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## Post-Colonial Nigerian State and Complexities of Irregular Cross-Border Migration

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### Abstract

The post-colonial Nigerian state has been confronted with internal socio-economic and political quagmires. Over the years, the globally accepted standards for sustainable human capital development seem to have eluded the Nigerian citizens, thereby creating situations of reoccurring social complexities. Irregular migrations across Nigerian borders have implicated trans-national illegalities especially within West African region, and African continent in general. Today, there is a consensus among scholars that human migration across borders of Nigeria has remained an issue of national concern with far-reaching consequences. The study aims at examining how cross-border human migration had been orchestrated by internal contradictions, hence leading to unprecedented increase in organized trans-border illegal and criminal activities in Nigeria and beyond. The study adopts documentary method and employs the push and pull theory of migration that explains the phenomenon within analytical framework of trajectories of post-colonial Nigeria and complexities of cross border migration of Nigerians. The study argues that many migrants who chose irregular migration routes seemed not to be aware of the challenges they would encounter, neither are they sure of job opportunities in their destination countries, but due to years of governance failure in Nigeria, Nigerian migrants consider leaving the country as a better alternative. The paper further argues that no matter all measures put in place by Nigeria government and other West African states to prevent irregular migration, the possibility of achieving that is far from reality. As long as the Nigerian state remains irresponsible and irresponsive to economic hardships of its citizens, there will always be outflow of Nigerians who are ever willing to 'escape' from the abysmally poor living standards in the country.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, post-colonial Nigerian State, human migration, human trafficking, push and pull theory

### Introduction

Africa is generally perceived as a continent confronted with enormous human security challenges. This perception is anchored on the level of humanitarian crises, poor living

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standards, trending unemployment, poverty and hunger as well as other human related security concerns. The post-colonial African states apportioned blames to colonialism for being responsible for their socio-political and economic problems. In fact, this position was not misconstrued by some critical thinkers such as Rodney (1972), Settles (1996) and Fanon (1961), who believed that colonialism came with underdevelopment, deprivation, exclusion and suppression. It is based on this that it was argued that colonialism in Africa was synonymous with underdevelopment. They argued that economic woes of Africa are traceable to the contact that Africa had with Europe. After decades of independence, Africa is still stereotyped as a region where poverty and conflict dwell and reinforce each other. There are evidences to validate this claim. For instance, conflict and poverty have caused humanitarian crises in African countries like Rwanda, Ethiopia, Congo, Nigeria, Mali, and so on. These two phenomena combined usually cause mass displacement and forced migration. There are reports indicating an ‘exodus’ of desperate Africans attempting to escape from poverty, hunger, unemployment and conflict, to move to Europe in search of European economic ‘El Dorado’ (Flahaux and de Haas, 2016). Nigeria does not only belong to this category of African nations affected by economic and social challenges but also the country produces more irregular migrants than other sub-Saharan African countries (Beber and Scacco, 2020).

The colonial Nigeria experienced rural-urban migration of people seeking economic opportunities and better living standards. During this period, the concentration of industries in the urban areas made cities more attractive than rural areas. Rural areas were perceived to lack certain basic infrastructure, business and job opportunities for school leavers. These serve as an explanatory factor that buttress push-pull analysis. During colonial era the Nigerian economy was characterized with structural disarticulation and uneven infrastructure development (Ake, c1981). It was structured for the benefit of the European capitalists, which was one of the reasons that heightened the agitation of the Nigerian nationalists for self-rule. At independence, many believed that there would be a restructuring of the economy to accommodate both the urban and rural dwellers to participate in the economy. However, the status quo was maintained by the politicians who inherited political power from the colonial officials. Instead of the political elite to redirect the economy to the path of development, they were consumed in their quest for primitive accumulation of wealth. The situation has not changed.

The post-colonial Nigeria experiences series of political and economic disturbances despite the fact that the country is abundantly endowed with enormous human and natural resources. The trajectory of political development in Nigeria has been worrisome as well as the concomitant human centred economic development which remains an issue of serious concern. The interplay of politics and economics for the general well-being of the people seems to consolidate internal economic instabilities and human security deficits in Nigeria. The post-colonial Nigerian state has been battling with human security challenges orchestrated by poor governance, economic mismanagement, systemic corruption and

general sectoral instabilities. These situations have impacted on the human development of the Nigerian citizens after many years of political independence. The struggle for power among the political elites also has its implication for the general well-being of the people. Since independence, the political elites in Nigeria are involved in struggle for state power and use same for their personal aggrandizement (Obikaeze, 2019). Arguably, the recycling of the elites, the capture of state power, and the use of state power has often served the interest of the elites at the expense of the masses. This is suggestive that the people of Nigeria are systematically alienated from benefiting from the state. This scenario negates the 'social contract' between the people and the state. The inability of the Nigerian government to translate the aspirations of the people into reality reinforces pervasive crimes, acute poverty, human health vulnerability, internal conflicts and illegal cross-border movements.

In 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that the overall unemployment rate had risen to 13.9%, with the youth unemployment rate having risen to 25% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In 2018, the World Poverty Clock categorized Nigeria as the poverty capital of the world, with statistics displaying 87 million Nigerians living in poverty. This means that more people are living in extreme poverty than any other country in the world. This categorization does not contradict the reality on ground. More than 50% of Nigerians lives in poverty (Akran 2018), and majority of the population is commonly identified with widespread poverty (Obadan 2001). Poverty in Nigeria cuts across ethnic, religious, and gender lines, pervading every social category. The post-colonial Nigerian state is also engulfed by incessant internal conflicts. There have been intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, banditry, farmers-herders clashes, militancy, and so on. In fact, general armed conflicts and terrorism in the country have continued to appear insurmountable despite their negative consequences. For instance, Boko Haram insurgency has caused severe humanitarian crisis leaving many people in need of humanitarian aid (Botha and Abdile, 2019). Since independence, the magnitude and dimension of ethno-religious wars is increasing and further deepening disunity. It seems that colonial administration in Nigeria handed over a politically and ethnically vulnerable state, as Uka (2012) alleges that former colonial officers in Nigeria handed Nigerians ethnic and religious conflict in the country. They are being exploited by the political demagogues to inflame social tensions to attain their selfish interests.

Despite the challenges confronting Nigeria, the political leadership is yet to galvanize human and material resources for the development of citizens. There are obvious governance failures attributed to both past and present administrations. There are cases of misappropriation of funds, mismanagement of scarce material resources, siphon of public treasury, and so on. Multidimensional corruption is pervasive, hindering socio-economic and political development. Consequent upon loss of hope in Nigeria as well as level of massive infrastructural decay, unemployment, poor state of human capital development and poverty, there have been cases of Nigerians leaving the country to other parts of the

world. As a result of the state of hopelessness in the country, many have taken dreaded risks in their attempt to escape from poverty and hunger. Typical examples are instances of Nigerians migrating to Europe through desert, Mediterranean Sea and other risky and unofficial routes. Pattern of migration is worrisome as unskilled individuals who attempt to move out of Nigeria prefer to adopt diverse means that can facilitate their movement to their destination. This development comes with security challenges and increase crimes and illegal transactions at the borders. This study therefore sets out to investigate how internal economic hardships, armed conflicts, high employment rates and so forth, pose as a push factor that contradicts the trajectories of the post-colonial Nigerian state. Also, to link the above variables as some of the enablers of human migration as well as to mediate in the ongoing debates and controversies regarding complexities of irregular migration. While pursuing this objective, the study provides both theoretical and practical justifications by situating the discussion strictly, to broaden intellectual space and expand the scope of extant literature. The study will provoke further debates regarding the so-called awareness programmes by government sponsored organizations that campaign against irregular migration in Nigeria, without the Nigerian government initiating sustainable development-driven policies and programmes to pull many Nigerians out of unemployment, poverty and hunger. Thus, the study will be relevant to policy makers in Nigeria as well as civil society organisations to continue to hold the post-colonial Nigerian state responsible and accountable for the dangerous, tortuous, dehumanizing and life-threatening cross-border movements of Nigerians who struggle to escape from the country for economic survival. Aligning with this, the study tilts towards a paradigm shift by not classifying individuals who migrate from Nigeria to other countries as strictly voluntary migrants, but “economic escapees” or forced migrants.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Push and Pull Theory of Migration. This theory is originally attributed to Ernest George Ravenstein’s *The Laws of Migration* published in 1885, in which he explained and predicted migration patterns both within countries and between nations. Ravenstein’s work was informed by the industrial revolution in the second half of the 19th century in Europe which revolutionised work patterns and lifestyles in Europe and North America. As a result, millions of people left their birthplaces and livelihoods and went in search of greener pastures, or at least, to escape from the one that had become unbearable (Corbett, 2003). It was on the basis of this that Ravenstein decided to study the relationship between the distance and volume of migration between a source and destination country, and came up with the seven laws of migration. Following Ravenstein’s perspective, people are expected to move from low-income countries to middle- or high-income countries, as well as from densely populated to sparsely populated areas. This brings about “the general notion that migration movements tend towards a certain spatial-economic equilibrium” (de Haas, 2008, p.4). This is the underlying assumption of the push and pull theory of migration.

Other scholars that have popularized the push and pull theory include Lee (1966) who opined that the decision to migrate are determined by factors in the country of origin, factors in the destination countries and other intervening variables which include distance, immigration laws of both origin and destination countries, as well as physical barriers. Though Lee (1966) did not use the term, his analytical framework is generally construed to be the ‘push and pull’ theory (de Haas, 2008). Another scholar whose analysis of migration movements has popularized the push and pull theory is Zimmermann (1996). Zimmermann (1996) categorized the factors that drive migration movements as demand pull and supply push factors. Demand pull factors usually attract people to migrate to certain geographical locations where there are better conditions of work, social security and a working economy. On the other hand, supply push factors include bad governance, unemployment, and insecurity which push people into migrating to other areas where there are better conditions.

Push and pull migration theory contends that human desire for better opportunities and improvement of one’s life usually motivates people to migrate. The ‘pull’ factors are the conditions in the destination countries which tend to pull the intending migrants from their countries of origin. In most cases, the conditions in the destination countries are better than what obtains in the migrant’s country of origin. Such conditions include better and more rewarding job opportunities, better general living conditions, better education and health systems, better security system, etc. On the other hand, the ‘push’ factors are the conditions in the migrants’ countries of origin which push them away from their birthplaces to other countries overseas. Such conditions include unemployment or underemployment, abject poverty, general low conditions of living, rapid population growth, insecurity, internal conflicts and violence, political instability and oppressive regimes, human rights violations etc. While ‘pull’ factors are referred to as positive factors, ‘push’ factors are referred to as negative factors.

Despite the attractiveness and utility of the push and pull theory in explaining migration movements, it has come under criticisms. Among other criticisms, de Haas (2008) doubts whether the theory is of any analytical use, and whether it can even be called a theory in the first place. He contends that the model is merely an assemblage of the different factors which play different roles in migration decisions. de Haas asserts that the aspirations-capabilities model is a better framework for analysing migration movements (de Haas, 2021). According to him, international migration is determined by aspirations (ambitions) and capabilities (resources) to migrate. In other words, people can only migrate if they have the aspirations and capabilities to make migration take place, and not because of the factors that lure them into other countries or the factors that push them away from their own countries. He contends that there is a link between development and migration. Development expands peoples’ access to education, resources, media, knowledge and social networks. In the same vein, infrastructural development and improved transportation systems reduce the cost and risk of traveling, thereby enhancing migration.

Despite these criticisms of the push and pull theory, its usefulness in explaining irregular migration in Nigeria is not in doubt. The economic conditions in Nigeria, exemplified in low wages, high unemployment and underemployment rates, and general poor living conditions constitute the push (negative) factors that push people away from their homelands in search of greener pastures abroad. Also included in this are the worsening insecurity situation and political instability that have characterised the system for a long time. Thus, young people consider migration to escape these poor living conditions. In contrast, the pull (positive) factors include the conditions abroad that lure young Nigerians away from their country. There are evidences and testimonies of friends and family members who travel overseas and ‘made it’ after a short stay, suggesting that life is generally easier over there. Apart from testimonies from those who have migrated overseas, globalization has also helped to change the way young Nigerians see the world. They are now aware of standards of living and lifestyles elsewhere across the globe through televisions, mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices. These have changed their understanding of the world and increased their expectations, and therefore, motivate them in seeking for a brighter future abroad. These factors (both push and pull) then combine to motivate young people to ‘do everything possible’ including using the irregular means to migrate, in order to escape from the negative conditions at home and also to secure a better life abroad.

Thus, the aspirations-capabilities model of de Haas (2021), despite its seeming explanatory powers, does not ultimately capture the complexities of irregular migration in Nigeria. These young people do not necessarily migrate because they have the capabilities or resources to do so. Many of them take loans to fund their migration movements with the hope of paying back when they cross over. Many others are sponsored or assisted by family and friends, while families sell their properties (especially lands) to sponsor their children to travel abroad in the hope that the economic fortunes of such family will improve when he/she migrates abroad. This also explains why most of the intending migrants use the irregular routes because they do not have enough resources or capabilities for regular migration. Therefore, in line with the foregoing analysis, the push and pull theory of migration is considered suitable for analysis post-colonial Nigerian state and complexities of irregular cross-border migration.

### **Why Irregular Migration is Preferred among African Migrants**

Migration is an age-old phenomenon. From antiquity, people have been moving from one location to another, unrestricted by geographical barriers. Naturally, human beings tend to move to places that offer them better opportunities, especially in terms of economic gains, better living conditions, and even personal safety (Okeke-Uzodike, Isike & Iloh, 2021). These movements could either be regular/legal or irregular/illegal. Regular migration entails obtaining a visa, residence, work or study permit, as well as meeting other requirements that are needed before a migrant enters into another country. It is when a migrant enters into another country in non-compliance with these requirements that his/her movement becomes irregular or illegal. It is in line with this that the International Organization for

Migration (IOM), defines irregular migration as movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving country (Migration Data Portal, 2022).

Irregularity of migration does not refer to the migrant per se, but to his/her migratory status at any particular time. What this means is that the status of the migrant can change either during transit or stay in the country of destination. For example, someone who leaves his/her country as a regular migrant can suddenly change into an irregular migrant due to sudden changes in migration laws of the receiving country, and vice versa. Second, an irregular migrant who enters another country through illegal cross-border routes can regularize his/her stay on entry, and becomes a legal migrant. Third, a migrant may meet all requirements before entering the country of destination, but may violate his/her visa conditions by either overstaying after visa expiration, or work without work permit, thereby turning his/her status from a regular to an irregular migrant. So, irregularity is not about the migrant, but about his/her migratory status. Migrants do not ordinarily choose the irregular path to mobility, especially considering the risks involved in the process. Irregular migration (especially as regards entering the country of destination) becomes an option because destination countries have continuously narrowed access to meeting the requirements for regular migration. The stringent nature of migration laws of destination countries has pushed intending migrants into taking the irregular option of getting to their destinations. As a matter of fact, highly restricted access to legal migration is the primary reason migrants consider the irregular option to mobility. In many cases, transit and destination countries have erected strict surveillance at official border crossing points, thereby forcing migrants to develop other alternative cross-border routes, in most cases, with the help of smugglers (International Organization for Migration, n.d.).

There are many instances of main destination countries (such as European Union [EU] countries) tightening access to regular migration. For instance, since the early 1990s, the EU has been tightening visa legislation for third countries, especially since after the Union introduced free mobility within the Schengen Area in 1995 (Kleist, 2011). This has made intending migrants heading to Europe unable to obtain the required travelling documents. In such circumstance, migrants devise other channels through which they cross over to Europe. Beyond tightening migration laws, the EU has also externalised some of its migration policies to Africa where African countries are expected to collaborate with the EU to minimize the rate of irregular migration from the continent to the EU. This is usually in exchange for aid and financial support to be used in strengthening border management. The aim is for African countries, including Nigeria, to tighten their borders in order to make it difficult for intending migrants to leave. FRONTEX, the European border agency, has been deeply involved in externalizing border controls and patrols to Africa, including its territorial waters. Many African countries, especially transit countries such as Niger, Morocco and Libya, have been implementing these measures funded by the EU, and aimed at curtailing irregular migration to Europe (Kleist, 2011).

One of the programmes in this regard is the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) in which stranded nationals are meant to return home after their journeys to Europe have been thwarted on transit. Nigeria has received external support from the EU Trust Fund to receive and resettle its citizens who intended to migrate to the EU but were caught up with stringent measures while on transit in Niger and Libya. Outcome of these collaborative measures by countries of origin, transit and destination have not always been the desired one. Migrants from third world countries have continued to devise new irregular means of getting to Europe, despite the danger, risks, and difficulty involved in the process. In order to ease their journey and circumvent official procedures, irregular migrants often make use of smugglers to get to their destinations. The job of these smugglers is to facilitate the movement of migrants from their countries of origin to their countries of destination. According to Iloh (forthcoming), the services involved in this facilitation include transit through the borders; transportation within transit countries; providing accommodation for their clients on transit; dealing with officials at checkpoints; helping migrants to secure temporary jobs while on transit; and helping to facilitate release of their clients/migrants from detention if they were arrested. More importantly, migrants use smugglers because of the increasing restrictive regimes of cross-border movements between West Africa and North Africa, as well as to navigate through the volatility of the Sahel region (through which the journey is made) which is replete with the presence of criminal gangs (di Cortemiglia, Hauck, Knoll, Akinyemi, Diallo, Ward-Booth, and Le Boulch, 2018). Nigerian migrants make extensive use of smugglers to move to Europe. A survey of Nigerian migrants taken in Italy, Libya and Nigeria shows that 91% of Nigerians who have migrated abroad have made use of smugglers at one point or the other (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021a).

Owing to the irregular nature of their movements, migrants usually use overland and sea routes to get to their destinations. Air routes are avoided because the strict immigration controls at airports make irregular journeys by air difficult. Even along the preferred overland and sea routes, tight border controls and immigration policies have led migrants and smugglers to develop alternative sea and overland crossings in order to avoid contact with state authorities. As regards overland movements, de Haas notes as follows:

Migrants from West Africa such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo or Benin usually travel via Niger's capital Niamey. Migrants from Nigeria, Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, and other central African countries directly pass from Nigeria, usually after regrouping in the cities of Sokoto and Kano in northern Nigeria. From Agadez, migration routes bifurcate to the Sebha oasis in Libya... and to Tamanrasset in southern Algeria... From Sebha in southern Libya, migrants move to Tripoli and other coastal cities or to Tunisia; from the coast, migrants travel by boat to either Malta or the Italian islands of Lampedusa, Pantalleria, and Sicily (de Haas, 2007, p.18).

Other overland routes connect Chad with Libya and they are most frequently used by migrants from Nigeria, Congo, Cameroon and Sudan. The alternative route to these



overland routes is through the sea, where migrants, especially from Nigeria and other West African countries sail to the Canary Islands in the southern part of Spain through Mauritania, Senegal and through other coasts around the sub-region. These irregular maritime journeys across the Mediterranean Sea usually follow three main routes: the Western Mediterranean Route, the Central Mediterranean Route, and the Eastern Mediterranean Route. Idemudia and Boehnke (2020) have also identified two other routes: the West African Route and the Western Balkan Route. Iloh (forthcoming) has documented the interconnectivities of these maritime routes and how often they are used by Nigerian and other West African migrants. In particular, the Western and Central Mediterranean Routes as well as the West African Route are the routes frequently used by Nigerian and other African migrants heading to Europe (di Cortemiglia et al, 2018). Idemudia and Boehnke (2020) further note that for Nigerian migrants, they pass through Kano to Agadez in Niger, and then to Tripoli in Libya. Alternatively, they may pass through Tamanrasset in Algeria after leaving Agadez before linking up with Oujda in Morocco, and then depart to Europe from the Western Mediterranean Route.

Evidence has shown that these irregular journeys through land and sea routes come with a lot of risks and dangers, and have led to several fatalities. Migrants on overland trans-Saharan movements to North Africa usually do so on trucks and pick-up vans that carry as many as 30 persons or even more in bigger vehicles (Yayboke, 2020). Alternatively, in order to avoid the tight border controls and the activities of armed gangs in the Maghreb, many migrants sail to the Canary Islands through the coasts of Mauritania and Senegal, and many of them do so using traditional wooden fishing canoes known as pirogues, or by hiding in cargo ships (de Haas, 2007). Migrants also pass through several abuses especially in the hands of local armed gangs in transit countries who either capture and traffic them or kidnap them for ransom. Kuwonu and Donovan (2019) note that in 2019, the International Organization for Migration estimated that between 700,000 and one million migrants (majority of them were West Africans) who were stranded in Libya were detained by armed groups and militias who extorted money from them before setting them free.

Many of the migrants do not eventually get to their countries of destination as they die either by drowning in the Mediterranean or under the scorching heat of the Sahara. Between 2014 and 2019, about 30,000 of these migrants have either gone missing or lost their lives from dehydration resulting from the scorching desert heat (Kuwonu and Donovan, 2019). In the desert between Niger and Algeria alone, Idris (2022) reports that an estimated 500 migrants die yearly in that route, and that the actual figure is likely to be more. The first half of 2021 witnessed the death of about 1,140 migrants along the three main Mediterranean routes on their way to Italy and Spain (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021b). Earlier in 2019, an estimated 5,200 migrants lost their lives or were missing on all migration routes. By 2020, the figure declined to about 3,900 (IOM, 2021). This decline could be as a result of COVID 19 pandemic. Nevertheless, Idemudia and Boehnke (2020) report that about 50 per cent of dead or missing migrants in all routes are Africans, including Nigerians.

Of the five maritime routes discussed above, the Central Mediterranean Route has been identified as the most dangerous route as an estimated 10% of migrants using the route either die or get missing (Idemudia and Boehnke, 2020). In the same vein, Yayboke (2020) notes that more than 3% of migrants using that route to Italy alone usually die in the process. The Western Mediterranean Route is not however free from fatalities. Within the first eight months of 2021, more than 780 fatalities were reported on that route to Canary Islands, and the third quarter of the same year witnessed several shipwrecks, including one in which 47 migrants from West Africa could not be accounted for (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021c). According to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2022), the number of shipwrecks in all these migratory routes in 2021 was 84, and the number of deaths arising from them was put at 1,173.

### Complexities of Cross-Border Migrants' Journeys

The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment encourages ECOWAS member states to remove obstacles to free movement of persons, services and capital (ECOWAS, 1979). Although this provision, alongside with the general objectives of ECOWAS promote migration of ECOWAS citizens, there are internal contradictions and complexities responsible for influx of migrants within and outside the region. The strategic position of West Africa linking it to the North Africa and the tropical zones, but also through its opening towards the Atlantic and the Americas has always been a place of intensive mobility and intermixing of populations (Charrière & Frésia, 2008). Countries in West Africa have experienced various forms of socio-economic and political instabilities, and have continued to be deeply affected by complex situations that attract internal and international interventions. For instance, the immediate post-colonial West African states experienced turbulent conflicts that triggered humanitarian crises, as was the case in the 30 months Nigeria-Biafran war (1967-1970), the political liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau (1963-1973), the Casamance independence movement in Senegal (1980s till date), the 1989 Mauritanian conflict, and the River Mano countries' (Sierra Leone and Liberia) wars from 1989-2000 (Charrière & Frésia, 2008). Beyond armed conflicts in the above mentioned, there is existence of governance patterns that cut short the aspirations of the people. There are pervasive corrupt practices that transcend every sector of the economy.

The level of human capital development is very poor. In fact, general economic and social conditions of the people are below global standards. Based on this traversing crisis of development, West African people, and Nigerians in particular struggle to survive beyond the shores of their national territories. The implication of this scenario is that there is imminent financial displacement of people from their countries of origin to another environment. Thus, many migrants who embark of tortuous journey are migrants seeking diverse ways of survival. In the process, they embark on irregular or unofficial routes to the destination countries. Based on desperation to survive, a good number of migrants are engaged in illegal means of money making. For instance, there are reports that there are

cases of cross-border human trafficking, armed robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, and illegal movement of small firearms. Regrettably, porous borders and some ungoverned spaces have facilitated the illegal movement of persons and items within West African borders. Obikaeze, Inah and Efanodor-Obeten (2021) argue that porous borders in Sub-Saharan Africa pose a serious threat to human security, thereby opening a floodgate for unregulated inflow and outflow of illegal migrants and materials. There has been no dependable governance system from ECOWAS Common approach or single-country unilateralism that provides effective migration governance in West Africa (Iwuoha and Mbaegbu, 2021). Thus, there has been no reliable model which provides effective strategies and mechanisms for effective border regulation in the region.

Nigeria is prominent and significant both as a regional economic hub and a typical rapidly growing economy in Africa (Iwuoha, 2018 cited in Iwuoha, 2021). The economic strength of Nigeria is drawn from her oil resources and population, making the country a regional actor in the comity of African states. Despite this strength, the citizens of the country are forcefully leaving the country consequent upon certain factors. There is paucity of opportunities for self-development, hostile working environment, lack of reliable sources of income, unreliable high education academic calendar, and other sundry reasons. This is attributed to ever increasing number of international migrants from Nigeria to Africa and Europe (Connor & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019). These have contributed to both regular and irregular migration. However, many unskilled people who migrate from Nigeria to other West African states or Europe usually follow irregular routes in order to bypass immigration law of Nigeria and destination country. In most cases, agents or migration syndicates are involved to facilitate free movement of irregular migrants. In Africa, undocumented dangerous migration to Europe is large. This kind of journeys comes with immense risk to livelihoods (UNICEF, 2017). Despite that, many in Africa participate in irregular migration.

The UNHCR reports indicate that approximately 144,166 migrants entered Europe irregularly through the sea, with more than 2275 reported dead or missing (UNHCR, 2018). Further, UNHCR (2022) reports that the death toll has increased. In 2021, 3,231 crossing migrants were recorded as dead or missing at sea in the Mediterranean and the northwest African routes, with 1,881 in 2020, 1,510 in 2019, and more than 2,277 for 2018. Nigeria is one of the main departure countries, including Morocco, Guinea, Mali, and Algeria. Nigeria is among the top nine countries involved in irregular immigration in Europe, and Nigerians constitute the largest population risking to cross to Europe through the sea (European Migration Network, 2018). UNHCR (2018) further reported that migrants experience terrible and dehumanizing treatment as they attempt to transit to other countries. This includes, but not exclusive to sexual exploitation meted at female migrants by migration agents and other border security agents. Migrants on transit die at the sea, especially Mediterranean Sea, and others meet their death in the desert at sea and on land (desert). Migrants are reported to suffer financial exploitation by migration agents. Carling (2016) submits that while male migrants pay smugglers, their female counterparts are often

victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking (Carling, 2006). They continue to be victims of deception, coercion and exploitation, after the trafficked individuals have arrived at their destination (Ellis and Akpala, 2011), because trafficking involves a long-term relationship between the trafficker and the trafficked person (Richards, 2004).

Majority of the victims of human trafficking are younger girls from Edo State, and other southern States like Ogun, Osun, Lagos, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Rivers, Cross-River, Delta and Akwa Ibom (Frontex, 2018; IOM, 2017). As part of the complexities of migration, trafficked girls are subjected to ritual by their traffickers for the purpose of eliciting total compliance. In some cases, they are forced to submit their nails, pubic hairs, menstrual blood or even forced to sleep in coffins (Obi, Bartolini and D’Haese, 2019). The traffickers may device other weapons of psychological exploitation by removal of the trafficked identity documents, and continually threatening to expose the victims to authorities to be deported (Richards, 2004). The reason for this is to instil fear and to subject the victims to a psychological trauma in order to serve the trafficked person as a prostitute or sex object for financial gains. It is reported that both the traffickers and the victims follow the same irregular routes (Taub, 2017). For instance, from any part of the country, both the trafficker and victim travel by road to Kano and upwards to Libya through Agadez in the Niger Republic where they are kept in connection houses. From Libya they find their way to Europe. The movement is usually complex and dangerous because to get to Europe requires crossing over the Mediterranean Sea. According to IOM (2019) more than 1,200 migrant children died from 2014 to 2018, nearly half of whom perished while attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. During 2018-2020, of 3,151 Nigerians who irregularly entered Europe by sea and land, 65% used the Central Mediterranean Route, 29% the Eastern Mediterranean and 6% the Western Mediterranean. During 2021, however, the majority of Nigerians entering irregularly (62%) arrived by land from Turkey to Bulgaria and Greece, while 36% arrived by sea on the Central Mediterranean (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-UNODC, 2022). According to the report, in 2017, 18,260 Nigerians arrived irregularly in Europe, representing the largest group by nationality that year. The number declined in 2020-2021, possibly due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

Another complexity of irregular migration is the involvement of smugglers who facilitate illegal and undocumented entry of a person into another country. Smuggling has continued to be a trending pattern of facilitating irregular migration. It has become fashionable among irregular immigrants due to increasing and restrictive border controls and inadequate opportunity at home, hence leaving migrants with alternative of relying on smugglers in order to have access to their prospective destination country (Skrivankova, 2006). They deceive escaping migrants to believe that the journey to their destination(s) is easy in order to exploit them financially. They often deceive the migrants regarding their safety and means of transportation as well as the distance of their journey. After collecting money from the desperate migrants, they take them to unanticipated life-threatening routes such as desert and sea. In the process, smugglers, unaware of the migrants, engage in

intermediary transactions by selling or handing over the migrants to other smugglers or syndicates en route. It has been a reoccurring phenomenon that in the process, migrants meet their untimely death in a most dreadful manner. For instance, many migrants who are deceived into following desert such as Sahara Desert with little or without water die as a result of starvation and thirst. However, many migrants are aware of the risks involved using smugglers. According to UNODC:

A study conducted through the use of interview instrument in 2019 and 2021 showed that migrants who embarked on the journey were aware of the risks and conditions, including women who were aware of the risks of sexual violence but still embarked on it. The study shows that some returned Nigerian migrants were still interested in leaving again despite their experiences. When asked whether they would have started the journey knowing the implications, 62% of Nigerians surveyed in 2021 said yes, just 23% said no and 15% were undecided. Similarly, 49% stated that they were very likely or likely to encourage others to migrate as they did, 20% were neutral, and 31% said they were unlikely or very unlikely to do (UNODC, 2022).

There are also stories that Nigerian migrants are sometimes kidnapped while attempting to cross Mali, Mauritania and Niger as well as while trying to leave Libya. The kidnapers usually demand a ransom from the families of the victims. Sometimes, when the request of the kidnapers is not met the kidnapped victim is tortured and even killed by the kidnapers. This is usually the situation in the Sahara Desert. It is sometimes an arranged deal between the driver and the kidnap gang. The driver sells the migrants to the kidnapers. In the context of smuggling, human rights abuses are perpetrated by both smugglers and other actors, such as kidnapers against smuggled Nigerians (UNODC, 2022). There has been widespread kidnapping, illegal detention, extortion, torture, physical and sexual violence and exploitation, perpetrated against Nigerians in a smuggling context by various actors (UNODC, 2022).

## Conclusion

Many migrants have often preferred to use unofficial routes despite existing legal frameworks and strategies against irregular migration. Regrettably, many Nigerian migrants being aware of the consequences of their risky missions continue to engage in irregular migration due to fear of the unknown in Nigeria. Internal challenges such as inadequate job opportunities, internal conflicts, lack of access to financial independence, excruciating poverty are interwoven factors pushing people out of Nigeria regardless of the social, emotional and psychological hardships they may encounter. Over the years, the post-colonial Nigerian state has been captured by the political elites who appropriate state resources to serve their personal interests. Sadly, the Nigerian state is constituted in such a way that it reflects and mainly caters for a narrow range of interests, that is, the interest of the rapacious and parochial political elite, as Obikaeze (2019) argues that politics in Nigeria has become a class struggle among the political elite to capture state power to satisfy their

personal aggrandizement. Based on the fact that there is a colossal governance failure in Nigeria which reflect in artificial rule of law, policy parochialism, pervasive corruption and general poor human capital management, the challenges enabling people to migrate out of the country will persist. Today, Nigerians while seeking means of survival to take care of themselves and their families are involved in irregular migration which poses great threats to their lives. Unfortunately, the complexities of irregular migration have continued to expand as a result of revolution that has taken place in the communication space. Nigerian migrants are faced with dangerous conditions while trying to escape from state of hopelessness and helplessness. In the process they fall into the hand of smugglers who exploit them financially; traffickers who perpetually subject, especially young girls into sexual exploitation for financial gains; kidnappers who sometime intercept their journeys in desert and kidnap them for a ransom. Beyond these above stated complexities, the risk of crossing through Mediterranean Sea and Sahara Desert has taken the lives of many Nigerians in the quest to escape from Nigeria.

The Nigerian government has attempted to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants by mobilizing the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the Armed Forces, the State Security Service (DSS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI). Despite the operations of these security agencies in combating irregular migration as well as prevent human smuggling and trafficking, the number of irregular migrants has continued to be alarming. Therefore, this paper argues that no matter all measures put in place by Nigeria and other West African states to prevent irregular migration the possibility of achieving that is far from reality. As long as the Nigerian state remains irresponsible and unresponsive to economic hardship of its citizens, there will always be influx of Nigerians who are ever willing to escape from Nigeria.

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