Libya Rape: Returnee's Horror Story

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Thirty-year-old single mother of two, Olaonipekun Adenike, narrates to AJIBADE OMAPE the horror of travelling to Libya by road for three months after her mother’s friend lured her under the pretence of getting her a better life  
  
Can you tell us about yourself Adenike?  
  
I’m from Sagamu Local Government Area in Ogun State. I was born on October 25, 1995. I’m a single mother of two kids, and I’m the only daughter of my mum. I lost my two elder siblings.  
  
I came from a family that doesn’t believe girls should have access to education, and I’m from a community where they believe travelling abroad is the major thing to achieve in life.  
  
What motivated you to embark on the journey to Libya?  
  
My mum had a passion for education, and she wanted me to stand out. Remember, I mentioned that I am from a family where they don’t believe girls should have access to education.  
  
What motivated me then was when my mum was unable to finance my education. I was in the National Open University in Abeokuta at that time; I needed a way out.  
  
How did you come up with the idea that Libya was the solution to your situation?  
  
The person who trafficked me to Libya was my mum’s close friend. I’ve known her since I was a kid. We met on Facebook, and she asked about my well-being, then I was able to tell her where I was having challenges.  
  
She then said my mum had done a lot of good for her and she wanted to repay my mum, and that the only thing she could do was to assist me to come down to Libya.  
  
So, I saw the offer as an incredible opportunity to solve my immediate problem. She told me I would work for three months, and after that, I would be free to work on my own. She was also living in Libya.  
  
How was the journey to Libya?  
  
The journey to Libya was not easy. To be sincere, some people are still on the road, travelling down to Libya, all in search of greener pastures.  
  
I wouldn’t have embarked on the journey if I knew this was how it was going to end. I took off from Sagamu in Ogun State to Mile 12 in Lagos State and then went to Kano State.  
  
From there, I took another vehicle from Kano State to Niger Republic, and then from there, we started the journey.  
  
I met with some other people from Niger Republic, Ghana and Togo. Niger Republic was our meeting point. We passed a lot of countries, though we had stopovers in some countries. I spent three months in the desert where there was little food and water.  
  
We lost some youths travelling in search of greener pastures. We were molested on the road. I can remember I was raped on the road.  
  
We begged for food and drank our urine when thirsty. That was the only way to survive. It was not an easy journey for me.  
  
Were the people who forcefully had their way with you among those you were travelling with?  
  
No, it was the police at the border. I cannot remember the border. It happened once, and it was not just me that was raped, the policemen picked us randomly and had sex with us before letting us go.  
  
How were you convinced or misled about the possibilities of a good job or life in Libya?  
  
It wasn’t only about being convinced; it was about the trust I had in her (my mum’s friend). I trusted her because I saw a motherly figure in her, and that was why I accepted the offer.  
  
Did you go through an agent or a middleman?  
  
My mum’s friend gave me some contacts to call. When I got to Kano, I called someone, who also gave me the contact of someone to call. I was being picked up by different drivers at different places until I got to Niger Republic. That was where the real journey started.  
  
Can you describe the conditions of the journey through the desert?  
  
It was terrible; the conditions were not friendly. There were some accidents. People had some health challenges, like asthma and other ailments, and they lost their lives. Sometimes, the vehicles tumbled, and the wind was too much. So, there were people with health challenges who died, and also people who had accidents.  
  
The drivers were using Google Maps, and the network went off several times. There were times when petrol finished in some vehicles. Sometimes we were dropped at some borders, and we had to clear ourselves at these borders. So, the drivers dropped us, and when any of us (travellers) was cleared, the person would get back into the Hilux van conveying us.  
  
At what point did you realise that what you were told before leaving Nigeria was not the reality?  
  
It occurred to me while I was raped. I did not expect such to happen.  
  
Why and how did the rape issue occur at the border?  
  
There were some borders where the policemen didn’t stop us; they just let us go. The policemen just picked different women and raped them.  
  
What were the living conditions, and how were you fed and clothed while working as a maid in Libya?  
  
I was working as a maid, and it was not easy for me. I was unable to buy clothes; it was the Arab man I worked for who gave me food and clothes. The Ghanaians came every month to collect the money I owed until it was complete.  
  
You mentioned being stripped, molested, and eventually sold; can you properly describe the situation?  
  
When I got to Libya, my mum’s friend told me I spent too much time on the road. She had already sold me to a Ghanaian man. My name was changed to Ibrahim Aishat, and I was given a Ghanaian passport. I was told that I would have to pay one year and six months. That’s not what I was told before I left Nigeria.  
  
The Ghanaian man gave me to an Arab man as a maid, where I worked for 18 months. After 18 months, a friend of mine in Nigeria wrote a letter to the embassy on my behalf. The embassy called me to come and register for the free flight.  
  
I was called after some weeks that my TC (Terms and Conditions) was ready. I was on my way to get my TC when I got arrested. I did not commit any offence before my arrest.  
  
The police who arrested me got in touch with my mother. My mother sold her land and sent money to the police, but unfortunately, I was returned to prison. A policeman saw me crying and decided to help me after hearing my ordeal, and decided to help me escape from the prison.  
  
He took me to some Ghanaians, who later sold me to someone in a brothel. I was there for two weeks, and I was forced to work in the brothel as a harlot. I was stripped at the brothel; it was a way for them to showcase my body to the potential men who would want to sleep with me.  
  
How long were you in prison?  
  
I stayed in prison for one month. The conditions were horrible. People were being maltreated. Some people were arrested on the Mediterranean Sea.  
  
What was the experience like working at the brothel?  
  
It was hell for me. I was being forced to have sex. I met with some other people who were also victims like me. I was stripped naked because I refused to sleep with customers. I was also stripped naked because I was a new person among a group of sex workers.  
  
How did you leave the brothel?  
  
We don’t sleep in the brothel at night. They always drop us there in the morning. One day, I was the first person they dropped off at the house early in the morning. So, I found my way to escape by climbing a fence. I left the brothel and went to the embassy, where I stayed for two weeks before the Federal Government sent a chartered flight to bring us back to Nigeria.  
  
The flight came and we were dropped in a warehouse in Port Harcourt, where we were being profiled. The Ogun State Government later sent a bus to pick up some of us and took us to a cultural centre in Abeokuta.  
  
Was there any Nigerian you met in Libya who tried to help you, or was everyone part of the abuse or trafficking network?  
  
Every Nigerian I met there had one issue. There was barely anyone to help me. It was either that you were working for someone or in prison. It was tough.  
  
Why do people get trafficked to Libya and other surrounding countries?  
  
It is because of the lack of proper information and opportunities in the country, and poverty. Some people get lied to about going to Europe, and then they bring them to Libya.  
  
You mentioned that you are a single mother of two. Did you have these two children before you went to Libya or after you came back?  
  
I had one child before I left Nigeria, and then I had a second child when I got back.  
  
What kind of support, if any, did you receive upon your return to Nigeria—mental health care, reintegration programmes, or financial assistance?  
  
When I returned to Nigeria, the first support I got was from the Ogun State Government. It was N5,000 for empowerment in 2018. After a year, the International Organisation for Migration called me for assistance. After that, the IOM trained me in public speaking.  
  
That was when I developed an interest in setting up an NGO, which is called the Foundation for Action against Irregular Migration, which was being registered by the IOM.  
  
You wrote a book titled ,‘My Journey’. What inspired you to write that book?  
  
The first thing that inspired me to write the book was that I wanted my stories to be heard, and I wanted people to learn from my experience. I wanted to make sure that my migration contents and stories were accessible to students in the community. I don’t sell my book; I give the book out for free. I spoke with people who believed in me, and that was how I raised money to publish my book.  
  
Looking back, what do you wish you had known before making that journey?  
  
My experience in Libya brought out my passion and ability to speak to people about my experience. I wish I had analysed and done my survey about Libya, maybe I might not have been a victim of all these.  
  
You travelled to Libya because you had difficulties financing your education. Have you been able to go back to school since you returned?  
  
No, I have not.  
  
Do you still wish to go back to school?  
  
Yes, I wish to go back to school if I get sponsors. I was just in the 100 level when I decided to travel. I was studying Business Administration and Entrepreneurship at the National Open University, Abeokuta.  
  
What message do you have for young Nigerians who may still be considering travelling to Libya by road?  
  
I would like to tell them that migration is good, but it has to be done the right way. Not all that glitters is gold. I won’t discourage Japa, but our youths should be wise about it. Libya is not a country that is best for youths with great minds. I am planning to move out of Nigeria, but in a proper way. I am planning to go to Canada.  
  
Have you been able to rebuild your life since returning from Libya?  
  
Life has not been easy for me because of the kind of trauma I went through. I’m a single mother of two kids; raising them has not been easy. If there’s anybody out there who can help with visa processing, I would be glad.  
  
What is the name of your foundation?  
  
It is called The Foundation for Action against Irregular Migration. It’s a group of returnees. It is where we create awareness that sensitises people to the dangers of irregular migration and human trafficking.  
  
Some survivors of human trafficking are having medical challenges and accommodation challenges. I believe there are some potential migrants, and if we don’t protect them, they’ll come back to be victims of human trafficking.  
  
My WhatsApp number is 08122372057. It would be a good idea if the federal government could make me an ambassador for returning migrants because I have done a lot in trying to create awareness and sensitise people about irregular migration through my foundation and personal story.