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**Regional Networking and Identity Integration  
within ECOWAS Framework on Development:  
An Exploration of Nigerian-Ivorian Corridor**

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## Background to the Research

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 behavioral 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 that cannot impactfully 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 is 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.

Meanwhile, notable discourses centering on contemporary migration have often tended to emanate from the perspective of flows from developing countries into rich countries of Europe, North America and Australasia. Yet, most movement across the globe does not even take place between countries. The *Human Development Report* (2009: 1-2) observes that an approximate of 740 million people are classified as internal migrants worldwide - almost four times as the international migrants. Among those who have moved across national borders, just over a third did move from a developing to a developed country - fewer than 70 million people. Most of the world's 200 million international migrants had moved from one developing country to another or between developed countries. Usually, most international migrants (more than three quarters) go to a country with higher level of 'human development' than their country of origin, especially at respective regional level.

Nevertheless, upon arrival at the point of destination, they are often constrained largely by various institutional peculiarities, such as policies and cultures.

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-Nigerians who, for instance, have had a long-distance experience of trade relations with the people of Cote d'Ivoire. 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. Such have not essentially been male-dominated as migrations used to be in this part of the world, particularly during the pre-colonial period; often factored by inter-ethnic strife and wars. The colonial and post-colonial movements of labor within the West African sub-region have equally put on the move a large portion of women who are seeking for opportunities, trying to face new market situations or to escape the rhetorical discourse of nationalist projects in their home societies. Generally, their transnational engagements reflect the newly acquired or rediscovered 'freedom of movement', hitherto improbable within the pre-colonial configuration, but it could have also been as a result of coercion and/or human trafficking.

For several decades, the Ejigbo-Nigerian migrants in Cote d'Ivoire have utilized their vantage position in the retail and wholesale trade to provide identifiable multinational firms, such as the *Lever Brothers of Nigeria*, access to the sub-regional market. In the views of Asiwaju (1992), such migrants' networks in West Africa have contributed in no little measure to the dynamism of a series of market centers, '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 the contemporary national demarcation in such cases. For instance, the situation with the Ejigbo-Nigerians from 'British Nigeria', who have found it easier to trade and settle in a '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 *Economic Community of West African States (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).

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Ostensibly, the impact of migrants on trade and related socio-economic endeavors often improves as soon as they become potently entrenched into the host economy. But, their role as trade facilitators for exports and imports to and from their home country respectively could only be most effective if they remain in regular contact with the home country and are aware of developments, which could influence trade there (Manning, 2005). In the meantime, the problem of economic immobility on which most migrants usually predicate their relocation upon, *ab initio*, often resurfaces on the social plane within the host society when vagaries of transnationalism present limits to them by way of undue foreclosure of their emancipatory propensities. As such, any emanating attempt at identity repositioning by the people is bound to impact on their usual day-to-day experience.

In the event that the Ejigbo-Nigerian migrants in Cote d'Ivoire are desirous of sustaining their Nigerian identity at the level of socio-economic interaction, their related transnational goals could remain perpetually elusive within such adopted social space, hence the need to identify with the institutional peculiarities of the host society, such as, language, food, dressing and other identifiable traditional specificities. Yet, in situating new migrants within the host society, and for the sake of subsequent networking endeavors, such as remittance making, short term visit; usually for new migrants' recruitment, and projects' monitoring (personal and/or communal), the Ejigbo-Nigerian identity often come to the fore in the interactive process. What would thenceforth be obtainable is an entangled situation in which individuals are exigently conscripted to oscillate within a space of dual identity cleavage.

It is, perhaps, with the realization of this, that ECOWAS has found it expedient to transform its earlier intention of "ECOWAS of States" to "ECOWAS of People". Having identified the limitations of 'top-bottom' approach to development, it became glaring that the hope of a community of people requires a 'bottom-up' approach. Within the prism of this new expectation, it would be probable to assess what is happening to the 'people' directly rather than through the 'state'.

In this light therefore, an array of interrogations crop up: why do individuals, in the first instance, engage in cross-border networking? How, and what have been the impetus for such cross-border interaction? Of what specific significance are related exchanges to both 'releasing' and 'receiving' societies, and the region at large? How do indirect connections and positions in such network affect individual and group's identities? What are thus, the structural (identity) implications of such exchanges, and what are the implications of these for ECOWAS regional integration, and development efforts?

### **Objectives of Research**

The main objective of this research is to 'explore the significance of trans-border networking in the process of enabling regional integration and development in West Africa'. Other objectives include:

- To identify the socio-historical precursors of subsisting migratory trend in West Africa;
- To examine the functioning of extant migratory network system in West Africa;
- To analyze the process of identity construction among *Ejigbo-Nigerian* migrants within Ivorian social space; and
- To explain how regional migration could functionally enhance the process of ECOWAS' transformation from "an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People".

### **Justification for the Research**

Over the years, traditional accounts on mobility and migration have increasingly been found inadequate in interpreting the patterns, processes and implications of contemporary regional trans-border interaction, which may not necessarily be formal in scope and functioning. Such gap has been visible in grasping the impetus and motives underlying the way in which identities are deployed by individuals in the transnational process, especially at the regional level. This study provides a framework for understanding the identity-implications of simultaneous attachment to two nations, which the *Ejigbo-Nigerian* migrants in Cote d'Ivoire engage in, and how such could be utilized in facilitating integration and development within the region.

Besides, the efforts of most analysts of transnational migration have often been targeted at understanding related 'motivations for moving' and their socio-economic impacts on both the



'releasing' and 'receiving' societies (Richards and Seary, 2000). Thus, excluding issues, which might actually been miscegenationary (that is, attitudinal), yet transnational and developmental in nature and practice. Such is the case with identity integration being facilitated by ongoing mobility and migration among the Ejigbo-Nigerians in Cote d'Ivoire. However, since identifiable transnational perspectives have provided insufficient frameworks for capturing such a transitory re-construction of a people's identity over time and space, this study has sought to situate it within an appropriate context of regional networking process.

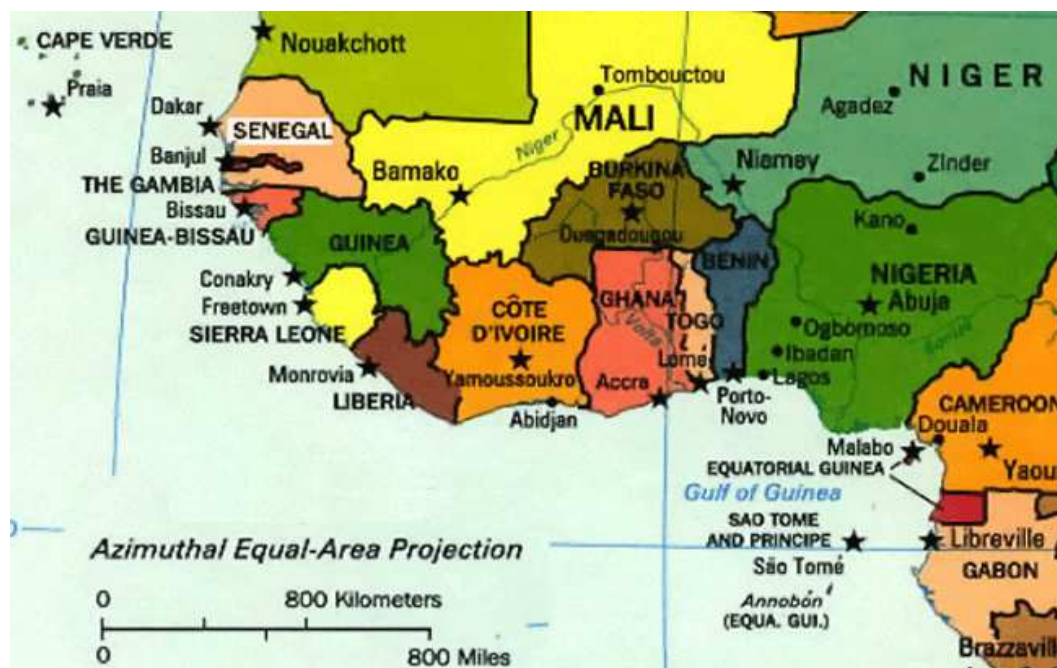
### **Historical Constructs of Social Network and Migration System in West Africa**

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 analyzing social change, especially within the transnational realm. According to Tilly, all investigating sociologists of social life formation (such as it is obtainable in the migratory process) and social structure should view social processes and social structures as being, first and foremost, 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 as 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 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-Nigerians in Cote d'Ivoire. Despite prevalent colonial, cultural and geographical impediments between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, the Ejigbo-Nigerians 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 over (see Fig. I below).

**Fig. I: Map of West Africa showing the Migratory Poles and the Transit Points**



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

Contextually, the nature of cross-border networking and migration processes within West African sub-region could be situated across three epochs; that is, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. 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 natives who participated in the capture or trade in slaves, inter-ethnic strife and wars, or who were its victims. Furthermore, trading across the Sahara and nomadic herding has caused human mobility and migration across parts of West Africa. The dynamics of free movement of persons, inside and outside of empires and kingdoms of West African communities were

facilitated by the absence of any clearly defined borders among the then existing empires and kingdoms.

It is worthy of noting that, while most of the ethnic groups that left the old Borno Empire now occupy parts of various northern Francophone countries neighboring modern day Nigeria, most of the ethnic groups that left the defunct Oyo Empire, especially the Yoruba, presently spread across parts of both Francophone and Anglophone countries neighboring contemporary Nigeria (Akinjogbin, 1980; Mahadi, 1989). Indeed, the fall of the old Oyo Empire as a result of the 19<sup>th</sup> century invasion of parts of Yorubaland by the Fulani jihadists had facilitated the dispersions of the Yoruba to other West African states and 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 Fig. II below), which extended to the west, to areas of Ashanti; Dahomey and as far as present day Togo (Akinjogbin, 1980).

**Fig. II: Map of Nigeria showing the limits of Old Oyo Empire**



Source: <http://brown.edu/Faculties/Haffenreffer/yoruba2.html>, 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-Nigerians are mainly found in parts of present day Ghana, the Ejigbo-Nigerians



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-Nigerians to locations considered safer for them, especially within the West African sub-region, had been necessitated. Also, the search for arms and ammunitions for the prosecution of prevalent inter-ethnic wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by traders of Yoruba ethnic descent did facilitate imperative contact and eventual settlement of some of them in such neighboring Anglophone and Francophone countries, conspicuously before the advent of colonial rule (Adeniran, 2009: 3676-8).

The advent of European colonialism in parts of West Africa at the tail end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century undoubtedly presented a new interpretation to the phenomenon of trans-border migration and interaction within the region. The policies and programs of the colonial administration did result among others in the geographical and political demarcation of borders, and the monetization of the economy. The political economy of the colonial administration was such that it provided a framework for large-scale internal migration, which was derived from the important need of manpower for work in mines, plantations and public administration (Adepoju, 1996).

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 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, the British, though presented a rather cooperative mode of relationship with their African colonies in the name of 'association', she 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 post-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) separately affirm that some Nigerian workers, who had participated in the construction of the railway network of Nigeria, were subsequently recruited as laborers 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 First World War. 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 sub-region.

### **The functioning of extant migratory network system 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:

*.....in our family, the first person that came to Cote d'Ivoire was my daddy's elder brother...he brought his younger brother... who later brought me after gaining 'freedom' (IDI, Male, Vulcanizer, 40 years, Abidjan, 19/06/10).*

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. On a general note, 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. Hence, the continued growth of the network pattern has been predicated largely upon familial attachment (FGD, Female, 40 years+, Abidjan, 26/06/10; Observations, Abidjan, 22-30/06/10).

It is, however, a 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 quantity of honor and regards is routinely adduced by family members to the migrants who provided the migratory 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:

*.....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, 20/06/10).*

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' above has not been the sole beneficiary 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, 27/06/10);*

*....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, 28/06/10).*

Generally, the process of obtaining 'freedom' by the 'apprentices' from their 'masters' and 'mistresses' entailed rendering of unspecified and unremunerated services within a given period of time. Thereafter, such 'apprentices' are provided with fund, equipments and shops to begin their own life. At this point such 'apprentices' are relieved of all forms of control and supervision from their hitherto 'masters' and 'mistresses' (Observations, Abidjan, 20/06-03/07/10).

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-Nigerians along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor over the years.

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

Notable complexities subsist in the manner by which the Ejigbo-Nigerian 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 Oba's institution) often plays a significant role in fashioning out situationally tenable interactive patterns, which often time facilitate the migrants' identities. 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 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 usually 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 also visit Nigeria monthly (IDI, Male, Trader, 40 years +, Abidjan, 19/06/10).*

From the preceding IDI submission, identification with the Ivorian society by the migrants could be seen as being essentially necessitated by business or work interest within the host country. The interactive patterns observed at the Adjame Main Market and at the Treichville Port Market (of individuals of Ejigbo descent whom I have had opportunity of interacting with at their private homes earlier) laid credence to the fact that the social space and the interest at stake do determine the mode of identity projections within the Ivorian society. Unlike the Yoruba language I had seen them engaging at home freely and proudly, they were speaking French, *Bete* and *Baure* among other indigenous Ivorian language with unimaginable mastery in the course of business conversations. Their (the Ejigbo-Nigerians) carriage, gesticulations and composites were just like the “hosts” and there was nothing to show that they were from Nigeria, except for some who were having Ejigbo tribal marks on their cheeks (*Observations, Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10*). Yet, one was still tempted to affirm that they were indigenous Ivorian who equally put on similar tribal marks.

Ostensibly, the socio-economic environment in Abidjan has made it expedient for the people to identify with the host community as such. One of the most visible ways, 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)*

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, the ‘normal behavior’ 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-Nigerian 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 neighbors often perform a significant role in this respect. As soon as one could speak a native language, the Ivorian permanent residence permit (*card identete*) 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, that is, the Ejigbo-Nigerian 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 identete*' 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 identete*' (FGD, Female, 40+, Abidjan, 26/06/10; Observations, Abidjan, 28/06/10).

Perhaps, the acquisition of the '*card identete*', 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-Nigerians 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 tediousness and risky nature of such trips, 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, 18/06/10; Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, 21/06-02/07/10*).

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, 18/06/10; Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10*).

*.....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, Ejigbo, 18/06/10).*

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.

Naming of monuments and streets in Ejigbo town in Nigeria equally attests to this claim of regional integrative propensity, courtesy of the ongoing transnational practice along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor. "Oba Abidjan Street" (see **Fig. III** below) is a major street in Ejigbo town. Not only that it comprises of mainly properties of Cote d'Ivoire-based indigenes, the most revered and respected Oba-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire - late Chief Emmanuel Alabi - has his house and burial site on this street. This street radiates high-class 'setting' within Ejigbo community and, indeed, savors the subsisting interconnectedness and identification of the town with the Ivorian society. Notably, obtainable way of life in Abidjan is replicated on this street freely. Such existential patterns have included the retail of solely imported goods from Cote d'Ivoire.

**Fig. III: One of the major Streets in Ejigbo, Nigeria**



*Source: Fieldwork, Ejigbo, Nigeria, 2010*

The nature of Ejigbo-Nigerian 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 Ejigbo-Nigerians. Essentially, as many Ivorian commodities are sold in Ejigbo, so also identifiable local Nigerian commodities/items are retailed in Abidjan. Though, as a group they tend to replicate most of the things done back home in Abidjan, 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 amidst them. The speaking pattern of the people has been largely distorted; whenever they speak Yoruba, colloquial Abidjan French usually reflects and vice versa (*Observations, Ejigbo, 18/06/10; Abidjan, 21/06-02/07/10*).

## **Theories and Methods for the Study**

The study's specificities have been situated within the confines of Weber's 'Social Action Postulate' in which the usefulness of individuals' subjective interpretation of disposition is emphasized and Levitt and Glick-Schiller's 'Transnational Social Field Theory', which analyzes the social networks between "those who move and those who stay back". While the 'transnational social field' view emphasizes the nature and structure of ongoing social relations within the transnational frameworks, the 'social action' postulate explains the patterns of functioning of individuals and institutions within the transnational social space. That is, the manner by which social capital, as ethnic identity, is deployed in constructing a tenable network identity for the migrants in the course of their transnational engagements. In this light, the 'fluidity' of the *transnational social field* becomes established, since individuals' dispositions and tenable identities are subjectively deployed across the borders. More significantly, individuals' extant interest routinely determines the mode and patterns of related dispositions and identities' deployment within the transnational framework.

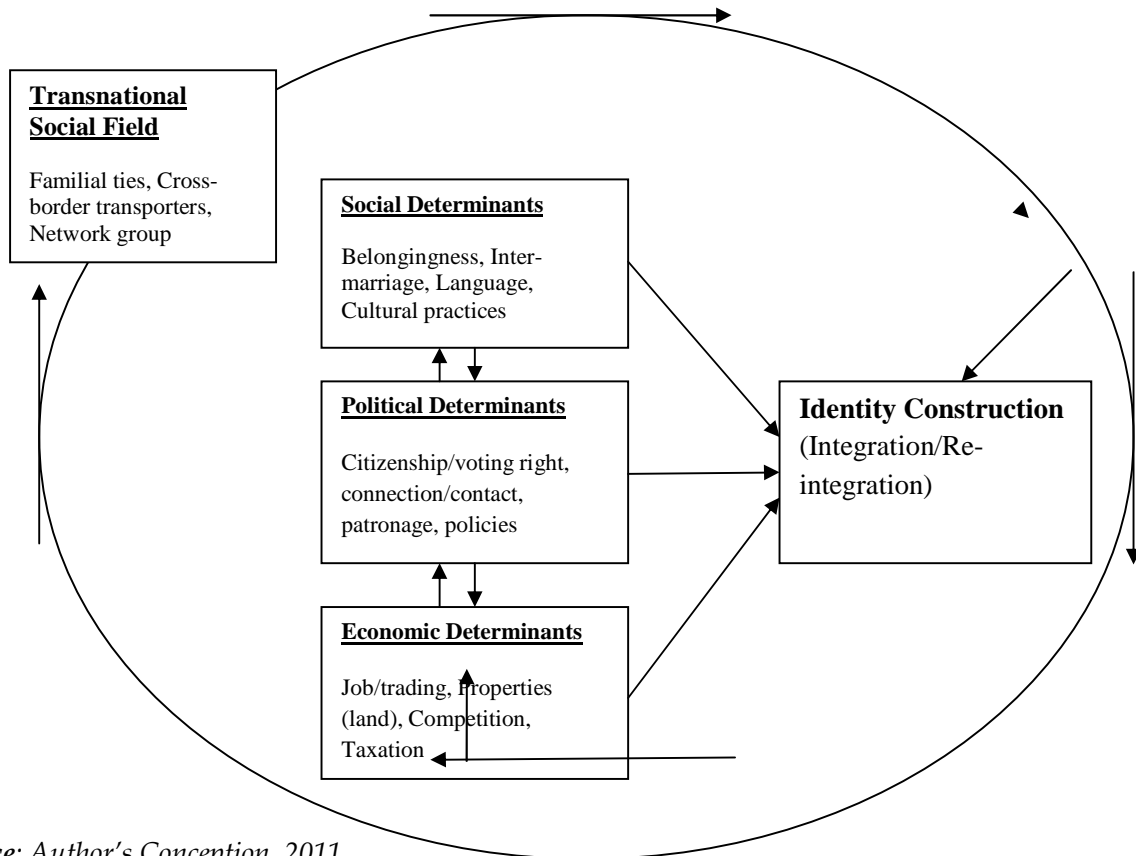
The research design utilized four principal qualitative methods - non-participant observation, focus group discussion, in-depth interviewing and case profiling in collecting primary data for the study, while useful secondary data were generated through sources as archives, journals, textbooks, periodicals, encyclopedias and reliable internet sources. Due to the reflexive undertone of the study, purposive sampling (and snowballing) techniques were engaged in selecting the research subjects, while all of the research instruments were prepared in longitudinal and case studies format. The non-participant observation took six months to conduct. A total of 8 focus group discussions and 40 in-depth interviews were evenly conducted in both study locations (that is, Ejigbo, Nigeria and Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire). The archival method provided imperative historical details, and the case profiling canvassed for obtainable benefits of related social capital utilization among participating individuals within the transnational functioning.

## **Conceptual Framework for the Research**

In order to determine the specific role(s) of the "transnational social field" in the network process, especially in the process of constructing a suitable network identity for the migrants, it is pertinent to have a concise definition of the concept. Such definition, however, should depict a

framework that potently links identity construction (integration to the host society and re-integration to the home country) to opportunities presented by prevalent “transnational network culture”, and identify determinants of such intent.

**Fig. IV: Overview of the Conceptual Framework**



*Source: Author's Conception, 2011*

In this study, identity construction is defined as the process of “image molding”, in which the individual (or the collective) interest(s) at stake plays a significant role in depicting who an individual is (that is, his/her dispositional attribute); and why the individual is as such (that is, the underlying precursors of prevalent dispositional attribute). Routinely, time, space and other people, in combination with the subsisting interests, are equal determinants of the process of identity construction. Proceeding from this general definition, which prioritizes individuals and institutions within the transnational network space, **Fig. IV** above explains a feasible conceptual analysis model for the process of identity construction. That is, a model which is applicable in understanding such tangible determinants that could enhance network



members' efforts to present tenable network identities within the transnational network space, and also impact the process of larger regional integration, and of course, development.

The conceptual analysis consists of one "primary networking axis" and three distinct "network identity determinants". That is:

- The "transnational social field" (or trans-border network): the primary networking axis
- Institutional/social determinants (belongingness, marriage, language, beliefs/traditions)
- Political determinants (citizenship/voting right, connection/contact, patronage, policies)
- Economic determinants (job/trading, property (land), competition, taxation)

The unilateral "primary networking axis" is described by vagaries of the "transnational social field", that is, factors facilitating enhanced level of 'migratory capability' – familial ties, cross-border transporters, network group and religious outfits. The "network identity determinants" are often defined by broader institutional/social, political and economic context of formal and informal regulations and cultures within which network members pursue their interests, and their capability to purposeful action; for instance, to integrate to the host society and to re-integrate to the homeland, whenever it is necessary. While the "primary networking axis" provides imperative platform or adequate functioning of identified determinants, related determinants functionally impact each other, and collectively they enable the process of identity construction.

At this point, two components of the conceptual framework call for specific emphasis. First, "transnational networking" is basically an interactive process, emanating from exchanges across the borders. This unfolds through unwritten rules, traditions, beliefs and extant interests at stake (both individual and group). Second, "identity construction" courtesy of the "transnational social field" requires both group-focused changes in individual migratory interests and ways of life, and individual-focused changes in migrants' networks and contacts, and their agencies.

To broaden the understanding of this conceptual framework, an enhanced conception of its specificities has become expedient. For the "transnational social field" to really be efficient in

the process of identity construction by the migrants, tangible interactive changes among the distinct network identity determinants are deemed necessary. Such will entail the removal of extant social impediments as discrimination and related 'unfreedoms', which usually prevent network members from taking up opportunities that will enhance their socio-economic well-being, individually and collectively, within the 'host' society's functioning. It equally implies the need for changes in economic and political components that perpetuate unevenness in social relations, such as rights to land, establishment, property, citizenship, voting and patronage.

### **Network and Identity Implications of the Conceptual Framework (Research Findings)**

Productive relationship among vagaries of the "transnational social field", that is, the "primary networking axis" and relevant network identity determinants often provide the imperative platforms for migrants' identity construction process. Such relationships have been evidenced by:

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 'belongingness' in dealing with everyday challenges. Aside from providing the migrants with imperative leverage to subsist within the host social space, such sense of 'belongingness' 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, individual migrants are able to interact with the "home front"; for instance, in sending goods and funds for projects to '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 migratory intent 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 are seen to be contributing 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 hindrance have included 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.

## **Conclusion**

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-Nigerian 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 often time the network identity (identities); such identities

so emanating are primarily geared towards the realization of related transnational goals of network members.

Essentially however, this study has been able to situate the day-to-day experiences of such cross-border migrants' group 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, the initial point of departure). Hence, this study affirms that the resultant implication of such interactive pattern 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.

The submissions of both "social action" and "transnational social field" perspectives have been in precise consonance with this stand point. The former tends to explain related interactions taking place between the 'host' and the migrants on one hand, and between the migrants and their 'home' on the other as an 'analytical dualist' concern (interpretative understanding). That is, the projectable identity of individuals at a specific point in time would be factored by the subsisting social space within which related interactions are taking place and the extant interests at stake. Connectedly, the later emphasizes the essentialities for the continuation of existing pre-migratory social relations' pattern between the people who have 'moved' and those 'back home' for the sake of development initiatives at personal and communal levels. Significantly therefore, an epistemological framework for understanding the way a transnational migrants' community constructs its identity in relation to the 'home' and 'host' communities has been presented by this study.

### **Recommendations**

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 being practiced by the Ejigbo-Nigerian 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 all of the obstacles on the path of regional integration would become obliterated.

- ii) A greater attention should be given to contextualizing the preference of the Ejigbo-Nigerians 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-Nigerians 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 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 being 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; so also 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, often time, 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-Nigerian migratory experience along the Nigerian-Ivorian corridor. Within the framework of ongoing interaction between the Ejigbo-Nigerian 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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