

## **Jacob, Japa, Japada: A Theological and Socio-economic Reflections on Genesis 30:25, 30 in the Light of Nigerian Youth Emigration**

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### **Abstract**

*History is replete with accounts of people's movement from one place to another (migration) either for temporary or permanent settlement in the new locations. In the biblical account for instance, human migration began with Adam and Eve when banished from the garden to cultivate land for living (Gen. 3:23-24). But every event of migration whether voluntary or involuntary is occasioned by certain factors. It could be in search of better livelihood or as an escape from some unpleasant circumstances. Since around 2017-2023, Nigeria witnessed mass emigration of young professionals and artisans. This alarming phenomenon, commonly referred to as 'japa', raised different concerns for different people. While some worry about the brain drain effect on Nigeria socio-economy, others are concerned about the possible backlashes on the emigrants themselves. This paper examined a similar situation in Jacob narrative in the book of Genesis to appraise the japa syndrome. Adopting narrative criticism and comparative method, the study descriptively engaged the text by analysing the narrative of Jacob and comparing the narrative plot to Nigeria recent migratory tides. Findings reveal that while migration is inevitable in human communities, the connotative intent of the word japa portends hopelessness on one's land of birth and complete detachment from it. The study therefore, concluded that just as in the case of Jacob in the Bible, emigration should not only be conceived as an escape, but as a venture to acquire fortune in order to better one's home land and further its prosperity.*

**Keywords:** Jacob's migration, Japa, Japada, the Book of Genesis, Nigerian youths

## **Jacob, japa, japada : Réflexions théologiques et socio-économiques sur Genèse 30 :25, 30 à la lumière de l'émigration des jeunes Nigériens**

### **Résumé**

*L'histoire regorge de récits de déplacements de personnes d'un endroit à un autre (migration), que ce soit pour une installation temporaire ou permanente dans les nouveaux lieux. Dans le récit biblique par exemple, la migration humaine a commencé avec Adam et Ève lorsqu'ils ont été bannis du jardin pour cultiver la terre pour survivre (Genèse 3 :23-24). Mais chaque événement de migration, qu'il soit volontaire ou involontaire, est provoqué par certains facteurs. Il peut être de la recherche de meilleurs moyens de subsistance ou d'une échappée de certaines circonstances désagréables. Depuis 2017-2023, le Nigéria a connu une émigration massive de jeunes professionnels et artisans. Ce phénomène alarmant, communément surnommé japa, a suscité des inquiétudes différentes aux personnes diverses. Alors que certains s'inquiètent de l'effet de la fuite des cerveaux sur la vie socio-économie du Nigéria, d'autres s'inquiètent des répercussions possibles sur les émigrants eux-mêmes. Cet article a examiné une situation similaire dans le récit de Jacob dans le livre de la Genèse pour évaluer le syndrome du japa. Adoptant une critique narrative et une méthode comparative, l'étude a abordé le texte de manière descriptive en analysant le récit de Jacob et en comparant l'intrigue narrative aux récentes marées migratoires du Nigéria. Les résultats révèlent que la migration est inévitable dans les communautés humaines, l'intention connotative du mot japa laisse présager le désespoir sur la terre de naissance et un détachement total d'elle. L'étude a donc conclu que, tout comme dans le cas de Jacob dans la Bible, l'émigration ne doit pas seulement être conçue comme une échappée, mais comme une entreprise pour acquérir une fortune afin d'améliorer son pays natal et de favoriser sa prospérité.*

**Mots-clés :** la migration de Jacob, le japa, le japada, le livre de la Genèse, les jeunes Nigériens

## Introduction

Movement of people from one place to new locations for temporary or permanent settlement dates back to the beginning of human history. Biblical account of human history reveals that migration began with the first family. When they ate the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden to cultivate another land for living (Gen. 3:23-24). Soon afterwards, their first son, Cain migrated to settle in the land of Nod after murdering his brother (Gen. 4:16). This migratory trend from the earliest history continued throughout the Bible. Secular history also affirms this fact of migration. Emina William Uli and Nduonofit Larry-Love Effiong say that the world's history is history of migration and throughout the past 2000 years or more, humans have migrated, seeking new-found lands, natural resources, better social, cultural, and economic conditions or escaping wars, persecution, or ethnic tensions.<sup>1</sup> Christopher Agbonkhese states that according to the National Geographic Society, migration took place throughout human history. According to him, East Africa seems to be the cradle of human history as the earliest groups of people moved from there to their current location on the globe.<sup>2</sup> Thus, migration has occurred over centuries, right from the time people moved to regions of the world without human habitation, to the more recent shift in global population bringing about different forms of migration such as labour migrations, refugee migrations, and urbanisation.<sup>3</sup>

Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but certain factors cause migration. In involuntary migration, the forced displacement may be due to deportation, human trafficking, slave trade, asylum, ethnic cleansing, medical care, job opportunities, political instability, and natural disasters among other factors. Abimbola Oladayo notes further that research classifies the factors responsible for immigration and emigration into push and pull factors. The push factors, like aforementioned, forcefully thrust people into leaving a place. The pull factors, on the other hand, attract individuals to a new place. They include better climate, increased job opportunities, security, and better living standards.<sup>4</sup> Definitely, migration is inevitable and its growing importance cannot be overlooked. Of a truth, international migration provides significant mutual financial and social benefits for migrants, and their host countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Emina W. Uli and Nduonofit L. Effiong, "Migration: The Mediterranean as Death Trap for African Youths." *IJMGS* 2 no. 2 (2022): 195

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Agbonkhese, "Japa: The Causes and Effects of the Migration of Information Technology Professionals in Nigeria" *International Journal of Migration and Global Studies (IJMGS)* 3 no1 (2023): 50

<sup>3</sup> Abimbola Oladayo, "Economic Impact of Migration: A Case Study of the United States of America and The Federal Republic of Nigeria" *IJMGS* 2 no 1 (2022): 62

<sup>4</sup> Oladayo, 63

Therefore, it is no surprise that; “currently, one out of every 35th individual represents an international migrant” and “three-quarters of all international migrants are in only 12% of all countries across the globe.”<sup>5</sup>

While migration is inevitable, the recent cases of mass emigration in Nigeria, especially among the youths, is certainly a reason for concern. This mass exodus of teeming vibrant Nigerian youths is believed to be caused by poverty, economic crises, political instability, insecurity, low pay, lack of social amenities, and other undesirable conditions. Hence, the emigration is in search of solution to their socio-economic woe.<sup>6</sup> Although, migration of African to Europe and America in search of better living condition is not new. Agbonkhese relates it to the arrival of merchant capitalists from Europe (around 1500 to 1800 AD) in Africa to establish protectorates and live on its vast tracts of land for hundreds of years. He notes that this colonial ties between Europeans and Africans affects the current global migratory movements.<sup>7</sup> Because of the growing attention to this migratory tide, this study relates Jacob’s migration in the Book of Genesis to the phenomenon.

The study draws parallel between Jacob’s situation and that of many Nigerian emigrants. In both cases, migration is an escape from undesirable situation. But Genesis 30:30 reflects the psychology of Jacob about migration. The text reveals that while migration is not a bad phenomenon as it were, the desire for the good of one’s homeland should be taken serious. This study therefore, examines the text of Gen 30:25, 30 in the overall spectrum of Jacob’s narrative. It compares the situation to Nigerian challenges, and offers some reflections for the emigrants from the narrative.

## Objective

The study examines migration narrative of Jacob in the book of Genesis with a view to using it to address the current emigrational trend in Nigeria. Specifically, the study provides information about ‘what and why’ of recent surge in emigration. It also explains the term *japa* and *japada*; and applies the two to Jacob’s story in order to recommend positive attitudinal inclination towards emigration. It calls on the emigrants to keep a return in view while planning to travel abroad, and also calls on the government to innovatively see how to turn the tide of brain drain, caused by *japa*,

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<sup>5</sup> Oladayo, 63

<sup>6</sup> Olawale O. Peter, “Harnessing Home-Grown Alternatives for Economic Sustainability in Nigeria: The Book of Ruth” *IJMGS* 3 no 2 (2023): 127

<sup>7</sup> Agbonkhese, 50

to gain by creating alluring environment that will attract people back to the country to use their earned wealth from foreign lands to build Nigeria.

## Materials and Methods

This study adopts narrative criticism to analyse the text of Genesis 30:25, 30. Narrative criticism is used because the passage of discussion is a narrative literature. Narrative criticism analyses how an author uses narrative characters and plot to communicate meaning in a text. In this study, this is done through exegesis two key verses to underscore how Jacob viewed his homeland and foreign land. Comparative method is also employed to compare and appraise the *japa* syndrome among Nigerian youths, and migration of Jacob in the book of Genesis. For instance, Jacob's emigration was to flee from unpleasant situation just as the case with many young Nigerian emigrants. The host was blessed by his dedicated services just as many Nigerian emigrants too give commitment to work and build the economy of their host nations. Also, Jacob's host provided some amenities but exploited him in similar way as many emigrants are exploited though they enjoy some basis amenities. The paper uses descriptive analysis to effectively compare Jacob's migration in the book of Genesis to current Nigerian situation to offer some theological and socio-economic reflections. Bible text is the primary source of data in the study while secondary sources such as documented outcome of empirical research, journal publications and Bible commentaries as well as dictionaries provide data on migration in Nigeria and Jacob migration story. The text of Genesis 30: 30 is subjected to exegetical scrutiny to elucidate the point of focus of the study.

## Results

The staggering statistics of Nigerian youth migrating the country, though alarming, has some justifications. The unfavourable conditions, some of which are noted in the discussion below, give rise to the phenomenon currently dubbed: *japa* (escape). The statistics below helps in putting the situation in perspective: In 2018, there is a surge in visa applications from Nigeria to Schengen countries like Germany, Hungary, Finland, Italy, and Spain. A total of 88,587 visa applications were said to be received. 2020 statistics show an increase of 51% in the rejection rate of Schengen visa applications lodged by Nigerians. Also, recent statistics by the UK government reveal that 486,869 study visas were granted as of June 2022, about 71 per cent more than

that of 2019. In point of fact, Nigeria ranks third after India and China, increasing from 8,384 to a record 65,929 applications for study visas to the UK.<sup>8</sup>

Another report from Afrobarometer, a pan-African research network, in one of their surveys in Nigeria interviewed random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adults between 26 April and 10 May 2017. Below are their key findings:

- More than one in three Nigerians (35%) say they have considered emigration, including 11% who say they have given “a lot” of thought to the idea.
- Respondents who have a post-secondary education (44%), who live in cities (42%), and who are younger than 35 (39%) are particularly likely to consider emigration.
- Economic reasons dominate motivations for emigration. Three-fourths of those who have considered emigration cite as the main reason finding work (35%), escaping economic hardship/poverty (31%), or pursuing better business prospects (10%).
- The most popular destinations for Nigerians who have considered emigration are North America (32%) and Europe (21%). About one in five say they would go to Ghana (9%), another country in

West Africa (5%), or somewhere else in Africa (6%).<sup>9</sup>

In the Bible, Jacob’s migration also has justification. But like him, those who, for certain reasons have escaped the scourging situations in Nigeria and Africa must also find some justifications for return at some later time. If plan to return is kept in view, then Nigeria challenges would be conceived as collective responsibility of all. Therefore, emigration will not just be an escape from Nigerian but and an enterprise to seek fortune to build Nigeria.

## Discussion

### Nigerian youths and migration

Inclement climatic conditions, war, and economic difficulties are among the causes of migration. These various causes are rightly captured as ‘pull of a better life, the push

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<sup>8</sup> Olatunji Ololade, “From Japa to Japada: Greening the Nigerian pasture (1).” *The Nation*, September 7, 2023, Accessed January 12, 2024, <https://thenationonlineng.net/from-japa-to-japada-greening-the-nigerian-pasture-1/>

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Isbell and Oluwole Ojewale, “One in three Nigerians have considered emigration, most to find economic opportunity” *Afrobarometer Dispatch*, (27 Aug., 2018): 1-2 Accessed January 12, 2024, [ab\\_r7\\_dispatchno231\\_migration\\_in\\_nigeria\\_1.pdf](#)

of danger or despair, forces of market and the call of the human heart.<sup>10</sup> Migration may be voluntary or involuntary and it can as well be seasonal. It can also be permanent; long term or short term.<sup>11</sup> Migration is actually not a bad thing, provided it is a well-thought-out action. As matter of fact, Damilola Adegoke states that international human migration, is an increasingly global phenomenon in the 21st century and this has been made easier in an increasingly globalised world of improved communication technologies and transportation.<sup>12</sup> Volumes have been written about migration from prehistoric times to colonial era as well as postcolonial times in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> Also, much has been written on the phenomenon, and causes of youth emigration from Nigeria. This is what has become popularly known as *Japa*. Attention is here given to youth migration in Nigeria and the causes.

Since about the last two decades, massive transnational migration of Africans, including Nigerians, to other parts of the world, especially Europe and United States of America (USA). The emigrations have been through illegal routes, porous land borders, the Sahara, and across the Mediterranean into Europe. Some are through legalised routes with the required documents. This irregular migration culture is a notorious endeavour. Over the years, it has led to the deaths of many Nigerians as well as other ‘back-door’ migrants in the Sahara Desert, the Maghreb region, and the Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup>

The situation became worsened following the COVID-19 pandemic when many developing countries experienced intense socio-economic challenges leading to upsurge in migration in search of better opportunities. North America and Western Europe are the preferred destinations of this new wave of migrants, although they are not necessarily the only final destinations of choice. Scholars attribute the surge in emigration pattern to several reasons; chiefly socio-economic. But the impacts of COVID-19 are also significant. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, living

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<sup>10</sup> William A. Duyile and John U. Nwachukwu “Japa’ Phenomenon and Nigeria Students in the Mix of a Proxy War in Ukraine.” *Matondang Journal ISSN: 2828-1942 (Online)* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1

<sup>11</sup> D. Harmon, *West, 1800 to Present Lagos*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publisher, 2020),

<sup>12</sup> Damilola Adegoke, “‘Japa’: An Exploratory Study of the Roles of Social Media in an Out-Migration Trend in Nigeria.” *Social Media + Society*, October-December (2023), 4. Accessed December 27, 2023, [sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions) DOI: 10.1177/20563051231203691 [journals.sagepub.com/home/sms](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/sms)

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, Eneche Ogwuche, “Migrants and the National Question: A Study of the Nigerian Migration Experience.” *Centre of Excellence in Migration and Global Studies* 1 no. 2 (2021): 1-24. Christopher Agbonkhese, “Japa: The Causes and Effects of the Migration of Information Technology Professionals in Nigeria International.” *Journal of Migration and Global Studies (IJMGS)* 3 no1 (2023): 50 -51. Dokun Oyeshola, “Young Nigerians’ Migration in the Era of Sustainable Development Paradigm in Nigeria: Some Challenges.” *IJMGS* 2 no.2 (2022): 3-10

<sup>14</sup> Samuel K. Okunade and Oladotun E. Awosusi, “The Japa syndrome and the Migration of Nigerians to the United Kingdom: An Empirical Analysis.” *Comparative Migration Studies*, (2023), 1 Accessed March 16, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00351-2>.

conditions of Nigerians were already on the brink of collapse but the pandemic intensified its ‘terror’ on the people. The period welcomed inflation, unemployment, and other economic vices that overwhelmed the country. Adegoke remarks about the connection between migratory behaviours in Africa the factors of unemployment, political instability, poverty, infrastructural decay, economic opportunities, and the enticing promises of better facilities abroad.<sup>15</sup> Others also cite the case of ‘pull’ of better educational environment, and ‘push’ of Nigeria dysfunctional education.<sup>16</sup> Okunade and Awosusi give statistics showing that many Nigerian immigrants in UK mainly used study visa as step to seek relocation for better prospect and living. The statistics also support the claim that youth are those involved in the outmigration.

According to their findings, respondents were between the ages of 20 and 50 and hail from different Nigeria geopolitical zones. The age bracket of 36–40 years has the highest number with a percentage of 38.8%, while the age bracket of 20–25 years has the lowest percentage of 8.7%. The age bracket of 46 has an appreciable rate of 13%. The respondents were mostly postgraduate students, while a very small proportion (7%) were undergraduate students. Male population was the highest, with a percentage of 52.2%, while the female population had 47.8%. Also before leaving Nigeria, 87% of the respondents were middle-class individuals. Some were business owners, while 13% of the respondents were unemployed. Of the 87% in the middle class, 73.5% were gainfully employed and had businesses running, while 26.1% were underemployed.<sup>17</sup> Africa is home to some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised youth in the world. Many of these young relocate due to their inability to explore their potential or achieve their dreams in their home countries. So worrisome is the situation that young people would graduate from the university at young ages and would be jobless for many years such that at age 40, many still live with, and are being fed by their parents.<sup>18</sup> This leads to desperation among many youths to the point that many take reckless adventure in their bid to migrate. Danjibo, Sabiu, Uli and Effiong chronicle some of these in their articles.<sup>19</sup> Further, Imhangbe blame ineffective leadership which

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<sup>15</sup> Adegoke, 4

<sup>16</sup> William A. Duyile and John U. Nwachukwu “‘Japa’ Phenomenon and Nigeria Students In The Mix Of A Proxy War In Ukraine.” *Matondang Journal ISSN: 2828-1942 (Online)* 2, no. 1 (2023):1-10

<sup>17</sup> Samuel K. Okunade and Oladotun E. Awosusi, “The Japa syndrome and the Migration of Nigerians to the United Kingdom: An Empirical Analysis.” *Comparative Migration Studies*, (2023), 3 Accessed March 16, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00351-2>.

<sup>18</sup> Emina W. Uli and Nduonofit L. Effiong, “Migration: The Mediterranean as Death Trap for African Youths.” *IJMGS*, 2 no. 2 (2022): 192-193

<sup>19</sup> Uli and Effiong,



lead to infrastructural decay, poor governance, poor policies and structure as catalyst for youth emigration.<sup>20</sup>

## Japa and Japada

**Japa** is about the most popular slogan that gains press in Nigeria and abroad in the recent times. Japa syndrome is recently being popularised by young Nigerians, but the practice is not limited to their class. It is about Nigerians of all works of life relocating abroad for the much-talked about greener pastures.<sup>21</sup> According to Taiwo Adisa, the trend started with the brain drain syndrome of the early 1990s, but it took a new turn in recent years, when Nigerian-trained medical practitioners, information technology experts and digital and non-digital savvy young and middle aged, civil servants, paramilitary personnel and even drivers join the migration train.<sup>22</sup>

Japa is a Yoruba word coined to designate current migratory tides in Nigeria (especially youths' emigration to Europe and America). According to Okunade and Awosusi, japa means 'fleeing' beyond the shores of Nigeria. That is, deploying any migration strategy (regular or irregular) to escape from Nigeria's territory to other parts of the world.<sup>23</sup> Afunugo, quoting another scholar's submission, says it is a Yoruba expression meaning "to run, flee, or escape."<sup>24</sup> He stresses further that the word takes firm root in the aspiration that young Nigerians have to leave the country for good. But analysing the word, japa comprises of two parts: *ja* and *pa*. *Ja* (a verb) means cut, cut tie, sever, separate usually with force. *Pa* on the other hand can be a verb or an adverb. As verb it means kill (eg *pa eranko* kill an animal). As an adverb it can still mean kill (eg *tee pa* match it to death, *gun un pa* stab him to death). But sometimes, *pa* shows the intensity with which an action is done. So, it is usually translated as doing something intensely, exhaustively, completely, very well or perfectly. For instance, *o gan pa* he is completely still etc. This second sense of *pa* is intended in the coined slogan of japa. Therefore japa literally means to sever completely or perfectly or to seriously cut tie with. But the intent is to make a good escape from an unpleasant situation. It is in this wise that the general notion of japa as flee or escape is very right. Adegoke adds that japa is not essentially illegal or irregular

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<sup>20</sup> Osayamen S. Imhangbe, "Stemming the Tide of Emigration of Persons from Nigeria through Effective Leadership Practice: The Role of Leadership Education" *IJMGS*, 2 no. 2 (2022): 48-73

<sup>21</sup> Taiwo Adisa, "The Orita meta that Connects Japa, Japada and Sekuseyes," *Nigerian Tribune*, October 8, 2023, Accessed february 18, 2024 <https://tribuneonlineng.com/the-orita-meta-that-connects-japa-japada-and-seku-seyes/> para 1

<sup>22</sup> Adisa, 3

<sup>23</sup> Okunade, and Awosusi, 2

<sup>24</sup> Kenechi N. Afunugo, "Japa Syndrome and its Challenges to the Nigeria's Labour Force: A Search for Religious Solutions." *Ohazurume: Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization*, 2, no. 2 (2023): 73

migration; it is suggestive of those with legal means to leave their country with some pawning material possessions to satisfy this desperate wish for a better living outside of the country. This route of relocation requires financial resources that the young adults cannot afford on their own; therefore, the proportions of those leaving are in the middle class and those in mid-level career positions.<sup>25</sup> From the coinage of the word japa as analysed above, one notices an undertone of emigration without intent of returning or hope that Nigeria will get better. It seems the word is coined with a feeling of relief in mind that one has finally escaped danger. In this case, the desire or wish to return is absent because the hope of things getting better is not envisioned.

**Japada** is a word used in some quarters to denote the return from abroad to Nigeria. Taiwo Adisa says “On the other hand of japa is those that japada (return home) after encountering unfavourable conditions in their chosen foreign locations”<sup>26</sup> Also, while giving a lecture on brain drain in Nigerian institutions of higher learning, a professor (Khalid Adekoya), charges the government to urgently reverse the ‘japa’ syndrome to ‘japada’ through proper funding of education and research in the country.<sup>27</sup> This shows that the term is gaining increasing use.<sup>28</sup> Though not yet as popular as japa, japada is intended to describe a return back to Nigeria either on account of deportation or other unpleasant consequences of improper migration. It also involves desire to return because of better opportunities at home. Japada, like japa, also has two components: ja and pada. We already know what pa means. Pada simply means return.

**Jacob:** The Jacob narrative begins in Gen 25:19ff with the *Toledot* (genealogy) formula and a description of the struggle between Esau and Jacob during their birth. Indication of their conflict with one another is highlighted by the stew-birthright negotiation story in 25:27-34. The brewing rivalry between the two is interrupted by the story of Isaac facing a famine, like Abraham before him, though it underscores the centrality of involuntary migration in the ancestral narrative.

Jacob, as presented in the Bible, is an enigma! The biblical account of his character presents the reader with some of the most eclectic and puzzling stories in the Bible. Jacob is the third of the three great Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Abraham is the father of Isaac and Isaac the father of Jacob. In some ways, Jacob is

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<sup>25</sup> Adegoke, 4

<sup>26</sup> Adisa, 3

<sup>27</sup> Rasheed Abubakar, “Reverse ‘Japa’ To ‘Japada’, Don Urges Nigerian Govt.” *Independence*, November 3, 2023, Accessed february18, 2024 <https://independent.ng/reverse-japa-to-japada-don-urges-nigerian-govt/> Par 3

<sup>28</sup> Olatunji Ololade “From Japa to Japada: Greening the Nigerian pasture (1).” *The Nation*, September 7, 2023, Accessed January12, 2024 <https://thenationonlineng.net/from-japa-to-japada-greening-the-nigerian-pasture-1/>

an unusual hero fluctuating between good and bad portrayals. He is sometimes conniving, a crafty opportunist, a trickster, an angry and embittered father as well as discriminatory husband. John Anderson remarks that about the most pervasively troubling issue within the stories of Jacob is that of his character. Not only is he unabashedly portrayed as one who deceives and tricks to gain what he desires, he is even named as such. Recognising these seemingly unflattering traits in the presentation of his personality, many scholars often respond by reducing Jacob to nothing more than a morally corrupt individual.<sup>29</sup>

Jacob and his twin brother, Esau are born to their parents (Isaac and Rebekah) after some years of waiting (Gen 25:20). They are born in response to prayers probably at Beer-lahai-roi around 2006 BC.<sup>30</sup> The narrative reveals that they had prenatal struggles in their mother's womb which serves as harbinger of their later years struggles through their lives and future histories of their respective progenies. In the Old Testament world, just like many African cultures, naming a child is an auspicious occasion. Thus, Esau is so named because of his hairy appearance but Jacob's name ('one who takes by the heel' or by derivation; 'a supplanter') comes from his unusual behaviour at birth. Although Esau and Jacob are twins, they exhibit little or no resemblance in character. Jacob chooses a quiet domestic lifestyle which makes him stay close to home and probably working closely with the shepherding business of the family. Esau, on the other hand, chooses a difficult occupation of a hunter (Genesis 25: 27). For some strange reasons, the parents are respectively partial towards each of the boys—the father favours Esau while the mother favours Jacob! This sets the stage for later trouble that led to Jacob's migration from his land of birth.

### Migration of Jacob

In the patriarchal narratives, migration is not unique to Jacob. It begins with Abraham, who migrates to Canaan from Mesopotamia. On arrival in Canaan, Abraham is forced by famine to flee to Egypt (Gen 12:10). He eventually returns to Canaan, where his son Isaac also faces a similar situation of famine that forces him to migrate (Gen 26:1). But rather than leaving Canaan, Isaac drifts within its boundaries. Jacob, Isaac's son, grows up in Canaan, but spends his early adulthood as an asylum seeker while avoiding the aggression of his brother, Esau. He takes refuge with his family in

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<sup>29</sup> John E. Anderson, "Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster? The Covenantal Framework of God's Deception in the Theology of the Jacob Cycle." *Perspectives in Religious Studies Journal of the NABPR* 34 (nd), Accessed December 15, 2023, [Jacob\\_Laban\\_and\\_the\\_Divine\\_Tricksster\\_Th.pdf](#)

<sup>30</sup> R. O. Rigsby, "Jacob," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* eds. T. Desmond Alexander & David W. Baker, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, nd), 462

Mesopotamia and returns to Canaan after 20 years. To put it in the way of an author, “Abraham is an environmentally induced externally displaced person; Isaac is an environmentally induced internally displaced person; and, Jacob is an asylum seeker who subsequently repatriates by choice.”<sup>31</sup> The narratives in Gen 12–36 beckons on readers to consider migration. Very little work on the ancestral narrative foregrounds the issue of migration. Strine comments that perhaps the first to recognise the prominence of the theme of migration in Genesis was John Van Seters, though it informs his approach tangentially. He also notes the recent volumes by David Frankel and Elizabeth Robertson Kennedy and an article by Guy Darshan as giving a larger role to migration in Genesis.<sup>32</sup>

Under normal circumstance, the firstborn receives certain inheritance rights including a double portion of material inheritance, family headship with a special emphasis on spiritual leadership as well as father’s deathbed blessings. This is reflection of Ancient Near East custom. In this practice, the family estate was typically divided into a number of portions corresponding to the number of sons plus one such that the firstborn would receive two portions.<sup>33</sup> According to their birth order, these privileges are to go to Esau. But by some scheming and dubiousness together with the mother’s connivance, Jacob takes all these rights and privileges from Esau! The embittered Esau vows not to stay still. While the details of Rebekah and Jacob’s ruse to gain the patriarchal blessing for Jacob instead of Esau are familiar, it is worth noting the end of Gen 27 where the circumstances of Jacob’s departure from Canaan are reckoned. The bitterness of Esau towards Jacob produces homicidal intentions, which Rebekah discovers. On gaining knowledge of this, she counsels Jacob to flee Canaan and seek safety with Laban in Haran. This is the background to Jacob’s migration.

### **Jacob in a foreign land**

On arriving Haran, Jacob meets Rachel, who then introduces him to Laban, her father. Jacob is well received into Laban’s house. He explains reasons for his migration from Canaan to Paddanaram (29:13b). Laban, on the other hand, declares his willingness to protect Jacob by calling him “my bone and my flesh” (29:14a). On account of this familial recognition, Jacob falls under Laban’s protection. He is granted the privilege of exploring economic prosperity in the new land, and safety from the threat of his

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<sup>31</sup> C. Strine, “Your Name Shall No Longer be Jacob, but Refugee: Involuntary Migration and the Development of the Jacob Narrative.” in *Scripture as Social Discourse: Social-Scientific Perspectives on Early Jewish and Christian Writings*. (London:T&T Clark , 2018): 51-70.

<sup>32</sup> Strine, 2

<sup>33</sup> Rigsby, 462

brother. A month after his arrival, “Laban said to Jacob, ‘Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing?’” (Gen 29:15a). Despite inviting Jacob to set the wage, the text leaves Laban’s motivation ambiguous. One fact to be born in mind is that Jacob escapes danger in his homeland and seeks asylum in Haran. He is thus, a refugee.

Jacob’s refugee status illuminates the power dynamics at play with foreigners even on modern times. Usually, asylum seekers do not choose where they live, cannot work legally, and sometimes survive on subsistence earnings. At times, constant threat of deportation makes life complicated for them. They often remain at the mercy of the government, do not live as citizens, but on time limited and revocable visas. Applying modern circumstances to the ancient context, it is evident that the one granting protection to the asylum seeker possesses remarkable power over them. As long as the threat of expulsion exists, an asymmetric power relationship exists as well. Laban’s duplicitous behaviour explained by this model.

Laban takes advantage of Jacob’s status as a refugee. And Jacob has little recourse. According to von Rad, ‘Benevolent Laban is a master of deceit’<sup>34</sup> He agrees that Jacob’s seven years of service will warrant marrying a daughter (29:19) but without warning or regret he gives Jacob the older, unwanted daughter Leah. Laban claims that ‘It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years’ (Gen 29:26-27). Claus Westermann remarks about this that Jacob agrees because he has no option.<sup>35</sup> Strine notes that Westermann is correct, but he does not elaborate on the reasons or consider the implications of the situation. Because Laban assures Jacob’s livelihood and safety, Jacob lives in an unequal power relationship with him. Just like all refugees, he is in a subservient position to the one who grants asylum. The refugee is marginalised, disempowered, and circumscribed in their ability to pursue their rights due to fear of expulsion. Strines states further all this is compressed into the short, dismissive statement of Laban with which he begins his explanation: “It is not done thus in our place” (Gen 29:26a).<sup>36</sup> Although Laban has welcomes Jacob like family and grants him asylum, he remains an outsider, not a part of the host community. Jacob’s options are severely limited in this situation. He expresses desire to marry Rachel, but is given Leah. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Jacob accepts Laban’s one-sided offer to serve for additional

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<sup>34</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks. (London: SCM Press, 1961), 292.

<sup>35</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. John K. Scullion S.J. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 467

<sup>36</sup> C. Strine, 7

seven years for Rachel without resistance or negotiation because of the unequal power relationship between them. This might just be the motivating factor for his decision and comment in Gen 30:30 when he acquires some fortunes.

### Jacob and Japada: Examination of Gen 30: 25, 30

Gen. 30: 25

נִּיְהִי יִפְאֵר שְׂרֵי לְדָהָרְךָ לְאֶת־יִוְסֵף נִאֲמָר וַיַּעֲקֹב אֶל־בָּאֵל לְבָבָא לְחַנּוּא לְכָתָּ לִּמְ קוּמִילְאָרְ צִי :

Gen. 30: 30

כִּי־מֵעַתָּה שְׂרֵי־הָיָה לְךָ לְפָנַי רִמְזָרְבָאֵתְּ לָרְ גְּלִזְעַתְּמָת יֵאֵ עֶשׂ תַּעֲמֵאֵנְכָ לְבִית י :

**Genesis 30:25** *Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country.*

**30:30** *"For you had little before I came, and it has increased to a multitude; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?"*

Increase that comes to the business of Laban reminds of many Nigerian emigrants who labour assiduously to better the economy of the host nation. According to biblical record, Jacob is a quiet tent dweller back at home. But on getting to the foreign land, he works tirelessly to the point of multiplying the fortune of his host. Ditto, many young Nigerian emigrants take diligence, hard work, commitment and efficiency along. So, regardless of status or type of job, the zeal to do their best undergirds their actions and this impact positively on their productiveness, and the overall economy of their host countries. The truth is; if half of the dedication, commitment and zeal that many African emigrants put to work in the foreign lands are invested in their homeland, Africa's development and economy would have been better.

After about two decades, Jacob acquires wives, children and some fortunes. But something he has nursed in mind for long finds expression following an event in his life: *Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country.* The passage opens with הָיָה and it happens, and it came to pass. This is an inflection of הָיָה *hayah*. *Hayah* shows existence. The verb makes a strong statement about the being or presence of a person or thing. However, it is often given the simple translation of *become* or *come to pass*.<sup>37</sup> In situations where the verb is used for emphasis of a

<sup>37</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. (Nashvile :Thomas Nelson, 1996), 13

person, emotion or thing, it indicates that their presence (or absence) is noticeable-making a real difference to what is happening (Gen 9:2; Judges 3:10). When the verb is used with particles, it colours its emphasis. For instance, in passages setting forth blessing or cursing, the verb does not only specify the object of the action but it also shows the dynamic force behind and within the action.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the verb shows emphasis of Jacob's decision to return home having felt satisfied with a complete blessing occasioned by the birth of Joseph by his favourite wife.

Another point to notice is how Jacob expresses his decision; *שְׁלַחְנִי אֶלְכָּא לְמִקְוִמִי* *let me be sent to my place*. The word *שלח* send is in *piel* form, which often describes state of being. Not only does Jacob express desire to be sent away, but he also states where he desires to go- his homeland. This request means a lot to Laban, his host. He lost no time in telling Jacob how much he benefits from his (Jacob's) sojourn in his place and pleads with him to stay on with him. Laban also proposes new wage packages as incentive for Jacob just to keep him from returning to his homeland (Genesis 30:27-28). It is at this level that Jacob comes up with a stronger expression of his wish to return to his homeland: *בְּעֵת הַמָּת יֵאָעַשׂ הַגְּמֹאֹנֶכָל לְבֵיתִי* *But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?*

Jacob protests Laban's travesty in his proposal of better wages. He claims that he has served Laban diligently over the years such that his wealth has increased and his flock protected. Then, with a rhetorical question, he asks: *when shall I provide for my own household also?* Jacob buttresses what Laban earlier says, that his presence has caused Laban's wealth to grow. He now contrasts that to his own status by introducing his question with *בְּעֵת* *but now...* as if to say "I have served you for years and you admit that my service has brought you fortunes. But now what becomes of me? How do I make my own fortunes?" Another word is *אָעַשׂ* It is *qal* imperfect 1<sup>st</sup> common singular of *עָשָׂה* It means to make or fashion a thing (Genesis 3:21; Isa 44:17), create (Genesis 1:7), perform (Exodus 11:10) prepare (food) (Genesis 18:7), take care of (2Sam 19:25). In all instances of its uses, the intent is that of action, performance or preparing something. So, the New International Version (NIV) rendering of the text "*But now, when may I do something for my own household?*" still captures the translation of many versions that have it as "*But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?*"

The other expressions that require attention are *גְּמֹאֹנֶכָל* *I also*, and *לְבֵיתִי* *for my house*. *בֵּית* can be translated as house or household depending on the context.

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<sup>38</sup> Vine, 13

Apparently, Jacob is referring to a household here. The passage gives no indication that Jacob's family is really destitute to the point of seeking an escape. More so, he indicates his willingness to return home in earlier verse. Therefore, Jacob undoubtedly means his home country by the word *לְמִצְרָיִם* *also* is employed in the context of the contrast that Jacob makes in the verse. If Laban's business and country has been blessed on account of Jacob's emigration to Laban's land, then Jacob, by that expression, is saying "me too" what have I to gain and how do I bless my home land too.

From the foregoing, it is evident that while Jacob, has earlier japa to Paddanaram on account of a threat to his life, he nonetheless has the love of his home country at heart such that at the slightest opportunity, he shows intention to japada. He loses no time in making this known to his host and he also grabs an opportunity to see this happen as soon as he can. From the Biblical narrative, every action of Jacob following his declaration of intention to return to his home country is a preparation towards returning to Canaan. It is at this time that renegotiation of wages is ratified with him (Genesis 30:29-43). It is after this that he calls his family to meeting to discuss the agenda of home return (Genesis 31: 4-15), and soon afterwards, he leaves with his family.

It should be noted that Jacob flees home because of a particular challenge at home—the threat of his brother. Of course, there is also the prospect of marriage in the foreign land following his parents' interest. Jacob marries and raises a family. He could just decide to stay back in Paddanaram where he has no physical threat to his life. As at the time of his decision to return home, Esau is still alive and could still nurse the old grudge against him. But in spite of it, he decides to return all the same. The gravity of the danger that lays ahead of him appears more palpable when, on the edge of Seir, Jacob divides his family and properties into groups in hope that if some of the groups are attacked by Esau, the others may escape (Genesis 32:7-21). Not only that, he makes the groups into delegations with gift to placate Esau. Yet, he still leaves Mesopotamia for Canaan! It is after his return that he builds his family and future.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study investigates Jacob's migration in the book of Genesis and relates it to the *japa* syndrome which is a current Nigerian reality. It is discovered that Jacob's migration is caused mainly by a threat to his life. Similarly, many Nigerian emigrants feel threatened by harsh economic realities, insecurity, unemployment, poor living



standard, poor health provision etc. and escape through migration hence the colloquial *japa!* But escape is not the same as deserting one's homeland. Therefore, once fortune smiles on Jacob, he returns home to better his land of origin. In similar vein, while young emigrants may not be blamed for their 'escape' and desire to explore their potentials in the foreign lands, the idea of total desertion of the country needs being corrected. From the findings, the study recommends as follows:

- every intending emigrant should not only make plan for their exit but also a plan to return to make positive impact in Nigeria. This will guide their conduct, savings and lifestyle in manners that will be mutually beneficial to themselves, the host nation, and their home country.
- hard work should be encouraged either at home or abroad as means of acquiring fortune and gaining economic independence.
- exploitation of emigrants should be discouraged.
- Nigeria government should seek ways to turn brain drain to gains by creating enabling environment that will attract emigrants who have acquired intellectual, and economic fortune back to the country and reverse the tide of massive emigration.

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