

THE NIGERIAN DIASPORA IN GUANGZHOU: ORIGIN AND CHARACTERISTICS

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian diaspora in Guangzhou has a very interesting history and sociology. As to origin, the diasporic core was formed by the pioneer migrants who are known in the diaspora's lingo as "sanpa". Roughly speaking, the sanpaera spanned a decade, beginning in 1997 and ending in 2007. As to sociology, the diaspora, which is arguably the largest African national population in China, is young, moderately educated and has a preponderance of males, Christians and Igbo migrants. While issues such as visa overstay, intermarriage and participation in Nigeria's trade with China have been substantially researched, very little attention has been paid to the origin and sociology of this diaspora. This paper is an effort to fill this critical gap in research. Its intended goal is to extricate the history and sociology of this diaspora from neglect and obscurity. The data mostly came from the fieldwork conducted in Guangzhou during 2013-2017.

Key words: Nigerian diaspora, sanpa, Guangzhou.

INTRODUCTION

African migration to China has become as a topic of intensive research and debate in both academia and the media. Until the late nineties, Western Europe and North America were the major destinations for intercontinental migration from Africa. Those two

regions, however, have been yielding to Asia and Oceania since the Cold War ended three decades ago. Since the late nineties, thousands of Africans have migrated to these two regions, namely Asia and Oceania. Many of those who have migrated to South and Southeast Asia have settled in China (including Hong Kong and Macau) and Malaysia; but it is only in Guangzhou that one can see an African diaspora in those parts of Asia. Arguably, the African diaspora in this Chinese city has attracted more research and media attention than any other African migrant population in Asia. One of the most-mentioned African national migrant populations in that city is the Nigerian diaspora, which, according to Olakpe (2017), is the largest African national population in the country. One of the first loud statements about the presence of Nigerian migrants in the country was made with the July 2009 street protest against the death of an Igbo migrant from injuries sustained while fleeing a police raid. Generally speaking, the diaspora has been copiously mentioned in China's (im)migration literature. Specifically, however, researchers and the media have only paid a marginal attention to its history and sociology. This paper, by discussing the origin and characteristics of the diaspora, aspires to push back the frontiers of research on Nigerian migration to China.

Origin of the Diaspora

The core of the Nigerian diaspora in Guangzhou was formed by sanpa---the pioneer migrants. Roughly speaking, the sanpayears started in 1997 when the first migrants arrived (Obeta, personal communication, February 7, 2019) and ended in 2007 when China began to tighten migration from Africa (fieldwork estimate). According to Obeta (personal communication, February 6, 2019), most of those who formed the core had crossed over from Hong Kong and Taiwan where they were based. Some of those who crossed over from Hong Kong had previously lived in South Korea or Japan. Hong Kong was a base arguably because of the retention of the Mao-era policy that required foreigners travelling to the Mainland to break their journey in Hong Kong. Those who crossed



over from Hong Kong had been visiting Guangzhou for business before deciding to uproot and relocate to the Mainland in the mid-nineties.

Some of those who arrived direct from home had been to Western Europe. By the mid-nineties some Nigerians who had travelled to Europe returned home covered in the material riches they had acquired from prostitution, drug trafficking and menial labour. They had been forced to quit Europe by circumstances such as the attenuation of colonial ties and the tightening of immigration policies in the West. In some parts of southern Nigeria, for example, living abroad (“to be away”) became a badge of social respectability and a rite of passage so that those young men and young women who had not been to “iruogu” were regarded as passive and shiftless. (The word iruogu, which literally means ‘battlefield’, is used for those living abroad, who earn their living from menial labour, prostitution or drug trafficking). It was during that time that human trafficking in Africa began in earnest. Criminal networks lured their prospective unsuspecting victims with offers of well-paid jobs and all-expenses-paid flights. With their stupendous wealth many returnee migrants bought their way to the upper rungs of the social pyramid and revelled in venalities, throwing expensive parties, parading pleasure squads and travelling in long convoys of exotic vehicles sardined with “ndiakpu obi” (overzealous, barrel-chested bodyguard), “ndi otimkpu”(praise singers; sycophants) and “umu asa”(beautiful girls). It was when the prospects of “making it” in Europe began to recede that the Igbo who constitute the majority (about sixty per cent) of the Nigerian diaspora in Guangzhou began to shift attention to Asia. Any history of how the diaspora emerged will be adjudged deficient if it omits to discuss the role played by sanpa migrants. But who are sanpa migrants? It is patently difficult to rescue the identity of those migrants from the stranglehold of its etymological controversy. Nonetheless, we shall launch a rescue operation, hoping that the effort to browse the past for fragments of history will moderate the controversy.



The word, sanpa, did not fall down from heaven. Like any other word in existence, it has its origin history. There are two hypotheses about its origin. Firstly, the word is believed to be a corruption of the Chinese expression (“shang ban”, which means “to work”). In the migrants’ lingo means “to hustle”. For most sanpa migrants who arrived before 2007, “to hustle” implied precarious existence and pursuing success through hard work. There were two categories of sanpa migrants.

The first category comprised those who travelled to China, hoping to teach the English language in nursery, primary and high schools. (There also were Africans from other countries, (such as Ghana, Cameroun, Kenya and Tanzania), who travelled to China during the same period with the intention of making a living from teaching the language). Although they were barely educated, as only about five percent of them had a university education, sanpa teachers were in demand due to the shortage of native speakers and the reluctance of most of the few available ones to work in the remote parts of the country. (Nowadays native speakers are found even in the remotest parts of the country). Some of those who became teachers had been businessmen in Hong Kong, who abandoned their business in order to join in the “gold rush” in the remote parts of the country. Undocumented and working without a residency permit and/or a work permit, sanpa teachers were mercilessly exploited under indentured servitude. At the instigation of their recruitment agents or employers, they could be arrested, detained and deported for daring to demand decent wages. To exemplify, there was a certain young man (Valerin) from Imo State working in Jilin who was deported for asking his employer to release his withheld wages. His agent never released those wages. The agents used different tactics to deter their victims from absconding or demanding wage increase, such as putting them on long probationary periods, withholding their passports after helping them to get a residency permit, blackmailing them with the threat of reporting them to the police for working without a work permit and withholding all or parts of



their wages ‘until further notice’. Some teachers used school-for-visa strategy to obtain and/or renew their residence permit. Over the years, many sanpa teachers have relocated to Guangzhou, Yiwu or Shanghai because of displacement by native speakers or because they had saved enough capital to set up in business in those cities.

The second category comprised those who wanted to use the country as a staging post in their journey to Japan, South Korea, Australia or New Zealand. Those in this category were helpless victims of exploitation by unscrupulous travel agents in their home country, who had assured them that they would eventually reach their destinations by road after breaking their journey in Guangzhou. Only a few of them dared to go back home to start life afresh. The majority were too ashamed to go back home. It was some of such victims that formed the core of the African immigrant drug and internet fraud (“419”) gangs the country is grappling with. The second etymological hypothesis contends that the word refers to those who arrived with a mind to settle in the country as businessmen. Most of those in this category had been businessmen in Nigeria who only wanted to internationalize their business. Some of them were tycoons (“oga” in Nigeria’s pidgin English) who were previously travelling to China to do business before deciding to settle in the country or apprentices (“nwa boyi”) who were stationed in the city by the tycoons to coordinate their business in China. In this sense, sanpa is thought to be a corruption of the Igbo word “sambara”(a settlement plain). Those Nigerians who settled down in the country were perceived in two ways. Firstly, they were perceived not only as adventurers who had joined in the gold rush of the post-Cold War China but also as a lot who wanted to occupy the front row of the new relationship that was developing between Africa and China following the cessation of the Cold War. Secondly, they were perceived, with a tinge of derision, by visiting businessmen as people who settled down in China because they did not have the capital needed to shuttle between it and their home country. The majority of the few female sanpa migrants



came from Ghana, Cameroun, Kenya and Tanzania and worked as teachers. Unlike those who arrived afterwards, sanpa migrants lacked the social capital of hometown associations (HTAs), friends and relations that would have eased their adaptation difficulties. Many of them, nonetheless, were able to overcome their initial privations with the experience they had gained while living in Japan or South Korea or Taiwan or Hong Kong. As noted by Obeta (personal communication, January 11, 2017), sanpa migrants have a higher rate of economic and marital stability and have a better reputation. What this means is that the rate of precariousness, dejection, divorce and crime is lower among sanpa migrants. Unable to settle down in Guangzhou, some sanpa migrants returned to Hong Kong or relocated to the hinterland where they became teachers. The diasporic core formed by sanpa migrants created the social capital network of hometown associations (HTAs), churches, relations and friends that have eased adaptation difficulties for those who arrived afterwards. In fact, the network has been an incentive to migrate to, and settle down in, Guangzhou for thousands of Nigerians (Liang, 2014).

The most popular rendezvouses during the sanpa years (1997-2007) were “Igboezue” (Igbo Square) and “Nke Okeke” (Mr Okeke’s Place), both of which were located on the Guangyuanxi Street (Guangyuanxilu) in the Sanyuali area. According to Kezie, who arrived in 2000 (personal communication, January 9, 2017), Igboezue [Igbo Square] and Nke Okeke [Okeke’s Place] are legends in the history of African migration to China. We frequented those two places to socialize. We would take every newly arrived migrant to those places to make them welcome and to orientate them. We would go to Igboezue for food and to Nke Okeke for drinks and currency exchange. There was this legend about Nke Okeke. [Chuckles]. Mr. Okeke was a Chinese man who ran a bar and a bureau de change. He was so popular with us. His bureau de change and the bank were the only two places where we could change money in those days. Most Nigerians who came to Guangzhou before 2005 knew about him even before departing Lagos since they must have been told by their travel agents that



they would continue their journey to Japan or South Korea from the mythical bus or train station around Nke Okeke.

Mr. Okeke was so popular with the migrants that “no one bothered to find out what his Chinese name really was. The migrants were content to call him by his Igbo name,” Kezie also told the researchers. “Who was Mr. Okeke?” “Where is Mr. Okeke?” “Is Mr. Okeke still alive?” It is regrettable that that vitally important figure in the history of African migration to China has been allowed to vanish without a trace. Those two rendezvouses were where sanpa migrants would gather (usually in the evening) to share experience, review decisions, seek advice and solace, catch up on the home front, etc. Since mobile telephony was not yet common in Africa during the sanpa years, the migrants mostly relied on freshly-arrived compatriots for news about home. The purge of those rendezvouses began in 2007 as part of the country’s security arrangements for the 2008 Olympic Games. It was with that purge that Mr Okeke disappeared.

As a word, sanpa has lost its semantic purity. In its current usage, it mostly implies vagrancy, precariousness and dejection, referring to migrants in any of the three blacklisted categories described as “sanfei” (“three illegals”) in the New Exit and Entry Law promulgated in 2012--- illegal migrants (those who entered the country illegally), illegal residents (undocumented migrants) and illegal workers (migrants working without a work permit). San fei migrants come from different parts of the world---Asia, Europe, Africa, the Oceania, etc. It is rare to find Africans in the first category. Most migrants in that category are from neighbouring countries such as Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos. Some African migrants in the second category actually entered the country with valid visas but slipped into the first category (i.e. became illegal migrants) after auctioning their passports. Most Africans in the third category work as teachers, feeder exporters or “ndiosoahia” (those who live by pitching buyers). Since the promulgation of the New Exit and Entry Law, sanpa migrants have found living in the country increasingly difficult. In the normal course of things, they are marooned in Guangzhou, prevented



from travelling long distances by their illegal residence status. The word is falling into disuse among the migrants, for the migrants, especially those of them who engage in drugs and internet fraud, now prefer to use these two terms, “hustler” and iruogu.

The diaspora has been involved in a recursive movement. According to Obeta (personal communication, July 20, 2016),

Most of the migrants who arrived at the turn of the century resided at Panyu and Donpu, since it was in the suburb that sanpa work abounded. Even the few who resided in the city centre were commuting to the suburb for work. By 2005, most of those residing in the suburb had migrated to the city, particularly to those areas around the old airport in order to exploit the business opportunities that were springing up around those areas. Sanpa work began to lose its appeal when more and more people abandoned it in order to set up in business as freighters or exporters in the city centre. From the airport area, we moved to the Golden Dragon buildings, then to the Sanyuanli area [where most of the migrants do business today].

The movement of labour from the suburb to Sanyuanli lasted about twelve years. Due to the purge of residential apartments in the city, the migrants now commute from the suburb to the city centre. The suburb, especially Tianhe and Nanhai, is being purged now, where upon the migrants are fleeing to faraway cities such as Dongguan and Chaozhou from where they travel several hours on a daily basis to Guangzhou for business. By 2005, due to drug trafficking and visa overstay, African presence in China had become a matter for intensive policy debates in political and security circles. The security component of the country’s preparations for the 2008 Olympics included nationwide arrest and deportation of sanfei migrants ---those who entered the country illegally, those with expired visas and those working without a work permit. In Guangzhou and Yiwu, many African migrants were thus arrested and deported. That purge marked the



end of the sanpa period. (Another round of arrest and deportation was carried out preparatory to the 2010 Asian Games).

Characteristics of the Diaspora

The following are the sociological characteristics of the diaspora.

a. Ethnic predominance

The Nigerian diaspora in Guangzhou has a preponderance of migrants from the Igbo ethnic group of southern Nigeria. The preponderance of migrants from this ethnic group, the most-mentioned African ethnic group in China's immigration literature, constitute about sixty per cent of the diaspora. Their preponderance, which is obvious even to the casual observer, is attributable to these four factors. The first factor is the fact that the Igbo have a very high migratory propensity, which has led to their widespread dispersion within and outside their country. In fact, they are the most widely dispersed ethnic group in Nigeria, residing in large numbers in non-Igbo parts of the country. Their migration outside their homeland has its origins in the colonial economy of their country. In the beginning, the colonial economy had focused on the coastal areas, particularly Calabar and Lagos. Igboland was disadvantaged in the emergent economy because of its location: it is landlocked. However, determined to spring board into the economy, the Igbo joined the civil service as well as the armed forces, in addition to migrating to other places to set up as traders. Through an ingenious combination of education and ambition, they were able to occupy top positions in the civil service by 1960 when the country became independent. The major destinations of their inter regional migration were the emerging urban centres, namely Lagos, Kano, Lokoja and Port Harcourt. Their north-south vertical migration preceded their south-south horizontal migration. This assertion is predicated on the fact that Igbo personages like Nnamdi Azikiwe (born in 1904), Cyprian Ekwensi (born 1921) and Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu (born 1933) were all born in the north. It is difficult to find any of the contemporaries of these personages from the other ethnic groups



who were born outside their own ethnic homeland. (Obafemi Awolowo was born at Ikenne; Tafawa Balewa was born in modern-day Bauchi State). Railway which created transport links between north and south was instrumental in the northward migration. In the north, they lived in enclaves called “sabongari” (strangers’ quarters) which practically segregated them from their hosts. (Sabongari, which was explicitly encouraged by the Britain’s divide-and-rule policy, has retarded their integration into the host population). The British colonialists did not only separate themselves from the natives by residing in reserved quarters (Government Reservation Areas) and denouncing mixed-race romance, they also used different measures to hinder contact among the ethnic groups. According to Nnoli (2008), the colonialists separated northern and southern migrants to northern cities because their living together in harmony “embarrassed the official view that only conflict characterized contact among such ethnic groups” (p. 36). Sabongaris, with the exception of the one in Kano municipality, have been virtually purged of their migrant residents. Indigenization measures as well as xenophobia have forced thousands of southerners, especially the Igbo, to flee back to the south. The next wave of Igbo migration focused on Lagos after it became the epicentre of the nationalist struggle. The preeminence of Nnamdi Azikiwe in the struggle induced the Igbo to migrate in their thousands to Lagos where they formed hometown associations that became the bedrock of the Igbo State Union, the progenitor of Ohaneze Ndigbo (the Pan-Igbo sociocultural organisation).

The second factor is what Lan (2016) describes as “the structural marginalization they [the Igbo] face in Nigeria” (p.13). The Igbo have been emigrating in their numbers since their abortive attempt to secede from Nigeria. Their apparent marginalization in their country’s politics and economy is a major reason for their emigration since the Nigerian civil war ended in 1970 as well as their resurgent agitation for Biafra.

The third factor is “the tremendous cultural pressure [among the Igbo] for success in a foreign land” (Lan 2016, p. 13).



The Igbo operate a society that encourages competitiveness with its veneration of individual achievements. Their society accords great respect to those who are able to escape their humble origins to become prominent members of society.

The fourth factor is the fact that the Igbo economy is dominated by traders; and traders make good migrants. The Igbo dominate Nigeria's import and retail trade. They had dominated commerce in the north until thousands of them residing in that part of the country were forced by xenophobia and religious as well as political crises (such as the Boko Haram insurgency and post-election violence) to abandon their trading posts and flee southwards. The majority of Igbo migrants in Guangzhou support the agitation, raging in their home country, for the establishment of a country to be called Biafra. Migrants affiliated to pro-Biafran organizations, such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), celebrate the Igbo Day on September 29, observe the "sit-at-home" (no movement) order by the organisations, donate money to the organisations, canvass membership for the organisations, etc. (The Igbo Day commemorates the massacre of thousands of Igbo residents in northern Nigeria in 1966. The massacre was one of the immediate causes of the 1967-1970 civil war). Pro-Biafran migrants usually shun business on that day, staying indoors and/or keeping vigil in the churches praying to "Chukwu okike abiam" (the Supreme God) for "liberation from Nigeria". Such migrants might decline to be interviewed if the researcher is cynical about their secessionist agitation. For example, during the fieldwork, some migrants declined to be interviewed "because your research is about the zoo called Nigeria; it is not about [our] Biafra." A certain migrant at the Bole mall agreed to an interview on the condition that he be profiled as a Biafran:

Are you a Biafran or are you a Nigerian? Tell me before I can listen to you. I am a Biafran. If you are not a Biafran, I cannot answer your questions because I don't have business with that zoo about which you



want to ask me some questions. I don't recognize it as my country any more, although I am still carrying its passport. It won't be long before we replace this trash called Nigerian passport with [our] Biafran passport. The world no longer regards your passport with respect. We will soon carry our own passport, which the world will be bound to treat with the utmost respect.

The Yoruba constitute thirty per cent of the diaspora; the Hausa-Fulani five per cent; the other ethnic groups the remaining five percent (fieldwork, June 2016). The Hausa-Fulani are grossly under-represented in the migrant population arguably because Nigeria's northern Muslims prefer to migrate or travel to the Middle East. However, the number of northern businessmen and businesswomen travelling to China instead of the Middle East has been increasing since the Igbo began to abandon their trading posts in the north, fleeing xenophobia and other crises.

Ethnicity, like religious cleavages, are militating against Pan-Nigerian solidarity in Guangzhou. For example, there is a tendency among non-Igbo migrants to avoid their Igbo compatriots. Lan (2015) attributes this tendency to the "disruptiveness" of Igbo migrants: "Africans from other countries tend to look down on Igbo and criticize them for becoming over stayers. Some blame Nigerian Igbo for ruining the reputation of all Nigerians due to their involvement in drug-related crimes and several public protest events in Guangzhou" (p. 293).

Religious Predominance

The second characteristic of the diaspora is religious predominance. Christians, the majority of who are Igbo, constitute ninety per cent of the migrant population. Muslims, most of who are Yoruba, constitute seven per cent. The remaining three per cent profess atheism (fieldwork interview, 2017). Catholics face fewer inhibitions than Pentecostals. The Pentecostal churches, most of which are affiliated to churches with international



headquarters in Nigeria such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith (Winners' Chapel) and Lord's Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement, mostly operate underground. Their number keeps increasing despite the government's illiberal attitude towards religious freedom.

Masculinization

The third characteristic of the diaspora is the fact that the diaspora is highly 'masculinized'. The vast majority of the migrants are men, but there is also a sprinkling of women. Men constitute about ninety-nine per cent of the diaspora (fieldwork observation). Most of the few women are spouses of sanpa sub-population. Most of the unmarried women are single mothers who make a living by hawking Nigerian foods such as "moi-moi" (steamed bean pudding) and jollof (one-pot rice). One such female migrant had a son who she could not send to school because of the high cost of education for non-citizens. Why does Guangzhou's Nigerian migrant population have a sprinkling of women from Nigeria? Here are some tenable reasons.

The first reason has to do with affordability. Eighty per cent of documented migrants interviewed during the fieldwork adduced "the high cost of maintaining a family in China" as the major reason for not bringing their families to live with them in China. For most married migrants, child education in China is unaffordable. Because migrant children are generally denied enrollment in public schools, it is not unusual to see school-age migrant children (most of them African-Chinese) roaming the malls during school hours. Unable to send their children to school, some married migrants have sent their families back home to Nigeria or returned home with them. The high cost of child education is a reason why the number of endogamous families is dwindling. A certain female informant (called Ifeoma) complained thus about the high cost of schooling migrant children in China:

We spend three thousand kuai (\$445) every month each on our two little children's education. They



attend a private school. We cannot send them to a public school because of hukou [household registration system]. There is also excessive taxation. My husband runs a company here, but he cannot hire fellow migrants to work in his company because of regulations. He is preparing to pay about forty thousand kuan in taxes for the past six months. What is more, we pay through our nose for our apartment. It looks like all we are doing here is slaving away for these people, emptying all we earn here back into the same hole. There is no place like home. I plan to return to Nigeria after completing my master's degree. It will be far better for me to set up in Nigeria, while my husband remains here. We can visit any time we like (personal communication, January 5, 2017).

However, her husband dissented, arguing empathically that the Chinese are only self-interestedly trying to curtail migrants' access to their highly socialised public systems:

It is not that the Chinese hate our people [Africans] living in their midst. Rather, they are only being smart, taking measures to ensure we do not become part of the population problem they are grappling with. They want us to come, buy their goods and go back to our countries. It is as simple as that. They donot want foreigners to partake of their social welfare system or compete in the labour market. I pay heavy taxes for my registered company, but receive no incentive whatsoever [for my hard work and honesty]. What they are doing has been in place since the imperial centuries. (personal communication, January 11, 2017).

The second reason has to do with residence status. Undocumented migrants generally find it difficult to bring their families to live with them because they cannot provide some of the documents the families will need for their visa application. The



migrants, however, can circumvent this obstacle by getting their spouses to disguise as business women who want to go to China for business. (It is relatively easy for women to get a Chinese visa). Invitation letters and other vital documents are vendible commodities that could be purchased from schools, companies and travel agents. Because of illegal residence and long spousal separation, the rate of divorce, concubinage and bigamy is rising among the migrants. According to Ufo, an intermarried migrant from Anambra State,

Divorce and estrangement are concomitant realities of Nigerian migration to China. A woman may decide to divorce her husband after waiting for two to three years for him to return or after learning that he is also “married” here. Many migrants who were married before coming here have Chinese girlfriends or wives. Such entanglement can make it extremely difficult for a migrant to remit money for the upkeep of the [Nigeria] family he wants to hide from his Chinese partner (personal communication, January 7, 2016).

Some migrants simultaneously have two legal spouses, one a Nigerian; the other a Chinese (a certain middle-aged migrant from Imo State, personal communication, date lost).

The third reason is the host country’s migrant labour policy. China has a labour policy that severely restricts the employment of both rural-urban and international migrants. For example, “hukou” can make it unbearably difficult for, say a migrant from Dongguan (a city in Guangdong province), to find a job in Guangzhou. Hukou has been extended to apply to foreigners as well in the shape of laws that severely restrict the employment of foreign labour. (The laws, however, filter out international migrants who lack high-end expertise). Female migrants may not be employed as domestic helps because the law, according to Tan (2010), forbids the Chinese to employ foreigners as domestic helps. Consequently, most domestic helps are migrants from the



rural areas. The few foreigners working in the hospitality industry mostly come from the Philippines, Burma and Vietnam.

The fourth reason is xenophobia. The hosts regard the migrants as a real threat to their role of intermediaries between manufacturers and visiting traders from Africa. Therefore, the hosts use different strategies to shield their position from competition with the migrants. One such strategy is to induce the police to reject applications by the migrants to rent shops at the malls. A migrant who wants to apply for a shop could be falsely accused of drug trafficking or internet fraud. Such possible accusations are serious enough to deter the migrants from wanting to rent a shop. The other strategy is to openly antagonize migrant shopkeepers. Ifeoma, who complained about the high cost of schooling her two children, additionally complained that her Chinese neighbours, who were feeling unhappy about her popularity with visiting traders, were unremittingly antagonizing her:

I want to move out of this place [her shop] because my [Chinese] neighbours don't want me around them. They complain I have cornered the patronage of African traders here. They are so jealous of me. Be careful with that woman [one of her neighbours with whom one of the researchers was chatting]. She smiles always; but her heart is full of evil (personal communication, January 5, 2017).

The fifth reason has to do with those cultural factors that curtail African women folk's freedom to travel long distances unaccompanied by spouses or male relations. In most African societies, because of cultural (as well as religious) constraints, migration, even when it is within the national borders, is regarded as a preserve of the masculine gender. In those societies, women who migrate unaccompanied by their spouses or male relations risk accusations of infidelity and waywardness. A mixed group of about seven Nigerians (migrants and visiting traders) interviewed at the Tangqi shopping mall on December 11, 2016 dismissed



women's engagement in international trade as a smoke screen for opportunistic prostitution. As one of the visiting traders contended,

Many women go to Dubai because of peer pressure. Some women come to China because they want to have a sense of belonging. They want freedom from their husbands. They think they can out do their husbands in international trade. Allowing women to engage in long-distance trade erodes a man's regard. Some men allow their wives to engage in long-distance trade for peace's sake, because they want to prevent trouble in their families ... I will lose the respect of my friends here if I should allow my wife to come here without me. Have you not noticed how indecently those female traders who come from our place dress while they're here? Other men pay their hotel accommodation and other expenses. They come here with, say \$4000, but will buy goods worth, say \$6000. Where did the extra \$2000 come from? Did it not come from sleeping around here? Any woman who comes here every three months is a suspect. You can see them at the Tong Tong Hotel area every evening loitering and pitching sex. No self-respecting man will allow his wife to stay away from her matrimonial home for more than two weeks. Any woman less than forty years old may be suspected of marital infidelity... My wife who is twenty-five years old now can only come here after attaining forty-five years of age. At that age, I may not care much what she does behind my back.

There is also the age-long belief that allowing women to become bread winners can erode men's authority enshrined in the traditional gender role system. This role prescription cannot be discounted in the preponderance of men in most African diasporas.



Lastly, prostitution is still a marginal element in the migrants' economy. According to a group of Nigerians interviewed at the Tanqi mall on January 8, 2017, the majority of the few Africans who live in the seedy world of opportunistic prostitution in Guangzhou are from East Africa. This was how that mixed group of Nigerians mentioned a while ago explained why Guangzhou is not yet a major destination for sex workers from Nigeria:

Prostitution here will not favour our women because there are many male Igbo migrants here. Our [large] number is big enough to deter any Igbo woman from coming here to do commercial sex. Besides, our culture does not sanction that kind of economic activity. A prostitute is a disgrace not only to herself but also to her entire village. The only Nigerian woman who tried to prostitute herself here left after just a few months due to low patronage and our hostility. We harassed and abused her, forcing her to flee back to Nigeria. People from her village accused her of disgracing them. Most African prostitutes here are from East Africa.

The second reason why there are not many sex workers from Nigeria is the low demand for African prostitutes among the Chinese. Most of those who patronize the prostitutes are undocumented migrants and visiting traders. Patronage by these people is low because the law forbids hotels being used for prostitution and because of the risk of rape, robbery and torture by such floating elements of the African diaspora in the city. With no fixed addresses, such clients can easily escape arrest and prosecution. The third reason is that prostitution is officially banned in the country. Because of that reason, the number of Nigerian women trafficked to the country is still small.



Education

The fourth characteristic of the diaspora has to do with educational attainment. Seventy per cent of interviewed informants claimed to have a secondary education in the ratio of 60:40 for senior and junior secondary school. Twenty-five per cent claimed to have gone to university. The remaining five per cent only had a primary education. The high percentage for secondary education appears to be credible. After all, the “buying-and-selling” sub-sector of Nigeria’s commerce is still dominated by secondary-school leavers. The percentage for university education ought to have been lower by at least five points if ego trip did not influence the informants’ response. Due to illegal residence and prohibitive cost, only a small number of migrants can further their education in China. Interestingly, most of those furthering their education are only using their studentship for visa extension.

Despondency and sense of status loss are pervasive among those with post-secondary education and those who travelled to China after abandoning some promising means of livelihood at home. These problems are compounded by the contemptuousness of those without a university education. There is an undercurrent of mutual antagonism between “non-graduate” migrants and “graduate” migrants. While the former regard the latter with a mixture of pity and disdain, believing that they travelled to China after job-hunting for years with their ‘poor certificates’, the latter regard the former as the “low-culture” elements of the diaspora. The latter believe that the former are responsible for the bad reputation the diaspora has acquired. Meagre education has made it difficult for the diaspora to find work in an economy that is cautiously opening up to expatriate manpower.

Age

The fifth characteristic of the diaspora is the fact that the majority of the migrants are still in their thirties. Age is a very important variable in the human capital theory of migration. As noted by Zaiceva and Zimmerman (2014), “Age plays an important role [in migration decision] since the older the individual, the smaller the



probability to move, which reflects the smaller expected lifetime gain from moving for older people”(p.7). Like sex, age is a very important variable in migration studies since it can affect not only the decision to migrate but also the patterns and rate of adaptation (see for example, Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Bolhark, 2008, 2009; Aslund, Bohlmark, & Skans, 2009).

Since eighty-five per cent of the migrants are in their thirties and have lived in China for averagely seven years, it can safely be concluded that most migrants were in their mid-twenties when they migrated. The majority of those above forty years belong to sanpa sub-population. This age average corresponds with the IOM’s2013 World Migration Report (p. 66) and possibly indicates that most migrants had a secondary education and/or were traders before migrating. More importantly, the average can help to account for the high rate of marriage into the host population.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian diaspora in Guangzhou is, arguably, one of the largest national migrant groups in China; and owing to curious reasons, it has received a generous mention in China’s migration literature. It owes its origin to sanpa migrants---those who pioneered Nigerian migration to China. The role played by those migrants in the formation of the diaspora, as important as it is, is still of marginal interest to researchers of African migration to China. Researching that sub-group of Nigerian migrants will greatly assist the reconstruction of diasporic formation and the appreciation of the metamorphosis which the diaspora has undergone since its formation. Similarly, sociologists are yet to start researching the characteristics of the diaspora, which include the predominance of males, Christians, migrants from Igbo ethnic group as well as the fact that the diaspora is still young and obviously lacks the high-end expertise the host country demands for migrant integration into the economy.



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