

SEARCH FOR GREENER PASTURES

[Reviews & Comments]

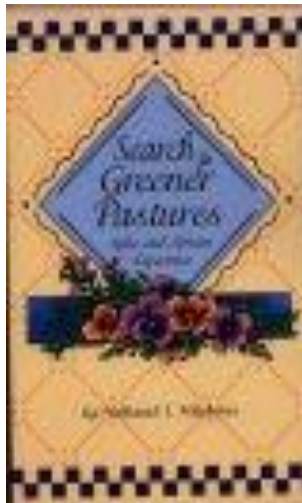
WORK: SEARCH FOR GREENER PASTURES - Igbo and African Experience

AUTHOR: Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere PhD

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REVIEWER: Chidozie Orjiako , Columbus, Ohio



Search for Greener Pastures is a book that will no doubt provoke reactions from both blacks and whites, particularly from the Igbo people of Nigeria, Nigerians, and Africans in Diaspora. It provides much insight into the current issues over which most Africans and their friends everywhere have continued to express great concern. Addressing of these issues that are known to have been behind the plight of black people from the early days of slavery and colonialism to the post independence period of political, social and economic turmoil in modern Africa, Dr. Ndiokwere has no doubt that Search for Greener Pastures by a great majority of Africans overseas has compounded the African dilemma. As he is convinced, it is not enough bemoaning the problems of the black race - ancient and modern. Finding ways out of the predicament is of utmost importance.

Born and raised in Nigeria, and coming from the Igbo ethnic group - one of the four major ethnic groups that make Nigeria the most populous and variegated nation in the black world, Ndiokwere is well at home with the history and culture of his Igbo people. Many Europeans, Americans, and non-Africans may already be familiar with Igbo people of Nigeria through Chinua Achebe's Things Falls Apart and through the secessionist war between Nigeria and Biafra in the late 1960s. Even though they failed in their struggle to break away from Nigeria to build a separate nation called Biafra, Igbo people seem to have survived the aftermath of

the war that seemed to have dislodged the Igbos from their former economic and political position in a united Nigeria. While Ndiokwere examines most of the African issues in his book from Igbo perspective there is no doubt he has in mind all Africans at home and in Diaspora.

Like most other African ethnic groups - ancient and modern - the Igbo of Nigeria have had a glorious history of enviable tradition, prosperity, and good government. Even in the modern era of misfortunes of poverty, crisis of identity, and crisis of political leadership, most of the treasured African traditional values have continued to sustain African communities in times of economic and political turbulence. No doubt, the aftermath of colonialism and slavery have been compounded by an abrupt loss of faith in the traditional values that once held the black and African communities together. The mass exodus of African best minds in search of new lifestyles and economic opportunities mostly in Europe and North America seemed to have sounded the death-knell of the long and tedious struggle for political and economic freedom.

The colonial and post-colonial freedom songs vanished into thin air almost immediately the colonial masters left the shores of the African states. The African leaders who took over from the colonial powers have had little to show for their promises to free their people from oppression, and poverty. The military in their messianic bid to free the oppressed Africans from the clutches of corrupt politicians have not proved to be better than the politicians they oust from power. Instead of restoring peace, political, social, and economic stability they too, have joined the gang of the oppressors. No African State has had the good luck of not being affected by misrule, exploitation, civil war, and poverty - all consequences of bad governance by these interlopers. The world readily points to Nigeria to prove the case that Africa is on its way back to the Dark Ages. If Nigerians are divided in most things they find accord on one issue, namely that by almost any measure military rule has been an unmitigated disaster for a country accustomed to thinking about itself as Africa's richest and most powerful nation, a giant in the sun!

The persistent bad situation in Africa provoked a black writer in the United States to thank the Almighty God for bringing their forefathers to the shores of Americas as slaves, otherwise they, the blacks in America, the descendants of the ex-slaves would today be suffering like their kinsmen and women in Africa! This reckless and nauseating utterance no doubt points to the level of frustrations of black people everywhere. There is nowhere to find comfort at home. Wouldn't any other condition be better, even that of slaves - hewers of wood and drawers of water -

outside the shores of Africa? So Africans - young and old, the educated and the ordinary - abandon the fatherland en masse for the greener pastures in Europe and America. But in their new home overseas - the Promised Land, - there are frustrations and disillusionment. The new visitors find to their dismay that they are most unwelcome to the shores of the white man's land. Those who have successfully landed and tried to settle down like other immigrants, in so short a time find their situation indeed desperate. Harsh immigration laws, mass deportations and harassment of new arrivals by security officials, discrimination, racism, neo-nazism, and Negrophobia clearly point to the dilemma of the African exiles in their land of fortune. The land of promise is also the land of frustrations and loss of identity. Many who left their fatherland to find fortune elsewhere most unfortunately lost their souls. As neither the sky nor the land is within reach, what is the next option? Back to Africa or to die in frustration in a foreign land?

Dr. Ndiokwere discusses the fate of the disillusioned black people in the United States in Chapters 4 and 7 of his book - "Welcome to America!" and "Turbulence in the Black Community." He address those young Nigerians and Africans who in their obstinacy are bent on "visiting" the "Land of Promise" by sounding a note of warning: "Avoid regrets. All that glitters is not gold!" He strikes the root of the black people's dilemma in the last three chapters of his work: "Slavery - Ancient and Modern" (Chap. 9), "Back to the Roots" (Chap. 10), and "The Igbo Predicament - The Black People's Predicament" (Chap. 11). He concludes with a powerful plea to all Africans in Diaspora to help in the real search for the salvation of the black continent by "Going back to the Roots." Solutions to most of the African political problems cannot be found, for example in copycat European systems. Who will contest the truth of the saying of the 18th century English sage - Alexander Pope - who wrote: "For forms of government, let fools contest; whatever is best administered is the best." While quality of leadership is fundamental to any system of governance, there is no doubt that the success of any modern political arrangement in Africa must be rooted in the perennial values of African traditional heritage going back to pre-colonial era.

Concluding with "Charity Begins at Home," Dr. Ndiokwere urges his fellow Igbos, Nigerians, and Africans, particularly intellectuals, scientists, and successful entrepreneurs and those who are known to have made it in their land of sojourn overseas to obey the biblical injunction "Physician, cure yourself. Do here in your native place the things that we hear you are doing elsewhere." The poor and oppressed Africans in Mother Africa look to the African sons and daughters living in exile to develop Africa

and make it an enviable place Africans will be proud of and which Europeans, Americans and other foreigners will seek out, visit, and admire. Ndiokwere quotes approvingly one young Nigerian he thinks has got his message - a pathetic summon on the returning exiles to the task of rebuilding a shattered continent. Remonstrating his country's military and political leaders for being responsible for the humiliating situation most young Nigerians find themselves overseas, this young fellow wrote in reaction to the news of the death of the two most prominent Nigerian leaders - Abacha and Abiola: "So many of us had to leave their country because of hardship to seek greener pastures, leaving a potential one behind. Who wants to be in a foreign land, where one has no self-esteem? Having stayed here for some years, I do not see the advantage I have over a progressive colleague back home. We must keep on fighting to make our home a better place to live." (P. 40)

Was Dr. Ndiokwere prophesying when he warned the "non-returning exiles: "

Igbo sons and daughters, Nigerians, and Africans in search of greener pastures do not need to be reminded by their hosts that they could serve the black continent better if they went back and settled in their fatherland. They do not need to be caught by some new immigration laws before they begin to think about Mother Africa. It should neither be recommended that these Africans who feel that they have settled permanently in Europe and America should wait until they are forced to reconsider their intentions by one form of disappointment or misfortune. They have to think seriously of returning to Africa because their services are badly needed by their countrymen and women there. (P. 314)

When the bad news came, Nigerians were quick to react to the new wave of deportation of Africans from Britain and France. It was welcome news to many and Augustine Ehimhen wrote from London:

The persecution of Pharaoh made the children of Israel willing to go home, otherwise they were too willing to forget their origin, their covenant relationship with God and settle down to eat and play in Egypt. Go home is not a curse. Everyone has a homeland, whether it be in the ultramodern high-tech world or in the forest jungle. Home is home. It is time to build our own nation. We have lived long enough in exile. Nigeria is a blessed land and every Nigerian should be proud of that. We must harness the God-given resources that we lay beneath our soil and develop our brainpower for the benefit of all Africans. The deportation of Nigerians from Britain is not a curse but a blessing in disguise. We cannot continue to suffer brain drain to enrich other nations with those

human resources. Let us analyze our situation and creatively evolve a solution to give our nation a face-lift.

Francis Tell also writing from the United States could not find the rationale behind the call for prayers by a Nigerian religious minister "...to avert this coming disaster," namely the deportation of Nigerians from Britain. He asks: "Since when did it become a disaster to return to one's homeland?" And went on to reason with his country men and women:

Black people seem to pray for everything except the single most important prayer and that is, for the Lord to help us to return to our fatherland. For at home the Lord has blessed us with everything we need. Instead we choose to remain slaves in foreign lands. No wonder they call us niggers, and describe us as being "lower than the lowest slaves, a slave shall they remain to their brothers forever."

There is no further need to straddle the issue for the sages have said it "a word is enough for the wise." Ndiokwere's book "Search for Greener Pastures" could not have appeared at a better moment in the history of most African states and black people's yearning for renaissance. Nigeria seems to be taking the lead and there is little doubt that the outcome of the renewal movement there will affect similar movements elsewhere in Africa and the black world. No one should wait to be told that "Search for Greener Pastures" is a book that must be read by all and sundry to evaluate the amount of research and sweat that went into its production.

SECOND REVIEW:

SEARCH FOR GREENER PASTURES: IGBO AND AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

REVIEWER: FINNIAN NWAZOR N.E.

The work, "Search for Greener Pastures: Igbo and African Experience," presents an in-depth scholarly study of the sorry experience black people in their struggle for survival. In the past, colonialism and slavery contributed much to lack of black people's progress in Mother Africa as well as in the Diaspora. The situation has not changed much. In the modern times, history repeats itself as Igbos, Nigerians, and many other Africans, who abandon their fatherland for one reason or another in

search of greener pastures in the United States and other parts of Europe end up becoming modern-age slaves in their host countries.

With wide and first-hand experience gained during his sojourn in many European countries and presently in the United States, the author gives a critical analysis of the social, economic and political situations that provoke the massive immigration of Africans to the United States and Europe. The consequences of such exodus are devastating to the social, economic and political development of Africa.

Search for Greener Pastures sends a distress call to all concerned blacks for the "Back to the roots movement," a rediscovery of the abandoned traditional Africa values that once gave meaning to life to Africa's ancestors. It provokes nostalgic feelings and genuine pride in the hearts of those blacks considered by Mother Africa as lost or brutally dehumanized by their host cultural lifestyles. The traditional African community is still ruled by respectable values, customs, and traditions.

The author cautiously and articulately crafts a "communal anthem," drawn from the very depth of the Being of Africa and blends a scholarly in-depth research with oral tradition of a culture he is at home with.

Looking back to the good old days, he projects a future of triumph for a race he felt had been terribly cheated out of the game of human survival through harsh realities of slavery, colonialism, and debilitating racism.

Search for Greener Pastures, a work of 338 pages, has eleven chapters dealing with targeted objectives. The Introduction launches the work into perspective. Tracing a history riddled with gruesome and somber pathos; the author provides a summary of the entire work for readers "in a hurry." This introductory part of the work answers the questions regarding its relevance, and proffers reasons why the author's suggestions should be given more than a cursory consideration.

The first Chapter discusses a unique segment of Africa, namely the Igbo people of Nigeria in West Africa, where the author takes his root and bearing. Sounding upbeat and eulogistic, he takes a case for "Ndi Igbo," describing them in glowing terms for their resilience and boldness in the face of difficulty, turmoil and pain. The Igbo democratic spirit and the unionism that fructifies in traditional community development are among the unique characteristic of the Igbo community - ancient and modern. The Chapter makes an excursus of the Igbo communalism that intricately identifies with much cherished extended family system. But it laments the deadly blow this once promising society is suffering from massive brain drain in search of "Greener Pastures."

The second and third Chapters weigh the gains and losses that result from such "mass exodus." Though some vivifying and visible gains are acknowledged, the author contends that the losses in terms of human and material resources cannot be underestimated. He is worried by what he calls "crisis of identity" in the sphere of language, marriage, family and other Igbo perennial traditional values.

Having sounded off the melodious tone: "home, sweet home, there is no place like home," the author moves ahead to examine in Chapters three, four, and five the various unpleasant sides of "the Promised Land." All that glitters is not gold. Visiting them one after the other, he lays bare their ugly and distasteful nature: harsh immigration laws, neo-colonialism, racism etc. He did not forget to apportion blame to victims of such "slavic" reality immersed in the feverish cult of mediocrity, and inferiority complex. He lashes at them strongly for their backwardness. At the same time he encourages them to buckle up like their white counterpart in pursuit of a decent and responsible lifestyle.

The leaders of the black people in Mother Africa as well as in the Diaspora never folded their hands in the struggle for the survival of the black race. The contributions of some black leaders were extolled in Chapter six in "Back to Africa Movement." These black leaders who are considered great African ancestors are seen as role models whose contributions toward the liberation of the black race and its development should always be valued.

The future of the black race is uncertain. This was discussed in Chapters seven and eight. Among the stumbling blocks to development is the unworkable political system of government that the new leaders of African countries adopt. The author argues that foreign political systems like all exotic cultural elements will not be capable of turning Africa around politically. Only homegrown political ideology, he opines, can stand the political climate of Africa.

The lingering influence of slavery in Africa and in the New World is evident in the modern times. In Chapter Nine, the author persuades his readers to share with him some of the thoughts, that most other authors - black and white - who have written on slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, neo-nazism and other similar issues concerning the misfortunes of the black race may not have considered seriously. If the Search for Greener Pastures has contributed anything of reflective value about the problems of black people globally, the author thinks it lies especially in this chapter on Slavery – Ancient and Modern. It touches on

a concept that should be of concern to blacks everywhere. It raises no false alarms. The chapter examines the hidden implications of search for greener pastures and the mass exodus of black people from Africa and immigration to the other parts of the world as their own world suffers from many pains of deprivation and oppression. Neo-Slavery or Slave Trade in a New Garb, is a reality today! As the Scriptures put it, it is "Old wine in new wineskin!"

There is need for a "new beginning" for Africa and blacks of the Diaspora. One of the important ways of tackling black people's problems lies is the "Back to the roots movement" Invoking earlier sentiments of pride in things black, the author examines the various philosophical and cultural movements that promoted black cause in Mother Africa and in the United States. They include Negritude Movement, the Harlem Movement and "Authenticite Africaine", which had their goals in drawing attention of all black people to the basics, the roots and to the perennial traditional African values. In these two last Chapters ten and eleven the author warns on the consequences of inaction on the part of black people and their leaders in both Mother Africa and in the Diaspora. He warns that "letting the sleeping dog lie," an attitude that has not only fanned into flame the embers of slavery and neo-colonialism, but also has helped foster the backwardness of the black race would lead to further exodus of more Africans, including the best brains, and the loss of the opportunity to salvage the continent whose future appears gloomy on the horizon.

In Search for Greener Pastures, Dr. Ndiokwere has shown an exceptional courage and down-right rigor in delving into areas so many people know to be true but lack the gut to wade in for fear of criticism. Here the author stands tall in this work by not circumventing the truth. Whether his propositions are acceptable to all or not, surely history will vindicate him for showing some deep, heart-felt sentiments for his people. In the annals of the vast continent of Africa, his work will claim its position among the rest who had made similar contributions for the betterment of Africa.

Search for Greener Pastures: Igbo and African Experience merits an honored place among college and university textbooks for Black and Igbo studies. The book is embellished with scholarly, in-depth and rigorous research, and presents an author, who is very much at home with his traditional society alive with its customs, traditions and values. It is an honor and privilege to be associated with this work.

Third Review of
Search for Greener Pastures &
The Third Millennium Church

By Correspondent of "The Daily Inter Lake"
Kalispell, Montana, USA
December 5th 1998

**PRIEST FOCUSES ON THE "BRAIN DRAIN" FROM AFRICA IN HIS
WRITINGS**

The Rev. Nathaniel Ndiokwere, assistant priest at St. Richard's Catholic Church in Columbia Falls, has written two books that were recently published by Morris Publishing of Kearney, Nebraska.

The first, "Search for Greener Pastures," is a detailed study of Africans who have left their homeland for better lives and jobs in America and Europe. Poor political and economic conditions in Africa over the last couple of decades have resulted in mass exodus of people, including most of the country's professional and business specialists, said Ndiokwere, a Nigerian Catholic priest on sabbatical leave. "What Africa has lost, the West has gained," he said, "Brain drain is a tragedy for the black continent."

Not all Africans who have come to the "Promised Land" make a good living. What Ndiokwere found after interviewing African transplants in 23 states is that there is frustration and a sense of loss. "Culturally, religiously and socially, they're not in touch with the customs of Africa," he said. "Here, there is a clash of cultures. The children will lose greatly.

Ndiokwere's book suggests solutions to the black people's dilemma and serves as a resource for American, European and African scholars.

His second book, "The Third Millennium Church: The Church That Will Survive," predicts what the Church will look like in the next 100 years. "The future is not bright for the mainline Churches," he warns. The Protestant and Catholic denominations that have dominated organized religion in America in the 20th Century are stagnant and out of touch, Ndiokwere said. "Concerned Christians have not stopped hoping that something new will emerge from the aging Christianity," he said. "They see the Church of the future assuming a new form, less identified with the old structures and societies."

The new Church will be charismatic and evangelical, able to adapt to people's desires for flexibility, he added.

Ndiokwere was born and raised in Nigeria and educated in Nigeria, Rome, London and Germany. He holds a doctorate in theology from Rome and higher diploma in education from the University of London.