Migrants in Countries in Crisis: The Experiences of Ghanaian and Nigerien Migrants during the Libyan Crisis of 2011

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Abstract

Using the experiences of Ghanaian and Nigerian migrants who were implicated in the 2011 Libyan crisis as a case study, this paper highlights the importance of examining micro-level factors in explaining migration decision-making processes. It therefore challenges the uncritical use of macro-level factors as exogenous 'root causes' of migration especially in developing country contexts. Adopting mainly qualitative approaches among seventy-five key informants from six distinct categories, the study finds that migration culture, household livelihood aspirations, geographical propinquity, the existence of social networks and migrant smuggling rings motivate migrations to Libya. The paper also challenges scholarship on the 2011 Libyan crisis that treats the experiences of sub-Saharan African (SSA) migrants in the country as an undifferentiated group. The paper concludes that within a developing country context, the political economy of the origin country contributes to the establishment, over time, of a migration culture especially among youth who feel trapped in 'waithood' and are unable to realize basic socio-cultural and economic markers in life. The paper recommends the regionalization of evacuation and repatriation programmes to facilitate the timely extraction of trapped migrants from countries in crisis.

Keywords *Libya, motivations for migration, Ghanaian migrants, Nigerian migrants, crisis situation.*

Introduction

This paper provides a nuanced perspective on how individuals' migration decision-making processes are informed by the broader social, economic, cultural and political environments in both their country of origin and the country of destination. The paper also argues that the experience of 'trappedness' in crisis-ridden destination countries is shaped by the political economy in both origin and destination countries. Ghana and Niger are used

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as case studies to test whether sameness or difference in religious and cultural affiliation and geographical propinquity necessarily serve as proximate factors in migration journeys and coping mechanisms by migrants during an outbreak of conflict in destination countries. The paper is situated within the 2011 Libyan crisis context.

Existing literature on migration in Ghana has examined different aspects of the effects of the Libyan crisis of 2011. Kandilige and Adiku (2019) analyzed the institutional challenges faced in the return and reintegration of Ghanaian returnees from Libya. Mensah (2016) examined the major difficulties that returnees faced in reintegrating into their societies of origin after their forced-return and assessed the factors that influence reintegration and possible re-emigration. Bob-Milliar (2012) discussed the deportation and repatriation of Ghanaian nationals from Libya and the challenges they faced in reintegrating into their home communities. Manuh (2011) assessed the reintegration needs of returnees from Libya to the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. In Niger, the limited number of academic writings tended to focus on the return and reintegration challenges. Nabara (2014) for instance, examined the return migration of Nigeriens from Libya, the reintegration strategies adopted and incidents of social change in the urban commune of Tchintabaraden as a result of their return. Mounkaïla (2015) discussed the management of Nigerien nationals who were repatriated from Libya to the municipality of Tchintabaraden and examined the challenges to their sustainable reintegration. Some studies have also examined cases of racism, discrimination, name-calling, robberies and casual attacks by Libyan youths, arbitrary arrests and detentions, lack of access to rental accommodation, inability to access the formal banking system and lack of protection by Libyan security services (Hamood, 2006; Kleist, 2017). However, a limited number of the extant studies have interrogated, from the perspective of the key actors themselves – migrants and their family members – the motivations behind the migration of mostly young, unskilled and illiterate/semi-literate migrants to Libya. Also, the first-hand accounts of experiences of the crisis situation by migrants have not been sufficiently examined (see Kleist, 2017) while generalizations about the experiences of sub-Saharan Africans in Libya are made as though they are an undifferentiated group (see Hamood, 2006).

This paper argues that even though experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants of the Libyan crisis were similar in some circumstances, they were significantly unique in others. Moreover, using Ghana and Niger as a case study, this paper extends the migration discourse beyond the predominant use

of macro-level factors to predict or explain individuals' migration decision-making by focusing on the micro-level motivations for migration. The comparative approach adopted in this paper allows for contrasts between a Muslim-majority sending country (Niger) and a Christian-majority sending country (Ghana). One country shares contiguous borders with Libya (Niger) and the other is far-removed from Libya (Ghana). Niger is one of the poorest countries in Africa and Ghana is one of the fastest growing economies in Africa.

This paper complements the existing works by asking new questions about the main motivations for migration from Ghana and Niger to Libya. It also discusses migrants' experiences and responses to the 2011 conflict situation in Libya. Key questions addressed in this paper include: (a) What are the individual as well as household-level motivations for migration to Libya? (b) What are migrants' experiences of crises in which they become implicated? (c) How are migrants' experiences of 'trappedness' defined by policy gaps in both countries of origin and destination? Data for this paper are from two case studies completed in Ghana and Niger as part of the research component of a European Union-funded project[1].

To better contextualize the two case studies, this paper provides a brief account of sub-Saharan African migrants in Libya in general and Nigerien and Ghanaian migrants in Libya in particular. The paper discusses key theories and concepts that are relevant for analyzing the drivers of migration, before outlining the methodology used for the data collection and analysis. The paper then presents the key findings, conclusions and policy implications.

Sub-Saharan African (SSA) Migrants in Libya: An Overview

In contemporary times, Libya has increasingly come to serve as a strategic staging post for broader migrations, particularly for sub-Saharan Africans (SSAs) heading to Europe (see Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). However, Libya also provides intervening opportunities for sub-Saharan African migrants who end up staying in the country as a destination, albeit with the desire to ultimately

[1] "Migrants in countries in crisis: Supporting an evidence-based approach for effective and cooperative state action". This larger project aimed at providing accessible, methodologically-robust and policy-relevant data on the migration implications of crisis situations in host countries. In addition, the project sought to investigate the availability of relevant mechanisms ensuring the protection of migrants before, during and after crises in countries of origin, transit and destination.

proceed to Europe on an uncertain future date. These migrants have historically not been afforded adequate protection due to unclear and very fluid policies regulating their stay in Libya (Hamood, 2006). The country's immigration policy has vacillated like a pendulum from pan-Arabism in the 1970s and 1980s to pro-sub-Saharan African migration in the 1990s. Several factors influenced this fluid policy: disagreements between former Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi and Arab countries; the imposition of United Nations sanctions; the normalization of relations with European countries in the early 2000s and the attendant clamping down on sub-Saharan African migrations to and through Libya to Europe. This policy u-turn led to the deportation of over 12 200 Ghanaian migrants between 2000 and 2012, making Libya one of the leading countries deporting Ghanaian migrants (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Kleist, 2017).

The experiences of SSA migrants have been characterized by a lack of state protection, regardless of their legal status in Libya. Migrants risk detention and, once detained, suffer ill-treatment. Sub-Saharan Africans face the additional difficulty of racism from both state officials and the wider Libyan society (Hamood, 2006; Kleist, 2017; Lucht, 2012). Furthermore, Kleist (2017) and Hamood (2006) report that SSA migrants are also vulnerable to theft by Libyan youths and exploitation (including non-payment of wages) by some employers. Detention of SSA migrants, for variable periods of time, continues to be commonplace, mostly without any formal explanation of alleged crimes committed. Anecdotal evidence from police officers and prison wardens suggests that migrants are held for *tahrib*[2]. According to Hamood (2006) migrants understand that this means trying to leave Libya illegally using the services of migrant smugglers.

However, as many SSA migrants in Libya regard the country as a transit destination, they endure these hardships in the hope of fulfilling their dreams of reaching Europe. The circumstances of SSA migrants significantly worsened during the 2011 Libyan revolution. Following the outbreak of the war, there were unproven allegations that a large number of mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa were fighting for Gaddafi. These migrants were portrayed as a security threat and massacres and mass violence against them ensued. Life during the 2011 revolution became torturous. Human Rights Watch (2017) reported that during the 2011 conflict in Libya, armed groups and guards of the government and militia groups detained SSA migrants at various facilities

[2] *Tahrib* means 'smuggling' in Arabic.

and subjected many to forced labour, torture, sexual abuse and extortion.

Nigerien and Ghanaian Emigration to Libya: A Brief Background

Niger is a vast territory in West Africa that occupies a pivotal position between North and West Africa. Historically, the country has been the crossroads and transit space connecting West Africa to North Africa through the trans-Saharan trade (ECOWAS/CSAO-OECD, 2006; Karine et al., 2007). Nigerien migration remained essentially intra-West African, but during the 1950s and 1960s there was an increase in migration to the Maghreb motivated by positive developments in Libyan and Algerian oil production and the tightening of migration policies of Schengen countries (Adepoju, 2006; de Wenden, 2009). This contributed to a reorientation of flows towards the Maghreb with the aim of irregularly continuing the journey towards Europe. Migration flows of Nigeriens to Libya and Algeria further accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s because of droughts in Sahel countries (Gregory, 2010; Pliez, 2000).

Niger is still characterized by intense movement of people. Indeed, in contemporary times, Niger remains the centre of exchange between black Africa and the Maghreb (Gregory, 1998). Niger continues to be a country of emigration and of transit to North Africa specifically Libya and Algeria, with which it shares a long and porous border (Mounkaïla, 2016). With Libya, Niger shares a border of 354 km (IOM, 2009). Predominant communities that migrate to Libya include the Tuareg, Arab, Toubou and the Niger Hausa. Many Nigeriens migrate to Libya, mostly irregularly, due to difficulties in obtaining travel documents, stringent immigration controls in Libya and the existence of structured networks of migrant smuggling (Nabara, 2014). Libyan official statistics classify Niger as the third largest sub-Saharan source country of immigration to Libya, after Sudan and Chad (IOM, 2009; Pliez, 2004). This is why the Libyan crisis in 2011 generated massive returns of Nigeriens. Niger simultaneously served as a transit country for West African migrants fleeing the Libyan crisis, especially nationals of Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Senegal, Ghana and the Gambia (Republic of Niger, 2012). This situation posed a huge humanitarian and social challenge to the country. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2012a), in June 2012 nearly 100 500 Nigerien nationals returned from Libya since the outbreak of the crisis in 2011.

Historically, Ghanaians have participated in both voluntary and involuntary migration at internal, regional and international levels since the 1970s due to economic and political crises (Akyeampong, 2000). Emigration from Ghana has been predominantly to other sub-Saharan African countries, especially Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire (Awumbila et al., 2013). However, a faltering economic situation in Nigeria resulted in the expulsion of almost two million Ghanaian immigrants in 1983 and 1985 (Akyeampong, 2000). These mass forced returns necessitated a change in the pattern of Ghanaian migration to other destination countries including to Libya (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Akyeampong, 2000). Drought, hunger and widespread bushfires that decimated farmlands and cocoa plantations in the early 1980s also served as push factors for Ghanaians to mostly African countries, including Libya.

Cordial relations between the then president of Ghana (Flight Lieutenant Jerry J. Rawlings) and the then Libyan leader (Colonel Gaddafi) on account of their shared interests in Pan-Africanism and the Non-Aligned Movement, bolstered a bilateral agreement between both countries (Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar, 2013). This agreement included opportunities for Ghanaian teachers to teach English in Libya. Subsequently, less-skilled Ghanaians also migrated to Libya to work in mainly the construction sector (predominantly as plasterers).

Theoretical and Conceptual Considerations

International migration from labour-surplus but capital-scarce origin countries to labour-scarce but capital-surplus destination countries has been explained largely from an economic perspective in the migration literature (see Borjas, 1989; Lucas, 2005; Stark, 1992; Taylor, 1999). It is, however, almost impossible to adduce one single theory that comprehensively explains the drivers of migration and the decision-making processes involved in international migration. As a result, while acknowledging the value of economic theories, this paper equally relies on the social network theory and the concept of 'migration culture' to guide the analysis. This is because the study finds that economic factors are intrinsically intertwined with socio-cultural and geographic factors.

Proponents of the network theory (see Bourdieu, 1985; Putnam, 1995) explain that once emigration is initiated, it becomes self-sustaining and develops its own autonomy as a result of migrants' networks. Networks in this context are defined as "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through bonds of kinship, friendship, and shared community of origin" (Massey et al., 1993: 448).

Migrants from the same origin community based at the destination are perceived to serve as what Böcker (1994) refers to as 'bridgeheads' with the capacity to reduce risks and the material and psychological costs of subsequent migration. Much as this might be true in most circumstances, some settled migrants could rather serve as 'gatekeepers', thus inhibiting opportunities for newly arrived migrants. Pieke et al.'s (2004) work draws attention to the need for a critical analysis of the role of networks so as not to take them for granted. They therefore examine how new networks are created and how old ones are reproduced, sustained and turned to serve the needs of different groups (old and new migrants, local officials and those left behind). They also demonstrate how migrants' networks are trans-nationalized, with time, due to either deliberate or accidental actions on their part (Pieke et al., 2004).

There is, however, the need to further contextualize the importance of networks in explaining migration decision-making processes and patterns by interrogating the concept of 'migration culture' or 'culture of migration'. Heering et al. (2004) define the 'culture of migration' as a culture where migration is considered to be the only way to improve one's standard of living; that is, those who stay are believed to be losers, and those who leave are winners (see Black et al., 2006). Pieke et al. (2004: 48 quoted in Black et al., 2006) concur that cultural explanations that take into consideration the historical context, in addition to an appreciation of structural opportunities and constraints, is critical in understanding the drivers of migration. A central plank of this culture is a discourse on how migration serves as a dominant strategy that initiates social mobility. This discourse prescribes what constitutes success, as well as ignoring other local strategies that are not considered an option (Pieke et al., 2004: 194). They also argue that this culture of migration "renders current emigration patterns unintelligible in terms of a narrow cost-benefit analysis".

The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) carried out a large survey in five labour-sending countries (Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Turkey) and found a fairly significant group of young people in Morocco who were neither working nor looking for work, but reported that they spent their time and energy in looking for ways to migrate, as they were convinced there were no alternatives for them (Schoorl, 2002 quoted in Black et al., 2006). The concept of 'migration culture' therefore alters the formula of the potential migrants' decision-making process and thus it is critical for a deeper understanding of emigration dynamics (see Black et al., 2006: 46). The culture

of migration, however, has some political economy aspects and it is unrealistic to assume a clear-cut difference between this culture and the political economy of the origin state. Socio-economic inequalities in Ghana and Niger have engendered a process of 'othering' and the creation of group boundaries that can be understood as the first step in establishing inequality among social groups in a society. While 'othering' entails drawing the lines between who belongs to a society or is excluded, inequality among such groups or dominance of one group requires differential control of the means of production and access to economic rights (Barth, 1998: 28). Inherent inequalities in the allocation as well as access to economic and political power in the origin country perpetuate migrants' positive evaluation of migration as the only route out of poverty.

Research Methodology and Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Returnees from Libya

Data was collected using mainly qualitative research methods (in-depth interviews and focus group discussions) among seventy-five participants from six categories of actors (return migrants, family members, civil society organizations, community leaders, inter-governmental organizations, government authorities). Generally, qualitative methods allow for an in-depth appreciation of perspectives, behaviors and experiences. As Bedford and Burgess (2001: 123) argued, focus group discussions place the individual research participants in a group context, where "conversations can flourish in what can be considered more commonplace social situations". Focus group discussions tend to help the researchers to understand the lived experiences, complexities, negotiations, perceptions, conflicts and shared meanings of actors' everyday social worlds and realities (Limb and Dwyer, 2001).

The returnees comprised both male and female migrants even though the overwhelming majority were males. Beyond the returnees, family members who were knowledgeable about the migration experience, return process and impact of return on the household were interviewed in-depth. In addition, community leaders and civil society organizations (CSOs) were selected on the basis of their provision of services to returnees from Libya. Government agencies that actively participated in the evacuation, repatriation and reintegration of returnees from Libya were also sampled in order to gauge the statutory and structural factors in managing situations of forced return. Scoping exercises conducted prior to the data collection in both countries and results of previous research (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Nabara, 2014) suggested the

involvement of far fewer CSOs and government agencies in the case of Ghana compared with Niger. This informed the bigger sample sizes in Niger (see Table 1). Finally, inter-governmental organizations that provided logistical, technical, financial or advisory support to the evacuation, repatriation and reintegration of returnees from Libya were interviewed. Participants provided informed consent and pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper in order to protect the identity of participants. The Ghana data collection took place in Accra (the capital city) and the Brong Ahafo Region (especially Nkoranza but also Sunyani, Domaa Maasu, Nkwabeng and Domaa-Ahenkro) between March and September 2016. Accra was selected because it hosts the head offices of almost all government agencies as well as those of inter-governmental organizations. The Brong Ahafo Region represents the region with the largest number of Ghanaian migrants to Libya (see Table 2) and also returnees to Ghana in 2011 (Bob-Milliar, 2012).

Table 1: List of Participants, Ghana and Niger

Participant	**Ghana**	**Niger**	**Total**
1. Return Migrants	11	9	20
2. Family members of migrants	11	8	19
3. Inter-governmental organisation	2	3	5
4. Community leaders and Private Actors	3	3	6
5. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)	1	9	10
6. Government Authorities	4	11	15
Total	**32**	**43**	**75**

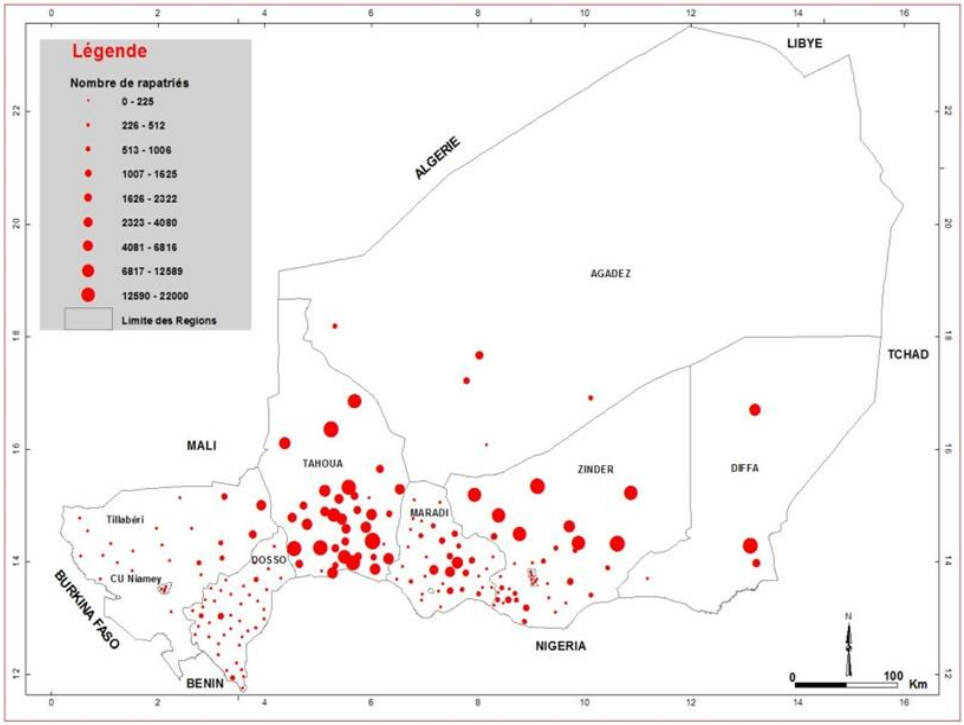
Table 2: Regional Distribution of Ghanaian Return Migrants from Libya in 2011

Region	**Percentage Share of National Population 2010** *(N = 24, 658,823)*	**Number of Returnees from Libya, 2011**	**Percentage Share of Returnees from Libya, 2011** *(N =18,445)*
Greater Accra	16.3%	665	3.6%
Central	8.9%	366	2%
Western	9.6%	852	4.7%
Ashanti	19.4%	2,375	12.8%
Eastern	10.7%	562	3.1%
Brong Ahafo	9.4%	9,520	51.6%
Volta	8.6%	373	2%
Northern	10.1%	1,834	9.9%
Upper East	4.2%	1,110	6%
Upper West	2.8%	784	4.3%

Source: IOM and NADMO, Accra, 2012.

In Niger, data was collected between April and September 2016 from Niamey (the capital city), Tahoua and Tchintabaraden (Central and North-western regions of the country, respectively). The goal of this approach was to see how policies were made at the central level and how they were implemented locally. The Tahoua region and the commune of Tchintabaraden were selected because they hosted more returnees from Libya than any other regions of Niger during the crisis (see Figure 1). These areas have an ancient tradition of emigration to Libya (Mounkaïla, 2015). According to a report from the Nigerien Prime Minister's Office, in 2011, of the 212 791 migrants returning from Libya, 136 287 were hosted by the Tahoua region, representing 64% of the returnees (Republic of Niger, 2011).

Figure 1: Breakdown of Returning Migrants from Libya by Host Regions and Localities: Niger



Ghanaian return migrants sampled included 11 participants – ten males and one female. Even though this sample size is too small to draw broad generalizations, the proportions are reflective of findings in existing literature (IOM, 2012a:5; Mensah, 2016) that indicate that the overwhelming majority of Ghanaian migrants to Libya are male. This is attributed to the types of work that Ghanaian migrants tend to do (masonry and construction work, especially plastering) and the perilous nature of the migration process through the desert (IOM, 2012b 4; GH/C/01[3]; GH/A/01[4]). In addition, migration of single females to Libya is frowned upon in Ghana due to the stigma attached to the jobs that some of them are alleged to engage in (i.e. prostitution) (GH/E/01[5]). This perception might, however, be mistaken as there are other domestic roles

[3] Representative of a Ghanaian Civil Society Organisation.
[4] A former Ghanaian diplomat to Libya.
[5] The director of a community radio station in Ghana.

such as housekeeping and even hairdressing that some female Ghanaian migrants engage themselves in. The only female return migrant interviewed for this study (GH/M/07[6]), for instance, joined her spouse in Libya and worked as a domestic worker (see Kandilige and Adiku, 2019). Her duties included cleaning, taking care of children and general household chores.

Of the nine Nigerien return migrants sampled, eight were males and one was female. Again, a small sample size constrains broad generalizations but the male-female ratio in our sample is also consistent with the results of bigger studies such as the National Survey on Migration (ENAMI) of 2011, which reported that 93.1% of Nigerien emigrants are men (National Statistics Institute, 2013). With particular reference to Libya, the Niger Horizon Consultancy (2014) reported that 98% of Nigerien migrants are male. It is also commonplace for at least half of the male population in rural areas to embark on seasonal migration during the dry season (Mounkaïla, 2016). Similar to the Ghanaian case study, male dominance in Niger's migration profile is partly attributed to the rugged travelling conditions and activities migrants engage in, in Libya, which require great physical effort. In addition, the Nigerien society is largely Islamic, and it does not tolerate independent female migration. Women must either migrate with their husbands or with their husbands' permission. The only female Nigerien migrant in this study's sample migrated with her husband and she did not work in Libya.

Nine out of the eleven Ghanaian returnees interviewed were between the ages of 20 and 30 years (see also Mensah, 2016: 311). Similarly, Nigerien returnees were of the young productive ages of between 20 and 45 years. Although small samples are used in this study, the results are borne out by larger studies that conclude that Nigerien migration to Libya concerns young adults (Gregory, 2010). The age of migrants is important in explaining the types of jobs executed in Libya.

The Ghanaian research indicates that the overwhelming majority of Ghanaian returnees are without any formal education, with the highest level of qualification being a junior high school certificate (GH/C/01[7]; GH/M/09[8]; GH/A/01[9]). In the case of Niger, four out of the nine returnees interviewed were without any formal education and the rest had low educational

[6] A female Ghanaian return migrant from Libya.
[7] A representative of a civil society organisation.
[8] A male Ghanaian return migrant from Libya.
[9] A former Ghanaian diplomat to Libya.

qualifications (the highest also being junior high school certificate). Low educational qualifications limit such migrants' chances of obtaining paid employment in their countries of origin upon return. Moreover, the low educational qualifications of migrants partly explain why most Nigerien migrants hold low-skilled jobs in Libya (in agriculture, construction, and also as dock workers, labourers or security guards).

Findings

Motivations for Nigerien and Ghanaian Migrations to Libya

While the macro-level debates about the 'root causes' of migration from sub-Saharan Africa to, and through Libya to Europe are well-rehearsed and complex (de Haas, 2007; Diatta and Mbow, 1999), it is immensely beneficial to carry out a focused and nuanced examination of motivating factors that inform migration decision-making processes at the individual and household levels. This approach extends the structure-agency debates (Bakewell, 2008) by arguing that in reality endogenous factors are just as important as exogenous ones in explaining migration decision-making. As de Haas (2007) notes, broader macro-level factors such as extreme poverty, high unemployment, civil war, environmental degradation, globalization, population pressure and general development failure are routinely presented, uncritically, as exogenous 'root causes' of migration from poor African countries. In such analysis, the individual's agency is missed. Classical attempts at explaining the main drivers of migration (e.g. Lee, 1966; Ravenstein, 1885) have identified economic factors as being fundamental to most migrations. This study indicates that international migration to Libya from Niger and Ghana has been motivated by an interplay of economic, socio-cultural and geographical factors. The results are thematised under these three categories, even though they overlap in some cases. Both case studies demonstrate the centrality of unemployment, perceived poverty, lack of economic opportunities at home and household survival as the main economic factors underlying individuals' decisions to migrate to Libya. Even local authority officials of migrant-sending communities attested to these factors:

> *The main reasons pushing Nigeriens to emigrate to Libya are unemployment and poverty in the country [Niger]. Libya is a developed country that needs manpower and pays the migrants well. Nigeriens earn much more in Libya, especially before the crisis (Interview with Deputy Mayor of Tchintabaraden, on 25 May 2016 at Tchintabaraden).*

Return migrants and their household members in this study cite good economic opportunities in Libya, poor employment prospects at home, wages in Libya considered as 'good', the existence of networks of smuggling rings that facilitate irregular entry and a demand for manpower to do unskilled jobs that Libyans detest (Gregory, 2010) as the main motivating factors for their migration. As Ghanaian return migrants asserted, poverty, family survival, unfulfilling jobs and potential reward from international migration are the main motivations for migration:

> *I travelled to Libya due to hardship and pressure from my household. My father is dead and my mother is poor and there is no one to care for the poor children. So, I decided to travel to Libya with a friend of mine through the desert. So, we passed through Burkina [Faso] to Niger. From Niger, we entered Libya with the help of smugglers (Interview with Ernest, 33-year-old Ghanaian returnee from Libya).*

Ernest's younger brother, Kwadwo, who remained in Ghana, confirmed his brother's stance on migration:

> *My brother went to Libya because of hardship like what we are facing now. He was farming and the yield wasn't enough. Even the annoying part is, despite the efforts of the farmers, these Kumasi-Accra traders will come and buy the food produce for a very cheap price. Sadly, these farmers have no option because if you don't sell it to them, your produce will rot. You see how sad it is? So he was frustrated, as he was not getting any job in Ghana to do, apart from farming. Here in Dormaa, those who have been to Libya come back with a lot of money. The Libyan returnees own most of the cars you see in this town. Some have even built their own houses. This is the motivating factor for most of the young guys in this community (Interview with Kwadwo, 28-year-old family member of a Ghanaian return migrant from Libya).*

Kwadwo's assessment of his brother's perceived poverty is relative to the apparent wealth that is associated with returnees from Libya who are able to acquire cars and even houses. This analysis feeds into the migration culture that has been entrenched in these migrant-sending communities whereby 'stayers' are classified as losers, while 'leavers' are regarded as winners. Within this context, migration to Libya serves as an important strategy that initiates social mobility. According to Rev. Twumasi, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a Civil Society Organization (Scholars in Transit) that operates in Nkoranza, the migration culture among the youth is even affecting their

attitude towards education:

> *We realized that irregular migration was predominant and most students mainly focused their attention on irregular migration. Because of that they were not concentrating on their education but rather on the trip that they were going to make...It was like the issue of 'children-on-the-run'. So our worry was, how do we curb this so that these young ones' concentration would be on their studies rather than migrating? (Interview with Rev. Twumasi, CEO of Scholars in Transit).*

The CEO's use of the graphic imagery of 'children-on-the-run' is indicative of a situation where perceived remuneration abroad overshadows any local opportunities that might exist and defines the livelihood approaches adopted by individuals and families.

Kandilige and Adiku (2019: 10) note that migration of Ghanaians to Libya is informed mainly by a search for employment opportunities. In the origin communities of migrants, which are mostly agrarian in nature, deprivation and low educational attainment are distinct disadvantages in accessing paid employment in Ghana. This reality frustrates any meaningful effort to realize their aspirations in life such as building a house, marrying, sending their children to private schools, acquiring property or starting a business (see Mensah, 2016). Kandilige and Adiku (2019) further note the importance of attaining these aspirational goals, since they are linked with transitioning from 'childhood' to 'adulthood' in the Ghanaian context. Honwana's (2012: 19) conceptualisation of 'waithood' is particularly instructive as it examines the "challenges of youth transitions to adulthood in Africa as an illustration of global contemporary forms of the struggle for freedom from want and freedom from fear. It explores the lives of young people struggling with unemployment and sustainable livelihoods in the context of widespread social and economic crisis". The concept of 'waithood' is equally applicable in examples of youth being involuntarily immobile due to lack of resources to pay for the cost of their migrations. In such instances, they are stuck both in their immobility and their youth (i.e. stagnated life-cycle).

Nigerien returnees adduce similar economic and social reasons as motivations for their migration to Libya. The Nigerien migrants also expressed a desire to accomplish a personal 'project' such as getting married, starting a business, building a house or supporting their families. These are measures aimed at escaping the trap of 'waithood' (Honwana, 2012). One returnee captured these sentiments succinctly:

> *The reasons that led me to leave my country are both economic and social. They are economic because I had no economic activities that would bring me money here in Niger, so I wanted to go and look for a means to start a business. In addition, we do not own land and we cultivate on a borrowed patch of land. So, I needed money to buy my own land. The reasons are social because I want to get married, buy a house and leave the family home. That is what pushed me to leave my country to go to Libya (Interview with a Nigerien returnee from Libya at Tahoua, 25 May 2016).*

A family member underscored this return migrant's sentiments:

> *The first thing that drove my brother to emigrate was to have enough money to build his own house and to leave the family house. Moreover, we cultivate on borrowed land because we do not have our own land. And he wanted to buy one for us. So, we sold a part of our agricultural produce to finance his trip to Libya (Interview with a family member of a Nigerien return migrant from Libya, 27 May 2016 at Tahoua).*

Another Nigerien returnee further corroborated the use of migration as a household livelihood strategy:

> *Before going to Libya, I was a tailor but I did not earn enough to support my family. That is why I went to Libya to earn money to support my family (Interview with a Nigerien return migrant from Libya, 27 May 2016 at Tahoua).*

Socio-cultural factors also play a key role in shaping the decisions of young Nigerien and Ghanaian males migrating to Libya. The study's results indicate that among the youth in especially Tahoua and Tchintabaraden in Niger and Nkoranza and Domaa-Ahenkro in Ghana, emigration to Libya is perceived as proof of maturity and a demonstration of bravery. Some parents even refuse their daughters in marriage to any young man who has not been to Libya, at least on one occasion. This is particularly commonplace in the village of Amokaye in Tchintabaraden in Niger and the towns of Nkoranza and Domaa-Ahenkro in Ghana. Anecdotal evidence from both countries suggests that some young men who are unable to embark on such migration to Libya resort to memorizing names of Libyan towns and also experiences of crossing the Sahara Desert from their interactions with actual returnees and then

impersonating 'been-tos[10]' in order to lure unsuspecting young women into dating and possibly marrying them. The Deputy Mayor of Tchintabaraden's views are illustrative of these socio-cultural factors:

> *We must add the influence of environment because migration has become a culture within the Tuareg community. It is very difficult to find a home in which there has never been a migrant. For example, in the village called Amokaye, emigration to Libya has become an act of bravery and one who never emigrated, hardly has a woman to marry (Interview with Deputy Mayor of Tchintabaraden, on 25 May 2016 at Tchintabaraden).*

Moreover, in the case of Niger, the existence of trans-border ethnic networks and the proximity of the Libyan border to some Nigerien communities such as the Tuareg, Toubou and Arab communities further serve as motivations for migration to Libya. The drought situations of the 1970s and 1980s, which caused large-scale loss of livestock in the Sahel countries, led several pastoralists of Niger (Tuareg, Arab and Fulani) to emigrate to Libya, which enabled the creation of a significant diaspora network of communities in southern Libya and Algeria (Gregory, 2010; Mounkaïla, 2015). The existence of interpersonal ties between prospective migrants in Niger and established social networks based in Libya, generates social capital through bonds of kinship, friendship, and shared community of origin. These social networks are not only beneficial to the prospective migrants but are equally important in helping members of the Nigerien diaspora in North Africa maintain what Pieke et al. (2004) refer to as a transnationalized migrants' network.

Migrants' Experiences of the Crisis in Libya

The Libyan crisis had variable impacts on migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The precarity of the employment status of migrants in Libya was manifest during the crisis situation partly because it lacked permanence, job security and the necessary subtle social ties that cushioned native employees. Migrants who worked for the more formalized corporate entities in the construction, oil and commercial agricultural sectors were first to be laid off as their, mostly Western, employers shut down their operations and advised their migrant staff to vacate the country (Nabara, 2014; NE/M/01[11]). On the other hand, migrants who were employed in informal settings or worked for

[10] This concept refers to an enhanced social status acquired through migration.
[11] A male Nigerien return migrant from Libya.

individuals later abandoned their jobs of their own volition for fear of coming to personal harm, injury or even death. In Libya, many SSA migrants occupy mostly very low socio-economic positions relative to the native population. This is partly due to their irregular migration statuses and differences in cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics (Naik and Laczko, 2012). They are mainly on the periphery of the Libyan society and are employed in the lower sectors of the economy. A high percentage of the returnees interviewed in this study held low-skilled jobs in Libya, such as labouring, farming and construction. The research equally revealed cases of racism, discrimination, name-calling, robberies and casual attacks by Libyan youths, arbitrary arrests and detentions, lack of access to rental accommodation, inability to access the formal banking system and lack of protection from the Libyan security services. This characterized the political economy of Libya leading up to the crisis in 2011. The 2011 crisis, therefore, exacerbated these pre-existing precarious living conditions. Both Ghanaian and Nigerien migrants experienced such difficulties:

> *While I was in Libya, the war broke out and it became very intense day-by-day. Everywhere you turned you'd hear the sounds of deadly weapons and bombs flying all over and I knew I could easily lose my precious life. I therefore decided to come back home, because I know that once there's life, there's hope (Interview with Samuel, 30-year-old Ghanaian returnee from Libya).*

> *When the war started I was plastering a storey building. They fired a gunshot and the bullet came through the walls I was working on. With my own eyes, I saw it. Meanwhile that was where we were staying, but we thank God nothing happened to us. So when I reflected on what happened I asked myself if this bullet had gotten to where we were sleeping, what would have happened? (Interview with Kwabena, 34-year-old Ghanaian returnee from Libya).*

> *During the crisis, migrants were in an unsafe situation and work opportunities declined. The fighting forced more than 100 000 migrants to return [to their countries of origin]. The migrants were traumatized, some were injured, without travel documents, especially for families (Interview with Head of IOM Mission in Niger).*

The loss of employment was compounded by the forfeiture of property and accumulated personal savings during migrants' flight from the crisis. The irregular migration status of most Ghanaian and Nigerien migrants in Libya

impacted negatively on their access to the formal banking system in the country. As a result, prior to the crisis most migrants either sent the bulk of their earnings as cash remittances through returning migrants or buried bundles of cash in unmarked secret locations. The outbreak of war denied migrants the opportunity to retrieve their informal savings. In addition, other property acquired by migrants was either confiscated by the warring parties or abandoned for fear of inhibiting their escape from the conflict. A Nigerien return migrant reflected,

> *War…when the bomb exploded, we fled into the bush. In the city, Libyan soldiers caught and imprisoned people. Then they took all our properties. Furthermore, it is in our city that Gaddafi left to go to Sirte, where he was murdered (Interview with a Nigerien return migrant from Libya).*

The impromptu departure of a migrant such as Ernest resulted in him leaving behind US$8,000:

> *I couldn't bring my stuff. I was in a rush because of the war. I left some of my money there – about US$8,000 and some of my luggage. I remember the amount because we used to wrap every $1,000 we get and I had wrapped about 8 of them by then. Not that I forgot to take it. The fighting was becoming intensive and scary. We were even lucky because we were under a kobri [i.e. overhead bridge] but even the overhead bridge was later destroyed by bombs (Interview with Ernest, 33-year-old Ghanaian returnee from Libya).*

Ghanaian and Nigerien migrants, just as other sub-Saharan Africans, were implicated in the conflict by virtue of their skin colour. Black Africans were accused of being mercenaries of Gaddafi during the conflict (see Bob-Milliar, 2012; Hamood, 2006). While this study corroborates a limited involvement by some Nigerien migrants (especially Tuareg and Toubou migrants), these claims were exaggerated by Libyan rebels and used as a basis for attacking all male migrants with a black skin. There is no evidence of involvement by Ghanaian migrants in the conflict but they were equally attacked just because they satisfied the racial profile of the alleged mercenaries. Unlike Ghanaian migrants, however, Nigerien migrants became targets of multiple warring factions during the crisis following the Nigerien authorities' recognition (through an official statement) of the National Transitional Council of Libya as the legitimate representatives of the Libyan people (NE/C/06 [12]). This

[12] A representative of a Nigerien NGO.

statement drew the anger of Gaddafi supporters who scapegoated Nigeriens living in the country (Nabara, 2014). Thus, Nigerien migrants were disproportionately persecuted, stripped of their properties, arrested, physically assaulted and some killed by competing parties in the same conflict (NE/C/05[13]). Some trapped Ghanaian migrants were assaulted and others killed on racial grounds. The account by this 25-year-old Ghanaian return migrant, vividly demonstrates the severity of the racially inspired vulnerability Ghanaian migrants faced in Libya:

> *They were four, all holding AK47s. They started shooting at us. Unfortunately for us, the bullets hit us. As for my friend it hit his waist and he fell. Then I was also hit in the leg by a bullet and I also fell down. Then I also lay down as if I was dead. So when they saw that we were both lying, then they moved their car and drove off. They thought they had killed us so they went away. So I went to my friend and called him, 'Gabriel, Gabriel', and he raised his head and looked at my face. Within a few minutes, his head just went down and he died (Interview with Prince, 25-year-old Ghanaian return migrant from Libya).*

There was a general sense of dissatisfaction by migrants with the role of the national governments of both Ghana and Niger in dealing with the complexities and vulnerabilities associated with being trapped in a country in crisis. The Ghanaian embassy in Libya, like other embassies, is charged with providing, among other services, consular protection for Ghanaians. However, this study found that there was a profound lack of trust in embassy officials by Ghanaian migrants, which predated the 2011 conflict. This mistrust culminated in very few migrants registering with the embassy, thus weakening the embassy's access to reliable data on the Ghanaian migrant stock in Libya. This handicap constrained the efficacy of logistical planning during the evacuation phase of the crisis. In addition, the absence of a policy on evacuation and repatriation of nationals from countries in crisis as well as an acute lack of financial resources resulted in delays in extracting trapped migrants and an over-reliance on inter-governmental organizations for evacuation support. As a former senior diplomat at the Ghanaian embassy in Libya noted:

> *The major evacuation when people were going to the border, UNHCR, the Red Cross and IOM were instrumental in getting us the buses. They*

[13] A representative of a Nigerien civil society organisation.

> *had an office arranged so people could go there [Tripoli]; people on the verge of dying, people who had their hands cut could go there and they will pay their hospital bills for them. We always relied on them; they will send people to the border and airlift them to Ghana (Interview with a former Ghanaian senior diplomat in Libya).*

The former senior diplomat also noted the direct impact on the embassy's daily operations as a result of re-assigning limited funds to meet unbudgeted costs. The absence of contingency funds to meet emergency expenditure in a crisis situation resulted in the ambassador using funds that were earmarked for staff salaries to support the cost of feeding migrants who were trapped at airports and transit centres. The former senior diplomat observed:

> *It denied resources for daily administration expenditure such as servicing of vehicles at the workshop. To a large extent it also affected payment of salaries. For example, for two months we were not paying ourselves. We requested for US$100,000 from government to cater for the trapped Ghanaians but nothing came. We finally spent about US$30,000 of our meagre funds on feeding the people because we had created a shelter at the airport (Interview with a former Ghanaian senior diplomat in Libya).*

Ghanaian migrants described their embassy staff in Libya as 'useless', 'self-centred' and 'uncaring'. Oyibo, for instance, recounted challenges migrants faced with acquiring emergency travel documentation to enable them return to Ghana during the crisis:

> *When it [the crisis] happened, like that all the countries were air-lifting their nationals because a lot of people travel to Libya to work... So when we realized that every country was rescuing its nationals, we also started calling home, but it was useless. The Ghanaian embassy over there [in Libya] doesn't even recognize you, they have an office there but it only benefits them, not us the migrants. They won't mind you, when you go there, they tell you that they don't know you, even when you are speaking Twi[14]. At times you may tell them where you come from just to confirm that you are a Ghanaian, but they still won't help you (Interview with Oyibo, a 32-year-old Ghanaian return migrant from Libya).*

[14] *Twi* is the most popular local language spoken in Ghana and it is native to the Akan ethnic group.

Nigerien migrants who were trapped in Libya also shared these concerns. Poor consular support during the crisis and the scapegoating of Nigeriens by rebel forces compelled migrants to hide their true identity (identifying themselves as Malians instead) and being repatriated to Mali before returning to Niger (NE/M/01[15]). The weakness in consular protection is compounded by the fact that Niger has neither a national migration policy nor official guidelines on the evacuation of nationals from countries in crisis. Although the process of adopting such a policy began in 2007, it has stalled because of lack of funding. There is also lack of accurate empirical data on the number of Nigeriens in Libya and their socio-economic profiles, which are important for contingency planning. According to a Nigerien return migrant:

> *I was myself a witness to the conditions of repatriation. While migrants were stuck and they needed papers [laissez-passer], the ambassador refused to make the trip to see the living conditions of Nigeriens, as did other ambassadors [example of Mali]. For several days the Nigeriens were at the border in the rain and cold and homeless. IOM transported people to the border, but the Nigerien authorities were unable to deliver laissez-passer for repatriation. Also, the committee for receiving migrants did not play its role. For example, when migrants transited through Tunisia and Algeria people welcomed them with water at the airport, which was not the case in Niger (Interview with 31-year- old Nigerien returnee from Libya and member of the Collective of Nigerien Returnees).*

Policy Implications

The Libyan crisis of 2011 has broader implications for global migration governance and management especially within the context of South-South migration. This paper demonstrates the importance of examining the multifaceted personal motivations for migration as a basis for better international migration policy formulation. The study also highlights the importance of drafting national migration policies, which expressly outline policy as well as institutional frameworks for the evacuation of nationals from countries in crisis. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have played leading roles in supporting countries in the Global South such as Nigeria (in 2015) and Ghana (in 2016) to draft and launch national migration policies. The IOM and the ILO

[15] A Nigerien return migrant from Libya.

have also supported countries such as Sri Lanka (in 2008), Ethiopia (in 2013), Kenya (in 2014) and Jamaica (in 2015) in drafting and launching either national labour migration policies or diaspora engagement policies. These policies are all geare d towards enhancing the potential for migration to contribute to national development. The status of these migration policies vary in the different countries. The Ghana National Migration Policy (2016: 45) calls for the drafting of "guidelines for the evacuation of Ghanaian nationals abroad, during situations of political crisis, deportation or natural disaster". The Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy (2008: 21) acknowledges that "repatriation is the responsibility of the State and the State shall ensure safe repatriation for all workers in need. This will address emergency situations faced by migrant workers, due to sudden and serious health issues, and grave safety and security issues". However, the migration policies of Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya and Jamaica are all silent on the evacuation of nationals from crisis situations abroad. This notwithstanding, specific guidelines on the 'how' and 'by who' are still lacking even in the cases of Ghana and Sri Lanka. There is, therefore, the need for the extension of rights and protections to migrants to be considered as central to the migration-development nexus debate, as migrants should not be perceived only as remittance 'cash cows' (saddled with obligations) that are devoid of protection entitlements (rights).

Unplanned and forcible return of migrants from countries in crisis impoverishes both returnees and their families that depend on them as a source of remittance income. It is, therefore, imperative for origin countries to develop programmes that facilitate a sustainable reintegration of forcibly returned migrants into their home communities. Such programmes should seek to capitalize on the skills that such migrants acquire abroad rather than embarking on 'one size fits all' types of generic projects that win governments and inter-governmental organizations/NGOs political capital without necessarily empowering the targeted beneficiaries.

While regional economic groupings across Africa are rightly drafting regional migration protocols (e.g. the ECOWAS Migration Protocol), aimed at facilitating uninhibited movement of persons and goods, there is the need for the creation of regional evacuation units that are specifically mandated to manage the evacuation and repatriation of migrants in times of political/social crises. This minimizes the onus on impoverished member states (which might not have the logistics and expertise) to extract their nationals at short notice.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that micro-level motivations for migration to Libya entail an amalgam of economic, social, cultural and political factors. Within a developing country context, the political economy of the origin country contributes to the establishment, over time, of a migration culture especially among youth who feel trapped in 'waithood' and unable to realize basic socio-cultural and economic markers in life. The paper also concludes that whereas sub-Saharan African migrants were generally targeted for xenophobic attacks due to exaggerated claims that they were mercenaries for former Libyan leader Gaddafi, some nationalities were worse affected than others due to political decisions by governments of their countries of origin. Overall, the paper confirms the strength of international migration as a livelihood strategy even for people from poor, rural and agrarian communities. The use of social networks and other migration infrastructures (including a network of migrant smugglers) to overcome formal structures highlights migrants' agency in breaking the shackles of involuntary immobility in Africa.

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