

# Migrants as Nationalists or Long Distance Critics: The Case of Nigerian Diaspora Members Perception of Homeland

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## Abstract

This paper examines the Nigerian Diaspora members' engagement with Nigeria, as a nation-state. The paper unearths the ambiguous processes that sometimes reveal nationalism in a transnational context, while in the process of communicating with origin. Other times, the revelations can possibly be a mitigation of longing mixed with anger. The indicated nationalism could be fastidious observations from the distance, which defies attachment. The complex relationship between diaspora and the *homeland*, raises questions regarding whether the migrants are long distance critics or long distance nationalists. Or could it be that they are simply enveloped in delusions about an ideal, unhelpful for the origin, or that they mitigate nostalgia through online exchanges? The paper examines these questions, concluding that some evidence exist to proof the posers.

## 1.1: INTRODUCTION

The questions raised in abstract arise given the operational definition of nationalism as the emotional and committed relationship between an individual, or a collective and the nation-state. The people in question, as one aspect of a binary are usually within the nation-state, but sometimes they live in a distant. The nation-state may express a top-down concern with the distant people, as it simultaneously relates with those within. How do we therefore consider the online relationship of Nigerian migrants with the *homeland*, within the framework of nationalism?

## 1.2: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was used for this work, and includes a combination of participant observation of websites, sampled online groups, and their offline interview statements. Like most online research, the sites, newsgroups and chatrooms were nebulous. It therefore was important to sample to enable the drawing of inferences, themes, and patterns.

## 2.1: CONTENTS, DISCONTENTS OF NATIONALISM: ETHNIC GROUPINGS AND THEIR ONLINE ENGAGEMENTS

As Alter and other theorists argue, nationalism often "conceals within itself extreme opposites and contradictions" (1985:2). In showing attachment to Nigeria, some migrants are positive about certain issues. However, others are negative on the same issues. The opposing standpoints reflect a relationship of a sort, which is necessary to understand nationalism. For this research, there is evidence to argue that a passion for virtual activities involving Nigeria exists.

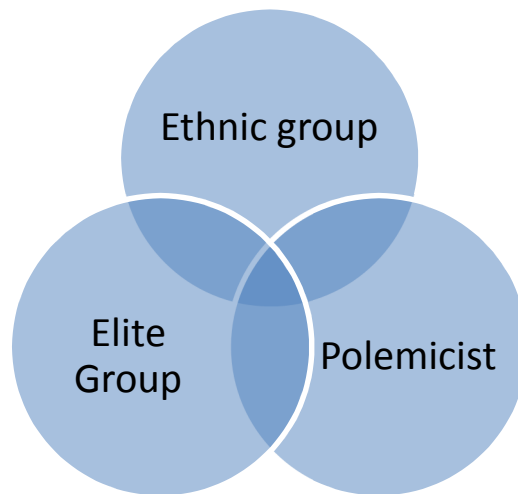
These channels of expression of nationalism can be, though inexclusively, ethnic or news inclined websites; or newsgroups and chatrooms. Participant in any group at a point in time may be in another group at some other time. The groupings help in understanding their feelings via different Internet functions. In a website for instance, the feelings may be expressed using the more permanent column, like "our profile", "who we are", or "our mission". But in the newsgroups and chatrooms, the stimulation of thoughts in the process of sending and receiving, can be livelier.

A first category of users in the website studied is those active in websites formed because of ethnic relationships. Each of this website is based on the original roots of parents, particularly that of the father in Nigeria. Owners of these websites speak a common native language and share a common culture and heritage. Their root in Nigeria is either same or geographically close to each other. The pull of a common language makes them move closer to one another while abroad. The group converges online because of these affiliations. Sometimes, they set up utilities like e-mail lists to attend to their peculiar interests.

The second group are the elites, who sound cultured, conversant and cosmopolitan in news/features stories inclined websites. They demonstrate a can-do spirit. Of course, these elites also belong to one ethnic group or the other as in the first classification, but this is concealed through their cosmopolitan posturing, when outside the ethnic online groups. These people are also often seen in sites of professional groups, individual sites, and sites of news media.

The third group describes persons, who could be part of the previous two groups, but are now conversational. Members of this group can be called the polemicists, as they are often ready for prolonged exchanges, arguments, and controversies. They exhibit these traits in locations like newsgroups, listservs and in usenets. Though the categories may sometimes overlap, their online roles at different times distinguish them from

each other. They are separated by the online facility in use. The simple diagram below illustrates these categories and the overlapping tendencies.



*An illustration of groups and the overlapping tendencies*

I shall first discuss the online context of nationalism or lack of it, within activities from ethnic groups. Then the paper will examine the possible manifestation of nationalism through elite engagements with specified websites and the likely expression of fondness, or its non-appearance, amongst the third group-the polemicists. The paper then discusses the gender dimension regarding possibilities of expressing nationalism.

### **3.1: ETHNIC ONLINE ASSOCIATIONS AND THE MITIGATION OF LONGING OR THE EXPRESSION OF NATIONALISM**

The internet is rich with cultural and informational content and resources related to ethnic communities. A multiplicity of websites, servers and rings offer a variety of services to community members and cater for their online and offline needs (Chalaby, 2000: 20).

Ethnic online groups are useful for enacting the communion of the *homeland*. The associations reflect the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria, and the numerical strengths of the groups. Dozens of these ethnic groups are online. However, the focus of analysis shall be on the three major groups, adjudged so because of their numerical strength and the expansive geography they occupy. I am focusing on these three groups for ease of examination, taking that there are over 250 ethnic groups in the country. Regardless, other smaller groups, usually called minorities are mentioned, so that diversities can be properly understood. There is, for instance, the Yoruba page-*Egbe Isokan* Yoruba, which loosely means the United Yoruba People. The ethnic group is one of the three major inhabitants in Nigeria.

In what the website administrator describes as “keeping with its mission to promote the Yoruba culture in Africa and in diaspora”, the webmaster made a trip to the *Oyotunji* African Village in South Carolina: Recollection, which visits initiates, enables the imagination of a nation, and even a nation-state. An association with the Yoruba nation through image can be evident. At the same time, in the website mission above, is a concern for the Nigerian nation-state that embodies the Yoruba language-speaking people. Although primary identification is with the Yorubas, loyalty to the larger political entity is part of the objectives of the site promoters, as seen in their mission statement.

That loyalty is not only an evidence of nationalism as it is in the pledge to “promote peace, stability, justice and unity”, but an indication of the complex character of Nigeria. Nigeria in this instance represents a political entity, while the ethnic group within the political entity represents the local place of origin. A duplication of the Yoruba page is “Oduduwa” (the Yorubanet). Smaller units of the Yoruba site also include, for example, those of Yoruba Community Association, Ontario; *Egbe* Association of Florida; and *Egbe Omo Obokun* of Ijeshaland. Another is that of Oduduwa Heritage Organisation, which is in Oakland, San Francisco, and has a similar motive.

The *Egbe Omo Obokun* of Ijeshaland is another instance of a smaller unit of the major Yoruba group, seeking union through its own Yoruba speaking town, Ijeshaland. Smaller sites appear when representation in the bigger group is viewed as marginal.

Like *Egbe Isokan* Yoruba, which represents a major Nigerian group in migration, the Igbo Community Association of Nigeria (ICAN) in Texas, represents another main group. A duplication of the site is [www.Igbo-net](http://www.Igbo-net). The website [www.biafraland.com](http://www.biafraland.com) is also associated with the Igbos, and is more assertive in its commitment

to the ethnic group. The word Biafra is a pseudonym for the Eastern part that attempted succession from the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1967. This nation was known as *The Republic of Biafra*, and it reigned during their three-year agitation for a separate country. The name is still a reference point for the people, while its use in circumstances invokes memories of a fight for independence.

Other websites by those in smaller groups, within the Igbo group are [www.arochukwu.com](http://www.arochukwu.com); *Arondizuogu* Patriotic Union, New Jersey; Obosi Development Association and the Asaba group. While the *Arochukwu* people are proud of their population in Nigerian and abroad, the *Arondizuogu* feels the same. They (*Arondizuogu* people) are also concerned about expanding their membership, including through conferring honorary membership to females married to non-natives. The Obosi group highlights their tradition and history, just as they invite members to contribute to community development projects in origin.

The [www.asaba.com](http://www.asaba.com) addresses migrant Asaba people. It represents a need to associate with a nation through ethnic affiliation, despite their minority status. Membership is for those “who share our desire to make Asaba a better place and have the concern and commitment to work towards achieving these goals”. It was built in “1989 out of the need to unite all Asaba people and point them towards one goal of making Asaba better” (Accessed at [www.asaba.com](http://www.asaba.com)). The site is administered from Texas, and has many sections including those on its history, tradition, and festivals. A music section is also available for visitors to listen in, while Video clips are available for viewing.

There is an Asaba discussion board where registered members are expected to “tell us what is on your mind”. Some contributions monitored at a time had the following headlines: “Think home, Asaba is the place”, “Kindly look homeward, Asaba youths at home need you”, and “Asaba youth and tomorrow”. The theme of contributions was on the need for migrant natives to support their local community in Nigeria. Importantly, the Asaba group lives a lively virtual life, through registration, chatting, posting messages, announcements and the creation of mailing lists. Links to other relevant sites like the Nigerian government departments, newspapers and useful organisations are available. The Asaba group is a good example of the activity of minority groups online. Similar minority sites are [www.warri.com](http://www.warri.com); [www.uromicommunity-ny.com](http://www.uromicommunity-ny.com); [www.edonation.com](http://www.edonation.com); and [www.rivnet.com](http://www.rivnet.com).

The third major group, the Hausas, has one main site, called the Hausa main page. The Hausa language-speaking people are a dominant set occupying the Northern part of Nigeria. An influential Nigerian political group, they reflect the need to work for the “continued political and economic progress of Nigeria”. They are pleased to invite website visitors to learn their language: a widely spoken language in the West African sub-region. This amounts to promoting an aspect of their culture in the bid to relate with their nation. Though a little more homogenous, they have splinter sites, like [Arewa-online.com](http://Arewa-online.com); Gumel (Hausa); the Hausa Culture Unit; the *Zumunta*, and that of the London based Arewa Union.

Some of these have well defined objectives. The administration of the *Zumunta* Association site [[www.zumunta.org](http://www.zumunta.org)], for instance, comes from the US. Its profile signed by Aliyu Mustapha seeks a distinction in its objective. In what shows a concern for its region in Nigeria, the association “aspires to help the North technologically, socially and economically, cater for its members, preserve the rich and diverse cultures of Nigeria, and improve the image of the country in the global media” (accessed at [www.zumunta.org](http://www.zumunta.org)). Gumel (Hausa) seeks to promote the cultures of its Northern Nigerian people through relating to each other in the native Hausa language.

These expressions of commitments to their culture, tradition and Nigerian, reveal an element of nationalism, as it aligns with a desire for progress of the nation. Again, it may simply be a desire to minimise longing, by virtually interacting with peers from the origin, rather than an interest in the well-being of a country, where economic needs are not met. An indication of nationalism, especially some of its ambiguities emerge in the circumstance.

Significantly, names like *Gumel*, *Egbe Isokan* and the *Arondizuogwu* are words from the native languages. Use of the word reflects a bond with the origin through language as a dimension of culture. It occurs despite possible exposure to other languages through dislocation.

The sites of minority groups often seek to popularise their own identity, to elevate it to prominence. It further reveals the ultimate desire of a small group to overcome insignificance through the creation of a definite online voice, and then have it influence the nation-state. Time and space are no limitations in the regular desire to relate with the nation. This desire is synonymous with the quest for emotional fulfilment, security and social inclusion. The drive for a union is associated with the majority, just as it is with the minority groups. Social categories like class, or numerical strength and spread of a group are not hindrance(s) for the individuals making up the groups.

The process of associating in various forms amongst the migrants as it relates to the definition of a relationship with a bigger entity, a nation, reveals the multiple level of constructing nationalism, that involve very emotional and personal engagement with the *homeland*, as well as communal and political campaigns around the country of origin’s affairs. Doubts may arise regarding the worth of this relationship. Clarification could come through the result of their actions and inactions towards Nigeria. But the outcome is still difficult to gauge, because

studies of dislocations amongst Nigerians is relatively new, compared to many other diaspora and migration stories mentioned in Paper one.

Apart from groups with websites, many others are active on the network through notices for meetings or announcements, via members' mailing lists. Information that comes through the list initiates interactions that mark the beginning of recollections and reminiscing. It may lead to reviews of the state of Nigeria's affairs, given an apparent concern for it.

Participant's reference to communal interaction through fellow migrants indicates a way of belonging. A feeling of otherness may reappear when interaction returns to his migration world. A mitigation of the possibilities of lacking interaction in hostland takes place at monthly interactions with close friends from Nigeria. The cycle satisfies Ibukun and hence the confession of enjoying the hostland.

However, Nigeria's growth and development remains a wish hence his regret regarding the inadequacies of Nigeria's leaders. The expression does not only show an attachment, but also reflects sympathy for the development crises in origin. The online ethnic unions further a sense of association in the face of possible integration challenges in hostland. The sense of association simultaneously goes on with a likely concern for native origin, and a worry for the nation-state (Nigeria), where this native origin is situated.

### **3.2: BETWEEN THE MAJORITY AND THE MINORITY**

Overall, complexities abound in the definition of the majority versus minority groups. While the definitions of some perceived minorities are based on their geographical location, the mapping of others is because of their linguistic peculiarity compared with the majority. Some supposed minority groups might not see themselves as such given the similarity of their language with the majority. Others will however be happy with the designation for political, social, religious, or other reasons (Achebe, 1983).

For the sake of this paper, however, while there are sites, which represent majority ethnic groups, there are also sites that represent the minorities. Sometimes, there are duplications of sites for majority groups. At other times, those of minorities also have duplication. Motivated individuals and groups within these ethnic bodies construct and administer these sites. The proliferation of the sites does not only represent the transference of the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria to migrants' online space, but also denotes the interest of sections of the migrants to virtually reconnect with their roots. The sites of the minority group further symbolise resistance against the possibility of domination by the majority, despite similarities in language and culture.

I have illustrated this with cases of the existence of numerous websites from minorities, like those of Asaba, Igbo-net, within the larger Igbo group; *Egbe Omo Obokun* of Ijeshaland and *Egba* Association of Florida, within the larger Yoruba group; and *Zumunta* and *Arewa* online, within the larger Hausa group. They are ethnically associated with the majority set and their websites, mailing lists; discussion groups are virtual outlets for identification, remembrance, and aspects of nationalism as seen above. Participants in this group possibly continue the portrayal of nationalism through other patterns, which are discussed in the next section. The pattern is illustrated mainly through their interests, and mode of socialisation. The analysis of this category appears below.

### **4.1: CONCERN FOR NIGERIA VIA "VIRTUAL ELITISM"**

Sites of individuals and professionals represent the second major category of migrants' online activity. Their Interests, professions, self-assigned role and the need for ongoing survival in migration distinguish them. They are also differentiated by a marginal or deep attachment to Nigeria. Many of them see their sites as virtual routes to the *homeland*. The websites are additionally for representations in situations of exclusions from hostland media. In using this route, a semblance of loyalty to the departed nation-state becomes visible through the evolution of threads of thoughts on deficiencies of Nigeria.

Some of the sites focus on news and current affairs. They regularly try to outdo each other through the quality of items they upload. A few examples are [www.nigeriaworld.com](http://www.nigeriaworld.com), which is a general interest site that uploads some topical stories from the home-based press. It has original contributors, as a leading migrant website. [www.amanaonline.com](http://www.amanaonline.com) equally concentrates on news, while [www.arewaonline.com](http://www.arewaonline.com) is named after the notable word *Arewa*: an acronym for identifying people of Northern Nigerian origin.

It uploads stories similar to [www.nigeriaworld.com](http://www.nigeriaworld.com) and features regular original contributors. [www.nigeriamasterweb.com](http://www.nigeriamasterweb.com) does the same, but appears to be more detailed in its sections. It has links to numerous other websites including ethnic; those of activists; educational websites; websites of notable African and World newspapers, with notes on dead websites. [www.nigeriaweb.com](http://www.nigeriaweb.com) is a part of [www.nigeriaworld.com](http://www.nigeriaworld.com) and was the first by the [www.nigeriaworld.com](http://www.nigeriaworld.com), administrator Mr Chuck Odili, before its expansion. [www.nigeriavillagesquare.com](http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com) is more interactive, because it encourages discussions of uploaded articles, besides publishing the latest news.

These sites typically provide detailed information particularly about Nigeria. They appeal to their users because of opportunities for cheery discussions and dialogues. They have several links to other sites, especially local newspapers. The sites welcome features and opinion articles from migrants. These readers take hold of the

chance to express their thoughts on events in Nigeria. In a day, [www.nigerianworld.com](http://www.nigerianworld.com) publishes articles from writers in different geographical locations. Central to the headlines written by individuals in Canada, the US, UK, Russia and Germany is a supposed affection that is at once a sign of a disdain for Nigeria, and a wish for a better future. While some comments are critical and others are not, the inspirations behind the thoughts seem to be mostly reconfirming the authors' commitment to Nigeria. Their immediate impact may not be measurable because of their far location but contentment seems to be achieved because of the possession of a space for the expression of concern.

Discussions take place in the sites, just as archives are kept. Updating is on a daily basis. A Nigerian in the US, Ekundayo, is one of the earliest administrators of a Nigerian issues based website (Bastian, 1999: 14), called [www.naijanet.com](http://www.naijanet.com). He began the network in 1991, leading thereafter to a proliferation of similar sites. More individual migrants' sites have since come into existence with the rise in the popularity of the Internet from the early 1990s, as this participant supports:

The question of agitating for a better Nigeria online introduces a new dimension to the discourse. Apart from being evidence that the Internet is an activist tool, it demonstrates the tendency of some migrants to correct the wrongs of the origin, if possible. A few websites are the products of activists' interests. They include those by Kudirat Institute for Nigeria Democracy, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and Progress Action Movement. The MOSOP site is for the interests of the minority Nigerian Niger-Delta Community, whose people suffer environmental degradation through oil exploration in their ancestral origin. Three recent news websites further fall into this category.

They are [www.elendureports.com](http://www.elendureports.com), [www.saharareports.com](http://www.saharareports.com) and [www.thetimesofnigeria.com](http://www.thetimesofnigeria.com). The three are barely a year old at the time of writing. The popularity of the site is nevertheless shown in the number of references made to them in newspapers, and discussion groups. Moreover, the popularity surpasses many of the older websites. While a journalist, Jonathan Elendu administers [www.elendureports.com](http://www.elendureports.com), a former Nigerian student union activist, Omoyele Sowore, manages [www.saharareports.com](http://www.saharareports.com). Another journalist, Sunny Ofili, who is in the US, runs the last website. They often counter government pronouncements with facts, in manners the *homeland* press would not do.

People with concerns also feed them with information. In this sense, an avenue for propaganda may have arisen in Internet space. This is more so because the government often responds through their own web pages, and on their transnational television network-the NTA. Various Nigerian leaders allegedly moving funds abroad hate the sites for publishing information about their activities. The reading migrants on the other hand celebrate the reports. With visual materials and vivid descriptions of the looting process, the sites sometimes publish the photographs of houses in foreign locations supposedly bought with public funds by these leaders.

Passion, determination and conviction against the problems in origin and the zeal to contribute towards alleviating it runs through the words above. Such commitment does not only come from a purportedly nationalistic mindset but one ready for sacrifices. Bade however argues that the likes of Sowore are extremists, who cause "confusion instead of helping development". However, while Sowore works through a site, which focuses on news/issues, other individual websites campaign for or against persons.

An intriguing one, which became propaganda, is about the controversial former military president Babangida. This person was once in a campaign to return as Nigeria's democratic president. Two websites promoted his ambition. The administration of the sites notably came from Nigeria. Named [www.Ibbheritageclub.com](http://www.Ibbheritageclub.com) and [www.Ibrahimbabangida.com](http://www.Ibrahimbabangida.com), they projected the capabilities of the politician in the past, the present and his potential. Some migrants in the US challenged the moral right of the politician to return, via a website [www.againstbabangida.com](http://www.againstbabangida.com).

Several diaspora members in the "elite class" have personal websites. It seems to be a form of self-endorsement in a flourishing global entity. Notable sites in this group are those of career persons like Cardinal Francis Arinze, a Catholic clergy in Rome named as a possible successor to John Paul II, before the announcement of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. Ben Okri also has his. So does Soyinka.

In addition, Chika Nnigwe, an Afro-Belgian writer of Nigerian ancestry also has a site (accessed at <http://library.stanford.edu/africa/nigeria.html>). *Weblogs* thrive amongst the migrants. Professor Aluko, who administers *Nigeriamuse*, is a case in point, amongst tens of others. *Blogg*ing on Nigeria events, owners invite discussions after providing leads from their individual point of view. This is even if the central focus of the blog is on personal stories. Important to them is the obvious emotional or less emotional concern for Nigerian affairs and a desire to lead topics for discussions.

A number of "virtual elites can also be found in a few relatively general sites. Notable here is the Association of Nigerians Abroad (ANA) and the Nigerian Diaspora Organisation, mentioned earlier. The ANA started in the early 1990s as an activist site. The site was constructed in the wake of the turbulent political climate of the period made worse by the controversial annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. An earlier paper already remarked that the former President Obasanjo administration encouraged the formation of the Nigerian in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO). Its presence to date is mostly on the Internet. NIDO says in its mission

that “Numerous societies and clubs of Nigerians (professional, ethnic, and family) already exist in many European countries, and it is not the intention that NIDO replaces them”.

The site has sections for migrants in different locations, while new members are invited. A website of Nigerian professional in Germany further signposts nationalism through the issues they raise in this category. The site, <http://www.nidogermany.org/projects.htm> notes that they are a non-profit group, which “provides a platform for Nigerians living in Germany to participate in the development of Nigeria”.

The clause “participate in the development of Nigeria” signifies a quest for involvement in supposed developmental efforts in origin. This concern also explains why they made further calls to members to come up with ideas that support projects like Agriculture, transportation, security, energy and education. They seek information on how to help the *homeland* on these areas, by calling on members, “friends and well-wishers of Nigeria to forward proposals and suggestions on what you think can be done and what you can do in these areas”.

Many other migrants express ideas as professionals. They interact at the level of common calling, eventually defining a path to relate with Nigeria and then try to contribute to its progress. A lot of them show specialist concerns for problem areas of Nigeria in which they have expertise. An example is the case of some Nigerian doctors who visit the country annually to help with medical care.

Some other similar gestures reported online are from groups like [www.nigeria-arts.net](http://www.nigeria-arts.net), and [www.nigerianexpertsabroad.com](http://www.nigerianexpertsabroad.com) in the Americas. The Nigerian Experts Abroad is a “web based resource which allows Nigerian Professionals across the world to make contacts with each other and share valuable knowledge and information”. The Association of Nigeria Physicians in the Americas says it has over “2,000 members” and “is a non-profit organisation of physicians and surgeons of Nigerian descent who are practising in the US and Canada”.

Also important is that many in this category access online version of Nigeria newspapers. This assertion does not ignore the possibility of opportunities to read physical copies through transnational networks; it only emphasises the irregularity of this type of access. Unreliable and expensive offline supply systems across international borders cannot be practicable alternatives. The immediacy, low cost, and relative convenience of online versions make them a regular mediation mode.

The Internet particularly mediates the interaction of members in the elitist sense in the noticeable quest for belonging. Diaspora members find a virtual space of connection through news and issue based sites. An expression of concerns manifests through professional and individual sites. The virtualised ties seen in the foregoing, supports the argument that longing and nostalgia for nation, and nation-state take place alongside a wish for its well-being (or a resentment for it), which most times take a nationalism turn.

### **5.1: THE POLEMICISTS AND THE LIKELY EXPRESSION OF NATIONALISM**

The third category to which I classify virtual ways through which nationalism likely manifests is in the course of news/discussion groups. Some of these groups use popular portals like Yahoo, Hotmail, and Google. A few other discussion groups are located on ethnic, professional or individually maintained websites.

The newsgroup activity helps the migrants feel more at ease. This takes their status further away from the traditional perception of migrants as a fragile group, endangered species or an unsettled people. Through a virtual life, they are able to share experiences, express pains and joys while discussing Nigeria, probably making them to cope better with their troubled everyday.

Consequently, with [naijapolitics@yahoo.com](mailto:naijapolitics@yahoo.com), participants are brought together, “through the mind, through artefacts, and through shared imagination” (Cohen, 1997: 26), while it revives national belonging. Virtual reconnections at [naija-politics@yahoo.com](mailto:naija-politics@yahoo.com), replace the physical absence from Nigeria. Possibly unable to find representation in the media of the settlement society, [naijapolitics@yahoo.com](mailto:naijapolitics@yahoo.com) provides a forum for the exploration of innovative possibilities towards national identification. It soon becomes a “habit for these modern sojourners” (Anyanwu, 2004).

Karim (2004: 18) adds that with new communication technologies, “diasporas are able to obtain cultural materials with growing ease from other parts of the world”. Besides, he says, “Governments are finding it increasingly difficult to compel them to assimilate minorities into the dominant national culture in the face of globalisation-from-below” (Karim, 2004: 18). From another viewpoint, the Internet saturates everyday life including those of diasporas (Georgiou, 2002). The Nigerian diaspora members are obviously involved in this saturation, especially as it offers a new avenue for connection with peers and with origin, pursuant to the demonstration of attachment. [naijapolitics@yahoo.com](mailto:naijapolitics@yahoo.com) is therefore round-table where virtual discussions, mainly on the *homeland* affairs, go on without conclusion.

### **6.1: THE GENDER FACET**

The gender element of online nationalism activity is worth discussing. Bastian records Lola as starting a female network from the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1990’s (1999: 5). The writer continues: “Naijanetters to whom I have appealed for information on this question suggest that the male to female ratio is in the area of 60:40

or 70:30". Foregoing discussions might have revealed a leading male participation in online nationalistic activities, female interactions are also complementary. This is even if patriarchy still predominates in Nigeria. In the countryside, people see men as heads, breadwinners, or natural leaders.

The description becomes more fitting towards the hinterlands than in the cities. It suggests that the concentration of the trend is proportional to the degree of cosmopolitanism, the people are experiencing. Exposures to modern civilisations make them more open-minded, while the opposite encourages being narrow-minded. Those in the hinterland are more conservative. Though many women achievers are present in various places, the popular thinking is that home affairs should be their forte. This believe however experiences alterations amongst migrants, because they are now part of a culture, with a stronger tendency towards visible gender equality.

Female migrants imbibe an orientation of independence, equal rights, or are averse to semblances of discrimination against them. They are less concerned about feminists', or similar labels (Azikiwe, 1996; Sarikakis and Leslie, 2008), they may afterwards earn. The action of Lola above represents the transference of this re-orientation to the virtual world. Apart from the Kudirat site, there are some other sites, which are specific to female affairs or have women as a primary reference point.

Examples of these are those of Nigerian women organisation; Nigerian Business Women; Nigerian Women Association of Georgia and Motherland Nigeria. The last has sections on healthcare; food and drinks; cultures and customs; and home management, all fundamentally from the Nigerian perspective. Some female interviewees' however confess to leaving the business of Internet use to their husbands or partners.

While the delegation of Internet use does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a prevalence of one gender over the other in Internet use, it nevertheless reveals how Internet use by proxy often occur. Direct engagement with the network takes place when Internet use is between the person and a network terminal. A third party comes in when the person relies on another for the performance of the network function. The go-between briefs the waiting party of deserving information. The distance created between the concerned party and the network through the agency of the third party, may (or may not) impact on the value of nationalism. It nevertheless introduces one alternative to Internet access, which is browsing it by surrogating. This reinforces some reasoning that males lead in use (Snow, cited in Manzrui, 2006: 11).

From another perspective, the women who use the Internet through proxies may be doing so for other unstated reasons. The three contributors above are between ages 34 and 44. They are therefore mature, and could probably be mothers, preoccupied with child-minding. Their responsibility may affect their chances of giving a high priority to browsing, even if they would ordinarily be interested in it. In their position, they could make do with the husband or partners' help in that regard. On the other hand, they may belong to the class of traditional Nigerian woman that believes in allowing the man take the initiative, including Internet use.

In other words, they are the hesitant set, who believes in total reliance on the man in the house. Some other women are however different. They are educated, and are initiators themselves, despite their marital or partnership status. They are often enterprising, modern, sometimes taking the leadership role in the home. The character blossoms when marriage or childbearing are not hindrances. It may not be different when they are.

As expected, women like men have varied interests. While some focus on beauty, a lot are concerned with career matters. Several are blogging in first-person, whereas many literally detach themselves from their contributions. A Norway based woman, blogging under the title "Nigerian woman in Norway", says that she is looking to live life to the fullest. She intends to "seek and grab all opportunities in life and contribute to humanity in my very little way" (accessed at [www.blogger.com/profile](http://www.blogger.com/profile)).

Iyanda sometimes operates from the lenses of her profession as a journalist, by publishing current issues on her blog, *Nigeriantimes*. Links with the name Nigeria, particularly in the case of the migrant women, could well mean a desire for attachment with an origin. This is happening even when they have the option of doing otherwise, or even using the name of their respective hostlands. The women are therefore active participants in the expression of a relationship with ancestry, whether for good, ill, or indifference.

## 7.1: CONCLUSION

Other than this is the tendency of mothers amongst the Nigerian diaspora members to cherish living in the west for the sake of their children, in what further raises questions on the quality of attachment to Nigeria. However, this desire is often common amongst other categories of people including fathers, but many mothers significantly confess to preferring the relative predictability of life in the west, than in Nigeria. They are concerned about the provision of better health facilities, availability of good roads and better educational institutions. To them, their children would rather take advantage of these facilities, and live a better future than what was available to them when parents were growing up in Nigeria. Some, as would be seen in the statements below, are happy to be left behind abroad while the husband may return, or shuttle between abroad and the *homeland* in search of means of livelihood.

The preference for hostland amongst women continues the ambiguity about migrants' perception of origin. To the women, priority is given to the future of the children, basic needs of life and a better ability to plan than

sheer appreciation of Nigeria. If Nigeria has to be appreciated, it must be able to fulfil basic expectations; otherwise, the inclination will be for the hostland, where they could be available. Then concern for Nigeria would simply be as a place of original belonging. Would these female diaspora members then be said to be nationalistic? To the extent that some form of concern and relationship exist with Nigeria, it can be argued that nationalism is inferred.

A counterargument could arise that because fondness is for another country, then they are not interested in Nigeria. This does not also indicate an absence of nationalism, as nationalism is laden with contradictions. The position of the women above can be seen as a more realistic, conditional form of nationalism, shaped in the meeting of the personal, the familial and the communal needs and priorities. Core to the debates is that nationalism is ambiguous. This ambiguity sometimes makes it flexible, as long as a relationship between the nation and nation-state on the one hand; and the individual, and/or the collective on the other hand is established.

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