

Historicising the Nigerian Diaspora: Nigerian Migrants and Homeland Relations

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Abstract

This work provides a veritable historical platform for studying the Nigerian diaspora against the background that its study has largely been subsumed under the rubric of the broad historiography on the African diaspora. The study therefore advocates for an in depth focus on country specific diasporas in order to make room for specificity. The study concentrates on the various aspects of identity formation among the groups constituting the Nigerian diaspora and finds out that while Cohen's (1997) ideal diaspora is a homogenous social or ethnic group, the Nigerian diaspora on the other hand reflects the diversity and ethnic divisions in the country which makes it highly fissiparous. Moreover, the paper rejects the popular Marxist-oriented poverty-induced migration thesis and argues that though poverty and inequality may induce migration, it would appear too narrow and simplistic to overstress this factor because empirical and theoretical evidence strongly suggest that higher incomes, improved education and access to media and information will give more people capabilities and aspirations to migrate. Indeed, the reality is that improvements in living standards and reductions in violence actually create the conditions for more migration. In terms of the prevailing diaspora-homeland development mantra, the study contends that the eventual impact of remittances will depend on the use to which such remittances are deployed. The paper concludes by highlighting the critical roles that the Nigerian diaspora could play in Nigeria's quest for rapid socio-economic and political development.

Keywords

Diaspora, Homeland, Hostland, Remittance, Brain Drain, Migration.

Introduction

The present epoch could reasonably be referred to as the diasporan age. Globally, it has been estimated that some 125 million people migrate from one country to another annually (De Montclos 2005, 1). Indeed, more than ever before, diasporan historiography and discourses have grown exponentially in recent times. In spite of this impressive historiography, the Nigerian diaspora has largely been subsumed under the general categories of studies dealing with Africans or Blacks living outside the shores of Africa. Curiously, rather than concentrating on country specific diasporas, African scholars are continuously being encouraged to become more engaged in the African diaspora because this arena is believed to be crucial to the deepening of the understanding of both African and world history (Zezeza 2004, 263). The few exceptions to this trend include (Nworah 2005; COMPAS 2004; De Haas 2006; Shettima, 1999; Odutola 2010). In fact, Harris' (2006, 2) seminal study of the Yoruba diaspora in the United Kingdom laments the fact that in the "plethora of analyses ..., the Nigerian diaspora is hardly mentioned." Adebayo (2010, 12) argues that in spite of the fact that there have been studies of several aspects of Nigerian diaspora such as Nigerian religious movements in the diaspora; hometown, ethnic and old student associations in the diaspora; and remittances by members of the Nigerian diaspora to the home country. Yet, the history of Nigerian Diaspora is yet to be written.

From a historical standpoint, the first major part of this essay accounts for the mass movement of Nigerians to other parts of the world starting from the colonial era. It also analyzes the prospects, problems and challenges confronting the Nigerian diaspora. The various aspects of identity formation among the Nigerian diaspora are also

considered in this section. The paper further articulates the connections between the Nigerian diaspora and the prospects for national development by specifically examining the role of the diaspora in development. In this respect the typologies developed by Mohan (2002) which centres on a developmental tripod of development in the diaspora, through the diaspora and by the diaspora were found useful. The modified social responsibility theory of Nworah (2005) is also adequately refined and appropriated for this purpose. Noting that migration can have both positive and negative effects on development, this section analyzes the impact of the Nigerian diaspora on poverty reduction, economic development, human resources development, democratic consolidation and socio-political engineering in Nigeria. A number of initiatives put in place by the Nigerian government towards the promotion of mutual partnership between the Nigerian diaspora and the larger Nigerian nation are also examined. The last section concludes the essay and makes salient recommendations. As customary with most orthodox historical works the study is more descriptive and interpretive rather empirical.

Defining the Nigerian Diaspora

As a matter of fact the term diaspora now shares meaning with dispersal, immigration, expatriate, refuge, exile, ethno-national communities and so on. There is no doubt that all these are more or less part of the intrinsic dynamics of a diasporan community. In recent times the rapid multiplications of the meanings and understandings of diaspora could be traced to the lightning speed at which international migrations of people take place given the stupendous advances in information and telecommunication technology (Viswanathan 2005, 13 – 14). Another basic reason is the remarkable and wide-

spread interest of diasporas' engagement in the developmental processes especially in the vast and growing literature on migration and development (Bakewell 2008a, 3). Today, the meanings of the term, diaspora, are as varied as the types of diaspora that have been identified. For instance, there are references and discourses on corporate diaspora (Tololyan 1994), trade diaspora (Curtin 1984), academic diaspora (Zezeza 2004) cultural diaspora (Butler 2001), macro, micro or overlapping diasporas as well as cleft, endo and ecto-diasporas (Riggs 1999).

Be that as it may, membership of a contemporary diaspora now implies potential empowerment based on the ability to exert socio-economic and political influence in both the homeland and the hostland (Butler 2001, 190). This study adopts the definition by the African Union which links membership of the African Diaspora with a remarkable interest for African development.

The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship or nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union (AU, 2005, cited in Bakewell 2008a, 9).

In the same vein and for the purpose of this paper, the Nigerian Diaspora could be referred to as those Nigerians living outside the country and who are desirous or already contributing to the development of Nigeria.

Historicising the Nigerian Diaspora

With a population of over 140 million which makes it Africa's demographic giant, Nigeria has become increasingly involved in international migration worldwide. The in-

ternational migration of Nigerians could be dated back to the pre-colonial era. It effectively began with the Hausa transnational links that found its best expression in the trans-Saharan trade especially between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This period also witnessed pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, however, marked a significant milestone in the forced movement of Nigerians to the New World. The colonial era equally witnessed large scale labour migration required for plantations, mines and public administration from Nigeria to such countries as Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Benin Republic and Ghana (Adepoju 2005, 2). During this period and parallel to migration to other African countries, Nigerians also migrated first to the United Kingdom and later, the United States also became a destination point primarily for the pursuit of higher education. Some of these migrants decided to stay back even when the original idea was for them to return to Nigeria to take the positions left by the departing British colonial administration (Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2006, 3).

After independence in 1960 the quest for education and greener pastures continued in earnest (de Hass 2006, 3). The economic downturn in the country in the early 1980s due to the collapse of crude oil prices alongside sustained political repression and violence appears to have exacerbated the exodus of Nigerians abroad. Since the 1980s the waves of migration to Anglo – Saxon countries have been complemented by the remarkable movements of Nigerians to Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Ireland and the Gulf States. Within Africa, Nigerians have increasingly immigrated to countries such as Gabon, Botswana and South Africa. To Adepoju (2004), some highly skilled Nigerian migrants have even found the booming economy of South

Africa a convenient alternative to Europe, North America and the Gulf States. In all these modern migrations there has been an increasing tendency by Nigerian migrants towards permanent residency.

Due to the dismal state of the Nigerian higher education system, universities in the United Kingdom, North America and South Africa often embarked upon recruitment drives for Nigerian students. Most of these students when they finish their studies find ways to renew their visas, pick up jobs and become permanent residents. Various immigration "consultants" promise prospective migrants visa and job opportunities for a fee (De Haas 2006, 4) Labour migration from Nigeria has also become increasingly feminine. Nigerian female nurses and doctors have been recruited in large numbers to work in Europe especially the United Kingdom, the United States and Saudi Arabia (Adepoju 2000, 386). The trafficking of female Nigerian sex workers mainly to Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia has received substantial attention in recent times (Carling 2005). It has been estimated that about 10,000 Nigerian prostitutes are currently living in Italy alone (De Haas 2006, 5).

Reliable statistics on the quantum of Nigerians residing abroad is generally lacking due to poor record keeping on the part of the Nigerian authorities. Host countries statistics are also incomplete because many of the countries do not take into consideration naturalized and second generation Nigerians in immigrants statistics. Even more worrisome is the substantial presence of undocumented Nigerian migrants. Hernandez-Coss *et al*, (2006) as cited in de Haas (2006, n9) claims that there are about 5 million Nigerians living abroad. Though OECD statistics suggests that about 1.2million Nigerians are resident abroad, the Nigerian

Ministry of External Affairs gives an estimate of about 20 million Nigerian residents in Europe and the United States. In fact, it has been estimated that about 3.4 million Nigerians are currently living in the United States (Adebayo 2010, 9).

In spite of the general unreliability of the above figures, one fact that is very clear is that a considerable number of Nigerians are currently resident abroad and that more or less, this cadre of Nigerians constitutes the Nigerian diaspora. While the majority of Nigerians resident in Europe and North America are from the southern part of Nigeria, those residing in the Gulf States are mainly from the northern region of Nigeria. This of course is mainly due to the Muslim character of the north (de Haas 2006).

But then what could have been the fundamental factors for the contemporary movement of Nigerians to other major countries of the world? And what are the features of identity formations among Nigerians in the diaspora? Akinrinade and Ajibewa (2003) re-echoed the views earlier expressed by Harris (1997, 85) that migration is a function of the laws of uneven development and that the high level of economic development attained by industrialized countries confer on their people and workers in particular a high level of per-capita income which attracts migrants from less developed countries. The conclusion is that since international migration is a key element of globalization, the phenomenon of global demographic mobility has been facilitated by the negative consequences of globalization as exemplified in glaring inequalities in economic and political power between immigration and emigration countries (Castles 2007, 1-2). Thus, unemployment, violence, environmental degradation, lack of an enabling social infrastructure, political repression and extreme poverty have been found to in-

duce large scale migrations of Nigerians to the developed world. The dominant media, political and academic discourses on the demographic mobility of Nigerians sees a wave of desperate people fleeing chronic poverty, repression and violence and trying to enter the elusive Eldorado of the developed world.

While it is partly correct that poverty and inequality may induce migration, this study argues that it appears simplistic to overstress this factor. Indeed, a strict adherence to such a narrow line of thinking neglects the very fundamentals – history, nature and causes – of human migration. It is interesting to note that majority of Nigerian migrants are not among the poorest and are from relatively educated and reasonably well off backgrounds especially if we take into consideration the high cost of the journey. Empirical and theoretical evidence strongly suggests that higher incomes and improved education and access to media and information will give more people capabilities and aspirations to migrate (De Haas 2008, 1313).

The Marxist-oriented poverty-induced migration thesis rests on the false assumption that tackling the poverty and violence that force people to move will lead to a decline in migration. The reality however, is that improvements in living standards and reductions in violence actually create the conditions for more migration (Castles 2008, 13). This thesis is also anchored on the perceived dangers that the migration of poor people to urban areas pose to urban dwellers. The idea is that the migration of poor people to rich areas is intrinsically bad. Bauman (1998) as cited in Castles (2008, 13) has argued that the right to be mobile is the badge of the elite, while the poor are meant to stay at home. The bottom line is that the majority of Nigerians living abroad belongs to the elite class and not the class of over 90

million Nigerians living below the poverty line and earning less than a dollar per day.

British colonial records of the mid 1920s show that 3000 out of 8000 Nigerian pilgrims crossing Sudan every year never reached Mecca. A large number of them stayed back in the Sudan where they were known as *Fellata* (De Montclos 2005, 55). Definitely, this type of migration cannot be poverty induced. Historically and contemporaneously, migration has always been a way of life and the peopling of any country is always a vintage account of migrants' manifold contributions to nation building (Ogen 2008, 54). It would seem that the huge size of the Nigerian diaspora also has a lot to do with Nigeria's high population figure of over 140 million inhabitants as well as the aggressive and resilient nature of Nigerians to tap into any available opportunity anywhere in the world.

Basic Components of the Nigerian Diaspora

A study of the Nigerian diaspora shows that its functions are in consonance with the new migration networks theory. This theory underscores the efficacy of the collective agency of migrants and their communities in organizing processes of migration and incorporation (Castles 2008, 5). Nigerian migrants in the diaspora come together in all sorts of formal and informal associations based on faith, trade, occupation, politics gender, home place and ethnic group. In the face of racist and xenophobic hostility to Nigerian migrants, these associations facilitate the integration of the Nigerian migrant communities in the host states. Thus, the integration of Nigerian migrants in their host states is predicated on the support and presence of existing social networks (Akinrinade and Ajibewa 2003, 435).

Given its varied ethnic affiliates, the Nigerian diaspora is as 'disorganized' as the Nigerian state, at least ethnically. Apart from the proliferation of groups along the major ethnic lines such as Edo, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Ogoni, Itsekiri, and so on, there are also sub-ethnic and hometown associations such as the Ikaile World Congress in the United States, the London based Odoziobodo Club of Ogwashi-Uku and the Zumunta Association, U.S.A, to mention but a few (COMPAS 2004, 10). Ethnic, sub-ethnic and home place associations are central to the integration of new migrants into the Nigerian diaspora network.

Faith based associations also play a crucial role in this regard. Religions experiences of migrant communities play a crucial role in their integration process. Given their mental orientation, it was easier for migrants to come together to worship with people of perceived similar orientation, and places of worship easily became major avenues for contact with members of the diaspora (Akinrinade and Ajibewa 2003, 435). Indeed, diasporan faith groups have been attracting a lot of attention from scholars (Harris 2006; Akinrinade and Ajibewa 2003; Mercer, Page and Evans 2008). These studies reveal that faith groups meet certain needs of migrants such as spiritual, social, cultural and sometimes materials needs. The Cherubim and Seraphim Church for instance has become a major player in what is termed the African Independent Church Movement. Brought to the United Kingdom by Nigerian students in 1965, it is now an ubiquitous religious sect in London. The Church with its norms of mutual assistance and elaborate inclusive hierarchy provides support for an insecure and disadvantaged black immigrant group in a White society (Harris 2006, 3-4). Also the Christ Apostolic Church is reputed to have over 50 branches in the United Kingdom and an estimated 15,000 worshippers. The

Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), has more than 25 branches in Atlanta alone (Adebayo 2010, 14). With the stupendous growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, Nigerian migrants have also established Pentecostal Churches abroad. These churches provide support for their congregation and assist those dealing with unfamiliar bureaucracies and facing marginalization and loneliness (Mercer, Page and Evans 2008, 58-60).

The Nigerian diaspora also includes association formed for distinct political struggles by the Nigerian diaspora. The first was the participation of Nigeria students in the diapora in the Pan African Movement and the struggle for decolonization. Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikwe were prominent during this period. The second wave of political struggle was the attempt by the Igbo ethnic group to secede from the federation and the proclamation of the Republic of Biafra in 1967. Many Igbo fled the country during the civil war that ensued and found refuge abroad, especially in the United States. From the US, the Igbo population was able to mobilize international opinion in support of their cause. The third wave of political activism came about as a result of the unfortunate cancellation of the June 12 1999 presidential elections. The aftermath of the annulment witnessed the formation of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) with a vibrant external wing abroad. Several pro-democracy activists and movements also moved out of Nigeria during this period. In fact Shettima (1999) observes that during this period there were no fewer than 100 Nigerian pro-democracy movements in the United States, 50 in the United Kingdom and 5 in Canada.

Wole Soyinka was one of the most radical of the political exiles. He chaired both the National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON) and the United Democratic

Front of Nigeria (UDF) based in Pittsburgh, the United States, and was the brain behind Radio Kudirat, a shortwave radio that continuously attacked the government (De Montclos 2005, 11). It is important to add that branches of political parties have always been formed abroad by the Nigerian diasporic community. Political parties and their candidates court the Nigerian diaspora for its influence, financial support and general mobilization. Thus, Nigerians in the diaspora have always organized themselves on the basis of radical political movements (Shettima, 1999).

It is significant to note the crucial role played by the phenomenal advances in information and telecommunication technology, particularly the internet in the formation of new diasporan communities and the creation of new identities for Nigerians in the diaspora. *Naijanet*, an internet-based discussion forum was instrumental to the networking and coming together of the Nigerian diaspora in the United States, Europe, the Asia – Pacific region and other regions of the world. Besides *Naijanet* are other *List-servs* such as Igbo-net, Yoruba-net, THT and so on (Akinrinade and Ajibewa, 2003, 437; Shettima, 1999). The *Nigerianwebradio*, a 24hour online radio station dedicated to the listening pleasure of the Nigerian diaspora with its 100% Nigerian programmes has also contributed immensely to the mobilization of members of the Nigerian diaspora. Satellite and cable television station such as BENTV and a host of others are also important in the coalescence of the Nigerian diaspora into a coherent force geared towards national development.

Socially, the Nigerian diaspora is by no means homogenous. There are those who struggle for basic means of survival such as car park attendants, cleaners and other menial workers working long hours to make

ends meet. But some professionals have distinguished themselves and moved on to become members of the Black middle class. This latter category owns shops, businesses, e.t.c. Though, Nigerians may no longer have to suffer stereotyping as illiterate savages but they have acquired a notorious reputation for arrogance and fraud (Harris 2006, 211). This negative reputation and stigmatization is partly responsible for the congregation of Nigerians into numerous associations for mutual protection as a direct response to the criminalization of the migratory process and demographic mobility from the Global South to the northern hemisphere.

Crisp (2000) as cited in Akinrinade and Ajibewa (2003, 435) identifies four important roles of migrant associations in the facilitation of the migration, integration and incorporation of new migrant and co-ethnics into the existing diasporas. First, existing networks act as a veritable source of information to prospective migrants. This body of information includes transportation arrangements, entry requirements, asylum procedures, social welfare benefits and the detention and deportation policies of destination countries. Second, mobilization of resources of prospective migrants for their onward movement to a destination country. These resources could be in the form of remittance sent home by members of the diaspora community to finance the overseas journeys of relatives, friends, kin, compatriots and co-ethnics. Third, the provision of organizational infrastructure required for people to move from a source country to a destination country. This is a very important function especially when it becomes critical to move people in an irregular or clandestine manner the way it happened during the pro – democracy struggles in Nigeria under NADECO or during any period of persecution and political repression. Finally, migrant social networks provide new migrants

with subsistence and support especially employment opportunities when they arrived at the host countries.

The Nigerian Diaspora and Homeland Relations

Until relatively recently the debates on the effects of international migration on developments in Africa have tended to be largely dominated by the negative impact of the loss of Africa's skilled manpower to the developed world, a phenomenon popularly referred to as the brain drain syndrome. However, growing evidence would seem to suggest that international migrations from the continent have been having some positive developmental effects on socio-economic and political developments in Africa. Even the hitherto most vociferous African governments, international development agencies and critics of the population movements out of Africa are now beginning to recognize the developmental potentials of the African diaspora with regard to the attainment of rapid and sustainable development in Africa.

As a matter of fact, emotional attachment to the homeland is a general characteristic shared by all diasporas. There is no doubt that diasporas help to set-up local businesses boost social infrastructure, promote trade and enterprise as well as the sustenance of democratic principles (UNDP, 2008, 6). Interestingly, members of the Nigerian diaspora are now heavily involved in transnational activities that are capable of effectively integrating their countries of origin with their host countries. They have, therefore, become not only veritable agents of poverty reduction but a key player in the process of Africa's socio-economic transformation and development, thereby playing a pivotal role in the process of integrating the

African continent into an increasingly globalized world. Globally, recorded remittances are now significantly larger than overseas aid flows and comprise an annual flow of around US\$240 billion into the Global South (Mercer, Page and Evans 2008, 7). Given the huge population of Nigerians living abroad and the fact that Nigeria is the largest recipient of remittances in sub-Saharan Africa, it appears that there is no better country to assess the nature and impact of the contributions of Africans immigrants in the diaspora to Africa's development than Nigeria.

Mohan's (2002) three-fold interdependent but clearly different typologies on the development roles of the diaspora is germane to our understanding of the potentials of the Nigerian diaspora for national development. These are development in the diaspora, development through the diaspora and development by the diaspora. On the one hand, development in the diaspora refers to benefits that accrue to the host locality as a result of the presence of international migrants. Such benefits are independent of the fact that these workers are members of a diaspora and relate simply to their functions as workers or professionals who propel economic growth within the host country. On the other hand, development through the diaspora refers to additional benefits experienced in the host country as a result of the ongoing transnational connections that are peculiar to diasporan groups. Finally, development by the diaspora refers to benefits that diasporic communities bring to their countries of origin. Diasporas, then, contribute to socio-economic well-being and economic growth in the host country as well as their homelands thereby redefining the nature and scope of development (Mercer, Page and Evans 2008, 53-54).

Also relevant to the new diaspora-development mantra is the social responsibility

theory of professionals as refined by Nworah (2005). This theory opines that professionals have a wider social function beyond their call to duty to comment and contribute to public policy and welfare. Thus, the society naturally expects high standards of performance from professionals, it is, therefore, assumed that Nigerian professionals have been contributing to socio-economic development and nation building. Trager (2001, 235-65) argues that the Nigerian Diaspora engages in a range of developmental activities because hometowns among the Yoruba and, indeed, virtually all Nigerians provide the most significant source of social identity and a web of social connections.

The Nigerian Diaspora and Remittances

Remittance from international migration have increased rapidly, generating debates on both sides of the Atlantic on how best to channel these transfers towards economic development. Nigeria is the largest recipient of remittances in sub-Saharan Africa. The country receives nearly 65 percent of officially recorded remittance flows to the region and 2 percent of global flows. In fact, as far back as 1999, Nigerians living abroad remitted the sum of US\$1.3 billion (Babawale 2008, 28 n37). Interestingly, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) began collecting data on remittances in 2002 and reported approximately US\$2.26billion in remittances for 2004 (Hernandez-Coss 2006, 3-4). In 2005 the figure stood at \$6.5billion. Remittances from Nigerians abroad almost doubled in 2007, rising to \$17.9billion from \$10.5billion in 2006, and \$18.2 billion was remitted into the country in 2009 (Oboh, 2011).

Monies sent home by Nigerians living abroad are spent on food, education and

health needs of the senders' relatives; as well as on investments in real estate, stock exchange and the transport sector (Ogbu, 2008).

As is the case for other countries in the region, under-reporting of remittance flows to Nigeria is common because of data collection deficiencies and the prevalence of informal transfer mechanisms. Significantly, the use of informal transfer mechanisms account for about 50 percent of total remittance flows to the country. The most common method is to give a person travelling to Nigeria cash to deliver to beneficiaries. Sometimes, remittances are in kind, for example, the sending clothes or cars by migrants (Hernandez-Coss 2006, 2-3). The typical remitter is altruistic and sees remittances as a means of providing economic support to individual recipients at home. The Nigerian culture in general requires the more fortunate family members to provide for the less fortunate, and that parents invest in their children, who will in turn take care of them in their old age. Osili (2007, 114) is convinced that some Nigerian migrants, over the course of their migration experience, do impact positively on the lives of their families back home. Based on extensive comparative fieldworks in Chicago and Nigeria, the author suggests that investing in housing provides migrants with an opportunity to learn about investment conditions in the country of origin. He notices that Nigerian migrants normally begin with housing investments before going on to provide initial capital for other businesses and to contribute to schools, hospitals, erosion control, and other projects in their hometowns (Osili 2007, 114).

As rightly argued by Hernandez-Coss (2006, 3-4), Nigerian migrants in the lower income brackets often send money more frequently through migrants carrying cash

and have more affiliations within the community. The basic reason for this, according to the author is that this class of migrants are mainly involved in unskilled labour, often live with wealthier Nigerians, do not own houses and tend to send the bulk of their money home. Many in this group are women, who have left their families at home because of desperate economic conditions.

The Brain Drain and Government-Diaspora Relations

The concept of the brain drain first emerged in the 1960s when it was used to describe the migration of British intellectuals and scientists to the United States. Strategies earmarked for stemming the brain drain could be divided into two. The first approach sees the drain as a loss and therefore emigration must be made difficult and less attractive. The second strategy is the diaspora option. The diaspora option represents a different approach to the brain drain. It takes a fundamentally different stance to traditional perspectives on the brain drain in that it sees the brain drain not as a loss, but a potential gain to the sending country.

The diaspora option is driven by the networks of highly skilled expatriates who are referred to as expatriate knowledge networks. Thus, the main feature of the diaspora option is that it tries to set up connections / linkages between highly skilled expatriates and their countries of origin. For instance, in the area of academic linkages, a number of Nigerian universities have started linking up with their alumni resident abroad in order to facilitate academic exchanges, manpower training, library development, and so on. The experience of the Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, between 2003 and 2007 is particularly noteworthy. Apart from book and cash dona-

tions by the Faculty alumni members based in South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States, several junior academics were also trained abroad through the links provided by the Faculty alumni and former academic staff of the Faculty who have migrated and are currently teaching in other universities in Europe, the Caribbean, the US and other parts of Africa. Some of these junior academics have since returned to beef up the academic staff strength of their different departments. Indeed, during this period book donations through the efforts of a former staff of the Faculty based in Durham increased the acquisition of the university main library by over 20,000 volumes.

Thus, intellectual remittances form an integral part of social remittances. Indeed, the contributions of the Nigerian academic diaspora to the development of Nigerian higher education cannot be over-emphasised. For instance, the Kennesaw State University has partnership agreements with a number of Nigerian universities. This partnership has been largely facilitated by a Nigerian intellectual at KSU, Professor Akanmu Adebayo. It is worth noting that from the University of Ibadan alone, about ten academic staff from the Faculties of Arts and Education have benefited from the KSU-UI staff exchange programme. In the same vein, ten KSU faculty have also visited Ibadan (Adebayo 2010, 7, 26-27).

The setting up of expatriates networks affords expatriates the opportunity to transfer their expertise and skills to their countries of origin, without necessarily returning home permanently. In this way, the country of origin has access not only to the knowledge and expertise of the expatriate, but also the knowledge networks that he / she belongs to in the host country (Brown 2007). There is no doubt that the relationship between the Nigerian government and

Nigerian diaspora in contemporary times is governed by this diaspora approach to development. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo launched a "Presidential Dialogue with Nigerians Abroad" in 2002 and this marked a significant milestone in government-diaspora relations. The presidential dialogue was aimed at incorporating the Nigerian diaspora in national development.

De Haas (2006, 16-17) states that the Nigerian Diaspora provides a substantial contribution, especially by way of remittances, to the homeland, and that, in addition to these transfers, members of the Nigerian diaspora contribute to poverty reduction and development in Nigeria through temporary or permanent return programmes for highly skilled migrants. This new initiative enjoys the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Networks (TOKTEN) programme.

The Nigerians in the Diaspora Organisation (NIDO)

The government also established the Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization, (NIDO) which has an office based at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Abuja. The government does not only focus its hope on individual Nigerians abroad to invest in Nigeria, Nigerian diasporan organizations are also ascribed a role in running and sustaining development projects. NIDO has set up a network of branches in Nigerian embassies abroad. Nigerians living abroad are officially encouraged to organize themselves and to link up with NIDO branches in their respective host countries. Arrangements were also made to have NIDO branches not only in almost all European countries, but also three in Asia specifically in Singapore, Malaysia and Australia and in some specific Af-

rican countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. NIDO usually organizes meetings and aims to embark on development projects in collaboration with Nigerians resident abroad.

For instance, it is as a result of the new initiative by NIDO that former US-based Professor Peter Nwangwu, a world renowned clinical pharmacologist who ranks among the top ten pharmacologists in the world decided to relocate to Nigeria in order to assist the Nigerian pharmaceutical industry with his expertise and technical knowhow (Babawale, 2008, 44). Under NIDO, some 400 Nigerian professionals and businessmen based abroad visited Abuja in December 2010 to explore investment opportunities and help in reversing the brain drain. The Jonathan government is also targeting over two billion dollar open ended instrument that will be issued for sale to the Diaspora for the development of Nigeria (Adisa, 2010; Oboh 2011).

Also, as a direct response to the NIDO initiative by government, a new group known as the Industry Growth, Investment and Competitiveness in Africa (IGICA) which is more or less like an amalgam of foreign-based Nigerian business groups has emerged. IGICA aims at providing networking opportunities between private sector and governments, between emerging markets and developed markets, between small businesses and international private sector, as well as between universities and industry and between parastatals and the private sector. IGICA is also interested in creating networking environment for Africa's knowledge transfer partnerships and commercialisation of innovation for industrial growth and investment in Africa (Onuorah and Okwe 2009).

Closely related to the above is the UK-based organisation, *AfricaRecruit* launched

in 1999. This organisation has effectively utilised the skills, knowledge, remittances and networks of the diaspora for the benefit of Nigeria and several African countries. The agency has also been facilitating interactions between recruitment agencies in Europe and job seekers from Africa (UNDP 2008, 16).

The Nigerian National Volunteer Services (NNVS)

Another government agency, the Nigerian National Volunteer Services (NNVS), an organ under the office of the Secretary to the Government of Federation was also established by the Federal Executive Council to among others, to midwife a constructive engagement between Nigeria and her diaspora. NNVS also aims to engage the Nigerian diaspora to create a reverse brain drain (brain gain) of their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, NNVS attempts to mobilize Nigerians professionals living abroad for capacity building, through encouraging temporary visits, technical missions and sabbaticals to Nigerian institutions or through giving summer courses (De Haas 2006, 16-17).

To underscore government's commitment and seriousness to this new diasporan initiative, July 25 every year was declared the Nigerian Diaspora Day by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. This was to recognize the Nigerian diaspora as an important stakeholder in the Nigerian project. It was first celebrated in 2006 with the 2nd Science and Technology conference, which was initiated a year earlier by the Nigerian Volunteer Service (NNVS). On 25 July 2008 Former President Umaru Musa Yar'adua declared open the 2nd Nigerian Diaspora Day and the 3rd Science and Technology Conference. More than 400 Nigerians abroad registered

to attend the conference from 32 countries. The theme of the conference was "Connecting Nigeria with Her Diaspora." (FGN 2007).

Thus, the Federal Government's initiative to engage her diaspora which began in 2002 was motivated by the high profile of a number of distinguished Nigerians in the diaspora, the accumulation of human capital and investments by Nigerians abroad especially professionals and the fact that other developing countries notably India, China, Malaysia, Ireland, and others, had and continue to tap the experience and resources of their diasporas to accelerate their economic growth and development (FGN 2007). India for instance, partly through the assistance of its diaspora, has become one of the global giants in terms of information technology. The Irish diaspora also contributed in no small measure in bridging the managerial gap in the Republic of Ireland and this helped to transform the country to one of the leading countries in Europe. Invariably, there is no denying the fact the diasporas are the most important strategic stakeholders in the migration and development field. The UNDP even described the African diaspora as the greatest offshore asset of Africa (UNDP 2008, 4-5).

On 25 February 2010, the World Bank hosted some 400 members of the African Diaspora, representatives from 19 countries and 137 associations gathered in Washington D.C. and discussed ways to mobilise resources in order to push development in Africa. The participants particularly emphasised the need to devote sustained and additional resources to improving governance. The conference also raised the need to improve channels for remittances. Interestingly, the World Bank estimates that African immigrants living abroad send home between \$32 and \$40 billion annually. It has been argued that this figure far exceeds the money

that is given to Africa through formalised development aid channels (Adeleye 2010).

Conclusion

This paper examines the Nigerian diaspora against the background that its study has largely been subsumed under the rubric of the broad historiography on the African diaspora. The study therefore advocates for an in depth focus on country specific diasporas in order to make room for specificity and avoid broad and sweeping generalizations. Significantly, the connections between the Nigerian diaspora and the prospects for national development received elaborate attention. The study finds out that while Cohen's (1997) ideal diaspora is a homogenous social or ethnic group, the Nigerian diaspora on the other hand reflects the diversity and ethnic divisions in the country which makes it highly fissiparous. It is also the view of the paper that though poverty and inequality may induce migration, it would appear too narrow and simplistic to overstress this factor because empirical and theoretical evidence strongly suggest that higher incomes, improved education and access to media and information will give more people capabilities and aspirations to migrate.

In terms of the prevailing diaspora-homeland development mantra, the study is of the view that the eventual impact of remittances will depend on the use to which such remittances are deployed (Bakewell 2008b, 11). The point is that no matter how remunerative migration might be, it cannot solve the problem of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Individuals and their kin may become better – off, but their places of origin will largely remain backward or underdeveloped because migration and remittances by themselves do not enable any country to escape poverty (Houngbo 2007, 1). Nigeria needs to urgently address the structural

problems behind persistence poverty. Indeed, increasing remittance inflow should not reduce governments' development and social responsibilities. This, however, is not to underestimate the role of the diaspora in Nigeria's quest for rapid socio-economic and political development. This paper, therefore, reiterates the need for continued sustenance and further active engagement by the Nigerian government with the Nigerian diaspora. The extension of voting rights to the Nigerian diaspora would be a step in the right direction because this move would definitely make them develop a stronger sense of belonging to their homeland.

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