

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES DIASPORA

EMMANUEL YEWAH & DIMEJI TOGUNDE

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racism created a hierarchy in which Anglo perceptions about race and ethnicity dominated the social structure, and other non-White groups were placed in the "other" category, which translates into inferior social status.

¹⁵Though Stebbins (1992) admits that White ethnic groups exist (White ethnic populations consist of Irish, Polish, Italian, German and Mediterranean peoples) he informs that the term "ethnic" is reserved as a descriptor for non-White, foreign and heathen groups (see Jackson, 1999, p. 31). More recently, Coover (2001) and Mastro (2003) also report that Whites put no significance on their ethnicity.

¹⁶Other minority groups in America include the Asian-, Chinese-, German-, Irish-, and Italian-Americans.

¹⁷Abrahams (1970) argues that any critical definition of culture must include a connection to a land mass that represents the origin of the culture. Levine (1977) adds that the absence of a land-referent strengthens the suggestion that Blacks had neither culture nor cultural identity.

¹⁸It is useful to mention that the noted absence of extensive relationship is not a phenomenon that is unique to the African and African-American communities. Similar occurrences may be noticed between Asian émigrés and the Asian-American communities and so on. Though this may read as an anti-melting pot comment, America does appear to engender cultural diversity more than it does cultural hybridization.

¹⁹Randall Robinson, an African-American, is founder and president of Trans-Africa; a UNITED STATES-based organization that has consistently spearheaded movement to influence UNITED STATES policies on Africa.

²⁰Hutu genocide of 500,000 Tutsis in Rwanda was one of the most terrible debacles of the 20th century.

²¹The civil war in Darfur, Sudan, Africa's largest country geographically, which has been described as the "world's worst humanitarian crisis" pits government-backed Arab Muslim mounted militias, the Janjaweed, against predominantly black Muslims," (see Markkula Center for Applied Ethics' website).

²²Keith Richburg's direct personal experience with African countries provides a ceiling of sorts to this recommendation. As Washington Post's bureau chief, Richburg traversed Africa's trouble spots, from Rwanda to Zaire, reporting about the wars, famine, mass murders and official malfeasance. Any romanticized notion that this African-American correspondent might have had about Africa disappeared with his experience. His book, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*, first published in 1997, details his confusion and, among others, gratitude for slavery that brought his ancestors to America. In the process of sorting his deeply-scared sense of being, he denounced his African-ness. Many critics were appalled by Richburg's confrontation. Our position is to acknowledge the extremity of the events that he witnessed; to grant him the right to his felt response; and to simply express the academic doubt that Richburg can express gratitude for slavery and expunge his African-ness at the same time.

²³See for example, G. Gerbner, L. Gross, M.F. Eley, M. Jackson-Beeck, S. Jeffries-Fox, and N. Signorielli (1977); see also, G. Gerbner, L. Gross, N. Signorielli, and M. Morgan, (1980); see also, G. Gerbner, L. Gross, M. Morgan, and N. Signorielli (1982).

Chapter 7

Emigration and the Social Value of Remittances in Nigeria

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Introduction

Human migration from one geographical location to another has a historical underpinning. Evidence from anthropological records indicates that such movement has led to the development of social structures. During the colonial period, Africans also traveled to the metropolis to acquire further education and enhance their technical skills. Over time and due to rapid social change, reasons for human migration from less developed to developed societies has become elaborate, though in a somewhat regulated manner because of border controls (Adesina and Adebayo 2009, Akanle 2009). One major aspect of migration is remittance which has been defined as "that quantity of currency that migrants earn abroad and then send home to their families and communities" (Orozco 2002:43). While the means of sending remittances may be formal or informal, its meaning has been expanded over time to include material goods (Osili 2007, Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2006).

Since the 1980s when most African nations adopted the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the importance of remittances has attracted the attention of scholars (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002). This came about as unemployment grew in SAP nations and their currencies also lost value leading to the search for new and creative ways to improve their standard of living. However, the SAP had unintended consequences. It has led to further impoverishment rather than development. In Nigeria for instance, SAP was introduced by General Babangida's Administration in 1986. By the 1990s Nigeria's economy was in serious decline to the extent that about 70 per cent of the population was living for less than \$1 per day. To further buttress this assertion, table 1 shows the impact of SAP-induced inflation on the real purchasing power of low, medium, and high level civil servants between 1979 and 2003.

Table 1: Real Take Home Remuneration in Public Service in Naira

Year	Grade Level 01	Grade Level 08	Grade Level 15
1979-1983	244.00	737.22	1,947.70
1984-1988	164.29	427.64	1,064.06
1989-1993	149.23	272.64	576.14
1994-1998	82.10	198.20	369.70
1999-2003	139.40	340.30	728.90

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2006: Chapter 13)

The data above shows that the real take home pay for public workers in Nigeria declined dramatically from N244 to N82.1, N737.22 to N272.64 and N1,947.70 to N369.7 for Grade levels 01, 08 and 15 respectively, between 1979 and 2003. It should be noted that real take-home pay grossly depreciated, especially as from the post-1986 era, signaling the effect of SAP on wages in spite of salary increases granted to workers. This simply meant that the volume of bills taken as wages only increased while their real purchasing value actually declined. Given the precipitous decline in the value of wages in Nigeria, emigration becomes the logical alternative to remedy the poor standard of living. Those who are fortunate to emigrate are exposed to greater opportunities not only to improve their own socio-economic well-being but to send part of their earnings to extended families and friends.

Between 1980 and 1991, McComic and Wahba (2000) reported that estimated global remittances through formal channels increased from US\$43.3 billion to US\$71.1 billion. More specifically, Haas (2006) submitted that remittances sent to developing nations by emigrants based in developed countries increased from \$31.1 billion in 1990 to \$76.8 billion in 2000. By 2005, it had further increased to \$167 billion which now doubles the value of Official Development Assistance to Third World nations (Haas 2006).

Scholars have however, identified the merits and demerits of emigration and remittances. Orozco (2002) has argued that remittances to developing

countries have directly or indirectly helped alleviate poverty and improve the economy of recipient countries. For instance, particularly he has noted that remittances contributed significantly in rescuing Latin American economies during the period of depression and decline in production and export. A similar finding by Hass (2007), Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002), and Mc Cormic and Wahba (2000) has been reported to show how remittances have enhanced the economies of many countries and contributed to alleviating poverty worldwide. On the contrary, remittances could lead to growth of economic inequality among families as those who do not have relatives abroad may not benefit from remittance flow (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002). Nevertheless, it is usually expected that emigrants will remit goods for family and friends' benefits. Those who fail to send remittances may be seen as greedy and errant members of a familial network system and thus ostracized. The ongoing interaction between an emigrant and relatives at home serves as an essential component of the network theory of migration, which posits that the exchange of information between an emigrant and his/her relatives at the area of origin becomes a stimulating factor for further migration from the areas of origin. An in-depth discussion of the motivation for migration, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

In this chapter, we examine the social value of remittances by drawing on the essential elements of African family structure and organization. The goal is to articulate the cultural foundation that propels the African emigrant to send remittances. Unlike previous studies on remittances, this perspective provides a unique approach to grounding remittances within the framework of African family structure.

Theoretical Background

In examining the socio-cultural relevance of remittances in the African context, cognizance must be given to the importance of the extended family structure. Underlying the African family organization is the notion of familism or collectivism; a notion that differs substantially from the Euro-American definition where the nuclear family and individualization of members takes precedence over the extended family (Coontz, 2000). For the Africans, the extended family network includes the nuclear family members as well as uncles, aunties, cousins, in-laws, other kits and kins and friends and associates who are recognized as part of the familial networks. As a result, in most African societies, uncles and aunties may be seen as parents; cousins as siblings, and friends as brethren - who all participate in a social network aimed at ensuring the wellbeing of every member (Balogun and Olutayo 2005-2006, Sofola 1973).

In addition to mutual responsibilities of members towards one another through a network of relationships, the extended family organization in Africa emphasizes the need to strengthen the sense of cohesion and a sense of belonging of members. Consequently, contribution of each member to the common good of the family institution becomes very important. It is

not uncommon for family members to contribute financial resources to support aspiring emigrants. In this case, migration destination choice becomes a household decision taken for the common good and welfare of the family. This perspective is reinforced by new household economic theory of migration. Given the difficulty in securing visas to developed countries such as the United States, a successful application for a visa and a ticket to travel abroad is celebrated. Such a celebration has two components. First, it indicates a collective effort that has been rewarded. Second, it raises hope in the family that their investment will pay off in the form of remittances. The emigrant is reminded prior to departure not to forget family who in one way or the other has been instrumental to his/her success in leaving an area of origin. If for one reason or the other the emigrant fails to send remittances s/he would be viewed as having abandoned his/her family, roots, and those who made him/her what s/he has become. Thus, individual success in the African context at the area of destination translates into family or community success. The community's expectations sometimes lead some emigrants to embark on some form of socio-economic development in their community as an appreciation of the role of kin, and as a link to his/her heritage.

Furthermore, members promote communal participation in family events and ceremonies such as naming, funerals, inheritance and succession. In most cases, support network is created for needy members of the family such as the elderly, widows, orphans, and the disabled. An African that grows up within this culture who emphasizes interdependence and multi-dimensional network of relationships that bind various relatives together is more likely to remember the obligations that s/he has been socialized to fulfill as an emigrant or as a sojourner in a foreign land. Using the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria as an example, a family member who travels abroad is expected to bring back gifts. In particular, the one who emigrates to an area with better socio-economic opportunities has an even greater obligation to ensure that distance does not create severance of ties with his/her family in the country of origin. Part of the strategy to continue the bond that has been created before departure takes the form of frequent contacts through telephone, mails, or return visits. In an attempt to ensure that the welfare of family members at home is not imperiled, it is expected of an emigrant to send remittances. In a study carried by Hernandez-Coss and Bun, (2006: 3) on remittance out-flow from Nigerians resident in the United Kingdom, respondents emphasized

the importance of being able to stay in touch with their families and improve the economic situation by sending remittances. The Nigerian culture in general requires the more fortunate to provide for the less fortunate...since there are limited formal welfare systems in Nigeria, senders often feel obligated to provide for immediate family members, as well as extended family, friends, and orphans.

As evidence, Nigerians living abroad sent home \$5.4 billion in 2006 alone (Joseph 2007), which represents about 65 per cent of remittances coming to sub-Saharan Africa (Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2006).

In recognition of the financial support that is received by family members in the country of origin, the Yorubas would use a phrase such as "*omolubi to ranti ile*" (that is, a responsible person who remembers home) to describe an individual that sends remittances. These remittances also show the sender as a successful person who must have benefited from this Yoruba

Olodumare je ki a ko o ko de ti

Ki a rajo kabo, ki a ma rajo gbe sajo

Ka ma pada l'owo ojo

May the Almighty God grant the grace to come back home
with the proceeds from the land of sojourn

May we return from our sojourn, may we not perish in
the land of sojourn

May we not return empty handed.

The prayer quote above shows that as emigrants strive to be successful in the land of sojourn, an important part of their cultural background that expects them to support their extended family resonates with them even in the midst of immediate challenges. As a result, remittances sent home become symbols of their presence even though they are physically absent. An African emigrant, therefore, sees the land of sojourn as a land of work. S/he sees "home" not as a place of residence; rather "home" is the place of origin where s/he was raised and socialized. Hence, his/her allegiance and commitment go to the family back at home. In that way, remittances reinforce the emotional bond that exists in the organizational structure of the African family. In the section that follows, we discuss the source of data and methods of analysis.

Source of Data and Method of Analysis

In this paper, we employed a qualitative methodological approach. Data were collected from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary data were collected through a review of literature while primary data were garnered through interviews conducted both in the United States of America (USA)⁴ and Nigeria. It was particularly difficult to secure primary data from Nigerians resident abroad because of the distance between the researchers and potential respondents in the USA. Consequently, the research instrument was sent to a close relation in the USA who assisted in conducting interviews with only five Nigerians (3 males and 2 females) resident in the USA. All responses from interviews in the USA were received between December 2007 and January 2008 via e-mail. In an attempt to enlarge our sample size and to increase the depth of our analysis, we decided in January 2009 to interview 12 new respondents – 6 males and 6 females – (through a snowballing sampling technique) who had relations sending remittances. At the end, a total of 17 interviews were conducted with the aid

of 2 sets of specially designed questionnaire guides. We then utilized a descriptive analytical technique to present results.

Findings on Remittances and Human Development

As earlier articulated, the goal of this chapter is to provide an empirical analysis of the socio-cultural value of remittances in Africa drawing on data collected from both emigrants and their relatives. The socio-cultural organization of African family that expects an emigrant to assist family members at home is captured by a Nigerian resident in the USA who relayed his experience with remittances thus:

The nature of the assistance that I have given and continue to give falls into two classes-financial and non financial. I do send money via Western Union to Nigeria for the payment of school fees of both my relatives and in-laws. I have sent a laptop computer for the use and improvement of the skills of my loved ones in school. It is my opinion that the remittances have been well used as I have contributed to the graduation at university level of one in-law while I am also currently helping out two others. I have been rewarded by their continued excellence in school as well as phone calls and gift items from Nigeria. A sister in-law graduated this last term with a bachelor's degree in Accounting from the University of Benin while another one is a final year law student at Abia State University. I am both proud and honored to play a part in their education. Finally, I support both my mother and mother in-law who are widows and extended family members who are in business as well.

Yet another interviewee stated thus:

The assistance I have given to my siblings and loved ones are in form of financial help and provision of equipment. I have sent money home to help my brothers and I have also bought them a desktop computer. I think it has enhanced and improved greatly their learning process and capacity building. The monetary assistance has been a great benefit to all my brothers. School fees are getting paid on time and books are also being bought to enhance their studies. To top it all, the computer back home has improved their access to educational materials online and two of my brothers have completed PhDs while two others are in the process of completing theirs too.

Furthermore, another emigrant stated,

The type of assistance I have made is financial. It was meant to help a relation complete medical school because his parents could not afford his school fees anymore. The assistance being sent home will not only benefit the recipient in completing his degree but his younger ones as well when he gets a job. I receive progress reports on his grades at school and he gets into less trouble now that he is engaged with studies. From every indication this will be a success story because not only is he in his final year but he is one of the best in his class and he is already guaranteed a job once he is done.

The preceding quotations confirm that remittances are not sent just to show off new found wealth in the land of sojourn. They are usually meant for human development and capacity building. Though the sender and recipient are miles apart, to maintain the existing social bond, African emigrants are obligated to send money home. These aspects of African culture are hereby validated. What follows is sense of relief and fulfillment for the

senders knowing quite well that they are contributing to human capital at the area of origin.

Remittances received keep emigrants in mind. At the same time, the expression of appreciation by the receiver motivates further remittance-flow, thereby strengthening the social bond and contact between the emigrant and his/her kin in the country of origin. The assertion above was corroborated by an interviewee thus:

...there is a very big value attached to what is sent from abroad especially because the livelihood of parents at old age may be dependent on what is sent. The sender should however also relate responsibly with the parents by calling besides the money sent so that their joy may be full. Those living abroad should also be encouraged to return home someday. Ajo o dabi ile (a place of sojourn is unlike home).

In addition, we find that remittances enhance the prestige of family members in their communities as they go to receive USA Dollars from financial institutions such as MoneyGram and/or Western Union outlets or through unofficial channels, they exude a sense of the privilege few.

As another interviewee opined:

That a person's close sibling stays abroad boosts the family social status. Especially if the person is the type that remembers home, the family's economic standard will be improved.

Furthermore, the non material component of remittances, that is, goods such as clothing, shoes, and computers become symbolic gestures that make recipients happy, connected, and valued. Clearly, remittances carry positive psychological impact on recipients. Moreover, senders are perceived as fortunate with clear advantages that make their family and friends look up to them. In the words of one interviewee,

If you have somebody abroad, you have access to opportunities much faster than those who do not have relations abroad. You have more access to cash and technology. Their lifestyles and ideologies tend to impact their relations at home as the relations view those abroad as the ideal. Economic hardships make things difficult here in Nigeria but with a relation abroad, a lot of things could be made easier.

The findings further reveal that recipients place greater emphasis on their perception of the quality and durability of goods received from abroad as compared to those made in Nigeria. Recipients wear name brands sent from abroad; they stand out tall as the imported foreign goods give the impression of comfort, affluence, and care from kits and kin residing in the United States. The following statement from another interviewee bears evidence to the assertion:

I have received gifts from friends and siblings abroad. What they have sent were usually better than the goods that may be procured in Nigeria. This is because what they use abroad is of better quality and value than what we have here. For example, American butter and tea will be better appreciated here. I remember that when my sister came with American tea, I appreciated it so much. I have received assistance financially. I have also received clothes, shoes

and many other goods. I consider the goods durable. You cannot compare it with a made in Nigeria product.

Conclusion

Beyond the economic value that remittances convey, this chapter has shown that it is imbued with social values, which enhance social cohesion irrespective of the thousands of miles that separate emigrants from loved ones. Given that African emigrants are often motivated to travel to developed countries in order to gain access to socio-economic opportunities in the countries of destination, this chapter confirms that the African family structure that emphasizes interdependence, togetherness, sharing, maintaining family ties and cohesiveness serve as bases for remittance-flow. The analysis in this chapter reveals that remittances solidify social bonding and keep the meaning and essence of African family alive. Thus, this study elucidates the socio-cultural value of remittances as they serve as a unifying tool that connects the senders with their families and communities of origin.

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Endnotes

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⁴The researchers tried to conduct interviews with Nigerians residents in the United Kingdom and Canada all to no avail. The contact persons in these countries also could not help.

Chapter 8

Religious Institutions

Mode of Adaptation for African Immigrants in the U.S.A.

Emmanuel K. Twesigye

Introduction

Drawing on the author's research¹ and personal story as an immigrant, this chapter looks at some characteristic religious traditions and practices of some recent African immigrants within the United States of America. Along with their diverse traditions, the African immigrants have brought with them their professional skills, African cultures, religions, and value systems. They pay most of the expenses for staying electronically connected with their relatives back in Africa. By doing so, the more recent African immigrants have been able to preserve their cultural, religious, and linguistic links with their countries of origin. At the same time, these African immigrants are also struggling to adopt new values and to modify their African cultures and religions at new destinations, where they also encounter more challenging liberal religious, moral, and secular cultural traditions.

It is interesting that most of the African immigrants, who came to Europe and North America in the last century, are not the products of the digital revolution. They represent more conservative traditional African values and heritage. In contrast to the more internationalized digital revolu-