

“Japa”: Self-Volunteer Into Slavery – Way Out

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The “Japa” syndrome is a slang and phenomenon in Nigeria that has awakened the sensibilities of many scholars who have written copiously about it in recent time. To Ogungbile (2023), the word “japa” is a Yoruba Locution which means to leave for greener pasture. Though, according to Ogunjobi (2022), the “japa” syndrome which is the Nigerian slang for emigration was said to have occurred in the 70’s/80’s as the first time of such scenario. Ogunjobi (2022) makes reference to the “big scramble” of the 16th to 19th centuries during which the British Empire and other European warlords made Africans go through the excruciating forced labour of slave trade. However, according to him, the current trend is no longer related to slave trade but can justifiably be termed, “self-trade”.

It is against this backdrop that this paper is therefore looking at the trend of how both the young and old are plunging themselves into self-volunteer slavery. After all, they are not being forced or taking to these foreign lands like what occurred during the era of slave trade. Moreso, this “japa” syndrome is having gross telling

effect on the country's brain drain which is not helping nor aiding the development and growth of Nigeria.

Why Subjection Into Self Slavery?

A lot of Nigerians willingly subjected themselves into slavery by deciding on their own to abandon whatever they are doing to earn a livelihood and then Japa to foreign countries. Majority of them travel out without knowing what such places have in stock for them. Findings have even shown that majority of these migrants have viable means of livelihood that are sustainable but still decides to migrate because they have seen others doing so.

The political situation of Nigeria, poor quality of life and limited access to good and quality health care, high level of unemployment and very bad economic conditions are also part of the reasons why young people are emigrating. Moreover, lack of contentment and peer group influence are equally very significant as to why Nigerians are going into self-slavery. This is because most of these migrants have no justifiable reasons for leaving the shores of Nigeria but only decided to abandon their paid jobs and they migrate to countries where they are second rated citizens. In addition, this subjection of one-self into slavery is impacting negatively on the brain drain of the country.

Brain drain is a situation whereby a considerable number of educated professionals and skillful persons migrate from developing countries to developed countries in search of better jobs or better condition of service. It can as well be referred to as the departure of educated or professionals from one country economic sector or field for another usually for better pay or living conditions.

Brain drain often happens when skilled individuals and professionals leave their home countries which in most cases are developing countries and go elsewhere to take advantage of better opportunities. It also occurs when individuals leave one area of workforce and go to another for want of a better life.

This trend of japa/brain drain was initially restricted to certain professions but has now become free for all with the introduction of visa programmes so as to fill the workforce gaps in developed

nations. Brain drain in Yoruba language of Nigeria is nicknamed “Japa” meaning run or flee to where there is exodus of middle class and highly skilled citizens that has been occurring since the late 1980s to the early 1990s which has escalated now.

‘Japa’ according to Wikipedia (2023) is a nickname for brain drain which means run or flee in Yoruba. Japa is the exodus of middle class and highly skilled Nigerians which has been occurring in waves since the late 1980s to early 1990s. The survey carried out in 2017 by Nigeria’s polling agency in conjunction with Nigeria Health watch revealed that most doctors seek opportunities abroad as 88 percent (88%) of doctors were considering work opportunities abroad as such average of 12 doctors a week move to the U.K.

The *Oxford Learners Dictionary* (2015) defines Brain drain as the emigration of highly trained or qualified people from a particular country. Likewise, the Merriam-Webster (2023) sees Brain drain as the departure of educated or professional people from one country, economic sector or field for another usually for better pay or living conditions.

The Encyclopedia Britannica (undated) also defines brain drain as a situation in which many educated or professional people leave a particular place or profession and move to another one that gives them better pay or living condition.

Brain drain are caused by so many reasons either on the geographical level which could be as a result of political instability, poor quality of life, limited access to health care, high rate of unemployment and general shortage of economic opportunity. All of those and many more could prompt both the skilled and talented willing workers to leave the shores of their countries for places that offer better opportunities.

Records have shown that qualified and skilled manpower whose training have been subsidized by the Nigerian tax payers funds, who ought to stay back in Nigeria to care, cater and work for Nigeria and Nigerians have all ‘Japa’ to either Canada or any of the European Western World in an attempt to seek for better working conditions in countries where things done at the standard stipulated period at the expense of their father land and her inhabitants.

It is high time we reversed the trend of brain drain to brain gain which can only be done when adequate and suitable panaceas are proffered for solving the lingering problems in the country at large which now culminate into the ‘Japa’ syndrome.

An Overview of the “Japa” Syndrome

It is a matter of fact that the country in recent time is prone to insecurity and in some instances no enabling environment to dwell and seek for their livelihood. Still, running out of the country in search of greener pasture is not the best solution, as the ‘Japa’ is more or less putting oneself into modern day self-slavery, as no place is ever like home. This is in corroboration with, the view of Sowore, a Political Scientist being quoted by Ajimotokan (2023), who lamented that expectations of many Nigerians of Eldorado in diaspora are often dashed because they suffer cultural shock and dislocation in their new environment.

Aside the above view, when a Nigerian leaves the shore of the country, he/she becomes a second, if not a third-class citizen and is he/she treated and rated as such. They are made to work long hours and are paid peanuts. The rate of taxation melted on immigrants is quite burdensome. This is because the tax paid by them is what the host countries use to develop their own land and even take care of their dependent citizens. Another disheartening situation of this ‘Japa’ syndrome is back home, some of these immigrants are qualified professionals, but when they get to these their so called “greener pastures”, they are most of the time compelled to do menial jobs meant for labourers. Emelike (2023) cites a case of a banker, a father of three back home in Nigeria, who relocated to Atlanta in the United States but noted that the juicy jobs are not so easy to find because the number of immigrants who need jobs are increasing every day and its becoming a source of concern to the host country. The Leadership News (2023) gives further examples of what self-inflicted slavery is, if a bank manager should abandon his lucrative employment in Nigeria for a job as a factory hand abroad just because the pay is higher. Likewise, a lawyer to abandon his practice in Nigeria to go and take up a job abroad as a janitor and so on.

Conversely Ajimotokan (2023) quoted Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the CEO of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission who posited that one cannot stop people from migrating but, it is the irregular migration that should be stopped. Those who are successful in diaspora should equally come back to develop Nigeria to contribute their quota in order for it to grow like the countries they run to, to seek greener pasture.

Nigerians in the Diaspora

It is no gainsaying that Nigeria is blessed with the best brains despite the fact that Nigerians learn and study under harsh conditions, yet they often excel in their studies and in other life endeavours, no wonder they excel and surpass all other nationalities whenever they go out of the shores of the country to compete with other nationalities.

Adesogan, N. (2019) advance reasons why Nigerians excel abroad which are: Nigeria with about 250 ethnic groups naturally creates competitive nature of Nigerians in the diaspora which results to their success.

Nigerians carry this competitive behavior outside with a burning and fearless desire to excel in whatever field they find themselves.

Nigerians prioritize education because it has proven to be the consistent leveler and equalizer in the country.

Nigerians are hardworking and resilient individuals when they are abroad with a very strong desire to succeed so as to have something tangible to take back home. No wonder Nigerians tend to have a hedge when it comes to securing jobs abroad.

Nigerians make good use of the standard of infrastructure abroad to facilitate their success, such as uninterrupted power supply, internet and good transport facilities, adequate water supply all of those often fast-track their academic achievements and records.

Nigerians are known to congregate and link-up with one another when they migrate, which has served as a support system for Nigerian especially for new immigrants trying to find their bearing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Nigerian government should be very much proactive in creating conducive environment for economic, social, political health sectors and so on to be stable and sustainable in the country. This will prevent and surely eradicate the idea of this ‘japa’ syndrome which is leading to brain drain, from the mind-sets of the citizenry of Nigeria, since the country is very much blessed in natural resources which can be tapped into, to create wealth for the sustainability of the country. The stoppage of this “japa” syndrome will allow Nigeria to grow and develop like other developed nations too, where these immigrants run into self-volunteer slavery.

The Way Forward/Recommendations

The way forward to stymie the tide of this “japa” syndrome has been given in form of recommendations which are that:

- the government at all levels (local, state and federal) must secure the country so that an enabling environment will be created and made safe for both the old and young to practice their professions to contribute to the development and growth of Nigeria.
- effective leadership is also important and crucial to take care of every facet of life in the country, such as the economic, social, health, political sectors and so on.
- government should assist the active and vibrant youth population in developing and converting their innovative ideas into viable businesses to enhance their livelihood.
- the government must make sure national development show noticeable improvements ensuring that actions taken by political leaders yield commensurate results.

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