HISTORY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

A historical perspective of Nigerian immigrants in Europe

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Abstract: The world is gradually shrinking that at the press of a button events happening in a far-flung part of the earth could be followed live via a cable network. Globalization or capitalist penetration of every economy is a new phenomenon. Industrialized nations of the West are growing richer and having access to natural resources of the third world. Most of the third world countries are experiencing a harsh economic turn. World trade organization (WTO) continues to harp on the need for free trade which is beneficial to the developed countries. Yet developed Western countries mount an impenetrable fortress to ward off immigrants from their paradise. Nigerian immigrants’ device different strategies to scale the protected Western fence at great cost. Employing newspaper, magazine reports, and other extant secondary materials as well as primary data such as oral interviews of those in the business of securing visas in Nigeria and eyewitness account of repatriated migrants, the paper attempts an analysis of this phenomenon. Also, Ernest Ravestin’s Push-Pull theory of migration is used to interrogate this quest to emigrate.

Subjects: African Studies; History; Cultural Studies

Keywords: Nigeria; globalization; immigrants; Europe; refugees; industrialization; economy; fence

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In the face of adversity, whether natural or man-made, the survival instincts in man comes to the fore. Displaced persons during wars also make efforts to move to safe-havens away from the theatre of conflicts. These movements whether induced by natural disaster or man-made are often frowned at by those forced to host the displaced persons. However, in Nigeria, the biting unemployment situation among youths without any social security ignites the migrating spirit of the Nigerian man and woman. However, the protectionist tendencies of the industrialized nations of Europe make it difficult to procure genuine travel documents or secure visa. Therefore, Nigerians devised different methods to reach Europe often through hazardous voyages across the Mediterranean sea and Sahara desert. The paper concludes that, the Nigerian government should strengthen its educational sector, improve its infrastructural deficit and
1. Introduction

In the face of adversity, whether natural or man-made, the survival instincts in man comes to the fore. When threatened by national disasters such as drought, earthquake, hurricane, or lava eruptions or Tsunami both man and beast strive to escape to a more hospitable environment. Displaced persons during wars also make efforts to move to safe-havens away from the theatre of conflicts. These movements whether induced by natural disaster or man-made are often frowned at by those forced to host the displaced persons. This is due to the pressure the additional mouths would add to the inadequate scarce resources at their disposal. Refugees from conflict-induced migrations generally return to their country at the end of the strife that drove them away, yet, within the period of their sojourn, they constitute an unanticipated burden to their host. However, in a world that has gradually turned into a global village by the internet age, economic opportunities are daily highlighted by cable network news and transnational organizations. Citizens of third world countries are inundated hourly with technological wonders of the developed capitalist Western world and strongly desire to partake of it.

It is due to economic adversity, political turmoil, and religious conflict that have propelled Nigerians to migrate to economic safe-havens of Europe in their droves. Their quests have received rude rebuff. Yet the industrialized nations of Europe preach free trade and have unimpeded access to the natural resources of Nigeria. Trade liberalization has been promoted by the International Monetary Fund, IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organization, WTO, and its underpinning globalization as beneficial to third world countries. This is indeed a ruse to have access to the markets of these poor developing nations. In 1997, after Nigeria removed all restrictions on the importation of textile in line with the WTO agreements, its textile industry virtually collapsed. The local textile industry suffered job losses of over 100,000 as it operates below 30% of capacity. As Osuoka (1999) aptly stated:

Governments of poor countries are prevented from formulating regulations that will protect local industries, the environment, healthcare and the protection of local culture as such regulations will violate the WTO agreements.

For a deep understanding of globalization, an appreciation of the meaning of imperialism is necessary as they intertwined. According to Claude (1981, p. 20), imperialism means economic control and exploitation of foreign lands arising from the necessity for counteracting the impediments to the accumulation of capital engendered by the internal contradictions of the domestic capitalist economy. The concept of imperialism has been associated with the outward drive to build empires, both formal colonies and privileged positions in markets, protected sources of materials, and extended opportunities for the profitable employment of labour.

The whole essence of globalization or capitalist penetration of every economy would remain hollow unless it is accompanied by the free movement of labour both skilled and unskilled. Globalization has been described as the spread of worldwide practices, relations, consciousness, and organization of social life. It has dramatically transformed the lives of billions of people globally (Ritzer, 2012, p. 574). However, globalization has been criticized for strengthening the economic dominance of the industrialized nations while impoverishing the weak economic base of the developing countries of the south. This is the crux of the argument of R. Petrella (Folabi, 2007, p. 87) when he opined that globalization increases dependence, peripheralization, and pauperization of the less developed economies as against the affluence, convergence, and integration of the core capitalist states. Critics have also lampooned the recommendation of the same panacea for different economic ailments by the apostles of globalization such as IMF, WTO, and World Bank. The Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz (Ritzer, 2012, p. 575) blamed these monetary institutions for their roles in worsening, rather than resolving, global economic crisis. He singled out IMF for its homogenizing, “One-size-fits—all” approach that fails to take into account national differences (Ritzer, 2012, p. 575). The stringent economic conditionalities foisted on countries facing economic turmoil by the IMF and World Bank have indeed exacerbated economic difficulties
in those countries rather than ameliorating them. The objective of the International Monetary Fund has been the enhancement of the stability and growth of world economies by rendering technical, financial, managerial and counselling assistance to nations of the world who are bona fide members (Fritz-krockow & Ramlogan, 2007, p. 1).

Nonetheless, the IMF’s ‘conditionality’ as a panacea for Nigeria’s economic woes, especially the insistence on making Nigeria’s currency convertible, in the long run would enhance economic growth if properly administered. However, Nigeria lacks the critical leadership to undertake such a tortuous journey of economic growth. The economic climate in Nigeria is extractive. Thus, when a country’s political and economic institutions are inclusive, the tendency is for economic growth. The reverse is the case when they are extractive thereby impeding economic growth. Nations fail when they have extractive economic institutions supported by extractive political institutions that impede and even block economic growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012, p. 83). This is the basis of Nigeria’s economic backwardness. Nigeria though blessed with abundant natural resources continues to stumble and grope in the dark economically. Her vibrant youths are unable to find jobs after schooling and the country lacks any social welfare scheme. Thus, young Nigerians see emigration as the only viable option in the face of economic difficulties.

Nigeria is a purely agro-based economy until oil was discovered in Oloibiri Bayelsa State in 1956 (Danladi & Naankiel, 2016, p. 6). It should be noted that from colonial to the end of the Nigeria civil war in 1970, the country remained agro-based economy until the advent of the oil boom in the early 1970s. She exploited this golden opportunity offered by the oil boom and made substantial wealth (Amaghionyeodiwe & Udeaja, 2003, p. 61). This upswing in oil fortunes led to the gross neglect of non-oil sectors particularly agriculture which had hitherto been the mainstay of the economy (Amaghionyeodiwe & Udeaja, 62). By the second half of the 1970s, the economy had transformed from being an agro-petrol based to purely oil based; as traditional exports (cocoa, groundnut and palm oil) of the country were rapidly approaching their vanishing point (Amaghionyeodiwe & Udeaja:63). Oil dominated the economy accounting for about 80% of the Federal Government’s revenues and 95% of foreign exchange earnings (NCEMA, n.d., p. 2).

The fall in the prices of oil extended to the early 1980s, up till 1986 left Nigeria’s economy almost on the verge of collapse (Dappa Tamuno-Omi & Daminabo, 2011 p. 4). This led to the lowering of Nigeria’s OPEC quota in the early 1980s and also brought the country’s economic and financial position to a precarious state (Dappa Tamuno-Omi & Daminabo, 2011, p. 5). Against this backdrop, the sudden oil price shock created a balance of payment deficit in Nigeria’s economy (Imimonle & Enoma, 2011, p. 1–4). Ranging from her inability to meet her domestic financial obligations to difficulties in servicing her foreign debt, the Nigerian economy shrank. It is this economic difficulty that led to the intervention of IMF in 1986 together with its Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The attempt by the Babangida regime to revive the ailing economy through IMF intervention led to more economic difficulties. Nigeria’s currency, Naira, has up until then been overvalued. The government attempt to make the currency convertible vis-à-vis other world major currencies led to the depreciation of Naira. This consequently threw the economy into recession. The attempt to remove the heavily subsidized cost of premium petrol, kerosene and gas-spiked cost of transportation throughout the country. This had a spiraling effect on the cost of living in Nigeria as prices of foodstuff rose. Students of tertiary institutions in the country poured into the streets in the famous May SAP riots of 1989. The resultant hardship has left many school leavers to migrate to Europe.

Amidst all these, religious riots in Northern Nigeria made a very bad situation worse as non-muslims were forced out of the region, their previous lines of business difficult to reestablish in Southern Nigeria. There was neither government empathy nor financial assistance for the displaced people. The transition to democratic rule was half-heartedly implemented by the military government. Many Nigerians in an attempt to escape the overwhelming economic difficulties and political frustrations at home sort to avail themselves of opportunities elsewhere in the world. As Agbu (2008, p. 72) rightly pointed out that 1986 marked the outset of a generation of Nigerian
migrants to other parts of the industrialized Western nations in search of economic well-being. However, this view of Osita Agbu needs to be put in its proper historical perspective. Migration has been part and parcel of Nigerians, indeed, West Africa and of all peoples from time immemorial. As Adepoju and Wiel (2007, p. 11) aptly noted:

Historically, there has for a very long time been a strong migration pattern in West Africa. The Trans-Saharan trade connected North and West Africa economically, politically, religiously and socially. Until the 20th century, the slave trade constituted an important form of forced migration across the Sahara. In addition, European mercantilist expansion caused the displacement of millions of African people to the Americas and the Caribbean between the mid-sixteenth and early nineteenth century.

Indeed, even during colonial domination, young Nigerians travelled to Europe and the United States of America for their tertiary education. The pattern of travelling to the West for higher education continued even after independence in 1960. But the economic downturn and political instability in the late 1980s and 1990s drove many Nigerians to Europe and other parts of the world in search of economic well-being. Many of these migrants lacked skills needed in industrialised Europe to work. European nations saw this wave of migrants as a burden to shoulder. This is the crux of the matter as many Nigerians devised different methods to reach Europe often through hazardous voyages across the Mediterranean sea and Sahara desert.

2. Theoretical framework

The theory of push-pull is adopted in this research. The theory was propounded by Ernest Ravenstein, one of the foremost British migration theorists. In his theory, he used the census population and the migration strategies of inhabitants from England and Wales to analyse the concept and context of issues surrounding migrations. In his argument, he avers that “unfavorable conditions in rural areas or less developed countries ‘push’ people away from their temporary places to permanent residences” (Ravenstein, 1885; Obi-Ani & Isiani, 2020, p. 5). Among his instances on unfavourable conditions include, high rate of unemployment, heavy taxatation, high rate of mortality, wars, conflicts, abuses of human rights, food insecurity, lack of good education facilities and teachers, poor climatic conditions, flood and erosion. In contrast to these unfavourable conditions which pushes people away are the pull factors envisioned in another environment of which inhabitants convert the place as its permanent abode. These pull factors according to Obi-Ani and Isiani (2020) negates the conditions previously found by the migrants in their former residence. Some of these pull factors include, good atmosphere, peaceful co-existence, food security, adequate employment, allured opportunities, provision of skills, good transportation sectors, good education, less conflicts, democratic elections, less thefts and arson as well as less means of taxation.

This theory reveals that Nigeria is descending into poverty due to poor leadership style, insecure environment, poor infrastructure, inadequate educational facilities, lack of jobs for graduates as the indices rises to 2.48 million, 120,000 and 18,000 for Bachelor’s, Masters and Ph.D degree holders in the recent 2020 unemployment ranking in Nigeria (The Cable Index, 2020). These disjointed atmospheres motivate the youths to risk their lives in search of greener pastures in European countries where there is a high level of technological advancement, good job opportunities, education as well as high life expectancy. Thus, in the quest to migrate to these technologically driven environments, Nigerian youths suffer the loss of lives and properties having adopted harmful strategies and coping devices towards surviving in foreign lands.

In elucidating the reasons individual or groups move from one place to another, the research complemented the Ravenstien theory with theories of human mobility which summarizes that human mobility grew as a result of the spread of diseases, urban and cities house planning, financial market and employment opportunities as well as the economic well-being of people living in a particular country. The theory avows that the migration of individuals or groups can be
predicted and could be curtailed when issues accompanying people to move is averted. According to Yan and Zhou (2019) “predicting human mobility fluxes between locations which is a fundamental problem of transportation science in a country or spatial economy”. This entails that individuals take full responsibility of the dangers of transportation to its destination or permanent place of abode as well as the outcome of economic advancement in the country he or she is migrating to.

In analyzing this theory as it affects this study, migrants from Nigeria adopt different strategies such as faking individual's documents, false international passports and identity and stow away to scale to Western Europe for better opportunities. In an attempt to navigate the legitimate means of migration, many opt for the illegitimate path of crossing through the North African desert to the Mediterranean Sea where they face the options of drowning, deportation, enslavement or incarceration. On other hand, the survivors who managed to make it into Europe had to devise coping mechanisms of not only avoiding the security agents but also of their survival. These migrants remain helpless as their dreams and hopes of making ‘quick’ wealth suspend in the limbo.

The above theories explain the reasons Nigerians move from their country to another in search of greener pastures without taking cognizance of the risk involved in these unlawful migration strategies. It is on this note that the study avers that there is the need to restructure the socio-economic organisational sectors of the country and inward looking by the successive Nigerian leadership to devise strategies of mitigating those systemic problems that drive her citizens to look unto Europe for greener pastures. Therefore, the thrust of the paper is on the one hand to fill the gap in knowledge of the debilitating economic climate prevalent in Nigeria occasioned by corrupt and inept leadership that induces Nigerians to migrate and on the other hand why European nations mount an impenetrable fortresses to protect themselves from the burden of unskilled migrants from Nigeria.

3. Method
The research adopted ethnographic and field survey research designs, and qualitative historical method of analysis in order to examine the movement of individuals and groups from one locality to another. The qualitative data were collected through primary and secondary sources. The study area is Nigeria and the primary sources were inhabitants living in the major cities of the country. In collecting the primary sources, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussion in order to sample the opinions of individuals and group on migration strategies for emigration. The interviews were conducted mainly in an informal setting where the respondents were free to express themselves without any act of intimidation. Indeed, in some instances, pseudonyms were used to protect the real identity of some interviewees, who gave that as a precondition to grant the interview. Secondary sources of this research include, books, journals, unpublished project reports, dissertation and online publications. The work is presented in the thematic, chronological and analytical pattern. It also shows that poor economic conditions in Nigeria push her citizens into undertaking perilous journeys across the desert and the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

4. Different strategies of scaling protected western fence
The biting unemployment situation in Nigeria among youths without any social security scheme to cushion its effect ignites the migrating spirit of Nigerian man and woman. Again, the protectionist tendencies of the industrialized nations of Europe make it difficult to procure genuine travel documents or secure visa. These two factors push people into desperate measures to overcome the obstacles to travel. Indeed, even where Nigerians could procure legal document to travel, securing a visa interview appointment is a herculean task. As Emeka Okeke (personal communication September 6, 2009) stated thus:

The embassy would give a telephone number to be called to book for visa appointment. You could call the number for eternity and nobody would respond. Upon discreet inquiry, one
realizes the embassy had only one hour in a day to respond to request for interviews. The realities are that dubious embassy officials fill in the quota for the day’s interview and leave hapless thousands of applicants struggling to reach them through a telephone line that had been jammed by the thousands of others desperate to get through.

This unnecessary barricade at key European embassies in Nigeria gave rise to the presence of touts. Thus, each embassy had a colony of touts or agents through whom one could first secure an interview appointment and sometimes through whose influence the procurement of visa could be made possible as well. In the past, these touts could charge as much as N50,000 (about £200) to secure an appointment for a visa interview depending on the embassy. What is more, securing a visa for key European economic giants like Germany, United Kingdom, France, Holland and Switzerland which are normally an attraction for migrant workers through touts that had contacts with embassy staff could cost as much as N500,000.00 (about £2000) (Emeka Okeke personal communication, September 6, 2009). Raising this huge sum could entail borrowing, selling of family land and at the end being deported the next day after landing in Europe.

Also, where the quest to secure a visa through legal means fails, some people could buy passports belonging to other people with valid visas and try to travel with them. These works where there is a semblance in the facial appearance of the two people. Many desperate Nigerian migrants have succeeded in beating the immigration checkpoints and took-off from different airports in the world and landed safely to whichever destination they chose. Besides, someone else passport could be bought, the information page which carries the person’s passport photograph torn-off and replaced with a new information page carrying the new person’s photograph who bought the passport. This could be done easily in forgery centres in Lagos—the popular Oluwole street in Lagos where everything under the sun could be forged and something nearly the same as the original gotten. Unfortunately for some migrants they could run into problems: if they were unlucky to come across more careful immigration officials both in Nigeria and outside Nigeria. Nonetheless, there are devices installed in many immigration entry points in some parts of Europe that could detect such forgeries which leads to the culprit being apprehended, detained and deported subsequently. One could imagine the social and economic consequences of such a misadventure. All the money spent buying such a passport, money paid to swindlers, who expunged and replaced parts of the passports and information page would have been in vain. This often led to the frustration of the victims, occasional suicide and death wish rather than being deported to an unbearable and inhospitable environment like Nigeria (Emeka Okeke personal communication: September 6, 2009).

Indeed, upon arrest and detention in a foreign country owing to forgery of passport one could be detained as long as it pleases the authorities there. More so, if it happens in countries that have weak legal system like countries of former East European bloc. In some of these countries, the immigration authorities would insist that the migrant must pay for the return ticket and in addition pay a certain amount of money as fine. Where the person could not pay the fine the alternative was to spend sometime in jail before being deported. In Israel for example, one must pay for the deportation ticket or rot in jail until family members or friends send the air ticket. In Egypt and Libya, thousands of Nigerians are dying in jail, unable to be deported because they could not raise money for their ticket. And the immigration authorities of those respective countries are not willing to foot the deportation expenses.

In countries under the European Union, EU, it is much easier to be deported, because the deportation expenses could easily be borne by the government where the deportee has no return ticket (Emeka Okeke, September 6, 2009). However, in recent times most visa appointments are secured through their websites. Even at that it is still subject to manipulation. Assuming one wants the visa appointment quickly one could go through contacts. In countries where there is no pressure for people to travel, the available window for visa appointment would not be under pressure and the need to bribe anybody would be non-existent.
Another strategy employed by desperate Nigerians to travel to Europe, though the most dangerous, was through the Sahara Desert. There are illegal human trafficking agencies that have very powerful connections that nurture illegal migrations. These networks are highly sophisticated illegal migration system ran by the organised mafia. They could procure travel papers of all nationalities and can make landing and take-off easy once the pay is good. The Lagos angle of this mafia can take their “human cargo” by road to Cotonou in the Benin Republic or Lome in Togo. From either of these cities, they travel northwards. From Lomé, they travel to the town of Cinkasse, a border town between Togo and Burkina Faso. At Cinkasse the migrants would enter the small town called Bittou from where they could board a northward vehicle to Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso. In Ouagadougou, they could decide to travel to Mauritania or Libya from where they move towards the Mediterranean shores of North Africa. From those shores, the migrants can enter the Spanish islands of Canary or the Italian island of Lampedusa (Okeke, 2009). This hazardous crossing of the Mediterranean by Nigerian migrants on perilous boats have been catastrophic. So many people have perished while the few that survived end up in detention or as political asylum. But as Aderanti Adepoju and Arie van der Wiel (Adepoju & Wiel, 2007, p. 17) opined:

Many irregular migrants who fail to enter Europe settle in North Africa rather than face the humiliation of returning home. But the costliest price of irregular migration is loss of life itself. About 3000 Africans are believed to be drowning each year while attempting illegal crossings to Europe.

In summation, Egbuta (2019) opined that:

those seeking economic survival see irregular migration as the best alternative, given the difficulty and resources involved in migrating through regular and legitimate routes. In many instances, very few of the original number who set out live to tell their stories. While many regularly drown in the Mediterranean Sea, many also die in the desert, and others are sold as slaves in a modern slave market. Most of the victims of this trade are from West Africa. Many leave home with the expectations of getting to Europe and other destinations perceived to have better economic prospects for them, but they end up in the slave merchant nets in North Africa. The victims are put in camps and sold in open markets in Libya while the international community watches in silence.

Another loophole which the Nigerian syndicate exploited to move migrants to Europe were the visa-free national passports of the Gambia and Guinea Bissau to the United Kingdom and Portugal respectively. Until the military incursion in the Gambian politics, the Gambian international passport was visa free to the United Kingdom, UK. Nigerians normally sneak into the country through the assistance of this mafia and procure the Gambian passport, claiming to be Gambians. The Gambia is English speaking and Nigerians could easily pose as Gambians and enter the UK unmolested (Ugwuagbo personal communication, June15, 2014). However, the Guinea Bissau was a different ball game. Guinea Bissau is a Portuguese speaking nation yet many Nigerians brave it to travel with Guinea Bissau international passport. This is fraught with its consequences. Consider this scenario where a Nigerian, an English-speaking man and woman, without any knowledge of the Portuguese language, flies into Portugal with Guinea Bissau passport. If he or she is unfortunate that a Portuguese immigration official speaks Portuguese to him or her then the misadventure ends. He would be apprehended and repatriated and all the investment ruined (Ugwuagbo personal communication, June15, 2014).

Nevertheless, the most dangerous stratagem desperate young men and women employ to enter Europe is by stow away. As ships that brought goods from different parts of the world discharge their cargos, frustrated young Nigerians in league with dubious dock workers at Lagos ports, Port Harcourt, Calabar and Warri harbours are sneaked into the ships with their bags and food items often without the knowledge of the ship captains on journeys to Europe and other parts of the world. This is one of the most dangerous means of illegal migrations because many of such
migrants have had themselves thrown overboard in the high sea. Often the ship captain in order to avoid being seen as part of the mafia that engages in illegal migration which would make him liable to fine in the country where he was heading had no other choice than to eject the illegal human cargo into the high sea. According to Emeka Okeke (Personal communication, June 15, 2014) sometime ago a Thailand bound ship captain had to make a detour on the high sea and came back to Tincan Island port, Lagos, to off-load an illegal human cargo of twenty (20) young men discovered hiding in the engine room of his ship when they left Nigeria. They were all handed over to the Nigerian immigration authority for debriefing and possible prosecution.

An informant and a stowaway survivor narrated how economic hardship aborted his secondary school education forcing him to engage in menial works to raise enough money to embark on the journey to Germany. Himself and his colleagues after bribing the dockworkers at Port Harcourt Wharf Nigeria were advised to buy paracetamol drug, bottled water and Cabin biscuit and were hidden in a ship compartment bound for Daura, Cameroon. From there they entered Congo Brazzaville and finally got into Johannesburg, South Africa. It was in South Africa that they met a lady that helped them to procure South African national passport with which they traveled to Berlin, Germany. On the fourth day of their stay in Berlin, his fellow compatriot had high fever and went out to buy drugs and the police arrested him. He revealed where they were staying and both of them were arrested and deported to South Africa the next day (Ugwuagbo personal communication, June 15, 2014). The South African immigration authority after a series of interrogation insisted that they were not from South Africa. After months of detention, the South African authorities claimed that they were either from Cameroon or Nigeria and deported them to Cameroon. The Cameroon gendarmes felt that they might be from the English-speaking part of the country and released them. It was from there they worked their way back to Nigeria.

For instance, an informant narrated a gory story of a young man named John (not the real name) who was duped of all he had and yet was issued a fake visa to New Zealand. The young aspiring migrant committed suicide as he later realized his folly. His ordeal went as follows: His one-time University bosom friend named Onyeka (not his real name) duped him of 400 000 naira (about 1,048.49 USD). The story has it that both friends reconnected via Facebook after five years and John was impressed with the expensive lifestyle displayed by Onyeka on Facebook. Onyeka posts on his page expensive cars and clothed with designers’ wears. John thought that this school friend of his has “made it big (in Nigerian parlance).” They started communicating via social media and Onyeka informed him that he is settled in New Zealand as a real estate agent and contractor. He claimed he has made it very big in life. John enraptured with the ostentatious lifestyle of his friend, pleaded with him to assist in his migration to New Zealand. Meanwhile, after graduation, John had already established a leather business at Onitsha market where he was doing fairly well. The need to “make it big” like his friend overwhelmed every other sense of reasoning. He continued disturbing and pleading with his friend to help him migrate to the “promised land”. The friend kept warding him off and giving excuses why he could not help at that material time. This prompted John to intensify his supplications for help. Onyeka after a little pressure accepted to help John, then inundating him of how he will link and connect him to real estate business. At this juncture, it can be said that Onyeka stalled and feigned busy in helping John as a decoy for John to believe he was genuine or actually a busy contractor or real estate agent as he claimed. John was told to pay for his visa and work permit. To raise the money, John quickly sold off his business and sent every dime to his friend. He left Onitsha to Lagos for his onward journey to New Zealand when Onyeka claimed the visa was ready. John got to the airport on the said day of departure and an immigration officer declared his visa fake. The shame, hurt, betrayal was too much and one night, he took an overdose of a sleeping pill and died (Onyechi, personal communication, Onyechi, 2020). Thus, Mr Samuel (personal communication, 2020) lamented that his friend left his university schooling in Nigeria and travelled to “make it big” in Dubai. His friend in Dubai helped him to procure the visa. The last time they spoke, through video call, he was regretting leaving the country because from all indication, there was no gold dotting the streets of Dubai.
4.1. Coping devices of surviving in Europe

Many Nigerians equate Europe to a paradise on earth with automated railroad networks, uninterrupted power supply and beautiful castles. The allurement is great and many are prepared to stake everything including well-paid jobs in banks and secured teaching positions in Universities in Nigeria to drift to Europe. No sooner had they arrived than the illusion is dispelled. Europe is a law-governed society and their well-advertised social security benefit is not intended for all particularly illegal migrants. This notion of a land flowing with milk and honey needs to be refuted. Adepoju and Wiel have advocated that the Nigerian government should embark on programs to demystify the perception of youths that the roads of EU countries are paved with gold. This is because many youths rely on information from their peers but such information tends to be distorted, exaggerated and misleading. Indeed, becoming a “been to”—a term that is commonly used to refer to those who have travelled abroad—has become one of society’s cultural ideals (Adepoju & Wiel, 2007, p. 18). The quest to travel to Europe could be demystified through expanding the economy and enacting similar social security benefits as obtained in Europe to assuage the biting youth unemployment in Nigeria and not through rhetoric.

In spite of all odds, many Nigerian migrants successfully landed in Europe. But living in Europe proves an uphill task. For those with genuine visa, they could move freely in the streets with their travel documents. But the moment their visas expired they could run into a problem. Thus, the moment one’s visa lapses one had to limit one’s movement to avoid being arrested and deported. But those who enter Europe with illegal travelling documents usually discard them upon entry and rely on friends and relations to procure other equally illegal documents that would enable them to move about without being caught though invariably they end up being caught. Such people could apply for asylum. European legal and political system has provisions to accept and accommodate people who suffer one form of persecution or the other—political and religious persecutions. An asylum applicant must adduce sufficient evidence that he or she suffers political persecution. Political crisis in different parts of Africa gives Nigerians the raison d’etre to change nationality in order to gain political asylum. Political turmoil in Sudan, Congo Democratic Republic, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia are capitalized upon by Nigerians to apply for asylum in EU countries. They discard their identity and assume the nationality of these troubled spots. There exists a syndicate who procure international passports and travel documents of such nationalities. But even after procuring such documents they still find it difficult to convince foreign office authorities that they are bonafide citizens of those countries. However, these unfounded claims of Nigerian asylum seekers enable them to buy time while their applications are being processed since such application can take months or years to conclude. Nevertheless, if it is not in favour of the applicant; then, such asylum seeker would be arrested and deported (Okeke, 2009). Thus, it is difficult to use a national passport to establish true national identities of migrants. What is even worse, in the case of boat capsize off the Italian coast of Lampedusa and Spanish Canary Islands the nationalities could be varied and true identities of the dead lost forever.

Another method Nigerian migrants exploit to prolong their stay in Europe and avoid being deported is to contract a marriage with a European woman. Through such marriage, a migrant can procure resident permit and even work permit. However, more often than not this kind of marriage can lead an immigrant to a lot of problems because 80% of such marriages are consummated between the social dregs of European society and migrants. Often, in less than three months after the contractual of the marriage, the migrants are thrown out of their homes by such women who are strongly protected under their matrimonial laws. What is even more, such women can go further to lodge a complaint to the police complaints of matrimonial violence against such migrant could lead to arrest, trial and eventual sentence and possibly deportation if the sentence is under the penal code (Okeke, 2009). In some cases, such marriages are “arranged” with European ladies for a price to enable migrants to legalize their stay. Thereafter voluntary divorce is actualized without any altercation.

There are other migrants who do not care to legalize their papers and live in different parts of Europe illegally. These groups of migrants perform illegal jobs popularly called black jobs. This type
of job is provided by Europeans who know they are breaking European laws by providing jobs to people who are undocumented labour – wise but are constrained to err because such labour is provided very cheaply. These people work under inhuman conditions in remote parts of Europe. Indeed, some of these migrants including those whose stay had been regularized and those yet to be regularized sometimes for lack of jobs, are under pressure from home or the syndicates who bankrolled their trips and assisted in the procurement of their papers, to indulge in criminality: prostitution and drug peddling. It is easier for women to go into prostitution because of the permissive European laws which recognize the trade of sex worker as a time-hallowed business. In Holland, sex workers pay tax on their income. But those who go into drug pushing have it more roughly as the drug is a highly prohibited trade in the whole of Europe. Although drugs and prostitution are business with high turnover dividends they are embedded with risk. And as Olukoyode Thomas (Guardian Nigeria February 22, 2004) pointed out:

there are a few living in affluence, but one needs the heart of a lion to do what they do. The women are into prostitution, while the men hawk drugs. Most of the money the prostitute earns is used to service debt they own their madams or sponsors that is the person who brought them to Italy. They stand on the road half naked in summer or winter. The men hawk cocaine and heroin on the streets. All you need to do this is a mobile phone and a car. The more junkies you have, the more money you make.

The fate of Sisi, one of the characters in the novel On Black Sisters’ Street, who defied the Lagos boss that organizes a prostitution ring in Europe to opt for a more decent way of life, had befallen many other girls who dared to reneged on their agreement with their sponsors. Sisi was murdered for refusing to continue to sell her body when she found love (Unigwe, 2010, p. 293). Some who engage in prostitution in Europe are victims of human trafficking. They have been beguiled with promises of well-paid jobs in Europe only to be entrapped in the business of sex worker to defray the cost of their sponsorship. A report noted that at least 60% of foreign prostitution in Italy hail from African countries, the majority from Nigeria. It added that Nigerian and Italian authorities estimated that there are 10,000 to 15,000 Nigerian prostitutes in Italy (Bakare, 2006). A UN estimates indicated that trafficking in persons generated seven to ten billion dollars annually for the traffickers, the third-largest profits for illicit activities behind arms dealing and narcotic trafficking (Bakare, 2006). No matter the subterfuge deployed by Nigerian, migrants’ life in Europe is like a horror tale.

5. Shattered dreams of Nigerian migrants

Despite the strong quest of Nigerians to migrate to Europe, many have had their dreams shattered and many more never lived to tell their story. The syndicates that run this trade are dubious, deceptive and manipulative. They thrive on the ignorance of their victims, mostly school dropouts, unemployed graduates roaming the cities and those displaced and dispossessed through incessant communal and sectarian violence in Nigeria. Only a few greedy Nigerians are caught in the web of these duplicitous ones. These merchants of death make outlandish promises of contacts in every European country capable of offering their prey instant job upon landing in Europe. To solidify their illicit act, they took the desperadoes to native doctors for oath taking. This is to entrap them into fulfilling part of their travelling agreement. Many families have been deceived into selling their land in the villages in order to “buy” visa for a member of the family to travel abroad. Unfortunately, these migrants are abandoned in the dark corners of North Africa while a large proportion perishes in the desert journey due to thirst. According to Obaynwana (2005):

It is the story of modern slavery, whereby unsuspecting persons, the gullible and beguiled of the dark corners of our cities, towns and villages are provided upon by urban renegades luring them away from their homes, with the promise of an El Dorado in faraway Europe. But the European destination soon turn out to be some street corners in Algeria, Cote D’Ivoire, Togo, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and even Sudan.
These stranded migrants do incredible things to survive and many end up in prison. About 4,000 Nigerian destitute live in Libya, many of them engaged as sex workers while others do car cleaning and petty trading. Nigerian migrants do not only change nationality they also change names. According to Nigerian ambassador to Libya, Ibrahim Mohammed, when they arrived Libya they adopt desert names (Islamic names) and therefore when they ran foul of the laws and they were to have their limbs amputated, they create a problem for the Nigerian Embassy in Libya. They would not like to be subjected to justice according to Islamic creed but the host authorities presumed that they were Muslims because of their names. Mr Mohammed further stated that “if you see them in the prisons here you will weep. They are terribly emaciated with no adequate attention. Most of them are already sick. Our citizens constitute a sizeable percentage of aliens in Libyan jails” (Obaynwana, 2005; Siegfred & Westcott, 2016). It is disheartening that our youths are allowed to be debased and dehumanized by the few disgruntled syndicates engaged in human trafficking. The Nigeria government should uproot this menace and end the scourge. If indeed the youths are the human capital of the nation they should not be allowed to be cattle off into the 21st century trans-Saharan slavery.

The black man and woman have been abused more than any other race in the history of mankind. Our generation must not give any other race the opportunity to degrade us. In Europe, the black skin is easily spotted by the security agents as law breakers. One must wear his travel documents as he wears his clothing before stepping into the streets in Europe or else he would be humiliated, arrested and deported. This issue borders on racism. As Cornell West asserted: “race matters” and that it continues to matter not only in the legal system but throughout the structures and institutions of society” (Ritzer, 2012, p. 654). Nigerians are routinely hounded throughout Europe and deported on flimsy excuses. Between 1999 and 2000 about 800 Nigerian women were deported from Italy. Also in 2001, about 10,000 were also sent back to Nigeria from Italy (Agbu, 2008, p. 73). In 2012, 62 Nigerians were deported from Rome over allegations of immigration default, drug trafficking and other related issues. Even South Africa, the once beleaguered nation that Nigerian authorities hosted and sponsored in higher institutions during the apartheid era now took delight in maltreatings Nigerians. Over 300 Nigerians were deported from Johannesburg in September 2012 (Mbamalu & Shadare, 2012; Mikairu, 2017; N.A, 2014, 2017; VOAnews, 2017).

Nigerians’ craze to travel abroad and work is giving the country a bad name. Even highly qualified professionals with good degrees from British universities are not treated equally with their white counterparts. According to a Nigerian resident (Olukayode, 2004) in London:

Forget about my credentials, in my profession, your skin determines your destiny. I did my secondary and other education here. Yet, I can’t get cases. I have to rely on a Whitman’s chamber.

Many Nigerians are overcome by the feeling of shame to pick their pieces and return home when they realize that the El Dorado is a complete sham. Many medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants are performing demeaning jobs such as cab driving, cleaning and security jobs in European cities rather than return home. It is indeed painful that these human capitals should lay farrow abroad. There is an urgent need for the Nigerian government to restore the dignity of Nigerians being daily eroded by uncontrolled migration.

5.1. Conclusion

Migrants are attracted to sources of wealth as a moth is to light. Europe is the foremost part of the industrialized world, well-endowed, and better governed. It is its fabled wealth that many migrants are irresistibly drawn to. But Europe is a fortress which only the rich and powerful could easily access. In spite of its insurmountable odds, Nigerian migrants, many of them deluded by the grandiose wealth to be attained, stake everything, their patrimony and even life to attain. Many forged travel documents to actualize their quest to partake in this alchemy that would banish
excruciating poverty in their lives. Others stow away in ships under turbulent seas to reach their destination—Europe. While a lot more defy the Sahara Desert to cross the perilous Mediterranean Sea Islands of Lampadusa and Spanish Canary Islands to embrace the cherished El Dorado more often in vain. The migrants’ attempt to get around this fortress Europe has cost so many lives in recent times. Between January and early July 2014 over 500 migrants were drowned while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea on boats off the Italian coast. Survivors of another shipwreck confirmed that about 75 migrants lost their lives trying to cross into Italy (Nigeria Vanguard July 2, 2014). The fixation of migrants to reach Italy is buttressed by an account of a Nigerian embassy official in Tripoli, Libya. He narrated how one of the rafters ferrying some 20 Nigerians capsized and the victims were drowning. When help came from a Maltese military vessel on patrol, one of the six Nigerians rescued eventually regained consciousness. He inquired from his kind attendants where he was and was promptly told. To the dismay of his custodians who were expecting an effusion of gratitude to God and the rescuers, he blotted out from the recesses of his dreamy fixation: “Oh, take me to Italy. I said I’m going to Italy, not—Malta” He had to be taken to a mental asylum (Obaynwona, 2005). Many migrants suffer from this fixation and are psychologically wrecked.

Indeed, the European coast guards especially Italy, Spain and Malta have performed chivalrous deeds to minimize the tragedy that would have been associated with migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea with rickety boats and policing mainland Europe from poverty stricken African migrants. The cost of policing the Mediterranean Sea from hungry Nigerian migrants is enormous. However, it would be more realistic tackling the upsurge of migrants from its source. Europe has already reached its limit of development. EU leaders should change their style of trying to protect their paradise from African migrants. They have the ingenuity to replicate the European technological transformation in Africa without losing their edge in world leadership. Africa is a virgin land where they could establish many of their factories and help stem the tide of migration to Europe. Globalization and free trade would make meaning to the average Nigerian if he is accepted as a member of the global community. Shedding of crocodile tears after the loss of African migrants struggling to cross the perilous Mediterranean Sea off Spanish and Italian costal lines would not solve the problem. We are of the opinion that the EU can afford the cost of constructing an underground train linking Europe with sub-Saharan African countries. Europe is like an umbilical cord to Africa. Europeans should take pride in developing Africa.

However, Africa and indeed Nigeria must put its house in order. Nigeria is naturally well endowed and with highly enterprising citizens. It is disheartening that very few elites monopolise the resources of the country, leaving the vast majority of the peasantry in penury. Nigeria is over-centralized with the constitution giving the central government more than 50 items in the exclusive list while the concurrent list is legislated upon by both federal and state governments. The clamour for devolution of more powers to the federating units has been resisted. For instance, the police force is centrally controlled as well as mining of crude oil resources, and other minerals making the struggle for power a “do or die” affair. The essence of leadership is to grow the economy to be able to sustain the bulging population. In Nigeria, however, it is about “sharing the so-called national cake” by the party in power or their military surrogates. Thus, no position of authority is ever occupied by the most competent among its talented citizenry. Everything is trivialized, looked at from ethnic prism, cronyism and favouritism. A hedonistic governing elite interested in fleets of cars, private jets and castles around the world to the utter neglect of industrialisation and infrastructural development has kept Nigerian youths impoverished and perpetually beggarly around the world. Thus, the glittering capital cities of Europe and their humming industrial establishments did not drop from the sky but were achieved by dedicated leaders concerned with lifting their people out of the poverty loop. Nigerians can replicate Europe example through selfless leadership. Nigeria has regressed as the poverty capital of the world, displacing India in the inglorious top spot. Little wonder her youths are leaving the country in droves by any means possible.
As Odita (2020) remarked:

the notion that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence daily lures many young Nigerians to embark on the dangerous journey of migration through the desert to Europe through North Africa, where they face violence, exploitation and abuse along the central Mediterranean route.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that 70% of people irregularly migrating from Nigeria are from Edo State. The perceptive Governor of Edo State, Godwin Obaseki, has created an entrepreneurship and farming scheme to reabsorb and rehabilitate the returnees (Odita, 2020). The saying that an idle mind is the devil's workshop aptly applies to the upsurge in youth migration in Nigeria. The worsening economic situation in Nigeria, if properly addressed would rekindle hope in the people and stem the utopia dream of Europe among Nigerians.

Sub-Saharan African is passing through political and economic crises. Her people are malnourished, blighted and in dire need of succour. But they do not need self-pity but opportunities to better their lot. They should not be categorized into what Zygmunt Bauman (Hagl, 2012) called vagabonds in his “space war”. Bauman categorized mankind into two: the tourists and the vagabonds. The tourists are those who are on the move because they want to be. They are attracted by something, find it irresistible, and move toward it. While vagabonds are those who are on the move because they find their environs unbearable, inhospitable for any number of reasons. He opined that the positive aspects of globalization are those associated with tourists, while an unavoidable side effect is that many others are transformed into vagabonds. The world economy is chiefly driven by tourism. The Spanish economy is sustained by tourism. A vibrant economy, a secure environment, draws tourists whereas inhospitable and chaotic country turns off tourists. Nigeria leaders should not reduce her people to Bauman’s characterisation of vagabonds in the world stage.

Europe in the Middle Ages faced a population crisis which the discoveries of other parts of the world helped to alleviate. According to Siegfried Hagl (2012), “Europe with its growing population would have suffered a series of deep economic crises, had it not been for the discoveries of the great navigators. The age of discoveries is gone. Nations are husbanding their resources, using science and technology to drive their economy. Europe does not wish to be burdened with unskilled migrants and refugees. Indeed, skilled workers are highly sought out for by industrialised nations. Nigerian government should strengthen its educational sector, improve its infrastructural deficit and revive the economy to engage its large population productively. This is partly a recipe against migration.

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