Human Security: A Panacea to the Rising Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

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Abstract

As endemic poverty and unemployment continue to inflame terrorism, banditry, and other security challenges in the Nigerian Fourth Republic, the country is, much more than at any time since its civil war of the 1960s, facing existential threats. This paper analysed the threats which affect human security, undermine the country's national objectives, and skyrocket japa—Nigeria's slang for desperate emigration—with its attendant implications. Guided by emancipatory realism theory, the paper adopted a qualitative research approach to synthesise ideas and facts from a pool of published scholarly and experts' discourses. The paper revealed that internal conflicts, corruption, inequality, and exclusion embody the human security threats that infect Nigerians with the japa syndrome. The paper further expounded how emancipatory politics could accelerate the achievement of human security in the country. Thus, the paper provides valuable insights on how to curtail the japa syndrome that is eating deep into the country's most productive human resources, and by implication, its developmental potential.

Keywords: Emigration, Fourth Republic, human security threats, Nigerians.

La sécurité humaine : une panacée contre la montée du syndrome de japa au Nigéria

Résumé

Alors que la pauvreté endémique et le chômage continuent d'attiser le terrorisme, le banditisme et d'autres problèmes de sécurité dans la quatrième République nigériane, le pays est, bien plus que jamais depuis la guerre civile des années 1960, confronté à des menaces existentielles. Cet article analyse les menaces qui affectent la sécurité humaine, sapent les objectifs nationaux du pays et font monter en flèche le japa – l'argot nigérian pour l'émigration désespérée – avec ses concomitants. Guidé par la théorie du réalisme émancipateur, l'article a adopté une approche de recherche qualitative pour synthétiser les idées et les faits à partir d'un ensemble de discours publiés par des erudits et des experts. L'article a révélé que les conflits internes, la corruption, les inégalités et l'exclusion incarnent les menaces à la sécurité humaine qui infectent les Nigérians avec le syndrome de japa. L'article explique en outre comment les politiques émancipatrices pourraient accélérer la réalisation de la sécurité humaine dans le pays. L'article fournit ainsi des indications précieuses sur lesquelles réduire le syndrome du japa qui ronge les ressources humaines les plus productives du pays et, par conséquent peut reduire son potentiel de développement.

Mots-clés : l'émigration, la quatrième République, les menaces à la sécurité humaine, les Nigérians.

Introduction

Nigeria's mass emigration experience predated the country's creation by British colonial administrators in the late 19th century. Beside the trade driven migration common in pre-colonial Africa, four simultaneous slave trades—trans-Saharan, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and transatlantic—had resulted in the forced emigration of over 15 million Africans, among whom over 2 million were from the entity now called Nigeria.[1] During colonialism, the British colonial administrators had utilised locals as labour force, thus facilitating the emigration of many Nigerians to neighbouring West African countries and vice versa.[2]

The Nigerian post-independence mass emigration experience can be broadly divided into four eras, namely: the civil/political unrest era of the 1960s; the petroleum boom downfall era of the 1980s; the military dictatorship era of the 1990s; and the Fourth Republic era since the dawn of the 2nd millennium.[3] In the first era, mass emigration was sparked by hardship arising from the political crises that engulfed the country, which resulted in a military coup, a counter coup, and a civil war. While the mass emigration trend significantly declined in the 1970s (due to the oil boom the country enjoyed), it again skyrocketed in the 1980s in the wake of economic instability. The instability was partly precipitated by sharp decline in oil price, and partly the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The SAP, which was wrapped in Western economic values, proved incompatible with Nigeria's having exacerbated the country's economic distress.[4] In the 1990s, economic woes continued to drive mass emigration, while large scale persecution of democratic enthusiasts by the then military dictator resulted in many of them seeking asylum outside the country.

No sooner than a democratic transition ushered the country's Fourth Republic in 1999, ethnoreligious crises in sections of the country began to erupt and gradually became usual occurrences. There has also been rise in the incidents of crimes and the emergence of terrorism and armed banditry. A wide range of human security threats, which include rising public sector corruption, unemployment, porous borders and

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1   Mberu, U. B., & Pongou, R. (2010). Nigeria: Multiple Forms of Mobility in Africa's Demographic Giant. Migration Policy Institute: 2.
2   Arhin-Sam, K. (2019). The Political Economy of Migration Governance in Nigeria. Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute (ABI): 11.
3   Inegbedion, Racheal (2022). Migration and youth in Nigeria. Policy Brief, 4(1).
4   Egwu, G. & Mshelia, I.H. (2024). Leadership Failure as a Drawback to Africa's Socio-Economic Development: Analysis of the Challenges and the way forward. Lapai Journal of Economics 8 (1): 315. https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/lje.v8i1.22

poverty are found to be among the harbingers of the rising insecurity in the country.[5] As these result in another wave of mass emigration of Nigerians, the phenomenon has assumed a unique dimension known in the country as *japa.*

Grammatically, the word '*japa'* simply means 'to flee'. It traces its etymological origin to the Yoruba language of south-western Nigeria, conveying 'the action of swiftly escaping from a potentially hazardous situation.'[6] The term, which has technically evolved to become a popular Nigerian slang synonymous with the idea of leaving the country, "traces back to Naira Marley's 2018 song of the same name."[7] While leaving the country simply implies 'emigration', the desperation that surrounds Nigerians' desire to emigrate in recent time negate this simple meaning. As some Nigerians are quoted as saying, "*japa* doesn't mean to migrate; it means to run for your life… I'm done. I'm not doing this anymore. I am running away. I can't cope."[8] Legally or illegally, with or without tangible purpose, the burning desire among most Nigerians today is to deploy any migration strategy to *japa* to just about any other country, hence the term's semblance to a 'syndrome'. And once achieved, it "becomes a lifetime achievement" as it almost certainly provides more opportunities and ease.[9]

The rising *japa* syndrome among Nigerian youth has been a subject of scholarly endeavours.[10],[11],[12],[13] Some of them have explored the push and pull factors of the phenomenon, which are broadly categorised as political, economic, and socio-cultural.[14] Others have examined the short and long term effects of the phenomenon

[5]   Adeniji, A.S. (2019). Democracy and National Security Challenges in Nigeria, 1999-2017. In State, Governance and Regional Integration in Africa, ed. A. Okolie, Hassan Saliu & Gerald Ezirim (The Nigerian Political Science Association).

[6]   Adediran, K. O. (2024). Japa Syndrome in Nigeria: Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' Perspective. Nigerian Journal of Social Studies, 27 (1):66.

[7]   Liu, J. J. 2023. Japa, or to flee or to run: Nigerian youth and the urgency of departure. MoLab Inventory of Mobilities and Socioeconomic Changes: 2. https://doi.org/10.48509/MoLab.6432

[8]   Ibid.

[9]   Falola, T. (2022). Japa!, By Toyin Falola. Premium Times, September 2: 'Run!' section, para 3. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/551986-japa-by-toyin-falola.html

[10] Okunade, S. K. (2021). Irregular emigration of Nigeria youths: An exploration of Core Drivers from the Perspective and Experiences of Returnee Migrants. In Intra-Africa migrations: Reimaging borders and migration management, ed. I. Moyo, Laine, J. P., and Nshimbi, C. C. (Routledge).

[11] Nwosu, I. A., Eteng, M. J., Ekpechu, J., Nnam, M. U., Ukah, J. A., Eyisi, E., & Orakwe, E. C. (2022). Poverty and youth migration out of Nigeria: Enthronement of modern slavery: 1–13.

[12] Olumoyo, A. E. & Abiri O. C. (2023). Japa Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Solutions for Sustainable National Development. International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability 11 (5): 87-95. https://doi.org/10.37745/ijdes.13/vol11n58795

[13] Adediran, K. O. (2024). Japa Syndrome in Nigeria: Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' Perspective. Nigerian Journal of Social Studies 27 (1): 64-83.

[14] Okunade, S. K. & Bakare O. D. (2020). Youth Out-migration in Nigeria: The Dual Role of Social Media as a Cause and Solution. Commonwealth Youth and Development, 18 (2).

on the country and the migrants.[15],[16] In this paper, the findings of these scholarly endeavours are synthesised from human security perspective.

Objectives

This paper seeks to analyse the human security threats that skyrocket *japa* syndrome in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. The paper further seeks to expound the role of good governance in accelerating the achievement of human security which would in turn curtail the rising *japa* syndrome in the country.

Materials and Methods

This paper adopts a qualitative approach. Secondary data are sourced from institutional sources (i.e. web pages and published reports), and academic works (i.e. published books and peer reviewed articles). The data are generated through google search using the keywords: '*japa*', 'Nigerian out-migration', 'human security' and 'human security threats in Nigeria'. Among over 240 results for the four keywords, 100 most relevant were first selected and further filtered to 76, based on the researcher's judgement of their relevance and authenticity.

The selected documents were categorised into three thematic areas as follows: (1) the rising japa syndrome in Nigeria, (2) theoretical explanation, and (3) human security threats in Nigeria. The ideas and facts extracted from them formed the building blocks of this analysis as the researcher offers reasoned lines of explanation to synthesise them.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the rising *japa* phenomenon in Nigeria is first examined. This is followed by a theoretical explanation to the phenomenon, and analysis of the human security threats that precipitated it.

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[15] Adedokun, O. A., and Karzanova I.V. (2019). Impact of Migration on the Economy of Nigeria: Recent Trends. Вестник НГУЭУ 2: 204-211. https://doi.org/10.34020/2073-6495-2019-2-204-211

[16] Afunugo, K. N. (2023). Japa Syndrome and its Challenges to the Nigeria's Labour Force: A Search for Religious Solutions. Ohazurume: Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization 2 (2): 70-93.

The Rising Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

According to the UN, there are over 272 million migrants (equating 3.5% of the global human population) across various countries in 2019.[17] Of these number, over 1.2 million are from Nigeria, having so increased from 450,000 in 1990.[18] Though this official figure is staggering, the actual figure far surpassed it given that there are a good number of undocumented Nigerian migrants. The figure is thus estimated at about 15 million, with the United States, United Kingdom, Cameroun, Niger, Ghana, Italy and Benin as their top seven destinations.[19] It is observed that "a considerable portion of individuals presently impacted by the *Japa* phenomena articulate a feeling of disappointment towards Nigeria, considering the country as deficient in feasible options for their future."[20] This attitude explains the continuous surge of the *japa* syndrome.

The country now has the highest percentage of intending migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, which, according to the 2021 World Bank report, rapidly increased from 36% in 2014 to 52% in 2018. Indeed, a survey by Afrobarometer in 2018 revealed that in every three Nigerians, one would like to migrate.[21] And these are not mere desires but desperate intentions being backed by concrete efforts. For example, in 2018 alone, a total of 88,587 Nigerians had reportedly applied for visa to Finland, Germany, Hungary and Italy among other Schengen countries.[22] Despite high rejections due to stricter migration laws, not a few number of the visa applicants are succeeding, while others resort to irregular emigration. As of June 2022, for example, UK government statistics revealed that 486,869 Nigerians secured study visas to the UK, 71% more than in 2019.[23] In Canada, the total number of Nigerians granted permanent residency status has reached 22,118 in 2022.[24]

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[17] National Policy on Labour Migration 2020. Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, Federal Republic of Nigeria: 1.
[18] IOM, UN Nigeria (2019). Migration in Nigeria – A Country Profile 2019: 22.
[19] PwC 2019, in National Policy on Labour Migration 2020, 1.
[20] Adediran, K. O. (2024). Japa Syndrome in Nigeria: Pre-Service Social Studies Teachers' Perspective. Nigerian Journal of Social Studies 27 (1): 71.
[21] Isbell, T. & Oluwole O. (2018). One in three Nigerians have considered emigration, most to find economic opportunity. Afrobarometer, Dispatch No. 231.
[22] The Guardian (2019). Nigeria tops Schengen Visa Denials for African Countries. https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria-tops-schengen-visa-denials-for-african-countries/
[23] Okunade, S. K & Oladotun E. Awosusi. (2023). The Japa Syndrome and the Migration of Nigerians to the United Kingdom: An Empirical Analysis. Comparative Migration Studies 11:2. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00351-2
[24] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). 2023 annual report to parliament on immigration: 59.

For several decades, migration issues have not been among the top priorities of the Nigerian government.[25],[26] But the impact of the phenomenon and pressure from international actors have compelled the government to rise up to the challenge.[27] Consequently, the Nigerian government in the Fourth Republic has made efforts to maximise the benefits of migration while minimising its long and short term negative consequences. In 2000, for example, it facilitated the establishment of Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO), with the aim of leveraging the contributions of Nigerian migrants to national development. In 2014, Annual National Migration Dialogue was initiated to shape the country's migratory orientation. It has since then been drawing stakeholders from the 36 states of the federation to debate and review the impacts of migration on the country.[28]

Furthermore, the Nigerian government has adopted National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP), National Migration Policy (NMP), and National Diaspora Policy (NDP) in 2014, 2015 and 2021 respectively. And in addition to other international treaties, the country has recently (in 2023) ratified both the Migrant Workers Convention (No.143) and the Private Employment Agencies Convention (No.181) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).[29]

Scholars have expounded both the positive and negative impacts of the *japa* phenomenon on Nigeria. On the positive side, it has, against the "largely misapplied" concept of brain drain, surged "brain drip"—"a mechanism for mitigating the overarching suffocation being experienced in the labour market."[30] In addition, it significantly increased remittance inflows, which is "a strategic tool for improving the economic and social outlook of the country by increasing financial credit, providing foreign currency, and improving balance of payment accounts."[31] With $25 billion remittance inflow in 2018 alone, the country had received 3.6% and 55.6% of the years' global and sub-Saharan African totals ($689 billion and $45 billion)

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[25] Darkwah, S.A. & Nahanga V. (2014). Determinants of International Migration: The Nigerian Experience. Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis 62 (2):323. http://dx.doi.org/10.11118/actaun201462020321

[26] Arhin-Sam, K. (2019). The Political Economy of Migration Governance in Nigeria. Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute (ABI): 12.

[27] Ibid.

[28] IOM, UN Nigeria (2019). Migration in Nigeria – A Country Profile 2019: 65.

[29] International Labour Organization (ILO) (2023). Nigeria Ratified ILO Conventions Concerning Migrant Workers And Private Employment Agencies. https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/nigeria-ratified-ilo-conventions-concerning-migrant-workers-and-private#:~:text=Nigeria%20becomes%20the%2029th%20country,181.&text=On%2023%20March%202023%2C%20Nigeria,)%20Convention%2C%201975%20(No

[30] Nwokocha, E. E. (2016). Demystifying the Fallacy of Brain-Drain in Nigeria's Development Discourse: Engaging the Burden and the Contradictions. Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa 18 (2): 30.

[31] IOM, UN Nigeria (2019). Migration in Nigeria – A Country Profile 2019: 59.

respectively—which made it the fifth highest and first recipient of remittances in the world and sub-Saharan Africa respectively.[32] And in prospect, the transnational connections, skills, and technological know-how of many Nigerians in the diaspora is a huge asset that could accelerate the country's development—should a significant number of such emigrants be convinced to return home.[33]

However, it is believed that the negative impacts of the *japa* phenomenon outweigh the foregoing positive impacts.[34] While Nigeria—though a net out-migration country—also host many migrants as Table 3 shows, the demographics of the immigrants and emigrants has gravely increased the country's dependency ratio on one hand, and pave way for brain drain on the other hand.

Table 3: Migration from and into Nigeria, 1990 – 2017

	People living in Nigeria born outside Nigeria	Decennial growth rate (%)	People born in Nigeria living in other countries	Decennial growth rate (%)
1990	460,000	-	450,000	-
2000	490,000	6.52	600,000	33.33
2010	990,000	102.04	990,000	65.00
2017	1,240,000	25.25	1,260,000	27.27

Source: United Nations Population Division (2018), cited in IOM Nigeria (2019: 22).

A significant number of the Nigerian immigrants are unskilled workers, refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries.[35] On the contrary, the emigrants are majorly able bodied youth who leave behind aged parents with younger siblings, and they include "highly skilled professionals in technology, science, and the medical and paramedical fields."[36] And the country hardly attracts a significant number of voluntary return migrants, with "a higher proportion of Nigerian returnees being repatriates, rather than skilled migrants."[37] Should the *japa* trend continue unabated, the huge vacuum in key sectors, though a consequence of poor governance and not the *japa* phenomenon, would become difficult to fill.

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[32] World Bank (2018), in IOM Nigeria (2019): 59.
[33] Ibid.: 59-60.
[34] Olumoyo, A. E. & Abiri O. C. (2023). Japa Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Solutions for Sustainable National Development. International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability 11 (5): 92. https://doi.org/10.37745/ijdes.13/vol11n58795
[35] IOM, UN Nigeria (2019). Migration in Nigeria – A Country Profile 201: 13.
[36] Ibid.: 62.
[37] Ibid.: 60.

In the health sector, for example, between 2011 and 2019, the doctor-to-population ratio in the country stood at 38 doctors per 100,000 population, grossly short of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s recommendation of 166 doctors per 100,000 population, and even lower than what obtains in other developing countries as shown in Figure 1.
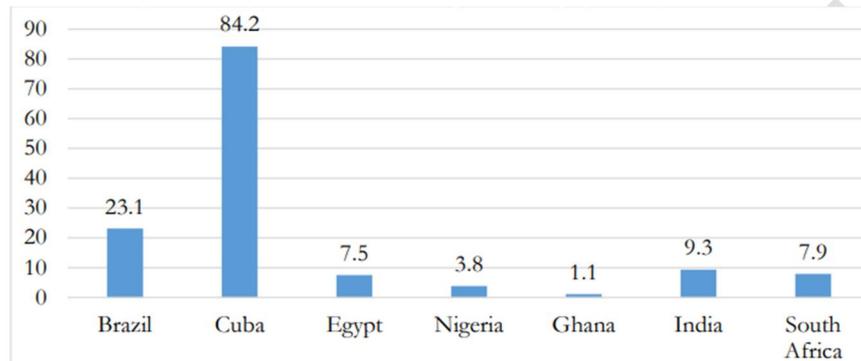

Fig. 1: Density of medical doctors (per 10,000 population), 2011-2019.
Source: World Health Organisation (2021), cited in Ikhide (2021:3).
And the trend of their exodus continues. Between 2021 and 2022, for instance, the number of health care workers who left the country for UK alone was 11,823.[38] As Toyin Falola decries, "if the future depends on innovations and ideas and those who have them prefer to take or have taken their trade elsewhere, then the future is in danger."[39]

Theoretical Explanation to the Rising Japa syndrome in Nigeria

Emancipatory realism theory provides a firm ground for understanding the root causes of the japa phenomenon from human security perspective. Developed by Ken Booth and Richard Jones around the concepts of 'security', 'emancipation', and 'community', the theory came to intellectual limelight in the 1900s. Security, according to the theory, can only be understood and defined by its opposition to insecurity, while emancipation is the only avenue through which insecurity can be overcome.[40] Thus, security means freedom from insecurity—any form of threat that

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[38] GOV.UK. (2023, February 23). National Statistics: Why do people come to the UK? To Work: 'work visas by nationality' section. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2022/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-to-work#worker

[39] Falola, T. (2022). Japa!, By Toyin Falola. Premium Times: 'Run!' section, para.5. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/551986-japa-by-toyin-falola.html

[40] Booth, K. (2005). Beyond Critical Security Studies. In Critical security Studies and World Politics (259–279), ed. K. Booth (Lynne Rienner Publishers). https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685857536-015

tempers with human freedom. While such freedom means 'emancipation,'—a situation where people are free from any sort of constraint capable of interfering with their fundamental rights,—community is the "medium of security where emancipatory politics is put into practice because here, the individual as the agent of change operates in the community for emancipatory practices to take hold."[41]

The theory therefore believes the world community should be committed to protecting and promoting fundamental human rights and democratic principles. It is thus not just a theoretical commitment but also a political orientation. As the former, "it embraces a set of ideas engaging in a critical and permanent exploration of the ontology, epistemology, and praxis of security, community, and emancipations in world politics" and as the latter, "it is informed by the aim of enhancing security through emancipatory politics and networks of community at all levels, including the potential community of communities—common humanity'.[42]

The concept of security in this theoretical perspective is more aligned to human security which, unlike national security, focuses on human life, dignity, and emancipation as contrasted in Table 1. Before and during the cold war, the conceptions of security was state-centric having revolved around states' safety hence it being referred to as 'national security'. This conception changed after the cold war as "the failing favour of the nation state provided space for the concept of human security."[43] Human security is an inter-disciplinary, prevention-oriented, people-centred, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, and context-specific concept that brings together the human elements of security, rights, and development; while offering the global community a new way of viewing and confronting the wide range of 21st century challenges.[44] It is thus referred to as "the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment."[45]

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[41] Sezal, M. (2019). Origins of Differentiation in Critical Security Schools: A Philosophic-Genealogical Search for Emancipatory Roots: 79.

[42] Booth, K. 2005. Beyond Critical Security Studies. In Critical security Studies and World Politics (259–279), ed. K. Booth (Lynne Rienner Publishers): 268. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685857536-015

[43] Marriage, Z. (2007). From National Security to Human Security—Less of the Same in Congo? New Faces Conference: 9.

[44] United Nations (2016). Human Security Handbook: An Integrated Approach for the Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Priority Areas of the International Community and the United Nations system.

[45] Commission on Human Security (2003). Human Security Now. Final Report: 4.

Table 1: Contrasting Forms of Security

	National Security	**Human Security**
Primary Actor	States	Individuals
Primary Concerns	Regime stability and security	Economic status, health, personal security, and liberties
Primary Threats	Forms of economic, military, or diplomatic coercion	Disease, poverty, and crime
Origin of Threats	Unfriendly states, weak states, and rival states	Non-state actors, transnational issues (e.g., climate change), repressive regimes, and illegally armed groups
Measure of Strength	Military power, economic productivity, control of borders, and appeal of values	Human development index that captures quality of life, educational opportunities, and life expectancy
Basis	National interests	Universal human needs and values
Ultimate End state	National sovereignty, territorial integrity, vitality of government, institutions, and society	Freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of expression, and freedom of beliefs
Legal Basis	United Nations Charter and International Law	Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine

Source: Adapted from Reveron and Mahoney-Norris (2019:3).

The protection and development of human lives, being the strategic concerns at the heart of human security, cut across political, economic and social dimensions, enabling a life free from risk and fear.[46] In this vein, the United Nations Human Development Program (UNDP) identified seven comprehensive dimensions of human security as follows: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security.[47] Insecurity, therefore, refers to the presence of any threat that affects any of these dimensions as shown in Table 2.

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[46]   Hussein, K., Donata G., & Julia W. (2004). Security and Human Security: An Overview of Concepts and Initiatives; What Implications for West Africa? Sahel and West Africa Club. Paris: Issues Paper, SAH/D(2004)547.
[47]   United Nations Development Program (1994). Human Development Report —New Dimensions of Human Security.

Table 2: Human security and their Threats

Type of Security	Examples of Main Threats
Economic security	Persistent poverty, unemployment
Food security	Hunger, famine
Health security	Deadly infectious diseases, unsafe food, malnutrition, lack of access to basic health care
Environmental security	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution
Personal security	Physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, child labour
Community security	Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions
Political security	Political repression, human rights abuses

Source: Adapted from United Nations (UN, 2009: 7)

Nigeria is one of the countries where human security threats are most prevalent hence the rising *japa* syndrome in the country.[48],[49] This—viewing through the lens of the emancipatory realism theory—is due to the lack of emancipatory politics at the federal, state and local government levels over the years. As the dark days of military dictatorship got over, and the Fourth Republic democracy evolved through periodic elections and orderly change of governments, emancipatory politics in the country would have precipitated emancipation through effective networks of community at the three levels of government.

Human Insecurity and the Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

Since the inception of Nigeria's fourth republic, there have been constant rise in the threats militating against the country's quest for human security which metamorphosed the yearnings of Nigerians for emigration into *japa* syndrome as analysed above. These are embedded in the four broad categories shown in Figure 2 and subsequently examined.

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[48]   Nasirudeen, L. O., & Nahdrah A. K. (2023). Human Security as a Basic Ingredient for the Smooth Running of Society: The Nigerian Experience. RUDN Journal of Public Administration 10 (3): 404-417. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2023-10-3-404-417

[49]   Creed, X., Zeynep K., & Shyamika J. (2023). Safe for Whom? A Human Security Perspective on Nigeria as a 'Safe Country of Origin'. Journal of Refugee Studies 36 (3): 359-382. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead002
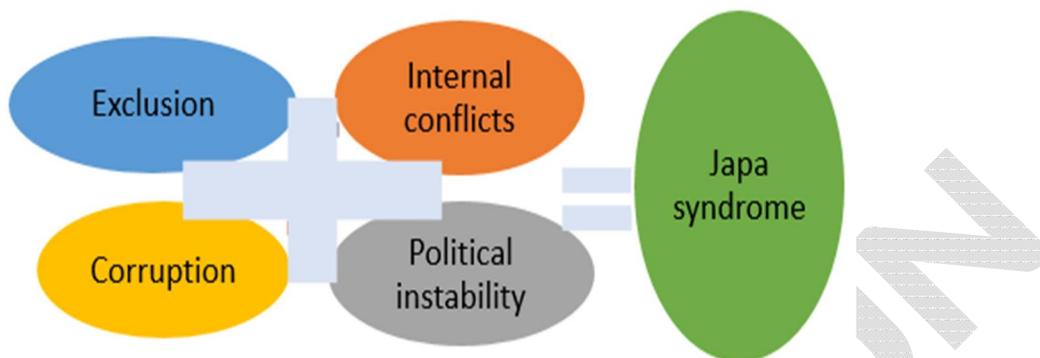
Fig. 2: The root causes of *japa* syndrome in Nigeria
Source: The author

1.   **Internal Conflicts**

Militia groups, which fueled socio-economic conflicts became visible in the country since the early 1990s. In the oil-rich Niger Delta region, for example, more than 20 minority right groups (like the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People [MOSOP]) have emerged in reaction to the government's failure to combat the numerous human security threats bedeviling the region. The return of the country to civil rule in 1999 precipitated many circumstances that made those militias to carry out large scale extra judicial violence in the name of vigilantism or protecting their socio-economic interests. Foremost in this regard were the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF).

Similarly, the Odua People's Congress (OPC), active in the south-west started out as a self-determination group for the Yorubas in 1994, but turned to vigilante activities in 1999. They specialized in "brutality, robbery, torture, lynching and necklacing of both criminal suspects and opponents during inter-ethnic conflict."[50] They allegedly played active roles in the ethnic skirmishes between the Hausa and Yoruba ethnic groups which consumed thousands of lives in the early 2000s.

In the south-east, the Bakassi Boys, officially known as the Abia Vigilante Service (AVS), Anambra Vigilante Services (AVS), and Imo Vigilante Services (IVS) in the three states they were most active, had carried out arbitrary arrests, torture, and killings of suspected criminals. They made "routine public spectacles of some of the criminal

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[50]   Tertsakian (2003), in. Alemika, E. E. O. & Chukwuma I. C. (2004). The Poor and Informal Policing in Nigeria: A Report on Poor Peoples' Perceptions and Priorities on Safety, Security and Informal Policing in A2j Focal States in Nigeria. Centre for Law Enforcement Education:12.

suspects they capture, often parading them naked through the streets, chopping body parts into pieces, and later burning them to the cheering of crowds."[51] Though they were disbanded in 2002, their activities continued unabated.

The introduction of Sharia law in 12 northern states in the early 2000s precipitated a crisis in Kaduna state, resulting in over 63,000 deaths and 3,000 displacements, thus described by the then president as the worst violence since the 1967 civil war.[52] Another ethno-religious crisis had already erupted in Plateau state which, like the Kaduna crisis, claimed thousands of lives, broke the social bond among the people, and lingered.

Those were among the internal conflicts the first fourth republican president failed to curb until he passed the mantle of leadership in 2007. While the next president successfully implemented a disarmament program for the Niger Delta militants, he witnessed the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in 2009, which peaked in 2014.[53] The Boko Haram terrorism has ravaged the north eastern part of the country and affected over 14.8 million people.[54] Failure to contain the insurgency partly led to the defeat of the third president in 2015 poll. While the victory of the fourth president offered hope to Nigerians, he had, without success, struggled to combat not only the Boko Haram but also armed bandits in the north-west. And in the south-east, violent secessionist agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) had continuously evolved, in addition to the resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta.[55]

2.   Exclusion

The population of Nigeria is estimated to be around 221,279,177.[56] A significant majority of this population are people who are educationally and financially excluded. While education is the key to all sorts of inclusion and empowerment, it is reported

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51 Chukwuma, I. (2002). Human Rights Dialogue (1994–2005): Series 2 no. 8 (fall 2002): Public Security and Human Rights: Articles: Responding to Vigilantism." Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs: para.6. https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/series/dialogue/human-rights-dialogue-1994-2005-series-2-no-8-fall-2002-public-security-and-human-rights-articles-responding-to-vigilantism

52 Okpanachi, E. (2010). Ethno-religious Identity and Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Sharia in Kaduna and Kebbi States. IFRA-Nigeria e-Papers, 07: 25. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.cetri.be/IMG/pdf/Okpanachi_2010.pdf&sa=U&ved=2ahUKEwjin7308NmGAxX3h_0HHZrhApQQFnoECAkQAg&usg=AOvVaw2pC7D-fV-UFVcHocEXtypS

53 Institute for Economics and Peace (2021). Global Terrorism Index 2020. Measuring the Impact of Terrorism. https://reliefweb.int/attachments/93b527d8-5b8d-3ea1-bc5e-f810e42d45df/GTI-2020-web-2.pdf

54 United Nations System in Nigeria (2017). United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework: Nigeria - UNSDPF 2018 – 2022: 17.

55 Home Office (2022). Nigeria: Separatist Groups in the South-East. Country Policy and Information Note.

56 World Population Review (2023). Nigeria Population 2023 (Live). https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nigeria-population

that 31% of the adult population in Nigeria are illiterates.[57] Also, there are about 20 million out-of-school children.[58] The telecom access gaps and internet user penetration in the country which respectively stand at 97 clusters and 38% in 2022 show improved, yet unsatisfactory level of digital inclusion.[59],[60]

The financial exclusion in the country, which stood at 46.3% in 2012 led to the launching of National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) with the aim of reducing the gap to 20% by 2020—albeit unsuccessfully.[61] The government's efforts towards financial inclusion and gender parity have been "adversely affected by unforeseen socioeconomic factors such as the economic recession, the precarious security situation in parts of northern Nigeria, and other factors such as the slow uptake of digital financial services."[62] Indeed, unemployment rate has continuously risen, with the unemployment-to-population ratio reaching 77.1% in 2023.[63] This worsened poverty as the country continuously adds to its world-record largest number of extremely poor people (over 80 million in 2018), with multi-dimensional poverty affecting over 63% (133 million) of the people in 2022.[64],[65] With inflation rate also rising from 20.77% to 33.69% between 2022 – 2024, the country is too suffocating to the unemployed and extremely/multi-dimensionally poor citizens, hence their contagious infection with the *japa* syndrome.[66]

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[58] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2022). Global Education Monitoring Report. Out-of-school Numbers are Growing in Sub-Saharan Africa. https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/2022-out-school

[59] Premium Times (2023). Nigeria's Telecom Access Gaps Drop by 53%." https://www.premiumtimesng.com/promoted/604435-nigerias-telecom-access-gaps-drop-by-53.html?fbclid=IwAR2XSedHVRIfCQw7oz98glqfd6C3iyiXVBMG2xU-MGBkxhYKOkPb0rvO_q4

[60] Sasu, D. D. (2022). Nigeria: Online Usage Penetration 2018 – 2027. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/484918/internet-user-reach-nigeria/

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[63] National Bureau of Statistics (2023). Nigeria Labour Force Statistics Report Q2 2023. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1241429

[64] Adebayo, B. (2018). Nigeria Overtakes India in Extreme Poverty Ranking. CNN https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/26/africa/nigeria-overtakes-india-extreme-poverty-intl/index.html

[65] National Bureau of Statistics (2022). Nigeria launches its most extensive national measure of multidimensional poverty. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78

[66] Channels Television (2024). Nigeria's inflation rate soars to 33.69% in April 2024. https://www.channelstv.com/2024/05/15/breaking-nigerias-inflation-rate-soars-to-33-69-in-april-2024/

3.   Corruption

Corruption, in the words of a former Nigerian president, is "the greatest single bane of our society today."[67] It refers to the abuse of public office for private gains in the form of an official giving or accepting undue favour, collecting or giving bribe, and engaging in any act of diversion or misuse of state resources.[68] The history of corruption in Nigeria will necessarily be narrated side by side the history of the country. This is because, it has been in manifestation since the colonial era and at no point in time after independence was the country free from it.[69],[70]

While successive governments continued to declare war against corruption, they have recorded little, if any success as the menace continues to grow. Having realised the impossibility of achieving the MDGs with corruption in the wheels, the first president of the fourth republic declared 'transparency' and 'accountability' as the pillars of his administration. He therefore established two anti-graft agencies, Independent Corruption and other Practices Commission (ICPC), and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in 2000 and 2003 respectively. These agencies, however, were said to have been mainly used by him to witch-hunt his political opponents.[71] It was observed that lower-level public officials, businessmen and individuals were usually at the receiving end of their convictions, as in most cases, the big fishes evaded conviction through plea bargaining.[72]

While the second president did not live long enough to implement his form of anti-corruption crusade, his successor was infamous for not living up to expectations. Among the brazen corrupt practices under his watch was the loss of $20 billion from the federation account in 2014.[73] The impunity that surrounded such scandals was among the major reasons that led to his defeat in 2015 election. His successor could therefore not resist decrying war against corruption. In his eight year regime, the

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[67] Akinwale, A. (2017). Let's Stop Talking About Corruption. The Guardian: para.12. https://guardian.ng/opinion/lets-stop-talking-about-corruption/

[68] World Bank (1997). Helping countries combat corruption: The role of the World Bank. http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/corruptn/corrptn.pdf

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[71] Shehu, M. S. (2011). Nigeria: Wikileaks - EFCC Was OBJ's Witch-Hunt Tool. Daily Trust. https://allafrica.com/stories/201109150966.html

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[73] Vanguard. (2014), Missing $20b: I Want The Whole Truth, says Okonjo-Iweala. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/02/missing-20b-want-whole-truth-says-okonjo-iweala/

EFCC reportedly recovered assets worth billions of naira having secured 1,280, 2,220, and 3,785 convictions in 2019, 2021 and 2022 respectively.[74]

Yet, the administration was also accused of using the anti-graft agencies to witch-hunt the opposition.[75],[76] Also, the 2022 presidential pardon granted to 158 convicts (including former governors Joshua Dariye and Jolly Nyame) was a negation of the anti-corruption crusade.[77] In fact, many of the president's close allies such as late Abba Kyari (former Chief of Staff) and Rotimi Amaechi (former Minister of Transportation) have not been charged despite their alleged involvement in corrupt practices.[78] Consequently, the country did not see any significant progress in the fight against corruption. In fact, there is an empirical evidence of retrogression.[79]

4. Political Instability

Political instability is "the propensity of a government collapse either because of conflicts or rampant competition between various political parties".[80] Having experienced 30 months of civil war and 5 successful military coups which culminated in 29 years of military rule, the Nigerian state is apparently a survivor of political instability precipitated by "colonial inheritance and inappropriate political structures and system."[81] Like corruption, narrating its history in Nigeria is tantamount to narrating the country's history. No sooner than its independence in 1960, leadership crisis engulfed the political party controlling the western region (Action Group, AG) resulting in the declaration of state emergency in the region. Then came the census crisis of 1962/63 and the general election crisis of 1966. These led to the country's first military coup, a counter coup, attempted secession of the eastern region and the

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[74] Umeorah, C. (2023). EFCC Secured Over 6,000 Convictions in 2 Years – CDG. The Sun. https://sunnewsonline.com/efcc-secured-over-6000-convictions-in-2-years-cdg/

[75] Opejobi, S. (2018). EFCC, ICPC, FIRS, Others Directed to Witch-Hunt Political Opponents – Obasanjo. Daily Post. https://dailypost.ng/2018/07/11/efcc-icpc-firs-others-directed-witch-hunt-political-opponents-obasanjo/

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[77] Odeniyi, S. (2022). Presidential Pardon: Dariye, Nyame, Three Others Regain Freedom. Punch. https://punchng.com/presidential-pardon-dariye-nyame-three-others-regain-freedom/

[78] Thompson, O. O., Afolabi, A. R. & Onifade, C. (2020). When I See the 'Broom', I Will Pass over You: An Assessment of President Muhammadu Buhari's Anti-Corruption Crusade in Nigeria, 2015-2019. Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities 21 (2): 195–232. http://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v21i2.10

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[80] Hussain, Z. (2014). Can Political Stability Hurt Economic Growth? World Bank Group: para.1. https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/can-political-stability-hurt-economic-growth

[81] Okunade, B. (2008). Leadership: The Big Challenge. Ibadan University Press Publishing House: 20.

civil war. Though the country survived the civil war undivided, violence and political conflicts have since then become permanent features of the country's politics.[82]

Owing to "rivalry and suspicions among the various ethnic groups in the country that have culminated in political instability across the entire country", violence and conflicts have always characterised the process of gaining entrance into the corridor of political power.[83] And while electoral agency is by true democratic principles indispensable to democratic survival through its function of conducting credible, free and fair elections, the electoral umpire in Nigeria has always been accused of dancing to the tune of the ruling party, thus exacerbating political instability in the country. Events in the fourth republic have shown that monumental fraud and irregularities have marred elections with only the magnitude subsequently increasing.[84] It was so bad that former president Umaru Yar'adua admitted that his election "had some shortcomings."[85] More worrisomely, however, is the fact that the judiciary, which should grant redress for aggrieved parties also "served as a tool for creating political topsy-turvy that undermined the democratic process".[86]

Conclusion

Since independence, Nigeria's statehood journey has been hampered by internal conflict, exclusion, corruption, and political instability. These account for the underutilisation of the country's enormous resources, exacerbation of human security threats, and waves of mass emigration—which now metamorphosed into *japa* syndrome with its attendant effects. So long as the human security threats are not curbed through emancipatory politics at all levels of governance, the *japa* phenomenon will continue to eat deep into the country's most productive human resources, and by implication, its developmental potentials. Curbing them, however, will undoubtedly provide a firm ground upon which the country's constitutionally defined ideals of freedom, equality and justice among other lofty ideals will be achieved.

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Recommendations

The government at all levels in Nigeria need to make concerted efforts towards combating internal conflicts, exclusion, corruption, and political instability which embody the human security threats prevalent in the country. Useful in this regard is the UN's "guide for practitioners and policymakers who plan to integrate the human security approach into their work," which 'introduces a step-by-step analytical process for the design and implementation of human security initiatives."[87]

The Nigerian government should also design strategies for attracting skilled migrants back home. This should be among the core objectives of the Nigerian National Migration Policy (NMP) and its sector specific policies like the National Diaspora Policy (NDP).

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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