

Envisioning ‘Eldorado’ in the ‘Western World’: The Lures and Expectations of Training as a Nurse in sub-Saharan Africa

Extended Abstract

One of the most sought after “highly skilled professionals” from sub-Saharan Africa are nurses, who immigrate, in great numbers, to the developed world. Research shows that nurses of sub-Sahara African origin have been migrating in reasonably great numbers to several developed countries, including Canada, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, United Kingdom and the United States of America. They have also immigrated to selected countries of the Gulf-region and South East Asia. Indeed, this development has gained considerable scholarly attention in recent years. However, one important area of the trend which has got very little or no research attention is an interrogation of the drive behind these migrations and the sociological trends they have produced over time in affected societies. Both of these developments have, inadvertently though forcefully, reinforced a ‘culture of exile’ for a considerable number of young adults, especially females, in affected countries. It is this conspicuous gap in scholarship that this paper bridges.

This paper is an exploratory study of a Nigerian case of the exigencies of this ‘culture of exile’, which examines and seeks to explain the lures, preparations, and strategies of these would-be migrants. Essentially, it answers the following pertinent questions: What are the lures and attractions which have foisted a ‘culture of exile’ among young people in Nigeria? What are the dynamics and exigencies of this trend? What kinds of subjectivities are produced in contexts where young adults treat everyday life as preparation for future travel? What are the coping strategies and experiences of *life in transit* in such situations? It shows how a society’s significant population with their families’ solid encouragement, take to train as nurses, for the sole aim of migrating to the developed economies for better opportunities. It further reveals how, in line with the ‘culture of exile’, student-nurses put in a lot of diverse efforts to successfully qualify, thus making their everyday living ‘a preparation for future travel’.

The paper additionally highlights the ‘*Di Obodo Oyibo* syndrome’, another dimension of this discourse that is quite supportive of the ‘culture of exile’. In this regard, the society believes in the high probability of young women training/trained as nurses to ‘acquire’ a husband living in a developed country (*Di Obodo Oyibo*) – a situation which is highly desirable as it ultimately leads to the hoped migration. This belief is supported by several cases in which it was proven that ‘foreign-based’ males tend to prefer marriage arrangements by their families with either qualified nurses or those in training. Again, in many circumstances where ladies trained in another profession/discipline, pressures were on them by their foreign-based suitors to re-train as nurses. This is hinged on the belief that nurses are paid very well in the developed world, thus the desire to have one as a wife. In other words, with the whole idea geared towards migration, the society places a high premium on those who take to the nursing profession.

It is argued that in pursuance of this ultimate fantasy, which often time come true, diverse strategies, including illegitimate ones, have been employed by the hopeful migrants and their families. These include the “sorting”¹ and “sexually transmitted marks”² phenomena that also plague the wider higher education system in Nigeria. The paper also notes two very important implications of this development. First, due to the continuous migration of its qualified nurses the society’s medical systems is further impoverished, a situation ultimately engendered by unabating brain drain in the nursing sector. Second, the trend is triggering an emerging change in gender roles. In this wise, the society and family are very hopeful of the nurse migrants, because of their believed jumbo job opportunities and pay, thus becoming breadwinners and crucial financiers in their families.

¹ ‘Sorting’ is a Nigerian slang which involves the undue compromising of teachers/lecturers by students, with material gifts (including money) for the purpose of securing better grades/scores in courses.

² As the nomenclature of this phenomenon denotes, it involves students having sexual liaisons with their teachers/lecturers for the purpose of obtaining better grades in courses. It is mostly a trend between female students and male lecturers.

Due to the trans-disciplinary nature of this study, a multi-disciplinary framework in social research was adopted. In this regard, data for the study were got primarily from 23 in-depth individual interviews amongst student nurses and members of their families, as well as community leaders to ascertain their perceptions of this trend and the feasibility of its continuity. In addition, four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) sessions were conducted with knowledgeable members of the society to determine collective opinions, perceptions, agreements and/or disagreements on the concerns of the study. Other extant secondary source materials were also employed in validating or contesting particular positions in the paper. The use of this repertoire of methods is to ensure that the three basic purposes of this research – exploration, description and explanation – are achieved.