

Migration From Nigeria: Exaggerated Ideas Versus Harsh Realities

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The commercialisation of social media views and clicks has generated a new breed of armchair journalists, content creators and internet advisers on any topic of interest. These people target issues of interest and claim expertise in them. While many of their claims are unverified and unverifiable, some are commonsensical and verifiable. But time and experience play special roles in the value of the information or disinformation. The recent wave of youth unemployment and the drive to 'survive at all costs' occasioned by the economic difficulty in Nigeria, has blindfolded some youths into believing that anywhere outside Nigeria is a greener pasture. This desperation therefore makes them pay attention to positive information about travelling without balancing the discernment by listening to the woes that could befall a traveller. On the other hand, the desire to generate internet traffic and clicks has deterred some bloggers and content creators from publishing the truth because they would suffer lack of views or positive ratings. They therefore prepare what the audience wants to. As a result, too, lots of people get involved in migrating with lofty expectations which are soon dashed on the ground, only but too late. This presentation explores some of the roles migration internet advisers, registered agents and foreign enterprises play in misleading young Nigerians. Correspondence and Coherence theories of Truth were adopted as framework, while focus group discussion design was used. The scope of the study lies within the migration experiences that result to 'woes and wonders' to the Nigerian populace as well as the roles and responsibilities of the concerned order in the industry. It also recommends a positive way forward, which includes balanced provision of information from both sides, appeal to family and significant others to investigate and commit to the outcome, and preparation for fallback by the traveller in case of disappointment.

Keywords: Social media, Migration, Unemployment, Nigerian youths, Truth.

Introduction

Leaving Nigeria to Malaysia on student's visa for further studies on the 30th of December, 2009, I was so happy that my long-time dream of setting foot abroad had become a reality. With the bold inscription on the Malaysian visa issued on my International passport that one was not permitted any form of paid work as a student in the country and that any form of engagement in hard drugs attracts the death penalty, I was not bothered, but believed that once I got there, everything would be okay for me. You see, I was a trained teacher in Nigeria, and had taught English in a private secondary school for 3 years. My agent, who resided in Malaysia, had confirmed that I would teach English at the same college I was going to study in, and that the arrangement would offset my future school fees. That way, I would not be violating the immigration restriction. He told me of other benefits I would get from being in Malaysia, namely, that after living in the country for a year, I would easily get an Australian visa. I thought I had hit the jackpot! What a lucky man I was! Little did I know it was a scam! sTrue to his words, upon arrival, the agent took me to the office of the College President and in his presence reaffirmed that I would be teaching English at the College. This convinced me to pay the rest of the tuition for the first term. I also paid the balance agency fees. In my presence, they signed an agreement which would give the agent some percentage from every school fees I would pay in that College. I was past caring because I had been reassured by the College President. Thereafter began the avoidance! The President never had time to see me anymore! The agent told me to leave

him alone! There was no position for me to teach anyone! My pocket money was quickly depleting from feeding and accommodation! My fellow students laughed at me and told me to face reality: I had been 'looted' they said. They then explained that it was an elaborately crafted scam which colleges like ours have liaised with 'Nigerian agents' to put naïve Nigerians through. Numerous pieces of advice were overwhelmingly coming my way to find some illegitimate ways of making money so to keep up with my tuition and other needs before I got deported. I had to illegally serve as a busboy in hotels for free food and chicken change, risking police raids, for the 7 months I lived in Malaysia before I left the country." (FGD/Tony/Male/42/Online/2023)

This was the story of a 27 year old Nigerian man 15 years ago. He had hopes and dreams of making it outside Nigeria. He had lost hope in the Nigerian dream that he became gullible to the stories peddled by scammers about legitimate migration. At the time, YouTube was not replete with the advisory content on migration it has now. I suppose he was lucky that he was able to see his scammers face to face and was even able to secure some

valid stay in the country. That cannot be said for how it happens now, even though it has similar factors: a Nigeria young people have lost faith in, a greener pasture viewpoint of any place foreign, and lies perpetrated by Nigerians in those foreign places.

This presentation will not condemn emigration: it rather explores these 3 aspects listed above and then suggests means of discernment for a proper emigration. Note too that this approach is not exhaustive. There are other numerous aspects that we cannot fit in here for the purpose of this study and in order to avoid verbosity and confusion.

Background

Nigeria, popularly regarded as the giant of Africa, is a member of the OPEC and one of the largest oil producing countries in Africa. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa which is according to Annual Statistical Bulletin (2022); is home to estimated 200 million people in 2023. It was observed by the National Bureau of Statistics that; about 157 million of this 200 million are youths who make up 70% of the population. About 53% of the youths are unemployed. Thus, the alarming global spectator index published in April, 2023 indicates that Nigeria ranks second after South Africa which has 61% in the index of unemployed youths in the world (Punch, 2023). The rate of unemployment in Nigeria has relentlessly been on the rise to the point that exponential inflation has not peaked, and all the sectors of the nation's economy are affected. This has created an imbalance even in the gradation of poverty, as adjectives like 'abject penury' have resurfaced again.

Security and infrastructure are breaking down rapidly and those in authority seem impractical to viable solutions, which chiefly should be pulling young people out of poverty. So, it has created desperation which daily leaches the society's moral compass. Now 'anything goes' so far as money is involved; 'the end justifies the means'. Parents now goad their children with the unexplained 'success' of their peers and encourage them to do anything for money. Some even buy laptops for their adolescent children, not to learn coding, but to get involved in fraud, wire and romance scams.

This Nigerian climate filled with unemployment, terrorism, insecurity, kidnappings for ransom and rituals, insurgencies, waging of war against ethnic groups and religious bodies; money laundering, fraud and scamming has therefore become a reasonable ground for young people to desire escape. Many Nigerians, young and old, are massively trying to get out of Nigeria. This was the root cause of the popular japa syndrome, which generally signifies emigration in the Nigerian parlance and as well means "to flee, run away or escape" from horrible situation in the Yoruba language from which it originated (Punch, 2022; Ndeche & Agbo, 2022; Adegoke, 2023). They use all the migratory loopholes available either to go as skilled workers or as students. Some even embark on the dangerous travel through the deserts to enter Europe illegally, which has created more victims than victors. In sum, the current Nigerian economic quagmire has necessitated the need for education and clarification on what is right and healthy so that while losing our youths and talents to

these countries, we might turn it around to good instead of them getting into trouble abroad; giving Nigeria a bad name and creating a fertile ground for a worldwide consternation of Nigerians. This is based on the belief that the foreign countries are better than Nigeria and that in them are numerous opportunities that need to be tapped and explored through migration.

The need for a regular source of income has turned most Nigerians, especially those living in foreign lands to be actively engaged on the internet. This has resulted to their quest for traffics which demands regular commitments to generating constant clicks of likes, shares and comments from their followers. Here, they create posts and contents in order to attract, captivate, convince and entertain their followers on whatever they present online. The followers consist of over 140 million active internet users who are predominantly youths; that are swayed of the exaggerations on life and comfort living abroad (Oludayo and Obinwa, 2025). They tend to believe that everything performed outside the shores of Nigeria is so perfect and does not have any hindrance to achieving it. The social media platforms and online applications comprise of Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Tiktok, Wechat, Telegram, and the rest of them that involve interaction and engagement. Thus, to those involved in the creation; bloggers and content creators, what matters in this aspect is the financial earnings that come as rewards from the applied social media platforms; and not the impacts of their posts and contents on enriching the society.

The Inferiority Complex Factor

Looking at the greener pasture mindset, one could not but ask whether the reason was because of the present economic condition of Nigeria because young Nigerians have been emigrating even when things were better. It would be beneficial to look at other factors like the value system we have in Nigeria. John Ekei (2005) and Obi J. Oguejiofor (2001) are of the claim that one of the effects of colonialism in Africa was a deep-seated inferiority complex, which still affects even the educated. The average Nigerian believes that foreign is superior. That is why our local manufacturing suffers. For example, the recent allocation of “operational vehicles” by the Federal government through the purchase of foreign made SUVs for the members of the 3 arms of government, to the negligence of local vehicle producers in the country (Premium Times, 2023, para. 6). They even came on air to defend their reasons for doing so. Nigerians therefore pay much attention; respect and regard to foreign degrees, products, currencies and even connections to the extent that they do not mind spending higher in order to obtain them. They even go as far as selling landed properties, borrowing with much more interests from banks, individuals, co-operatives and other financial institutions in order to live up to the societal pressures by spending higher in acquiring visas and financing their travel expenditures to the foreign lands.

This inferiority complex can be applied to test this japa syndrome as an average Nigerian youth believes that migrating abroad is a major achievement

anyone can make in their lifetime. Therefore many Nigerians have lost sight of the truth and the realities of what life truly is for emigrating outside the shores of their native lands. They so much believe in the posts, views, pictures and ‘facts’ they obtain from the internet, social media applications and platforms, as well as the beautiful pictures, advertisements on “international admissions, existing labour shortages” and stories of beautiful life abroad painted by travel agents (Igbinosua, 2023, para. 6). Thus, “By documenting their journeys and sharing their ‘successful arrival into destination countries, these migrants inspire others back home to follow in their footsteps” (Koigi, 2021, para. 14). They therefore focus on the beauty of the environment, without paying much attention to the realities surrounding the stories, facts, pictures and the scenarios portrayed to them.

Further Narrated Experiences

People can obtain visa to travel abroad to study, work, and reside permanently, for tourism and refuge from wars, economic and family challenges, and life-threatening situations. Each of these categories of persons has their stories and tales of how it has been and was differently out of what they had initially expected before migration to the foreign land. These are because of the economy and environment of the destination countries, accommodation, comfort and adaptation to weather and climate, immigration, employment, survival, language barrier, cultural differences, food and some others.

Hear another Nigerian young man, Frank (real name):

I felt lucky when I was ‘successful’ for an intensive English as Second Language teacher’s coaching college in Harbin, China in 2008. My friend who applied with me was not shortlisted. This move convinced me that the college was not mucking around as they gave strict guidelines and deadlines. I fulfilled all the requirements, and my fears were calmed by the assurance that the college commits to training me and my colleagues for 3 months, accommodating us in the duration, and getting us hired to schools to teach English. They had all my documentation, which included pictures. I did a Church thanksgiving before leaving Nigeria for Harbin, which was one of the coldest parts of China. We were received at the airport and the training went as planned until it was time to get hired. At this time too, my money had run out. The college reneged on their promise because they could not find a school willing to hire a black man, a non-native speaker for that matter. They gave me a week’s notice to either find alternative accommodation or return to my home country. All my efforts to remind them of the agreement fell on deaf ears. In fact they refused to get me a work visa as pre-planned. I had to move out onto the streets until I met another Nigerian man who let me in and housed me for another 3 months before I was arrested and deported. I experienced racism, fraud, and intimidation. I spent weeks in immigration detention before I was deported back to Nigeria. It was after I was kicked out of the college accommodation that people in the streets told me that I was a victim of a popular scam at the time. I must have had a big image of myself to think that racist and uneducated Asian folk would allow me to enter their classes to teach their children. I deeply regretted making the move and tarnishing my travelling record. (FGD/Frank/Male/42/Online/2023)

A 36 year old Nigerian priest who embarked on further studies and foreign mission to the United States of America from Nigeria relays his experience thus:

I left Nigeria for America in 2019, thinking that I was going to a place flowing with milk and honey. The first reality hit me on arrival. There was no place to stay. As a priest, I thought (as obtainable in Nigeria) I could enter any rectory and I would be welcomed. But here

in the U.S.A. there is a different protocol; you and your bishop are supposed to write the diocese, which will then look for a priest who is willing to accommodate you. I had to hang in a hotel until we were able to do the needful before I was welcomed and granted accommodation in a parish of residence, with my responsibilities and contribution properly ironed out.”
(FGD/Patrick/Male/40/Online/2023)

Another Nigerian, Liz (real name) who eventually settled in the United States of America over the past 30 years has this to say:

No matter your level of education and job status before coming to the States, you must go back to school in order to be properly integrated and adapt fully into the lifestyle, cultures, laws and the legal systems of the country. This is done in order to accord respect and the necessary regards where applicable. Be you a medical doctor, lawyer, judge, teacher or lecturer; no matter your years of experience and level of knowledge in your native country like Nigeria, you are required to undergo some form of training, teaching and certification examinations, before you are allowed access to practice your profession in the United States. This is often frustrating to many of them that after several failed attempts, some would give up the already acquired profession by going to school and switching over to new courses that lead to new and different career paths.
(FGD/Lizy/Female/56/Online/2023)

Another interesting story was that of a young man who got a student visa to study Law as his second degree in Malaysia. Unknown to him, the agent faked all the documents, but he got the tourist visa that would help him travel to the country first. When it was time to convert the visa to a long term visa, they realized that the University had no Law faculty. The admission was for Bachelor of Business Administration, but he paid a huge sum to study Law! He reported the Agent to the police but the agent presented documents for Business Administration, saying that the university was planning to open

a Law faculty that year. The young Nigerian was advised to either take the offered course or leave the country. He tried to stay for a semester and then try to get into another University. To do this was hard because he had no means of livelihood and was already running out of the meagre amount of money he travelled with. Hope and help were not coming from home either, and the few relatives and friends he thought he could count on advised that he tries to find a way out by doing whatever others were doing over there to survive. The only opportunity there for most migrants was getting involved in all forms of illegality like drug trafficking and fraud. Seeing that this was not the life he bargained for, he decided to seek a way out from Malaysia, and with the assistance of an old school mate, who was already in Thailand for his masters degree, he gained a genuine admission over there and then again left Malaysia for Thailand where he truly got a teaching job and studied while at it.
(FGD/Nnaka/Male/45/Online/2023)

Apart from the above narrated experiences, people struggle with other challenges like payment of taxes in high proportions, racism and discrimination, rejection, segregation, problems of assimilation or acculturation in order to fit into the system and also become accepted as one knowledgeable in the chosen career.

Migration ‘Wonder’ Experiences

Despite the migration woes narrated above, there are also stories of migration wonders from Nigerians, who have migrated abroad. These come in the form of testimonies

on how they have made it and gained citizenship through various means and expressions of hard works and exceptional abilities in their careers, academics and lifestyles. Some even went as far as gaining asylum from their host countries in order to make it over there in their places of migration. Hearing their stories, one feels their expressions of joy and achievement that they were able to achieve that which seemed so difficult that they had already lost hope of while still in Nigeria. Here is a summary of their stories:

I grew up in Nigeria where I had my Primary and Secondary education as an 'A' list candidate whose ambition was to become a medical doctor. Seeing what the Nigerian education system and mode of gaining admission into the University was trying to turn me into after two attempts despite my high scores in the Joint University Tertiary Matriculation Examination, my beloved parents did all that was in their power to send me for studies outside Nigeria. Though it came with challenges and cultural differences in language, lifestyle, climate and belief system, life in China as a Medical student was a life time experience I will cherish for the rest of my life. This is because it opened many horizons for me that today, I have a residence permit in Germany where I did my Postgraduate and professional studies and became certified as a practising Medical doctor as well. (FGD/Doris/Female/28/Online/2024)

Coming from Tony a Nigerian businessman;

I got my dreams fulfilled when my wife succeeded in gaining admission for her Masters Degree in Australia. This gave us the opportunity of her moving first before me and our three children later joined her over there in Australia. Since we made this move, life has become much more meaningful and enjoyable for us that we are now Australian citizens. (FGD/Tony/Male/42/Online/2024)

Okechukwu who was an accountant in Nigeria has this to say:

Leaving Nigeria on a Tourist visa to Australia for the Sydney Olympic '98, I had the intention of coming back to Nigeria for my job in a bank which I thought was well paying. On getting to Australia and also from the transits we made through London, I realised that the world is far different from what we have in Nigeria. There during the Olympic Games in Sydney, I decided I was not going back to Nigeria again and with this started looking for ways to actualise it. Help came my way through contacts and directives that provided the needed assistance, my visa was converted and the rest is history today. Though it was not an easy task for me, yet I am happy that I made the moves and today I can boast of having maximum security and assured future for myself and my children. Making the moves and migrating from Nigeria is a risk that pays once you overcome the hurdles of it. (FGD/Okechukwu/Male/58/Online/2024)

These and many more other stories elucidate the several means some Nigerians engage to migrate abroad. Some even go as far as telling lies, denying their Nigerian citizenships and seeking asylum based on the Nigerian state of insecurity, terrorism, kidnapping, paying of ransoms, fraud and poor economic situation. Achieving this does not come all rosy since it sometimes comes with conditions that at oftentimes do not turn out favourable to the persons involved.

Suggested Solutions

Having pointed out that emigration is not a bad thing in itself, it is important to find ways of doing it properly so that our young people would stop being victims of exploitation by both fellow Nigerians who serve as agents and the foreign bodies and people who are only interested in making profit off unsuspecting Nigerians. The question then becomes, how? How can we ground our people on the true realities they should expect abroad? How do we guide them

to the truth about emigration? The age-old question asked by Pontius Pilate over 2000 years ago comes to mind: “And what is truth?” (John 18: 38).

Truth is an abstract noun which is used variously. It may be applied as overall to general relational property which is in order words regarded as; “being true.” It is also used as noun referred to as a “truth” which can be applied to the concept that highlights the property that is expressed in English by the adjective “true.” It involves the issue of being accurate, faithful, right, correct and transparent in one’s actions and speech especially when it concern expressing the truth. Thus, “Truth can be both subjective, relating to one’s philosophical belief about the world, objective, which relates to facts that are existent and define reality irrespective of a person’s beliefs or opinion” (Klein, 2023: para. 1).

Now, the truth has been defined in varied ways that even the truth becomes elusive and easily manipulated. This reality makes it even harder for proper discernment as every blogger and content creator peddles ‘the truth’. Since “their truths” are subjective, they are open to mistakes and misdirection. Hence the need to look at a structure proposed by some philosophers. The most popular ones are the correspondence and coherence theories of truth. We can adopt these two theories in order to achieve clarity, plan well and execute a safe and successful emigration, knowing that a successful emigration will also benefit the society we leave behind because of our ties.

Correspondence Theory of Truth

This theory was first proposed by Plato and Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*. It was the most popular theory of truth which defines it; thus, “truth is what propositions have by corresponding to a way the world is” (Downen & Swartz). Thus, a proposition is true provided there exists a fact corresponding to it. This takes us back to asking the question on what truth is. Truth automatically, therefore, is what valid reasoning preserves. It is the reason for scientific inquiry, business audit and historical research. Hence, understanding much of what a sentence means is by understanding the conditions under which what it expresses is true.

The Correspondence theory of truth according to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2018) is defined as; “A belief is true if and only if it corresponds to a fact.” When applied to the issue in hand, we would advise the person trying to travel abroad to do a thorough research, consult multiple sources like the embassies and certified tourism agencies and ministries to certify that the claims made by the bloggers, content creators or paid agents are factual.

Coherence Theory of Truth

This accounts that the truth of a proposition arises out of a relationship which exists between that proposition and the others. The coherence theory aids at revealing the means of our arrival at our truth claims and our facts. Here, we continually work at merging our beliefs into a clear system. A proposition is true if and only if it coheres with the general

and acceptable beliefs of the majority in one's society and must be logically consistent.

The coherence theory of truth asserts that; "A belief is true if and only if it is a part of a coherent system of beliefs" (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2018). Whatever that corresponds to observable reality is true. Thus, when applied to the issue at hand, we ask the migrant to make sure that the information is coherent. For instance, if one is told that they would have a white Christmas in the South Pole. Such a claim would not be coherent because December period is summertime in the South Pole. This theory focuses on verifiability and not truth. "The claims are true if they are logically and coherently from a set of actions (or intermediate propositions)" (Chin, 2020). Here, the arguments must flow logically.

In a sense, the two theories of truth considered say the same thing, and when applied to migration, they imply doing the due diligence instead of being hooded and hoodwinked. Some practical moves in this aspect would be to diligently double-check and verify every bit of information before fully committing to the venture.

Secondly, our people should aim at legitimate emigration to retain dignity and build confidence in the country's image. This has its challenges, especially with document forgery which has been recently in the Nigerian media after the 2023 presidential elections and those of political appointees. But it takes individual efforts to renew this national image confidence we seem to struggle with. It is advised to make proper research on the intended place of migration. One should be

critical in assessment and not be carried away by the sweetness of the stories told and beauty of the pictures seen but should see beyond them to decide better. Since the internet is always there to guide one in seeking and sieving the truth from the beautiful and palatable pictures posted online, one needs to make good use of it as; "one who asks questions does no loose his/her way, track, direction or focus while on a journey". Proper planning, research and critical assessment should be the major aim of one ready to embark on migration outside his/her native land.

Government should play the major role of partnership by setting a board for monitoring and censoring of social media contents and uploads on the internet by Nigerians. This like we have in the various bodies and agencies like the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria- BON, National Film and Video Censors Board- NFVCB, Nigerian Copyrights Commission- NCC, Nigerian Communications Commission- NCC, will be responsible for handling the various social media applications that are operated in Nigeria, have their rules of operation and agreement that should be accepted before having access to the applications. With this, any breach would result to measures to deterrents.

The Nigerian government should also get involved by practising active and engaging governance which should be goal oriented by providing the necessary amenities and having an active and working economy. If these are paid attention to, most Nigerians who are migrants in foreign countries and those taking

the risks to leave the country through the many dangerous routes they undertake, would not be that much. They would rather be here in Nigeria contributing to both human and capital development of the nation.

As Nigerians, we should apply the principle of truth in all we do, learn, teach and portray. Through this we can truly project who we really are, what we do and intend to achieve in all areas and spheres of the country. Patriotism would be the watchword in all we do, thereby becoming less dependent on foreign products and nations. The Nigerian products, certificates, national and citizens would be sincerely seen for what they project and who they are; and not for the different acts of drama they perform to gain admittance, acceptance and recognitions in the foreign lands.

Conclusion

As much as we have affirmed that there are positive outcomes of migration as opposed to the negatives which include brain drain and the loss of human resources, we have established that it is very important to work on our mindset. Nigerians need to be pried out from the clutches of inferiority complex, especially with anything and anywhere foreign to her soil. Every Nigerian should be invested in saving the Nigerian image so that issues of colluding with foreign bodies to scam Nigerians and victimize them abroad would be totally eradicated. Only this will help save those who emigrate to have less bitterness against home and when they settle and make money, they would remit, invest and build our country to be better.

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