

FROM LAGOS TO GULF: A STUDY ON MIGRATION PHENOMENON OF NIGERIAN CROSS BORDERS TRAFFICKERS IN ARABIAN GCC STATES

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Abstract

Lagos to Gulf is a phenomenon that denotes illegal migration, human trafficking and drug dealings of some Nigerians in the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The concept is unique going by its criminality hoer and dilute with economic activities. This paper is going to use multiple and innovative means of data collection to tie disparate date to decipher the unofficial trafficking, kidnapping and drug dealing system. This paper hopes that modern technology and informational system could be used in checkmating the gaps connected with tackling the operational systems of these cross bordering security and drug dealing. Meanwhile, this paper concludes that the major livelihood option of Nigerians in the GCC states include street hawking, driving, guide services for pilgrims, lecturing, heavy goods packing and loading small scale and large scale, import and export business.

Keywords: Gulf state, Lagos, Migration, Phenomenon, Pilgrims, Nigerians, Cross bordering.

Introduction

This paper seeks to shed light and to unveil the dynamics of Nigerian migrants and traffickers, cross borders, drug dealers in Arabian GCC states. In the Nigerian context, these acts are commonly known as *9ja to the Arab world*. This informal, underestimated, and poorly understood system develops on the surface and underneath. It represents an informal international intercity business and criminal syndicate operating system. This study is so important as it depicts cross-national urban - urban human trafficking with Lagos or Kano as sources and Jeddah or Dubai as entry points or final destinations.

Unfortunately, inadequate literature, information, and data on this Phenomenon hampers the research albeit not quite significant. Meanwhile, this paper hopes to demystify the dynamics of the phenomenon of Lagos to the Gulf. The specific research objectives are to:

- 1- Identify the livelihood options of the illegal migrants and traffickers
- 2- Identify risks associated with the characters of Lagos to Gulf Phenomenon
- 3- Recommend sustainable technical and policy measures for handling the situation
- 4- Identify actors of Lagos to Gulf and their operation strategies.

The US based Middle East Institute identifies migration as one of the great and core contemporary challenges in the Gulf region. Meanwhile, Migration is a one issue that traverses other identified challenges (Health, environment and Skill) migration is a particular and spectacular activity that defines history, diplomacy and culture specifically in the GCC states. The hijra (Migration) as it is called in Arabic is a landmark in the Islamic and global political and historical life. Flow of people towards the Gulf has continued flourishingly. The trend of population flow has increased sharply since the creation of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar and the amalgamation of the United Arab Emirates. The two grand religious sites of the Makkah and Madinah constitute the major symbols of the Saudi state and royalty while Dubai represent the trade centre of the Gulf Empire. In the concept of modern migration, we can easily classify Makkah, Madinah, Jeddah, Doha and Dubai as attractions or pull factors for people who would move to fulfil their greener pastures and potentials. Some secular researchers are of the opinion that these cities raise socioeconomic status quo of those who aim to migrate. Hence, the motivation for many to also to Saudi Arabia for Hajj or lesser hajj (Umrah) then their after on the way to branch Dubai for business.

Apparently, the 21st century migration escalates illegal migrants whose number exceeds 150,000 now. At the age of defined international political boundaries and sovereignty of nation-states, observance of certain rules, regulations and standards become inevitable. Hajj and Umrah is at the Centre as migrants use it as genuine or counterfeit motivation.

It has been said repeatedly that most of the people initiated into the various cycle of trafficking and illegalities of overstaying in the Gulf region are poor. However, that is not enough as far as their social standing is concerned. None of the victims interviewed had never completed secondary school while in Nigeria. Some confessed that they dropped out though they failed to give the reasons behind that. Both Nigerian and Gulf countries authorities try to eradicate and erase trafficking without necessary understanding its system mechanisms, this paper understands that the syndicates that organise the travels have sufficient experiences of Lagos to Gulf cities. It is learnt that some of them have been living in the region for decades and they still come to Nigeria and go back to the Middle East at will. A travelling agent in Lagos regard them as highly connected in the Gulf States.

Organisation of trip to GCC States.

This organisation comes in highly organised ways. The syndicate organise trafficking package from passport issuance to ticket acquisition then to the accommodation. This paper looks at Lagos that syndicate inadvertently devolve duties among people who have known the system mechanisms, this research tries to understand operations and hierarchies of the system but that has not been satisfactory. However, the leading opinion among the respondents is that they operate without formal structure.

Livelihood and strategies of Trafficking Syndicates

This is devoted to unpacking the strategies of illegal immigrants and their syndicates. How do they survive in the GCC states? What strategies do they use in their trafficking pursuits? This research observations and contacts reveal that though they are needy and poor with low educated yet they are crafty and brainy enough in understanding security establishment's weakness, which they exploit to their advantage. In another phenomenon, since the 1980s, migration has been a part of the Nigerian middle-class psyche, catalysed by highly unemployment rate, security concerns, infrastructural decay and gaps, and poor governance. Migrants tend to be middle-class since one need money to migrate. For many middle age Nigerians, the bloodshed that ended the 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality and

injustice proved to be a decisive factor. Their desire to leave the country crystallised into action. Leaders had disregarded their criticisms and, for some youth, it seemed futile to continue struggling.

In 2022, 75% of Nigerians aged 20-35 surveyed by African polling Institute reported they would relocate if given the opportunity, a marked jump from 40% across all age groups in 2019. Moreover, the number of passport newly issued or renewed almost doubled, from one million in 2012 to 2.1 million in 2022. Data from popular destinations, such as the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UK, Germany, France and Canada, suggest that education and work are the primary migration pathway. In Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the office for National Statistic reported an increase in Nigeria students. Similarly in Europe and Canada statistics reported an increase in Nigeria students, from 6,797 in 2017 to 60,000 in 2022. Similarly, in Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada reported an increase in number of study and working permit issued. Another study has been monitoring money flows between the West Africa and GCC states since 2010. Global south destination like United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar were becoming increasing popular prior COVID-19 pandemic, while Nigerians gaining prestigious degrees from various universities across Nigeria, international work experience and a pathway to citizenship are cited as reasons to migrate, this research explores how a new *japa*, has emerged to capture an additional layer of contemporary migration. *Japa* stitches together the Yoruba expression meaning to run or to flee. But, it's more than another word for migration. The expression identifies the sentiment of desperation, toxic and danger, according to researchers, *Japa* does not mean to migrate, it means to run for a dear life.

For this research an in-person interviews conducted for students of University of Ilorin, with 30 students aged between 20-25, it shows most of them are really desperate to run for their dear lives after their B.sc studies with some chosen Dubai, Qatar or Kuwait as their final destination.

Another additional motivation to leave

When people think of survival migration, the image that comes to their mind includes perilous journeys to escape. I discussed this in the column I wrote for for Straight-Time Malaysia in 2022 about perilous journey of African Migrants. It was discussed that, Africans are desperate to escape poverty or war, when middle class Nigerian youth draw on the same phenomenon, they highlight another excuse as reason: existential worry and consideration about the future of the nation. Another

study indicates that Nigerians are travelling to the GCC states out of survival or necessity rather than choice, and there is a massive difference to life in Nigeria to any of the GCC states, mostly Dubai, Jeddah and Qatar.

Idris, 21, an Arabic Department student of University of Ilorin declared: "This Nigeria is not progressing or moving anywhere near progress, for me, all I want is to *Japa*, to at least Saudi Arabia to further my M.Sc. in Arabic Language. This Nigeria has tired me". Specifically, Students in the study said they were tired of interruption to the university education in public institutions, and unnerved by the unprecedented Naira depreciation, from January 2022 to April 2024, the Naira has declined by 75% against the United State dollar. Rather than expending additional efforts to survive in Nigeria, a student pronounced, "I am not going to be in Nigeria anymore after my M.Sc." (Nafisat a student of Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Ilorin).

Preferred Destination in the GCC States

Potential migrants from Sub Sahara Africa differ in their preferred destination in the Gulf region, Dubai top the list, followed by Qatar and Jeddah. Dubai is the favourite destination for more than half of those who want to migrate to Arabian Peninsula. A third or more of potential migrants want Kuwait because of the high value of the currency, some section of the Nigerian youths also want to migrate to Jordan, while some also want to travel and migrate to Oman, Bahrain respectively.

Conclusion

Besides African survival migration tends to be associated with impoverished migrants, besides state level concerns with brain drain, some of the more pressing consequences of *Japa* includes solitude and the reorganisation of social and economic relations, another effect and consequence is secrecy. More discussed interview is the secrecy across *Japa* plans for security and personal gains. Many youths who remain in Nigeria are ready to withdraw from their love affairs with their fiancés and marital life, some of the youths are not afraid and ready to withdraw from friendship or be unwilling to make new ones. The state of *Japa* in Nigeria today is the reaction from the Federal Government is one of the concern and alarm about the loss of educated, talented and determined youth, the issue however is out of hand, Nigeria government should not underestimate the profound emotional and symbolic aspects of survival migration. Youths are no longer seeing themselves as the part of the country anymore, *Japa* should be understand as a middle – class sensibility that conjoins and contain a critique of state viability and a mode of self-care. The Nigerian youths has seen it that their existential reasons either hook or crook must be addressed.

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