

Ethical Issues in *Japa* syndrome in the Context of Migration Trajectory of Nigerians

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Abstract: Human migration whether for tourism, religious purposes, or the pursuit of improved living conditions has been a persistent feature of human history. Both the Bible and the Qur'an contain numerous accounts of individuals, communities, and nations relocating under divine instruction. In Nigeria's historical trajectory, there are also well-documented cases of students who traveled abroad on scholarship to pursue higher education, often with the intention of returning to contribute to national development. While much of the existing literature emphasizes the beneficial aspects of migration recently framed within the popular discourse as the "Japa" syndrome, there has been comparatively limited attention paid to its adverse implications for individuals, families, and the nation at large. This study seeks to fill that gap. Drawing primarily on secondary sources and a critical review of relevant literature, the paper examines the "Japa" phenomenon as an emerging social challenge. It explores key drivers of this trend which include but not limited to governmental failure, systemic corruption, unfulfilled political promises, widespread youth disillusionment, and pervasive anxiety about an uncertain future. The paper concludes by offering policy recommendations, underscoring the urgent need for the Nigerian government to revitalize the economy and demonstrate effective governance in order to address the underlying factors contributing to mass emigration.

Keywords: *Japa Syndrome, Migration Trajectory, Nigerians*

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ *Migration as a Historical and Contemporary Phenomenon*

Migration which can be said to mean the movement of individuals from one geographical location to another is not a recent development (Emerenu, 2023, 85-96). Rather, it is a phenomenon as old as human history itself. What is often perceived today as a modern trend is, in fact, deeply rooted in antiquity (Martin Asiegbu and Chidozie Chukwuokolo, 2020, 1-14). For instance, biblical narratives recount God's instruction to Abraham to leave his homeland for an unknown destination, and the Israelite's exodus from Egypt under divine guidance remains a seminal reference in the discourse on human mobility. Despite these historical antecedents, contemporary migration trends, particularly within the Nigerian context demand critical scholarly attention. Historically, migration was driven by diverse motivations, including research, educational advancement, tourism, and leisure (Michaela B. and Karen O, Reailly, 2019, 5-13). Notably, individuals who pursued academic opportunities abroad often did so with the intention of returning home to apply their acquired knowledge and skills to national development. Many of these individuals benefited from scholarships and grants provided by governments,

private institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Dilrabo Jonbekova, 2023, 126-140).

In contrast, the current wave of migration from Nigeria is marked by a significant outflow of individuals seeking improved living conditions commonly referred to as the pursuit of "greener pastures" (Samuel, K. O. and Oladotun, E. A., 2023, 1-18). This trend raises several pressing questions: What compels so many Nigerians to leave their country of origin? Why has migration become such a prominent issue in recent times? The motivations for migration are multifaceted and include unemployment, rising costs of living, insecurity, systemic corruption, poverty, inflation, economic recession, policy inconsistency, and poor governance. These factors have coalesced to create socioeconomic conditions in which emigration is not merely an option but, for many, a perceived necessity (Okonkwo, N.O and Akamike, J.O, 2023, 79-92).

II. UNDERSTANDING JAPA SYNDROME

The term *Japa* has recently gained widespread usage and academic attention. While some scholars attempt to define the word, others prefer to explain it through contextual usage. Broadly speaking, *Japa*, according to Ogunode, et.al. is a Yoruba term that means "to run," "flee," "abscond," or "escape" (Ogunode, et.al., 2024, 216-228) Olayinka defines

Japa more specifically as the emigration of individuals from their home country with no intention of returning. The *Japa Syndrome* refers to the growing phenomenon of Nigerians relocating to various parts of the world in search of better living conditions and improved quality of life (Abel, Idowu Olayinka, 2023,1-21). According to Toyin Falola, *Japa* connotes a sense of fleeing from hardship, and when successfully executed, it is often celebrated as a form of liberation—a feeling akin to gaining long-sought freedom (Princewill, O.O. and Onwuasoigwe, C.A., 2024,3-8).

To put this trend into perspective, data from 2018 revealed a significant rise in visa applications from Nigerians to Schengen countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, and Hungary (Arberie Shabani, 2025). A total of 88,587 visa applications were recorded. Similarly, Nigeria ranked third after India and China for the number of study visas issued by the United Kingdom, with a staggering 65,929 applications (Charles Ogwu, 2025). What is particularly alarming is that this phenomenon is no longer limited to Nigerian youths; adults and skilled professionals are increasingly choosing to emigrate (Christian, C.M. and Tony, F.E. Nwaka, 2024, 1-63). Many of those who have *Japa-ed*, or are preparing to do so, express deep disappointment in the Nigerian government. The decision to leave is often driven by a sense of frustration, economic hardship, insecurity, and a lack of viable opportunities. Some even go as far as selling their properties to fund their relocation (John, Akokpari, 2007). Tragically, many undertake perilous journeys to leave the country, including crossing the Mediterranean Sea or trekking through the deserts of North Africa. While some perish along the way, others fall victim to kidnapping, sexual violence, or exploitation (Erhabor Idemudia and Klaus Boehnke, 2020,1-238). Only a few manage to reach their destinations, and even then, not without significant trauma. A Yoruba proverb aptly captures this reality: “*Bi ilẹ̀ kò bá ẹ̀ gbé, a sì má gbé ilàlà,*” which means “If a place is no longer livable, one will move elsewhere, no matter how little the comfort.”

Interestingly, while some Nigerians target developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Canada, others are willing to migrate to any available country, regardless of its economic or political stability simply to *Japa* (Tunde, A.A.2024, 233-254). This reflects a deepening crisis in national confidence and identity. This trend poses a significant threat to Nigeria’s development. As the saying goes, the future of any nation lies in the hands of its youth. It is therefore imperative for the leadership of Nigeria to invest earnestly in youth empowerment, education, and job creation (Ndukwe, et.al.2023, 1-18). Unfortunately, that has not been the case. Despite its abundant human and natural resources, Nigeria continues to lose its most valuable asset (its people) to migration (Cletus, I.A and Adaugo N., 2019),148-165.

Nigeria is increasingly being ranked among the poorest countries in the world due to corruption, policy inconsistencies, and the insensitivity of those in power (Henri N. et.al., 2024, 171-197). Poor governance and leadership failure have compelled many—particularly the youth, who

constitute the majority of the population to question the apathy, unresponsiveness, and irresponsibility of the very leaders they elected to represent them. One of the most immediate consequences of the widespread *Japa* syndrome is the depletion of skilled and semi-skilled labour across various sectors in Nigeria (Ratzinger, E.E.N, 2024, 11-25). This phenomenon will be further examined in the course of this paper.

➤ *Factors that Brought About Japa Syndrome in Nigeria*

There is no doubt that the recent *japa* phenomenon, the mass emigration of Nigerians has had a significant impact on the country’s economy (Umeh, L.C., 2024, 56-59). As the popular saying goes, “there is no smoke without fire”; this situation is no exception. Several factors have contributed to this widespread exodus of Nigerians from various states to other countries, often without regard for the economic stability of their destinations. It is, therefore, essential to examine these underlying factors to better understand the context and content of this discussion. One of the most critical issues is the alarming rate of unemployment in the country. Economic hardship has drastically limited opportunities for career advancement (Brown, LR,2020,4-170). Even those who are employed find it increasingly difficult to meet basic needs, let alone the millions of Nigerian youths who have graduated over the years without securing any form of employment. Many still rely on their parents for food and other necessities. Each year, tertiary institutions produce thousands of graduates, yet there is no robust framework in place to absorb or engage them productively (Temitope, J.O. and Oluyemi A., 2023,187-206).

The lack of responsiveness and insensitivity from all levels of government has led to widespread discouragement. There is little hope for improved working conditions, and even those who have served the nation diligently and are now retired face extreme difficulty in accessing their gratuities and other entitlements promptly (Ugo, C.O,2022,79-92). As the government continues to fail in creating employment opportunities, many private and corporate organizations that once helped alleviate unemployment have relocated to countries with more stable and promising economic climates. Some cite constant power outages and unreliable infrastructure as reasons for their departure, both of which have severely impacted their operations (Robert Kappel, 2021,1-68). The closure of such businesses inevitably leads to the retrenchment of workers, further compounding the challenges of Nigeria’s already fragile economy (Ekanem, D.E. and Evelyn U, 2018,295-302).

For any country to experience sustainable and unprecedented development across all sectors, security must be treated as a top priority. No meaningful development can take place in a nation plagued by insecurity of lives and property. Investors both local and international are unlikely to commit their resources in environments riddled with crises (Achumba, et.al 2013, 79-99). Similarly, individuals are unable to fully express their potential in an atmosphere fraught with fear and instability. Many Nigerians, both those who have emigrated and those considering emigration, cite the country’s growing insecurity as a primary concern

(Fayemi, J.K. and Funmi, O cited in Alan, Bryden et.al.Eds,2008, 248) . Life in Nigeria, according to the words of Thomas Hobbes, has become "nasty, brutish, short and uncertain (Pouria, M. 2015,468-474)." People now seek refuge in countries where the safety of lives and property is guaranteed. Indeed, residing in Nigeria in recent times has become a significant risk (Xander, C. et.al.,2023,359-378).

While no nation is entirely free of crisis, the critical difference lies in the government's response. In many developed countries, especially in the West, governments act swiftly and decisively to manage crises because they place a high premium on the lives of their citizens (Oyebola, B.A., 2022,38-47). Losing a single citizen in such contexts is treated with the gravity of a national tragedy. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Nigeria, where innocent lives are lost daily to bandits, kidnappers, and terrorists (Cyril, O.U et.al.,2023,23). These attacks many of which are preventable or manageable—continue due to the government's failure to act responsibly and efficiently. Systemic failure and institutional corruption have severely undermined efforts to tackle insecurity (Adagbababiri, M.M. and Ugo, C.O., 2018, 41-56). Funds earmarked for security operations are often embezzled by individuals who view public office as a personal enrichment scheme (Corruption and Poverty Report, 2015, 1-68). This entrenched corruption has plagued the country since independence. Until Nigeria experiences the emergence of dedicated, selfless, and visionary leaders. Leaders who see themselves as servants of the people rather than rulers, the security situation is unlikely to improve. Only with such leadership can a safe and progressive society be built (Onolememe, M.O., 2015, 1-209).

In addition to the fragile security infrastructure, electoral violence has also become a defining feature of Nigeria's political landscape. During every election cycle, whether national or local, lives are lost. The "winner-takes-all" mentality has eroded the moral compass of many politicians and political actors, resulting in conflict, intimidation, and bloodshed. This climate of fear has prompted many citizens to seek better opportunities abroad (Oyewole, L.E and Jamiu, M.S., 2023,442-452). One of the most common coping strategies against insecurity in Nigeria is emigration to countries perceived as safer (Achumba, et.al 2013, 79-99). The *EndSARS* protest marked a turning point. The protest, which was primarily driven by young people in their 20s and 30s, ended in tragedy, particularly in Lagos and other major states, where hundreds reportedly lost their lives (Uwazuruike, A.R.,2020,28-42). The aftermath triggered a significant wave of emigration and brain drain—a trend from which Nigeria may not recover for decades.

The rate at which the prices of essential commodities are rising in Nigeria is alarming(Nwosu, U.I. and Vincent, U,2020.1043-1048). Many individuals are exploiting the ongoing economic downturn to engage in exploitative practices under the guise of inflation. Currently, virtually every commodity is exorbitantly priced. Regardless of one's income level, salaries are no longer sufficient to sustain an average family(Simon, M, Angela, D. and Tim, J.(2019.11-23). A growing number of car owners have abandoned their

personal vehicles and now rely on public transportation to commute to work(Nabuife,E.K.et.al, 2016.9-31). More concerning is the emerging trend where two or three individuals contribute money to fuel a single vehicle owned by one of them in a rotating arrangement to reduce individual costs.

One of the fundamental reasons for the surge in commodity prices, according to experts, is the country's overdependence on crude oil and the U.S. dollar in the international market(Enitan, O. 2017.1-37) As crude oil prices rise, so too do the costs of basic food items. Additionally, the activities of terrorists in the northern part of the country have significantly contributed to the escalating cost of food. The Boko Haram insurgency and the violent actions of some Fulani herdsmen have become a major threat to peaceful coexistence (Emmanuel, B.M.2020.1-215) Many farmers are unable to access their farms due to fear of attacks, leading to a decline in agricultural productivity and, consequently, food scarcity (Usman, G. et.al.2024.1-14) This situation has resulted in widespread hardship. As a coping mechanism, many Nigerians are contemplating emigration to countries with lower costs of living. The desire for a better standard of living often serves as a strong motivation for relocation (Christian, M and Nwaka, T.F.E, 2024.1-63) . Furthermore, as individuals age, they tend to seek economically stable and peaceful environments in which to reside. To say that corruption has permeated the fabric of Nigerian society is, perhaps, an understatement. Efforts to eradicate corruption in Nigeria often appear as futile as attempting to keep a monkey from eating bananas or a goat from eating yams deeply instinctive actions tied to survival. Corruption cuts across all sectors, and its pervasive nature continues to hinder the nation's development(Nnorom, K. 2019,143-149).

From education and healthcare to the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, virtually every institution is affected (Okibe, H.B. and Onyekachi, E.B., 2020. 1-27). Political corruption, arguably the most damaging form, stands at the core of this dysfunction. It is not uncommon for public officials to demand gratification before attending to official duties (Nnamdi I. 2013.148-167). Even in public hospitals, patients are often compelled to offer bribes to receive timely care. Importantly, corruption in Nigeria is not limited to monetary exchanges. A broader understanding includes any failure to uphold integrity or to act in accordance with ethical standards (Philip, N.E. 2019.1-241). This normalization of corrupt practices has reached a point where individuals who choose not to participate are often perceived as naïve or foolish(Blake, E.A. and Anand, V. 2003.1-52).

Ironically, those appointed to lead anti-corruption agencies have themselves, in some instances, been engulfed by the same corrupt practices they were meant to combat (Aliyu, N. 2014.102-127). Attempting to fight corruption in Nigeria, therefore, is akin to shaking an Iroko tree to make dew fall symbolic of a struggle that yields little tangible change(Ademilokun, M.A. 2014.41-48). This environment has fostered a sense of hopelessness, particularly among the youth. Many have concluded that the battle against corruption

is unwinnable, prompting them to seek better opportunities in societies where institutional structures discourage corruption and enforce accountability (Myint, U. 2000.33-58) . While the capacity for corrupt behaviour may exist in all societies, effective governance and strict institutional checks in developed nations significantly reduce the opportunity and incentive to engage in such practices(Susan, R.A. 2004.1-61). Nigeria, by contrast, has witnessed the institutionalization of corruption(Aluko, M.A.O.2002. 392-402).

Alarming, religious institutions have not remained immune. Rather than serving as moral compasses, some religious leaders have become complicit, engaging in political manipulation and promoting fraudulent spiritual claims to deceive unsuspecting followers (Salisu, A.K. 2019.20-17). It is no exaggeration to state that Nigeria is a wealthy nation inhabited by impoverished citizens. The national poverty rate has been estimated at approximately 80%, with many households struggling to afford three meals a day(Chimobi, U. 2010.46-56). Although poverty is a global phenomenon, its severity in Nigeria is particularly pronounced. Successive governments have implemented various poverty alleviation programmes, but poor management has rendered many of these efforts ineffective (Ishidi, S.A and Bashir, M.B. 2023.18-35). While Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have also contributed to poverty reduction, their impact remains limited in the face of overwhelming need and systemic inefficiencies(Moses, N.F. 2022.40-48).

➤ *Peace and Economic Development: The Nigerian Experience*

A peaceful nation is more likely to experience comprehensive development across various sectors. Peaceful societies tend to foster economic growth and social stability, as peace provides the enabling environment necessary for sustainable development (Osimen, G.U, Rufus, A. and Isaac, A. 2022.88-103). Economic growth is typically measured using several key indicators, including but not limited to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which represents the total value of goods and services produced within a country; Gross National Product (GNP), which accounts for the total value of goods and services produced by a country's citizens regardless of their location; and Gross National Income (GNI), which encompasses income earned both domestically and abroad (Tim, C. 2014. 1-2).

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has in recent years grappled with significant economic challenges (Okonjo-Iweala, N. and Philip, O.K. 2002.1-30) . The reality of economic recession in the country is widely acknowledged and is largely attributed to systemic mismanagement of national resources. An economic recession denotes a period of economic downturn characterized by declining productivity, rising unemployment, and reduced income levels (Ugoni, N. and John, N. 2017.498-518). These conditions often lead to business closures and widespread economic hardship. In response to these challenges, many Nigerians have adopted various coping strategies to navigate the harsh economic climate. For some, these strategies involve internal adjustments to daily living; for others, the

preferred option has been emigration in search of better opportunities (Okunade, S.K. and Oladotun, E.A. 2023.1-18). This phenomenon highlights the deep-seated economic disillusionment within the country and the urgent need for sustainable policy interventions (Ratzinger, E.E Nwobodo, 202411-25).

➤ *Multidimensional Effects of the Japa Syndrome on Nigeria*

The impact of the *Japa* syndrome characterized by the mass emigration of Nigerians, particularly the youth, in search of better opportunities abroad is undeniably multidimensional. This phenomenon has far-reaching implications across critical sectors such as health, education, agriculture, the economy, and sports (Adeyanju, F.2024.124-140). The loss of promising, energetic, and innovative young professionals weakens national development and undermines long-term sustainability (Oliver, L.2025.1-15). The health sector, arguably one of the most affected, vividly illustrates the consequences of this migratory trend. A widely acknowledged adage asserts that "health is wealth"; hence, the prosperity of any nation is deeply rooted in the strength of its healthcare system (Bonnie, C. 2013.2-50). Unfortunately, Nigeria's health sector is currently in a state of crisis. It is particularly disheartening that the country continues to witness an exodus of medical professionals (Umar, A.A.2025.1-3). For example, between December 2021 and May 2022, approximately 727 Nigerian-trained medical doctors relocated to the United Kingdom alone (Tolu-Kolawole, D.2025). Similarly, the Pharmacy Council of Nigeria reported that more than 783 pharmacists left the country in 2021. Even more alarming, the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) estimated that approximately 75,000 nurses and midwives emigrated over a five-year period (NANNM, 2023.1).

The consequences of such mass migration are dire. A recent instance of systemic failure occurred at the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan, where a total blackout persisted for over 80 days. It took the intervention of the Minister of Power to restore electricity (Remi, F. and Oyedokun, T.2025.2) Such events underscore the fragile state of Nigeria's healthcare infrastructure and highlight the crucial role of qualified professionals in maintaining its viability. Furthermore, while government officials routinely seek medical treatment abroad often for minor ailments they fail to recognize the irony: the systems they rely on overseas were built through long-term, intentional investment (Banko, H.O and Onyekachi, E.B.2020.69-95). If those countries had similarly neglected their healthcare systems, such options would not be available to them today.

Beyond the immediate loss of manpower, migration also affects national economic dynamics. The outflow of skilled professionals results in a corresponding outflow of spending power, which is essential for domestic economic growth (Bohme, M.H. and Sarah, K. (2017)2-73). According to the Clinical and Dental Advisory Relationship of Nigeria (CDARN), Nigeria lost over 100 medical specialists between 2021 and 2022 alone. The economic implications are significant: when professionals relocate, the nation not only

loses their direct contributions to healthcare delivery but also forfeits the consumer spending that would have supported local businesses and services (Timothy, J.M.2004.2-12). The phenomenon of brain drain deprives Nigeria of the professionals who were trained at considerable public and private cost. These individuals often go on to utilize their skills in the service of other countries, effectively subsidizing the development of foreign healthcare systems at Nigeria's expense (Osigbesan, O.20211-195). A particularly striking moment occurred in Abuja, where long queues of Nigerian medical professionals awaited screening by foreign hospitals seeking to recruit healthcare workers (Businessday. 2021.1). Such scenes reflect a deep-seated crisis that demands urgent attention. In conclusion, the *Japa* syndrome presents a significant challenge to Nigeria's developmental trajectory. Its effects permeate all sectors of national life, and unless proactive policies are implemented to retain talent and improve working conditions, the country risks continued deterioration in both its human capital and institutional capacity (Okunade,,S.K. and Oladotun, E.A. 2023.1-18).

➤ *Education and National Development: A Critical Examination of the Nigerian Context*

Education serves as the fulcrum upon which the progress and development of any nation rest. A country that neglects its educational sector jeopardizes the future of its youth and undermines its own prospects for sustainable growth. It is widely acknowledged that no nation can advance beyond the quality and capacity of its educational system (Umo, U.A. 2015.319-324). Therefore, the failure to adequately support educational institutions amounts to courting long-term socio-economic instability (Brian, L. 2022.1-41) . Nigeria exemplifies this dilemma. Successive governments have demonstrated a consistent pattern of neglect toward the education sector, often paying lip service to reform while failing to implement substantive change (Odusanya, O. 201980-84). The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has engaged in numerous industrial actions to advocate for improved working conditions and increased funding for tertiary institutions, with limited success (Edet, J.T. and Ndaeyo, E.A.2024.242-255). Similarly, other professional bodies such as the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) face parallel challenges, highlighting systemic dysfunction across multiple sectors (Obianuju, C.U. and Nnonye, A.N.2023.1-13).

The consequences of this neglect are profound. A significant number of academics are emigrating in search of better opportunities, a phenomenon widely referred to as the *Japa* syndrome (Adeniran, K.O. 2024.64-82). This ongoing brain drain has resulted in a critical shortage of qualified personnel to administer and deliver quality education in Nigeria (Ogunode, N.J.and Ishaya, S.A. 2021.44-41). Moreover, many Nigerian students, disillusioned with the state of local institutions, increasingly seek opportunities abroad, drawn by the promise of better educational standards and clearer post-graduation pathways. Despite the fact that Nigerian youth remain driven and enthusiastic about education, the current state of the nation's educational infrastructure fails to meet their aspirations (Dike, V.E. 2009129-151). Among the most pressing issues is the

persistent non-payment of teachers' salaries, which has demoralized the workforce and hindered productivity (Subiri, K. and Nyangarika,A.2020.1249-1305). Retired educators are frequently subjected to bureaucratic bottlenecks that delay pension payments, often with fatal consequences(Annastasia, K.,Jamin, M ,and Harrison, M.2019.17-26). Tragically, there have been reported cases of academic staff who died during protracted strike actions, unable to afford essential medication due to unpaid wages (Matthew, A. 2024).

These conditions reflect a broader crisis in governance and public sector accountability. Without urgent and sustained intervention, Nigeria's education sector may continue to deteriorate, with dire implications for national development and youth empowerment. The adage, "*A hungry man is an angry man,*" aptly captures the prevailing socio-economic condition in Nigeria (Ako, J.A. and James,P.O.2018.77-86). Despite the country's abundance of human and natural resources, it continues to rank among the poorest nations globally (Davood, B.S.M. and Azhdar, K. 2010.81-101). This paradox is not difficult to understand. Virtually every state in Nigeria is endowed with at least one significant resource that could support its development. However, pervasive corruption and a persistent lack of political will among successive governments have severely undermined national progress. As a result, the economy has suffered extensive damage, making it increasingly difficult for the average Nigerian to lead a meaningful and dignified life. Access to basic necessities, such as three square meals a day, has become a luxury for many. (Obona,E.E. 2016.122-141). A small group of corrupt elites monopolize resources that are meant to benefit the broader population, further exacerbating inequality and poverty (Adamaagashi,I. Awakessien, C, and Awakessien,S.2024.1-19).

Traditionally, African societies are rooted in communalism, with strong family bonds playing a central role in social organization. In many communities, individuals refer to one another as *Molebi*, meaning members of the same family lineage, reflecting a deep sense of kinship and interconnectedness (Etta, E.F. and Esowe, D. D.2016.302-316). The closeness shared among nuclear and extended family members has historically served as a social safety net (Georgas, J. Kostas M. and Tsabika, B. 2001.289-300). However, this sense of togetherness is undergoing significant transformation. Migration, particularly international migration, is one of the key factors contributing to this change (Alonso, A. 2011.1-62). Family members who travel abroad often face considerable challenges adapting to new cultural and social environments, while those left behind must also adjust to their absence. These dynamics can result in strained relationships, exacerbated by feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Radharika, R. and Cebotari, V. 2023.192-211). When spouses migrate and leave their partners behind, the emotional and psychological distance can further strain marital relationships, sometimes leading to separation or divorce (Ojuri, A.T A and Akanle,O. 2025.85-103).

➤ *Ethical Issues in the Japa Syndrome*

Ethics is fundamentally concerned with human actions and how these actions affect others. Broadly defined, ethics

is the systematic study of human behaviour with the aim of discerning the rightness or wrongness of such actions (Omogrebe, J.I. 1993.3). Given this orientation, ethical considerations are central to understanding the growing trend of migration popularly referred to in Nigeria as the *Japa* syndrome. The increasing desire among Nigerians, especially the youth, to relocate abroad in search of better opportunities (Olanrewaju, O. 2024. 1-19). Migration is never without reason. People move across borders in response to various push and pull factors—economic hardship, insecurity, lack of opportunities, and the allure of better living conditions elsewhere (Adibe, J. et.al. 2023. 156-181). Underlying these factors, however, is the failure of the social contract between the government and the governed. In a democratic society, the people willingly confer legitimacy upon elected leaders through the ballot. In return, it is the ethical responsibility of government to protect lives and property and to ensure the provision of basic amenities that enhance the quality of life (Okeke, O.E. 2022. 1-13).

In Nigeria, persistent systemic failure has eroded this foundational contract. Citizens, disillusioned by leadership that appears incapable or unwilling to effect meaningful change, resort to self-help strategies, of which migration is a prominent example (Ojo, O.D and Ugochukwu, N.O.A.2011.434-453). Unlike developed nations where governments prioritize the welfare and well-being of their citizens (Rudra, N. 2002.441-445). Nigeria presents a stark contrast. Consequently, many Nigerians view relocation as the only viable means to secure a future (Makinde, O.G.et.al.2024.1-20).

However, the *Japa* phenomenon is not without its ethical complications. The desperation to leave the country has made many Nigerians vulnerable to exploitation by fraudulent agents who promise them lucrative opportunities abroad (Ingwe, R. et.al. 2012.65-93). Tragically, some of these agents ironically identifying as Christians or Muslims traffic young people into exploitative and dehumanizing conditions, including forced sex work, in countries that are themselves economically unstable (Marley, S.W.2015.1-52). In conclusion, the *Japa* syndrome reveals more than a desire to escape hardship, it exposes deep ethical failures at both governmental and societal levels (Adelowo, N.O.F 2024.107-115). Addressing this crisis requires more than policy interventions; it necessitates a reinvigoration of ethical leadership and collective responsibility to create a society in which citizens are not compelled to flee, but are empowered to thrive (Afunugo, K.N. 2023.70-93).

III. CONCLUSION

This study presents a comprehensive examination of the root causes of the *japa* phenomenon and its broad implications for national development. Fundamentally, it can be argued that bad governance and systemic failure are interlinked factors—akin to Siamese twins that have consistently hindered the nation's progress over the years. While some scholars and commentators contend that the *japa* phenomenon yields certain benefits, such as increased investment and knowledge transfer through diasporic

engagement, the adverse consequences particularly brain drain often outweigh these gains. The mass migration of skilled individuals undermines the country's human capital base, thus exacerbating developmental challenges.

In light of this, a holistic and deliberate response is required from both government officials and political leaders, who must adopt and implement policies aimed at improving the quality of life for citizens. As stewards of public resources, they must prioritize addressing the internal crises that fuel the desperation among the nation's youth and adults to seek opportunities abroad. Therefore, we offer the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Promoting National Development through Good Governance and Economic Diversification.

Economic diversification remains a critical pathway to sustainable development. The government must prioritize the strategic use of revenue generated from crude oil to develop other sectors of the economy. Such diversification will significantly contribute to job creation, particularly for the large population of unemployed youth currently roaming the streets.

Furthermore, the government must work proactively to enhance political stability. The era of unfulfilled promises should be relegated to history. A concerted effort is required to address systemic issues such as corruption, insecurity, unemployment, and nepotism. Tackling these challenges will help restore public confidence in governance and foster national loyalty among the citizenry.

Poverty alleviation must also be a central focus of government policy. With over 80% of Nigerians living in extreme poverty, the situation has reached a critical stage. This alarming trend serves as a warning signal to the state. It is imperative that comprehensive measures are adopted to reduce poverty and improve the living standards of the population.

Incentives for skilled professionals are equally essential. This can be achieved through the provision of soft loans, interest-free credit facilities, and other forms of support. These incentives will not only help to retain domestic talent but also attract professionals from the diaspora, thereby enhancing the nation's global competitiveness and fostering higher standards in various sectors.

Political offices should be entrusted to individuals with proven integrity, competence, and a verifiable record of public service—rather than being filled solely on the basis of party loyalty. Moreover, politicians and public office holders found guilty of corruption must be prosecuted without exception. The example set by Captain Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso, who pledged that anyone guilty of embezzling public funds would spend the rest of his life in prison serves as a powerful precedent worth emulating.

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