

# DIVERGENT DISCOURSES ON MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGES: A FOCUS ON NIGERIANS IN JAPAN

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## **Abstract**

*International migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, has a long history dating to several centuries before the slave trade. Today, the phenomenon of migration has come to stay, particularly with the advancement of globalization and the global media. As migration takes root, migrants also become more comfortable in their adopted countries and make the active decision of marrying into and creating a family. This paper takes a cursory look at migration as a phenomenon, reasons for migration, the effect of globalization on migration and the migration of sub-Saharan African men to Japan. It then focuses particularly on the marriages between migrant Nigerian men and Japanese women and, while paying close attention to five case studies, it analyzes from divergent angles, the problems and challenges that plague such unions while proffering solutions to some of the issues. It concludes by stating that a more profound understanding of the cultures of each of the partners involved is necessary for the sustainability, stability and permanence of such unions.*

**Keywords:** Migration, Globalization, International Marriage, Discourses, Japan

## **Introduction**

There are palpable scientific evidences that suggest that human life as a whole started in the continent of Africa, from where it spread to the rest of the world. This can be said to be the very first wave of human migration, even as it was not a single, monolithic event that can be discussed as we discuss the clearer and delineable migration waves in modern history. Early humans first migrated out of Africa into Asia probably between 2 million and 1.8 million years ago. They entered Europe somewhat later, between 1.5 million and 1 million years. Species of modern humans populated many parts of the world much later. For instance, people first arrived Australia probably within the past 60,000 years and to the Americas within the past 30,000 years or so. The beginnings of agriculture and the rise of the first civilizations occurred within the past 12,000 years (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, 2018). It is noteworthy to observe that Africa, in history, has seen more migration from it to other parts of the world than migration to it from other parts of the world.

## **Migration to Japan from sub-Saharan Africa**

It was estimated by the Japanese government that about 11000 Africans were living in Japan in 2007, with approximately 8000 of them coming from sub-Saharan Africa. Over

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one-third of these are registered as living in Tokyo. African immigrants in Japan originate from a vast number of sub-Saharan African countries with the largest groups coming from Nigeria (2523) and Ghana (1884), followed at a distance by those from Kenya (523), Uganda (459) Tanzania (371) Senegal (269) Cameroon (261) and Congo (259).

Only several hundreds of Africans have received refugee status in Japan, mostly from Ethiopia and Somalia. There are a far higher percentage of males than females in the distribution of gender among the immigrants. This reflects the cultural attitudes in the countries of origin of the migrants where the women stay close to home while the men are on the move looking for better economic results for themselves and their families. For a predominantly Muslim country such as Senegal, the percentage of female migrants is less than 10 per cent (MOJ, Japan 2007). Although the overall number of African immigrants in Japan is still small, their number has increased rapidly since they started arriving in the 1980s when the economic situation in many African countries deteriorated while Japan was experiencing a booming economy. For example, while there were only 44 Nigerians registered in Japan in 1985 their number increased to 1315 in 1993 and 2405 in 2005 (Kawada, 2007).

Contemporary African migration to Japan began in the 1980s when Africans working in the Middle East travelled to Japan in search of more lucrative economic opportunities. (Kawada 2005, 2007; Wakabayashi 1996). This initial group, which consisted primarily of Ghanaians and Nigerians, eventually evolved into a diverse population representing a variety of national, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. According to statistics from the Cabinet Office (2014) there are over 9,000 legally registered Africans in Japan, most of which are from Nigeria (2,484) and Ghana (1,877). The majority of Africans are concentrated around the Kanto region (over 5,000), though there are significant populations around the Chūbu (over 1,000) and Kansai (over 1,200) regions as well. These statistics, however, only depict the number of Africans legally registered in Japan; when one considers the number of visa over-stayers, those who entered Japan illegally or on non-African passports and those who have naturalized, the actual number is expected to be considerably higher, with some estimates as much as 50,000 (Bodomo 2012).

The first African immigrants to arrive in Japan in the 1980s, if we exclude embassy personnel, are believed to have come from Ghana. The evidence shows that they were working in the middle-east at the time and heard from middle-eastern return-migrants about the opportunities in Japan. In those days, it was relatively easy to obtain a tourist visa for Japan and renew it every 3-months by briefly leaving the country, or to enroll in a Japanese language school and receive a cultural visa which was valid for one or two years and allowed one to work a certain number of hours a week. Since most of the earlier immigrants from Africa were single males, family reunification did not occur often, yet chain migration did happen when the first immigrants told friends back home about the opportunities in Japan.

### **International Marriage in Japan: An Overview**

Marriage between a Japanese national and non-Japanese person dates back to the Meiji period with the first officially permitted marriage by an act of law held on March 14, 1871. It entered into law before the old Meiji Constitution (1889) and the former Nationality Law (1899). At this time, intermarriages were frowned at and bore social consequences.

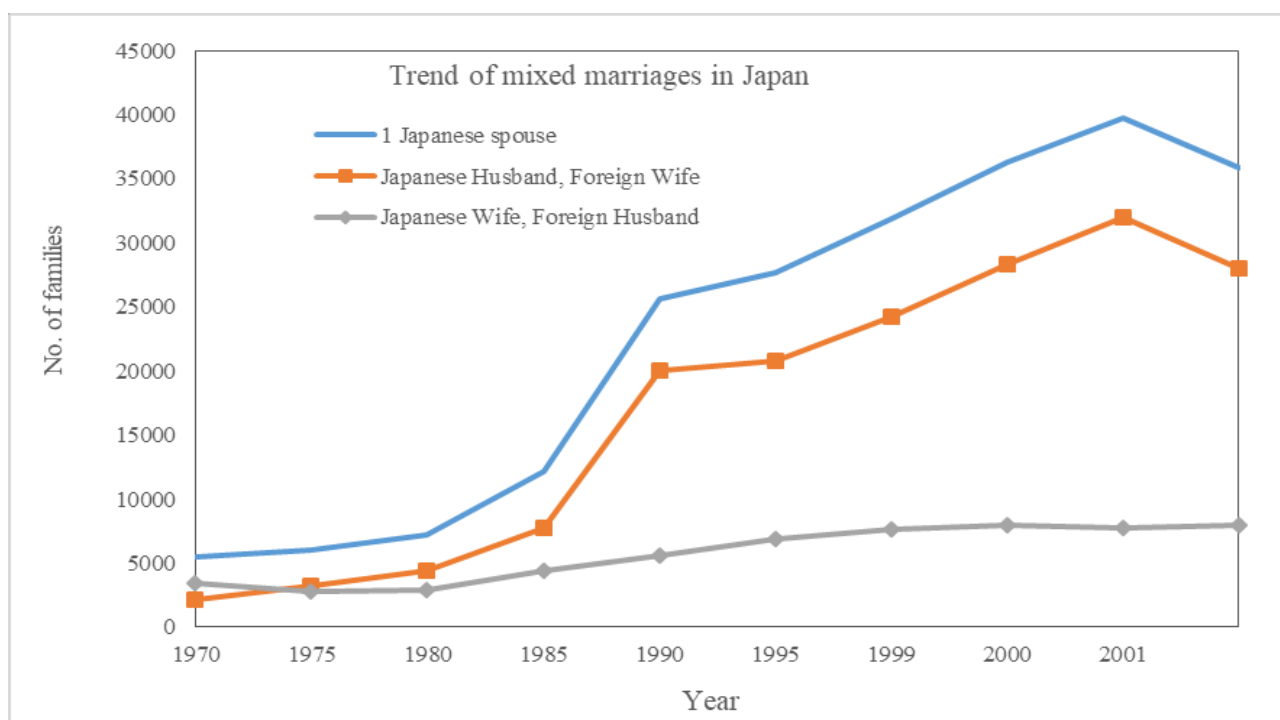
International marriages has since then taken a lot of giant strides. According to a 2001 demographic data issued by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, out of a total of 800,000 registered marriages, an estimated 40,000 were international marriages. This represents a ratio of 1:20 of all marriages. It further reports that there has been a 9.6 fold increase in the number of international marriages over the past 30 years, with a particularly dramatic rise in the early 1990s. In 1970, there were only 5,546 international marriages. In 2000 however, there were 36,263. (See table 1 and figures 4&5 below).

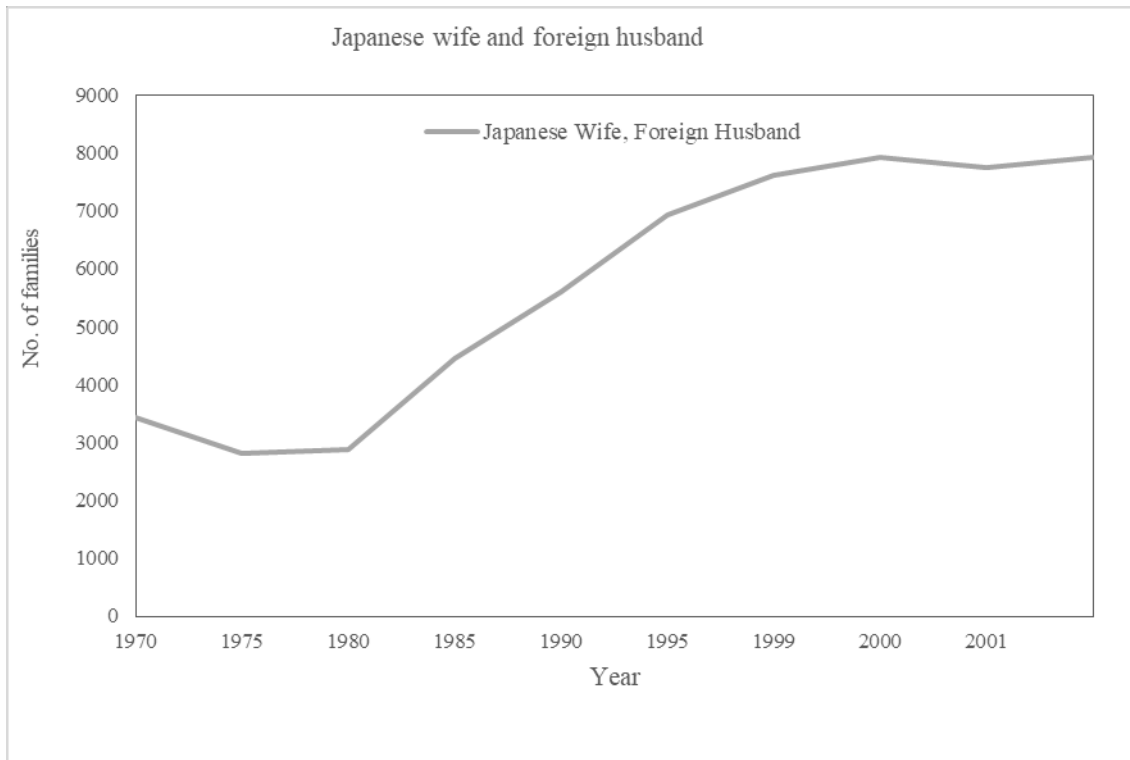
Japanese husband and foreign wife marriages account for a whopping 80% of all international marriages in Japan. The majority of marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese are often between Japanese men and Koreans, then Japanese and Filipinos as well as other Asian countries. According to the Labour Ministry, the proportion of Japanese men and women getting married to foreigners are expected to increase further in the future.

## Annual changes in the number of International Marriages

国籍 <sup>1)</sup>	昭和 45 年	50 年	55 年	60 年	平成 2 年	7 年	11 年	12 年	13 年	14 年
総数	1 029 405	941 628	774 702	735 850	722 138	791 888	762 028	798 138	799 999	757 331
夫妻とも日本	1 023 859	935 583	767 441	723 669	696 512	764 161	730 128	761 875	760 272	721 452
夫妻の一方が外国	5 546	6 045	7 261	12 181	25 626	27 727	31 900	36 263	39 727	35 879
夫日本・妻外国	2 108	3 222	4 386	7 738	20 026	20 787	24 272	28 326	31 972	27 957
妻日本・夫外国	3 438	2 823	2 875	4 443	5 600	6 940	7 628	7 937	7 755	7 922

Data from Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare





Caucasian-Japanese marriages “have often been viewed with admiration, envy and spite” (Suzuki 2003:91). A Caucasian husband is something to aspire to, a trophy to possess (Mal 1996). Karen Kelsky terms this phenomenon *akogare* (translated as fantasy, yearning, longing, adoration). *Akogare* prompts many Japanese women to seek romantic relationships and transnational marriage with western men. Sometimes, *akogare* can be carried on to ridiculous levels and draws social backlash and criticism from other women and especially Japanese men, a good instance is the yellow cab saga. (Kelsky 2001; Suzuki 2000). On the other hand of the international marriage, the scale is the less weighty marriage to non- Caucasians, mostly Asians and others. It comes with less glee, less shine and, of course, less spectacle and it forms the majority of international marriages in Japan. There are also Japanese-foreigner couples from other parts of the world including South America the Arab worlds.

A subset of these international marriages which in recent years has been growing and falls within, or even below the less weighty class of the second subset is the marriage between Japanese (women) and African men. Note that the noun, African men and not black men, has been used deliberately to differentiate the status difference in marriages between African men and African-Americans. Japanese women, African-American men marriages, while not as exactly gleeful as marriages with Caucasian men from the US and Europe are also valuable for reasons ranging from raging passions to green cards. The latter is in a unique class of its own while the former appears (until recently) to be the least unpopular within the groups.

International marriages in Japan, in the early times (as evidenced by available research), is a liaison between other Asians and Japanese or Caucasian and Japanese men and women. Due to the presence of an American military base in Japan, such liaison with African-American men is also a throw in. In recent times however, the scope of international marriages has expanded to accommodate people from all over the world including a handful of couples from the Middle East and a relevant number of liaisons with Africans. This can be explained as an import of the growing influence of globalization and the influence of the global media or what Arjun Appadurai termed “work of imagination”.

The choice of one's spouse, Suzuki opines, mirrors ones 'taste' and “accordingly, the spouse's class, race, and nationality become important markers of difference in one`s social position” (Bourdieu 1984; Suzuki 2003:91). But more than just taste, it mirrors the active decision of the new woman and the achievability of her motives which many times can be pinned to her desire for relative freedom (Kelsky 2001; Suzuki 2000; Schans 2009), a quest for power and control (Onogwu 2015) to sheer love.

## **Methods**

Starting from August (soon after I arrived) to the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September 2018, I met with close to dozens Nigerian men married to Japanese women mostly living around Tokyo, Chiba and Yokohama areas. This was easy for me because I am a Nigerian who had lived in Yokohama for over 4 years before and knew quite a handful of the Nigerian men personally. Some others were introduced to me by their friends who sometimes accompanied me to their places of business. There are no fixed groupings or stereotyped images of the men or the women that love them. Of the 22 men I interviewed, 6 are highly successful career men (including 3 salaried workers), 4 are university graduates with middle and low level jobs, 12 are high school graduates and operate their own businesses (bars, clubs, restaurants, container freights etc.) About 55% of the people I interviewed met their wives at social centres (bars, clubs, and parties, etc). A few others met on the street, at English conversation classes or schools and official functions or festivals. Many of them however, had their wives introduced to them by other Nigerian men who were already living in Japan and married to Japanese women. Among the men who spoke to me are Chudi Eze, Emeka Okorie; Uzo Chukwuma; John Emezua and Uche Maxwell. At the time of the interview, these men had been married for 15, 23, 14, 20 and 6 years respectively.

## **Nigerian Husbands, Japanese Wives: Of Love and Pragmatism (Five Life stories)**

### **Chudi Eze**

I came to Japan 16 years ago. Soon after graduating from a polytechnic in Nigeria, I migrated to London in search of greener pastures. While at London, a friend who already lived here told me about Japan and how much better it was compared to Europe so I migrated here on a short stay temporary visa. I first started working with a Nigerian at a club in Tokyo and he was paying me fairly well. It was at the club that I met my wife Sayaka. Sayaka is a very beautiful woman from an above average family. She loved me so much. I genuinely loved and still love her. Sayaka's father however, was less than impressed with our relationship. He did everything possible to break us up but Sayaka would not budge so he gave up. We got married and Sayaka's father would have none of a club working son-in-law so he insisted I come work in his company. Those years of working for the family company were the toughest years of my life. I was literally a slave and was treated as less than human. I endured so much out of my love for my woman and also because I needed a permanent residency visa. I put up with all forms of maltreatment until I got my permanent visa and immediately quitted the family company.

On quitting, I started my own company with so much support from my wife. I registered the company in my wife's name and have nurtured it to great heights. We are blessed with 3 wonderful children and are doing well. I can say that my dreams of coming to Japan have all been achieved. My children are growing up and are doing well in their respective schools and my wife is taking good care of the home front while I work so I feel accomplished. My children have been brought up largely in my absence. As I have been very busy with growing the business and trying to make a success of it, I have hardly had enough time to spend with the children. Now, I just realized that these children will never see themselves as Nigerians. I wish I spent time with them when they were younger and more impressionable. Sometimes, I feel like when I am older and unable to work this hard, I might find myself returning to Nigeria alone. My wife may not want to go to live in Nigeria and neither will my kids who do not feel any attachment to my home. At times like this, I wonder if I have achieved as much as I would like to believe I have. I feel really satisfied right now but I am truly worried about the future. In my house, I keep the purse. Although I avail my wife of a generous monthly stipend such that she lacks nothing, she is in the know of all my cash incomes and outflows so nothing is actually hidden from her. Remember, most of the books are in her name.

### **Emeka Okorie**

Emeka was born and bred in Nigeria. On graduation from the university in Nigeria, he learnt from his friend who at the time was studying in China that Japan was the dream country claiming that jobs in Japan were paying more than Europe or America. He then somehow found himself in Japan in the early 1990s on a pretty short visa.

At that time, it was easy to get a visitor's visa and have it renewed every 3 months by returning home and reapplying. His hope at the time was to work hard, save a lot of money and return to Nigeria within a maximum of 18 months. On getting to Japan, he worked hard in the company and made an average of ¥300,000 per month. However, other extraneous circumstances saw him lose his entire savings of roughly \$30,000 to a dubious uncle and this forced him to stay longer in Japan. In order to stay longer he needed a much longer visa and circumstances also helped him meet his wife and they soon started dating and she became pregnant thus forcing a wedding as soon as possible. Soon after they got married, he realized that Japanese customs are the norms in his household and that established some ground rules that were difficult to change later on. For instance, as a factory worker, he would hand over his entire pay check to his wife who gives him between ¥20-30,000 back to him as his pocket money.

“Controlling the finances bestowed her with so much power and left me vulnerable to all sorts of manipulations”. He further adds; “the power was grossly abused and it took so much clout and determination for me to wriggle out of that situation. I get this pocket money and I am often asked to buy a couple of things on my way home every day and these side monies are never refunded. It makes you a slave to your own income. This is coupled and compounded by the fact that she initially saw herself as my lifeline to staying in Japan”. He soon left the factory and started his own business of buying fairly used cars and car parts and shipping back to Nigeria. Working for himself however paid much more than working at the factory. “She also works and earn really well but I am solely responsible for the household and everyone's upkeep” he said. “We have two boys, all grown and in college. I work really hard and spent little time with my boys while they were growing up. Looking back, that is one thing I really wish I could change. They have never been to Nigeria and have never met any of my family members, not even my father. The children have grown up to be 90-95% Japanese in all ways. They spend more time with their mother and with friends. My second son has even caught the mother complex. He is completely dependent on his mother for everything. There is hardly a balance of culture and very little effort to recognize my culture in this partnership. If I were to marry again, I would first take the time to explain to her how I would prefer our home to be first. Now, it's all too late.” Mr Okorie concluded by saying, “In the future, soon, I hope to relocate back to Nigeria especially after the boys graduate from college. There is no place for an old black man here, I know the boys won't come to settle in Nigeria and my wife may not come either. I have made my peace with all of that”.

### **Uzo Chukwma**

Uzo 42, a young man from Eastern Nigeria has been in Japan for 7 years. He graduated from the university and struggled to find a good paid job in Nigeria. In a quest for a better life and better job opportunity, a friend told him about Japan. Uzo arrived on a 3 months visitor's visa and had to find a way of finding a bride quickly before the expiration of his short visa. This he said is because getting a longer visa otherwise was difficult. He was soon told by a friend he met here in Japan to go see a particular lady who might be interested in getting married. Uzo approached the lady, Junko who is 15 years older than him and she promptly agrees to marry him. Uzo believes that marriage laws are rather too strict in Japan and being married to Japanese while living in Japan makes it harder as the Japanese laws protect the women a lot. He claimed that he had to endure a lot in the 5 years leading to his getting a permanent visa. All his understanding of marriage from Nigeria was reversed and he had no ground to complain because his wife was always eager to remind him that 'this is Japan'. Uzo claims that the only aspect he was able to succeed with bringing his Nigerian view in his home was the fact that he keeps his salary by himself. “I keep my money by myself. I can't come and become a full time slave; I pay all the bills and keep the change for myself”. His wife works but she contributes minimally to the house.

Asked if they have any kids, Uzo answered in the negative “she was already 50 going on 51 when we got married so I knew that it would take a miracle for us to have kids. I like her and we are still together even though my visa has been regularized. I do not have any plans of leaving her. However, if given the opportunity to start all over again, I would not have had any need to hurriedly find a wife and marry here in Japan so I most likely would not have married her.” He further adds; “the Japanese government has changed the immigration laws and has

relaxed their immigration and visa policy especially for skilled workers. I would have tried coming to Japan on such visa and then taken my time and get married to a woman I truly want to be with as I would really have loved to have kids of my own". Uzo has since stopped working at the company and is now a farmer and a business man. In the future, Uzo plans to return to Nigeria and resettle there. He says "one can love Japan for so long but eventually one has to return home. Home is home. Asked what he will do should his wife refuse to relocate with him to Nigeria? He said, nothing, "that cannot be helped" he added. "We will only say a nice good bye to ourselves and keep in touch by phone".

### **John Emezua**

John left Nigeria for Japan soon after the compulsory one year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria for his Masters in Pharmacy on the Japanese Government scholarship (MEXT). Upon graduation, he started working with a pharmaceutical company first at Osaka and later Tokyo. John met his Japanese wife Misa as a student in the university where she was then an undergraduate student. Misa was John's student tutor. She also helped him with his Japanese language homework. The duo first started out as friends and later grew to love each other. John considers Misa a blessing as "she has been nothing but supportive all the 20 years of our marriage. Misa is beautiful both inside and outside. I attribute all my success in this country to her support". Marrying Misa wasn't as dramatic and tension filled as many other biracial marriages. Her parents were welcoming and open hearted. They were not opposed to their daughter's choice and so it was a relatively happy and successful wedding celebration and family union as John's parents flew in from Nigeria. The couple is blessed with a son who is currently studying medicine in the United States of America. John said he was as much involved in bringing up their son as Misa. "Remember she also works. It was my duty to help him with his homework all the time. I used that opportunity to bond with him. We also enjoyed going out fishing or camping as a family once in a while". John also notes that they go to church together as a family every Sunday morning as Misa has also become a Christian.

One family tradition they had for the first 10 years of their marriage was travelling back to Nigeria every end of the year. It used to be one of the best experiences for my wife and son. They usually get showered with so much love and attention at home. We are not able to keep up with that tradition anymore and now that our boy is grown and in college outside Japan, things have changed. Although Misa has been troubling me about visiting Nigeria with her, we may plan for this year end. I am not in the least worried about my future in Japan. I have made a home here. I plan to continue living here even after retirement, we will be fine. When I die, I want my ash cremated and my bones placed in a grave for us where Misa will eventually be interred (I hope to go first). I have instructed my son to see to that. In all, I am blessed and grateful to God.

### **Uche Maxwell**

Uche from a family of seven was born and grew up in and had all his education up to the Master's degree level in Nigeria. On graduation, he started working first in Nigeria and later opted to go to London for better opportunities. At London he found a nice paid job but his friend who had studied in Japan kept inviting him over to Japan telling him how life is much easier and more rewarding in Japan. He took his friend's advice and applied for a job in Japan. He got an offer and had a work visa processed for him by his company. Uche said Japan is a great country and life is generally good. In Japan wherever you go, the basic necessities of life are at your disposal. Everything is working effectively well but the only problem is the work ethic, you have to work so hard and many times it comes with a lot of stress and despair. Uche says of his dreams and aspirations;

I have been able to achieve most of my dreams and met some of my aspirations for coming to Japan and thus have no regrets thus far. He said he is happily married to his Japanese wife but his assessment of international marriage in Japan is that of too many divorces and separation of families. People hardly understand themselves beyond the initial attraction and then, they are hurriedly married. They only start attempting to understand themselves and their cultural differences after the marriage. It is a sort of on the job training. When people are not patient enough to understand the rubrics and challenges involved at this point, they cave in to divorce.

He met his wife on the streets of Yokohama. “She is beautiful, kind-hearted, easy going and that is exactly what you want in a woman whether Japanese or Nigerian. I didn't set out to marry a Japanese as I already had my visa and all, but as I came to Japan, I met, mingled and interacted with many Japanese and I found them interesting, kind, lovely and beautiful, hence a change of mind. We are happy together even though we have no kids. About keeping the purse strings Uche said, “I made her understand from the onset that the part of the world I come from, a man is the head of the family and that the culture of a woman being the head of the family (by the implication of keeping the money) is not acceptable to me and she agreed to those terms and conditions so we do not have any frictions about money. I pay the entire bills and we are just fine. It was and still very difficult to understand the Japanese culture in entirety but I believe you can modify your family the way you want notwithstanding the cultures involved or the differences. For instance, it's like a tradition for me to attend church every Sunday but sometimes she will try to fix some outings at the exact time on Sunday that I normally attend service and she expects me to cancel going to church and go out with her. She often gets angry when I refuse but as I maintained my ground, with time she got to know that there are certain things I can't compromise and she got used to it. He concluded by saying “naturally most men would like to marry from amongst their own kindred but if the same circumstances occur again, I will still marry a Japanese lady like my wife. For the future, soon, Uche hopes to resign from his company and go back home to Nigeria to set up a business of his own. He said his wife is welcomed if she wants to live in Nigeria, otherwise, she can visit from time to time. He will try to buy a ticket for her anytime she wants to visit.

## **Discussion**

Migration, like we have established earlier is a global phenomenon which has come to stay with the advancement of globalization and the easy diffusion of knowledge and information. People migrate for various reasons but mostly for economic reasons and depending on how porous or acceptable to foreigners a country is, it is likely to have more migrants than others. Also, people are prone to migrate to the country of the former colonial masters. Conversely, a country heavily hit by economic crisis, political crisis or war is more likely to have more immigrants trooping out of it than a stable country.

In Nigeria for instance, having a brother or relation in Europe, America or certain countries in Asia can be seen as a thing of pride even when the details of the immigrants day to day life and conditions of living in the foreign country is not known. Such social outlooks put a lot of undue pressures on migrants to ensure that they succeed at all cost. The pressures to succeed see migrants move from one foreign country where they have experienced less success to another (many of my interlocutors did not come directly to Japan. Some came from London, Dublin, Spain and even within Asia: Malaysia and China). It is this pressure and the urge or challenge to succeed abroad that is responsible for some migrant's decision to marry quickly and marry anyone at all that is willing. In the following section, I shall be examining what I consider to be some of the discourses and issues that surround such unions paying close attention to the life stories above.

## **Wide Cultural Gaps and their Many Challenges**

### **Patriarchy, Power and Control**

Nigeria is basically a highly patriarchal nation and most Nigerian men by implication are likely to be more domineering and see themselves as the sole head of the family. This also implies that there is usually an unequal gender and power relation in their partnership, thus casting women into subordinate positions. This culture of patriarchy sees to it that roles are clearly bifurcated within the household. It is the wife's place to cook, clean, wash clothes, takes care of the children amongst other domestic duties. The husband is to provide shelter, food, protection and be venerated for all these. (K.A. Anele 2010; G.A. Makama 2013; S. A. Dogo 2014). Japan, even though not exactly like Nigeria is also not completely free of various forms of institutionalized and localized patriarchy (Nakane C. 1973). This near similarity in the culture of the man/wife relationship ordinarily should be an easy sight of convergence and acceptance. This is even more so as sociologist Kalmijn argues that “people search for potential spouses who are culturally similar” (Kalmijn, 1998).



This is however not the situation in most cases of the Nigerian man/Japanese wife encountered. Most of my interlocutors decried how extremely powerful their wives are. This is even more so in relationships under 5 years where the men are yet to obtain a permanent residency visa or where the family purse string is controlled by the Japanese wife. This is also true when a company or business has been registered in the wife's name. All these factors combine to give the woman an edge and indeed control over her husband. While talking to two Nigerian men about the extent of their tolerance in comparison to their compatriots' at home and why, they both answered in unison, this is Japan, and then busted into laughter. One of the men quickly explained that this is what they are often told by their wives. Schams (2009) echoing Ito (2005) argues that "Indeed, in terms of rights, sociologists have classified "spouses of Japanese nationals" as one of the most privileged groups among foreigners, particularly in comparison with the vulnerability of undocumented migrants.

This "unnatural" power dynamics in the marriage invariably emasculate the man who sometimes has no option but to tolerate the arrangement. This power dynamics if sustained lead to an early divorce (soon after 5 years for those on spousal visa). Divorces are even more common for men whose Japanese wives control the purse strings. It is however worthy to note that in recent times, such divorces are no longer common as most Nigerian men are able to negotiate and take charge of their financial earnings and expenditure.

"With financial control, it is easy to overlook some of the other *wagamama* attitudes displayed by my wife", says one of my interlocutors. This is also true of Emeka Okorie's case above. He notes the power that comes with financial control and argues how "the power was grossly abused and it took so much clout and determination for me to wriggle out of that situation. I get this pocket money and I am often asked to buy a couple of things on my way home every day from work and these side monies are never refunded. It makes you a slave to your own income".

International marriage is ideally a site for the negotiation of various interests from the two cultures to create a harmony. This becomes necessary because some migrants are vulnerable in terms of visa and their migrant status but still feels the need to be respected as the breadwinner. It entails that, by saying yes to a person from another culture and norm, a little negotiation and adjustments to some deeply held beliefs will make for a more harmonious relationship

### **Biracial Children and the Question of Identity**

The birth of a child in biracial unions brings some level of acceptance to the union especially for relationships that were highly opposed to by the Japanese family. Although this is not the case in every biracial marriage, however, most of my interlocutors confirmed that the arrival of a child helps calm tensed nerves. Emeka Okorie from case 2 for instance narrates how his cold father in law's heart melted when he saw his grandson. "He is so cute, he almost looks as beautiful as a girl" he exclaimed. Another interviewee claimed when his would be parent's in-law got tired of opposing them; they came with the proposal that the offspring of his then pregnant daughter be given their Japanese surname. He claimed that being eager for peace, he quickly agreed.

Beyond birth and recognition however, is the bigger issue of identity. Historically, Japan has often been identified as a homogenous nation with neither little room for identity expansion nor plural or hyphenated identity (Lie 2008). Homogeneity for instance is at the core of *Nihonjinron* (Befu 2001). Dale (1986: 119) defines *Nihonjinron* as "discussions of Japanese identity". Murphy-Shigematsu claimed:

The mono-ethnic myth is credited with giving majority Japanese a secure sense of belonging and safety. It is also seen as providing impetus for the masses to subjugate personal desires and individual will and sacrifice for the group and for the country. This myth is regarded by many as the philosophical foundation of the immensely successful post-war economic recovery. (Murphy, 1993:84)

Thus, the inclusion of bi-racial children into mainstream identity is not easily operable as inclusion into mainstream identity has been predicated upon both cultural fluency and phenotypic congruity (Tsuda, 2003) and so such children basically remain "hafu". "Hafu", on the other hand is the total or near total lack of ethnic consciousness of these bi-racial children who can best be described as half Japanese and half nothing. They have no identification with their paternal ancestry, have never visited Nigeria, do not identify with Nigerian culture

and cannot speak any Nigerian language. The fact that many Nigerian men have to hustle so hard to both regularize their stay here and earn decent wages means that they are mostly away from home and hardly feature in the day to day life of their children at impressionable ages. This is the case of Mr. Eze and Okorie who decried their absence in the lives of their children. Mr. Okorie for instance has two grown sons who have never visited Nigeria and he sees the younger one as dependent on his mother so much for everything. This is also compounded by the lack of the knowledge of one's spouse's culture and sometimes unwillingness to learn by the Japanese wife. That way, she being the present parent in the child's life, is unable to impress on him/her any knowledge of the father's culture or identity.

It is often the case that when groups experience exclusion from the mainstream and are clearly tagged “half”, they usually embrace some form of counter-identity of any sort, cultural, ethnic, national etc. (Capobianco 2015, Ryang 1997; Tsuda 2003). These children on the other hand, being raised mono-culturally with little or no connection to the other culture lack the requisite knowledge, impulse and even ability to assert such alternative ethnic identity. They thus marry Japanese and eventually obliterate their African gene whether they feel completely accepted or not. This is however not the norm as there are many exceptions to the case. Some Nigerian fathers such as Mr. Emezua have made conscious efforts to be in their children's lives as much as possible. Some others make it a duty to attend events like the Nigerian Independence Day Celebration; New Yam festival, Cultural Day and the many Nigerian end of the Year parties in Tokyo with their wives and children. This way, they are able to experience a little of the culture of their fathers. Recently too, there have been efforts to bring Nigerian, nay African Japan kids together by forming the African Japan kids in Tokyo.

### **Remigration, International Marriages and the Future**

One important but obviously absent question intending biracial couple fails to ask is what happens if and when a partner decides to re-migrate back to his place of origin. This question becomes necessary for many reasons;

- a. Most Nigerian men based abroad usually love to retire and return back home as they age and their strength wax less and less.
- b. Most Nigerian men want to age and die at home surrounded by family members whose duty it is, culturally, to care and nurse their aged loved ones
- c. Due to the lack of many social amenities and security structures and the total absence of close family members and dissimilar cultures etc., many Japanese women would decline to relocate back to Nigeria with their husbands.

A cursory look into the activities of many Nigerian associations in Tokyo and its environs show a total commitment to brotherhood and unity. This unity is also fostered by the fact that these men long for people who will insist that culture be followed should they pass on while in Japan. Thus you see them making serious financial commitments and monthly contributions to a fund set up for such eventuality as most of them want to be taken back to Nigeria and given a befitting burial should they die here. This culture is a huge contrast to the Japanese funeral culture, and it costs so much to have a corpse transported over several thousand miles for burial.

Besides the sudden death of a partner, many Nigerian men, as evidenced by the interviews expressed the need to return home as they age. This is even so as older people are surrounded by children and relatives (nephews, nieces, cousins etc.) who take care of and ensure they live in comfort. Thus juxtaposed with probably being likely sent to an old people's home (since they were mostly absent in their children's life and can't possibly live with them), they return home. With the exception of Mr. John Emezua, all my interlocutors expressed the wish to retire back home in the future. This is irrespective of their wife or children's willingness or unwillingness to re-migrate with them.

This approach to the future of international marriages reveal that sometimes, such unions are by implication transient and mostly come with superficial attachments. Also, couples in such unions are easily dispensable of

each other. This suggests that such unions are a phase in their migration sojourn and can be easily disremembered especially when the couples don't have any kids together. It also implies that the Japanese women would rather forego a relationship than relocate from Japan, especially when it's to a much poorer country.

## Conclusion

It has been observed that migration is an inescapable aspect of life and people are more likely to migrate to nations that are more economically and socially promising than theirs. The advancement of globalization and its attendant spread of knowledge will see to it that information about economically attractive countries bring more migrants to its doorsteps. The Japanese government on its part has also taken the positive step of opening their doors to welcome knowledgeable and skilled migrants (Komine 2014; Kodama 2015; Morita 2017). This way, Japan will witness the class of Nigerian migrants who would come to Japan and have all the legal requirements of a migrant without recusing to any shotgun marriage. This means couple will take time to date and understand each other's culture, and negotiate areas that need to be negotiated, make mutual compromises and lovingly build a family.

In conclusion it is noteworthy that the future of international marriages and indeed Nigerian/Japanese marriages is sunnier than it is now. This is also because Japan is beginning to debate the question of biracial children more deeply. The recent victory of Ms. Naomi Osaka in the 2018 U.S Opens Tennis Championship has re-ignited questions of the identity and contributions of bi-racial (half) Japanese children. There is therefore hope, that one day Japan will create space for black or African-Japanese children in the mainstream. This is certain to create an environment where Japanese wives of Nigerians will be more at ease to accept, imbibe and teach their children certain aspects of the Nigerian culture.

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