

Causal Agent of “Japa Syndrome”: Nigerian Youths in Search of Human Security

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Introduction

Nigeria is lacking on most of the indices of governance let alone good governance since independence. Indeed the connection drawn between pursuing constitutional government and observing this governance yardstick when measured in the last ten years of civil rule falls short of the ideals. Not only is the public service inefficient, it has been tampered with and politicized in the last ten years making it inefficient and bureaucratic; the judiciary is all but independent and in the years 1999 to 2007, it reached its lowest ebb in terms of enforcement of decisions while the framework for enforcing contract has been politicized; the country has ranked high in corruption in the administration of public funds as demonstrated by the power (Ajiboye, 2011 cited in Onoja, 2013); pension and oil subsidy probes and her consistent rating on Transparency International’s corruption perception index (Corruption Perception Index, 2011); the absence of an independent auditor and a less corrupt legislature since 1999 facilitates the perpetration of act of corruption that has impoverished the citizens while the press has remained relatively free even as it pursues its own agenda. The tendencies of regimes to set agenda and goals for meeting the expectation of the citizens for development is itself part of the corruption of the system. This enhances insecurity as it destroys the tenuous faith of the people in governance.

This is 2023 and the japa syndrome is still trending in Nigeria like an emerging pandemic. Japa, a Yoruba locution which means to leave for greener pastures, is still consistently running errands in the frustrated minds of Nigerian youths. A lot of them are leaving the shores of Nigeria to different countries of the world. Sadly, they left because they can no longer bear the distressing issues we have always fussed about; issues of neglect and oppressive government, calling the bluff of the weak citizens and treating them with disdain. Pathetically, the Nigerian “japa” situation is expanding. A recent survey from the Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey revealed that seven out of 10 Nigerians are willing to relocate to other countries for various reasons, with a good number of them recording success. Today, there is still the increasing rate of an emerging urge to leave Nigeria by the old and the young. Now, the current net Nigeria migration rate is -0.273 per 1000 population, indicating that more people are emigrating from the country. It's depressing that Nigeria is currently sinking deep in brain drain, and it probably needs a call for emergency.

A senior bank worker revealed how the Nigerian banking industries have been facing a mass resignation of employees, which has been affecting service delivery, lamenting how this has been slowing down banking processes, leaving many people frustrated as it affects important transactions. Also, recall that sometime last year, the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors revealed that about 50 per cent of Nigerian doctors had already found their way out of the country. The University College Hospital, Ibadan, Oyo State, also noted that more than 600 of its clinical workers have resigned their appointments, while the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital disclosed that more than 150 nurses resigned their appointments with the tertiary hospital (Ayorinde, 2023)/

Today, it is disheartening that most of the people who left the country are mostly highly skilled individuals with abundant talents across different sectors. In July 2022, the Association of Nigerian Students in Europe revealed that Europe alone has more than three million Nigerians enrolled in different higher institutions of learning. A survey also indicates that 89.87 per cent of Nigerian youths prefer

to study in a university outside the country. Seventy three per cent of Nigerians, 60 per cent of doctors, and 89.87 per cent of students want to leave the country. They want to flee the country. What are they really seeing that the government appears not to be seeing? First, Nigerian youths are frustrated with socio-economic challenges fuelled by unfulfilled government promises and bad leadership marked by absence of transparency and accountability. The situation brought about cold development, siphons scarce resources that could improve infrastructure and hinder education growth, public health and stack the deck against the poor masses.

In 2022, the unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated to reach 33 per cent in 2023. This figure was projected to 32.5 per cent in the preceding year. Chronological data show that the unemployment rate in Nigeria rose constantly in the past years. Nigeria's youth population eligible to work is about 40 million out of which only 14.7 million are fully employed and another 11.2 million are unemployed. Also, Nigerian youths are completely out of the picture. Rather than being empowered, they have been reduced to a bunch of frustrated citizens with many of them becoming political tugs and agents of destruction in the hands of the enemies of the country, and while the children of these politicians study in prestigious institutions abroad and graduate in time, Nigerian undergraduates struggle with incessant strikes and worrisome teaching aids. Yes, Nigerian youths aren't frustrated because the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd) failed to create his three million jobs per year. They aren't frustrated because Buhari called them lazy. Nigerian youths are frustrated because of the basic issues. They are frustrated by the lack of basic amenities, electricity and the distorted academic calendar that springs up every year. They are frustrated by the lack of an enabling environment for good business. Why won't they leave when they see that the level of insecurity in Nigeria has continued to worsen over the years? Before, the country battles only the Boko Haram insurgency, but now herdsmen crisis, aggressive kidnap attacks by known and unknown gunmen, and the needless bloodshed in the country are provoking signals. Now, who will really want to stay behind? Who? The country is dangerous

for its dwellers as it can be invaded by anyone and lives will be taken anyhow and anytime. Worse still, the perpetrators are never really brought to book which is more reason for anyone to flee this country. Besides, the economy remains poor. The masses are daily confronted by forex, naira redesign, rising food prices and fuel crises.

Even for business, from harsh economic policies to questionable government and bank policies and high unsustainable cost of doing business. Right now, it seems that the Nigerian government has not still realised how the japa issue can have a bad effect on the country. What happens to the quality of health of the citizens? Who and what are replacing the services of nurses and doctors who left the country? Many good hands are forsaking the Nigerian dream on a daily basis. When many of the citizens want to leave the country, what would this translate to logically? Moved by the exploits of friends who just left the country, it takes a lot not to obey one's heart to leave the country for better opportunities once the chance emerges. Not long ago, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group projected the unemployment rate in Nigeria to rise to 37 per cent in 2023 while the United Kingdom is offering a good annual pay to Nigerians willing to migrate there and work as teachers. This paper therefore seeks to examine human insecurity as a causal agent of japa syndrome by Nigerian youths.

Japa Syndrome and its Causes

The spate at which Nigerians emigrate in search of greener pasture and security is a highly debated topic with its attendant brain-drain effect on the country. Recently the Nowa Omoigui Centre for the Advancement of Art, History and Medicine, NOWAS, organised a webinar where speakers analysed the syndrome, the root causes of migration trend and its impact on Nigerian society (Ajimotokan, 2023).

Japa, is a Yoruba coinage, which in its literal connotation denotes 'to leave for good'. It has become the new catch phrase for unbridled migration by desperate Nigerians in search of better paying jobs or other life supporting means. But the worry is that it is not only the citizens with specialised skills in engineering,

medicine, education, law and information technology that are migrating for better opportunities. Now all manner of many of Nigerians now do so in some cases via irregular means with to work as either cleaners, cab drivers, labourers, hair dressers and mechanics among others, in the process putting their lives in harm’s way occasioned by the perilous journey they embark upon across the Sahara Desert or by attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe aboard overloaded dinghies. The long term effect for the country is that majority of the people that are migrating or planning to are the youths who constitute the productive population of the country (Ajimotokan, 2023).

A recent survey by the Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey revealed that seven out of 10 Nigerians are willing to relocate to other countries for various reasons, with a good number of them recording success. Now, the current net Nigeria migration rate is - 0.273 per 1000 population, which indicates that more people are emigrating from the country. Also of concern is the statistics which put Nigeria with 11,055 trained doctors as the country with the third-highest number of foreign doctors working in the United Kingdom. The first of wave of “japa” (Nigerian slang for emigration) in Nigeria was in the ‘70s/’80s. Faced with an uncertain future owing to military interregnums and a volatile economy, the Nigerian young journeyed to the West – the US and UK – while some left on a limb to **Ukraine**. Over the years more Nigerians have departed the country in pursuit of their dreams abroad. Some of these Diaspora Nigerians have distinguished themselves in different human enterprises. And they constitute a financial bulwark for the country, reportedly remitting about \$25 billion annually (Nwabufo, 2021).

A recent media report claimed that the Presidency sees nothing wrong with the overwhelming desire by Nigerians, across all age and social spectrum, to seek greener pasture outside the nation’s shores in what has come to be known in street lingo as ‘japa.’ According to the report, the Presidency believes that what it described as a syndrome has always been there and therefore, there was no crime committed if Nigerians decided to seek better opportunities abroad. To a certain degree, the Presidency is right. There is nothing

wrong with a Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu leaving his job as the Director General of Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to take up an appointment with the World Health Organisation (WHO). There is, certainly, nothing wrong with Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala taking up an appointment as Director General of World Trade Organisation (WTO) or for that matter, Dr Akinwumi Adesina taking up a job as President of African Development Bank (AfDB). But these are not part of the issue here. The causes of japa of the Nigerian youths are desire for prosperity, the high cost of living and low standard of living, weak economy, social distress, underemployment, poverty, hunger and mounting insecurity among others. This paper is mainly focusing the aspect of mounting insecurity which makes majority of the Nigerian youths to be searching for security.

Perspectives of Security and Insecurity

Security in Nigeria gained popular currency for three reasons. The first is the consequence of military intervention in politics. The second and closely related to the first is the international enabling environment including the origin of security studies as a sub-field of international studies, the cold war and the post-cold war worlds. The third is the prevailing insecurity that heightened from the decade of the 1980s which is largely explained by military misrule. There are two views of the security. The first is the realist paradigm which focuses on the state, external relations and military power (Morgenthau, 1969; Buzan, 1991 cited in Onoja, 2013). The second is human security paradigm popularized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994) which focuses on people and their wellbeing. The UNDP paradigm is a critique of the realist approach which it argues, messes up governance thus creating the deplorable state of human beings particularly in the developing world.

Security is peoples' relative feeling of being secure from economic, political, social, cultural and psychological fear. Insecurity is people's relative feeling of the presence of economic, political, social, cultural and psychological fear, all being human insecurity. Of these forms of insecurity, the one that is most common and triggers

consciousness of other forms of insecurity is economic insecurity (Transparency in Nigeria, 2011; Nkanga, 2011). Economic insecurity spawns into existence other forms of insecurity. For instance, the 1994 crisis in Jos was triggered by the appointment of the North coordinator of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (Nkanga, 2011). In simple term, economic insecurity is the absence of jobs, basic health care, portable drinking water, education, life enhancing opportunities and creative policies that cater for short, medium and long term needs of the different cadre of the population. It is the absence of basic economic and social infrastructure that would avail citizens of the opportunity to cater for their own welfare. The non-provision of these created conditions of political, cultural, and psychological exclusion detrimental to security (Booth, 2007).

Insecurity is the opposite of security and it describes the lack or absence of security whether in the realist or human security paradigms. When situated in the military dominated environment of Nigeria, insecurity is seen from the context of what the soldiers who governed Nigeria almost throughout independence and suffered what Buzan (1991) describes as defense dilemma, thought of it. This is the contradiction between military defense and national security. Armed forces are justified principally by their necessity for national security, and it is therefore politically expedient to assume that military might is positively correlated with national security (Buzan, 1991). As the Nigerian military discovered, this was not always the case since their definition of National security with time developed into the symbolic ambiguity type. In their case, defense and security began to work against each other. Their focus on defense or regime survival compromised other security objectives including the welfare of the people. In this case, the defense measure adopted by the government was inappropriate and irrelevant to the security needs of the country. This raises the fundamental question of what constitutes the referent. Should it be state/regime survival? Or should it be people and their welfare?

Insecurity involves an overall sense of uncertainty or anxiety about worth, abilities, skills, and value as a person, conveying the

message that you’re at risk or in danger of something or someone. That negative impacts of insecurity could be physical, mental, or emotional. Without security, you can’t accomplish full trust or function to your fullest potential. Life experiences can affect a person’s level of insecurity. There could also be a biological relationship with insecurity being an inheritable trait passed down over generations and expressed through temperament and personality, or someone might have a mental health condition adding to their insecurities.

The inability to provide basic needs constitutes the governance crisis bedeviling Nigeria. The situation has come to constitute another dimension of insecurity as governments set agenda that raises people’s expectation only for them to fail to deliver. This has been common since the return to civil rule in 1999. While part of the problem was created by military rule, the military hasty return to civilian rule was in part informed by the fact that the military discredited themselves as well as the removal of the enabling international environment supportive of military intervention. The exit of the military was heralded by immense campaign that equated return to civil rule with abundance for the citizens in terms of job, housing, education, infrastructure and the creation of a climate for continuous growth. Coming from an environment of deprivation, Nigerians were in hurry for the attainment of these promises. As it turned out, successive regime set agenda that were not attained. This has increased Nigerian’s distrust and insecurity (Onoja, 2013).

Possible Causes of Insecurity Include

- **Lack of family emotional support:** People with a loving, supportive family are less likely to deal with insecurity
- **Lack of physiological need satisfaction:** When people are insecure in their food, housing, and safety needs, they struggle to move on to satisfying psychological needs like security
- **Lack emotional intelligence:** Those with low emotional intelligence can’t accurately monitor the feelings of themselves and others, leading to unhealthy relationships and less trust

- **Lack of openness:** When people aren't open, curious, and comfortable with new people and situations, they note more stress and fear, resulting in lower security.
- **Lack of agreeableness:** Disagreeable people tend to have more interpersonal conflicts due to not being helpful, supportive, or empathetic. These qualities produce a sense of risk in social situations and less security.
- **An underlying mental health condition:** Mental health conditions like anxiety and depression have a bidirectional relationship with insecurity. Personality disorders like borderline personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder also have a connection to insecurity.⁴
- **An over-dependence on others:** As people become dependent on people or relationships, their insecurity grows as they perceive risk in the relationship ending.

Types of Human Insecurity

Insecurity can originate from several sources and branch out into multiple areas of your life. Because it has different origins and effects, one person's insecurity can look completely different from another's. Not all forms fit neatly into categories either, but some of the most common types of insecurity include relationship insecurity, social insecurity, body image insecurity, job insecurity, and insecurity of basic needs.

Insecurity in Relationships

With relationship insecurity, a person is unwilling to become vulnerable and willing to trust in others. An insecure person may have trust issues and be unable to trust what someone is saying or that they will follow through on what they say they'll do in the relationship.

These issues not only influence the individual, but also other person in the relationship.

Social Insecurity

Social insecurity typically involves a lack of confidence in one’s own ability to do well and succeed in social settings. Like other forms, social insecurity is mostly a creation of the person’s anxiety about what could happen in the future, rather than what has happened in the past. Often, social insecurity will overlap with the signs and symptoms of social anxiety.

Someone with social insecurity might worry about:

- Appearing awkward
- Saying something hurtful or inappropriate
- Not being smart enough to contribute to the conversation
- Not understanding jokes

Body Image Insecurity

Those with body image insecurity will struggle to accurately perceive their physical appearance. Instead of having a balanced view of their characteristics, they may spend excessive time and energy worrying about how they look. Someone might feel insecure about their whole body, or they could focus on only one part like their nose, ears, knees, or teeth. Some people may feel insecure based on feeling judged by others, while others will judge themselves more harshly than anyone else ever could.

Job Insecurity

Job insecurity centers around a person feeling inadequate in the workplace. They may have overwhelming doubt, confusion, hesitation, and anxiety about their job, constantly feeling like a fraud. Students in all levels of school may experience a similar type of insecurity that leads them to question their intelligence, ability to craft a well-written paper, and apply knowledge as needed. In either case, people with job and school insecurity face problems including failing grades, poor work performance, and leaving tasks unfinished.

Basic Need Insecurity – Food, Housing, Health

Without enough food, housing, or health, it is challenging to succeed in life. When a person doesn't know where their next meal is coming from, where they'll rest their head at night, and how This high level of chronic stress results in physical hardships, as well as psychological hardships much longer their physical and mental health will hold out, they can't devote enough energy towards other aspects of life.

Signs of Insecurity

Some forms of insecurity are easy to spot, while others are more concealed. People who conceal their insecurities generally want to limit exposure to judgment, but avoidance behaviors only perpetuate the insecurity. The signs of insecurity tend to overlap with poor self-esteem and self-worth, and while some symptoms prove consistent, others change frequently and without warning. Signs that you're feeling insecure could include:

- An overriding feeling of inadequacy
- Low self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth
- Like they are unable or ill-equipped to cope with stressors
- Generally uncertain about the world
- Anxious about their relationships with others
- Poor decision-making skills and limited ability to choose quickly
- Being overly critical of yourself and other people
- Trying to portray yourself as overly confident to mask how you really feel
- Perfectionism to the point of never being satisfied
- Strong desire to be alone and avoid social situations
- Struggling to believe others and build strong relationships based on mutual trust and understanding
- Poor communication patterns that focus on the other person's needs and wants more than your own.

The Effects of Always Feeling Insecure

The effects of occasional insecurity are challenging enough, and

the added consistency of always feeling insecure can significantly wear down someone’s self-esteem and worth. Some common effects of feeling insecure include:

- Never going for promotions at work and becoming dissatisfied with your job.
- Thinking you are not good enough to seek out a happy relationship.
- Settling for people and situations that don’t satisfy you.
- Worry that other people are out to hurt you.

How to Overcome Insecurity

Like other psychological conditions, you can become less insecure with some lifestyle changes and shifts in perspective, which a therapist can help you achieve if you’re struggling on your own. Changing your patterns takes time and patience, so you should be willing to maintain interventions over the long-term to see lasting results. Here are 11 ways to deal with insecurity:

1. Talk to a Therapist
2. Acknowledge the Role of Insecurity in Daily Life
3. Fully Assess the Source of Insecurity
4. Practice Unconditional Self-Compassion
5. Reparent Yourself
6. Openly Communicate Your Insecurity Concerns
7. Build a Strong Support Network
8. Focus on the Positives
9. Take Care of Your Physical Health
10. Accept Your Limitations and Celebrate Your Differences
11. Aim for Progress, Not Perfection

Final Thoughts on Insecurity

Insecurity is a universal experience, but not all people experience insecurity so intensely that it disrupts their life and ability to function. If insecurity is creating unwanted impacts in your mental, social, or physical health, it could be time to take action and address the issue with professional support and assistance.

Conclusion

In his remarks, Dr. Sota Omoigui, who wrote the national anthem in 1976, described the migration of the youth who constitute the country's productive population as a time bomb waiting to explode. He said youths should not be blamed for migrating in the face of hardship in a country where teaching hospitals have no running water, electricity, drugs and facilities and where patients are expected to bring their own water. “We must start from the basic because our youths who are hopeless they will continue to Japa,” Omoigui said. “Democracy in Nigeria is a sham. The Governors are setting up their own retirement plan and the legislators are planning a bill that will force the doctors to stay in the country for minimum of five years. “Corruption streaks across the judiciary, the public and private agencies and everywhere. When corruption thrives, no White Paper will work,” he said. When governments repeatedly fail to deliver on their promises to the people, they leave widening communication gap between the government and the people. This creates insecurity of all types. Persisting in the non-fulfillment and implementation of policies contravenes the social contract between government and the people. The last twenty years of civil rule is replete with failed promises and agenda that were not delivered. This affects governance. In view of the often unprepared leadership Nigeria has been experiencing, it is advisable to cut the expectation of the people by not devising grand schemes that will not see the light of the day. All we need is the political will that will tackle corruption and other challenges confronting Nigerian youths.

Recommendations

To minimize or completely eradicate human insecurity in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. “We can make treasures out of the exodus of Nigerian citizens by following the China example. China's Diaspora contributed immensely in the rise of China as a global power through capital investment, technology transferring Diaspora as an extension of China and as agents to drive

its domestic interest. The government intervenes directly in the lives of its citizens abroad, even influencing projects in areas populated by Chinese.” It is not all lost.

2. The Nigerian government can make lemonade out of these lemons – only if it wills it (Nwabufo, 2021).
3. The political leaders can develop the political will to tackle corruption and other development challenges confronting Nigerian youths; this will enable administration to promote realizable agenda in order to resuscitate hope in the citizens while insecurity and dwindling faith in government will be reduced to the minimal.

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