartoon addresses legal migration. What Imad addresses in his cartoon is immigration that circumvents formal admittance processes. It does not matter that the country at the receiving end calls it “illegal” immigration. That is a legalese that does little to discourage the burning desire of marginalized populations desperate to escape their oppressive condition. Internal strife, economic dissonance, religious unrest, political uprising, mass unemployment: These are some of the conditions



10 Talal Nayer
 “Migrant Boat Sinking”
 Cartoon Movement (<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/20899>), April 20, 2015
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



11 Talal Nayer
 Untitled
Cartoon Movement (<https://www.cartoon-movement.com/cartoon/31047>), June 26, 2016
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

that precipitate mass migration from one location to another. And when desperation becomes the driving factor for migration—when people are stuck between the rock and the hard place—calling the struggle to escape from what some believe is perdition “illegal” is mere semantics that does little to assuage the fear, desperation, and frustration of the afflicted.

The caption in Imad’s cartoon “Illegal Immigration: Life of Despair” (Fig. 3) is proclamatory. The signpost reads “Secret Immigration,” while a skinny but determined youth struggles to pull in a heavy cast iron ball on which the word “Despair” is boldly inscribed. At the base of the hill is a neatly wrapped corpse on which the word “Life” is written in Arabic. When you disambiguate the texts, you will arrive at the core of the issue, which poses the question, what is the value of a still life? And when you are despair personified, what approval do you need to plot your escape? In short, this cartoon essays on a hopeless, insipid existence as the

driver of illegal immigration. There! In a brief but compelling pictoriality, Imad just summarized what scholars or astute editorialists would spend eternity to communicate.

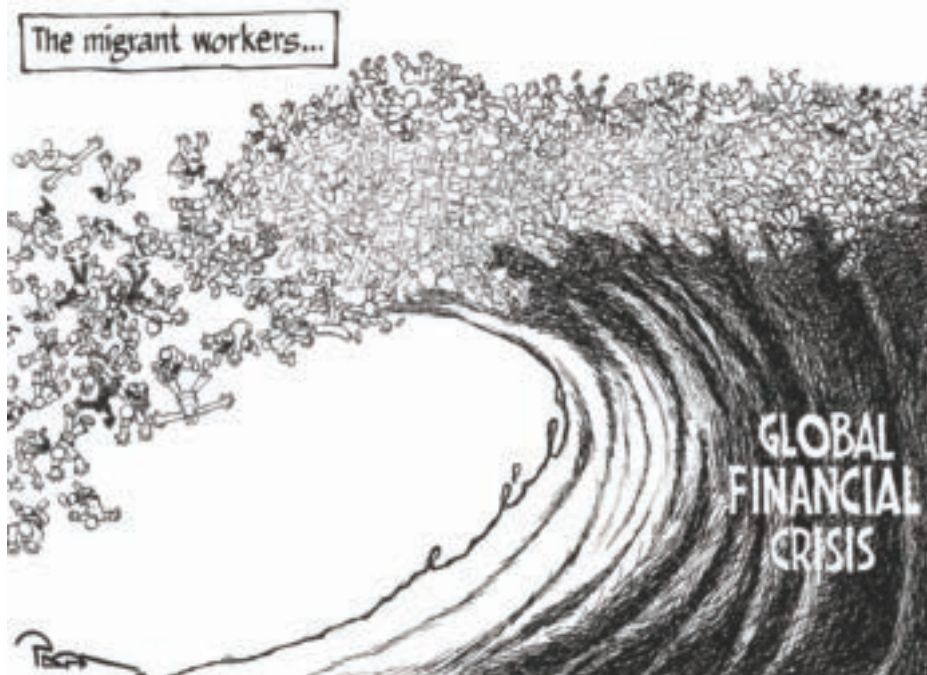
EU, IMMIGRANTS, AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

For desperate Africans striving to reach Europe on their own, the Mediterranean Sea has become a battle site. Vulnerable, ill-equipped, overpromised, underprotected, demoralized, but overly optimistic groups see the Mediterranean as the only barrier between them and escape—between despondency and opportunity. Regardless of how daunting, they reason that the chances of surviving the unforgiving nature on the seas are much higher than outliving the inexorability of economic strangulation in the home-states. From these cartoons, we have an overwhelming sense of the dangers that desperate folks face as they attempt to find their ways to Europe. Abdelghani Dahdouh, another Moroccan cartoonist,



12 Khalid Cherradi
 “Immigration”
Africa Cartoons, Encyclopedia of African Political Cartooning (https://africacartoons.com/wp-content/uploads/immigration_corruption_khalid_cherradi.jpeg), December 6, 2018
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

13 Popa Matumula
 “Wave of Migration”
 Cartoon Movement (<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/80>), October 13, 2008
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



evokes in the viewer the anguish that the mere thought of facing the vast sea in an overpacked and ill-equipped raft stirs (Fig. 4). The wide and eerily calm expanse of a deadly blue sea is the leitmotif favored by many cartoonists from the Maghreb, including the Algerian Siham Zebiri, one of a very few active women cartoonists in Africa (Fig. 5).

Many cartoonists have faulted the European Union for its lack of compassion in the mass migration crises. Tayo Fatunla, the internationally recognized British-born Nigerian cartoonist and writer who is resident in Britain, makes this quite clear in his piece on the attitude of Europe to refugees (Fig. 6). Refugees are perceived as irritating parasites who must be cleansed lest they contaminate European purity. Fatunla summons the power of scale to demonstrate the relative might of Europe and the inconsequentiality of the immigrants. One artist who has consistently decried the callousness of the EU in its response to the humanitarian disaster that immigrants on the Libya-Europe route face is the Sudanese

cartoonist Talal Nayer, who translates this sentiment by portraying Europe as a monstrous beast, with jaws wide open in readiness to devour the harmless and petrified African (Fig. 7). Two other cartoons by Nayer are unsparing of the EU in its atrocious response to the humanitarian problems raised by the plight of desperate immigrants clawing the waters, literally, as they struggle to reach Europe. In “Boats of Death” (Fig. 8), Nayer dips the EU logo into the sea, with the upper part of it hovering ominously on the site, a symbolic sunset over the wreckage of the battered and broken boat containing African immigrants. Nothing could be stronger than summoning the EU to bear witness to the institutionalization of gross inhumanity: the blatant disrespect for those who, fleeing persecution, are met with supercilious disdain. It is an indictment that the Nigerian cartoonist Tayo Fatunla displays as an unmistakable banner on a fortified holding enclosure with the black background standing in ominous contrast to the barbed wire fence (Fig. 9).

In what seems to be a sneering requiem mass for the hundreds



14 Mike Asukwo
 “Recession Beach”
 Business Day, December 9, 2016
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

15 Mustapha Bulama
 "Corruption"
 Daily Trust (Nigeria), March 10, 2018
 Image used with kind permission of the artist



of souls lost at sea when their boats capsized on the way to Italy and other European locations, Nayer lays the floating and dismembered bodies of twelve African victims in an arrangement that visually replicates the EU logo (Fig. 10). In this cartoon, Nayer assigns the EU total responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of migrants who sacrificed themselves in search of meaningful life. As if to convince the world of his own fairness on this issue, Nayer provides in another cartoon what, to many European nations, is the underlying rationale for their hostility (Fig. 11). In this piece, the gun is transformed into a boat atop which the lone subject stands as he paddles his way, presumably to Europe.

The inference to be drawn from this cartoon appears to be that the refugee problem in Africa is being used as a cover by religious extremists to invade Europe. But a closer reading of the cartoon reveals that such a line of thought is nothing but a mirage that can only thrive in the imagination of racists and religious bigots. The argument that religious extremism is the only cause of mass migrations from Africa is fatally flawed; it is not. In Africa, a myriad of causes is readily identifiable. This includes military dictatorship, endemic corruption, political instability, and attendant underdevelopment. For example, the Arab Spring, which had its origin in Tunisia in 2010 and quickly spread to other countries in North



16 Mustapha Bulama
 "Two Years of Buhari Administration"
 Daily Trust (Nigeria), May 29, 2017
 Image used with kind permission of the artist

17 Zapiro
 "Xenophobia"
 Cartoons by Zapiro © 2008–2015 (www.zapiro.com)
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Africa—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and others—reflected the concerted efforts of the citizens of those countries to rise and shake off the yoke of oppression that had festered for so long. At base were the political, financial, and socioeconomic systems that were severely tilted against the poor, the marginalized, and the underprivileged. The massive show of public defiance, leading to waves of demonstrations in the face of brazen show and abuse of power by authorities, further fueled the yearning for participatory democracy, realignment of economic policy, and a corruption-free polity. That such sheer authoritarianism couched in extreme religiosity has its limits can be seen in the balkanization of Sudan in 2011. One factor that cartoonists repeatedly cited as a causative for emigration is corruption. Khalid Cherradi of Morocco illustrates this in his cartoon “Immigration” (Fig. 12).

In several parts of the continent, Africans continually scramble in droves in search of greener pastures believed to be found in

Europe and the United States. It was a scramble that became exponentially worse as a result of the global financial meltdown of 2008, which had catastrophic effect on the anemic economies of several African states. The Tanzanian cartoonist Popa Matumula captured the effect of the global financial turmoil on migrant workers in an iconic cartoon of a human tsunami wave: Every drop of the crest is an African migrant worker caught in a convulsive churn (Fig. 13). “Migrant Worker” is a summation of the instability that Africa continues to experience. Generations of African leaders sought election with the promise to purge the state of ensconced maladies, only to renege and use all apparatuses of state to perpetuate themselves in power. Matumula’s piece demonstrates the power of the tsunamic wave, the type that invariably promotes anomic conditions as normative lifestyle. The absence of strong leadership is one of the conditions precipitating the waves of unrest and immigration so powerfully articulated in Matumula’s cartoon.



18 Zapiro
 "Xenophobia"
 Cartoons by Zapiro, © 2008–2015 (www.zapiro.com)
 Republished with permission



19 Zapiro
 "Rainbow Nation of God"
 Cartoons by Zapiro © 2008–2015 (www.zapiro.com)
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Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is perpetually mired in an unshakable miasma of poverty, arising no doubt from endemic corruption fostered by a succession of military regimes that took nearly half of the country's postindependence existence. Since Nigeria's fourth republic, which began in 1999, corruption has metastasized. Mike Asukwo, one of Nigeria's most abrasive cartoonists, shows in "Recession Beach" (Fig. 14) how the current administration of retired General Muhammadu Buhari, whose December 1983 coup d'état ended the country's Second Republic, created a condition precedent to social upheaval and, consequently, emigration. A nation's economic team in a boat that is stranded on Recession Beach does not inspire or deserve the confidence of the citizenry. The consternation on the faces of the team mirrors the

anguish that is clearly inscribed on the face of the president.

Mustapha Bulama, another Nigerian cartoonist, in his epic on corruption demonstrates the relative disproportion that exists between the monster and the strategy for getting rid of it by two West African leaders—Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana and Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria. Just by itself or used as a car sticker without the images, for instance, Buhari's plan as contained in the dialog box evokes laughter and incredulity. But seen in full context, the cartoon is a masterstroke as it provides instant visual index of who is threatening whom (Fig. 15). The two presidents are reduced to no more than two pesky buffoons—pusillanimous rascals who are full of long talks that earn nothing but the contempt of this hideous thing called corruption. In yet another cartoon Bulama did



Look here... in the name of Amadioha... I command you to issue me with a multiple visa or else...

20 Tayo Fatunla
 "Visa Section"
 BBCWorld Series, December 2005
 Published with kind permission of the artist



21 Didier Viod
 "Immigration Thing"
 Yao: Visa Refusé
 September 25, 2019
 Published with kind permission of the artist

about the same time, we see Buhari's report card and the myriad of ailments that he and his vice president struggle to tackle. What is most poignant about this cartoon is the puerility of the effort and the predictable failure that will result from it (Fig. 16). Those who are befuddled by the desire of generations of young Nigerians to head for Libya in hopes of crossing over to Europe should take deeper interest in Bulama's cartoon.

In recent years, attention has shifted to intra-African immigration, although internal migration amongst African countries is not a recent phenomenon. In 1983, for example, the Shehu Shagari administration deported millions of West African immigrants from Nigeria, ostensibly because they contributed to the festering of

religious flare-ups in the northern part of Nigeria (Brydon 1985). In reality, however, the mass deportation, which affected over one million Ghanaians and gave rise to the slogan "Ghana Must Go," had to do with an economy that was beginning to buckle because of the country's economic policy. Indeed, Nigeria was not the only country that expelled citizens of neighboring African states who were often classified by the pejorative term "illegal aliens." Okolo (1984) explains that Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone also purged citizens of other countries in defiance of existing protocols that these countries assented to as members of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The most recent iteration of mass opposition to intra-African movement of people occurred in South Africa, where antagonism towards immigrants resulted in a spate of vicious attacks on immigrants from countries such as Nigeria, Somalia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Nigeria had no option but to evacuate its battered citizens from South Africa in September 2019. These xenophobic attacks became more pronounced because of the perception that illegal immigrants and refugees from various sites of conflict on the continent were a national security threat and a parasite on the South African economy. Whatever the reasons, the horrific optics of the situation was not lost on the South African cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, who goes by Zapiro. Clearly one of the best and most prolific cartoonists in Africa, Zapiro is battle-tested, having engaged in protracted legal sparring with former president Jacob Zuma, whom Zapiro relentlessly savaged in his cartoons over Zuma's perceived moral, ethical, and leadership deficiencies.

Zapiro's cartoons on South African xenophobia tug at the conscience of humanity. In one cartoon (Fig. 17), Zapiro reveals the wretchedness of the mindset that would set fellow humans ablaze, ostensibly for not knowing the meaning of "Ubuntu." When the reader realizes that Ubuntu is an African philosophic tenet that emphasizes mutuality of humanity—the idea that peaceful and mutually respectful coexistence is beneficial to all—the paradoxical meaning of Zapiro's cartoon becomes magnified. For Zapiro, South Africa has, quite unfortunately, traded the evil of apartheid for the depravity of xenophobia (Fig. 18). For those who were yet to grasp the enormity of the injury that such dastardly undertakings constituted to the spirit of the new South Africa, a country that was nurtured by such revered figures as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, Zapiro depicts the flag of the "Rainbow Nation of God" covered in heavy drips of the blood of innocent immigrants (Fig. 19).

It should be clear at this point that on emigration/immigration, there is no necessary linear order for leaving one location for the other. As the African proverb goes, there are innumerable ways to the marketplace. "Secret immigration" or "illegal immigration" of "illegal aliens" or any other classificatory mechanisms are simply handles that do nothing to discourage those who must escape their countries for an assortment of reasons. In Nigeria, for example, years of military dictatorship and civilian regimes populated with a succession of corrupt, indolent, and pompous politicians have eliminated the middle class and produced a new generation of Nigerians who are determined to emigrate even when they do not know where to go. The crucial aim is to leave the country in which the politician's jumbo paycheck is reputed to be perhaps the fattest in the world at the same time that Nigeria is generally acknowledged among the world's poorest countries. Perhaps the

IMMIGRATION CHOISE



RÉCOURNEMENT N'EST PAS AFRICAIN



22 Didier Viode
 Yao: Visa Refusé
 September 25, 2019
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23 Didier Viode
 Yao: Visa Refusé
 September 25, 2019
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most unfavorable public admonition of Nigeria was issued by former British prime minister David Cameron, who in a conversation with the Queen in May 2016 described Nigeria as “fantastically corrupt.” Transparency International recently ranked Nigeria 146/180 on its 2019 Corruption Perception Index. Clearly, unmitigated corruption is one of the drivers of illegal immigration.

On the other hand, legal immigration is often not as unencumbered as it sounds. Attempts to obtain a visa from EU or United States consulates or embassies, even by those who have the

resources and proper documentation, are often rebuffed without any explanation. Tayo Fatunla’s cartoon on the frustrations that pent up from such arbitrary dismissal of applications for a visa gives a comical consideration to the matter (Fig. 20). The subject of Fatunla’s cartoon, a titled and befeathered traditional ruler, must have been stupefied when he realized that the imperious visa officer, a begoggled white man, was neither impressed by his command nor awed by the invocation of Amadioha, the powerful Igbo deity of thunder and lightning. While Fatunla’s cheekiness offers what many—observers and applicants alike—who have been humiliated at the visa office can easily relate to, the deeper issue here alludes to the use of visa by European and American embassies as an assertion of dominance and control.

So far, I have placed the accent on political or editorial cartoons because such a format favors single-panel drawing, with or without dialog box(es). It is a design that provides in one fell swoop a synopsis of whatever it is that the cartoonist seeks to draw attention to. There are, however, other cartoon formats, such as the comic strip, that have added flexibility for dealing with a single issue on an extended basis. Comic strips are particularly suitable for introducing many characters and developing story lines in a manner akin to the way a plot develops in a novel. Massimo Repetti’s 2007 essay on comic strips examines how African artists have begun to appropriate this platform.

Comic strips are versatile for creating a multitude of plots. In

his graphic novel *Yao: Visa Refusé* (2019), the Beninois painter Didier Viodé offers comic illustrations of events centered around Yao's frustrating attempts to obtain a visa at the French consulate. Viodé's storyline draws from social chronicles detailing the anxiety that is often induced by visits to the visa office. The son of Beninese parents who migrated to Côte d'Ivoire, Viodé's growth as an artist followed a path familiar to many young kids who grew up on a diet of comic strips, often foreign imports. His imagination was whetted by early exposure to French-Belgian comics, which spurred him to create comic strips that affirmed his vision of Africa. The stories that Viodé illustrates in his *roman graphique* lend credence to the widespread notion that the process of visa issuance recalls the impetuosity of colonialist overlords, except that now the dramatis personae are culturally tone-deaf and unempathetic visa officers.

For several decades, visa-issuing powers have continually aligned their policies to the detriment of visa-seeking countries. According to Eytan Meyers (2002) industrial democracies have, over the centuries, pursued similar immigration policies and followed comparable immigration practices with regard to illegal immigration and asylum seekers.

Viodé's graphic novel offers a short but pungent narrative, which constitutes the artist's riposte to the conceitedness of visa officials. In "Selective Immigration" (p. 6), Yao has a nightmare; he is in a capsized boat and struggles to stay alive (Fig. 21).

"I am alive! Oof! What a horrible nightmare!" Yao exclaims upon realizing that what he experienced was only a nightmare, where nightmare (*cauchemar*) is a metaphor for the ongoing debacle in which thousands of Africans converge on Libya, convinced that they were on their way to Europe, only to encounter a myriad of problems ranging from slavery to capsized boats.

Later on, in the same book (p. 10) (Fig. 22), it is the next day. Yao is thinking to himself:

"Oof—finally. It's my turn. No stress." Then from the visa window comes the loud yell,

"NEXT!"

"Hello, ma'am. I am a painter and I want to ask for a visa, please."

"I'm sorry. We've already reached the quota imposed by the government."

"Return in six months." That was the officer responding.

"SIX MONTHS?"

"It's not acceptable! Sarkozy said on television to give visa priority to talent, to artists ..."

"I am a talented artist and I will not move from here until the visa comes!"

"SECURITY!"

And the outcome of Yao's attempt at asserting himself is bedlam.

In a later page (Fig. 23), Yao meets with success at last: his visa application is successful. The euphoric "Hallelujah" however proves to be an anticlimax. In the last box, the visa clerk sniggers as she tells Yao,

"Hahaha—April fool!"

Yes, his visa application has been refused. Again!

CONCLUSION

African cartoonists are a formidable class of actors whose body of work pesters dictators, corrupt governments, and authoritarian regimes with explosive and penetrating canons of humor and acidic lampoonery. While cartoonists are numerically few relative to the number of writers, journalists, and critical media establishments on the continent, they are perhaps the most effective group out there pleading the cause of the deprived, disrespected, and marginalized citizens. They are at the forefront in drawing attention to the ongoing immigration tragedy in Africa.

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