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إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**Cross-border Migrations, Regional Integration and Conviviality
in the Gulf of Guinea: the Reality and the Prospects**

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Abstract

The Gulf of Guinea region has always been a sphere of migrations, the production of identities and trans-ethnic as well as inter-ethnic relations. These have combined to endow the region with colourful *metissage* of people. The mixing of people on the Atlantic coast of West-Central Africa pre-dates the colonial era. Such movements were in all directions, north-south or east-west involving Bantu speaking peoples. Some of the factors that account for inter-ethnic contacts at the *longue durée* in the modern period are the Slave Trade and commercial activities promoted by European traders and prospective colonial powers. The partition of Africa while creating and carving and crystallizing boundaries between colonial spheres thus restricting movements across the new frontiers triggered new internal movements under a labour imperative. This explains the movement towards colonial plantations and public work projects (stations, roads, railway construction sites). Developments following the First World War were also responsible for the reshuffling of peoples. The retreat of German forces to Fernando Po and the partitioning of the former German of Cameroon between Britain and France were responsible for a new series of migrations and the erection of new spaces frontiers likely to control population movements. The resulting contacts between peoples at this period gave rise to new forms of identity awareness, what Bourdieu called “social categories of perception” that were in reality “principles of a vision and division” of the world. Besides the colonial dichotomy between subject and citizen, new categories were introduced to take care of an awareness of the difference between insider and outsider e. g. the division between native and stranger. Independence inherited both this legacy also ushered in new forms of movements both within and across the post-colonial state boundaries: regular movements across the linguistic divide in Cameroon, the continuing presence and movement of Nigerians (especially the Igbo) within and across the commercial cities of Cameroon, the movement of Anglophone Cameroonians to Nigeria.

The development of sub-regional economic schemes has been at the basis of new waves of migration in the Central African sub region. Although the dominant destinations are oil rich but human resource deficit countries such as Gabon and Equatorial Guinea in the post-1980 period or Nigeria in the 1970s, other countries have also hosted migrants from across the region. For example, migration towards Cameroon has been a function of its status as an

economic and cultural power or its stability in a region marked by civil wars. Moreover the continuing patterns of ancient population movements where former colonial boundaries at times split the same peoples into different national spaces has been a very strong factor in permanent factor in what can be considered as cross border migrations. These migratory movements have given rise to new forms of distinctions between insiders and outsiders especially that of nationals and non-nationals that have come to be grafted to older distinctions derived from the colonial era, resulting in several crises (expulsion of non-nationals, xenophobic attacks, violent attacks, confrontations. Although belonging to the same economic community, the status of migrants in the CEMAC region has often been problematic within some countries (Cameroonians in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, Equatorial Guineans in Cameroon, Central Africans in Cameroon) even resulting in diplomatic incidents or prolonged border closure. This situation is paradoxical not only because these countries all belong to CEMAC but also because they display characteristically very homogenous political, social and cultural characteristics that are supposed to cushion rather than exacerbate tensions resulting from cross-border movements and contacts between their peoples. On the contrary, Cameroonian migrants in Nigeria seem to live at greater ease with Nigerians in spite of the fact that Nigeria belongs to an almost entirely different economic social and fiscal dispensation (ECOWAS). Conversely, Nigerians have relatively enjoyed peaceful relations within Cameroon although there are incidents that tend to project their status as non- nationals (harassment by corrupt government officials, threats of expulsion, mass return home). Nigeria itself has also been the host of nationals of countries in the Gulf of Guinea besides the larger West African region but it appears to be more a starting point for migrations to smaller countries (Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome e Principe) with its own crises.

This paper attempts to investigate the crises of identity which have often occurred with the contact of different people moving across recognised borders within the states of the Gulf of Guinea in the contemporary context. The paper will set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify, characterise and classify the various cross-border movements in the Gulf of Guinea.
2. Examine the nature and outcomes of contacts in areas of destination of migrants;

3. Identify and examine the causes of crises arising from cross-border migrations especially as related to the identity question in the countries of designation.
4. Examine the prospects for alternative models of regional integration in the Gulf of Guinea.

Keywords: Cross-border Migration, Identity, Cameroon, Regional Integration, Gulf of Guinea, Crises.