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## Regional Networking and Identity Integration in West Africa: Case Study of Ejigbo-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire

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### **Introduction**

Essentially, cross-border network process predicated upon ethnic identity is seen as being stimulated by a relatively high level of risk aversion; bounded by moral and behavioural prescripts from the 'home front'. Meanwhile, varying reasons could generally be adduced as the motives for people engaging in cross-border interaction. Some have been insistent on having a feel or an experience of other societies; as such 'dropping out of the continuity of life'. While such individuals have existed across human histories, they have been observed as an insignificant component whose impact cannot account for such huge movement of people across national territories (Kivisto and Faist 2010:1). Instead, prevalent developments within the immediate social world have been the main motivating propensities; that is, the 'push factors', for instance, the desire to enhance individuals' standard of living (economic cause); to avoid social turmoil/political repression (political cause); to escape natural disaster (environmental cause) and sometimes to facilitate religious expression (spiritual cause).

On the other hand, when factors drawing people into another society are more active than those discouraging them, they tend to move. Such 'pull factors' have included better conditions of living, security of life and property, sustainable access to social resources, job opportunities and relative higher wages. The relevant intensity of these factors contributes to the 'volume' and defines the specific nature of the 'stream', moving from point A to point B, instead of point C (Lee 1966:50). Routinely, when people move, they embark on a journey of hope and uncertainty whether within or across international borders.

Trans-border movements, for purposes of trade and/or work, have become the most widespread pattern, especially since the colonial and immediate post-colonial era, in parts of West Africa. For several decades, such migrants' networks, as the Ejjigbo-Yoruba have contributed in no little measure to the emergence of a series of market centres in West Africa (Asiwaju 1992). Unusually, businesses are transacted without much regard for international boundaries. Of course, related long-established, pre-colonial mode of interaction has outwitted the contemporary national demarcation in such cases. For instance, the situation with the Ejjigbo-Yoruba from former 'British Nigeria', who have found it easier to trade and settle in a former 'French colonial state' like Cote d'Ivoire overlooking extant; impeding tendencies, is a good case at hand. Indeed, this case has become more significant and interesting in the light of the ongoing intent of the ECOWAS to transform the regional body from 'an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People'. This is basically envisaged as an enabling platform for guaranteeing 'free movement of persons and goods' within the sub-region; thereby, giving imperative lifeline to the regional integrative-cum-developmental proposition (ECOWAS 2010). Besides facilitating the process of socio-economic unification of the ECOWAS sub-region, ongoing cross-border activities of the Ejjigbo-Yoruba along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor has been oiling the process of inter-community development in West Africa. As they are contributing to the development process of the host society, so also Ejjigbo-Yoruba are engaging in the socio-economic transformation of their point of departure in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of Study**

The following objectives drive the study:

- i. To explore relevant socio-historical underpinnings driving contemporary cross-border interaction in West Africa;
- ii. To examine the sustainability of prevalent cross-border networking system in West Africa;
- iii. To explain the outcomes of identity interposition, along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor, for the process of regional integration in West Africa; and;
- iv. To establish a relationship between identity integration and regional development in West Africa.

### **Study's Methodology**

Being essentially a reflexive exploratory study, relevant qualitative data collection techniques (non-participant observation, in-depth interviews [IDIs], focus group discussions [FGDs] and case study) were utilized in generating primary data for the study from the two study locations of Ejjigbo, Nigeria and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. This was done in order to provide the study with useful first-hand information on the nature of cross-border networking and mode of constructing 'self' within the

transnational social space. Content analysis and ethnographic summaries were engaged in the process of data coding and analysis.

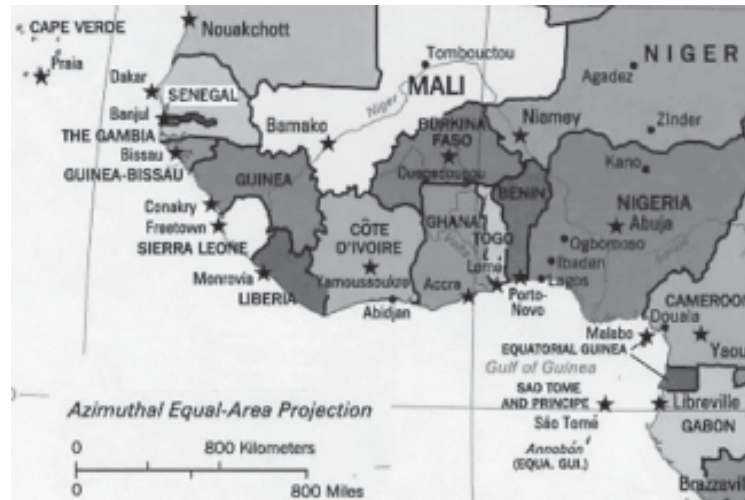
In Abidjan, only Ejigbo-Yoruba immigrants who have stayed for a minimum of five years in Cote d'Ivoire were engaged in the study, and in Ejigbo, only Ejigbo-Yoruba returnees of a minimum of five years stay in Nigeria were involved in the study. A pilot study preceded each of the main surveys in the two study locations in order to pre-test the potentiality of the research instruments and, indeed, to get accustomed to the study's locations.

### **Historical Constructs of Social Network and Migration System in West Africa**

Drawing from the submissions of earlier social network scholars, Tilly (1996), among other new age network analysts, had presented a contextual positioning of social network as a sociological paradigm, especially as it pertains to migrants and the migration process. Core to his network summation is the assertion that history serves as a critical component in analysing social change, especially within the transnational realm. According to Tilly, all investigating sociologists of social life formation (such as is obtainable in the migratory process) and social structure should view social processes and social structures as being, first, historically contingent. In this way, the pattern and nature of migration to other locales could only be interpreted in relation to the connotation of such evolving social networks.

However, contrary to the logics of minimizing distances and multiplying opportunities, over and over again, individuals have sought to establish regular migration between two widely separated locations, and then concentrated their migration within such bipolar system rather than continuing their search for opportunities outside of it. The long chain, history of exchange between such bipolar migratory points has made the contemporary movement flourishing. Chain migration in this regard is, of course, the arrangements in which social ties persist between people of a particular origin of migration and people of a particular destination of migration, with people at the destination sending back information about new opportunities, recruiting new migrants and helping them to make the move. This form of cross-border interaction has been noted in the nature of prevalent migration pattern among the Ejigbo-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire. Despite prevalent colonial, cultural and geographical impediments between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, the Ejigbo-Yoruba have been able to sustain the long established chain of migration over the years — that is, between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire; though a 'supposed' sister nation of Ghana, and two other West African countries – Togo and Republic of Benin – have to be crossed (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1:** Map of West Africa showing the migratory poles and the transit points



Source: <http://un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/westafrika.pdf>, accessed 06/08/2011

Contextually, the nature of cross-border networking and migration processes within the West African sub-region could be situated across three epochs; that is, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. Meanwhile, a pre-colonial classification of related practices as intra-border or cross-border could be essentially infeasible for obvious situational exigencies. The first of such difficulties is the fact that the region could not be distinctively identified as a group of independent nations as at then (Alkali 1985). Numerous ethnic nationalities existed in kingdoms and empires within the geographical space of contemporary West Africa. Nevertheless, the existence of cross-border interaction was evident in the movement of indigenes who either participated in slave trading and inter-tribal wars or who were all together victims. Equally, trading activities across the Sahara and nomadic herding has caused human mobility and migration across parts of Africa. The dynamics of free movement of persons, inside and outside of empires and kingdoms of West African communities, were facilitated by the lack of such ostensibly defined border lines between and among the hitherto existing human settlements. It is worth noting that, while most of the ethnic groups that left the old Borno Empire now occupy parts of various northern Francophone countries, most of the ethnic groups that left the defunct Oyo Empire, especially the Yoruba, are presently spread across parts of both Francophone and Anglophone countries neighbouring contemporary Nigeria (Akinjogbin 1980; Mahadi 1989). Indeed, the fall of the old Oyo Empire as a result of the nineteenth century invasion of parts of Yorubaland by the Fulani jihadists

had facilitated the dispersions of the Yoruba to other West African states, the establishment of various migrants' settlements and the emergence of booming commercial activities at such locations. This has been enabled by the vastness of the old Oyo Empire (see Figure 2 below), which extended to the west, to areas of Ashanti, Dahomey and as far as present-day Togo (Akinjogbin 1980).

**Figure 2:** Map of Nigeria showing the limits of old Oyo Empire



Source: <http://brown.edu/Faculties/Haffenreffer/yoruba2.html>, accessed on 06/08/2011

Accordingly, the Yoruba have come in contact with individuals from such West African countries as the Republics of Ghana, Benin, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia. While the Ogbomoso-Yoruba are mainly found in parts of present-day Ghana, the Ejigbo-Yoruba are predominant in present-day Cote d'Ivoire, especially in Abidjan (Afolayan 2004; Lawan 2004). At another realm, the capture and trade of slaves in many parts of present-day Nigeria, including the Yoruba areas, which began around 1500, did result in forced displacement of populations. Impliedly, the trans-border migration of the Yoruba including the Ejigbo-Yoruba to locations considered safer for them, especially within the West African sub-region, had been necessitated. Also, *l'océan vers des terres* the search for arms and ammunition for the prosecution of prevalent inter-ethnic wars of the nineteenth century by traders of Yoruba ethnic descent did facilitate imperative contact and eventual settlement of some of them in such neighbouring Anglophone and Francophone countries, conspicuously before the advent of colonial rule (Adeniran 2009:3676-8).

*Des études portant sur la migration interne de la main-d'œuvre ont aussi révélé que,* Although colonial economic policies within the emergent West African nation-states promoted an export-based economy and movement from various hinterlands to the emerging urban settlements, they indirectly discouraged cross-border interactions, especially along the Anglophone/Francophone dichotomy. Such dichotomy was to play a significant role in the formation of national outlooks for such emergent political entities in West Africa, for instance. On the one hand, the French took over some of the political entities, imposing their cultural disposition on the citizens in the disguise of 'assimilation'. On the other hand, although the British presented a rather cooperative mode of relationship with their African colonies in the name of 'association', they tended to affirm a distinct political identity for the colonies through the 'Commonwealth of Nations'. These developments could be readily affirmed to be the conceptual impetus for related, contemporary identity misinterpretation among the people.

Yet, though ironically, such colonial creation could not stop the people from sustaining their pre-colonial socio-economic interactive patterns after colonial rule. Ostensibly, it would have seemed logical for the subjects of two former British colonies to be intermingling, and for the citizens of two former French colonies to be interacting. Rather, the established pre-colonial mode of interaction has outwitted the contemporary nationalistic configuration in such cases. As regards trans-border migration within West Africa, Abba (1993) and Afolayan (1998) affirm that some Nigerian workers who had participated in the construction of the railway network of Nigeria, were subsequently recruited as labourers for the construction of railways in other parts of the West African region. Between 1900 and 1902, an estimate of 7,000 workers left Lagos to work on the Railway project of *Sekondi-Tarkwa* and gold mines of the Gold Coast (Ghana), where wages were comparatively higher than those in Lagos. In Dahomey (Republic of Benin), many Nigerian emigrants began to trade after the railway projects were completed, and many others were to head for Cote d'Ivoire after the World War I. Many emigrants from Nigeria were apparently attracted by the conviction that it was easier to eke out a living across the border, and, over time, the wives and wards joined their husbands (Adegbola 1972), thus oiling the chain of existing cross-border networking across the West African sub-region.

### **Cross-border Interaction and Migration in West Africa**

Over time, related ethnic affiliation of the people has tended to determine the patterns and structure of the migratory network obtainable within the West African sub-region. That is, individuals' subsisting interpersonal social ties do serve as measurements of prevalent social capital amidst them. The ensuing interaction, and subsequent movement have been taking a direct negotiating path since all obtainable social capital at the level of familial and communal interactions are usually pleaded within the network functioning. According to an Ejigbo-Yoruba migrant in Abidjan:

.....in our family, the first person that came to Cote d'Ivoire was my paternal uncle...who invited his younger brother...that later brought me upon attainment of 'freedom' (IDI, Male, Vulcanizer, 40 years, Abidjan, 19 June 2010).



Alternatively, when a 'would be' migrant decides to network himself or herself without utilizing such available familial and communal affiliations, then the entailed process becomes an 'indirect one'. Varying networks of unfamiliar individuals ('crossers') would become essential at various border posts, and along the migratory route until such migrants get to the point of destination where the ethnic network could then be useful. Generally, the need for more reliable helping hands in Cote d'Ivoire as a result of business expansion, has been encouraging the recruitment of wards of immediate family members from the home front in comparison with other sources. An Ejigbo-Yoruba female business owner in Abidjan surmises:

.....this explains why the continued growth of the network pattern has been predicated largely upon familial attachment (FGD, Female, 40 years+, Abidjan, 26 June 2010; Observations, Abidjan, 22–30 June 2010).

It is, however, common knowledge within the migrants' network that it is much more profitable and prestigious to facilitate the relocation of relatives from home (that is, Nigeria), who will work for them than taking up Ivorian or foreign workers. One, aside from the transport fare from Ejigbo (Nigeria) to Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), no remuneration is usually attached for work done after arrival. Two, for facilitating such trips for relatives, an immeasurable degree of honour and regards is routinely adduced by family members to the migrants who provided the platform for others to utilize. Three, the social base of affected facilitators is usually enhanced within the Ivorian social space, since 'number' is paramount in the interaction of various migrants' communities with the host society (the state in particular), especially when it comes to politicking. A female case profile states:

....I have lost count of those who have made it to Abidjan through me....it is also to my advantage to bring them.... (Case Profile 1, Female, Shop Owner, 52 years, Adjame-Abidjan, 20 June 2010).

With the number of apprentices in her shops, ostensibly recruited from 'home', there is no doubt the fact that it is to her 'advantage' to bring them (the migrants). Meanwhile, it is obvious that established network members as the 'case study' above have not been the sole beneficiaries of the network process; also, the 'recruited apprentices' and the family members left behind in Ejigbo, Nigeria do benefit from the entire process. While the apprentices are assisted to set up their own businesses when the time to obtain 'freedom' matures, intermittently, goods and funds are sent to relatives left behind courtesy of the service being rendered by the apprentices. The texts of the following IDIs seem to be in appropriate consonance:

.....my sister paid for my trip to Abidjan....I lived with her and served in her shop before she helped me to set up my own shop (IDI, Female, Provision Seller, 33 years, Adjame-Abidjan, 27 June 2010)

....from what I have been telling you....you would see that there is no way I could have made it here without my relations, especially my uncle who actually paid for my transport fare from home (Ejigbo, Nigeria) (IDI, Male, Nursery Teacher, 34 years, Semisel-Abidjan, 28 June 2010).

Generally, the process of the ‘apprentices’ obtaining ‘freedom’ from their ‘masters’ and ‘mistresses’ entail rendering of unspecified and unremunerated services within a given period of time. Thereafter, such ‘apprentices’ are provided with funds, equipment and shops to begin their own life. At this point such ‘apprentices’ are relieved of all forms of control and supervision from their ‘masters’ and ‘mistresses’ (Observations, Abidjan, 20 June 2010).

Nevertheless, it has been very glaring that prevalent interpersonal ties, and sometimes, communal ties, have been the precursors of prevalent familial patterns of the migration network of the Ejigbo-Yoruba along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor over the years.

### **Interposition of Nigerian and Ivorian Identity Within the Transnational Social Space**

Ostensibly, the socio-economic environment in Cote d’Ivoire has made it expedient for the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants to identify with the Ivorian community. One of the most visible ways, however, is through language and dressing; though oftentimes for merely business and survival sake:

....environment matters....because among those who made Cote d’Ivoire great we have Nigerians; also among those who made it bad, we have Nigerians..... in the market I speak French and dress like the Ivorian; amidst Nigerians, I behave normally... (IDI, Female, 35 years, Trader, Semisel-Abidjan, 22 June 2010).

The ‘environment’ from the above submission is indicative of the deterministic tendency of the social space in the process of identity projection. On the other hand, the ‘normal behaviour’ points to the engagement of disposition that is basically Nigerian within household interactions, and amidst fellow migrants, unlike interactions within larger Ivorian social space. Essentially, the migrants’ network, which has the ‘Oba’ as its central symbol, usually plays a prominent role in fashioning out a tenable identity (identities) for individual Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants within the Ivorian social space. Such identity construction was routinely carried out with the economic goals of the affected migrants kept in focus. Preceding potent integration into the Ivorian society, the need for language re-orientation is crucial as noted earlier. Of all the languages, the colloquial Abidjan French is mandatory. Respective migrants’ relatives, tribal friends and neighbours often perform a significant role in this respect. As soon as one is able to speak an indigenous language, the Ivorian permanent residence permit (*card identite*) is normally processed through the ‘Oba’. The ‘Oba’ performs an intermediary role between the government and his subjects. He is deemed to be the custodian of the migrants who fall within his jurisdiction; the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants in this case. Interestingly, this is the pattern routinely employed by the Ivorian authorities in relating to other migrant network groups from other West African countries.

The ‘*card identite*’ is compulsory for all foreigners; without it you cannot get anything in Cote d’Ivoire. In hospitals, schools and during election you will need the ‘*card identite*’ (FGD, Female, 40+, Abidjan, June 26, 2010; Observations, Abidjan, 28 June 2010).



Perhaps, the acquisition of the '*card identite*', which is basically the creation of the state, has been factored by the peculiarities of the Ivorian 'social space' as a 'country of migrants'. As such, it has been made a potent denominator for realizing individual and collective transnational intents (and interests) within the Ivorian 'social space'.

### **Identity Dualism as Impetus for Regional Integration and Development in West Africa**

The process of simultaneous identification with two societies, as being played out by the Ejigbo-Yoruba in the course of their transnational engagements along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor, seems to be presenting a positive framework for realizing the much desired integration and, of course, development within the West Africa sub-region. For instance, among the relatively older, returnee-indigenes of Ejigbo community in Nigeria (that is, 70 years and above), their retirement or relocation from Cote d'Ivoire has not stopped them from going back to the country intermittently by road despite the tedium and risk of the trip, especially for the elderly. Why? One, their existence is still largely tied to Cote d'Ivoire. They do go there to collect rents on their houses, shops and other business ventures (often managed by their Ivorian spouses or children or relatives who they took there *ab initio*). Some even go there to collect their retirement benefits and/or pensions from the Ivorian government (Observations, Ejigbo, Nigeria, 18 June 2010; Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 21 June–2 July 2010).

Two, to visit their Ivorian friends whom they must have met in the course of their sojourn in Cote d'Ivoire, especially those who, one way or the other, facilitated the path of their existence while there; for instance, in the process of acquiring Ivorian residence permit, right of stay or citizenship, getting jobs and/or contracts, securing lands and/or property, marrying indigenes and, of course, in acquiring local spiritual power (Observations, Ejigbo, 18 June 2010; Abidjan, 21 June - 2 July 2010).

.....I am on my way to collect rent on my house and shops in Abobo-Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) so that I could complete my house at Ejigbo (Nigeria)....I also want to do my annual pension verification....to visit my family and my old friend at Bouake to renew my 'gbetugbetu' (traditional spiritual power) which he gave me while we were working together in Abidjan (IDI, Male, Retiree, 86 years, 18 Ejigbo, June 2010).

Inferring from the text of the IDI above, it is conspicuous that the respondent, as applicable to others, still has arrays of reasons for sustaining his contact with the Ivorian society; from economic consideration to family consideration and, interestingly, 'spiritual' consideration. A conspicuous end product of all these interactions is the enhancement of possibility of integration across the ECOWAS region, though in a rather inverse pattern.

The nature of Ejigbo-Yoruba interactions with the Ivorian has prominently made both Ejigbo and Abidjan communities to become somewhat interdependent over the years. At the level of transactions, the '*Franc CFA*' has been a popular 'legal tender' in Ejigbo, and of course, exchanged with the '*Nigerian Naira*' in most households

in the town. Reciprocally, this is the situation with the '*Nigerian Naira*' against the '*Franc CFA*' in most Nigerian households in Abidjan, often populated by the Ejjigbo-Yoruba. Essentially, as many Ivorian commodities are sold in Ejjigbo, so also identifiable local Nigerian commodities/items are retailed in Abidjan. Though, as a group in Abidjan, they tend to replicate most of the things done back home, there still exists a remarkable departure from the ideal. The Ivorian society has actually impacted on them. Therefore, a new outlook, definitely not wholly Ivorian or wholly Nigerian (possibly, ECOWAS) has emerged among them. The speaking pattern of the people has been largely distorted; whenever they speak Yoruba, colloquial Abidjan French usually reflects and vice versa (Observations, Ejjigbo, 18 June 2010; Abidjan, 21 June –7 July 2010).

### Conclusions

#### ***i) Enhanced integrative capability within the host society***

The process of integrating migrants into the socio-economic workings of the 'host society' is usually better facilitated when the migrants' network is actively functioning at the centre of all migratory processes within the 'transnational social field' framework. That is, from the point of initiating the journey to the point of terminating the journey and, indeed, in the process of situating the migrants within the socio-economic specificities of the 'host' society, adequate involvement of the migrants' network has often tended to engender a functional integration process.

#### ***ii) Improved socio-economic and political participation within the host society***

A productive integration of the migrants into the 'host' society will be a potent platform for enabling active functioning of the migrants within the socio-economic and political space of the 'host' society. For instance, social acceptability would always be a major avenue for facilitating economic participation; so also, a combination of both social acceptability and economic empowerment would encourage active political participation. Ostensibly, active political participation will be a veritable platform for engendering durable socio-economic integration of the migrants' community within the 'host' society.

#### ***iii) Prevalence of cross-cultural marriages between the migrants and their host***

Between the migrants' community and the 'host' community, the prevalence of inter-marriage has tended to bolster the migratory trend and the process of integrating migrants within the 'host' society. Such marital relationship will routinely present the migrants (and the migrants' community) with the much desired sense of 'belonging' in dealing with everyday challenges. Aside from providing the migrants with imperative leverage to subsist within the host social space, such sense of 'belonging' portrays a formidable platform to realizing the regional integrative intent of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

***iv) Sustenance of pre-migratory interactive patterns with the home front***

The 'transnational social space' presents individual migrants with the opportunity of sustaining the pre-migratory interactive patterns. Through the network functioning, ably depicted by the network association and cross-border transporters, migrants are able to interact with the 'home front'; for instance, in sending goods and funds for projects at 'home', and in receiving information and prospective migrants from 'home'. Indeed, the migrants function as if they are within the same social space as their 'country of origin' since the channel of communication has not been severed in any significant manner. To a considerable extent, this development has been quite functional to the realization of most migrants' intent of convenient re-integration into the home country after their sojourn.

***v) Sustainable network members' contributions to socio-economic growth of both 'host' and 'home' societies***

The patterns of interaction and interposition between the point of initiating migration and the process of integrating migrants within the 'host society' have given sufficient space for productive development outcomes. Between the two migratory poles, that is, the point of embarkation and the point of disembarkation, the migrants contribute to the process of socio-economic integration and development. In virtually all sectors of the host country, they are active; businesses are nurtured, taxes are paid, houses are built and the progress of the society is basically seen as being paramount to the realization of their transnational aspirations. Hence, they are usually willing to contribute all that is feasible to a smooth operation of the adopted social space. On the other hand, they are involved in various personal and communal projects back home. They build houses, and equally put business ventures in place from time to time. They usually embark on such projects in anticipation of the day they would have to stop functioning within the 'transnational social space' and return home.

***iv) Facilitation of the larger regional integration and development agenda***

The pattern of interaction, especially as it pertains to the process of identity positioning within the 'host society' has been of a significant impetus to the ongoing intent of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to transform the regional body to an 'ECOWAS of People', in which all pertinent impediments towards regional integration will become obliterated. Such hindrances have included the language barrier, which the process of integration of migrants within the 'host society' has adequately taken care of. Of course, there cannot be proper integration without overcoming extant challenge of language diversity, first and foremost. Meanwhile, the integrative process of adequate positioning within the 'host society' has not been detrimental to the existing pre-migratory attachment of the migrants to their country of origin. As they are subsisting within the 'new environment', so also they are in intermittent touch with their kinsmen left behind in their 'home country'. When such micro trans-border interactive pattern is made sustainable, conveniently the

process of socio-economic integration, and indeed, development at the larger regional level would become progressively oiled.

### Recommendations

Inferring from the findings emanating from the entire study, it has been ostensible that from the point of initiating the journey to the point of arriving at the destination; till the last day of departure, the migrants' network has always been there for the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants in Cote d'Ivoire. Therefore, in the process of identity construction within the Ivorian social space, individual migrants from Ejigbo, Nigeria, routinely carry the network group along. The individual's identity (identities) is oftentimes the network identity (identities); such identities so emanating are primarily geared towards the realization of related transnational goals of network members.

On the basis of the study's findings, the following recommendations have been deemed expedient for policy planners, network members and groups, and for the purpose of further research in related areas of research sojourn:

- i) The functionality of 'transnational subsistence dualism', as practised by the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor, should be utilized as a veritable platform for fast-tracking the process of regional integration and development within the West African sub-region. Such extent of utilization has become more expedient in view of the ongoing intent of the ECOWAS authorities to transmute the regional body from 'an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People', in which the obstacles on the path of regional integration would be obliterated.
- ii) Greater attention should be given to contextualizing the preference of the Ejigbo-Yoruba for migrating to Cote d'Ivoire despite prevalent colonial and contemporary impediments like language and related cultural specificities. Between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, there exists Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana, and still the Ejigbo-Yoruba have enjoyed migrating to Cote d'Ivoire. Equally, the *lingua franca* in Cote d'Ivoire (that is, French) is not the same as that of Nigeria, which is English. Even none of the indigenous languages on either side is similar. Yet, the migration system on the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor has been bolstering. With further interest in this subject-matter, perhaps such unusual pattern of migratory practice could be utilized in explaining the process of regional integration as desired by the ECOWAS region.
- iii) Essentially, the subsisting network group and the Oba's institution should be strengthened further in order to facilitate the course of the people's transnational engagements better. Over the years, this network group that has the institution of the 'Oba' as its central symbol has been quite functional in the growth, development and sustenance of the familial/kinship pattern, which has been driving the functioning of the network system since inception. Through the network platform, development ideas on both sides of the divide have often come to reality, especially those that are communal-based.

Also, in the process of carrying the migrants' community along, the Ivorian authorities have always found the network group, ably represented by the institution of the Oba, as a useful platform; more particularly in attaining social control amongst network migrants.

- iv) The network identity should continue to take pre-eminence over individuals' identity within the transnational framework so as to make the process of integration sustainable, and of course, competition from other migrants' communities surmountable within the host society. The network identity, which seeks to integrate network migrants into the socio-economic workings of the host community and, at the same time, facilitating the sustenance of the pre-migratory relations with the home front, seems to have been functional, and indeed, productive over the years. The network identity has been tested; it has been sustainable over time and space. More significantly, the much desired leverage over other migrants' groups, especially those from other countries in West Africa is better attainable within the network framework. For instance, in the process of seeking economic space within the host society, such as shops, jobs, loans, contracts *et cetera*; the network group usually deploys the prevalent social capital amidst them such as interpersonal ties in the process. The result has, oftentimes, been more fruitful for individual network members in particular and the network group as a whole.
- v) Communal and regional integration, and indeed, development should be fostered through the Ejigbo-Yoruba migratory experience along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor. Within the framework of ongoing interaction between the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants and the Ivorian society, both communal and regional integration and development could be attained. While communal development is noted to be taking place across the border already, the much needed regional integration could be facilitated if all subsisting impediments, as border posts and national policies that are often conflicting to the regional integrative interests, are considerably exorcised. As such, development of the region could be facilitated. This is deemed more necessary at this point, considering the subsisting transformational preference of the ECOWAS for an 'ECOWAS of People', in which 'free movement of people, goods and rights of establishment' will be prominently enabled instead of the usual 'ECOWAS of States', in which regional integration and development has been largely elusive.

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