

MIGRATION CRISIS AND THE AFRICA'S DILEMMA ON THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA**ASHIRU IBRAHIM ZURMI**Department of Liberal Studies,
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+2348027216098**ABSTRACT**

The quest for greener pasture in foreign lands especially in Europe by Africans crossing the Mediterranean Sea is alarming. This dicey migratory movement without proper means of transport has created a lacuna and opened a Pandora box with regard to African level of unemployment especially among the youth. Recently, one of the major issues or headlines on the media is the reported problem of thousands of Africans submerging in the Mediterranean Sea off Libyan coast and near the Italian island of Lampedusa all in search for better life. The paper seeks to find the causes and impact of transmigration on African continent most especially as it affects Nigeria and West Africa. Consequently, the research which adopted communication theory to explain the nature of the problem; used secondary sources of data like text books, magazines, journals, newspapers and internet sources. In the course of this academic search of objective reality, the paper discovered that some migrants were forced to flee as a result of famine, drought, political persecution, while others wholly migrated for economic reasons. In the final analysis recommendations were given in order to ameliorate this menace that has eaten deep the fabric of social relations and is about to affect diplomatic relations of the affected countries. (The paper thus recommends that official visits should be encouraged between and among countries facing this challenge. For example, the Nigerian Inspector General of police, the Director-General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and their likes should come out with diplomatic measures to strengthen the bond of solidarity through the means of good offices and paying homage to the concern countries; this will help in enforcing restrictions on the international irregular migration system.

KEYWORDS: *Mediterranean Sea, Migration, Africa, International Law.*

INTRODUCTION

International migration is a major social reality of our time. Human migration is an age-old phenomenon that stretches back to the earliest periods of human history. In the modern era, emigration and immigration continue to provide states, societies and migrants with many opportunities. In 2015, 3.3% of the world's population was estimated to be international migrants (IOM, World Migration Report, 2018). In today's increasingly interconnected world, international migration has become a reality that touches nearly all corners of the globe (International Migration Report, 2017:1). It prevails an opportunity for one to made it easier, cheaper and faster for people to move in search of jobs opportunity, education and quality of life. At the same time conflict, poverty, inequality and a lack of sustainable livelihoods compel people to leave their homes to seek a better future for themselves and their families abroad.

The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly in recent years, reaching 258 million in 2017. Over 60 percent of all international migrants live in Asia (80 million), or Europe (78 million), Northern America hosted the third largest number of international migrant (58 million) followed by Africa (25 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (10 million) and Oceania (8 million) (International Migration Report, 2017).

Among them are immigrants who have resettled in the receiving countries. Refugees who have been accepted in a country where living conditions are safer or who are temporarily abroad to earn a living. For many of them migration has provided opportunities and the possibilities to look at the future with more confidence. For many others, however, migration is harsh reality entailing difficult working and living conditions (Ladan, 2004).

The illegal migration of African population to Europe has become a thorny issue today and caused motley of problems to the image of the most populous black continent and has jaded the Africans in the eyes of others. The predominance of Tran's human or peripatetic occupations such as farming, fishing, grazing and trading was one factor that did not allow for strict or linear delimitation of communities within

fixed boundaries. Whatever boundaries existed were taken to be zones of contact and inter-change as the long history of established relations between west and North Africa through the era of dumb-barter to the organized trans-Saharan networks. The arrival of Islam from North Africa through traders and itinerant preachers added to the element of permeability of pre-colonial boundaries.

Migration due to drought, famine, wars and other adversities have scattered Shuwa Arabs throughout the Sahel region (Ladan, 2004). Free movement of people within and between regions has therefore, been an antiquated phenomenon in Africa.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from his or her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes of the movements are; (4) what the length of the stay is (www.iom.int). (The pattern of the journey is characterized with a lot of uncertainties largely because of pantheon of risks involve. The migrants heavily rely on illegal routes and porous borders of West Africa connecting them to the Sahara Desert; a situation that threatens the migrants and risk of dehydration becomes obvious. In many instances migrants can be buried alive by the desert sand storm. It likewise involves maritime journey on the Mediterranean which in quite number of times caused the migrants to submerge. In so many instances' migrants lose their lives because of poor means of transportation. They depend on fishing boats instead of highly and sophisticated ships. Over loading of boats atimes leads to loss of lives of the migrants. While those who survived the inglorious journey, especially the women folk ended being prostitutes and commercial sex workers a bad development for Africa and Africans.

Theoretical Framework

The research adopts Lee's theory of migration. Lee's laws bifurcate the causes of migration into push and pull factors. Push factors are things that are unfavorable about the area that one lives in and pull factors are things that attract one to another area. He also conceptualized factors associated with the decision to migrate and the process of migration into the following categories (1) factors associated with the area of origin (2) factors associated with the area of destination (3) intervening obstacles (4) personal factors. The proponent of this theory is Everett Lee.

Central to this paper is how Africans especially youth engage in uncertain journeys to Europe through Sahara Desert and then crossing the Mediterranean Sea to escape persecution, threats, famine, and desire to secure better employment, serene environment and better standard of living in their perceived Eldorado with regard to their journeys to Europe to make ends **meet. RESEARCH GAP**

The work attempts to fill the existing gap in the literature. Several works have preceded this, as there are myriad of extant literature which dealt with the issues of migration such as Ladan (2007), Nwalutu (2017) and Kohnert (2007). However, their writings did not actually concentrate on the challenges of Africans especially those from Sahel and Sahara regions on the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the work aims at bridging this gap. (Except per force in the main stream media, much is not written on the challenges of migration in this part of Africa and the plight of the youth to emigrate from the continent especially the massive explosion to Europe.

Reasons for Migration

Many migrants move for economic reasons others face extreme economic vulnerability in their home country and see no choice but migrating to survive. Some work legally while others have no work permit and are employed in the shadow economy.

Migrants move not only for themselves but also for their families. They send money back home, thereby enabling their relatives to live better lives. Migrants ---sending countries are also interested in these remittances which play a key role in their economy, Nigeria received 19.75 billion US dollar in 2010 and 18.96 billion US dollar in 2015 (IOM, World Migration Report, 2018:31). Other migrants move because of political circumstances. They flee war, civil strife, ethnic conflict, violations of human rights or other circumstances. Some are recognized as refugees straight away, often in neighboring countries, others become asylum-seekers. Asylum seekers and refugees are not always entitled to work, but may work illegally (Ladan, 2004).

Migration from Africa is a reflection of its socio-economic dynamics over time. In the past decade the number of refugees from conflict regions in Africa increased dramatically (Kohnert, 2007) argued that between 1993 and 2002, the population of 27 out of 53 African states suffered from violent conflicts. This may be one of the reasons why African population is on the front line of transmigration to Europe.

Kohnert further added that “there are push and pull factors associated with this phenomenon. He opined that, apart from push factors like violent conflicts gross human rights violations, population pressure, degradation of natural resources, and poverty, the major part of current migration is due to external pull factors. Notably young people, threatened by unemployment and lack of perspectives in their home country are eager to try their luck in what may appear to them at first sight as their El Dorado... he further argued that according to estimates of the Migration Policy Institute, there are some seven to eight million irregular African immigrants living in the E.U, mostly in its southern parts” (Kohnert, 2007:7).

More recently the dimension of migration has been shifted to Europe from West Africa specifically from the fringes of Sahara where thousands of migrants risk their lives, embarking on inglorious journey of uncertainty first crossing the popular and alarmingly dry sand storm of the Sahara to Libya from where they enter into a floating casket (i.e., fishing boats) through the much-watered Mediterranean Sea to Italy from where they scatter into Malta and other European countries. Along this scary maritime route, a lot of migrant's risk losing their lives. For example, on Monday April 20th, 2015, as many as 700 migrants were feared dead after their 20-meter-long boat capsized in the Mediterranean; about 70 miles from Libyan coast and south to the southern Italian island of Lampedusa as a large merchant approach it (Daily Trust, April 24, 2015). So disappointing is how sporadically this menace continues to occur, as the numbers of deaths keep on rising at least by 19th May, 2015, the total figure of the migrants died, trying to cross the Mediterranean has increased to 1,829, a 20-fold increase on the same period in 2014. This horrible marine macabre is embarrassing and disappointing to the African continent and its leaders. One of the migrants AstoyFallDia from Senegal said; she knew how to swim and stayed close to the dinghy. She described hearing the “boom” of an explosion, before the merchant ship came to the rescue.

One of the major sources of concern in respect to migration is lack of reliable figure of those that lost their lives while trying to reach Europe along the dicey route that crosses through Sahara Desert to Europe. These migrants can't make any impact in the newsstand as only a small fraction of them is known to have died whose information is documented by the coast guards' officials of the receiving nations while the rest were either buried by the desert sand storm or drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. Nwalutu (2016) maintained that “the United for Intercultural Action, a non-governmental organization that tracks migrant deaths reported by the media, says about 6,450 people died in the canal of Sicily between 1994 and 2012. Of these 2,000 died in 2011 and 1,700 in 2012. No account of those who perished trying to cross the Sahara Desert ever reaches the media (Nwalutu, 2016:35).

The Africa's Dilemma

The burly journey to Europe is calamitous such that according to International Organization for Migration IOM, the bodies of 18 migrants, mainly from West Africa who were trying to reach Europe was found in the Sahara Desert in Niger Republic. The cause of the death is mostly dehydration after losing their way in a sand storm having set off from the desert town of Arlit, 17 men and one woman were thought to have died on 3rd June, 2015 (www.bbcnews.com 15th June, 2015). The migrants came from different countries including Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, Senegal, the Central African Republic, Liberia, and Guinea with one reportedly from Algeria, IOM says. The year 2017 has been marked by fewer large shipwrecks in the Mediterranean than in previous years. The 464 migrant fatalities recorded in Africa in the first half of 2017 are significantly fewer than the 1,035 recorded in the equivalent period of 2016. IOM staff in Libya and Italy has reported (www.bbcnews.com) that smugglers increasingly use less seaworthy vessels to send migrants across the central Mediterranean. There have also been an increased number of instances in which multiple boats leave the North African coast at the same time. Additionally, there is evidence that embarking from Libya to Europe is no longer restricted to particular seasons with better weather and sea conditions the four-month period between November 2016 and February 2017 saw 35,448 arrivals in Italy a 61 percent increase compared with the winter months of 2015-2016 (Frank, 2017). Relatively, on Sunday (17th September, 2017) some 550 migrants at the eastern Sicilian port of Augusta as well as three dead

bodies, two women and a child who the Red Cross said was a three-year-old Cameroonian were rescued (www.middleeasteye.net, 18th September, 2017). Missing migrant project data, show that more than 3,800 migrants have died travelling in Africa since 2014. There are many data challenges in the continent, but it is thought that the majority of incidents occur along routes from Western Africa and the Horn of Africa north towards Libya and Egypt since 2014 hundreds of fatalities have been recorded in Sahara Desert alone (Frank, 2017). The issue of migrant crisis is escalating and even trying to disintegrate European Union. For example, the “Luxembourg Talks”: that is plan to distribute asylum seekers more evenly across all 28 EU states, if failed according to Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi without agreement, Italy would adopt a plan “B” that would hurt Europe. Italy has also been involved in a row with France over the presence of more than 200 African migrants stuck at Ventimiglia on the border. The migrants are mostly from Eritrea and Sudan (www.bbcnews.com, 15th June, 2015).

Eve nearly September, 2017, around 1,074 migrants on one wooden and five rubber boats were rescued at sea off Azzawiyah. Among the rescued migrants were 17 children. The rescued migrants, the majority of them from Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana were transferred to Shuhada al Nasr detention Centre where they received health assistance from IOM (www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reach, 19 September, 2017). It further added that, the number of migrant’s death from sub-Saharan Africa increased from 65 in 2016 to 147 in 2017.

The often-hesitant cooperation between Italian and non-Italian criminal organizations to exploit migrants is growing. One example is the relationship between criminals who exploit Nigerian organization on whose territory they are operating. The trade in women from Nigeria mainly from Edo State to work as prostitutes in Italy is long standing. Some of the women arrive in Italy expecting to work as maids or nannies. However, many understand that they will be working as prostitutes but are not aware of the number of clients they will be expected to serve each day. The physical and psychological coercion they will face or that the money they earn will be taken to “pay off” an exaggerated debt for their journey from Nigeria, that Nigerians can operate in these places is a result of recognition by mafia that scruples about making money from smuggled and trafficked migrants (www.chathamhouse.org).

Europe's Response

Italy and Greece which have already seen more than 100,000 boat people arrive on their shores in 2015 insisted that other EU nations must share some of the burden. Italy has seen an influx of almost 60,000 migrants, mainly from Libya. According to Italy's Prime Minister Renzi without a fair deal, Italy would start issuing visas to enable migrants to travel beyond Italy. This international disaster is increasing by the day. It is asserted by migration expert that over 60% of the migrants on the Italian shores are migrants due to poverty not misery in their countries; he further added that there are distinctions between those who are forced into this journey of death as a result of political reasons and those fleeing because of poverty.

Crossing Mediterranean is very dangerous looking at how migrants coming from Africa are faced with a lot of inhuman treatments by criminals at their arrival in Italy. Studies of criminal prosecutions in Italy indicate that smugglers of migrants are not part of hierarchical Mafia-like criminal organizations. They are from fluid networks. One network smuggling people from the Horn of Africa and Sudan to Italy was made up of nationals from Morocco, Tunisia, Eritrea and Sudan with only one of those convicted having the Italian authorities, because of criminal activity after the migrants had been brought to Italy. Network members held some of these migrants incommunicado until relatives in Africa paid a ransom to release them.

Knowing fully well that, this journey of jeopardy could not augur them and their economies well, policy makers in Europe have to immediately respond. For example, European Union (EU) foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, said the bloc has a “moral duty to concentrate our responsibility as Europeans to prevent these kinds of tragedies from happening again and again” (www.chathamhouse.org). Nevertheless, African countries especially the Sahel and Sahara regions must rise and bring to an end this socio-economic menace.

Recommendations

The following are recommended for African states especially those on the fringes of Sahara; Parliamentarians and policy makers across the affected countries should ensure that their governments

collaborate with the IOM and other relevant stake holders with information on the number and condition of migrants leaving their national territory every day or at least periodically. The international community should also enforce the implementation of the migrant's conventions and the laws, regulations and decrees in force related to migrants and refugees.

African Legislators through the instrumentality of African inter parliamentary panel can also seek United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and (IOM's) views on matters related to migrant's protection, including proposed or pending legislation, court cases and policy decision.

Moreover, official visits should be encouraged between and among countries facing this challenge, for example, the Nigerian Inspector General of Police, the Director-General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and their likes should come out with diplomatic measures to strengthen the bond of solidarity through the means of good offices and paying homage to the concern countries, this will help in enforcing restrictions on the international irregular migration system.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is therefore up to the African Union (A.U) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to come out with concrete, workable and realistic modalities to combat this hazardous journey that resulted into the death of countless number of African citizens largely drowned in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. If tangible policies are not carried out and implemented by African leaders; this migratory phenomenon could take Africa several million steps back in the area of development and could lead to drastic reduction of African population that is being consumed by the mammy waters of the Mediterranean Sea, more than the numbers lost in the 18th and 19th centuries to the obnoxious Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

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