

“One-Way-Ticket”: When Langston Hughes Traduces the Massive, Absolute and Obligatory Immigration of Today's Africans

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze how Langston Hughes through his poem “One-Way-Ticket” while expressing why blacks were obliged to flee the Big South to the North of the United States. He expresses also in a metaphorical and symbolical language many centuries later in the same poem the reasons why and the reality linked to the motivations of today’s Africans mass immigration towards Europe, the North also. Although separated in time and space, the different characteristics are the same in terms of pull and push factors concerning the past “Great Migration” and today’s Africans mass immigration.

Keywords: Immigration, Africans immigrants, Europe, Africa, Movement of no return

Introduction

The poem “One-Way-Ticket”¹¹ written by Langston Hughes in relation with the reality of “The Great Migration”¹² of blacks toward principally the North of the United States is fundamentally connected to nowadays Africans’ mass immigration toward mainly Europe characterized symbolically as the North in our geographical space.

Indeed, written to denounce the need for blacks to migrate from the Big South toward principally the North of the United States or other places in the United States (West and East) in quest of freedom, welfare and other

¹¹ Langston Hughes, “One-Way-Ticket”, *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1979), p. 177.

¹² From its beginning in 1916 to its end in 1930, the Great Migration sent nearly one-tenth of the African-American population from the South to the North. By 1930, 89 percent of the northern black population was urban, while 32 percent of southern African Americans lived in cities. In the country as a whole, 44 percent of African Americans were urban by the end of the Great Migration.

facilities etc. This historical and contextual poem traducing blacks' realities in the past in terms of absolute and obligatory mass migration mainly toward the North of the United States is still nowadays topical to traduce today's Africans mass immigration towards the same destinations (place /setting) and with the same realities.

On the one hand, this symbolic poem both in the title and in the context evokes the same four points of the compass and tells exactly the same movement of nowadays immigration because the movement from the South to the North or other places (West and East) is nowadays symbolized by the movement from Africa to Europe (South to North) or other places (West: USA¹³ and East: Asia¹⁴).

On the other hand, the poem "One-Way-Ticket" with its contextual and meaningful description about the past realities tells exactly also why Africans nowadays immigrate from Africa (the South) toward principally Europe (the North) or other places which are the United States of America or Asia.

In a word, the poem "One-Way-Ticket" with its contextual and meaningful title is a suitable and topical poem to traduce the today's mass immigration of Africans in the world.

Both on the sociological aspects or realities (conditions and motivations of this movement toward other places North, East, and West) and on the geographical aspects (settings of South, North, East, and West); we observe in a thorough analysis that this poem updates the reasons, the realities, the destinations and the objective of all the African migrants toward Europe (the North), USA (the West) and Asia (the East) with Africa being the South.

In addition, although quite different in time (past/present), in space/setting (South of the United States toward the North of the United States /Africa (South) toward Europe (North)), and with the concerned people (African Americans/Africans); we observe that there are many similarities between "The Great Migration" of African Americans in the past and today's mass immigration of Africans that this poem in its meaning points out through images, metaphors, and symbols.

Due to those similarities, the following questions become important to us: to what extent the poem "One-Way-Ticket" can be a testimony and foreteller of today's Africans mass immigration toward the North? How does the poem "One-Way-Ticket" shape, characterize and foretell the reasons, motivations and the choice for mainly the North or at least the West and the East in Africans mass immigration nowadays?

¹³ The movement from Africa to USA (South to West).

¹⁴ The movement from Africa to Asia (South to East).

The theoretical background that will be used in analyzing the reasons, motivations and conditions obliging Africans to strive to immigrate toward the North principally, or at least West and East will be theories such as sociocriticism, geocriticism, stylistics and as approach, it will be a comparative study due to similarities observed between the past and the present.

This study will revolve around three parts which are the context of the massive, absolute and obligatory immigration of today's Africans, the choice of the North as the preferred destination or either West and East at least and the absolute refusal of the South and risking one's life during immigration.

The context of the massive, absolute and obligatory immigration of today's Africans

First of all, analyzing the symbolical meaning of the title “One-Way-Ticket”, we observe that this semantic unit demonstrates at first a movement of no return for all those African Americans who migrate towards the North. And it is obvious that this feeling or perspective of a “One-Way-Ticket” or a travel of no return means that the motivations, reasons or causes for “The Great Migration” are extremely important to leave one place and go forever somewhere else.

Indeed being the spokesperson of his community and following the patterns of the ethnic literature¹⁵, Hughes expresses in this poem the motivations, reasons or causes of blacks “Great Migration” towards the North of the United States like this:

I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws,
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me
And me of them

Through this stanza, we notice the realities to which blacks were confronted to in the Big South thanks to the meaningful lexemes used by Hughes to explain the different reasons and to characterize the period and the environment favoring “The Great Migration”. Furthermore and in a broad context, the different lexemes used summarize at least the different political, economic, social, and safety reasons for which blacks of his time were fleeing the South. And these mean also that the situation of blacks was so

¹⁵ Langston Hughes works displayed the voices of the “folks” in his community who shared their thoughts, experiences, and concerns of the various issues of his time.

drastic in terms of living conditions¹⁶ that they were obliged to flee the South in mass:

New York City had become a magnet, perhaps the most powerful, for the thousands of blacks fleeing the South in the aftermath of the entrenchment of segregation following the end of the Reconstruction era, which itself followed the Civil War, and the segregation rulings of U.S. Supreme Court notably the landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which endorsed separation in transportation. As legal segregation made living conditions for blacks in the South more and more intolerable, the widespread lynching of blacks bitterly underscored the extent to which they were powerless before the law and less than human in the eyes of many whites. Migration to the North increasingly seemed an absolute necessity for blacks seeking a better life for themselves and their children.¹⁷

Nowadays, and much more than the past, the world witnesses a mass immigration of Africans toward Europe. The world today is characterized by large-scale migration out of Africa toward Europe. This involved displaced persons leaving the African continent, others who moved from the South (Africa) to the North (Europe), along with some migration from overseas, typically from former colonies into Europe (irregular, including some regular and regularized, migration).

Historically, Europeans provided the bulk of immigration to France, but immigration from African countries has steadily increased since the 1950s (Fassmann and Munz 1992). These African immigrants come largely from countries that were former colonies in West and Central Africa, and they include many ethnic groups that share the French language. Peoples from North Africa represented the bulk of immigrants from the African continent until the 1980s, when Sub-Saharan Africans began to arrive in greater numbers. From 1982 until 1990, the Sub-Saharan African population tripled, and then it doubled from 1990 until 2000. By 1998, there were over

¹⁶ Those living conditions imply the different reasons of their Great migration which can be economic, social, political or cultural.

¹⁷ Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, "Migration North", *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*, ed. (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), p. 930.

350,000 Sub-Saharan Africans in France (Tribalat 1999). Based on 2008 census data, the INSEE [National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies] (Borrel and L'Hommeau 2010) estimates that there are one million people of Sub-Saharan African origin living in France, that were either born in Africa or have parents who were born in Africa. This means that in a span of just ten years, the Sub-Saharan African population nearly tripled. At the same time, this official census statistic is an underestimate, as I will discuss later in Chapter 3.¹⁸

2015, plus d'un million de gens est entré illégalement dans l'Union européenne, principalement en Grèce, en Bulgarie et en Italie (et dans une moindre mesure en Espagne, à Malte et à Chypre). Depuis janvier 2016, le flot des migrants (50.000 par mois) n'a pas faibli malgré les mauvaises conditions climatiques, la baisse des températures, le fait que les gens tombent malades et que d'autres meurent tragiquement noyés. L'ONU prévoit qu'un million de migrants devrait arriver en 2016, tandis que la Commission européenne avance le chiffre de trois millions.¹⁹

Before a thorough analysis of these verses²⁰ in order to show the link between past blacks “Great Migration” and today’s Africans mass immigration, it is very important to notice at the outset that as far as the title is concerned, the feeling or the perspective of a “One-Way-Ticket” or a travel of no return is this same feeling that is shared by all the African immigrants who move to Europe characterized as the North.

Initially, the migration to Europe ... dates back to the colonial impact but has gained momentum with decolonization, and it appears that it has taken other irreversible forms with globalization. Regulation of migration has become structural and immigrants who ‘dared’ to cross the Mediterranean found themselves

¹⁸ Loretta E. Bass, “African Immigrant Families in Another France” in *Increasing numbers of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in France*, p. 18.

¹⁹ John Meakin, « MIGRATION EN EUROPE : CRISE ET CONSÉQUENCES », 2016 Mai-Juin in *Le Monde de Demain*, <https://www.mondedemain.org/revues/2016/mai-juin/migration-en-europe-crise-et-consequences>.

²⁰ The stanza explaining the reasons of blacks “Great Migration”.

bound to their initial decision, with their emigration becoming a point of no return²¹

In fact, thanks to the first semantic unit "I am fed up"²² used by the poet to justify the first reason why they migrate to the North and which seems to be the main reason of their "Great Migration"; we realize that the real motivation and true reason why we observe a mass immigration of African toward Europe is the fact that all the Africans who flee toward the North are also "fed up"²³. This first semantic unit metaphorically explains a kind of despair, a disillusion, a discouragement which characterize most of the time the Africans about their life in Africa (including their future and their possible welfare due to the realities they live everyday).

Les images troublantes et horribles d'un nouveau phénomène envahissent nos écrans de télévision et hantent notre mémoire : la migration de masse de centaines de milliers de personnes désespérées qui s'infiltrèrent en Europe, depuis des pays musulmans déchirés par les guerres – une migration qui ne montre pas de signes d'affaiblissement... Sans surprise, les médias ont appelé 2015 « l'année des migrants », alors qu'un exode massif continue de faire la une des journaux. Cette migration en Europe est devenue un tsunami virtuel, alors que des gens désespérés, fuyant la violence et les privations dans leur pays natal, essaient de trouver une vie meilleure pour eux-mêmes et leur famille.²⁴

With such a general state of mind of "gens désespérés" or "personnes désespérées", Africans and precisely young Africans think that immigration to Europe is the alone outlet to have a new chance to succeed in life. In fact, the daily difficulties they encounter in their own society and in their motherland oblige them to feel "fed up": fed up about their drastic and

²¹ Hassène Kassar and Als, "Emigration flows from North Africa to Europe", Published on 06 August 2014 in European Journal Public Health (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cku105>.

²² It was the feelings of many southern blacks at the time of the Great Migration. Indeed unequal treatment, poor paying jobs, poor living arrangements and lack of schools and the right to vote and hold office, lynching in the South and the "Jim Crow Laws" are the different factors and others which led to a despair and hatred for the segregation and violence of the South and which lured many African Americans to the North.

²³ having had enough: having reached the limits of tolerance or patience with somebody or something

²⁴ John Meakin, « MIGRATION EN EUROPE : CRISE ET CONSÉQUENCES », 2016 Mai-Juin in *Le Monde de Demain*, <https://www.mondedemain.org/revues/2016/mai-juin/migration-en-europe-crise-et-consequences>.

“intolerable” living conditions, fed up about their livelihood, fed up about the possibilities and opportunities offered by their society, fed up about poverty, fed up about unemployment, fed up about everyday life etc. This feeling of despair and discouragement is indeed the first motive of all those Africans immigrants leaving their mother country to Europe and other places in the world.

Initially, theories of immigration traditionally distinguish between push factors and pull factors. Push factors refer primarily to the motive for emigration from the country of origin and we may also add to this aspect, the motive for migration from one place to another place due to the context of “The Great Migration” concerning blacks in the South. In the context of “The Great Migration” and during their lifetime period, the poet Hughes evokes as one push factor, the matters of the "Jim Crow laws" characterizing the American society of the South when saying: "I am fed up / With Jim Crow laws". Indeed, in the American context, it should be said that the concept of "Jim Crow laws" in its largest scope targets the American society of the South and involves the social, economic, political and cultural living conditions governing the members (blacks and whites) of the society in a separate and unequal way²⁵.

This push factor known as the "Jim Crow laws" in the past can be updated metaphorically today in the context of the African society and relatively to the mass immigration of Africans by several equivalences. First of all, the "Jim Crow laws" meaning generally the bad and intolerable living conditions of blacks in the South so that they may look for “a better life for themselves and their children in the North” may also metaphorically mean the execrable living conditions of Africans on the economic, political, and social levels in Africa so that they look for a better living conditions or a better quality of life in Europe.

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another. The reasons for migration can be economic, social, political or environmental. There are usually *push factors* and *pull factors* at work...People migrate for many different reasons. These reasons can be classified as economic, social, political or environmental: economic migration - moving to find work or follow a particular career path. Social migration - moving somewhere for a better quality of

²⁵ Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system which operated primarily, but not exclusively in southern and border states, between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-black laws. It was a way of life. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second class citizens. Jim Crow represented the legitimization of anti-black racism.

life or to be closer to family or friends. Political migration - moving to escape political persecution or war. Environmental causes of migration include natural disasters such as flooding. Some people choose to migrate, eg someone who moves to another country to enhance their career opportunities. Some people are forced to migrate, eg someone who moves due to war or famine.²⁶

Secondly, we should note that this context of "Jim Crow laws" involving conflict of interests²⁷ with a profitable society for whites while being at the same time an unprofitable society for blacks, this context exists today in a stark way in the African society. Indeed, many social, economic, political and cultural conditions governing African people in their own society shape a climate of conflict of interests with a profitable society for some Africans and at the same time an unprofitable society for the other Africans of the same country or society. So those Africans who think that their social and economic conditions in their homeland are not good prefer to immigrate toward Europe with the hope to change or ameliorate their living conditions.

We observe nowadays that the context of "Jim Crow laws" is well understood in African societies, even if unofficial, when we rely to notions such as: ethnic divisions, ethnic groups, ethnic ownership of political power, political parties and followers, the Ivorian concept of "sefonisme"²⁸ and others undeclared and tacit economic, social, or cultural laws. These notions create the conditions of a profitable society for one ethnic group (or some individuals) and at the same time an unprofitable society for the other groups (or other individuals) both on the social, economic, political and cultural opportunities offered by the same society.

Symbolically implying many barriers with its notion of caste system, the context of "Jim Crow laws" is also seen today in terms of barriers through all the economic, social and political barriers existing in the African society between individuals or different communities or different ethnic groups.

²⁶Migration

trends,http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/migration/migration_trends_rev2.shtml

²⁷ Generally considered as some social, economic, political and cultural conditions governing the same members of the society and being profitable for one part (some individuals) of the society while being unprofitable for the others.

²⁸ The fact to prioritize, favour or help only an individual of one's own ethnic community in a job application or in other fields of profit or welfare.

In Africa today, all the political strategies or all the ethnic strategies implemented by a group/ethnic group/class/group of people in order to prevent the other members of the society to benefit from the welfare of the whole society are barriers which symbolically can constitute an unofficial "Jim Crow laws". So, as well as racial issues have favored the migration of blacks toward the North, it must be recognized also that today, ethnic issues favor the mass immigration of African toward Europe. It is therefore important to recognize that both the execrable social, political and economic living conditions of today's Africans and the different barriers in the African society oblige many Africans to immigrate toward Europe where they think the society is more open and permeable. And also where they think they will have a better quality of life.

After the bad social, political and economic living conditions involved in the concept of "Jim Crow laws" and experienced by blacks in the South of the United States, Hughes evokes another push factor through the following three verses stating clearly that "I am fed up with":

People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run

Indeed, through these meaningful verses, Hughes evokes the general climate of violence and the general state of racial brutalities characterized by race riots, fear and terror, atrocities, terrorization of blacks, massacre and racial tensions between whites and blacks through which blacks are most of the time the main victims because being the minority. The wickedness of whites toward blacks is traduced by the utmost violence and brutalities with sadistic murders or distasteful lynching and shots as we can notice it in «Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States (1919) »:

Georgia, 1918: Hampton Smith, a white farmer, had the reputation of ill treating his Negro employees. Among those whom he abused was Sidney Johnson, a Negro peon, whose fine of thirty dollars he had paid when he was up before the court for gaming. After having been beaten and abused, the Negro shot and killed Smith as he sat in his window at home He also shot and wounded Smith's wife. For this murder a mob of white men of Georgia for a week, May 17 to 24, engaged in a hunt for the guilty man, and in the meantime lynched the following innocent persons: Will Head, Will Thompson, Hayes Turner, Mary Turner, his wife, for loudly proclaiming her husband's innocence, Chime Riley and four unidentified Negroes. Mary Turner was pregnant and was hung by

her feet. Gasoline was thrown on her clothing and it was set on fire. Her body was cut open and her infant fell to the ground with a little cry, to be crushed to death by the heel of one of the white men present. The mother's body was then riddled with bullets. The murderer, Sidney Johnson, was at length located in a house in Valdosta. The house was surrounded by a posse headed by the Chief of Police and Johnson, who was known to be armed, fired until his shot gave out, wounding the Chief. The house was entered and Johnson found dead. His body was mutilated. After the lynching more than 500 Negroes left the vicinity of Valdosta, leaving hundreds of acres of untilled land behind them.²⁹

This general state of violence and racial brutalities evoked by Hughes in the three verses can symbolically or metaphorically mean a climate of conflict or war because there are several similarities between the state of violence described above and the state of violence prevailing during war or conflict. And it is very essential to say that nowadays, this push factor of conflict or war or further civil war is one of the most important push factors favoring mass immigration of Africans toward Europe.

Wars, military coups, state-building processes, and economic crises drove Asian, African and South and Central American people to safer or more economically promising havens.³⁰

Fourth, irregular immigrants are related to refugee crises during the 1980s and 1990s, either because rejected asylum seekers did not return or because these recent migrants attracted further illicit chain migration.³¹

Of course, in the most extreme forms of violence such as war or ethnic conflicts, where there are violent crimes, where people or armies destroyed additional lives and property (Rwanda, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Ivory coast, Libya; Sudan, etc.) Africans are obliged to flee Africa toward

²⁹ J. Lee Greene, "White Things", *Time's Unfading Garden* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 123. For further details about ethnic and racial on blacks in the United States please read *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States* (1919).

³⁰ Franck Düvell, "Irregular Migration: a Global, Historical and Economic Perspective" in *Illegal Immigration in Europe Beyond Control?*, p.14.

³¹ Franck Düvell, "Irregular Migration: a Global, Historical and Economic Perspective" in *Illegal Immigration in Europe Beyond Control?*, p. 19.

Europe and other peaceful places (refugee, asylum seeker etc.)³² Namely today, war or conflict (anyway the case either ethnic or political or racial) is the most extreme push factor of mass immigration compared to illegal or undocumented immigration which is due most of the time to economic, social and even political execrable living conditions.

Political conflicts, religious conflicts (Muslims and Christian), ethnic divisions (Hutu and Tutsi/the case of the Ibo in Nigeria) sustained by some unnamed factors are most of the time in Africa nowadays the different causes of those civil wars where we observe many social tensions accompanied by sadistic murders, atrocities and massacre.

Il est difficile d'obtenir des chiffres précis, car la crise ne cesse d'évoluer, mais les dernières estimations font état de 821.000 migrants arrivés en Grèce en 2015, presque tous par bateau. 150.000 autres seraient arrivés en Italie, également par bateau, et plus de 30.000 seraient entrés par voie terrestre en Bulgarie, via la Turquie. Dans l'ensemble, ils viennent de pays ravagés par la guerre, où des gouvernements compétents et consensuels ont été remplacés par la voix des armes – des sociétés où la haine et les hostilités atteignent des sommets.³³

As already experienced in Africa, we observe that the most extreme state of conflict or war is the case of civil wars. During civil wars and after civil wars, it should be known that some individuals or groups or ethnic groups in Africa have gone through terrible brutality, “lynching”, massacre, or ethnic cleansing. Also, on the political level or religious level, most of the time the environment is not safe for some Africans in voicing their thoughts and concerns on some issues, then they also fear to be afraid or run after by the political power in place. So they try their best to flee their country of origin and most of the time, their immigration is toward Europe.

Non-economic push factors include persecution (religious and otherwise), frequent abuse, bullying, oppression, ethnic cleansing and even genocide, and risks to civilians during war. Political motives traditionally motivate refugee flows - to escape dictatorship for instance. Some migration is for personal reasons, based on a relationship (e.g. to be

³² Exactly in the same climate of tension, when there is no peace in Africa or when there are conflicts or wars in some African countries many Africans flee to Europe.

³³ John Meakin, « MIGRATION EN EUROPE : CRISE ET CONSÉQUENCES », 2016 Mai-Juin in *Le Monde de Demain*, <https://www.mondedemain.org/revues/2016/mai-juin/migration-en-europe-crise-et-consequences>.

with family or a partner), such as in family reunification or transnational marriage. In a few cases, an individual may wish to emigrate to a new country in a form of transferred patriotism. Evasion of criminal justice (e.g. avoiding arrest) is a personal motivation. This type of emigration and immigration is not normally legal, if a crime is internationally recognized, although criminals may disguise their identities or find other loopholes to evade detection. There have been cases, for example, of those who might be guilty of war crimes disguising themselves as victims of war or conflict and then pursuing asylum in a different country.³⁴

After this aspect of state of conflict or war, Hughes evokes also the climate of hatred against one another between the two communities (black and white) clearly stating that “I am fed up with People” (Who are scared of me / And me of them).The subsequence of an environment characterized by "Jim Crow laws", violence, racial brutalities, and by conflicts create as result another climate of disdain and distaste toward one another and it is absolutely safeguard to leave such an environment.

This same feeling of disdain is shared by most Africans who want to immigrate to Europe. They dislike their own environment, their own country, their own government, the system governing their life and future, their living conditions. And such a distasteful feeling is reinforced and most dense when there has been a civil war or a state of conflict in the country because the reconciliation process after the war is not always efficient. It is obvious that such a disdain for the mother country with all the aspects favoring the will to immigrate enhance the notion of being “fed up” when saying in the first verse of the third stanza: “I am fed up”.

The North: the preferred destination; or either East or West at least

During “The Great Migration”³⁵ both in context and in place / setting, the main destination of all those blacks fleeing the South was the North and namely the North of the United States: that is why it was also called “Migration North”. So, first of all, something very important was the movement South to North:

SOUTH-----NORTH

³⁴ Dr. Mohammad Reza Iravani, “Immigration: Problems and Prospects” in *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 2 No. 15; August 2011, p.2.

³⁵ From its beginning in 1916 to its end in 1930, the Great Migration sent nearly one-tenth of the African-American population from the South to the North.

Secondly, the other important thing is the North. Indeed, the North as place, site or setting represents somewhere (geographical place) very symbolical for all the blacks who migrate from the perspective that contrary to the South, the North, for example, offers positive opportunities – such as in terms of peace, work, safety, education, individual freedoms, human rights, cultures and religions – that might not be found in the South as far as blacks were concerned.

Migration to the North increasingly seemed an absolute necessity for blacks seeking a better life for themselves and their children. In addition, swift industrial expansion in the North created a demand for labor that made many employers eager to recruit and hire black workers. This demand intensified when the United States entered World War I (1914-1918) in 1917 and jobs previously held by white males, themselves now serving in the armed forces, became available to newcomers from the South³⁶

This opposition between South and North (from the perspective that, its neighbor the North, offers positive opportunities – while it, the South, made living conditions for blacks more and more intolerable) can be clearly noticed in this poem by the same author when he characterizes the South:

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong,
Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
For a Negro's bones.
Cotton and the moon,
Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
Passionate, cruel,
Honey-lipped, syphilitic —
That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her

³⁶ Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, “Migration North”, *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*, ed. (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), p. 930.

But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North —
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.³⁷

Likewise, in his poem “One-Way-Ticket” written about “The Great Migration”, obviously the poet shows this important movement South to North and also insists on this symbolic place or setting which is the North through a repetition (insistence) concerning the North and the movement sending blacks to the North.

I pick up
my life,
And take it with me,
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East,
And not Dixie.

I pick up
my life
And take it on the train,
To Los Angeles, Bakersfield,
Seattle, Oakland, Salt Lake
Any place that is
North and West,
And not South.

I pick up
my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket-
Gone up North
Gone out West
Gone

³⁷ Langston Hughes, “The South”, *The collected poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 1994), p. 27.

The repetition (refrain) concerning the destination of the North three times in these stanzas demonstrates that the setting of the North (this symbolical North) was the predestinate place for all those blacks fleeing the South and when the North is no longer possible in their journey then they may accept the West or the East. But first of all, the North was the preferred destination because it represents the symbol and the image of a better life for blacks and “New York City had become a magnet, perhaps the most powerful, for the thousands of blacks fleeing the South”.

First, we observe clearly that after the push factor concerning the intolerable living conditions of blacks in the South, there is a pull factor concerning an attractive North where blacks are seeking a better life for themselves and their children. It is important at this step to notice that this same pull factor is shared by all the African immigrants fleeing Africa (the South) to Europe considered as the North.

Furthermore, this movement South to North and the symbolical meaning and value of the North in the context of “The Great Migration” are the same similarities we have nowadays in Africans mass immigration.

Indeed, as described in this poem, the different sites that Hughes enumerates are the same sites that African migrants target today with the North being the preferred site or place. Because the destination of the North of the United States that Hughes used to mention is metaphorically the same destination of the North that Europe represents nowadays. And due to the fact that Africa is considered as the South (reference to countries of the South) and Europe is considered as the North (reference to countries of the North), we observe also a similar movement from Africa (the South) to Europe (the North) like was the same movement that blacks in United States used to follow.

Of course, “under “everything being the same” conditions, a decision of a migrant as to where to emigrate will depend on the expected income in one country vs. another.”³⁸ That is why the same choice of the symbolic North in today’s mass immigration³⁹ is favored by the same hope and pull factors favoring the past “Great Migration” and the result is this influx and flow of immigrants toward Europe nowadays

This ‘dilemma’ has been seen as the result of the coincidence of ‘unstoppable migration flows’, strong incentives, ‘porous borders’ and the fact that

³⁸ Branko Milanovic, “The choice of place” in *Migration Vs. the Welfare State?* May 16, 2017, <https://www.theglobalist.com/migration-vs-the-welfare-state/>

³⁹ The North in the past and the North in today’s immigration embody the same characteristics and the same symbolical values in terms of pull factors.

‘enforcement to keep out all illegal immigrants [is] impractical’ (Johnson and Fitzgerald, 2003: 5).⁴⁰

Europe (the North) is characterized as a society that combines economic growth with high living standards and good working conditions, including universal health care, free higher education, strong labor protections and regulations, and generous welfare programs in areas such as unemployment insurance, retirement pensions, and public housing. And also the European social model combines welfare states and this include a commitment to full employment, social protections for all citizens, social inclusion, and democracy. European states, those rich countries, experienced higher growth rates and such a larger welfare and more developed welfare states will be more attractive for African migrants; that is why the pull factor of the past “Great Migration” is still the pull factor of today’s Africans mass immigration. And as well as blacks in the past were fleeing North seeking a better life for themselves and their children, “We all travel to get to plant a new life. We Africans we believe that if you go to Europe your life is good.”⁴¹

International migration to Europe more generally, and to France, specifically, is not a result of a labor shortage pull factor today. Rather, it should be viewed in terms of a push factor as individuals migrate from poorer to richer countries in search of greater economic opportunity. A quick perusal of the ten poorest countries in the world shows that all ten are located in Sub-Saharan Africa (International Monetary Fund 2011). Sub-Saharan Africans migrate to France for many reasons, and Europe is a demographic pull for people seeking a higher standard of living, political stability, and human rights.⁴²

Today’s Africans mass immigration usually happens as a result of a combination of these push and pull factors. And the characteristics of the North in terms of pull factors (higher employment, more wealth, better services, good climate, safer, less crime, political stability) favor most of the time economic migration

⁴⁰ Franck Düvell, “The Irregular Migration Dilemma” in *Illegal Immigration in Europe Beyond Control?*, p. 6.

⁴¹ According to Patrick Jabbi, 27, a Congolese migrant in “African migrants: What really drives them to Europe?”<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2015/06/african-migrants-drives-europe-150604124356795.html>

⁴² Loretta E. Bass, “African Immigrant Families in Another France” in *Increasing numbers of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in France*, p. 19.

Ce mouvement se compose entièrement de migrants « illégaux » et irréguliers, qui viennent avec l'espoir de ne pas être refoulés. Il s'agit d'une crise durable qui empire – avec une partie de *véritables réfugiés* qui fuient pour sauver leur vie et une partie de *migrants économiques* qui cherchent une vie meilleure.⁴³

The absolute refusal of the South and risking one's life

The South of the United States of their time characterized as a site where there is no place for a black to stay because of "Jim Crow laws", racial violence, cruelty, lynching and hatred. Blacks see migration to North as “an absolute necessity” for them. This in turns means also that there is an absolute refusal of the South and this feeling and decision is well noticed when the poet says:

Any place that is
North and East,
And not Dixie.

Any place that is
North and West,
And not South.

On a one-way ticket-
Gone up North
Gone out West
Gone

Through the expressions (And not Dixie/And not South), the absolute refusal of the South is better understood due to the issues (push factors) and thanks to the hope (pull factors) favoring this “Great Migration”. And also the absolute refusal of the South is seen through the migration wave during that period in terms of number of blacks fleeing the South.

Today also we observe an absolute refusal of the South (Africa) due to the fact that migrants often make their own decisions and follow ‘autonomous’ agendas because they just want to get away from Africa and migrate to Europe in search of a better life. Indeed, Africa (the South) considered as a place of lack of economic growth and high unemployment rates including lack of services or amenities, poor safety and security, high crime, famine, poverty, war, political insecurity, etc. Africans migrants want to move out of the South (this desolate place with misery everywhere) that it doesn't matter where they go. That is why the absolute refusal of the South

⁴³ John Meakin, « MIGRATION EN EUROPE : CRISE ET CONSÉQUENCES », 2016 Mai-Juin in *Le Monde de Demain*, <https://www.mondedemain.org/revues/2016/mai-juin/migration-en-europe-crise-et-consequences>.

by Africans will also imply the fact that many African migrants risk everything in search of a better life because “Thousands of Africans put their lives at risk as they go on a boat journey in search of what they think would be a better and easier living. It is a journey that begins with hope, but often ends in despair.”⁴⁴ The decision and determination to migrate means also to risk one’s own life, and the poet Hughes mentions this aspect linked to their “Great Migration” when he says clearly:

I pick up my life,
And take it with me,
I pick up my life
And take it on the train,
I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket-
Gone up North
Gone out West
Gone

The refrain through the expression “I pick up my life/ And take it” at the beginning of each stanza (three times) emphasizes the fact that one’s takes the final decision to migrate and with such a final decision, migrants do not necessarily bother much about the risk of life or all the eventual difficulties this decision may encompass. And in today’s Africans mass immigration this aspect of risking one’s life is well understood when we know that:

This year almost 2,000 people have died trying to make this crossing. And the Libyan coast guard intercepts many of the boats transporting illegal immigrants from across Africa to Italy. We travelled off the coast of Libya to meet African migrants risking everything for a future in Europe.⁴⁵

What is the message one may take from the latest **tragedy in the Mediterranean**, where more than 300 Africans died trying to cross to Europe? One way to look at it is simply as a tragedy, one of the many that occur daily in the world. Another way is to look at it in the context of European migration

⁴⁴ See “African migrants: What really drives them to Europe?” <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2015/06/african-migrants-drives-europe-150604124356795.html>

⁴⁵ Source: Al Jazeera in “African migrants: What really drives them to Europe?” <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2015/06/african-migrants-drives-europe-150604124356795.html>

policies, which have become more restrictive of late. Either of these two ways is, I think, correct but limited.⁴⁶

One major important aspect is that “immigrants who ‘dared’ to cross the Mediterranean found themselves bound to their initial decision, with their emigration becoming a point of no return”⁴⁷ that is why the only will is the following:

Gone
Gone
Gone

A refrain and repetition which show exactly that they no longer want to stay in Africa and their emigration has become “a point of no return” even though

Barriers to immigration come not only in legal form; natural barriers to immigration can also be very powerful. Immigrants when leaving their country also leave everything familiar: their family, friends, support network, and culture. They also need to liquidate their assets often at a large loss, and incur the expense of moving. When they arrive in a new country this is often with many uncertainties including finding work, where to live, new laws, new cultural norms, language or accent issues, possible racism and other exclusionary behaviour towards them and their family.⁴⁸

At this level, it will be important to state that the title of this poem in its semantic scope is very well understood in terms of absolute refusal of the South⁴⁹ (Africa) when we know that all those immigrants who flee to Europe do not want to come back again. That is why the notion of a *one way ticket* or a travel of no return is very clear with the expression⁵⁰ in the last stanza stating with insistence (three times)⁵¹ the idea or ‘final decision’ or absolute

⁴⁶ Branko Milanovic, “The Economic Causes of Migration”, October 22, 2013. <https://www.theglobalist.com/economic-causes-migration/>

⁴⁷ Hassène Kassar and Als, “Emigration flows from North Africa to Europe”, Published on 06 August 2014 in European Journal Public Health (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cku105>.

⁴⁸ Dr. Mohammad Reza Iravani, “Immigration: Problems and Prospects” in *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 2 No. 15; August 2011, p.2.

⁴⁹ As it was the case during “The Great Migration” of blacks fleeing the South of the United States

⁵⁰ (Gone / Gone / Gone)

⁵¹ A repetition saying that the decision to go is the final decision and no one nor anything can prevent them to go abroad.

decision to migrate through the metaphor of “gone”. And even though some African migrants seem to be successful in attaining the North⁵² or the ‘final’ destination which is Europe, it is also important and very important to recognize that recent events about immigration show dishumanization of human being through those African migrants’ daily sufferings

Des canots pneumatiques, prêts à chavirer, surchargés de migrants qui jouent avec la mort pour traverser la Méditerranée et la mer Égée ; des foules de personnes frustrées et affamées en colère car les autorités essaient de les contenir et de les contrôler ; des colonnes de migrants qui marchent d’un pas lourd le long des routes et des sentiers, à travers champs ou en suivant les voies ferrées ; des migrants qui déjouent les barrières en fil de fer barbelé leur bloquant l’accès à la liberté ; le soulagement des parents dans la détresse, enfin arrivés sur la terre ferme avec leurs précieux enfants. Qui peut oublier ce mois d’avril 2015, pendant lequel cinq bateaux amenant presque 2000 migrants coulèrent près de Lampedusa (une île italienne au sud-ouest de la Sicile) et où 1200 périrent noyés ; ou encore le 27 août, lorsqu’un camion fut retrouvé abandonné le long d’une autoroute autrichienne avec les corps sans vie de 71 migrants à l’intérieur, dont plusieurs enfants ; ou encore l’image saisissante, en septembre, du corps sans vie du petit *Alan Kurdi*, cet enfant syrien de trois ans échoué sur une plage de la Méditerranée, près de Bodrum, en Turquie ? Environ 4000 personnes sont mortes noyées en 2015 dans leur périple pour rejoindre l’Europe. Les passeurs et le crime organisé ont une grande part de responsabilité dans ces mouvements illégaux, mais très lucratifs, de migrants, sans se soucier des règles de sécurité. Cependant, une vague humaine, qui semble inarrêtable, continue d’affluer inlassablement vers l’Europe.⁵³

Conclusion

⁵² Edition du journal télévisé de France 24 du 03 juillet 2017 chiffre à 83360 les immigrants que l’Italie a reçu

⁵³ John Meakin, « MIGRATION EN EUROPE : CRISE ET CONSÉQUENCES », 2016 Mai-Juin in *Le Monde de Demain*, <https://www.mondedemain.org/revues/2016/mai-juin/migration-en-europe-crise-et-consequences>.

In this comparative and thorough analysis, we observe that the similarities in terms of characteristics between the past “Great Migration” of blacks toward the North of United States and today’s Africans mass immigration toward Europe are about four major aspects which are namely the sociological aspects favoring the immigration, the choice of the North as a symbolical place of heaven (paradise), the typical movement from South to North, and the absolute refusal of the South as a symbolical place of hell.

Both on the sociological aspects in terms of push and pull factors and on the geographical aspects in terms of the symbolic North and the movement from South to North, we note the same causes, the same movement and the same destination not undermining the relative same people and the same quest.

Likewise the bad living conditions and violence in the South have favored the “Great Migration” in the North; nowadays the execrable living conditions (economic, social, political, cultural and now environmental etc.) of Africans and conflicts or civil wars favor the mass immigration of Africans toward Europe. In the two cases (execrable living conditions and conflicts or civil wars), the quest for a better life and the quest for safety or security are the two objectives justifying mass immigration of Africans.

As well as the North in the past “Great Migration” embodies some important values and images of success, better life, safety and good opportunities of job. Today Europe, the same North embodies the attractive values and images of welfare, labor market and better quality of life so that most of the time we have African economic migrants⁵⁴.

Likewise the movement was from the South to the North and either East or West at last, today we have the same movement South to North (Africa toward Europe). And it obvious that the scale of development between the South (less developed) and the North (well developed) will always encourage the same typical movement and the same direction: South toward North.

In a word, despair, execrable living conditions, civil wars, conflicts, repression and persecution are the main reasons of today’s Africans mass immigration toward Europe, this same symbolical and geographical North. The desire and the resolution to flee Africa and immigrate to Europe are so high that they defy all the difficulties and barriers putting therefore their life at risk through illegal immigration. And the hot question is that each year

⁵⁴ The term economic migrant refers to someone who has travelled from one region to another region for the purposes of seeking employment and an improvement in quality of life and access to resources. An economic migrant is distinct from someone who is a refugee fleeing persecution.

there several hundred-illegal immigrants who die⁵⁵ while risking their life to immigrate to Europe.

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⁵⁵ More than 5600 for the year 2016 according to France 24.

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