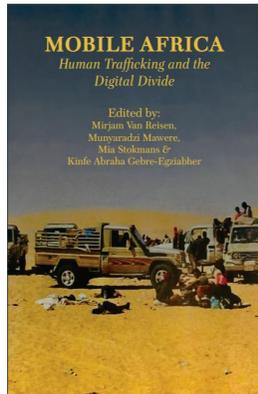


Preface

Chief Fortune Charumbira

Chapter in: Mobile Africa:
Human Trafficking and the Digital Divide

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Preface by Chief Fortune Charumbira¹

This book is about life and death – there is no other way to put it. And now is the right time to be discussing this critical issue, which has become a thorn in the side of those who are eager to see a better world. It is, therefore, my sincere hope that this book will motivate us to come up with a plan that can be used to find solutions for people on the move in Libya and the Horn of Africa.

I am currently the Vice President of the Pan African Parliament, which is an organ of the African Union. It represents the voices of African people. Among other functions, it is the guardian of democracy, human rights, good governance, accountability and transparency on the African continent.

In this book, you will read about refugees and their shocking stories. Their testimonies reveal modern-day slavery in Africa. The heart breaking and horrific stories that I have read here involve the violation of human rights of the highest order. We need to do all in our power to end these practices and stop slavery in Africa.

In Africa, our tradition obliges us as leaders to listen to the troubles of our people. I have personally spent time listening to the suffering of the refugees who crossed from the Horn to Sudan and Chad, surviving the dire situation in Libya and crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The devastating testimonies that I heard are reflected in this book, which is a courageous attempt to understand these experiences based on the voices of refugees – most of whom end up finding a place on African soil.

I have been particularly concerned about the dehumanising experiences encountered by Eritrean migrants and others who have

¹ This preface was adapted from a speech given by the author at the conference ‘We the People! Peace in the Horn: The Safety and Future of the Eritrean People’ held in Brussels, Belgium from 13 to 14 December 2019.

suffered at the hands of human traffickers. These are clearly crimes against humanity. Millions of Eritreans have been systematically displaced from their motherland, with thousands seeking refuge in Ethiopia, Sudan, Niger, Uganda, Kenya, Israel and Libya, among other places. The story of the Afar people, who have been marginalised, displaced, dispossessed, and victimised, is equally touching and requires urgent attention.

Some refugees find themselves in countries like Libya, where they endure cruel treatment at the hands of prisons officials and the Libyan Coast Guard, who's brief is to ensure that no one crosses over to Europe. Shockingly, we are told that Europe's invisible hand is ever present in funding the Libyan Coastal Guard, which harasses our brothers and sisters. Another shocking revelation is about the network of rich and powerful people involved in the human trafficking trade in Europe and Africa.

I would like to think that as the European Union preaches respect for human rights, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its voice must be the loudest in calling for an end to the ill treatment of migrants. Europe, which projects itself as a champion and enforcer of human rights, risks losing dignity and integrity if it continues to contribute to the inhumane and degrading treatment of African migrants.

On behalf of the Pan African Parliament, I can say that we now have a full picture of what is going on in Libya and in the Horn. My heart bleeds when we talk about the slavery of the people of Africa. I see our people following a familiar, but unpleasant, journey; one that our forefathers travelled during the slave trade. As Vice President of the Pan African Parliament, I can assure you that we will compile all the sad stories that I have heard and present them to the parliament.

Also, as President of the Chief Council in my home country, Zimbabwe, I am the custodian of our morals and cultural values.

Hence, I know very well that it is shockingly evil to treat a human being as an animal. In African culture, human life is sacrosanct and we respect both the living and the dead. It is, therefore, worrying when our colleagues across the oceans in the European Union seem to take a lukewarm approach to ending these problems, which are affecting innocent people. In order to have a world in which human beings are treated as equals, it is high time that we embrace democracy in its totality. People, no matter which part of the world they come from, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Today, Africans are being seen as a ‘nuisance’ in the West, with many of our brothers and sisters perishing as they try to run away from their countries. We need to have a deeper understanding of how this whole thing started. The problems affecting the Third World, especially the African continent, are explicable in terms of history. An attempt to understand the continent outside the various historical trajectories it went through is an exercise in futility. The continent lacks a distinctive historicity, hence, Mbembe (1992) describes the postcolonial situation in Africa as “chaotically pluralistic”.

Because of the emotive nature of this subject, allow me to be blunt by saying that the problems that we have in Africa, at large, and in the Horn, in particular, are the creation of those who sat somewhere in Berlin in 1884 and divided up our motherland. What followed only worked to brew chaos in Africa. At that time, the Europeans themselves were illegal migrants in Africa. But today they are treating our brothers and sisters as animals. The historical legacy of slavery, colonialism and the perpetual struggle to find authentic self-expression has only served to produce multifaceted challenges. At the heart of these struggles lies the need to achieve distributive justice in the face of material lack and political gamesmanship.

The embers of hope ignited by colonial independence are fast dying, with mass disillusionment, civil unrest and structural violence threatening the very foundations of independence. The use of force,

coercion and brutality to achieve political goals has remained indelibly etched on the people in the Horn of Africa. Such use of violence to quell real or perceived threats to national security has left deep scars on communities in Africa. There is an apparent lack of open dialogue about the need to correct past and ongoing threats to peace, resulting in the sustenance of both open and latent strife among citizens.

Let me thank the editors of this book for their valuable efforts to make this important publication a reality. To Professor Mirjam Van Reisen, please accept my sincere and deep felt gratitude. To Professor Munyaradzi Mawere, who is a prolific writer and an African philosopher who makes Africa proud, and to all the editors and authors who have put their heart and soul into this book, I thank you all. When I was invited to contribute the foreword to this book, I did not hesitate because I am aware that this publication has the potential to transform the lives of millions of people who are suffering.

There is urgent need for the European Union and African Union to find each other and to call for an end to the ill-treatment of migrants. We urge the European Union to take a common position and speak with one strong voice against the ill-treatment of Eritreans and other Africans. I call upon political leaders and other stakeholders to come up with a catalogue of issues and a clear plan of action for what needs to be done, and I promise that I will present the same to the Pan African Parliament and the African Heads of States. The Pan African Parliament will also engage the European Parliament on the matter. The African Union, under the framework of EU-AU strategy, will be seized with the matter.

Hon. Chief Fortune Charumbira
Vice-President Pan African Parliament

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