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Cross-border Networking and Identity Integration among Ejigbo-Yoruba in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

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Abstract

While it could seem logical for subjects of identifiable British and French West African states to intermingle freely, at least, on the bases of their respective; shared colonial experiences, the established pre-colonial mode of interaction has ostensibly outwitted such contemporary cleavages in most instances. This study essentially examines the effects of prevalent cross-border networking practices on *Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants* in Cote d'Ivoire; in measures of identity integration. The specific relevance of trans-border ethnic network in constructing a tenable identity for *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants within Ivorian social space is explored. The study's specificities are situated within the confines of 'social network' and 'social action' postulates, while the research design routinely engaged the exploratory tradition. In all, the study surmises that identity positioning amongst *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants in Cote d'Ivoire is usually a product of ongoing interaction between 'social space' and 'extant interest', especially within the 'host society'.

Introduction

   While various factors have often been affirmed as precursors to extant migratory processes that extend beyond the immediate national delineate, one common denominator for its prevalence, over time, is that it does serve as a risk-averting strategy for individuals and households. Within the West African sub-region, however, are numerous communities of traders and occupational groups of the same and varying ethnic and cultural origin. Among such groups are the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* traders, who for instance, have had a long-distance experience of business relations with the Ivorian. Trans-border movements, for purposes of work and trade have become the most common trend of mobility and migration, especially since the colonial and immediate post-colonial era in parts of West Africa. Such have not been essentially male-dominated as migrations used to be, especially during pre-colonial period; often factored by inter-ethnic strife and wars. The colonial and post-colonial movements of labour within the West African sub-region have equally put on the move a considerable proportion of women who are seeking for opportunities to enhance their well being. Their migratory experiences essentially reflect the newly discovered 'freedom of movement', hitherto improbable within the pre-colonial configuration. Meanwhile, it could have also been as a consequence of coercion (that is, involuntary relocation). For decades, the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants in Cote d'Ivoire have utilized their vantage position in the retail and wholesale trade to provide identifiable multinational firms like the 'Lever Brothers of Nigeria' access to the sub-regional market. As noted by Asiwaju (1992), such migrants' networks in West Africa have contributed in no little measure to the dynamism of a series of market centres, 'which normally attract business transactions from remarkably extensive areas without much regard for international boundaries'.

   Of course, related long-established pre-colonial mode of interaction has outwitted contemporary national demarcation in such cases. For instance, the situation with the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* indigenes from British Nigeria who find it easier to trade and settle in a French colonial state like Cote d'Ivoire overlooking related colonial impeding tendencies is a good case at hand. Meanwhile, available evidence from cogent investigations of cross-border economic activities in Africa, such as between Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso; Mali and Senegal in West Africa, and between South Africa and Lesotho in Southern Africa, points to an increase in the actual quantity of cross-border flows, as well as, a deepening of the penetration of cross-border activities into

the heart of relevant national territories. This shows that socio-economic integrations of respective indigenous populations are executed with little or no regards for the prevalent institutional impediments, such as, the borders (ECOWAS, 2000).

In this text, I focus on the discussion of related; contextual peculiarities that are responsible for sustainable integration of the *Ejigbo-Yoruba (Nigerians)* into the Ivorian social space, in spite of obtainable cultural, geographical, colonial and contemporary impediments. Equally, the nature of utility to which the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* routinely put their social networks into in the process of attaining their subsisting transnational goals is presented in the study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to establish a relationship between cross-border networking process and the pattern of identity integration amongst *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. Other objectives include:

   i.   Understanding the network trend facilitating trans-border migration among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba*;

   ii. Investigating if the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Cote d'Ivoire are still able to sustain their Nigerian identity within such adopted social space;

Patterns of Trans-border Interactions in Colonial and Post-colonial West Africa

The advent of European colonialism in parts of West Africa at the tail end of 19th century undoubtedly presented a new interpretation to the phenomenon of trans-border migration and trade within the region (Adeniran 2009). The policies and workings of the colonial administration did result among others in the geographical and political demarcation of borders, and the monetization of the economy of various societies in modern day West Africa. The political economy of the colonial administration did present a framework for large-scale internal migration, which was necessitated by the extant requirement of labour force for work in plantations and public administration. As noted by Mabogunje (1972) in *Migration System Theory*, individuals tend to move from the hinterlands to the urban environment where economic opportunities are deemed accessible. Routinely, space and time are factored into such intent. Indeed, this view has been supported by the dictates of the *World System Theory* where the context of the world market has been altered basically as a result of the emergence of capital in the process of transaction. Hence, in West Africa, the trend of migration has mostly been from

the hinterlands to the urban centres. It is, however, worthy of noting that such affirmation as short distance being an attraction for prospective migrants might not really been generally tenable, as Ravenstein (1885) had espoused in *On the Laws of Migration*. At least, within the context of the ongoing investigation, individuals of *Ejigbo-Yoruba* extract have been migrating to such distant destination as Cote d'Ivoire in a sustainable pattern over time and space.

Although, colonial economic policies within the emergent West African nation-states promoted an export-based economy and rural-urban migration, they indirectly discouraged cross-borders' interactions, especially along the Anglophone/Francophone dichotomy (Asiwaju, 1992). Yet, ironically, such colonial creation could not stop the people from sustaining their pre-colonial socio-economic interaction post-colonial rule. Indeed, it would have seemed reasonable for the subjects of a British West African country to be intermingling with the people from another British West African state and for the citizens of a French West African state to be interacting with those from another French state, the established pre-colonial mode of interaction has ostensibly outwitted the contemporary national demarcation in such cases. Many emigrants from Nigeria were apparently attracted by the conviction that it was easier to fortune 'abroad', 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 region.

Despite exigent set back in notable migratory practices among the people of West Africa, one age long, astonishing development is the fact that boundaries between the peoples of the same or different cultures (ethnic groups) in different countries were generally perceived by these same people as being an artificial creation. Thus, different migrants who came from either side of the border or from areas on both sides of the border or across borders routinely adjudge such movement as one taking place within similar socio-economic space rather than between two different countries (Okobiah 1989). Meanwhile the absence of contiguity of former British colonies had resulted in a variety of destinations for migrants from Nigeria, such as the Abidjan destination for the *Ejigbo-Yoruba*, who eventually metamorphosed from short term; cross-border trading to long term stay to improve, among other things, their life style.

Mode of 'Self' Construction among Ejigbo-Yoruba Migrants in Cote d'Ivoire

The focus in this sub-segment is to explain probable interpositions derivable from the process of identities' interaction, and how such impact on the specific migratory intents of individuals, and sometimes, the group. This has become essentially significant for two reasons. One, in view

of uncommon ancestral; colonial and contemporary backgrounds of the meeting cultures; and two, since the potency of related identity 'manipulation' routinely factors the extent to which subsisting transnational goals would transform to realities. Hence, issues and developments in this respect have been analyzed under the following headings: social space and extant interest, interposition of personal and network identities, identity dualism in the interactive process, cross-cultural marriages in the process of identity integration, and belief in and reality of Yoruba adage: *ile labo isimi oko*[1].

Social Space and Extant Interest of Network Members

Notable complexities subsist in the manner by which the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants tend to present themselves within the transnational social space. Nevertheless, two issues have remained paramount in understanding what identity actually entails and how it is projected in related interactive processes. One, that the ethnic network/association (mostly denominated by the institution of Oba[2]) often plays a significant role in fashioning out situationally tenable interactive patterns, which often time facilitate what the migrants' identity(s) would look like within the adopted social space. Two, that the social space (often denominated by the subsisting interest) within which specific interactions takes place is equally a crucial determinant of individuals' tenable identity(s) within a given situation or period; hence, a combinatory of the network's structure and the subsisting interactive space does factors the identity which individual actors would lay claim to under certain circumstances:

> *....like me no one knows that I am a Yoruba man except I reveal it....I have obtained the residence permit because of business....I visit Nigeria monthly (IDI, Male, Trader, 40 years +, Abidjan, 19/06/10).*

The interactive patterns observed at the 'Adjame-Abidjan' Main Market and at the Treichville-Abidjan Port Market of individuals of *Ejigbo* descent, whom the researcher have had the opportunity of interacting with at their private homes earlier, laid credence to the fact that the social space and the interest at stake determine the mode of identity projections within the Ivorian society. Unlike the Yoruba language I have seen them engaging at home, they spoke French, *Bete* and *Baure* amongst other indigenous Ivorian language with unimaginable mastery. Their carriage, gesticulations and composures were just like the "hosts" *(Observations, Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10)*. Ostensibly, the socio-economic environment in Abidjan has made it expedient

1. 'home' is the place of rest after sojourn
2. Yoruba name for King

for the people to identify with the host community as such. One of the most visible ways of expressing this, however, is through language and dressing; though often time for just 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, 22/06/10)*

'Environment' from the above is indicative of the deterministic tendency of the social space in the process of identity projection amidst the hosts. On the other, the 'normal behavior' points to the engagement of disposition that is basically Nigerian within household interactions, and amidst fellow Nigerian 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 process 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. Of all the languages, the colloquial Abidjan French is mandatory. Respective migrants' relatives, tribal friends and neighbors often perform a significant role in this respect. As soon as one could speak a native language, residence permit is normally processed through the Oba. The '*card identete*' (permanent residence permit) is compulsory for all foreigners; without it you cannot get anything in Cote d'Ivoire *(FGD, Female, 40+, Abidjan, 26/06/10; Observations, Abidjan, 28/06/10).*

Interposition of Personal and Network Identities

Usually, within the Ivorian social space, it is utterly improbable for individual migrants to sustain the 'image' he/she brought in from 'home' for a number of reasons. Prominent among such is the need to integrate into the socio-economic functioning of the new environment in order to 'survive'. Also, the need to stay abreast of ostensible competition from other migrants' communities, especially from fellow West African countries has made cleavage towards the 'network identity' imperative for the Ejigbo-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire:

> *....it is to one's advantage to take directives from the elders....and we do as they direct (IDI, Female, Trader, 47 years, Adjame-Abidjan, 24/06/10).*

Taking "directives" from the elders (that is, the network operators) is in outright consonance with putting on the network disposition (that is, the group's identity) in the interactive process within the "host" society. In such situation, personal traits, which could tend to project individuality, are dropped or better still "reserved" for subsequent interactions with the "home" front. Routinely, network identity takes pre-eminence over individual identity, since such network's outlook had been tested and stood the test of time, especially within the "host" society:

> *....the case with the Ivorian is different; they dislike immigrants who still identify with their home country. In fact, they will make sure they destroy them at all cost if you do not behave as if you are one of them....what we have been taught is pretence....it has worked for our fore-bearers....it is still working for us.... (IDI, Female, Retailer, 56 years, Adjame-Abidjan, 26/06/10).*

The "pretence" being referred above by the female IDI respondent actually underlies the philosophy of "cooperation" with both the adopted social space and the home front; which is basically the subsisting framework for functioning within the "transnational social space". "Pretence" here is rather constructive and not any way detrimental to the interest(s) of either the "home" or the "host" societies. Such "cooperation" entails identification with the home front and, when necessary, identification with the host society. The application of a specific identity at any point in time was seen to be situationally dependent on the interest (s) at stake:

> *.....amidst them we speak their language.....among us, we speak our language (IDI, Male, Trader, 38 years, Abidjan, 28/06/10).*

Inferably, speaking "their" language and "our" language is vividly tantamount to furtherance of the prevalent culture of "pretence" amongst the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants within the Ivorian social space. Meanwhile, it has to be emphasized that it is a common practice to see the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants speaking Ivorian languages in town, but amidst themselves they speak just their original Yoruba language.

Identity Dualism in the Interactive Process

Generally, the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants in Cote d'Ivoire do keep alive two distinct identities, that is, a "Nigerian identity" and an "Ivorian identity". While the Nigerian identity depicts traits

and attributes that are basically Nigerian (that is, of *Ejigbo-Yoruba*), the Ivorian identity entails traits and peculiarities that are essentially of Ivorian (that is, of cosmopolitan Abidjan, for instance, the colloquial Abidjan French). Such identity cleavage has, however, undoubtedly emanated from the larger network functioning. Situations and interests facilitate the modes of related identity deployment. While the need for productive socio-economic integration into the host society has been the impetus for related identification with the Ivorian culture, the need for an un-hindered re-integration into the Nigerian society after their stay has been the underlying factor for their continued attachment to their Nigerian peculiarities. The following IDI submission has been appropriate in driving home this affirmation:

> *.....during selling and other business transactions, I do as if I am part of Abidjan….among ourselves and whenever I go to Nigeria I relate like a typical Nigerian (IDI, Female, Trader, 52 years, Abidjan, 21/06/10).*

Though, most of the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Cote d'Ivoire believe in Nigeria, they seemed to have been 'conscripted' to live and identify with specificities that are of Ivorian society for socio-economic survival more than any other thing. One could see that hardly would you find a matured *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Cote d'Ivoire without a building or a business project going back in Nigeria. In fact, participation in such projects is seen as the evidence that one has not been 'lost' completely to the Ivorian society, and indeed, it serves as means of re-oiling the wheel of pre-migratory social relations with people back home since they are, first and foremost, the immediate beneficiaries of these projects.

Besides, I view that most of them would have ordinarily preferred to exist in Nigeria if relevant opportunities had been available. In spite of their ability to attain considerable measure of their transnational goals, most of the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Abidjan, still felt attached to Nigeria. This stand-point has been buttressed further by the submission of this FGD participant in Abidjan:

> *.....I love Nigeria, but what would I be eating….see what God has given me in Abidjan….I have learnt to be like the people (FGD, Male, Entrepreneur, 56 years, Treichville-Abidjan).*

All I could see around this migrant entrepreneur were riches and accomplishment. Though, this male FGD participant is not educated, he functions as a 'big time' contractor to the Ivorian

national government; a feat that would have been rarely feasible in Nigeria considering his humble family and educational background.

Meanwhile, it is a common belief among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Cote d'Ivoire that, either while they are alive or after they are dead, they would need to return to Nigeria. As such, they have every reason to continue to be at peace with the people back home while away. Here, the usefulness of the "transnational social field" theory seems prominent. It affirms that migrants and relatives left behind would continue to interact across the borders for the progress of all involved. While a progressive sustenance of the chain of social relations with relatives left behind was a sure guarantee of a peaceful return, the people at home gain both material and financial connections from the migrants. In fact, the people left behind usually enter the transnational network system courtesy of already established migrant relatives. Those who severed such interactive chain could be said to be those who often mix completely with the Ivorian society and never dreamt of returning home one day. The text of the following FGD submission presents a concise understanding of this interactive pattern:

> *.....if one is not a bastard, there is no way you would forget home....though it happens sometimes, but very rare among us (FGD, Female, Shop Owner, 62 years, Adjame-Abidjan, 24/06/10).*

Various observations made at a burial party for the father of a male *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrant (who had been buried in Nigeria) in Macory-Abidjan did reveal that ceremonies among the people here do take after the usual styles and procedures back home. When I inquired of the reason for this, I was informed that they did not want to forget home. In fact, the arrangement of the street (not the party) was as if it was in Nigeria. The *Ejigbo-Yoruba* and other Yoruba on the street clearly outnumbered the Ivorian. A whispering from an 'unsolicited' informant was to confirm this observation. According to him, the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* (and other Nigerians) are like the indigenes here, while the natives are like tenants and visitors. Of course, I did observe this; the migrants are like the "indigenes", while the real "indigenes" (including *Bete* and *Baure* Ivorian tribes) were the on lookers *(Observations/Interactions, Macory-Abidjan, 22/06/10).*

I was to overhear a middle age woman cracking a joke at the occasion, which I could not grab the detail of *ab initio*. The focus of interaction was a middle age man with *Ejigbo-Yoruba* tribal marks on his cheeks:

.....leave my brother alone; unfortunately for him he has his 'identity' on his cheeks" (that is, the tribal marks on his cheeks).

Literally, the submission above laid credence to prevalent 'identity dualism' that most of the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* tend to imbibe in the transnational process. The middle age woman was jokingly affirming the 'Nigerian' in his 'brother' as indicated by the tribal marks on his face, though he was flagrantly tending to claim to be 'more Ivorian than the indigenes' while interacting within the public space *(Observations/Interactions, Macory-Abidjan, 22/06/10).*

In most instances, integrative and economic concerns have been the precursors of such intention and practice among the people over time. Indeed, I came across few adults of *Ejigbo-Yoruba* extract whom I greeted in 'Yoruba' but never answered me, not because they did not understand. They were being conscious of 'social space' (that is, public space). Such individuals in these shoes must have decided to take this seemingly 'dualist' decision so as to gain social acceptance and by implications, economic integration within the host society. Hence, a situational dissociation from their Nigerian roots has become imperative. Interestingly, they are said to be keeping secret; routine contacts with the home front; even, at the level of marital relationships *(FGD, Female, 40 years+, Abidjan, 26/06/10).*

Cross-cultural Marriage in the Process of Identity Integration

Over the years, incidence of cross-cultural marriages has been a recurring decimal between the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants in Cote d'Ivoire and their indigenous Ivorian hosts. While various motives often underlie such intent, what has been conspicuous is the fact that such marital relationship often provides the migrants with the much needed leverage in the process of entrenching themselves into the socio-economic peculiarities of the host society:

> *.....intermarriage is now common between the indigenes and us, but….has negative influence on our claim as Ejigbo-Yoruba, especially concerning the Ejigbo ladies and women that marry Ivorian men….(IDI, Male, Tyre Retailer, 40 years, Macory-Abidjan, 19/06/10).*

It is usually considered a 'detestable' act for any female member of the migrants' network to marry an Ivorian man. With the Ivorian men, their culture does not permit anything in the realm of partial integration when it comes to such issue. Migrant women that engaged in such affairs

are rarely allowed to even visit their Nigerian relatives, not to talk of visiting Nigeria from time to time *(Observations, Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10).*

> *.....we do intermarry....especially among our women that were born here...by this development such women are considered indigenes of this place (Cote d'Ivoire). For such people, Cote d'Ivoire is their home....(FGD, Female, 40 years+, Abidjan, 26/06/10).*

'Lost' is the description of females of *Ejigbo-Yoruba* descent that marry Ivorian nationals. This is usually viewed as being detrimental to the course of the migrants' network functioning amidst the network participants since 'loyalty' is normally shifted to their Ivorian spouses. On the other hand, however, the men folk are often encouraged to marry Ivorian women. Unlike the case with the womenfolk, it is considered as a plus for such *Ejigbo-Yoruba* men in particular, and to the larger network interest in general. If an *Ejigbo-Yoruba* man marries an Ivorian woman, his usual Nigerian 'belongingness' would still remain intact; but if it is the other way round such migrant woman's 'belongingness' is routinely deemed to have been lost to the Ivorian society forever.

> *....unlike the case with our women who are not even allowed to be taken home for burial upon demise if married to Ivorian, Ivorian women are allowed to return to Nigeria with their Ejigbo husbands dead or alive. Intermarriage here is good for only our men....(IDI, Trader, 55 years, Abobo-Abidjan, 26/06/10).*

On a general note however, intermarriages between the Ejigbo-Yoruba and their Ivorian hosts, regardless of 'who contributes' the husband or the wife, do benefit both sides. Such relationships often assist the migrants in the process of integrating into the host society easily. It is usually with relative comfort by which the migrants who are married to indigenes secure 'residence permit' or 'citizenship card'; government jobs or contracts, lands, loans from government and banks, and business ventures and premises. On the other hand, indigenes who are married to the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* are often time linked up with the Nigerian market and, of course, they do enjoy replicating some of Nigerian ways of life *(Observations, Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10).*

Belief in and Reality of Yoruba Adage "*Ile labo Isimi Oko*" ('Home is the Place of Rest')

From cogent interactions, observations and scrutiny, it has been ostensible that common Yoruba belief, such as 'communal living' and 'monarchical leadership' pattern has been prevalent among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Abidjan, though notable disagreements among their

leaders have tended to batter such over the years. For quite some time, the Oba-Yoruba's palace in Abobo-Abidjan (where I resided during the research) was observed to have been serving as a centre of cross-border networking (transit) for the people and, of course, as a centre-piece of related identity projection within the Ivorian social space. This has been encouraging the sustenance of contacts with respective relatives back home since the migrants daily live the 'reality' of an eventual return homeward:

> *.....take money and business opportunities away, honestly I have no business here....home is the place of rest after sojourn (FGD, Male, Businessman, 48 years, Abidjan, 28/06/10);*

> *.....how can I die outside Ejigbo....as you can see there is food here; there is constant light here, yet these cannot change my identity and original belongingness (FGD, Female, Trader, 35 years, Abidjan, 25/06/10).*

While most of the research subjects in both study locations routinely believe in this Yoruba adage: "*ile labo isimi oko*" (that is, home is the final place to relax/die after sojourn), they rarely make it a reality, though few do. Those who are in Abidjan hardly prepare to come home even in old age, and most of those who have relocated still have one reason or the other for going to Abidjan intermittently, such as collection of rents on properties and/or collection of monthly pension from the government. They usually wish they die at home or their bodies brought home in case of death in Abidjan, yet they often end up being buried in Abidjan due to their refusal to relocate in good time. Economic consideration was observed as the impetus for their inability to relocate at the appropriate time and also as an impediment to return home in case of demise *(Observations, Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10)*:

> *.....see what it would cost the living to come home or to go there, now imagine a dead person (FGD, Male, Retiree, 75 years, Ejigbo, 27/08/10).*

Of another specific relevance in explaining the people seeming belief in the Yoruba adage: "*ile labo isimi oko*" is the fact that most of them do come 'home' intermittently to monitor some of their personal projects. My key informant in Ejigbo and I came across a middle age (or fairly old) Ejigbo indigene from Abidjan. He came home to put finishing touches to his new building, ostensibly financed with proceeds from Abidjan. Notably, most of such houses and projects do serve the purposes of relatives back at home since the 'real' migrant financiers rarely have the time to relocate from Cote d'Ivoire and utilize such; usually, throughout their life time! Here, the

submission of "transnational social field" seems to be in tandem. Such projects merely strengthens the pre-migratory relations between the migrants and their relatives left behind *(Observation/ Interaction, Ejigbo, 13/07/10).*

Aside from this man, most of the houses (old and new) in this area of Ejigbo were constructed by Cote d'Ivoire-based *Ejigbo-Yoruba* (current, retired or dead). Most of the houses observed in *Ika-Ejigbo*, as small as the community is, have one or more intending or visiting individuals from Abidjan (and other parts of Cote d'Ivoire). Obviously, all seem to be savouring, living or anchoring their existence on their Ivorian experiences in this part of the world. This scenario, of course, re-confirmed the situation prevalent within the larger Ejigbo society. They believe in Abidjan; they live Abidjan *(Observation, Ejigbo, 13/07/10).*

A probable deduction is that the 'home' is still important to the migrants. This is why they deemed it fit to be involved in related projects back home. Routinely, among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in Nigeria and in Cote d'Ivoire, an active involvement in related projects targeted at individual and/or communal development, is usually considered as a clear evidence of one still being a Nigerian, though existing within the Ivorian social space. In fact, individuals of Ejigbo extract in Abidjan who do not involve himself/herself in such projects are normally considered to have been lost completely to the Ivorian society.

> *……insofar you participate in developmental discussions and contributions, definitely you are our own; if otherwise, you are simply not (IDI, Female, Trader, 60 years, Ejigbo, 18/08/10).*

Those who partake in network meetings and contributions towards communal projects are seen as truly of Ejigbo descent, and those who never participate are seen as 'bastards' who have lost touch with their roots. 'Such individuals never come back home' as it is often the case with *Ejigbo-Yoruba* women that are married to Ivorian men. It is more common with women than men. Ordinarily, it is believed among the people that there is no way one would be thinking of his or her root and about related attachments with the people back home, and will not be a part of activities that seek to improve the conditions of the home front:

> *……if not for distance and cost, no right thinking Ejigbo indigene will ever wish to be buried here (Abidjan). This is why it is not possible for any one of us to forget home. Personally, I send money home from time to time for*

personal, family and community purposes (FGD, Female, 40 years+, Adjame-Abidjan, 26/06/10);

......is it possible to forget one's root just like that? Nigeria is my home.....this why I normally call home every day to ask and contribute to the welfare and progress of my people no matter how little it is. I discuss with my people in Nigeria every day....in fact; I still spoke with my father yesterday since I am not a bastard....(FGD, Male, 40 years+, Adjame-Abidjan, 28/06/10).

Astonishingly however, despite their long stay in Cote d'Ivoire, the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* have not been adopting the Ivorian indigenous names. They usually answer normal Christian and Muslim names as the indigenes; possibly, to bridge the integrative gap which the indigenous Yoruba names would have created in their relationship with the Ivorian societies. Nevertheless, among the minority Christian (note: Muslims are in majority of the *Ejigbo-Yoruba*'s population in Cote d'Ivoire) children are called normal Yoruba names while their parents answer traditional appellations such as *"Baba Damilola, Mama Ayo et cetera"*. Interestingly, most of these children cannot utter a word in Yoruba; if at all they do, it sounds distorted *(Observations, Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10).*

Theoretical Positioning for the Study

The study's specificities are anchored on a fusion of Charles Tilly's 'Urban Sociological Perspective' and Max Weber's 'Postulate of Social Action'.

Core to Tilly's sociological summations is the assertion that history serves as a critical component in analyzing social change (Tilly 1996). According to him, the fields of social history and sociology are parallel paths towards understanding social change, but both require adjustment in their approaches. The pattern and nature of migration into cities could only be interpreted in relation to the connotation of such as evolving social networks. Social network theory conceives of social structure as comprising of a set of actors (nodes) and a set of relationships connecting pairs of these actors. The core concern of network analysis is to understand how social structures facilitate and constrain opportunities, behaviours and cognitions. Network analysis tends to probe patterns of relationships that connect members of social systems, and how these patterns channel resources to specific locations in the social structures. The basic premise here is that knowledge about the structure of social relationships enriches explanations based only on knowledge about the attributes of actors. Although, social

structures have powerful influences on people's lives, network analysts have also focused upon individuals as social agents: how people actively work to construct and maintain relationships and structures that help to sustain them in times of need and facilitate the creation of new opportunities. As such, the social organization of migration affects welfare of migrants and their dependants; among other resources because some forms of migration build means of capital accumulation within families and ethnic groups, while others individualize whatever accumulation that occurs. In all these processes, time and space matter fundamentally; when and where they occur affects how they occur. They nevertheless fall into history's domain.

Contrary to the logics of minimizing distances and multiplying opportunities, over and over again, individuals do establish regular migration between two widely separated locations, and then concentrated their migration within a bi-polar system rather than continuing their search for opportunities outside of it. Chain migration in this regard is, of course, the arrangements in which social ties persist between people of a particular origin of migration and a particular destination of migration, with people at the destination sending back information about new opportunities, recruiting new migrants and helping them make the move. This form of cross-border interaction is observable in the nature of prevalent migration pattern among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* toward Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. Despite related colonial, cultural and geographical impediments existing between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, the people have been able to sustain the existing chain of migration over time (that is, between Ejigbo in Nigeria and Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire) though a seemingly sister nation of Ghana, and two other West African countries – Togo and Republic of Benin – have to be crossed over.

On the other hand, Weber in his 'social action' analysis affirms that it would be improbable to explain social behaviour by same type of objective frameworks often engage in the applied sciences. Rather, the subjective meaning(s) of actions should be focused. That is, how individuals view and explain, or construct their own behaviour or related existential realities, thus, take paramount role. For instance, some *Ejigbo-Yoruba* network migrants in Abidjan do see themselves first and foremost, as Ivorian in order to ensure a productive realization of their transnational goals. In this regard, obtainable stereotypes and discrimination could become surmountable, or at best attenuated within the Ivorian social space. Acting contrary could keep them as perpetual strangers who would remain isolated from the institutional peculiarities of the host society. Meanwhile, when same sets of individuals are back in Nigeria, a display of such

'Ivorian' cleavage could be a major undoing amidst their people. Their Nigerian identity does come into application in such situation. Hence, the useful identities of such individuals become situationally dependent on the social space within which related interaction takes place.

Interestingly, Karl Marx's perspective on the relation of 'being' and 'consciousness' seems to have offered a useful explanation in this respect, but Weber emphasized what Marx did neglect: that individuals act wittingly. Again, Weber emphasizes the social action of the individual-action, that is, in which the actor takes into account the past, present and future behaviour of others. Actions, then entail the ideas that people have of one another, their abilities to take the role of the other, their definitions of the situations in which they see themselves. Indeed, the relevance of the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* migrants' network in the functioning of individual migrants is of paramount significance in this case. Beginning from the point of recruitment to the point of situating the migrants within the host's society and subsequent interaction, individuals' actions seem to be factored by the larger network functioning.

Weber's explanation of social action, thus, encompasses the existential. As such, 'meaning' is the relationship we see between our 'act' and its 'goal'. Because we recognize this relationship from past experience, the meaning gives our action some measure of coherence; and links it to other actions. Each new situation may be unique, but as we give meaning to it, our acts take on some regularity and some pattern. Seeking coherence in continually changing situations, we create and impose order on ourselves. At the same time, we create and renew the possibilities of social order, by acting in ways that allow others to predict the pattern of our action.

Contextually therefore, the focus of this inquiry, that is, the examination of ongoing cross-border networking and the attendant attempt to construct a situationally suitable identity among the Ejigbo-Yoruba in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire could be functionally situated within the confines of both Tilly's explication of the workings of social network within the urban context and Weber's conceptual analysis of 'social action' – the actions of two or more individuals in which the meanings of each are oriented to the action of others.

Research Design for the Study

The study is essentially exploratory in context and scope. As such related qualitative data collection and analysis techniques were utilized.

The design combines three principal qualitative methods: nonparticipant observation, in-depth interviewing (IDI), and focus group discussion (FGD).

In the course of the nonparticipant study, relevant information on the nature and patterns of prevalent socio-economic practices among the people were derived from the observation of activities in useful public spaces. Indigenous social functions, such as coronation and coronation anniversary of traditional heads, naming ceremonies, funeral ceremonies and religious activities of the people were given prominent consideration. In Abidjan, the study focused on *Ejigbo-Yoruba* 'migrants' who have stayed in Cote d'Ivoire for a minimum of 5 years (that is, those considered to be long-term migrants) and in Nigeria, Ejigbo-Yoruba 'returnees' (from Cote d'Ivoire) of minimum of 5 years stay were involved.

In buttressing the study's specificities, *in-depth interviews* were conducted in Ejigbo, Nigeria and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire for selected traditional leaders, chiefs, opinion leaders, individual migrants/network members and policy planners, putting into consideration variables of sex and geography in the process. This action helped in unravelling the impacts, which trans-border networking has made on the people as a group, especially in the area of identity utilization in the course of their sojourn.

Focus group discussions comprising of eight participants each were conducted during the study for selected current migrants and returnee migrants in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire and Ejigbo, Nigeria respectively. That is, for males ages 18-39 years (Abidjan and Ejigbo); females ages 18-39 years (Abidjan and Ejigbo); males 40 years and above (Abidjan and Ejigbo) and females ages 40 years and above (Abidjan and Ejigbo). Individuals of same sex and age-group worked as facilitators of discussions for their respective groups. This was to enable a free and conducive atmosphere for information exchange.

Essentially, a pilot study preceded the main surveys for the purpose of pre-testing the potentiality of the research instruments, and indeed, to get accustomed to the study's locations.

Sampling technique:

In selecting the research samples, purposive sampling technique was engaged. This was equally applicable in selecting public spaces that were involved in the study.

Study Location:

The research took place in two locations, that is, Ejigbo, the headquarters of Ejigbo Local Government Area (LGA) of Osun State, Nigeria and Abidjan, the economic and former capital of Cote d'Ivoire. According to a 2006 governmental data for Ejigbo LGA, Ejigbo has an

approximate of 63,000 inhabitants with majority of the population working as farmers and artisans.

Abidjan is the largest city in Cote d'Ivoire, and the second largest French speaking capital in the world. It has according to the authorities of the country in 2006, 5,068,858 inhabitants within the municipal area and 3,796,677 in the city. The residents (including immigrants from a wide array of different ethnicities across the globe) are mainly engaged in trading, white-collar jobs and private professional services.

Specific Findings from the Study

i.   That the conceptual impetus for cross-border regional exploration among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba*, especially within the West African sub-region, has been trading and the need for socio-economic survival;

ii. Despite the impact of colonialism on African societies, the pre-colonial pattern of relationship within the West African region has assisted the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* in the process integration within the Ivorian social space;

iii. That the process of identity integration as being facilitated among the *Ejigbo-Yoruba* within the Ivorian social space has been primarily predicated upon the need to have socio-economic acceptance;

iv. That the sustained relationship with the 'home front' in Nigeria is basically for the sake of convenient re-integration after their stay within their adopted Ivorian social space;

v.   That such cross-border migratory practices as being undertaken by the *Ejigbo- Yoruba* has been serving invariably as an impetus for fostering regional integration of West Africa.

Concluding Comments

Essentially, this study has been able to situate the day-to-day experiences of such cross-border migrants' network within a feasible identity construction framework, especially within the host society. While the migrants are usually desirous of attaining formidable socio-economic acceptance within the host society, they equally wish to be in kinship touch with their home country (that is, their initial point of departure). It has been affirmed that the resultant implication is the production of a people engaged in a kind of 'transnational subsistence dualism' in which integration for socio-economic gains within the host society and re-integration into the home country thereafter have been the main impetus for the prevailing disposition. As they tend to

identify with the host's institutional peculiarities, so also they tend to identify with their home cultural affinity.

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