WORKING PAPER

**Rescuing Migrants in Libya:
The Political Economy of State Responses
to Migration Crises – The Case of Ghana**

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DIIS WORKING PAPER SUB-SERIES
ON NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF HOPE AND DESPAIR

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper has two main aims. First, it explores the return of young Ghanaian migrants from Libya following the uprising in 2011. Secondly, the paper is interested in the role state agencies played in the repatriation and resettlement of returnees. Migrants from some 120 countries living in Libya were directly affected by the conflict. The breakdown of law and order saw Ghanaian migrants become targets when the rebels accused the Gaddafi regime of recruiting mercenaries from Sub-Saharan Africa to help put down the rebellion. The conflict brought up the issue of migration management in times of crisis. What was the response of the government of Ghana to its citizens caught up in the crisis? Through a qualitative study of official documents, newspaper reports and in-depth interviews, the paper discusses migration and state responses within a political economy perspective. It posits that Ghanaian migration patterns show no significant difference between the various time periods. However, the characteristics of migrants have changed. Thus, it appears the country has witnessed an increased emigration of young people during the last two decades.

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of 2011 was marked by widespread anti-government protests in the Maghreb. North Africans challenged the political establishments that had dominated their countries for decades. The roots of the revolts against political longevity and economic hardships were set off by an act of self-immolation, committed by a young Tunisian fruit seller on 17 December 2010 (OHCHR 2011). Despite its inauspicious beginnings, the unrests soon spread through Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other parts of the Middle East. The roots of these revolutions, however, were decades of political marginalization, repression, corruption and a sense of injustice. Meanwhile, the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was home to an estimated 1.5 million migrants (Bredeloup & Pliez 2011). Colonel Muammar Al-Gaddafi's pro-Sub-Saharan foreign policy made the country a popular destination for migrants. Furthermore, Libya's proximity to Europe made it the stepping stone into Europe by undocumented migrants (Lucht 2012; de Haas 2007a). The country attracted foreign workers, both highly skilled and larger numbers of unskilled irregular migrants. Mostly without legal status and subject to exploitation, many Sub-Saharan migrants found work in the informal low-skilled labour market in the retail, construction and agriculture sectors. The uprising affected Libya's economy, and those of some migrant sending countries in the South (de Haas & Sigona 2012).[1]

Thus, migration took centre stage in the discussions surrounding the Libyan conflict. The recurring question of migration governance including the irregular mobility of

young Africans and the implications of the Libyan conflict on the local economies of sending countries were raised by international organizations and African governments. Indeed, migration was so crucial to Gaddafi's European policy that when the protests engulfed Libyan cities, the Colonel tried to use the case of irregular migration for political leverage and threaten Europe that "millions of blacks" would swamp European cities if he were to be deposed (Lucht 2011; Bredeloup & Pliez 2011). Yet, there is no consensus on the impact of the conflict. While the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2012b) claimed that the fighting led to one of the largest "migration crises" in modern times, de Haas and Sigona (2012) posit that the revolutions have not "radically transformed migration patterns in the Mediterranean". All the same, the uprising occasioned the involuntary return of citizens of more than 120 countries (IOM 2012b). Sub-Saharan African migrant workers in Libya encountered many problems. Not only were their properties confiscated, they were also accused of aiding the Gaddafi regime as fighting mercenaries.

Ghana is one of the countries whose nationals were caught in the crisis. Indeed, over 18,000 Ghanaians were directly affected by the fighting. When Ghana's economy experienced difficulties in the 1970s, its nationals started looking for better living opportunities in the sub-region. But it was not until the mid-1980s that Libya became one of many Ghanaian migrant destinations in the Global South. Ghanaian migrants expelled from Nigeria in 1983 and 1985 migrated to other parts of the continent including Libya (Akyeampong 2000). At the beginning, the Libyan authorities recruited highly skilled Ghanaian nationals. The awareness of available livelihood opportunities to low-skilled migrants opened an informal migratory route through

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[1] *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*, "Hundreds of returning Tuaregs alarm Mali, Niger" (29 August, 2011).

the Sahara desert. However, by the turn of the new millennium many young Ghanaians were increasingly using Libya as a transit to European destinations (Lucht 2012; Bredeloup 2012; de Haas 2008). It was also during this period that the Libyan authorities intensified the clamp down on irregular migration. For instance, between 2000 and 2012, 12,201 Ghanaians were deported (NADMO 2012). The conflict in 2011 also occasioned the repatriation of 18,455 Ghanaians (*ibid*).[2]

This working paper discusses youth migration and state responses to migration crisis within a political economy perspective. It argues that contemporary youth mobility is not a new phenomenon. However, political and economic developments in Ghana in the last two decades have influenced migration patterns. The paper has two main objectives. First, it explores Ghanaian migration history to Libya and the case of the involuntary return of young migrants from Libya following the uprising of 2011. Secondly, the paper is interested in the role state agencies played in the repatriation and resettlement of nationals. Here, I argue that the state handled the migration crisis without a policy framework to guide the process. The absence of a relevant policy in turn has affected the pace of resettlement and re-integration of the returnees into local communities. The data for this paper was gathered using a qualitative research methodology which used official documents, newspaper reports and ten in-depth interviews. The rest of the paper is divided into four main sections. The first section looks at the state of the existing literature on West African emigration to Libya. The next section of the paper gives a history of Ghanaian migration to Libya. The third section examines migration governance, focusing on deportations and, following the civil war, the repatriation of Ghanaians from Libya. The final section discusses the management of the crisis by state institutions and international organizations. It also looks at the possible consequences of the sudden return of several young men on their households and local communities.

WEST AFRICAN EMIGRATION TO LIBYA: AN OVERVIEW

In recent times, migration in Sub-Saharan Africa has been the focus of the research and policy communities, yet as an OECD (2012: 308) report acknowledged "little is known about migration flows and stocks to, from, and within the region". The reason, as many researchers have noted, is due to the informal character of African migration (e.g. Akokpari 2006, 2000). The informalization of African mobility patterns makes it extremely difficult for researchers to give accurate data on the movement of persons and goods. In a similar vein, for nearly four decades Libya was closed to outside researchers. Academic writings on Sub-Saharan African emigration to Libya from insiders' perspectives are also rare. Indeed, in one of the few extant studies on migration in Libya, Sara Hamood (2008) lamented the dearth of empirical research in this area and noted that "existing research on Libya remains limited", partly because of the regimented nature of Libyan society under Colonel Gaddafi. The permission to conduct field work in Libya was usually denied to outside academics and Libyan scholars were not incentivized enough to conduct research on migration-related issues such as the arbitrary arrest and the detention of migrants.

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[2] The government estimated 10,000 Ghanaians to be living in Libya prior to the conflict.

Nevertheless, broadly, researchers have examined West African emigration to Libya from three related angles. Some have examined the movement patterns of sub-Saharans and the development of "migration corridors" (e.g. Bredeloup 2012; Adepoju 2002; de Haas 2008). Others have shown how transnational mobility has contributed to the urbanization and transformation of the desert landscape. Relatedly, researchers have also examined the plight of migrants in transit through the Sahara desert or those trapped in the forests of Bel Younes at Ceuta, and those drowning in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean Sea (e.g. Bredeloup 2012; Lucht 2012, Hamood 2008). Finally, there are numerous studies examining the impact of migration on the sending countries in the South and the new security concerns of the governments in the North.

The history of contemporary Sub-Saharan African migration is the obvious starting point. In this context, the works of de Haas (2008; 2007) and Bredeloup (2012) on the trajectory of Sub-Saharan migration and the transformation of desert transit economies are useful. In these studies, both researchers emphasized the linkages between current mobility patterns and pre-colonial trading activities in the Sahel region. Yet, they disagree with scholars who use the concept 'transit' to describe the movement of Sub-Saharan Africans to Libya. African historians maintain that before the advent of western imperialism in Africa, a thriving trade relation existed between the West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhay and their North African counterparts (Boahen *et al.*, 1986). Trade routes extended from West Africa to the Mediterranean coast in North Africa. Trading activities between the two regions were diverted to the West African coast when European nations began their voyages in the fifteenth century

(*ibid*). Based on this history, de Haas (2006) concludes that trans-Saharan migration is not a new phenomenon.

However, organizations involved in migration governance in the South tend to favour the migration discourses that see the Sahara desert merely as an overland route used by irregular migrants, human and drug traffickers. Yet, research has shown that prior to political independence, human migration resulted in the urbanization of the desert landscape. Thus, trade, migrant and nomadic activities have revived old settlements and new ones have emerged (Bredeloup 2012). At the same time, this period witnessed several social upheavals in the Sahel region which led to forced and voluntary movement of communities. For instance, civil wars and drought forced Tuareg nomads to look for new settlements and livelihoods in southern Algeria and Libya (Bredeloup & Pliez 2011). Many young Tuareg nomads found work in the construction sites and in oil fields. The period after political independence saw the intensification of the movement of people from other Sahelian states further north in search of employment opportunities. Bredeloup (2012: 462) writes that the 1970s witnessed the migration of some 14,000 Saharawis relocating to Algeria. The upshot is the development of important transit cities in the desert landscape occupied by Niger, Algeria and Libya. Some of the transit settlements in these states have seen "spectacular growth rates" owning to the mobility of people and goods (*ibid*).

Sub-Saharan migrants have increased the populations of the urbanized Sahara. According to Bredeloup (2012: 462), they account for 20 percent of the population of the Algerian Sahara. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the Sahara desert has been tamed and humanized partly because of discriminatory immigration policies in North

Africa and Europe. Akokpari (2000: 72) has observed that "shrinking immigration opportunities" have led to increasing numbers of young Africans using "informal alternatives" to reach their destinations. Thus, migration from West Africa to the Maghreb as well as to other parts of the continent has not been without challenges. Restrictive im-

migration policies have led to many migrants using overland routes to reach destination and transit countries in North Africa (Bredeloup & Pliez 2011; de Haas 2007).

According to experts, the northwards journey from West Africa or Central Africa to Libya is undertaken in several stages and a trip may take between one month and several

Simplified map of international migration routes in and from West and North Africa

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Sources: Brachet (2010), Haas (2008); www.imap-migration.org; migrantsatsea.wordpress.com

years (Bredeloup 2012). Most overland journeys transit at Agadez in Niger. West African migrants from Ghana, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso or Côte d'Ivoire usually travel through Niger's capital Niamey. Those from Nigeria and Central Africa journey through Sokoto and Kano in northern Nigeria (*ibid*). From Agadez, the road divides into northwesterly and northeasterly directions. The left, northwesterly route from Agadez passes through Arlit which branches into Tamanrasset in southern Algeria. The right, northeasterly route from Agadez heads to the Shabha region in Libya (de Haas 2007).

Meanwhile, each of the destination countries in North Africa has its own distinctive attraction. The availability of economic opportunities explains why young West Africans undertake the perilous journey across the desert to reach Libya, and possibly across the Mediterranean into Europe. Following the 1973 oil crisis, Libya attained the new status of "North Africa's migration pole" (de Haas 2006). Its booming oil industry encouraged the emigration of Egyptians and Sudanese to Libya to find work at its oil wells (*ibid*). The imposition of UN Security Council sanctions on Libya between 1992 and 2000 did little to discourage emigration into the country. Rather, Libya's so-called international isolation[3] or pariah status forced it to turn southwards to Sub-Saharan Africa and this gesture culminated in the "consolidation of migration routes and networks" (*ibid*). Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi's pan-African foreign policy included investing in improvised African economies, sponsoring liberation movements and encouraging the free movement of persons. However, it must be pointed out that Libya's immigration laws, in existence since 1987, required all non-citizens entering Libya to have a residence permit or an entry visa (GDP 2009). Yet, the Libyan authorities only inspected the medical certificates of migrants. The non-enforcement of the law encouraged the emigration of nationals from Sub-Saharan Africa to Libya. Migrants filled local job vacancies and also fitted into the government settlement plans which were aimed at revitalizing under-populated desert regions (de Haas 2008).

In the pre-colonial period in Sub-Saharan Africa, intra-states population flows were short-term and circular migrations. Nomadic practices and agricultural production influenced migration flows. During the colonial period, population flows was characterized by a North-South movement. Generally, human populations tended to congregate around the few growth poles in the coastal enclaves. In West Africa, populations moved from the dry savannah and landlocked Sahelian region into the forest belt and coastal regions. Colonial states including Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and the Gambia all experienced this North-South migratory pattern (Kress 2006; Findley 2004; Arthur 1991). The intra-regional migration allowed people to search for livelihood opportunities which the colonial economy offered in the few urban centres. Others also migrated in search of fertile lands for grazing and other agricultural purposes. This migration pattern did not change after independence; it rather increased because of the great differences in economic development of the various states and the policies pursued by the nationalists' leaders.

By virtue of its pioneering role in leading the independence movement, Ghana became an immigration country until the late 1960s (Anarfi & Kwankye 2003; Van Hear

[3] In spite of sanctions, Western companies were still doing business in Libya. See *African Business Journal* "Sanctions for Libya: Libya's oil industry and Western business interests" available at, http://www.tabj.co.za/northern_africa/libya_oil_industry_and_western_business_interests.html (accessed 16.10.2012).

1998; Peil 1995). Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's founding president's pan-African philosophy encouraged the emigration of people from the sub-region into Ghana. However, when the country experienced its first military coup in 1966, which was followed by subsequent coups in 1972 and 1981, Ghana was on the path to a major economic decline. This period marked Ghana's transition from a net immigration to a net emigration country (Van Hear 1998; Peil 1995). It is important to point out that in 1969, a knee jerk policy introduced by Prime Minister Busia's government targeted the immigrant community and this led to the expulsion of several West African nationals from Ghana. Declining living conditions and the general economic decline that Nkrumah's opponents linked to his pursuit of state socialism did not abate with Busia's neo-liberal economic policies. In short, the expulsion of over 200,000 aliens did not arrest the worsening economic situation in Ghana. However, by the mid-1970s Ghanaian nationals were adapting to the living conditions of immigrants in neighbouring countries. Economic decay coupled with political repression encouraged more Ghanaians to emigrate.

Van Hear (1998:74) estimated that two million Ghanaian workers left the country between 1974 and 1981. The Ghanaian migrants who were both skilled and semi-skilled searched for decent livelihood opportunities in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and later in Nigeria (Anarfi & Kwankye 2003). Ivoirian President Félix Houphouet-Boigny's policy of increased agricultural production encouraged the migration of low-skilled Ghanaian, Liberian, Malian, and Burkinabe citizens who found employment in cocoa plantations (Riester 2011). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, migration to Côte d'Ivoire

continued. During this period Nigeria replaced Ghana as West Africa's second most popular migration destination (de Haas 2007; Akyeampong 2000). Like Libya and other Persian Gulf oil producers, the 1973 oil crisis turned oil-rich Nigeria into a popular migration destination. Nigeria's oil windfall allowed the government to increase public spending. Improved pay packages and the availability of employment in the expanding economy attracted substantial numbers of West African nationals (Van Hear 1998). However, like Ghana, ambitious goals and a misguided mass industrialization policy fuelled corruption in the public sector. By 1981, the Nigerian economy began to contract as a result of the decrease in world oil prices (Van Hear 1998; Arthur 1991).

The turning points in West African transnational migration history occurred in 1983 and 1985, when Nigeria, facing a severe economic recession, expelled low-skilled West African nationals living in the country. Van Hear (1998: 78) captures it succinctly when he described the situation as "pendulum-like shifts in the relative fortunes of Ghana and Nigeria as poles of attraction for migrants". Like Ghana, Nigeria also experienced a "reverse migration transition", moving from a country of net immigration to a net emigration country (Black *et al.* 2004:11). The factors that caused economic decline in West Africa in the 1970s and 1980s were similar in both Anglophone and Francophone zones. Yet, after the decline of Nigeria, the only country that still offered some semblance of decent livelihood opportunities in the sub-region was Côte d'Ivoire. From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire consolidated its position as a major migration pole in the sub-region (de Haas 2007). However, after the death of its long-serving president in 1993, his successor overplayed

the ethnic card[4] and this led to political unrest with the country experiencing its first military takeover in December 1999 (Riester 2011). The lack of employment opportunities and bad governance foisted on the people by military dictators forced West African nationals to widen their net and look further afield. After the fall of apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa, which became known as the "Europe of Africa", was a popular migrant destination (Akokpari 2006: 136).

The deteriorating economic situation in Sub-Saharan Africa was not reversed with political and economic liberalization. If anything, liberalization encouraged a one-direction movement of capital from the North to the South (*ibid*). While exhorting the virtues of globalization seen in the unfettered movement of western capital and capitalists to so-called "darker corners" of the globe, barriers are erected to prevent undocumented Africans from reaching Europe. After 2000, the issue of irregular migration from Sub-Sahara to Europe was given some oxygen of publicity when the western media presented an "apocalyptic image of a wave or 'exodus' of 'desperate' black Africans swamping Europe" (de Haas 2008). The image of 'Black Europe' (cf. Bredeloup & Pliez 2011) coupled with new security concerns compelled northern governments to institute stricter border control policies. Many young Ghanaians have continued to search for work in Libya and others have tried crossing the Mediterranean to European destinations. The next section examines Ghanaian migration history to Libya.

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[4] Henri Konan Bedie succeeded President Houphouet-Boigny in 1993, and in 1995 he introduced the concept of Ivoirité which classified Ivorians either as citizens or so-called foreigners.

HISTORY OF GHANAIAN EMIGRATION TO LIBYA

Anarfi and Kwankye (2003: 5) have identified four distinct phases of Ghanaian emigration. Two phases are relevant for the current analysis: the "phase of large-scale emigration" and the "period of intensification and diasporisation of Ghanaians". Mass emigration of Ghanaian nationals started during the period of the country's economic crisis from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s (Van Hear 1998). The economic crisis was partly caused by mismanagement of the national economy by the various ruling coalitions. Ghanaian emigration to Nigeria during this period demystified transnational mobility "as the preserve of the educated or the professional" classes (Akyeampong 2000: 206). Nigeria offered opportunities to skilled, semi-skilled and non-skilled Ghanaians. Faced with macro-economic challenges, Nigeria expelled over a million Ghanaian migrants in 1983. The expulsion coincided with a major crisis in the nation's history. Press reports of daily activities in Ghana between 1983 and 1984 portrayed a state on the verge of near collapse. In 1983, the country suffered one of the most devastating droughts in recorded history. The drought caused extensive bushfire to consume the few food crops available and led to a period of great misery and hunger. Citizens queued to buy uncooked *kenkey*[5] and others took to eating any available root tubers and many died from eating poisonous tubers. At the macro-level, two chroniclers of the era put it this way:

The economy had been largely devastated. Signs of collapse were everywhere … Roads acutely needed repair; much of the railways had ceased to function and the ports were in

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[5] A popular local meal made from corn flour.

only slightly better condition. Power supply and telephone connections had broken down. Lack of imported spare parts had crippled much of the transport fleet and prevented repairs of the infrastructure (Chand and van Til 1988: 11).

Earlier, on New Year's Eve in December 1981, the military headed by J. J. Rawlings had overthrown the civilian government of Dr. Hilla Limann and declared a people's revolution. A Ghanaian repatriated from Nigeria compared the situation to that of from the "frying pan to fire". Ghana was appropriately nicknamed *ogyakrom*[6] and many citizens searched for new avenues to emigrate, just to escape the harsh living conditions. Political dissenters joined the emigration route. Libya and Saudi Arabia became new migration destinations (Akyeampong 2000).

The emigration of skilled Ghanaians to Libya started in the mid-1980s. During this period, the Libyan government recruited Ghanaian teachers to teach English in Libyan schools.[7] Two batches consisting of 100 teachers each arrived in Tripoli in 1983 and 1984.[8] The policy was short-lived. In 1986 it was stopped and no official reason was given.[9] Nevertheless, beneficiaries have professed a number of reasons. According to one source, the hostile relationship between the Libyan regime and the West compelled the Gaddafi administration to stop the teaching of English in public schools.[10] Another reason given was that Ghanaians did not stay on the teaching job but branched off into the more

lucrative petroleum sector.[11] Additionally, by the time the second batch of teachers arrived in the country many Ghanaian professionals were emigrating to Libya on their own. Nonetheless, what is certain is that throughout his forty-two years reign, Colonel Gaddafi policies were at times populists and also erratic (de Haas 2007). Perhaps, the behaviour of the ruling elites in Tripoli and Accra could offer some clues as to why the programme was stopped. The leaders of both countries saw themselves as African revolutionaries and were initially anti-western. One can conjecture that Ghana's embracing World Bank/IMF neo-liberal policies might have been seen as a betrayal or a sellout by Tripoli.

The end of this formal guest worker programme did not affect the emigration pattern from Ghana to Libya. If anything, as Anarfi and Kwankye (2003) noted, this period witnessed the intensification of Ghanaian emigration to Libya and Saudi Arabia. The awareness of employment opportunities attracted both skilled and non-skilled Ghanaians to Libya. Ghanaian workers in Libya were permitted to repatriate half of their salary home and the other half was to be spent in Libya. Nevertheless, many skilled Ghanaian migrants of the period regarded Libya as a transit country. For instance, the young graduate teachers saved part of their salaries in banks in the UK and after two or three years of working in Libya, many emigrated to the UK and Germany to pursue higher degree programmes.[12]

By the 1990s, non-skilled Ghanaian migrants replaced the skilled ones and for many of the young migrants Libya was their final destination. The Libyan migration nar-

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[6] 'Fire town' in *Twi*.

[7] According to one source, the Libyan authorities requested for English teachers from Britain but this was turned down and the British Council recommended Ghanaian teachers.

[8] Interview, Ghanatta Ayaric, 3 September 2012.

[9] Officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have no knowledge of this programme.

[10] Interview with Alexander Nasamu, 29 August 2012.

[11] Personal communications with Cyril K. Daddieh, 18 October 2012.

[12] Interview, Ayaric, 3 September 2012.

rative was popular among certain groups in Ghana. The lure of Libya for young Ghanaians depended on the networks that had formed between Ghanaian emigrants living in Libya and those at home. As one returnee explained, "my friend traveled to Libya in 1999 and worked for two years. He returned home and built a house in less than four months, he also bought a taxi. I was convinced that the work in Libya was better than my blacksmith job."[13] In Libya, Ghanaian migrants were engaged in diverse occupations such as trading, construction work, and farming (IOM 2012). Libya was also seen as a stepping stone to Europe (Carling 2007; Baldwin-Edwards 2006).

Politically, Ghana and Libya have enjoyed long cordial relations at the highest level of government. Like most liberation or revolutionary movements in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, the Rawlings-led Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) also benefited from Colonel Gaddafi largesse. The PNDC admitted in May 1983 that it had received "quantities of military equipment as gifts from Libya."[14] Yet, the relationship between Accra and Tripoli weakened by 1984 when Ghana engaged the West to resurrect its collapsing economy. Relations between the two countries were restored in the latter part of the 1980s through the establishment of the Permanent Joint Commission for Cooperation (JCC). The interests of the two countries have always differed, but Ghana was in favour of the Colonel Gaddafi pan-Africa project partly because the original idea for the continental government was mooted by Ghana's founding President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

[13] Interview, Kwame Osei, 4 July 2012.

[14] Ghana-Libya relationship, available at http://www. mongabay.com/history/ghana/ghana-libya italy.html (accessed 14.08.2012).

In 2001 on the assumption of power of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), President J. A. Kufuor visited Tripoli. The visit re-energized both countries and it resulted in the restoration of the JCC. Ghanaian emigration to Libya was raised at some of the bilateral talks. The Ghanaian authorities expressed concern about the alleged exploitation of nationals by their Libyan employers and the plight of migrants imprisoned for committing various crimes. In 2007, in a statement to the Ghanaian Parliament it was reported that over 200 Ghanaians were prosecuted for various offences including the distillation of alcohol, prostitution and the possession of drugs (Marma 2008). The next section discusses the nature of Libyan deportation to Ghana in the pre-war era.

DEPORTATION AND REPATRIATION OF GHANAIAN NATIONALS FROM LIBYA

Deportation

The issue of irregular immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa has created frictions between European governments and sending countries in the region (de Haas 2008). The EU's solution to "combating illegal" migration was the setting up of a central border agency, known as Frontex, in 2005. Frontex has entered into agreement with so-called 'transit' countries to police their shores. While the EU actively promotes the free mobility of labour within the Schengen zone, it nevertheless continues to put pressure on 'transit' countries in West Africa to regulate the movement of ECOWAS nationals in their territories. These diplomatic pressures are at odds with the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons within the sub-region (Akokpari 2006: 132; Adepoju 2002). The

problem of irregular migration from Ghana through Libya to Europe has encouraged a renewed political engagement from the EU towards the country (Van Criekinge 2008). In this context, Van Criekinge quoted a Ghanaian government official saying: "it is really thanks to the EU that Ghana is now starting to take its migration phenomenon seriously, and is starting to integrate migration into our national development agenda"(*ibid*).

Nonetheless, the externalization of EU migration policy to North African countries has implications for transnational mobility. By 2000, the social relations between African immigrants and citizens of Libya were fast deteriorating. After nearly two decades of peaceful co-existence and relative tolerance, Sub-Saharans were increasingly being abused by employers and citizens alike (Bredeloup & Pliez 2011; Hamood 2008). In September 2000, Sub-Saharan immigrants living in Tripoli and Zawiya were attacked by "gangs of youth" while the security forces did nothing to prevent the clashes (Bredeloup & Pliez 2011). In the anti-immigrants riots, 130 Sub-Saharan migrants were killed (*ibid*). In the wake of the widespread violence, the Libyan authorities intervened with a 'new' migration policy. And to satisfy its citizens and European partners, the government changed its immigration policy and declared many Sub-Saharans living in Libya as undocumented immigrants. Many immigrants including Ghanaians were rounded up by the security forces and sent to various detention centres (GDP 2009; HRW 2006). The head of Italy's secret service told the Italian Parliament that "undocumented migrants in Libya are caught like dogs" and described the conditions under which they were detained as appalling to the extent that "policemen must wear a dust mask on the mouth because of the nauseating odours" (cited in GDP 2009).

The Libyan authorities justified their arrest of undocumented immigrants saying that their presence was contributing to the rising level of crimes. However, many researchers have noted that the change in immigration policy starting from 2007, which imposed entry visas on both Arab and African migrants, was at the behest of the EU (de Haas 2008; Hamood 2008). As de Haas (2008: 1310) notes, Libya's policy shift was linked to Qaddafi's "efforts to regain international respectability, to lift the embargo, and to attract foreign direct investments". Forced removals became frequent in Libya. From an initial number of 4,000 migrants in 2000, deportation increased to 54,000 by 2004 (CARIM 2010). For instance, in 2003, 11 percent of deportees were Ghanaians (*ibid*). Deportations from Libya to Ghana increased dramatically, and between January and August 2004, 2,373 Ghanaian nationals were sent home (*GNA* 2004).

Migration as a social phenomenon is also intertwined with domestic politics in many countries. International migration is a "safety valve" for the many governments in the Global South (cf. de Haas & Sigona 2012). Emigration reduces the pressure for reform and unemployment and its related consequences are lessened. Increasingly, Ghanaian nationals like Africans elsewhere on the continent, are emigrating in search of better paying jobs and decent livelihood opportunities (OECD 2012; Akokpari 2006; Anarfi & Kwankye 2003). Nevertheless, the Ghana government occasionally put the issue of migration management on the discussion table in order to attract development aid and also to benefit from the limited numbers of temporary work permits for low-skilled immigrants.

The IOM spearheads the campaign to find new forms of transnational co-operation to reduce the cost and maximize the development impact of migration in the Global

South. For example, its local offices in Ghana organize sensitization workshops targeting students from senior high schools. These workshops are held to educate as well as to discourage vulnerable groups, especially the youth, from embarking on irregular migration. These measures have not succeeded in discouraging young people from undertaking undocumented migration. Young Ghanaians with no skills or semi-skilled most often claim that they are compelled to emigrate by the non-availability of sustainable jobs. Meanwhile, the opportunities to emigrate legally are rapidly declining. Thus, many young labour immigrants tend to use irregular routes for emigration. Furthermore, as noted by a recent OECD (2012: 313) publication "the adoption of more selective migration policies biased towards the highly educated" means that only the skilled and professional class may be eligible for documented migration. The majority of the low-skilled or the so-called "undesirables" are compelled to use irregular alternative means to gain entry into Europe.

Generally, deportation, whatever its shape or form, is troubling to the home/sending state and the affected individuals. From the perspective of the state, irregular migration is a symptom of underdevelopment. Thus, the government is often hesitant when it comes to the readmission of undocumented migrants (de Haas 2008). Despite having recorded impressive macro-economic figures in the last two decades, arguably Ghana has experienced a lot more irregular emigration of young people during the same period than any other period in the nation's entire history. The impressive growth rates have not translated into better living conditions because of structural problems with the economy (Aryeetey & Kanbur 2008). On the thorny issue of immigrant rights and deportations, the government of Ghana has on a number of occasions tried to negotiate with the Libyan authorities to secure the rights of nationals in detention centres (*Afrol News* 2011; Johnson 2000). Nevertheless, Libya continued to deport undocumented Ghanaians. All together 12,202 undocumented Ghanaian immigrants were deported to Ghana in the period between 2000 and 2012 (NADMO 2012).

From the point of view of the individual, deportation is the worst nightmare of the Ghanaian migrant. Many youths from poor families emigrate to acquire wealth to improve the socio-economic conditions of their dependents back home. Ghanaian deportees from Libya most times were flown in cargo planes and they arrived in Accra looking traumatized, unkempt and sometimes with signs of physical torture on their bodies. On one occasion Ghanaian deportees from Libya refused to disembark when they arrived at the Kotoka International Airport (*GNA* 2004). The reaction of deportees is best understood in relation to societal expectations. In the Akan culture, a migrant notwithstanding his/her legal status is considered successful when he/she can return home "as an upper class citizen" (Akyeampong 2000). Again in the Akan community in Ghana, success is depending on material accumulation. Indeed, a popular *Twi* proverb states that "high birth is not food; money is all that matters" (cited in Akyeampong 2000: 187). A typical deportee has none of these luxuries. As a result some deportees go into hiding because they are considered a failure and an embarrassment to their families.

Repatriation/evacuation

As the fighting intensified in Libya, the state was called upon to evacuate its nationals. Ghana has some experience in organizing the

evacuation of its nationals in crisis situations. And in the area of conflicts, the government organized the evacuation of Ghanaians and other West African nationals from Liberia at the height of that country's civil war in the 1990s. However, in the Libyan case, the government adopted 'a wait and see' approach. The state was challenged on a number of fronts. Politically, at the continental level, the African Union (AU) favoured a negotiated settlement and the government did not want to endorse the National Transitional Council (NTC).

Nationally, all Ghanaian leaders beginning with President Rawlings have visited Libya to seek investment opportunities. The Gaddafi administration's benevolence in investing in Ghana's tourism and financial sectors created employment. Therefore, rushing to evacuate Ghanaian nationals would have been seen as the acknowledgement that the Gaddafi regime was unstable and not in charge of the situation. Logistically, state resources were overstretched. Some 12,250 Ghanaians returned home following the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 and early 2011 and the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO) was still in the process of resettling them. The government therefore did not have the means to organize a mass evacuation on its own. Similarly, the state also faced difficulties in mobilizing Ghanaians in Libya in the absence of any reliable data on their numbers or location.

The delay in organizing the evacuation forced migrants and their relatives to resort to public radio to air their grievances. Some of the stranded Ghanaian migrants claimed that the fighting forced them to remain indoors without food and water. As one migrant explained, "… we are dying please tell the President to come for us, we have run out of food and water, the situation is now bad… please

tell Ghanaians to also pray for us it is not easy at all"(*Modern Ghana News* 2011). The calls for assistance got louder and perhaps embarrassing when some of the stranded immigrants offered to fund the cost of their repatriation if the government was finding difficulties in raising funds (*Adom News* 2011). "Please tell the government to come for us even if it means paying for the fare. Currently we have no food [and] water to drink, we are currently lodging under stones as we cannot stay at home because blacks are now been killed", a stranded Ghanaian immigrant told a radio station in Accra (*ibid*). The public sympathy coupled with sometimes heated discussions on radio put the government in a bad light.

The government set up an "Evacuation Task Force" on 25 February, 2011 "to co-ordinate and undertake the urgent evacuation" of Ghanaian nationals from Libya (Republic of Ghana 2011). The Task Force which comprised of eight state institutions collaborated with Ghana's Missions abroad, and the IOM and UNHCR started the first phase of the evacuation exercise (*ibid*). Three Liaison Posts were established. One was at Salum on the Libyan-Egyptian border; Ras Ajdir on the Libyan-Tunisian border was another evacuation point. Tripoli was the third point. All three evacuation posts were managed by the staff of Ghana's mission in the three countries. The posts processed relevant travel documents, provided medical care and coordinated the flight arrangements (*ibid*).

Arrival of migrants

On 26 February 2011, the first batch of 55 Ghanaian migrants arrived at the Kotoka International Airport (Republic of Ghana 2011). All together over 97 percent of evacuees returned by air and over 70 evacuation flights were organized from Cairo, Tripoli and Djer-

ba. Some 3 percent returned to Ghana from Libya by road.[15] As Table 1 below shows, by July 2012, a total of 18,445 nationals had returned home, according to NADMO statistics. However, it must be pointed out that the number of returnees could be higher than what was officially reported. Many more nationals returned by road and they were not captured in the official data.[16] Undocumented Ghanaian migrants, especially those that experienced arrest, detention and deportation, tend to avoid officialdom.[17] As Bredeloup (2012: 459) notes, transit "migrants are quickly equated with *sans papiers* or clandestine migrants". In a similar vein, Ghanaian migrants are aware of the biometric identification politics and usually try to avoid it. The migrants believe that if one's biometric data is captured, it would jeopardize the person's chances of migrating to Europe. One returnee explained that: "we know that Ghana government does not need our bio data; it is for the international organizations that compile it and the data is sent to Europe. Now if one succeed and make it to Europe you cannot work because you are on their database as a criminal".[18]

Ghanaians repatriated with the help of the IOM could not avoid being added to official statistics. Statistics show the vast majority of Ghanaian returnees were males, in the age cohort between 20 and 40 years old. Some 132 returnees were females, 96 minors, 2 adult males described as mentally ill as well as over 90 freed prisoners (Republic of Ghana 2011).

Figure 1 shows that the Brong Ahafo is a region of high emigration, 52 percent of all returnees hailed from the region. The region was followed by the Ashanti Region whose share of returnees was 13 percent. The Northern Region comes third with 10 percent. The Central and Volta regions register 2 percent each, representing the least number of returnees. The variations between Ghana's ten regions are not particularly surprising if the ethnic composition of each region is compared to the origin of the returnees. Certain ethnic groups have better opportunities for transnational migration, especially to OECD countries; while other ethnic groups engage in internal north-south migration (Mazzucato & Kabki 2009; Abdul-Korah 2008). In the Brong Ahafo Region, for instance, the ethnic majority group is the Akan who have long traditions of international migration. As Mazzucato has noted, the majority of Ghanaian migrants in the West are Akans[19] (cited in Kodwo-Nyameazea & Nguyen 2008). The Asante[20] ethnic group was the first to undertake international migration. In colonial times, wealthy cocoa and timber merchants sent their wards to England to be educated (McCaskie, 2009; Akyeampong 2000). In contemporary times, the Asante are the largest ethnic group in the Ghanaian diaspora (Mazzucato & Kabki 2009). Meanwhile, Libya is particularly attractive to Ghanaian Muslim emigrants from the Northern region and those from urban slums (so-called Zongo boys) because of the country's Islamic orientation.[21] Ghanaian Muslims assimilate better

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[15] The figure is probably not accurate as many other nationals used other routes to return home.

[16] Of the 212, 331 West African nationals who fled Libya, more than half (i.e. 130, 677) returned by road (Naik & Laczko 2012).

[17] Interview, Mohammed Abass, 7 July 2012.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] The Akans are the largest ethnic group and they occupy the southern half of Ghana. Almost 45.3 percent of the country's population belong to the Akan ethnic group.

[20] The Asante are the largest of the Akan sub group.

[21] Personal Communication with Emmanuel Sackey, 06 August, 2012.

Table 1. Regional Distribution of Libyan Returnees

Region	Number of Returnees	Frequency (%)	Transport fares to home
Greater Accra	665	3.6	GH¢15 per person (9,975)
Central	366	2.0	GH¢20 per person (7,320)
Western	852	4.7	GH¢25 per person (21,300)
Ashanti	2,375	12.8	GH¢25 per person (59,375)
Eastern	565	3.1	GH¢20 per person (11,300)
Brong Ahafo	9,520	51.6	GH¢30 per person (285,600)
Volta	373	2.0	GH¢20 per person (7,460)
Northern	1,834	9.9	GH¢35 per person (64,190)
Upper East	1,110	6.0	GH¢40 per person (44,400)
Upper West	785	4.3	GH¢40 per person (31,400)
Total	18,445	100	GH¢542,320

Source: Compiled by the author from National Secretariat of NADMO, Accra, 2012.

Figure 1. Regional Distribution of Libyan Returnees
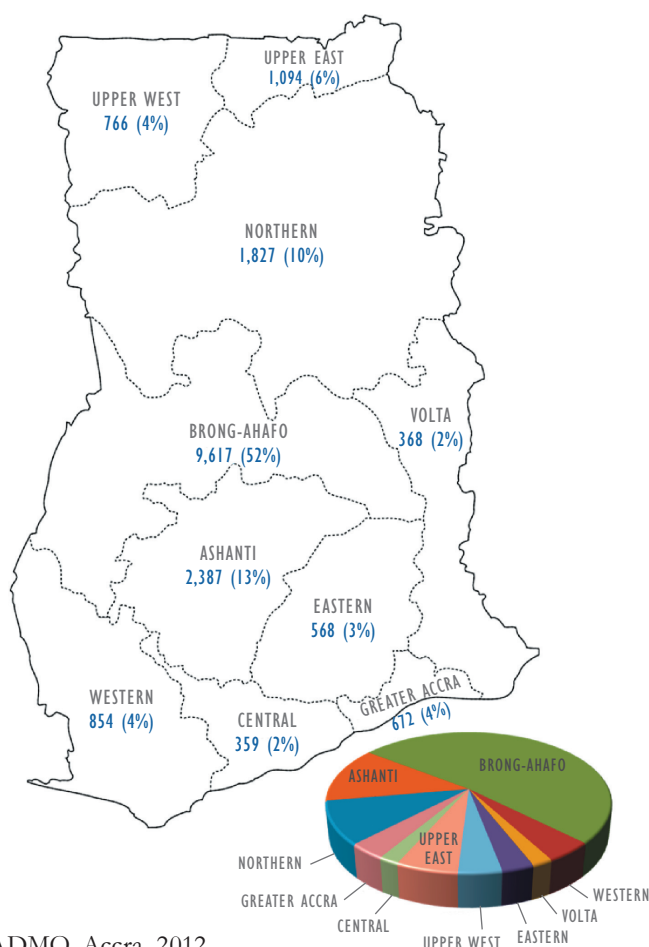
Source: IOM and NADMO, Accra, 2012

into Libyan society than non-Muslims and many poor migrants from the three regions of the north of Ghana prefer Libya mainly as a second alternative because they cannot afford the cost of travelling to Europe, North America and other destinations considered as more lucrative destinations for migrants.[22]

The second leg of the evacuation operation was based in the Ghanaian capital, Accra. The Accra transit centre received all returning nationals who came in by air. Back home in Accra, returnees were officially welcomed at the airport by senior government functionaries and transported by bus to one of three processing centres (Aviation Social Centre, Airport Hangar and the El-wak Stadium) where officials of IOM, NADMO and the National Security apparatus received them. At these centres returnees were registered, debriefed and given money to cover the cost of transportation to their various regions and hometowns.

Funds for the internal journeys were provided by the government of Ghana. Table 1 shows the various amounts that NADMO and National Security staff disbursed to returnees to cover the journeys to their hometowns. The distance or journey time from Accra to various regional capitals was used to calculate the lorry fares. Consequently, returnees from the two far away regions, Upper East and Upper West, received the highest amount per individual (GH¢40 or US$21) to cover the 9 hours journey to Bolga and Wa respectively. In comparative terms, more than half of the total sum was disbursed to returnees from the Brong Ahafo region. The returnees residing in Accra were each given GH¢15 (or US$8). The total amount spent on transporting all the returnees to their various hometowns was GH¢ 542,320, 00 (or US$ 290,120,00) (NADMO 2012).

[22] *Ibid.*

But for some returnees their hope of reuniting with their families was dashed on arrival in Accra. Some nationals, who sought shelter at the Ghana Mission in Tripoli and agitated for early repatriation, were labelled 'rebels' by the Mission staff. National Security agents arrested them on arrival (*Myjoyonline.com* 2011). A government spokesman claimed that the arrested returnees "took the law into their own hands and destroyed Ghana's properties in Libya" (*ibid*). The arrested returnees who were said to be unpatriotic were prosecuted. But above all, the government wanted to send a strong signal to the general public and returnees that even though it was committed to bringing its nationals home safely, it would not tolerate any disorderly behaviour.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE LIBYAN RETURNEES

Lack of remittances to dependents

Labour emigration to Libya supported several thousand households in the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Northern and Upper East regions of Ghana. When Ghanaian migrants fled, they, like all others, left their valuables and possessions behind in their haste to secure life and limb. The Libyan unrest cut short the dreams of many young men and women. The sudden return of so many 'bread winners' ended the flow of remittances to their dependents. Remittances play a major role in household survival in many migrant sending communities in Ghana (e.g. Boon & Ahenkan 2012; Obeng-Odoom 2010). In the case of Libya, money sent by migrants was used to meet basic daily needs (food, education, electricity and medical bills) and for other investments, especially buying land and building houses (UNDP 2011). At the macro-level, the full

economic impact of the loss of remittances will probably never be known. The majority of Ghanaian returnees were young men and also undocumented migrants. A lot of the activities of undocumented migrants is also informal, and as a result very little is known of Ghanaian migrants based in Libya. It is known, from the needs assessment report, that the economic impact of the loss of remittances was felt more at the individual family and community level (UNDP 2011).

Nearly half of all Libyan returnees came from the Brong Ahafo region. Several informal migration industries flourished in many of the district capitals. In these areas, prospective migrants could contact 'connection men' and procure false travel documents to enable them pass border controls, they could also seek expert advice on the nature of the journey, and be introduced to the social networks of nationals in the different Libyan cities.[23] Indeed, it has been reported that at the peak of the migration season, several busloads of migrants departed from some of these towns for the border town of Bawku in the Upper East region, where migrants would board other vehicles for the northwards journey to Agadez in Niger (UNDP 2011). Because of remittances irregular migration benefited local communities in the Brong Ahafo region. The UNDP (2011) assessment report on the region noted that 90 percent of returnees regularly sent remittances for the upkeep of their dependents. Aside the loss of remittances, returnees also faced a bleak and uncertain future because of the unemployment situation in Ghana.

Youth unemployment

The issue of youth unemployment or underemployment is a major concern for state au-

thorities. Youth joblessness has confronted all governments since the Fourth Republic begun in 1992. As many critical observers have noted, political and economic liberalization have not benefited the majority of the African poor. Thus, government after government have struggled to provide sufficient jobs for Ghana's expanding labour force. The number of job seekers keeps increasing (see ISSER 2011, 2012). And highly skilled, low-skilled or semi-skilled citizens remain unemployed or underemployed for a long period of time. In order to provide for their dependents, many young Ghanaians migrate to find sustainable livelihoods in Libya or Europe. As one returnee explained: "In Africa here, only Libya has work. Burkina [Faso], no work. Nigeria, no work. Even South Africa is bad. So only Libya is okay for us" (*Christian Science Monitor* 2011). Recently, another frustrated returnee stated: "I cannot even afford to get GH¢10 in a month but in Libya, I made about US$200 a month" (*GNA* 2012).

The vast majority of Ghanaian returnees came from communities with little economic opportunities. As a result, many returnees have remained jobless, others have gone back to their former occupations and yet others are planning to return to Libya (Naik & Laczko 2012; UNDP 2011). In the assessments carried out by the IOM and UNDP, many returnees expressed the desire to stay and want to start some income-generating activities, but needed financial and logistical support to launch their businesses. In spite of government promise to assist, the majority of returnees have been without jobs since their return and many have become an embarrassment to their families. The District Assemblies are encouraging the returnees to sign up for the various youth employment schemes that the government is rolling out under the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), but it appears the

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[23] Interview, Stephen Tabiri, 12 June 2012.

returnees are not enthused; having got used to different lifestyles in Libya, they find the allowances paid to the NYEP recruits too meagre. Their predicament is a classic case of a "migrant superhero" that provided for everybody in the household but now is being reduced to a "deportee trash" (Sørensen 2010). However, the unrest in Libya which disrupted the livelihoods of many undocumented migrant workers including those from Ghana illustrates how the grievances of unemployed young men can be a potential source of conflict. The issue of employment generation for the youth certainly requires more attention. The efforts of the Ghana government are certainly not encouraging.

Reintegration assistance

The government has roped in international organizations to assist with the resettlement of returnees and in June and October of 2011, a pilot project sponsored by the IOM and UNDP conducted a needs assessment of the returnees in the Brong Ahafo region. The "Libyan Returnees Reintegration Assistance Project" selected 100 returnees and 20 "identified vulnerable members" from the Nkoranza, Techiman and Kintampo municipalities. The returnees were given working tools and agricultural inputs (weedicides, fertilizers, improved tomato, and cabbage and maize seeds) to help them start businesses (IOM-Ghana 2012). The pilot project which was declared a success, paved the way for the implementation of another resettlement programme in other migrant sending communities. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provided funding for the expansion of the resettlement scheme to the Northern region of Ghana. The project known as the "Emergency Reintegration Assistance for Ghanaian Migrants Affected

by the 2011 Libyan Crisis" was undertaken by the IOM and NADMO. The project had three components which included: (i) "provision of health insurance and psycho-social counselling"; (ii) "entrepreneurial training" and, (iii) "study on capacities preparedness of migrant-sending communities to cope with sudden disasters" (IOM-Ghana 2012). These resettlement and reintegration initiatives are laudable. However, they appear to be heading in the same direction of many unsuccessful development initiatives because of the lack interest so far shown by the government.

CONCLUSION

Migration governance or management was intertwined with the popular uprising in the Maghreb. However, the root cause of the revolutions that swept across the region in 2011 were said to be linked to rulers denying the ruled political and economic rights. The demands for political and economic inclusion from Tunisia resonated with citizens in Egypt, Libya and beyond. The revolutions re-ignited discussions about migration governance in the Global North. However, the concern of southern governments was the loss of remittances, increased youth unemployment and regional instability to be caused by returning fighters. The ousting of the Gaddafi regime triggered a "migration crisis" in the region. Libya was home to an estimated 1.5 million migrant workers and its descent into chaos saw an exodus from the country that overwhelmed aid agencies in the initially stages. The crisis confirmed existing knowledge of Libya as a popular migrant destination. The conflict further revealed that more than 120 countries' nationals were working in Libya. Consequently, the migration crisis elicited

different responses from national governments while international assistance from humanitarian organizations was limited.

Arguably, the twenty first century has seen greater attention paid to migration from the global South to the North. Domestic politics in many northern countries sometimes put so-called illegal immigrants in the spotlight. The result of such concerns is the implementation of stricter border control measures and the tightening of immigration laws. Meanwhile, the push factors from the South have been intensified largely by bad governance. Political and economic liberalization has seen an improvement or acceptable management of national economies. However, these improvements are limited to a small segment of the population. Youth and other vulnerable groups are yet to be impacted by economic reforms implemented by governments in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore excruciating poverty compounded by unemployment has affected migration patterns in the region.

Oil windfall enabled Libya to expand its economy. In the process, the country became a magnet and it attracted both skilled and non-skilled people from sub-Saharan African and beyond. Nevertheless, the turning point, as far migration is concerned, was Gaddafi's attempt to escape Western-inspired sanctions, turning to sub-Saharan Africa. Libya's engagement with the region opened the doors for West Africans to emigrate to the country. Skilled Ghanaian professionals were first recruited to teach in Libyan schools beginning in 1983. The popularity of this employment scheme and the awareness created back home of job opportunities in Libya turned the country into an alternative migrant destination.

The fighting and the resulting violence targeting black sub-Saharan Africans attracted the attention of the Government of Ghana.

The government response to the migration crisis could best be described as lukewarm. The evidence shows the state failed to exhibit one of the tools modern states employ to legitimize themselves – knowledge of citizens' movement and location. The government was challenged on the process of repatriation and the institution of programmes to resettle and re-integrate returnees. The Libyan unrest exposed the scale of the irregularity of Ghanaian emigration to the country. It further revealed the unpreparedness of the Ghanaian state to respond to citizens in need. While the government estimated 10,000 nationals living in Libya, 18,455 returned home.

For the migrants, the consequences of returning home 'empty-handed' are dire. Many returnees have moved from a situation of political insecurity to one of economic insecurity, struggling to adjust back into their local communities. Meanwhile assistance from the various local government agencies and the IOM and UNDP is limited as is support from the Global North.

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