

**A POEM BY THE AUTHOR**  
**(A LAST NOTE FROM THE DESERT)**  
**IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY COLLEAGUES PERISHED IN**  
**THE COURSE OF THIS SAD JOURNEY)**

Staring out into the desert plains  
All I see is a wall of sand,  
East, West, North and South  
I feel like a needle in this endless stack

As I'm set to venture in  
With my bread loaf as hard as a rock  
And my money in my bowels saved  
Through my rectum I had it banked

Oh water can to you I plead  
My thirst to quench I hope you will  
And if my truck should die before I do  
Make me your meal O wiggly maggots

My flesh to you I freely give  
Promise you'd evolve and make the flight  
To Nigeria and announce my plight  
37 Eweje Street is my home

Let them know the Desert won  
Tell the truth about its tale  
The tale of me and my likes  
'Twasn't the plan, but now I'm lost

If I be not fleshy to eat  
As the sun my body dries  
On the scorching sand I lay  
Dying with my yes un-shut  
A mummified me is what you'd find

If you ever journeyed along this route  
But I pray you never will  
And this letter I hope you'd read

Should the sands inter me not  
And you wish to honour me  
As you move my dried out body  
Do not fail to find this letter

We all came, we saw but most got conquered.  
Keep resting desert soldiers...

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## **PREFACE**

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**T**his is a true life story on my perilous sojourn through the Sahara desert from my home country Nigeria, en-route Spain-Europe in the year 1999.

The audacity and impetus to tell my story in a bare-it-all fashion such as this were borne out of encouragements and upvotes I received to an innocent comment I had shared on a Nigerian online forum (Nairaland), to a random query.

The urge to finally let it all out was further rekindled by the need to start the process of healing from all the psychological traumas and scars I've had to bottle up and deal with, in the last 20 years since I embarked on this perilous journey.

It is my desire to also let the readers in, on the thinking of an average illegal migrant, including what factor(s) could push one into embarking on such a life-endangering journey of yes/no return.

This could be, as a result of one, or both of sheer ignorance and choice, not minding the apparent and inherent dangers associated by so doing.

I'd try as best as I can, relying mostly on my life and personal experiences to give an insight into the probable causes and effects of this journey as it were, its connections

and interlinks to the criminal underworld, and how it ultimately impacts on the life of the sojourners (both on the short and long terms).

In the course of this book, I'll also do an expose' on how I ended up in the criminal underworld of online fraud a.k.a. Advance Fee Fraud, 419, Yahoo - Yahoo, online scamming or whatever name you might know it by!

I am not ignorant of the possible threats this sensitive part of my story might pose to my person and security, neither am I oblivious to the fact that my narrative won't be earning me so many friends, nor the number of bridges and associations that'd be getting severed as a result of this my tell-it-all narrative.

The truth is, the need and desire to do this, surpasses all of the aforementioned risks I stand to bear, hence, my decision to embark on this narrative, to tell the story as it is because it is a story that needs to be told and heard.

I chose to let out all the hitherto bottled-up traumas, clear my conscience, seek forgiveness from God and humans, find that much elusive peace, and ultimately, some healing for myself as I soldier on in life.

This doesn't imply I am forgetting or downplaying the many pains my actions, however passive, must have wrought on my innocent victims, and how undoing these pains were almost impossible.

I sincerely hope and wish, I'd not be judged solely on my criminal past, seeing how hard I've worked at becoming truly reformed and repented from my criminal past. Because, in spite of the many temptations at falling back to what I'd come to know how to do best, (which was obviously-stealing), I've chose to remain steadfast in my decision to earn a honest living, unfazed and not succumbing to the temptations of reaping from where I'd not sown, in the past ten years of my reformation process.

It is pertinent to state here for the sake of clarity, that while my story would be about all I had been through, and known in the course of my escapades, this does not mean I am, in any way, advocating for, or encouraging illegal migrations by anyway, shape, or form. Neither am I seeking to promote, dignify or edify criminality, or criminal-enrichment by whatever name or guise.

This book shouldn't be misconstrued to be directly or indirectly justifying, encouraging or edifying illegal migrations or criminality in any way.

It aims, instead, to serve as an eye-opener to Governments, policymakers and by extension, the world at large, on the dangers of these voyages, the factors that might be fuelling these irregular migrations and ultimately lead so many into the world of crime-to-get-rich-quick, and to their untimely deaths.

Most of these factors which includes pressures from the immediate family front, society, corruption in Government circles, subsequently leading to a massive impoverishment of the citizenry, majority of who would rather resort to these desperate and suicidal means in an attempt to dig themselves out of poverty occasioned by poor government policies, corruption and ignorance by families who would make babies as if they were going out of fashion thereby recycling and passing on the baton of poverty from one generation to another, are still very much present with us as I write.

To save everyone the pains, inconvenience and embarrassment occasioned by these irregular migrations and incessant loss of lives, it is expedient that we take action as Governments or individuals, by putting in place policies and environments that'd make our home-fronts attractive/conducive enough for the citizens to thrive in whatever legal venture they set out to embark on, thereby making the need for the irregular mode of migration at the risk of one's life unattractive.

We need to also keep on with educating and sensitizing the public on the importance of birth control. Parents should stop with children-proliferation as is the norm presently.

You can imagine a man and wife, who'd ignore the harsh economic realities on the ground and proceed to make 8-12 kids in the ignorant and twisted hope that, no matter what happens, at least one of the lot will turn out successful and eventually bail the entire family out from the pervading poverty.

It is still held as a belief and saying to this day in Africa, that a man or woman with just one child is like a one-eyed man, who constantly has to be wary and careful not to lose this remaining one eye, and as such is technically childless, because, if anything

untoward should happen to that one child, the parents would be seen to have come back to square one.

In Africa, not having a child is seen as a curse/taboo, so most parents try to create a sort of a buffer, by multi-procreating to guard against being laughed at by the society.

These mass-procreation goes on to exert more pressure on the family's limited resources, ability to provide these kids with a good quality of life, and the buck to survive is soon passed on to these innocent kids (especially the eldest) who would not want to sit by and watch as hunger decimates him/her, and his entire family even when it is naturally not supposed to be his/her responsibility or fault.

Given the above situation, most people would often choose a way to survive no matter how crooked or risky to their lives. They'd often tell you 'I'd rather kill myself by myself while trying to survive or make a difference in my/mine family condition, rather than just sit, do nothing and die of starvation'.

My case captures the above scenario very aptly and I'll explain a bit of it in this preface, while you'd read more as you proceed.

I remember growing up in the early 80's, the Nigerian economy hadn't so much degenerated into the doldrums successive Military Governments would plunge it into, my immediate family could still well be regarded as an average lower-middle-class family of 8 including mum and dad.

For as much as I can recall, even though the economy had started showing signs in the negatives as a result of inept leadership and then, the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the then Military regime, we still had it a bit rosy until in 1987 when mummy and daddy had decided to up the ante by increasing our numbers, and gave us a number 7 sibling.

A week after mum gave birth to our little sister, I had sneaked out with my friend Chijioke to the local stream for a swim. Being kids, we were oblivious to how long we had been away for, and a search party was soon initiated to find us. We were found out at the stream, bundled and made to do the long walk of shame home in our birthday suits (Nude), while being made to tearfully dance amidst whips to chants and songs from the other kids on my street, as an example to what awaits them if they

were to ever tow our lines of going to the river for a bath unsupervised. We were subjected to a community mob action/humiliation.

Upon arriving home, it was uneasily quiet in my compound that I had begun bracing myself for the additional special beating that was to come from my parents, seeing how my truancy and stubbornness had rendered my usual bubbly compound quiet and gloomy.

And then, one of my younger siblings had come up to me where I was standing and still contemplating if I should step into the house or just vanish from the face of the earth, for fear of the beating that awaited me inside the house, saying “Baby died and had been buried”. I can’t remember if I cried because of the news of my baby sister’s death, or from the joint beating daddy and mummy dealt me that night. At a point, I wasn’t quite sure or believed they were my actual birth parents. I was so battered you’d think I murdered the innocent baby.

My parents had quickly got down to business and soon replaced baby number 7 with the arrival of Blessing the next year, 1988.

For three long years, there had been no action or signs of a baby, until in 1991 when mummy did it yet again, and this time it was a double blessing. Mummy had given us twin sisters (Odion and Akhere). We were very happy and had risen to become 9 siblings.

By this time, you could already tell the quality of life had drastically reduced, and feeding all 9 kids had soon become a challenge, but we soldiered on against all odds.

From 1991-1995, there wasn’t even time to think about making babies, not with the 9 growing mouths to be fed, and I was really proud of my parents for at least being considerate and deciding to call time on their baby(s)-manufacturing venture.

Until one beautiful Saturday morning, on the 1st of July, 1995. For a bit of clarity, my mum is a tall woman, whose pregnancy was almost invisible even by the last trimester.

Mummy had gone out that morning, and we all had thought she was out running her usual errands until daddy walked in to inform us that mummy had just done it again. She had successfully brought to the world, baby number 10 (Faith).

When daddy broke the news to us, we all went instantly quiet, and instead of the usual jubilations, we proceeded to leave his sight, and the room one after the other. We were obviously protesting to our parents for being ignorant, or insensitive to the already dire situation at hand with the present 9 children, and not at the innocent baby that had just been brought into the world. After a few grumbles, we had no choice than to accept, love and welcome our little sister to the fold.

Now we had grown exponentially into a family of 12 including dad and mum, and at a time we'd have one or two cousin's staying with us, raising that number to 13 or 14.

We weren't living in some fancy ranch or had a whole building to ourselves, we were holed up in a 2 room living space in a multi-room tenement housing arrangement (popularly referred to locally as face me, I face you), comprising of 16 rooms with a shared convenience. It is a sort of housing arrangement, where a hall-way separates two or more rows of single rooms, with a communal kitchen, and the convenience (toilet/bathroom) usually one each, are shared according to the row of rooms.

Other tenants had 2 rooms each to themselves, with the exception of two other tenants who were at the time still single.

While the other families did have kids, my family still held the ace and record in numbers. It was as such not a surprise that my parents were rightfully nick-named Papa/Mama dozen or Papa/Mama battalion, depending on who was calling. While these name callings and jeers did get to us the kids, I'm sure it never ruffled my parents' feathers one bit. We all simply learnt to live and deal with the situation as it were, and most of the time we'd get into a brawl with the other kids because we felt offended by the name-callings.

My parents could certainly be excused for their ignorance, even though it was really getting to us the kids, seeing most of us had come of age and knew the proliferation of kids was a major factor in our living condition. The question then had become; how do we as kids tell our parents to watch it, tone down their wanton display of fertility, and maybe tow the birth control route. Broaching such an idea, or going a step further

to intimate your parents about it was an abomination in the African context, coupled with the fact that my Dad was an orthodox part time-clergy at the time. How, and where would you tell your African parents you learnt the words; sex, restraint and birth control from? It was simply a taboo-topic and certainly off-limits for kids.

We the kids had no choice than to accept what we were faced with in silence until thankfully, a neighbour who was a Nurse talked them into doing the needful by way of family planning. How she was able to accomplish it I do not know, but we were thankful they listened.

At this point, I had been done with high school and struggling to pass the requisite entry examinations to proceed into the University. I was struggling to pass the requisite examinations because daddy had chosen a course he thought was more high-paying for me to go study instead of my preferred choice of Mass Communication or Law.

I did eventually manage to get admitted into a Polytechnic to do a remedial course to fulfil daddy's dream, but hugely struggled because I had no flair for what I was made to study (Banking/Finance).

I also had a problem with the five years I was expected to stay in school before graduating, judging from the battalion waiting on my wings, whom my parents could barely give the quality of life they all truly deserved.

Because of this, I had always thought and dreamt of an easy way out of this quagmire my family had been entrenched in, and to me, the five years I would need to do in the Polytechnic was a long stretch, where neither I, or my other siblings were certain we'd be able to get the best and complete our studies.

It was no wonder that while in school, I had always enjoyed listening to a classmate named Perry, who would often reel us with stories on how he had been so close to entering Europe through Morocco before he was caught and deported back to Nigeria.

I had always been intrigued by Perry's stories on how one could just walk through a long stretch of road into Spain almost effortlessly if one was lucky enough to avoid detection from the Spanish and Moroccan police. I soon nick-named Perry 'Spanish

Burger', and would always call him aside to hear more about the route he took and almost got into Europe. Did Perry ever make the trip? I wouldn't know.

My fixation on travelling through this easy route Perry always serenaded us with had become so much of an obsession, that I eventually dreamt and saw myself in Europe. How did I know I was in Europe in my dream? I had seen myself in a beautiful apartment, living as a mate with an older cousin who had been in Germany for aeons.

I believed my dream would come to pass because, the last time I had a dream as such was when I was in the 10th grade and had dreamt that a classmate I had a crush on in real life had agreed to be my date, and funny enough it had panned out exactly the way it had appeared in the dream.

It was thus no surprise that I held on to that dream and began to plot my early exit from School to realize my dream.

The perfect opportunity to abandon the ship of schooling eventually came, when in 1999, just after the death of then Nigeria's Military ruler, General Sanni Abacha, most of the higher institutions in Nigeria had been engulfed by deadly secret cult clashes, and this subsequently prompted the Federal Government to shut down almost all the schools including mine.

This had set the perfect excuse for me to drop out of school, and set in motion plans to actualize my dream of travelling to Europe in cohort with my then girlfriend.

I had always wondered why my parents mass produced us the way they did, but couldn't really bring myself to asking them. Until sometime in 2014 when we had a family reunion with my maternal grandma present. I had pointed to my parents and asked grandma; how did my parents become one?

She had gone on to narrate to me that, my paternal grandma had lost her sons before my dad, under suspicious circumstances. It was thus common sense that, when my dad was born, they hid the news of his birth, smuggled him out to the city, Lagos State, where he grew into a fine enterprising young man.

Daddy had come of age and would need a wife, so my paternal grandma had gone to the neighbouring village, precisely to my maternal home and sought to marry their

young daughter for my dad. My paternal grandma had made a sales pitch to my mum's family about her only surviving son, whom she needs a woman capable of bearing her as much grand-kids as possible to make up for her losses. Grandma narrated that, my young mum had been touched by my paternal grandma's pleas, that she told her mum "I feel so sorry for the old woman, I would help her and bare her grand-kids".

That was how my mum was married off as a child bride without any education, and we came to be the output of that decision.

I sincerely hope this book will go a long way, at discouraging irregular migrations, curbing the tide, or outrightly mitigating against the incessant and unnecessary losses of lives at sea, deserts, trafficking in persons and slavery.

And considering how badly my country's image has been seriously battered and shattered before the international community when corruption and fraud are mentioned, I have accepted responsibility as one of those who might have contributed to this fact, either actively, passively or ignorantly, which certainly is no excuse.

It is an open secret, that with the advent of the internet, the world has become a virtual and global village, where individuals, organisations and nations meet, transact, exchange knowledge and generally eke out a living by honest means.

The case, is however different with my Country, where the actions of a few, like me, has negatively impacted the lives of million others, who are unable to engage in genuine undertakings and take advantage of the numerous opportunities that abound on the cyberspace, due to blacklistings occasioned by the nefarious actions by a few greedy individuals.

This shameful and painful reality, finally hit home in the course of my writing this book to be self-published online, but unfortunately, my target audience (Country-men) with whom this book would have resonated the more, are barred or unable to make purchases from most of the online stores.

To this end, this book had become necessary on my part, at teaching, educating and re-orientating the future or downline generations from my country, on the dangers associated with life on the fast lane, and of course the classlessness thereof.

I am also convinced, without any doubt that this book, if properly inculcated into our African Educational system, from the Primary to Secondary cadres, will go a long way at teaching and sensitize our teeming youths, on the dangers of irregular migrations, how the grass isn't greener after all on the other side, and the vanities inherent in the quest to get rich quick through criminal means-which obviously has more disadvantages than the seeming lures, as you'd find out in this book.

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## BACKGROUND:

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**M**y name is Peterson Ojieson, I was born some 40 years ago. I am an entrepreneur, father, husband and a Nigerian. I was born into the family of Rev. / Mrs Pius Ojie E. in the city of Lagos-Nigeria, as the second, (but first son) of ten siblings (Dad and mum were very busy you could tell).

The sort of nomadic life I'd come to live and got used to, pretty much revealed itself early into my growing years, owing to the nature of dad's job.

Two years after my birth, dad got transferred to the city of Port Harcourt from Lagos, both in Nigeria. While daddy was an engineer, mum was a petty trader who had settled for trading in fresh corn cereal (Akamu) and palm oil.

Between ages seven and eight, I had already grown fully into the family business, and would usually wake up to a tray of this local cereal all set and be waiting to be distributed by me, before I would prepare and set out for school. After school, I would go marketing bottles of palm oil, which mum would have filled and arranged for the evening shift of my hustling to make money for her. It was a hustle I was always proud of, and happy to undertake. Knowing and seeing how it made my mummy smile every time I came back home and handed over the money from my sales.

Every time I'd take my breakfast wares out for marketing, I always got queried why I didn't sell its accompanying snack of fried bean cake (Akara), to which I often answered: "my mummy will start adding those soon".

On one of such mornings, while in the course of doing my usual rounds and heading towards the water-side areas of Mgbuosimini village, in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State-Nigeria, I had noticed a woman frying some bean cake (Akara) along with my marketing route. I had impulsively gone up to her and asked if she'd be kind enough to allow me to sell her bean cakes alongside my corn cereal in a win-win arrangement, seeing both foods were at best enjoyed together. It was a pretty straight-cut decision for her to make, as she obviously hadn't anyone as enterprising as I was presumably to help her go hawking her wares.

Before long, I had become known as the popular bean cake and fresh corn cereal marketer (a.k.a 'The Akamu and Akara boy'), in the small town of Mgbuosimini, Agip village-Port Harcourt, Nigeria, at the young age of eight.

My standard reward for this informal business partnership usually came in the form of a handful of bean cakes from this woman. These were usually aside the ones I'd have already eaten from the supposed compliments (locally known as Jara or Fisi), I was to give out to customers who had bought large quantities of this bean cake.

I'd oftentimes short-change customers in dispensing these compliments and always made sure I consumed my profit from this extra job before I got home. Otherwise, I'd have a whole lot of explanations and convincing to do to mummy on how I wasn't stealing her money to fund my snacking. I couldn't tell mum about my new joint venture, for fear of being yelled at, or beaten up as was usual.

It'd become a routine to do the corn cereal marketing in the mornings, and then palm oil in the evenings.

On a few occasions, in the course of my marketing on the evening shifts, I'd come across some of my age mates playing soccer on the streets, where sometimes a stray ball would come running my way, and I would in sheer innocence, natural instincts or compulsion, attempt at kicking the ball back to the "lucky" players in the circle, while forgetting I was balancing on my little head, my mummy's oil industry of glass bottled palm oil. What usually followed this my innocent urge at being a 'playful and absent-minded kid was usually the sound of my bottled wares hitting the hard ground in a crackle, and my palm oil spilling and messing up the dusty streets of my neighbourhood.

My family's crude oil would have been shattered and spilt irredeemably, and in such cases, I always knew not to bother going home, as the consequences of my playfulness (which was a sin) were better imagined than experienced.

After a couple of years, dad was transferred from Port Harcourt to Warri, in present day Delta State, shortly afterwards to Kaduna State, and then, back to Lagos State, all in Nigeria.

My academics and education had soon started taking a hit, as a result of these constant relocations and change of schools. This was obvious when my grades began to take a nose dive.

While I did manage to get through high school, going any further than that had soon become an uphill task. It became even worse when Dad would always tell me he wanted me to be an accountant or an engineer, as opposed to my quest to be a journalist or a lawyer.

He'd often tell me cynically, 'as a lawyer, you would only end up writing eviction notices and lease agreements to tenants.'

With this in mind, coupled with my weaknesses in Maths and other Science subjects, I had struggled to pass UTME, a compulsory pre-university examination.

I did eventually manage to get into a Polytechnic to do a remedial course, but I soon dropped out before I even got started to actualize my dream of a better life in Europe, and help get my family out from the doldrums of poverty.

The highest I could thus attain, was O'levels, high school certificate.

In a nutshell, I'd grown up getting it constantly drummed and drilled in that I was the first Son of the 10 kids, and as such, irrespective of my age, complacency wasn't an option and responsibilities were inevitable. According to my parents, whatever I'd become will naturally rub off on my siblings.

These drilling often came with massive verbal and physical abuses, with resultant scars some of which I bear till this day.

As an example, I've got an indelible mark in the form of a split tooth, which I'm sure I deservedly got from one of mummy's beatings when I'd once skipped school for swimming at the local river.

Thus, for fear of not disappointing my family or setting a bad precedence, I had been forced to grow up pretty fast, with my poor parents not knowing how dented my fragile psyche had become, probably out of sheer ignorance or frustration.

I, basically never had a proper childhood, because I was always expected to act the big brother and the matured one at all times. The one to whom every one of my siblings should look up to.

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## THE PERILS

### Chapter One – The Decision

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The year was 1999, and Nigeria/Nigerians had just barely made it out alive from one of its worst military regimes, following the sudden demise of General Sanni Abacha.

Although, a new democratically elected government had just been ushered in, still permeating, hovering and hanging around, however, was this huge cloud of uncertainty and fear, in the direction the country was headed. This had become a worry for everyone, and soon prompted many to deciding it was best to venture out of Nigeria in search of ‘The greener pastures’.

Thus at age 21, as a high school dropout, I’d decided to take the huge and uncertain step of migrating for economic reasons, in a bid to better my life and change the fortunes of my poor family.

There was, however, a snag to realizing my dreams, which was the lack of sufficient financial, and other requisites to travel legally, by way of obtaining a visa and travelling by air. This prompted my decision to travel by land, through the deserts and seas, en-route Europe, via the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, separating my continent of Africa from the European continent through Morocco.

On one cold Friday morning, in August of 1999, at about 4 a.m., I had felt someone nudging me to wake up. I grudgingly looked up to be sure I wasn't in a dream and beheld my dad urging me to wake up and get prepared. Without any questions, I had obeyed, got myself ready and all set.

I had initially thought it was one of such days when daddy would want me to accompany him to his engineering work at Apapa-Lagos State-Nigeria, as a way of teaching me some rudiments of the job, since almost all the Universities and Polytechnics had been ordered shut down by the Federal Government of Nigeria, as a result of numerous deaths occasioned by Secret cult clashes in majority of the higher institution in 1999.



A recent picture of Lagos, Nigeria

Photo by Chuks Udeze

We'd set out very early from our base in Oshodi en route Apapa, so as to beat the rush-hour traffic of the mornings. We arrived Dad's office to greetings from colleagues, and compliments to dad for bringing me to work, as had become the norm back in the days.

I had proceeded into dad's office and was about changing into my coverall, but Dad stopped me in my tracks and said, 'You'd be accompanying me somewhere down the street on commercial road-Apapa', to which I'd complied.

We stepped out of the office complex, walked down some 500 meters, before making a detour into a big complex where I'd seen written in bold, "All States' Trust Bank".

Upon stepping into the Bank, my dad had asked me to take, and fill out a withdrawal form. He had told me to write the sum of One hundred and fifty thousand nairas (about 600 dollars) only, while specifically mentioning that he was clearing out his account. I'd wanted to ask him why he was clearing out his account but decided to keep mute until we got back to his office.

The idea of travelling out of Nigeria had been instilled in my subconscious by a classmate (Perry), who had always revelled me with stories about how he almost made it into Spain travelling through the desert.

My then girlfriend Adesuwa, from Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, had also seen how things stood with me as the first of ten kids, coupled with the burden and need to assist my family from the shackles of poverty we'd been enmeshed in. She'd told me that her mum had helped a couple of people travel out of Nigeria in the past, so, she'd discuss my plight with her and put in a word for me to see how she could help realize my dream to migrate. I had agreed and appreciated her for the thoughtfulness and care.

This craze to travel abroad for greener pastures was for the most part kindled by the show of affluence exhibited by people who had migrated abroad before us.

In the days, it was commonplace to see people who had made the leap barely two years prior, sending home containers of automobiles and erecting mansions in no time. This had

helped fuel the belief that living abroad was indeed soft as a 'soft-ball', and had become every young man/woman's dream for a way out of poverty.

It was a popular belief and rumour then, that the whites were some liberal and naive set of people, who'd park their vehicles by the roadside, leaving the car keys in the ignition and walking off, and as such, one could simply walk up to any of the parked vehicles and drive them off to the ports to be shipped home to Africa.

This, we were told, explained how our fore-runners were able to bring in the many automobiles we often saw them cruise about in.

Pertinent to state here that, however, these vehicles or anything else where acquired by my people, 'Grand theft', was unfortunately not part of the adjectives in our Nigerian lexicon. We had better sounding names to qualify such brazen acts of theft. e.g 'Obtaining, Hammer, Guy etc. All these fancy-sounding acronyms simply meant outsmarting or capitalizing on someone else's naivety, exclusive of stealing.

A couple of days later, as promised by my girlfriend, she had informed me that her mum had been briefed about my case, and she had agreed and was willing to assist me. She had mentioned that, for courtesy and other sakes, I'd need to travel to Benin City from Lagos State, Nigeria to go see her mum - Madam Charity in person.

I'd travelled to Benin City a couple of days later, and was well received by Madam, with assurances that I would be assisted on my plan to travel out of Nigeria for greener pastures.

She had immediately set in motion, the plan to get me a visa by calling one of her contacts who unfortunately had told her, he only had a Russian or Bulgarian visa available at the time.

Besides, the amount he had quoted for the visa was outrageous. So, Madam had declined the arrangement altogether.

After a while, Madam drew up a plan 'B' with me, seeing she wasn't very financially buoyant to meet the outrageous amounts being quoted for a visa at the time. The plan B, was to get my dad in on the arrangement, so we could get off him a reasonable amount of money on the pretext that madam would be making up the balance, and then, we'd find an alternative means to actualize my dreams.



The popular bronze casting village and world heritage site in Benin City, Nigeria

Madam came up with this plan after seeing how securing a visa might pose a problem, owing to the lack of enough funds. This alternative plan was basically to enable me to get, whatever reasonable amount of money I could get from my dad, and make the journey to Europe by land - through the deserts and seas. She had told me of this plan, with a couple of confirmable successful voyeurs who'd travelled through the same route, as earlier as a week prior, and who'd made it into Spain successfully within a month.

When Daddy and I got to back to his office, he'd told me 'My son, you witnessed how I had just cleared out my account, this money would be for your proposed trip. God would help and see me through taking care of your remaining nine siblings.' I thanked daddy and assured him I wouldn't disappoint him. I was to go back to Benin the next day being a Saturday, to deliver the money to Madam. But dad had thought it wise to accompany me, for extra security, and also for a chance to meet with my new benefactor in person.

We had set out early the next morning to go see Madam Charity in Benin City, I had with me just a backpack, which was holding the three bundles of fifty nairas, totalling One hundred and fifty thousand nairas.

On our way out of my street, I'd seen my best friend at the front of his house, and gave him a hand signal, meaning I'd see him later in the day. He couldn't have guessed what, or where I was up to. It is commonplace in the African belief system that such plans, moves or trips, were to be closely guarded, and kept a top-secret, to prevent enemies from scuttling or derailing them with their voodooos if they knew about it.

We arrived in Benin City safely. Even though, all through the journey from Lagos, I had to constantly answer in the affirmative to daddy's frequent questions of "Do you feel the money in the bag"?

I had held on firmly and dearly unto the bag all through because it obviously was holding what would be changing my life for the better.

Daddy had met with Madam, they got acquainted, while he handed over the money to her, and headed back to Lagos same day. I was left to stay back in Benin City to continue the travel plans with Madam.

That would have been the last time I would see my family and friends if I'd lost my life on this perilous journey through the deserts and seas.

I stayed back with Madam for a couple of days, until she announced to me that one of her cousins - Osaze, had become disillusioned with the country, fed up with his work as a furniture maker, and was planning to travel to Europe by land. She had gone ahead to link us both up, while we took it up from there.

Osaze had revelled me with stories, on how most of his friends were already in Europe, having travelled by land, and how he'd just got off the phone with some other guys who left barely three weeks prior. I was indeed marvelled! He told me they've directed him on where to get maps of the different routes which he'd shown me. We both studied the maps critically, and settled for the Katsina-Niger route, seeing that was the same route the guys he'd just spoken with on the phone had travelled on, instead of the Cotonou-Mali-Abidjan et al routes.

We immediately set in motion, our preparations. Madam had given me some money to go change into dollars, from which I got about Six hundred US Dollars, and some money to get new clothing.

Osaze had taken me to forestry road, a popular shopping district in Benin City, Edo State, where I selected some sneakers, jeans and shirts, trying my possible best to appear as African-American as possible-taking a cue from the posters and photographs of American music stars that'd usually adorn our rooms back in the days. I also got a nice body lotion and a perfume too- I never knew, I won't be needing any of those in the Desert.

We got all we thought we'd need on the trip set, and got prepared for the next day which would be our great departure day.

Osaze had asked that we hung out, and have our last local groove because we'd obviously be going international from the next day.

We went hanging out with his friends, who were unaware of his/our planned check-outs. We had lots to drink and feast on, while we both tried so hard at outdoing each other in spending our last miserable Nairas that would soon become useless to us, anyway.

I got back home drunk and wasted. Madam had seen my condition, and understood what it was (euphoria plus excitement).

I woke up the next morning heavily hung-over and messed up but could still get all my stuff together, and nicely arranged my new clothes for the expected trip to Europe.

The D-evening came, and we would be travelling by night bus to Katsina State, Nigeria. We said our goodbyes and farewells and went to Aduwawa Bus Park in Benin City.

At the bus park, we met other folks embarking on the same journey, so we all naturally 'gelled' and from thence, formed a group.

When the bus was full and loaded, we took off on our way to Katsina State, bordering the Niger Republic.

Before we left home, we'd carefully hidden our dollars in different parts of our clothing, shoes and then wrapped a couple up in a nylon. I'd dropped the nylon into my lotion bottle, for fear of bandits, or being given away to the Nigerian Police or Immigration as potential "defectors" which would mean serious "obtaining"(Nigerian parlance).

We had journeyed all night, in between roadblocks/checkpoints, and arrived at Katsina State the next morning.

Pertinent to point out here that since Katsina, a state in my country Nigeria, bordered the Niger Republic, we'd need to find the right connections/smugglers to take us across the border into the Niger Republic proper. Our target city in Niger was Agadez.

Before our departure from Katsina, we had been warned on the need to expect the unexpected from bandits (janja--weeds/rebels) along the way, and to hide our monies as best as we could.

In hindsight, if I'd known what I now know, about a possible encounter with the janja--weeds/rebels, I sure would have made a detour and discontinued on the journey. But their notoriety was still in its early stages then, so, we got the all clear and proceeded.

To secure our monies from getting robbed, and in the case of any eventuality, we had devised an ingenious means of banking our monies. We had resorted to folding the bills to the size of a tampon, wrapped them in a nylon and inserted into our butt-holes (A very safe way to the bank), and straight up to our rectum the monies will get sucked in, and buried in our bellies.

Whenever we'd feel the urge to defecate, we always made sure to remember, we were about to log into our bank accounts. As a result of this, we always had to fiddle with our excreta at every defecation time, so as to retrieve, re-wash, re-wrap and re-insert our monies up our rectums. When the need arises, to buy or pay for something, we'd defecate, fiddle to reach our banks, make withdrawals, re-wrap and return the balance to our accounts.

It was thus, a common sight and place to behold most of the dollars in circulation out there reeking of human excreta.



Migrants on a truck to Agadez Photo by Akintunde Akinleye/Reuters

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