



The Drivers of African Migrants to Europe and the Mediterranean Sea Death Trap

*Ndaliman Alhaji Hassan¹ and Yakaka Abubakar²

¹Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State- Nigeria.

²Department of Political Science, Yobe State University, Damaturu – Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author: ndanliman@gmail.com

Abstract

The migration of Africans to Europe has witnessed a sharp rise in recent times with the aim of searching for greener pasture, safety and lucrative jobs to improve their standard of living. The paper examines the issues that serve as drivers which prompt Africans to leave their countries of origin to settle in Europe. The migrants' journey is parlous and some of them end up dying in the Mediterranean Sea before reaching their cherished destinations. The paper used secondary data from books, journal articles and United Nations publications. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The study is guided by the World System Theory. The findings of the paper showed that Africans migration to Europe is driven by the globalization forces controlled by the core states that impoverishes African countries, which is an indication of another world order shaped by imperialism. So also, maladministration, corruption, abject poverty, insecurity and unemployment are endemic issues that force Africans to leave for Europe in search of better living. The paper also found that in 2022 alone 2, 367 African migrants died in the Mediterranean Sea. Based on the findings, the paper recommends that the European Union and the African Union should work together to improve good governance in Africa, and reduce the global economic inequities, that will lead to economic prosperity and peace thereby curtailing the migration crisis.

Keywords: Drivers, Death, Mediterranean Sea, Migrants, Trap.

1. Introduction

Pre-colonial Africa in the 7th-15th century was a promising land for humanity and Africans, because of its political, economic, technological and cultural potentials that were blossoming which rivalled Europe and Asia. The distinct political, socio-economic and agricultural base of Africa were demonstrated in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nubia, Mali, Sokoto Caliphate and Ghana among others (Rodney, 1972; Hassan, 2017). Egypt and Ethiopia civilizations showed highly advanced political system, windmills, irrigation and well organized educational and religious institutions. Zimbabwe also had a veritable political order, there was iron and concrete buildings in Great Zimbabwe. The Sokoto Caliphate boasted of a sound political and administrative system cherished by the

European invaders, and used it for indirect rule system (Rodney, 1972; Hassan, 2017). The period of colonial rule in Africa witnessed the disruption of the continent's blossoming political and socio-economic development impaired by imperialism. The scramble and partition of Africa by the European powers resulted to the stunted growth and crude exploitation of the continent by the marauders (Hassan & Abada, 2023). Closely linked to colonialism was the earlier slave trade undertaken by the European merchants that led to the draining of African manpower to Europe. Instead of the Africans staying on the continent to enhance its development, they were forced to contribute to the advancement of Europe as cheap labour (Rodney, 1972; Thomson, 2010).



The exit of the colonial masters from Africa's political control and the granting of independence ushered another era of continuity under the guise of neo-colonialism. Britain, France and Portugal in particular maintained their subtle and manipulative control of the former colonies by inducing political change in countries that are not conforming to their vested interest of exploitation of scarce resources, thereby destabilizing the continent and enhancing the development of the metropole (McNulty, 1999). The era of globalization which is an economic, political and social homogenization of the world, and the hegemony of the core states added more problems to Africa's instability. Globalization is propelled by imperialism and anchored on technology, capital, liberalization and foreign investment is another major instrument for the plundering of the continent (Scholte, 2005; Hassan & Bitrus, 2021).

Other vital issues that stagnate the development of Africa and serve as drivers to migration include the failure of democracy in Africa to engender growth and human security. The leadership in Africa seems to be interested in collaborating with Europe and the US to devour the resources of the continent. In a nutshell, exclusion, maladministration, corruption, insecurity and the historical evolution of the continent are contributory factors that exacerbate the migration crisis in Africa (Hassan & Musa, 2011).

2. Review of Related Literature

In a study conducted by Dao, Docquier, Maurel and Shaus (2018) on global migration pattern, they found that between 1960-2010 the global migration numbers moved from 92 million to 211 million. That the migration of people from less developed countries to the developed nations increased rapidly. The study projected that there will be a dramatic surge in immigration from the South to the North up to 25% by the year 2050. The

study concluded that the migration rate will be a formidable challenge for the advanced capitalist countries. Closely related to the study by Dao et al (2018) is the work put together by the United Nations (2019), the study showed that in the period 1990-2019 the rate of migration worldwide grew by 119 million. The developed countries accounted for 69 million of the inflows, while the less developed countries had 50 million. The study reveals that the flow of migrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America to Europe and USA is increasing steadily due to economic and political issues.

According to Flahux and Hass (2016) the arguments of African migration is hinged on the fact that the numbers are increasing, the movement is towards Europe and driven by poverty and violence. They are also of the view that access to visa and reduced restrictions for legal migrants is contributing immensely to the flow of African migrants to Europe in search of better opportunities. However, in another analysis by Hofman, Jolvel, Huss and Ambiaux (2020), the authors are of the view that the phenomenon of migration cannot be explained by one factor, but a combination of factors. According to them the drivers of migration are the globalization of economies, values and aspirations, technological changes, wars and conflicts, shifting demographics, climate change and search for education. The authors conclude that unless there is global peace and equity, migration movements from the less developed to developed countries shall continue unabated,

The above studies share certain views and trajectory with this paper, but differ in the area of the role of the global capitalist system exacerbated by globalization in fostering Africans migration to Europe as well as the Mediterranean Sea death dilemma that the migrants encounter in the perilous journey to Europe which the paper tries to address.



3. Methodology

The paper relied on secondary data obtained from books, journal articles and the United Nations publications. The data generated from the secondary sources were discussed, analyzed through content analysis. In this method, the words and information generated from books, journal articles and the United Nations publications were explained and interpreted.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is premised on Wallerstein (1974) World System Theory which has its roots in Marx and Lenin's writings. The globalization of capitalism results to the pauperization of the periphery states and the enrichment of the core states. Wallerstein is of the view that the nation states in the modern world are not closed systems, but are connected to the overall global network of capitalist exploitation. That there exists a 'mini system' or the local economies; the 'world empire' that is, the extractor of tribute from the exploited states and the 'world economies' formed by a market exchange that serve the interest of the metropole (Wallerstein, 1974).

Wallerstein further stated that the core-periphery relations are such that the core transfer surplus from the periphery for its own aggrandizement, and utilizes the political machinery in the periphery to its own advantage of rip-off of resources from the developing countries. Globalization which is an extension of capitalism is an economic, political, technological and social instrument used by the core states in line with the liberalization ideology to continue the stifling and plundering of the periphery states. Globalization is indeed another form of imperialism designed to roll-back the state, which is advocated to the developing countries with accompanying negative results due to neo-liberalism, privatization, deregulation and market strategy as means to achieve development (Scholte, 2005).

Globalization has dramatically increased migration from the periphery to the core states of Europe and America due to inequality in development, fragile democracy, insecurity and exclusion driven by homogenization and hegemonization engendered by the advanced capitalist countries. Globalization weakens the economic potentials of the periphery which exacerbates migration to the developed world by citizens of the Third World Countries for improved living conditions (Hassan & Bitrus, 2021). In essence, the core-periphery relations reinforced by globalization has accelerated migration from Africa to Europe in search of lucrative opportunities which are absent in the developing countries.

4. Migration

The International Organization for Migration (2019) defines migration as a process that involves the movement of a person from his/her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The organization categorizes migration into legal and illegal migration; migrant workers; persecuted migrants, economic migrants and religious migrants. Furthermore, the United Nations (2021) stated that an international migrant is any person who changes his/her country of usual residence. A person's country of usual residence is the place of origin before moving to another country of choice. In line with the International Organization for Migration (2019) classification, the United Nations (2021) also categorizes migration in terms of migrant labour; education migrant; religious migrant; conflict driven migrant as well as temporary and permanent migrant.

The Drivers of Africans Migration to Europe

Migration of Africans to Europe is an intricate and perplexing phenomenon that involves a wide range of interrelated



elements that are ingrained in the political, social, economic, and environmental exigencies in the continent. The number of migrants has risen sharply in recent times. It is estimated that in 2017 420,000 Sub-Saharan African migrants lived in Europe. Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya are major sources of migrants to Europe especially to Italy and Spain (Flahaux & Hass, 2016). The migration process is driven by both push and pull factors that encourage people to decide to travel in order to experience a transformative life. Migration drivers play a significant role in determining the rationale on why a particular migrant from Africa decides to leave his country for another destination (Pew Research Centre, 2018). The need for safety, and lucrative opportunities are some of the fundamental drivers of migration to Europe. The push-pull forces driving African migration contributes largely to the uncontrolled spate in the number of African migrants risking their lives to move to Europe. The number of documented migrants from Africa has nearly doubled since 2010 (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

According to Flahaux & Hass (2016, p.8):

By the year 2000, African countries had an average of 2.3% of their citizens living abroad. Countries such as Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda stand out as countries with strong extra-continental connections, but with weak regional migratory connections.

In the past decades, the major sub-region in Africa that contribute large share of migrants to Europe is North Africa. France in particular was a major destination for Algerians, which could be due to colonial legacy (Kohmert, 2007). The proximity of North African countries to Europe makes it easy for the citizens to move to Europe with much ease unlike the migrants from the Sub-Saharan Africa who undertake parlous journey to reach Europe (Pew

Research Centre, 2018). Migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa especially those embarking on the risky trip mostly set out from Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Central Africa Republic among others, moving through Niger, Libya and crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy, from where they move to other European countries such as the UK, France, Germany, Belgium and Netherlands (Flahaux & Hass, 2016). The drivers of migration from Africa to Europe include:

1. Economic: One of the main drivers of migration is the economic divide between Africa and Europe. For instance, in Nigeria and other African countries, there are few prospects for productive employment which results to high youth unemployment rate due to weak economy. The temptation of Europe's thriving economies, with their promises of greater earnings, better employment prospects and social welfare systems offers opportunities for professional growth and financial security for African migrants. Two of the strongest incentives for people to look for possibilities overseas are the desire for economic empowerment and the possibility of sending money home to support family members. The economic backwardness of African countries which accelerates migration can be linked to globalization processes that impoverishes the continent. It is estimated that between 65,000 to 80,000 migrants crossed the Sahara annually in their pursuit of illegal entry to Europe (Kohmert, 2007).

2. Political instability and conflict: As demonstrated by the experiences of refugees escaping war-torn nations like South Sudan, Somalia, and Congo DRC, political instability and conflict are major forces behind migration from Africa to Europe. People are compelled to leave their country in search of safety and stability due to incessant violence, persecution, and the breakdown of vital services. They set out on the dangerous voyage by land and sea to seek for safety in Europe, where they hope



to rebuild their lives and ensure a better future for their children, motivated by the prospect of political asylum and hope for a better future. The violent conflicts going on in Sudan, Libya, Democratic Republic of Congo among others are influenced by foreign powers in order to sell arms (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

3. Population pressures: Many African societies have issue of population expansion and a youthful populace, which in turn fuels migration pressures. For instance, the young inactive population is a source of instability in nations like Ethiopia and Nigeria, where the population is expected to double in the coming decades but lack social services and suitable economic prospects to support the growing population. Young Africans are tempted to move to Europe in search of better chances for education, work, and personal improvement due to the lack of opportunities for economic advancement and social mobility in their home countries. The goal is to achieve their dreams and make a positive contribution to the development of their communities through financial transfers from abroad (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

4. Environmental degradation and climate change: Communities facing the devastating effects of droughts, desertification, and extreme weather events serve as examples of how environmental degradation and the effects of climate change are driving migration from Africa to Europe. Countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Ethiopia are battling with issues of extreme weather conditions that results to drought leading to food shortages. Many are forced to look for alternative livelihoods abroad due to declining agricultural yields and food insecurity, which frequently leads people to relocate to urban areas or even to Europe in need of sustainable future. Unfortunately, the bulk of the industrial pollution that results to global warming is caused by the industrialized Nations and

African countries bear the brunt of their economic prosperity (Kohmert, 2007).

5. Migration networks: The ability of Africans to migrate to Europe is facilitated by the existence of well-organized migration networks. Migrants from Africa rely on sophisticated unofficial human traffickers who exploit the migrants in their desire to reach Europe. These traffickers are found in Nigeria, Niger, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Senegal among others (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

6. Globalization and information access: Information and communication technologies developed and controlled by the Western powers for the exploitation and domination of the periphery states has gone a long way in making people more aware of opportunities abroad and has facilitated migration networks and routes (Pew Research Centre, 2018). In a nutshell, according to Kohmert (2007, p.5):

Africa's history is a history of large population movements driven by a variety of reasons: notably slave trade and colonialism, violent conflicts, poverty, ecological degradation, population pressure and a certain cultural propensity for cultural orientation. Africans live under conditions of extreme poverty and insecurity.

The Mediterranean Sea Death Trap

The Mediterranean Sea is a necessary crossing route used by migrants before reaching their destinations in Europe. It is a dangerous pathway due to the hazards of sea storm and poor boats used by the migrant traffickers. The Mediterranean Sea is a large body of water that cut across continents which facilitates socio-economic development of the countries surrounding it, and also utilized by migrants as easy access to reach Europe. The African migrants are at the mercy of the traffickers who exploit them to the core by demanding huge sums of money to take



them to Europe. The boats used by the traffickers are usually second-fiddle and crowded by the migrants beyond capacity, which sometimes capsizes killing hundreds of migrants in the sea. In some instances, surviving migrants are taken to Italy or nearby countries for health checks and rehabilitation (Voice of America, 2023).

There are numerous risks that confront migrants when they depart from the coasts of North Africa. Every aspect of the desperate journey is life threatening, such as the possibility of capsizing because of bad weather or overcrowding, to the probability of mechanical fault or fuel shortages. The possibility of danger in the case of an emergency is compounded by the fact that many migrants lack access to life jackets and emergency supplies. The Mediterranean Sea indeed represents a source of hope for people escaping conflict and persecution in nations like Egypt, Somalia, and Eritrea, despite the inherent risks. For many, the risks associated with the perilous sea voyage are outweighed by the promise of safety and opportunity in Europe. Thousands of migrants have died in the Mediterranean in recent years, which implies that the hazard is more obvious than the hope of a better future in Europe (Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2023).

The Mediterranean Sea voyage has become a symbol of tragedy that always draw international attention, but the international community is yet to do something tangible to curb the situation. The European Union is busy implementing nationalistic policies to deal with the migrant crisis rather than addressing the root causes of the issue. The UK is sending back migrants to Rwanda, under a deal, to transfer them to another country, which is inhuman. With over 20,000 migrant deaths reported since 2014, the Mediterranean route has emerged as one of the world's deadliest migration routes (International Organization for Migration, 2019). One of the unfortunate scenarios happened in April 2015 when a boat off the coast of

Libya carrying over 800 migrants sank, killing hundreds of migrants. In the period January-August, 2021 641 migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa died in the Mediterranean Sea (UNDP, 2019; Statista, 2023).

Unimaginable suffering experienced by migrants due to the humanitarian situation at sea includes malnourishment, dehydration, exposure to severe weather, and overcrowding. The lack of sufficient food, drinkable water, and sanitary facilities on temporary boats worsens the situation for migrants and puts them at risk of disease, accidents, and even death. The severity of this issue is further corroborated by reports of human rights violations, such as sexual assault, exploitation, and violence committed against defenceless migrants by traffickers and smugglers. The harsh seas of the Mediterranean continue to derail the hopes of many migrants for a better life, even in the face of rescue attempts by coast guards and humanitarian organizations (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

Policy makers in Europe are confronted with domestic obstacles especially from the far right parties in addressing the mortality trap in the Mediterranean Sea. Programmes like Operation Sophia and Frontex that seek to strengthen border security and combat human trafficking put deterrence measures above the preservation of immigrant rights (Boswell, 2002). Human rights abuses and maltreatment of asylum seekers have come under scrutiny due to the securitization of migration and tyrannical border controls by transit nations. Moreover, attempts to create an enduring strategy for controlling migrant flows over the Mediterranean have been hampered by the lack of solidarity and burden-sharing among EU members (Kohmert, 2007).

Lack of consensus among the EU members have increased as a result of disagreements over migrant quotas, relocation plans, and asylum processing. These differences have



undermined attempts to address the reasons for migration and guarantee the preservation of migrant rights. The death toll from the Mediterranean Sea could also be attributed to poor search and rescue operations, failed migration policy, and limited legal routes for those seeking asylum. The issue has reached a crisis level as a result of European governments' inability to enact compassionate immigration rules, which is encapsulating migrants and refugees in quagmire and uncertainty (Kohmert, 2007; Pew Research Centre, 2018; Boswell, 2002).

Humanitarian groups such as the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) undertake search and rescue operations to save lives at sea in reaction to the Mediterranean Sea deaths. These initiatives have saved many lives. However, the Mediterranean death trap will continue unabated unless reforms are made to address the reasons of migration and offer tangible solutions to risky journeys on the sea (Medecins Sans Frontiers, 2023). The main causes of migrant's deaths in the Mediterranean Sea in 2022 include: drowning in which 2,222 people died; harsh environment contributed to 27 deaths; violence caused the death of 20 migrants; 6 died due to sickness; and 92 died as a result of mixed and unknown factors which makes a total of 2,367 deaths (Statista, 2023).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the death trap in the Mediterranean Sea highlights the critical need for worldwide solidarity and coordinated action. It is a humanitarian crisis of astounding dimensions. A comprehensive strategy that tackles the underlying reasons of migration, upholds human rights, and encourages collaboration amongst all parties concerned is needed to handle the situation. The high rate of deaths recorded annually in the Mediterranean Sea is a tragedy that

can be averted through a formidable global response that treats Africans with dignity.

Contribution to Knowledge

The paper has contributed to the current body of knowledge in the following ways:

- i. Historically, Africa is a promising land of human and material resources that was developing at par with Europe, but colonialism changed the narrative which exposed the continent to Western dependent capitalist economic system.
- ii. That the migration of Africans to Europe is designed and consolidated by the world order under the aegis of globalization to ensure the movement of cheap labour to Europe.
- iii. The death of Africans in the Mediterranean Sea is a demonstration of inhumanity to Africans by Europe, which further depletes the population of the continent in line with Western calculation of reducing the population of Africans.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. The EU and AU should work closely to find a lasting solution to the factors that prompt migration from Africa to Europe.
- ii. The economic and social divide created by globalization should be addressed by the international community as a means of mitigating the deaths of Africans in the Mediterranean Sea.
- iii. African leaders should be committed to good governance in order to address the plethora of economic, social and security challenges that exacerbate migration from Africa to Europe.
- iv. Additional legal opportunities should be provided by the international community for the easy movement of prospective migrants to Europe, thereby reducing illegal routes that ends up with colossal number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea.



References

- Boswell, C. (2002). Addressing the Causes of Migratory and Refugee Movements: The Role of the European Union. Working Paper No. 73. Germany: Institute of Peace Research and Security Policy. University of Hamburg.
- Dao, T. H., Docquire, F., Maurel, M. & Shaus, P. (2018). Global Migration in the 20th and 21st Centuries: The Unstoppable Force of Demography. Working Paper. Paris: French Agency for Development.
- Flahaux, M. L. & Hass, H. D. (2016). African Migration: Trends, Patterns and Drivers. In Comparative Migration Studies. *Springer Open Journal (4) 1*.
- Hassan, N. A. (2017). Colonialism and Land Reform Crisis in Zimbabwe. Kaduna: Pyla-Mak Services Ltd.
- Hassan, N. A & Abada, I. M. (2023). Military Intervention in African Politics. In Abada, I. Omeh, P. H. & Uwaechia, O. G. (Eds) *Introduction to Political Science I*. Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Ltd.
- Hassan, N. A. & Bitrus, M. D. (2021). Globalization and Challenges of National Development in Nigeria. *Wukari Journal of Economics, Management and Social Sciences, Vol. 7, No. 1*.
- Hassan, N. A. & Musa, A. (2011). Socio-Economic Development Programmes in Nigeria: The Obasanjo Era, 1999-2007. Kaduna: Pyla-Mak Services Ltd.
- Hofman, M., Jolvel, A., Huss, D. & Ambiaux, C. (2020). International Migration: Drivers, Factors and Megatrends. Policy Paper. Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development.
- International Organization for Migration (2019). IOM Definition of "Migrant". Geneva: IOM Newsletter.
- Kohmert, D. (2007). African Migration to Europe: Obscured Responsibilities and Common Misconceptions. Germany: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, No.49.
- McNulty, M. W. E. (1999). Military Intervention in Theory and Practice: French Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1960. Published PhD Thesis. University of Portsmouth.
- Medecins Sans Frontiers (2023). In 2022, 2,367 People Died trying to Cross the Mediterranean Sea. Switzerland: MSF Newsletter.
- Pew Research Centre (2018). At least a Million Sub-Saharan Africans moved to Europe. Washington DC: Pew Centre Publication.
- Rodney, W. (1972). How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- Scholte, J. A. (2005). Globalization: A Critical Introduction. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Statista (2023). Number of recorded deaths of Migrants in the Mediterranean Sea from 2014- 2022. Retrieved from [statista.com/statistics/1082077/deaths-of-migrants-in-the-mediterranean-sea/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1082077/deaths-of-migrants-in-the-mediterranean-sea/)
- Thomson, A. (2010). An Introduction to African Politics. London: Routledge.
- United Nations (2021). Final Report on Conceptual Framework, Concepts and Definitions on International Migration. Washington DC: Expert Group on Migration Statistics.
- United Nations (2019). International Migration 2019 Highlights. New York: Department of Economic



and Social Affairs Population
Division Publication.

UNDP (2019). Despite Dangers, many
Africans still Migrate to European
Union. New York: UN
Publication.

Voice of America (2023, September 28th).
More than 2,500 Migrants dead or
missing in Mediterranean in
2023, UN says. Voice of America
News Bulletin.

Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The Modern World
System*. New York: Academic
Press.