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'Blood Money', Migrants' Enslavement and Insecurity in Africa's Sahel and Libya

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Abstract

This article examines how and why the pursuit of greener pastures in Europe and Libya has resulted in the enslavement of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa by human smugglers, felonious gangs, disaffected groups and government officials in an uncertain and unhealthy desert setting in Niger and Libya. Many young men, women and children are easily traded, sexually abused, made to work for long hours without pay, abandoned in the wild and/or tortured to death. The messy governance system in several migrants' countries of origin and transit countries like Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Sudan has fuelled migration, enslavement and insecurity. Those who have endured this brutish treatment recount frightful stories of the horrors of migration across the Sahel. Numerous calls for efforts to mitigate mass migration and human enslavement in the twenty-first century have apparently fallen on deaf ears. This phenomenon in Niger and Libya was investigated through a content analysis of victims' accounts and reports by humanitarian organisations and journalists. In fact, modern migrants' enslavement for cash through open purchase, sale and use for sexual pleasures have resulted in and still lead to many deaths today. Many African migrants who anticipate a better life in Libya or Europe have been trapped and persecuted by soulless individuals who want to make quick money through dehumanising, sexually abusing and killing them. Stable and sustainable governance is indispensable if we really want to address this problem and reinstate human self-possession in Africa's Sahara Desert.

Résumé

Cet article examine comment et pourquoi la recherche d'une vie meilleure en Europe et en Libye a entraîné l'esclavage de migrants d'Afrique sub-saharienne par des passeurs, des gangs criminels, des groupes dissidents et des représentants du gouvernement dans un lieu désertique et malsain au Niger et en Libye.

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Beaucoup de jeunes hommes, femmes et enfants sont facilement vendus, abusés sexuellement, travaillent de longues heures sans rémunération, abandonnés dans la nature et/ou torturés à mort. La désorganisation du système de gouvernance dans les pays d'origine des migrants et des pays de transit comme la Somalie, l'Érythrée, le Nigéria, la Côte d'Ivoire, la République démocratique du Congo, le Mali, le Niger, le Burkina Faso et le Soudan a alimenté la migration, l'esclavage et l'insécurité. Ceux qui ont enduré ce traitement brutal ou impitoyable racontent des histoires effrayantes sur les horreurs de la migration à travers le Sahel. Les efforts de limitation des migrations massives et de l'esclavage au XXIe siècle sont apparemment restés sans effet. J'enquête sur ce phénomène au Niger et en Libye à travers une analyse des récits de victimes et des reportages d'organisations humanitaires et de journalistes. En réalité, l'esclavage de migrants modernes pour de l'argent, leur vente ou leur achat à travers des enchères ouvertes et pour des plaisirs sexuels a entraîné et entraîne encore de nombreux décès aujourd'hui. De nombreux migrants africains qui espéraient une vie meilleure en Libye ou en Europe ont été piégés et persécutés par des individus sans âme qui gagnaient de l'argent en les déshumanisant, en abusant sexuellement d'eux et en les tuant. Une gouvernance stable et durable est indispensable pour résoudre ce problème et rétablir la maîtrise de soi des êtres humains dans le désert du Sahara en Afrique.

Introduction

Africa faces a hitherto unparalleled wave of migration, especially of young people to Europe in hope of a better life. Among the many migrants are refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, unaccompanied minors, environmental migrants, victims of trafficking and stranded individuals.[1] Many of them have lost confidence in their governments' willingness to provide them with employment. Others are lured by the investments of their kinsmen back home. Still others are victims of war and human rights abuse in countries like Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan while others are forced by chronic poverty to migrate to Europe through several African countries. Young and educated people want to migrate to Europe because it offers better prospects for the future. Others migrate to pursue further education elsewhere (*Security and Stability in Northern Africa* 2016: 21–2; Hamood 2006: 25, 31; Malakooti 2016: 104; Reitano and Tinti 2015: 4).[2]

Generally speaking, migration in sub-Saharan Africa is due to rapid population and labour force growth, unstable politics, escalating ethnic conflicts, breakdown in governance because of precarious democratisation processes, persistent economic downturn, retrenchment of public sector workers as a response to structural adjustment measures, and poverty and environmental deterioration across the continent (Adepoju 2008: 13). Highly skilled African professionals are now part of global job markets,

especially in health, education, the creative arts and multilateral institutions (Minter 2011: 10). This has however not always been the case with migrants who go through the Sahara with the hope of making it to southern Europe. Many have seen their hopes dashed through enslavement, torture and death.

In spite of increasing restrictions on immigration, emigration, especially from West Africa to Europe, is not plummeting. There is in fact growing irregular migration at an enormous cost. This is due to the life-threatening insecurity and instability, difficult economic circumstances, pervasive exploitation, abuse and trafficking of vulnerable migrants (Bakewell and de Haas 2007: 107).[3] The increasing profit margin for those involved in the smuggling economy has transformed relatively low-level trafficking groups into hard-boiled criminal enterprises (Reitano and Tinti 2015: 4) in the Sahel region of Africa. While some people migrate for the sake of it, others have to sell their labour power under conditions determined by the dynamics of capitalist development, expansion and accumulation (Zeleza 2008: 33).

The early migrants to Libya from sub-Saharan Africa went to work and then transit to Europe thereafter (Leghtas 2017: 1). Many of them eventually fell into the hands of smugglers. The sustainable returns from this smuggling economy of migrants and refugees have enabled transnational networks to develop where they did not previously exist, with serious implications for human security and state stability (Reitano and Tinti 2015: 1). Among the many beneficiaries of this illegal economy in Africa's Sahel region and Libya are truck drivers, corrupt government officials, warehouse operators and owners, food providers and local migrant recruiters, some of them former migrants who are versed in the intricacies of this illegal business. The local migrant recruiters connect migrants to the network of operators across the Sahel. Many of these local recruiters in West Africa come from Nigeria and Ghana. The *In Tchaga,* a Hausa expression for business operator in Agadez, run safe houses and also recruits sex workers for brothels in North Africa. In Gao and Kidal in northern Mali, business people who import goods from North Africa have their vehicles loaded with migrants who pay for this service.

Many migrants increasingly go through Libya to reach southern Europe although they also use Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. While there is a noticeable diminution in those originating from East Africa, the number from West Africa is disturbingly on the upsurge. They now represent well over half of the influx to Europe through the eastern Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy. Majority of refugees and migrants in Libya, about 80 per cent, are young men aged 22 on the average and those travelling alone represent about 72 per cent of the total. Women from West and

Central Africa, victims of trafficking, tend to transit to Europe over a short period of time probably because they are needed for brothels in Europe. The number of unaccompanied or separated children travelling alone is rising and now represents 14 per cent of all arrivals in Europe through the central Mediterranean route. These children come mainly from Eritrea, the Gambia and Nigeria. Those who get into Libya for economic reasons are mostly from the neighbouring countries of Niger, Chad, Sudan, Egypt and Tunisia. Many of those who come from West and Central African countries, notably Nigeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, the Gambia, Ghana and Mali, come for economic reasons; while others such as Cameroonian and Nigerian women are victims of trafficking, and others still flock into Libya for some form of international protection. Meanwhile, those coming from the East African countries of Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan migrate to Libya because of political persecution, conflict and poverty in their countries of origin. Migrants from other countries outside Africa like Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Bangladesh flee conflict and violence.[4]

Historically, the Sahel was traditionally an important transit zone for transnational crime in Africa, including for slavery over centuries (Tinti and Westcott 2016: 4). Neither the routes nor the roots of the current migration crisis are new. From the Silk Road to trans-Saharan caravan trails, migrants and refugees today follow paths that were carved out centuries ago (Reitano and Tinti 2015: 4). In fact, the old transport route between the Mediterranean and West Africa was the Sahel lifeline but it soon fell into disuse when national borders were erected by the colonising countries of Europe and when West African ports were opened to international commerce. The fall in 2011 of Muamar Gaddafi, who controlled a large portion of the criminal networks in the region, led to a rise in the reputation of this ancient route once again. This has been further made possible by porous borders and weak governance in many states. The region itself does not offer many opportunities for making a living due to climatic and environmental difficulties. To survive, therefore, many are kidnappers while others trade in cannabis from Morocco as well as smuggle cocaine and arms.

From the 1990s, added to the list of trafficked items across the Sahel were irregular migrants to Europe. Major towns like Gao in northern Mali and Agadez in Niger became hubs of trading people to Morocco and Libya. Within the Sahel, Niger has become notorious as the main transit country for migrants and other illegal goods. In south Libya, many smuggling routes have been created by transnational criminal networks (*Security and Stability in Northern Africa* 2016: 19–20). It is therefore not a surprise that migrants on their way to Europe are either kidnapped or bought and sold in open

markets by people eager to irk out a living from human enslavement. They use arms to ambush and seize money, goods and people traversing the Sahara Desert or moving to Libya to work in the building industry. This is 'blood money' acquired through the enslavement of these migrants.

'Blood money' and human enslavement contextually defined

In this article, 'blood money' can be defined as the monetary gains accumulated from various illicit activities of armed gangs, truck drivers, military officers, warehouse operators, local migrant recruiters, food providers and other criminal networks to dehumanise fellow human beings on their way to Europe in hope for a better life. This entails seizure and extortion of money under the pretext of providing assistance, detention of migrants on the move in connecting houses or warehouses, beatings to force relatives of migrants back home to mortgage property and send money to free these migrants, sexual exploitation of women in brothels, and open sale and re-sale of migrants for money. Others are tortured and left to die unattended in the desert or shot dead when they cannot buy their freedom with money. Money obtained through these means is described in this article as 'blood money' because it is at an enormous human cost and mistreatment of people.

Human enslavement, in the context of this article, is the brutal treatment of fellow human beings by other human beings using clubs, iron and other kinds of metals. It also refers to the deliberate attempt to lure people into torture and psychological torments in the guise of helping them attain a set goal or improved livelihood. When people are deliberately imprisoned in isolated connecting houses or warehouses in deplorable conditions without their consent and treated like garbage by their captors, they become slaves. In addition, when they are deprived of their consent before being sold in open places and tortured physically and psychologically, this is human enslavement. In short, human enslavement, in the context of this study, is taking total control of people from when they pay for their journey to when they are kept in permanent seclusion in Africa's Sahel region and Libya all because of weak and ineffectual governance.

Migrant enslavement in Africa's Sahel and Libya

The Sahel region of Africa and Libya, notably Agadez and Sabha in Niger and Libya respectively, hosts individuals who enslave migrants as a form of employment. Agadez for example remains a smuggling hub in the Sahara Desert. It has been one of Africa's most important trading nuclei and gateways between West and North Africa for centuries.[5] ollowing the

ECOWAS policy of unrestricted movement of people and goods within member countries, many young migrants made their way to Agadez en route to Libya and Europe. This ancient city was a last transit point for traders, goods and slaves heading into the desert several centuries ago. The young people who move into this city today get caught up in the treacherous web of smugglers. They are taken into slavery at the bases of middlemen known in migrant phraseology as 'connecting houses'.[6] The city is also reputed as part of a wider system of ethnically derived precincts of fortification and control entrenched in the political economy of the Sahel. In 2013 alone, various estimates suggested that as many as 3,000 people per week passed through Agadez with smugglers taking them to Libya. This figure remained consistent and increased in the years after (Tinti and Westcott 2016: 1–2). Agadez is therefore a slave hub in the Sahel traceable to ancient times.

Many migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are subjected to different forms of enslavement by state officials such as police officers, prison and coast guards, and ordinary members of the society by virtue of the colour of their skin (Hamood 2006: 29).[7] Niger for instance, is a geopolitically complex country and it links the Sahara Desert and the Sahel as well as West with Central Africa. The country has developed into a major nerve centre of migratory movements northwards to Algeria, Libya and the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to cross to Europe. This is because of economic instability in the neighbouring countries of Mali, Libya and Nigeria and internal conflicts in certain regions of the country, periodic drought and flooding, and the establishment of the ECOWAS free movement area (*Niger Mixed Migration* n.d.: 1).

Several centres of confinement exist in Libya and these include Zawiya, Bani Walid and Salaheddine. The lives, treatment and exchange of Africans, notably from sub-Saharan Africa, do not matter because of the money human smugglers get through intricate webs, force, and sale of migrants in south, eastern and western Libya (Micallef 2017).[8] In their aggressive pursuit of money, these smugglers subjugate and mistreat many migrants from West, Central and East Africa on their way to Europe. Many of these migrants and refugees who spend weeks, months or years in Libya while in transit to Europe have encountered various forms of enslavement which include indiscriminate incarceration, distress, unlawful butchery, rape, forced labour, abduction and servitude also perpetrated against children who accompany them. The smugglers detain them in cold-blooded conditions where even their most basic rights as human beings are denied (Leghtas 2017: 1; Hamood 2006: 30).[9] In some cases, mercenaries functioning in distinct zones force human smugglers to pay an amount per migrant, failing

which these migrants are snatched from them and kept in detention centres to be sold to others who have need for them (Micallef 2017: 32). All these mercenaries have been motivated by the yearning for money by all means.

Several accounts of enslavement and incarceration given by victims, fact-finding journalists and bodies working to free migrants from enslavement, like the UN International Organisation for Migration (IOM), have been documented. A young man from Guinea once narrated how he was traded twice while in captivity in Libya. This is what he said in his own words: 'I was sold to an Arab man who forced me to work and told me to call my family so they could send money. He sold me to another Arab man who forced me to work for him too' (Leghtas 2017: 4). Women were more expensive to buy than men in Libya. A 20-year-old woman from Nigeria painted a pitiable picture of what happens in Libya today. According to her, 'As a female, you can't walk alone in the street. Even if they don't shoot you, as long as you're black, they'll just take you and sell you' (Leghtas 2017: 4–5). Migrants have not only been enslaved through being bought and sold like goods and services in open markets,[10] but their families back home have also been enslaved through threats of elimination of their children in captivity if they do not send money to buy back their freedom. The enslaved migrants provide free labour services to their masters for very long hours. This is still not considered enough because their families are further coerced to send money so that their children can regain their freedom, failing which some are shot dead as is often the case in Libya. Such is modern slavery at its peak. It is worse than the perilous trans-Atlantic slave trade of the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

To say the least, the conditions of enslavement in Libya are very dehumanising. Many migrants are held for months in farms or warehouses and only move to the next stage of their journey after they have paid the ransom demanded by smugglers. The many places where migrants are held captive include Sabha in southwestern Libya and Bani Walid in the northwest. Many of the detention centres are divided into short stay, long-term, open camp and repatriation centres (Hamood 2006: 34–5). In warehouses in desert farms, enslaved migrants live in hostile conditions with inadequate or poor-quality food. People sleep on the floor in very congested and germ-infested warehouses. Fellow countrymen from Nigeria, Chad and Eritrea have been used by smugglers to further punish migrants as they connect with home to get money to pay for their freedom. One Eritrean man told a *Newsweek* reporter that 'it's better to die in the sea than to stay in Libya'.[11] Smugglers beat their captive migrants with very strong pipes, broom handles, truncheons, sticks, shovels, metals, whips, electric cables,

occasionally with their fingers cut off or branded with hot iron. This has led to many deaths in the detention camps.

Execution and other grievous forms of maltreatment are common in private jails and extortion or exaction houses dotted across Libya. Migrants are bought, sold and discarded when they no longer have value. Others are imprisoned in underground cells close to many dead bodies.[12] Still, others like 25-year-old Coulibaly from Côte d'Ivoire suffer serious burns after being doused with petrol and set on fire by their Libyan kidnappers.[13] Many horrendous stories like this are reported by migrants once they regain their freedom through celestial interference or the role played by the IOM. Smugglers work in places normally controlled by militia groups with whom they are associated. The cruelty meted out to migrants, as described by a humanitarian worker, is seen on the many bodies in the hospitals killed by bullets (Leghtas 2017: 7–8; Hamood 2006: 32). There is also the checkpoint business in the coastal areas where migrants are transported from collection points in panelled vans or closed-container trucks and militias appea r to collect levy taxes to wave smuggling convoys through (Micallef 2017: 33).

Migrants are also forced to perform other difficult tasks like construction and farming, another way through which smugglers get money from the sweat of captured or enslaved migrants. Others with special skills like electricians or plumbers are sold to buyers who need these skills. Many of them work for no pay.[14] The indentured or slave labourers working for no money are not permitted to complain of being tired because this would attract additional maltreatment from capitalist smugglers (Leghtas 2017: 8). Women are bought and taken into private homes to work as maids or sometimes even sold to brothels in towns like Brak Shati in the southwest of Libya and Girgaresh in Tripoli. This is especially the case with Nigerian women who are most at risk of falling victim to human trafficking. Members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the areas under their control abduct migrants at checkpoints and force them into drill for combat and suicide missions. Sub-Saharan Africans in ISIS controlled-areas in Libya were forced to relocate hundreds of boxes with documentation from a tax registry office to a Ministry of Interior building in the city which is used by the groups as the headquarters for the Hisbah or religious police (Micallef 2017: 35–6).

Female migrants suffer all forms of sexual abuse while in the warehouses or detention centres. This sexual abuse is so widespread that it affects almost all migrants and refugee women. Women are taken out of detention centres run by smugglers and sexually abused. Some are given contraceptive injections to prevent them from getting pregnant but they contract diseases after being forced to have sex with numerous partners. The sexual acts

sometimes take place on the road, in detention centres or informal detention centres. A Cameroonian woman called Juliette recounted how men would kidnap women and call their brothers to come and rape them. They are very comfortable raping Nigerian girls. When a refugee or migrant woman does not have the money to pay for her release from the detention centres, smugglers will use sex as an alternative form of payment (Leghtas 2017: 11–12). Other women are sold into sexual slavery and this makes them more valuable as commodities than men. Still others are raped in broad daylight. Prices for women range from 3,000 Libyan dinars, which is about €20, more than twice as much as traffickers pay for men.[15] But not just women, men also have been sexually abused while in detention in Libya.

The enslavement of migrants however begins with the complex and illegal networks created across the countries involved in the migration of people. The planning is done in the sub-Saharan hubs that include Khartoum, Agadez, Gao, Asmara, Dakar and Banjul right to the embarkation points on the west coast of Tripolitania. The East African networks are primarily in Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Nigerian, Senegalese and Gambian migrants increasingly go through the same experience. The *Samsars* or brokers, who are on the side of neither smugglers nor migrants, control the money migrants give for their journeys and settle any hurdles on the way. Things may however change when the migrant is kidnapped by another network different from the one the *Samsars* represent or work for (Micallef 2017: 39–40). This is usually the beginning of the enslavement of migrants from their countries throughout the migrant journey to Libya and eventually to Europe where many continue to live in slavery.

Smugglers are divided into two main categories in their role of enslaving migrants from other African countries. Some of them, locally known in Arabic as *muhareb*, facilitate the tortuous journey and other mediators create the market for migrants. These intermediaries, referred to as *samsar* in Arabic, take migrants to a holding location and once the number is adjudged sufficient a *muhareb* is invited to make available his services to these migrants. The migrants pay the *muhareb* for the journey and the *muhareb* gives a proportion of this payment to the *samsar*. Smugglers carefully organise and facilitate the crossing of the harsh terrain from Agadez in Niger to Sabha in Libya, Dongola in Sudan to Kufra or Sabha and across the Algerian desert into Libya through Tamanrasset to Djanet or Debdeb (Malakooti 2016: 106).

The hunt for money through human enslavement has led to the creation of open slave markets across the Sahara and Sahel region of Africa, and especially in Libya where many migrants are trapped. The twenty first century slave trade dealers operate with impunity. Some migrants are

helplessly auctioned off in private. Shamsuddin Jibril, a Cameroonian who lived through this experience, said that 'They took people and put them in the street under a sign that [reads] "For Sale". They tied their hands just like in the former slave trade, and drove them… in the back of a Toyota Hilux. There were maybe five or seven of them.' On two occasions he saw men traded in open markets in the streets of Sabha, a central Libyan town. Jibril was so frightened by what he saw that he could not speak to the men who were lined up near a monument known as Dar Muammar, a one-room cabin where Gaddafi had lived as a student. The spot was carefully selected beside a popular bakery always with large volumes of potential customers.[16] In southwestern Libya, migrants from all over sub-Saharan Africa are being bought and sold by Libyan nationals with the support of helpers who hail from Ghana and Nigeria.[17] There are fellow Africans from countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia and Liberia who were once enslaved but are now parties to the enslavement of their brothers and sisters to earn this 'blood money'. They perform different roles, which include acting as guards for their masters.[18] All this is happening because of the governance and other crises in many African countries.

Governance challenges and insecurity for migrants in the Sahel

The challenges of governance which have fuelled insecurity and human enslavement in the Sahel and Libya are not only in Niger and Libya, but also in sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Sudan and Eritrea. The overthrow of Muamar Gaddafi, the failure of the central government in Libya since 2011 and the collapse of the justice system created a governance vacuum in that country. Small villages joined in setting up open camps for migrants in the absence of police control, with a view to making money for themselves (Hamood 2006: 35).[19] Since the Libyan Revolution of 2011, the borders of Libya are leaky, compounded by the proliferation of more smuggling groups (Malakooti 2016: 105, 107) thereby making it impossible for the government to effectively crack down on the multifarious smuggling networks. As a result, the country has been rendered very insecure for migrants to work in Libya or in transit to Europe.

Three opposing governments have emerged in Libya with big challenges for the security of human beings. There is also an ISIS franchise and countless local militias competing for control of a vast, sparsely populated territory which is awash with weapons and has allowed traffickers to flourish, checked only by the activities of rival criminal groups.[20] The ongoing political crisis has led to conflict in certain parts of the country. In the southern part, there is endemic instability wracked by communal

conflict, a shortage of basic services, rampant smuggling and fragmented or collapsed institutions.[21] Many checkpoints have been erected across the country under the control of both state and non-state actors (Malakooti 2016: 106). Violent clashes between competing militias over political and economic control have left the country in anarchy, without a functioning government or state institutions. This governance challenge has led to a criminal economy and illicit trafficking, which is now an important source of income (Reitano and Tinti 2015: 9).[22]

In fact, without a central authority to stem the tides of departure, migrants from all over the world have sought passage to Europe through Libya. They have reinforced pre-existing migration paths, blazing new trails and transforming the business of migrant smuggling into a billion-dollar industry (Tinti and Westcott 2016: 3). The fall of Muamar Gaddafi also coincided with regime change in Tunisia and Egypt which for some time made it difficult for central governments to control the movement of people. This period saw a surge in migrant movement to Europe through this region.

Meanwhile, the challenge of governance in northern Niger is that migrant smuggling is part of a broader political economy that is thoroughly enmeshed within formal and informal political and security structures. The country's anti-corruption agency found that state security forces in the region of Agadez would not function if they did not collect bribes from smugglers. They would also not be able to purchase basic necessities such as fuel, vehicle spare parts and food. Government officials in Agadez have also conceded that everyone – drivers, fixers, landlords, shop owners, currency dealers, and local law enforcement agents – profit from the economic boom of migrant smuggling across the region to Libya and Europe. Migrant smuggling has become enmeshed in the political economy of the area, as argued by Ahmed Koussa, assistant to the Mayor of Agadez. In an interview with the *New York Times* he said that 'Many are eating off these migrants' and the Deputy Secretary General for the Regional Government, Abdourahamane Moussa, is also quoted to have revealed to the *Wall Street Journal* that 'Migrants are buying things, consuming our goods, animating our economy.' He also said that 'People here are benefitting …. How can we stop it [migrant smuggling]?[23] This shows their inability to stop it, or the deliberate collusion of officials from the Nigerien government with smuggling networks to dehumanise migrants for money to sustain the economy and administration.

Several people coming from different parts of Africa with governance challenges use different routes with all the risks involved. Some come from politically unstable countries like Eritrea, Somalia and other countries in the Horn of Africa and use migrant routes through Sudan, the Sinai and

the Red Sea. Migrants from trouble-spots in West Africa use old routes through the Sahel, from Mali to Libya through southern Algeria or Niger or through Agadez and southern Libya to the coast. Smuggling people is a very lucrative activity for militia groups which often compete with one another during governance vacuums. The Tuareg and Tebu smuggle people to Libya through the Sahara and the Horn of Africa and criminal networks are active in the smuggling of people (Security and Stability in Northern Africa 2016: 23). Due to three rival governments in Libya since the fall of Muamar Gaddafi in 2011, the security situation has deteriorated in the country. The lawlessness is a result of the multitude of militias, criminal gangs and human trafficking networks that freely operate in the country and extend their tentacles into neighbouring countries. In addition, there is the collapse of the judiciary; continued unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detention and widespread indiscriminate attacks (Leghtas 2017: 4) which create insecurity beyond the country.

Rivalry between different armed militias and ethnic groups in the control of the smuggling trade has an impact on human security. The smuggling industry is a tremendous boon for an economy that is suffering from closures and stoppages of local mines and regional instability (Tinti and Westcott 2016: 16). In fact, migrant smuggling has contributed to stability in northern Niger in a way. Many people are able to feed their families because of the exploitation of migrants on their way to Libya and Europe. Migration has provided employment for drivers, fixers, police officers, government officials and landlords who benefit from the influx of migrants passing through Agadez (Tinti and Westcott 2016: 16). There is therefore the need for measures to be taken to improve governance and secure human life from maltreatment and dehumanisation.

Good governance and the imperative of security for human life

Considering the heart-breaking experiences of helpless migrants from West, Central and East Africa in the Sahel region of Africa and Libya, and the fact that this is the fall-out of the governance crisis in Libya, Niger and other sub-Saharan African countries, there is the need to promote good governance practices as an imperative for the security of human life. Fye (2015: 28) argues that democratic principles can lead to sustainable and human development. He further contends that a good leader is one who convinces the people s/he leads through positive thinking, actions and results which uplift their living standards and protect their rights. It is precisely the failure to institute democratic principles above authoritarian rule and the absence of a vision of human welfare that has pushed many young and energetic people in

sub-Saharan Africa into looking elsewhere and dying in the process. Many countries like Nigeria, the Gambia, Senegal, Sudan, DRC, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea are permanently in a state of internal crises that have forced many hopeless young people to undertake the frightful journey of crossing the Sahara Desert through Niger and Libya to get to Europe. This is in the hope that life would be better there. Ironically however, the problems in Niger and Libya have often further compounded the problems of these vulnerable young migrant boys and girls. There is therefore need for institutional democratic structures and visionary leadership in many African countries for people to live their dreams at home and not to fancy moving to Europe only to be raped to death or drown in the Mediterranean Sea.

Article 2 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007: 3) prescribes, among other things for member states of the African Union (AU), the 'holding of regular free and fair elections to institutionalise legitimate authority of representative government as well as democratic change of governments.' Many other aspects of good governance in a democratic dispensation are the independence of the judiciary, human security, gender balance and equality in governance and management of elections to promote political stability and good governance. Djindjéré (2010: 1) insists on politicians adhering to constitutional limits on power as this would prevent the military from having the excuse to intervene in leadership and create chaos. There was the absence of much of this in countries like the Gambia, Sudan, Somalia and the DRC, which has resulted in the outflow of the population for a better life elsewhere. Yet, this has landed many people in the custody of criminal networks concerned with making money through their dehumanisation. African governments should promote power alternation through free and fair elections on a regular basis and should institutionalise the independence of the judiciary from the overbearing influence of the executive arm of government.

In addition, governments whose territories are used for migrant smuggling should strengthen security and dismantle these networks by cooperating with one another through joint action and intelligence sharing. This way, the smuggling groups will be starved of money with which to purchase arms and threaten the nascent democracies in several African countries as is currently the case. In May 2015 for example, the Nigerien government adopted an anti-smuggling law which prosecutes individuals involved in the smuggling of migrants through its borders. The following year, it took further measures as an inter-ministerial coordination framework was set up to develop a migration policy aimed at better managing internal

and international migration flows and fighting migrant smuggling. Since September 2016, the Government of Niger has operated a policy towards stronger repressive measures for smugglers transporting migrants from Agadez through Arlit and Séguédine by arresting human smugglers and confiscating the cars used in transport migrants. In fact, the Government of Niger has organised a crackdown to choke off much of the smuggling trade in Agadez where it was once carried out openly. Dozens of smugglers are now in jail and hundreds of vehicles have been confiscated.[24]

The general limitation of this policy of the Nigerien government is that crackdowns on smugglers were always almost symbolic and often only targeted low-level operatives who had run foul of local authorities, failed to pay the necessary bribes, or upset higher level counterparts who sought to use law enforcement to settle scores or wipe out competition.[25] The efforts of the Nigerien government are quite laudable because this can contribute to the security and dignity of human life against those who want more 'human cargo' to make money through their blood. The policy should however target all operatives, not only the low-level ones. Concerted efforts from other countries acting as transit zones can go a long way to destroy the networks of human enslavement as a form of survival.

The IOM and former captives have done, and can still do, a lot to secure human dignity and life. The IOM for example has been helping to send back home those who have been liberated from smugglers in Libya and Niger. These fortunate migrants should be motivated to share stories of the horrors that await those who want to migrate to Europe through Niger and Libya, so as to help preserve the lives of ignorant prospective migrants. Isoomah from Liberia, for instance, while sharing the horrendous stories of migrants' enslavement in Libya said, 'If I meet someone at home who says they [sic] want to go to Libya, I will slap him.'[26] This is a perfect example of people who have gone through very sad experiences and do not want their fellow citizens to experience the same. The medium through which these stories are told should be broadened because there are still many ignorant young people eager to better their lives without knowing that using the same migrant networks will lead them to their doom.

UNHCR can also do much to restore human dignity in this troublesome region of Africa. It is already seeking to expand its activities in Libya to meet the increased humanitarian and protection needs of refugees, asylum seekers and Libyan citizens affected by the ongoing conflict in the country. UNHCR is also multiplying efforts in Libya and neighbouring countries to provide credible alternatives; find durable solutions and establish legal pathways for refugees and asylum seekers as an alternative to dangerous trips

to Libya or over the Central Mediterranean Sea to Europe.[27] There is also the need to do everything possible to prevent West Africans from getting into Libya as the migration for better opportunities has created big business for their intermediaries all along the migratory routes.[28] This can be done by creating more incentives in agriculture and investing in sectors that create wealth and employment opportunities, like energy and infrastructure among others.

European policymakers preoccupied with fighting human smuggling and migration to Europe need to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of how anti-migrant smuggling efforts might impact local security dynamics in countries of the Sahel like Niger. This is because of the complexity of the situation on ground. Elements within Niger's coup-prone armed forces, for example, stand to lose a huge source of revenue if they are no longer able to collect money from migrant convoys. As a result, the Nigerien government might be forced to reallocate its already tight budget so as to adequately fund its restive security forces, thus diverting finances that could otherwise be used for health, education and economic development. Besides, low level smugglers, many of whom are former combatants, would react if they are no longer able to earn a living by smuggling migrants. Drivers are already saying that if they are no longer earning a living through smuggling fellow human beings, they would return to war or kidnap whites for ransom. It is worth noting that the recent rebellions in northern Niger and kidnap-for-ransom are an industry in the Sahel and Sahara that have netted armed groups well over a hundred million dollars in the last five years. Many low-level smugglers argue that if the Nigerien government stopped migrant smuggling they would die or starve to death.[29] European policymakers need to be fully aware of these local realities in order to help support local initiatives that might create wealth for many and not just a few people.

Tribal chiefs who are acting as accomplices in the business of human smuggling in Libya need to play an important role to stem its tide. In one such initiative, over 60 chieftains from the southern deserts of Libya were brought together at a meeting in Rome with the aim of seeking a lasting solution to this human scourge. In 2017, these chieftain leaders pledged to stop the flood of migrants trying to reach the Mediterranean coast of Libya, in return for aid and development from Europe. The leaders from the Tuareg, Tebu and Awlad Suleiman ethnic groups argue that for the right reward they would lock down Libya's southern border with Niger (over 3,000 miles long) which is the main transit route for migrants from West Africa and elsewhere. They also contend that with a whole range of aid and development, including infrastructure, employment programmes

and scholarship schemes, young people will study in Italy. Since the fall of Muamar Gaddafi in 2011, they have been left with few economic opportunities. A critical look at this approach shows that it cannot provide peace and restore dignity to the people who have been enslaved for money. It will only serve as a stop-gap measure for a brief moment. Giving aid to the people will only further consolidate their construction of warehouses and other avenues to continue with the trade. Italy was concerned with stemming migration simply because it did not want to admit migrant people any more. As long as there continues to be inequality in the world, such problems will continue to exist as a means of survival. There is need for a holistic approach which will include revamping the economies of all the countries involved in smuggling.

Furthermore, there is need for governments of the countries affected to develop re-insertion programmes that will re-integrate failed migrants when they return home. This could also be done with the assistance of the IOM in terms of additional funding. Many migrants who failed to get to Europe or are intercepted and deported have ended up frustrated and others indulge in all kinds of criminal activities. Twum from Ghana, for example, was a yam farmer before he saved money to migrate only to be deported to the country with nothing. He is now a street preacher,[31] which is probably what he would never have wanted to do but has been forced into by circumstances. He is just one out of very many frustrated returned migrants. Efforts must be made by governments through relevant social services to ensure that such people are rehabilitated and encouraged through attractive youth programmes that may serve as more suitable alternatives to migration to Europe or other African countries. The educational system should also be revised drastically to produce graduates who can add more value than is presently the case in many sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana.[32]

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that various socio-political and economic factors have contributed to migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, with migrants undertaking perilous journeys through the Sahel. Several African countries are permanently in political crisis, unable or unwilling to provide the basic human needs – water, shelter, food and electricity – for their populations. It is for these and other reasons that many young people under pressure to fend for their families migrate towards North Africa where some of them hope to get jobs in the construction and other industries to

support their families back home. Others use Libya only as a transit point to get to Italy and then other European countries where they hope to work for money and invest it back home in housing and agro-industry.

While some eventually succeed in reaching Europe on boats crossing the Mediterranean from the Libyan coast, many more remain trapped in the desert between Niger and Libya, while others are actually captured by criminal networks in Libya who use them to make money for themselves in connivance with government agencies. This has been compounded by a polarised political terrain with different armed groups including ISIS, wreaking havoc across the country. Their enslavement is so dehumanising that one is reminded of the era of the trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic slave trade that has left a scar on the history of Africa.

In the last part of this article, I made suggestions for improving governance and for dignified treatment of fellow human beings. This demands the collective efforts of governments and different stakeholders within and outside African countries. This is possible with political will but might not last if there is injustice and complicity. With the limited attention given to migrant enslavement in the Sahel and Libya, in spite of its disturbing pictures in the media, the practice is likely to go on – seeing the freedom and lives of fellow human beings continuously bastardised by those who benefit from this illicit trade in twenty-first century Africa.

Notes

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