"JAPA" IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY, THE EXPORTATION OF NIGERIA's INDIGENOUS CHURCHES AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

It is remarkable to note that in recent times, the rate at which young people move to other country of their choice in startling. There have been little or no consideration to this move. It seems youths leave at a whim. They don't give it a deep enough thought. They were always eager to leave the shore of the country by all means. They want to "Japa". "Japa" euphemistic way to explain the departure of one's birth country, especially Nigeria. For several reasons, Nigerians have seen the need to leave the shore of the mother land in droves. Many of these "Japaist" have discovered, after getting to their dreamland, that it is not all Eldorado. Many have faced some inhumane treatment from their host country and society. Therefore, this phenomenon has brought to the fore some religious and ethical interrogations. Religion as an institution has teachings on how to treat foreigners in the land of their sojourn. Hence, this research employs descriptive method for the work which would help to examine some of the religious ethics this phenomenon negates, using the analysis of injunction in Deuteronomy 23:19-22.

Introduction

Japaism is a concept that has come to stay in Nigeria language. It is euphemistic way of explaining the departure of one's birth country, especially Nigeria. For several reasons, Nigerians have seen the need to leave the shore of the mother land in droves. In fact, the rate people leave the country has become alarming. It is an indiscriminate migration, there has been no clear cut demography of the people that migrate from Nigeria to the Americas and other European countries. The only perceived demography would be that youths between the ages of 22 years and 45years (Anyokwu, 2022).

Nigeria is renowned for its strong religious inclination as a nation. Nigeria, being the most populated nation in Africa, has a population of over 230 million individuals, with a relatively equal distribution between adherents of Islam and Christianity. According to the CIA World Factbook, slightly more than 50% of the population adheres to the Islamic faith, while around 46% identify as Christian. According to the 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom by the US State Department, the Muslim community comprises adherents of Sunni, Shia, and Sufi sects, among tiny Izala and Salafist factions. According to the aforementioned survey, it is estimated that over 25% of those who identify as Christians belong to the Roman Catholic denomination. Additionally, among the many Protestant denominations, the Anglican, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches exhibit the highest numbers in terms of population. Additional groups that may be identified within the religious landscape including Baha'is, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Animists, as well as persons who adhere to a non-religious stance (Brooke Holland, et. al., 2023).

It is noteworthy that the aforementioned list only comprises faiths and their respective factions that have been imported from other sources. The African traditional religions are not mentioned in the given context. According to Ndemanu (2018), who cited Olupona (2007), Traditional African religions include the native religious beliefs and practices observed by the African people. These encompass many aspects such as worship, consultation with priests, rituals, symbolism, cosmology, arts, customs, and societal elements. The impact of traditional religions on Africans' cognitive processes, belief systems, and worldviews has been significant. Consequently, the emergence of African indigenous churches occurred. The emergence of Indigenous Christianity in Africa may be attributed to the efforts of indigenous Africans who saw the need for Christianity to be more aligned with African perspectives and worldviews. The purpose of this movement was to eradicate factionalism and foster unity among African Christians, encouraging them to embrace their African identity and perspectives in the context of Christianity. The use of this particular technique was deemed essential in order to bridge the divide that had emerged due to the presence of "foreign evangelists" who arrived with the intention of establishing a form of Christianity that clashed with the socio-cultural and political beliefs prevalent on the continent. The aforementioned religious institutions include the Celestial Church of Christ, Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church, and the African Church – Bethel, among others.

It is remarkable to note that in recent times, there have been an explosion in the growth of these churches in the European countries and the Americas. The churches are seen to be growing at a very unprecedented rate. This essay would help to enlighten people on the roles of Nigerian emigrants in the exportation of African indigenous churches, in particular. The overarching research question is: How has 'Japa' helped in the propagation of Christianity, especially African indigenous churches and what has the mother country, Nigeria, gained from this exportation of religious culture? What are socio-economic implications of this on Nigeria? This chapter further explores the concept of 'Japaism' and attempts to distinguish between the concept and migration. Furthermore, the study shows ways in which these AICs have influenced the understanding of the western world about Africans type of Christianity. Researchersstand to benefit enormously from this paper because African indigenous churches in diaspora are extremely under researched.

Conceptualization

An overview of Emigration in Nigeria

Migration is a historical and enduring aspect of human behavior that has been seen across many periods of time. Over the course of history, human populations have gradually migrated and established permanent residences in locations that were previously unfamiliar to them. This also has relevance for those from Nigeria. Nigerians are well recognized for their propensity for migration. The historical records pertaining to migration within the region now known as Nigeria can be traced back to four concurrent slave trades that occurred in Africa from 1400 to 1900. Among these, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade stands as the most significant, involving the transportation of approximately 12 million enslaved individuals from West, West-central, and

Eastern Africa to European colonies in the Americas, commencing in the 15th century.

According to Mberu and Pongue (2010), Nigeria saw migratory movements at the international level throughout the period of colonial authority. Afolayan et al. (year) have identified empirical evidence of both immigration and emigration dating back to the year 1903. Between the years 1900 and 1902, it is believed that around 6,500 individuals from Nigeria migrated to the region known as the Gold Coast, which is now recognized as Ghana, as well as to Cotonou-Parakou in Dahomey, which is now referred to as Benin. These migrants sought employment opportunities mostly in the construction of rail lines and the extraction of gold from mines. Following the completion of the railway, a portion of the migrants transitioned into the role of merchants, while a significant number departed for Côte d'Ivoire subsequent to World War I. The need for labor in Côte d'Ivoire arose due to the establishment of cash-crop plantations at the beginning of the 20th century, with the development of infrastructure like as ports, warehouses, railways, and highways, which aimed to facilitate the exportation of agricultural products (Ajeli, 2019).

Based on the 1948 census conducted in Ghana, it was determined that around 46,800 individuals of Nigerian origin were residing in the country. Subsequently, in 1959, this figure increased to 100,000 as a result of Ghana's economic progress and the nation's active Pan-African movement subsequent to its attainment of independence (Ajeli, 2019). Following the attainment of independence, a significant shift occurred in the emigration trend of Nigerians. Following Nigeria's attainment of independence, a notable trend emerged whereby the country's affluent and privileged class began sending their children to Western nations mostly for educational pursuits, sometimes extending to administrative roles. Certain military personnel were also sent to get specialized training in foreign universities and military institutions. It was anticipated that Nigerian students will acquire essential skills necessary for the development of the country. It is evident that a significant number of Nigerian individuals who pursued their education overseas during the 1960s and 1970s promptly returned to their home country upon finishing their studies, since they were guaranteed lucrative employment opportunities in various areas such as the public service, military, and the rapidly expanding oil and private industries. There was no apparent rationale for this particular group of immigrants to remain in their current location.

Nevertheless, with the military's assumption of administrative control over the nation and the subsequent intensification of the political climate, a considerable number of immigrants opted to remain in exile. According to available data, it is estimated that by 1978, over 30,000 Nigerian individuals who had obtained their degrees from higher education institutions in the United Kingdom had chosen to reside outside of the African continent. Out of this population, around 2,000 individuals had settled in the United States. According to Afoloyan, et al. (1984), the Nigerian population residing in the United States saw a notable growth, reaching a total of 10,000 individuals. The study further highlights that a significant proportion of this group possessed advanced skills and qualifications (Mberu & Pongou, 2010).

Since the late 1980s, and particularly from the early 1990s, a significant influx of Nigerian individuals has been seen, as they have sought safety and asylum inside other African nations as well as industrialized countries. The number of Nigerian asylum petitions in the United Kingdom saw a significant increase from 20 in 1989 to over 4,000 in 1994. During the first quarter of 1995, a total of 1,700 individuals seeking asylum entered the United Kingdom from Nigeria, seeking refuge from the oppressive military dictatorship that had incarcerated political dissidents and perpetrated violence against pro-democracy demonstrators.

Between the years 1996 and 2005, the United States, being a preferred destination for Nigerian immigrants, facilitated the resettlement of a total of 13,863 individuals from Nigeria. During the period from 1996 to 2005, the United Kingdom resettled a total of 11,749 individuals, making it one of the leading nations in terms of resettlement. Germany followed closely with 10,406 individuals resettled, while Canada resettled 9,378 individuals, solidifying its position as another prominent resettlement country during this time frame. During the aforementioned time frame, individuals from Nigeria sought refuge mostly in Ireland (21,378), South Africa (14,107), Austria (8,244), and France (6,510) (United Nations High Commission for Refugee, 2018).

“Japaism” a New Strain of Emigration

The term "Japa" has not yet been incorporated into the vocabulary of the English language or any other widely spoken language. The term in question is derived from the Yoruba language and denotes the act of departing or relocating from one's own country whenever a favorable chance arises, primarily motivated by the oppressive economic

and political circumstances prevailing within. The term in question is often said with a sense of joy by those who have successfully traversed the boundaries of the nation of Nigeria. Nigeria, similar to several other African nations, has seen a significant outflow of its populace over the course of time, as individuals seek improved economic opportunities in European countries.

Emigration and the term "Japa" are often used interchangeably, but they do not possess identical meanings in a strict sense. These terms have distinct connotations and their underlying ideologies vary significantly. Liu provides a more comprehensive explanation in this manner;

> *"When I asked Michael, a journalist in his 20s who works in Lagos, why "Japa" had come to be the term for international migration, he corrected me, insisting that ""Japa" doesn't mean to migrate; it means to run for your life (Liu, 2023)."*
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> *Pressed for clarification, Michael wryly explained that although "it [has long been] the Nigerian dream to leave Nigeria," a different feeling had taken hold today: "There wasn't the desperation…when I was growing up. People around me, they speak about leaving, [but] it wasn't that they need to run, that my life is in danger, shit I need to leave." Today, desperation is at the heart of talk about migration. As Aisha, a student in her 20s in Ibadan further clarified: "["Japa"] means I'm done. I'm not doing this anymore. I am running away. I can't cope"*

The topic of Japaism has gained significant attention and has become a subject of intense political discourse. Numerous scholarly deliberations have taken place over the impact of Japa on the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria. According to Falaiye (2023), the phenomenon known as the "Japa" syndrome has resulted in a significant transformation within the labor market, shifting its orientation from being employer-centric to one that is now centered on the needs and preferences of employees. Scholars have posited that the consequential phenomenon of brain drain resulting from the prevailing "Japa" syndrome would give rise to a depletion of prospective entrepreneurs and a dearth of proficient human resources. In recent times, Nigeria has seen a notable increase in the emigration of highly trained individuals to other nations. A significant portion of these migrants have obtained degrees from Nigerian colleges, which get substantial financial support from the government. Individuals who pursue opportunities overseas bring with them a wealth of experience and expertise obtained inside their native context**Error! Bookmark not defined.**.

According to a recent poll conducted by the Nigeria Social Cohesion poll, it was found that a significant proportion of the Nigerian population, namely seven out of ten individuals, express a want to transfer to other nations for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, a considerable number of these individuals have reported achieving positive outcomes as a result of their decision to relocate. Presently, the prevailing net migration rate in Nigeria is at -0.273 per 1000 population, signifying a higher number of individuals departing from the nation**Error! Bookmark not defined.**. Another point of consideration is the statistical data that positions Nigeria, with a total of 11,055 physicians who have received training, as the third-ranked nation in terms of the biggest number of foreign doctors employed in the United Kingdom (Ajimotokan, 2023).

Considerable concerns have been voiced with relation to the phenomenon known as "Japa". One of the most notable effects is that the export of human capital has resulted in a shortage of skilled labor in several areas of the Nigerian economy. The health industry has seen significant impact, particularly in terms of the migration of physicians and nurses, which has been observed in large numbers in recent years. The "Japa" syndrome has also affected the Information and Communication Technology and engineering industries to a significant extent.

One significant impact of the '"Japa"' condition on Nigerians is to the domain of family and familial dynamics. The current phenomenon of individuals seeking to leave their nation by whatever means possible is significantly undermining the fundamental structure upon which any community is constructed. Siblings who have been permanently separated, and couples who have experienced prolonged separation. There exists a subset of individuals who may never have the opportunity to reunite with their biological parents in the future. It has become more common to see instances when spouses and their children are separated, especially during celebratory periods. In contemporary times, the occurrence of weddings being held using digital platforms like as Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media applications, even among individuals who are unfamiliar with one another, has become more commonplace.

Nevertheless, despite the potential negative consequences of the "Japa" phenomena, it is crucial

to acknowledge the benefits and positive aspects it brings, particularly within Nigerian culture. For instance, by the reduction of the labor force in the nation of origin, emigration is anticipated to mitigate unemployment and enhance the earnings of the remaining workforce. A significant portion of individuals who engage in migration are young adults who lack work opportunities, while possessing either valuable skills and education or being engaged in positions that do not fully use their capabilities. Travel agencies are now seeing a higher level of patronage than in previous times. In accordance with the research conducted by Susan Akporiaye (2023).

> *"Migration does not affect airfares in any way. Migration itself is good for business because when lots of people migrate, which is not a luxury or holiday, they won't even mind the cost of the ticket because they know it is a migration. Somebody who just wants to go on a holiday and come back and you give him or her the price of N1m plus for a ticket, he or she will say, "No, I'm not going" and cancel the holiday. On the other hand, someone that is migrating won't really mind because he or she is leaving. There are no plans to come back. They have probably sold a lot of things and traded in a lot of things. So, they don't mind. Such people can pay N1.5m and go"*

Moreover, it is worth noting that immigrants originating from Nigeria often engage in the practice of remitting funds to their home country, so enhancing the quality of life for their respective families and concurrently stimulating domestic economies and trade balances. The volume of overseas remittances received by Nigeria has shown a consistent upward trend in the last several decades, mostly attributed to the increasing number of Nigerian immigrants. These remittances facilitate the generation of foreign currency income, foreign direct investment, assistance, and other private capital investments (Adeseye, 2021). Based on the most recent Migration and Development Brief report by the World Bank, it is indicated that there was an approximate growth of 8.85 percent in remittance flow to Nigeria in 2022, reaching a value of $19.2 billion, as compared to the previous year. The largest economy in Africa had a significant decline in diaspora remittances, with a decrease from $25.3 billion in the previous year to $17.2 billion in 2020, mostly due to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 epidemic (Business Day, 2022).

In the context of religion, the phenomenon known as the "Japa" syndrome has been beneficial to the church, particularly in relation to the expansion of the church and African autonomous churches, to be more specific. Prior to examining the ways in which the church benefited from the "Japa" syndrome, it is essential to provide a definition of Africa Independent churches.

Africa Independent Churches

Numerous scholars in the field of church history, including Aiyegboyin & Ishola (1997), Barrett (1996), Sundkler (1976), Turner (1967), and Oosthuizen (1992), have undertaken the examination and elucidation of African independent churches (AICs). These studies have provided valuable insights into the development of Artificial Intelligence Companies (AICs) and the underlying motivations for their founding. This analysis will include some aspects.

Emergence of Africa Independent Churches in Nigeria

The arrival of missionaries in Africa introduced a religious belief system that was unfamiliar to the local population. By virtue of their diligent efforts and remarkable perseverance, they successfully facilitated the conversion of many individuals from traditional African religious practices to the Christian faith. Nevertheless, a significant number of individuals who have undergone conversion have challenges in adapting to the more formal and serious style of worship that has been presented to them. Furthermore, the founders of these churches hold the viewpoint that Christianity would be more effectively conveyed via the lens of African vision and worldview. The purpose of this program was to mitigate factionalism and foster unity among African Christians, encouraging them to embrace their African identity and channel their emotions and interests towards the development of African perspectives within Christianity.

According to Allen (2016), African Independent Churches (AICs) are prevalent across the African continent, with notable documentation in southern Africa and West Africa. It has been suggested that around 36% of Africa's population identifies with an African Initiated Church. During the colonial era, a significant number of black individuals who embraced Christianity had challenges in properly reconciling their views with the ideas propagated by their church leaders, leading to a divergence from their original religious affiliations. The rationales for these divisions were often either: The political movement might be seen as an endeavor to emancipate oneself from the dominance of white

authority. Historically, several parent churches, especially those stemming from a Protestant lineage, have originated via a combination of schism and synthesis. The cultural phenomenon under examination is the outcome of the endeavor to reconcile Christian religion with an African worldview.

The African Independent Churches (AICs) had many periods, each arising from the need to contextualize Christianity within the African perspective and worldview. The implementation of his technique was deemed essential in bridging the divide that had emerged due to the presence of "foreign evangelists" who arrived with the intention of establishing a form of Christianity that was incongruent with the socio-cultural and political beliefs prevalent in the continent.

The first phase that has been recognized is often referred to as the emergence of African churches. According to Allen (2016), the establishment of these churches originated in various regions inside Yoruba territory and subsequently expanded their influence to include the northern areas of the nation. The primary catalysts for the ecclesiastical revolutions initiated by Africans inside the Mission churches were significant matters such as personality conflicts, racial discrimination, prejudice, and polygamy. The couple's mission has a lack of appreciation or comprehension of Africa's cultural history, particularly in relation to its religious traditions and beliefs. Additionally, the mission demonstrates inconsistency and insensitivity when addressing the matter of indigenous leadership within the church. The aforementioned factor consistently served as the primary catalyst for a significant amount of discontentment among Mission authorities both domestically and abroad, as well as their representatives, regardless of race, and the multitude of African individuals who had embraced the faith. As a result, the three Mission Churches, namely the Baptist, Methodist, and Anglican, had internal upheavals that resulted in Africans attaining substantial authority over their respective churches via local leadership, accompanied by assured financial backing. It may be seen that prior to the emergence of prophetic churches in Nigeria, Africans had already addressed significant issues pertaining to indigenous leadership, self-identity, and ecclesiastical governance, many decades or years earlier.

Subsequently, there emerged a subsequent era characterized by the ascent of prophetic churches. Similar to the emergence of African churches, the establishment of prophetic churches may be attributed to the discontentment shown by some individuals who saw a delay in the process of baptism and acceptance into the religious community. The length of time necessary for a new member to successfully complete catechetical training was disheartening. The duration of the process may sometimes extend to a period of one year or more. The origin of the prophetic church may be traced back to the influence of Garrick Sokari Braide. Braide, hailing from Bakana in the present-day Rivers State of Nigeria, established a connection with the Anglican Church during the 1890s under the influence of C.M.S. missionaries. Subsequently, he underwent confirmation under the auspices of Bishop James Johnson in 1912. During this particular year, Braide said that he had received a divine calling to serve as a messenger of God. By the year 1915, Braide, who was a fisherman and also held the position of warden at St. Andrew's church in Bakana, had established a notable reputation as a remarkable individual capable of doing extraordinary feats and possessing healing abilities. This reputation extended not just across the Delta area but even reached as far as the northern region of Benue. According to Nwadialor and Olusegun, this perspective may be summarized as follows.

> *"Braide lunched a strong attack on indigenous religion, publicly destroying objects of veneration, charms, and shrines, while at the same time attempting to adapt Christianity to the local situation. In addition to placing considerable emphasis on prayer and fasting, he introduced into church services the singing of hymns in the vernacular language, dancing, and hand clapping. By and large, he taught the Africans how to worship God in the African way" (Brooke-Holland, 2023).*

The emergence of the Aladura church movement coincides with this period as well. According to Clarke (1986), the emergence of the Precious Stone marked the inception of several Aladura churches and organizations in Nigeria. The inception occurred at Ijebu-Ode, located in the contemporary Ogun State in western Nigeria, during the year 1918. Similar to several other churches, dreams and visions had significant roles in the inception of this particular church. According to Beyer (1997), it is worth mentioning that the Aladura movement was not originally established with the purpose of separating from the main church or further dividing into other denominations, as it is now seen. The fragmentation may be attributed to a difference in ideological perspectives.

Babalola, a prophet known for his exceptional charismatic abilities, gained prominence in 1928 while operating as a traveling prophet in the northeastern region of Yoruba nation, after previously being relatively unknown. In July 1930, he initiated a new religious phase in the nation, assuming the role of the pioneering prophet for a nascent movement inside the Nigerian Faith Tabernacle. According to Omoyajowo (1975), the evangelistic efforts of Babalola resulted in a significant increase in persecution against those who embraced the newly introduced religious beliefs. The mission churches purportedly exhibited feelings of envy and antagonism, particularly due to the fact that their congregants were the primary converts of the Faith Tabernacle. Consequently, Babalola was incarcerated in Benin City. Babalola always recognized the presence of the mainstream churches, while often elucidating the divine calling that prompted him to establish a prayer group. The individual frequently conveyed to his audience that he had been divinely appointed to deliver a novel message, as the established churches had deviated from their intended path and purpose in various aspects. Specifically, he asserted that they had regressed by engaging in idol worship and engaging in occult practices, rather than adhering to a righteous, holy, and prayerful existence. Furthermore, he contended that they had succumbed to the influence of Satan, herbalists, and malevolent entities, resorting to consulting with witches and wizards to address the challenges faced by their congregants.

The Christ Apostolic Church is characterized by its significant separation from other Aladura churches, as it adheres to a more formal approach in its programs and strictly prohibits the inclusion of ritualistic elements. Members of the CAC are not obligated to wear white robes, unlike members of other Aladura churches who are often obliged to do so. The significant connection between the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (CAC) and the Aladura movement lies in their emphasis on prayer as the most effective means for Christians, their conviction in miracles and divine healing, and their belief in the communion that ought to be established between individuals and God, frequently experienced via visions, dreams, and trances (Omoyajewo, 1975).

The Celestial Church of Christ (C.C.C), established in 1947 by Samuel Bilewu Oshoffa, is a religious organization. The church is regarded as the most recent and newly established institution within the Aladura movement (Ajayi, 2019). The growth of the Celestial Church of Christ saw a significant acceleration subsequent to the official declaration of the divine instructions sent by Alexander Yanga on behalf of the Holy Spirit. Oshoffa swiftly gained recognition as a prophet by the growing multitude of devotees and supporters of his novel form of Christianity. The birth of the Celestial movement may be attributed to its theological belief that the Bible is a divine text, containing strong and universally relevant teachings from God. Another theological position held by the church is the profound belief that the Holy Spirit, as a divine entity, is actively present and manifests in many ways, ultimately leading to the occurrence of miraculous events related with the church's programs. The Celestial Church of Christ has garnered significant attention due to its manner of worship and the use of the Yoruba language in its religious activities, as highlighted by prominent writers such as Agbaje (1995) and Atiso-Doe (1995). The issue was further intensified due to the notable resemblance seen between the traditional religious traditions of the Yoruba people and the worship and liturgical practices of the Celestial Church of Christ (C.C.C.). The relaxed focus and notable resemblance have significantly contributed to the spread of the church, since sponsors were able to readily build parishes. During the period spanning from 1970 to 1980, the church had a remarkable expansion and extended its reach to several European and American nations subsequent to establishing its presence in prominent urban centers and communities inside Nigeria.

The Exportation of Africa Indigenous Churches through "Japa"

The initiation of Christianity among Africans occurred during the early 15th century, facilitated by the efforts of Augustinian and Capuchin monks originating from Portugal. However, the commencement of mission activity may be traced back to the establishment of the first English-speaking Christian mission in Badagry in September 1842. Nevertheless, there seems to have been a shift in the current situation, as we are currently seeing a reversal in the mission. The African churches are currently engaged in a process of reasserting their missionary efforts in the western world. This comes after a prolonged period during which Western Christian missionaries sought to reshape the religious practices and beliefs of indigenous Africans. In response, Black Christians residing in African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa have initiated the development of their own distinct denominational manifestations of Christianity. Referred to as African Independent Churches (AICs), these ecclesiastical movements have brought about significant changes in the theology, liturgy, and aesthetics of African churches, comparable in magnitude to those implemented by white Christian organizations. African Independent

Churches (AICs) include a diverse spectrum of religious movements, including the Aladura churches that emerged within the Yoruba Christian community in Nigeria, the Zion Christian congregations originating from South Africa, and the Kimbangu Church, a missionary-oriented church that arose in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.While it may appear that individuals who engage in the practice of "Japa" are attempting to evade unfavorable working conditions, inadequate compensation, insecurity, and challenging economic circumstances in their home country, it is important to acknowledge that many of them still aspire for improved living conditions that would have incentivized them to remain in their place of origin.

African churches have played a significant role in providing hope and assistance to migrants and refugees in Europe and America, similar to their contributions to the refugee population in Nigeria. Hence, migrants who have departed from their place of origin actively want access to available immigrant communities (AICs) inside their host nation. Similar to the historical relocation of the Jewish temple in the shape of a Synagogue to Babylon, it is noteworthy that persecuted Christians sought refuge from Jerusalem by migrating to the nearby villages of Samaria, and then to Asia Minor, in pursuit of a more stable and secure environment. During the course of their migration, these marginalized individuals of the Christian religion relocated with their families, belongings, as well as their religious beliefs and cultural practices (Anim, 2019).

There are around twelve AICs that have established congregations throughout the United States. The religious organizations included under this list consist of the Celestial Church of Christ, the Deeper Life Bible Church, the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God. It is noteworthy that an increasing quantity of African churches in the United States are mission churches that get sponsorship from denominational headquarters located in Africa, such as Lagos, Nigeria, or Accra, Ghana. This initiative establishes a transnational framework with the aim of advancing the worldwide objective of disseminating a message centered on Christian salvation and establishing churches to broaden the reach of AICs. The presence of these religious organizations has been more prominent in the religious landscape of Europe since the foundation of the first branches of the Church of the Lord Aladura (1964), Cherubim & Seraphim (1965), and the Celestial Church of Christ (1967) in London. It was from this location that subsequent branches, along with their subsequent breakaway groups, disseminated to other regions of Europe and North America. Another type of Aladura groups in the diaspora pertains to those that have arisen in Europe. These groups may have either separated from pre-existing Aladura organizations or have sprung from the charismatic qualities of a particular leader. One instance of the latter phenomenon is the establishment of the Aladura International Church in London, which was formed by Olu Abiola (Adogame, 2013). According to Benjamin Simon's history, it has been observed that the first African Initiated Church (AIC) in Germany was the Celestial Church of Christ, established in Munich in the year 1974 (Simmon, 2010). Additional religious assemblies were founded in Achen in 1991, in Franckfurt in 1993, and towards the conclusion of the 1990s in Bremen and Wippertal.

Socio-Economic Implications of "Japa" Syndrome

The expansion and dissemination of the African Independent Churches (AICs) have brought about several benefits, but Nigeria, the country of origin, has seen some social and economic repercussions. The reputation of Nigeria has been significantly tarnished due to the strong desire of its citizens to emigrate from the nation. The phenomenon of sub-Saharan Africans migrating via North Africa and then reaching Europe has attracted significant media scrutiny. According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), a significant number of African migrants, over 600,000, have successfully reached Italy through the treacherous Central Mediterranean route since 2014. Furthermore, the year 2017 saw a substantial influx of approximately 120,000 African migrants to Italy. The pathway is well recognized for its perilous nature, including hazards such as traversing the Sahara Desert, enduring prolonged confinement in austere circumstances inside Libya, and encountering the potential for maritime accidents leading to capsizing. Despite a notable decline in migration figures in the year 2017, it is worth noting that the Libyan Coast Guard successfully intercepted and rescued around 20,000 people. The phenomenon of migration via Niger and onward to Libya has attracted significant attention, prompting European countries to actively pursue measures aimed at impeding the flow of migrants (Kirwin & Anderson, 2018). A significant portion of the unauthorized migrants consists of individuals from Nigeria who are actively seeking various methods to depart the country, therefore negatively impacting the country's reputation among the international community.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the institution of family, as a fundamental element within Nigerian culture, is experiencing significant challenges attributed to the phenomenon known as

"Japa". The degree of desperation has escalated to the point that many parents are willing to entrust their children to a caretaker in order to go internationally. Liu (2023) argues that kinship relationships and borders undergo a process of contraction, transitioning from wide affiliations to the morphological unit of the nuclear family, which consists of parents and siblings. The majority of interpersonal relationships are unable to withstand physical separation and deteriorate due to the challenges posed by geographical move. In addition to the aforementioned strains, it is noteworthy to consider the element of secrecy surrounding the practice of "Japa". A limited number of individuals disclose their intentions to engage in the practice of "Japa" in advance, so prolonging the impact of their sudden departure by the lingering surprise it elicits. A group of intimate acquaintances collectively attend a social gathering on a certain evening, and thereafter, one member of the group publicly posts an image taken at an airport on a popular online platform. The absence of transparency in a friendship is often seen as an act of betrayal.

The nation is now experiencing the adverse effects of brain drain, which may be attributed directly to the phenomenon known as "Japa" syndrome. According to available data, there is an estimated presence of around 5,405 healthcare professionals, including physicians and nurses, who have had their training in Nigeria and are now employed within the National Health Services (NHS) of the United Kingdom (UK). The magnitude of the figure is remarkable considering the initial scarcity of medical staff in the nation. The phenomenon of brain drain is seen across several academic disciplines. There is concern that individuals with expertise in fields such as engineering, medicine, education, law, and information technology are not the exclusive demographic travelling in search of improved prospects. Currently, a significant number of Nigerians engage in various occupations, sometimes resorting to unconventional methods, such as working as cleaners, taxi drivers, laborers, hairdressers, or mechanics, among other professions (This Day, 2023).

Conclusion

The emigration of Nigerians to European nations has been a persistent issue for a considerable duration, representing a longstanding challenge for the nation. The sense of urgency and desperation shown by the character "Japa" seems to be a novel development. A significant number of Nigerian individuals have migrated to other countries in quest of improved living conditions and enhanced personal safety. However, many have come to realize that the reality of their experiences abroad does not always align with their initial expectations. Numerous Nigerian immigrants residing in their respective host nations encounter various obstacles, including matters pertaining to assimilation, prejudice, and the acquisition of fundamental amenities.

Consequently, the expansion of the African Independent Church Movement (AICS) has been seen, particularly in the regions of America and Europe, thus facilitating the advancement of Africanized Christianity. Similarly, individuals of African descent have a strong desire to safeguard their cultural heritage and prevent their offspring from adopting external ideologies that may supplant their indigenous principles. The intrinsic nature of the African Independent Churches (AICs) provides a distinct feeling of identity for those of African descent living outside of Africa, since it is the very foundation upon which these churches were established.

The significant consequences of "Japa" syndrome include brain drain, employment mobility, and the movement of the young, who comprise the nation's productive population. These factors should be seen as a latent threat with the potential to escalate. Therefore, it is imperative for the federal government to provide a conducive atmosphere that fosters the growth and maximization of the potential of young individuals. This measure would effectively minimize irregular migration and incentivize individuals to repatriate from the diaspora. The qualitative model in this paper focuses on Nigeria, but future research could be expanded to include other African countries. Also, the impact of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, in propagation of Christianity in diaspora could further be explored.

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