Nigerian Diaspora and the Online Construction of Identities: Visualisation and a Changing Self

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Abstract

"The movement of large masses of people across national boundaries, technologies that deliver modern instantaneous communication, the culture of simulation, and globalisation in all its forms are some of the forces determining the contemporary context of identity **(Paul Gilroy, 1997: 303)"**

This paper focuses on the changing individual and collective identities of Nigerian Diaspora members, by revealing the different identities that result from the migrants' use of the Internet. The paper situates the transformation of the Nigerian diaspora members' identities within the context of the growth of the Internet and its role as a tool for a people experiencing new political and economic challenges. The relative freedom and limitlessness of cyberspace encourages equally boundless online activities of diaspora members. The boundlessness combines with its low cost and easy access to help form new identities or the firming up of old ones. Some of the new identities may simply be limited to life online, as they could have little or no offline relevance. These may therefore be online identities. The paper reasons that online identities can occur where, for instance, the many online debaters do not find corresponding roles offline. The construction assume a new dimension, as is more common, where participants online roles are recognized offline, like in the case of those, as shall be shown, who have become popular as webmasters, and newsgroup moderators.

1.1: INTRODUCTION

From online, cultured or enlightened participants, "public advocates" and those with self-defined reformation abilities, amongst other characterisations emerge. The initial advantage of the Internet, which continues to date, is identified within the framework of self-representation in multiple forms. The migrant, as I will show, has become not only a wiser person, but also a possible agent of political, social and economic change. This takes place via their new roles as network activists, moralists, defenders of principles, and ideas. The paper locates the migrants' virtual self-representation as individuals, groups or collectives and reveals personae that evolve via simulations and the limits of representation in an alternative space. The section essentially reveals how some migrants are compelled to "rethink their identities", after "they move to the west" (Nesbitt, 2002:78).

Though the Internet is still maturing, its benefit to sections of societies particularly marginal and fragile communities like migrants is apparent. The evidence comes through the multiple manner of expression for which participants use it. Questions regarding possible manners of self-representation may arise (Wood, 2001:47), but it does not mean that representations cannot be self-influenced. A "complex personal and social construct" (Wood, ibid.: 47), identity is constructed by migrants online, in manners that shift opinions about them in the eyes of people in Nigeria and those in the hostland. Analyses in this section however note that virtual identities are short-lived.

This is because the Internet user would sooner rather than later retire to the original, natural self, after online activities (Robins and Webster, 1999). The paper proposes that the brief periods of change, could be beneficial for the dispersed people in the light of their often challenging experience. Many times as well, the changes are reflected in life offline, when their online engagements determine their characterisations offline. I shall now evaluate this process from the period of the rise of the network to present times.

1.2: METHODOLOGY

Analyses in this paper are founded on qualitative research method through the prism of the interpretations of literature, texts, and sampled newsgroups, mailing and discussion list. Websites were also examined to double check inferences from the literatures, while a few interviews were useful as additional sources.

2.1: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SPACE OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
2.2: VIRTUAL CAMPAIGNS FROM A DISTANCE

In this section, I focus on virtual political identity from 1993. This year marks the beginning of the rise of the Internet, which coincided with a complicated political development in Nigeria. The then Nigerian military regime annulled a presidential election were candidate Moshood Abiola led. This was on June 12 of that year. The election was the fairest and freest in Nigeria's unstable political history, going by the judgements of local and foreign observers. The cancellation of the results by the military President Babangida angered sections of the country. It nearly led to another civil war-after the one of between 1967 and 1970.

Despite the might of a military regime, there was resistance in various forms. Its internationalisation, as encouraged by the positive commentaries of international observers on the success of the polls, came shortly after. [1] International observers at the polls were from the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), with political inclinations from Western nations. British Scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, had only two years earlier invented the World Wide Web (WWW). This initiated Uniform Resource Identifiers (URLS), which expanded the frontiers of the Internet.

Still emotionally attached to Nigeria, sections of its diaspora, including those who at that time were escaping from the military enclave, cashed-in on the free network to regroup. They shared ideas, initiated sets of connections and sought critical perspectives to the state of Nigeria. These activities had become dangerous in many Nigerian spaces of public expression and media. Those who were escaping began joining other categories of migrants including older settlers, first or second generation migrants who still associate with Nigeria. They challenged with vigour the then military government's controversial decision.

The Internet eventually became a new place for political propaganda for the migrants. Besides, as Chalaby (2000:20) argues, the network enabled them to "coordinate their political lobbying, construct their collective identity and share information and resources". It became, and still is, a place for the re-negotiation of a real or imagined Nigerian identity (in the face of the political crisis). The network also became a place to paper their relationship with the identity of Nigeria as a nation-state. The dialectical interplay of the process has ultimately gone beyond temporal and spatial dimensions. It has continued overtime, resulting in other facets of social relations in the course of migrancy. One of the very first notable Nigerian oriented migrant websites that came in the wake of the protracted campaigns for the de-annulment of the polls was www.nigeriaweb.com.

Constructed in 1996 by Chuck E. Odili in the US, Adebanwi (2001:15) quotes him on the rationale behind the development of the website: "Nigerian community lacked an organised, coherent voice in their host countries to effect tangible change in the government in Nigeria". The site, he adds, therefore "came into existence to facilitate the empowerment of Nigerians in the diaspora by collating information on events in Nigeria". The administrator emphasised that he was interested in ensuring that migrants knew about events in Nigeria. Apart from helping the displaced population to have a "common front" or a "coherent voice" to "effect change", the administrator's motive also lay in helping the development of knowledgeable migrants. That last desire became realisable through the regular uploading of information on to the website. The website intended many roles for the migrants. Noteworthy roles are those of a political lobbyist, activist, agitator, and the epistemic.

However, while migrants may have carried all or some of these identities before the creation of www.nigeriaweb.com in 1996, use of this website re-enforced them, as I will show this in this paper. The website also introduced others to those roles, which arose from engaging with the network. A few visitors, who until then did not have those traits, perhaps acquired some of them through visiting the site and gaining access to information and opinions previously not available to them.

As of 2001, the site reportedly hosted 28,000 visitors on a daily basis. Of this number, 83% were in the US; 6% in the UK; 4% in other European countries; 3% in Canada; 1% in Asia; 1% in South America; and 1% for others. Less than 0.5% of visitors came from Nigeria. For contributors 75% were US based; 15% were based in Europe; and 10% were in Nigeria, while less than 1% was in the rest of the world (Adebanwi, ibid.:16). The dominance of contributions from migrants further suggests their desire to be involved in mediation with the *homeland*. It signifies a resistance against exclusion, which is intensified by distance. Physical distance often hinders participation in the *homeland* affairs. The www.nigerianweb.com provides a place where involvement is possible despite absence, as well as being a venue for psychological re-integration.

As at 2006, the website was reputedly one of the most popular amongst migrants', partly because it has constructed additional sites including www.odili.net; www.naijapages.com; and the all-embracing www.nigeriaworld.com. The site is constantly changing probably to remain relevant in the dynamic Internet space. However, its general focus gives it a continuous edge, in the proliferating world of websites.

Beyond information dissemination which is a key role of the media, and for which Andrew finds the website useful, an evolving power of knowledge leads some others to further an activist identity. They find the online space as a path to agitate. Their activities revolve around the purposeful expression of desires; mobilisation of co-travellers; and in general, propaganda activities. One of their methods is the creation of websites, which are usually more emotional, and more incisive in the analysis of Nigerian issues. Many more are forceful in the expression of viewpoints, and less welcoming of arguments.

While the informed self subsists in the circumstance, they have now added the activist facet to the self. As a demonstration of this, some participants have had grounds to mobilise others towards a cause online. An example was when discussants on naija-politics@yahoogroups.com in 2005 asked group users to sign-up to reject the plan of former military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida to return to power. London solicitor, Kenneth Emetulu who initiated the cause justifies it on the grounds of the politicians' anti-democratic tendencies while

once in power. His role in this instance as an online mobiliser shows how the network can transform a character.

If the mobilisation were to be offline, it would have involved traditional activists' means. This could include distribution of leaflets, posters, announcements in electronic and newspaper press, and perhaps word of mouth campaigns. Compatriots are most likely living in diverse places, with different densities in the hostland, which will make these traditional methods difficult. The different locations can be complex to cover in the physical. On the Internet, the newsgroups, usenets, networking locations, websites and e-mail lists, replace roads, streets, crescents, terraces, boulevard, avenues, and closes of the city. The computer terminal becomes a narrow gate to reach many in different places.

Offline mobilisation may also be unwieldy, costly, and perhaps ineffective. The online variant is nevertheless cheaper, doable and potentially more effective. Though the migrants' influence as voters is still absent, because they are yet to be part of the voting population during elections. Nevertheless, many silently pride themselves as being influential in the voting process, given an ability to persuade family members and friends on the choice of candidates. The thinking is that their views are likely to be respected because of their travels and because they are breadwinners due to remittances.

Emetulu is prominent in many online discussion groups, like naijapolitics@yahoogroups.com and talknigeria@yahoogroups.com. He sensitises migrant users to issues that relate to Nigeria and then urge them to discuss it. This reflects a virtual commitment to actualising a cause. Segun Dawodu in the US, who administers www.dawodu.com, also poises to instruct, inform and create awareness amongst visitors. It is another case of a migrant's commitment to effecting social change through the Internet. Bolaji Aluko also pre-occupies himself with www.nigeriamuse.com, through "sharing insight and information".

He goes further to say that he writes "always to inform, to teach, to provoke, to amuse, to inspire, to express a point-of-view, and to inquire, whereupon to learn!" (Accessed at www.nigeriamuse.com). The professor of chemical engineering is not only a scholar but also a virtual activist, by his own construction. His regular participation in the naija-politics@yahoogroup.com is another evidence of this. Martins Akindana's other website www.chitafrik.com is yet another instance of an effort to create awareness. These participants online locations reputedly admits different migrant contributors, where the freedom to be heard is of prime importance. In maintaining the online locations, Dawodu, Aluko and Akindana become key persons in the settler's virtual activities. Sometimes, the virtual activist identity evokes pride. By publicising information on Nigerian political troubles in an open space, the activists cause concern and unease among Nigerian politicians and even more so, among potential future dictators.

3.1: A WEB BASED MIGRANT ORGANISATION, SEARCH FOR A NIGERIAN IDENTITY

For now, the Internet is one of the ways through which Nigerian migrants identify members of groups and organisations. This is especially applicable to the notable Nigerian in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO). A Canadian based medical practitioner, Dr Ola Kasim, leads it. Its formation was encouraged by the previous President Obasanjo administration, as a link between the Nigerian government and the many Nigerians abroad. Other than this, participants deliberately attempt to sustain a connection with the name Nigeria. This manifests through symbolic identifications, names and practices.

In the US, many immigrant groups are identified in a fusion, first because of their origin and then when they add their American status. Examples include, Chinese-Americans, Indian-Americans, Greek-Americans, Spanish-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Irish-Americans, Iranian-Americans, and African-Americans. Participants have started to identify themselves as *Nigerian-Americans*. Though the name seems transnational in appearance, the redefinition of identity on an ethno-national basis shows an attempt to negotiate recognition away from the identity of African-Americans.

Previously, they had presumably been phenotypically members of this group. It is also a development in line with positioning themselves in a similar trend to the abovementioned more established migrants in America. References to Nigerian-American are present in many cases of participants' work. Examples are "Nigerian-Americans should decide whether they want to be part of the charade going on in Nigeria or not", by Benbe (accessed at www.nigeriansinamerican.com). "We Nigeria-Americans should not fail to be supportive of the democrats as they are more peace loving and friendlier to Africans", by Daniel (accessed at www.nigeriansinamerican.com).

The quote above is another reminder of the challenge of migration. Life on the move is sometimes risky. This is because of uncertainties of strangeness, which can make a migrant anxious and unsettled. Though comfort may be achieved at some point, the travails of dislocation and the absence of a sense of permanence constantly challenge likely routes to the gains of migration. This is why the above speaker talks about "depressing tales", arising from trying to integrate in the hostland. The tales are often reminders of an original self, the Nigerian origin and the need to seek association with it, even via its name. More directly, how is the individual identity affected in this mediation processes? I shall turn to this in the next section.

4.1: CYBERSPACE AND INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
4.2: THE SELF AND THE INTERNET

The Internet allows some of the migrants to assume multiple or fictional identities. Easier access and the absence of editorial policies of offline media aid them in possible self-representation. Issues of quality may arise from the act, but the short-lived satisfactions from the self-representation can be soothing. Though some sites have rules, the fact of marginal implementation and difficulty in sanctioning breaches encourages participants' undiluted thoughts. Some real identities in the form of the "real" self may appear. And from these real ones, new identities, like being contributors, virtual opinion moulders, webmasters, bloggers, online publishers, editors-in-chief, and list-owners reshape their self-conception. It initiates individualism and the chance of self-projection, leading to a possible increase in self-worth. When the words "I", "we", "us", "my", are also present in blogs, sites and in contributions, the subjects freely mirror themselves. Self-satisfaction could come through the expression of their individual identity. The occurrence is probably a contrast to migrant experience in real life, where identity is probably still a matter for negotiation.

Talking about themselves online enables their discovery and identification in an ever-shifting social formation. The opportunity to construct a site, to link up with one reduces the sense of loss in migration. They canvass relevance and recognition for the self in what is believably fulfilling in an ambivalent migration life.

Migrants are more conversational than they probably were in origin. They are prone to backward and forward gazes, and combined with a new epistemic outlook, there is always the temptation to engage with issues related to Nigeria. Dispersion is perhaps a beginning of a divided perspective, one for the *homeland* left behind and the other for the inhabited hostland. Trials of dislocation force the migrant to reminisce and to idealise return. It leads to thoughts about life "then", and the embrace of media like the Internet, which can make this occur.

This person points to a main attribute of migrants. Before migration, Internet use was minimal. It increases after travel, due to a range of reasons. To Dupe, use was probably limited in Nigeria because of access problems, or because offline contacts and relationships are easier because of proximity. Abroad, physical relationships with many other Nigerians have become limited, hence its substitution with virtual interaction. The interactions are not simply with websites, or on discussion groups, but through sending and receiving e-mails, photographs and other documents.

The Internet as a channel of re-integration fosters a remembrance of the *homeland*, and its people. The network then helps the sense of discovery and identification in the face of the inconveniences of dislocation. The process of sending and receiving e-mails for instance implies a variant of contact, which moderates the sense of absence in migration. They see the self as not only important but as one with promise, given their position as parties in exchanges across distances.

Engaging with more people, in what exemplifies the Internet, as a network of many to many, appears to have eased the everyday networking desire amongst participants. Invitations to join newsgroups, discussion lists and to be contributors to websites are a regular feature. They also relax rules for the admission of prospective contributors. Contributors have the opportunity of relating with individuals, instead of groups, through posting of personalised emails to single addresses. Websites often have links to "contact us". The chances of networking are open to a regular user of the web. It is often a feature of the migrants' interaction as they meet each other online. With the Internet becoming a mandatory technology rather than choice for the migrants, they become available to other users, who in turn see them as companions in virtual social interaction. Eventually, many participants become people with a high sense of association.

In reaching friends via email, the participant minimises the possibility of loneliness that dwelling in a new environment could cause. S/he becomes an agent behind a node in a network. This gives a sense of being active, just as it enables remembrances, through relating with fellow travellers and in reading about Nigeria.

5.1: ONLINE PUBLIC COMMENTATORS

Through their contributions to discussion groups, in chatrooms and on newsgroups, the migrants turn into public commentators, analysts and opinion moulders. The simulation of real life online is characterised with chances of greater anonymity, which gives the participant far more vocal and opinionated contributions. The representation may not have been possible for a shy person, or those with any form of inhibition. The likely quiet self is by-passed through the depersonalised opportunity, which the Internet offers. A desired or undesired public character in real life is then additionally realisable in the migrants' virtual life.

This public identity arises in the process of unrestricted advocacy. In itself, it emerges via continuous idealisation of how life could be better in Nigeria. An identity of people canvassing for the "public interest" emerges in the course of discussing social and political issues in the *homeland* and on ways of improving them. The virtual agents of change come up with an online representation of the public-spirited, the public commentator, or the "public intellectual". This new virtual identity improves with an ongoing exposure to other cultures. It expands their worldview, eventually opening them to new perspectives on life and other issues.

Many virtual public interest campaigners appear on the web. The website, www.nigeriansinamerica.com features scores of participants from the US and the UK. They contribute to issues in columns like life abroad; Nigerian matters; and Africa and the world. These participants became online celebrities because of their regular contributions, references to their thoughts by others and for expressing controversial opinions. As shown earlier, Seyi Oduyela provokes reactions many times, so does Uche Nworah and Bolaji Aluko.

Many use pseudonyms Some writers in Nigeria like Abati of www.ngrguardiannews.com regularly have their contributions reposted on web addresses like www.nigeriavillagesquare.com and www.nigeriaworld.com. This is typically for the attention of the migrant audience. Although, some of the contributions of the migrants are limited to one website, many others cross-post contributions, which broadens the scope, and likelihood of identification. Ajayi for instance maintains a column in www.nigeriaworld.com and contributes to www.zumunta.com. Okey Ndibe also writes for www.nigerianvillagesquare.com and then www.ngrguardiannews.com, before he went to www.thesunnewsonline.com. Uche Nworah is a regular in www.saharareports.com, www.nanka.com, www.nigeriavillage.com, and www.nigeriansinamerica.com, besides contributions on his own site, www.uchenworah.com. The major claim of the contributors on migrants' consciousness stems from the virtual world. In this world, their sense of presence is immense and their identity as public policy analysts grows.

6.1: A WIDE RANGE OF INTEREST IN IDEAS, DIFFERENT IDENTITIES

Some migrants' websites are regularly interested in the contributions of writers in Nigeria. This indicates a commitment to public ideas and their cross-fertilisation. It is also a sign of a deterritorialised web union. The coming together takes little or no notice of barriers, and makes a maximum gain from the variability of the Internet space. The initiative of the webmasters and administrators in reproducing contributions that they consider relevant to their context resembles such exchanges in real life. The difference lies in the more expanded web, as against the limited offline element. The migration context of these instances additionally shows their emotional attachment to the place of Nigeria in terms of longing. The processes of proving this importantly bring out the identity of the "public advocate".

Web activists' online development of the self is one instance of many Internet possibilities. They represent virtual vistas of liberty. The vista enables the pursuance of the participants' desire for rights. The rights may however become a license for overacting via, for instance, indecent use of language. It may be positive via conscientious contributions. In any case, the fact of self-actualisation with little hindrance is central. Overall, the new vista suggests latest scenery for self-expression and representation. The continuous identification of the wrongs of Nigeria could lead to a critical participant through this vista. Helped by the opportunity of interacting with a wider range of people in the hostland, the participant may rightly point at areas of change. It then increases the usefulness of the Internet as a platform for this course. This is because the liberty inherent within the network allows for limitless experimentations.

It is through these shades of experimenting ideas that those engaged with it unburden themselves. Fulfilments emerge, which again confirm the permissive character of the network. A continuation of an engagement with the Internet develops the consciousness of participants towards the *homeland*, the world at large, just as it helps with the discovery of online spaces. The interrelationships construct and reconstruct identities, resulting to transformations.

However, not all these result from a simple administration or ownership of websites. Neither is it limited to a few forms of online roles. There are those who do not have a website for instance, but feature regularly in many. They dissect the Nigerian situation with an emotional zeal, through well thought out pieces. Some notable writers like Okey Ndibe, and Seyi Oduyela post articles at different times, on different topics, in websites like www.nigeriaworld.com, www.nigeriavillagesquare.com, www.nanka.com, and www.ngrguardiannews.com, which amounts to using the license of freedom offered by the Internet to reach a wide audience.

The identity of the "purist" also comes out, when participants show little or no patience for imperfections. It is possible that seeming drive for perfections in hostland, through their ability to make things work leads to this posture. They are consequently incapable of taking excuses for observed lapses, neither are they able to understand why Nigeria cannot do things properly. Many participants see issues from the ideal perspective, and are easily angered by fellow migrants, sympathetic to Nigeria's troubles.

Puritanical postures may flow from discussions in the distant. The distance prevents the appreciation of realities on the ground, which Nworah minimally sympathises with, but which other commentators do not like. Some of the migrants, as in Nesbitt's (2002:72) criticism, become "conduits of Eurocentric thought for African consumption through the adaptation of the latest trend in European American perspectives to 'explain' the African experience". But, it would rather be definitive to take a position on which group is right or wrong, but what is clear from some viewpoints like those above is that many are finicky about Nigerian issues.

Related to the above is that the migrants can be more critical about Nigeria than even non-Nigerians can. The poor state of the country, which is causing emigration, often leads to controversial perceptions of migrants by some hostland people. They are perceived as dishonest, with a potential to commit crime. The grounds for this position towards some migrants may be justified, but the vast majority are responsible individuals. This responsible lot nevertheless carry on with the burden to establish themselves as trusted individuals, different from the deviant group. Because of the burden, many blame Nigerian leaders for not creating the enabling environment for a positive international image.

The Internet as a space of expression is not limited to Nigerians alone. Every interested person across nations is a potential consumer of the condemning discussions. This actually angers some participants. Olawole, contributing in www.nigeriansinamerica.com senses an exaggeration of the negative as against the positive about Nigeria. He argues that participants write as if they were outsiders, without any real or imagined stake in the origin. The process shows the flexibility of identities as it either pinpoints participants as constructive or acerbic critics.

Many of these participants also identify themselves as middle-class. The harsh economic realities at origin make it difficult for this class to be identified. The reality arguably produces the very rich and the very poor, with no group in between. Migration helps the re-discovery of the alienated middle-class, following their possibly new ability to act as elites, partly through an engagement with a modern technology like the Internet. It is also through a subdued glee in being identified as professionals, enlightened enough to proffer solutions to the travails of the origin.

Migrants often believe the *homeland* people perceive them highly. It can be illusory, but it points at a historical trend. This trend is one of admiration for migration to the West. The migrant is correctly or incorrectly urbane, cultured or civilised in the mould in which many regard the white host. Some settlers behave similar to what Fanon (1967) called the "artificial white man", in a bid to feign superiority. To some thinkers however, the description is justified, as they are "white black people", because colonialism "led them to be far too willing to please, mimic and uncritically adopt practices of 'white people'" (Clarke, 2004:14).

In some other cases of exposures, the migrant gains an edge in competition with the *homeland* peers. The middle class, which is absent in Nigeria subsequently beckons because of cosmopolitanism through migration. Many migrants are truly confident of this new status, especially when they engage in skilled work in the hostland. It confers a great deal of confidence both in the hostland and in the *homeland*, which erases the thoughts of degrading themselves by doing unsuitable jobs.

Besides, they enjoy greater comfort in Western institutions, which often function better. Many become used to it, frequently leading to "western struckness" (Naficy, 1999), which ultimately make returning difficult. Living in the west amounts to a departure from the state of origin where only the rich and government officials can meet the basic needs of life, whether legitimately or otherwise. This does not mean that all migrants were poor before migration. A small percentage of migrants were not. This set probably relocated for other reasons other than economic. However, a majority of are from the lower economic group. Some of this majority frequently talk about their new advantages online.

Being free, the Internet enables a proliferation of post migration pundits. These self-acclaimed experts and analysts proclaim superior opinion on Nigerian matters. Saying they are right or wrong in this regard is perhaps improper. They find the act a useful one, through projecting themselves creditably or otherwise, as people with authoritative views about the origin. They project themselves because a lot have one or two ideas on what the problems with the *homeland* are. Countless also claim to have solutions. All participants carry on with a self-righteous fury, which when added to the purist identity, produces the character of "distant redeemers". The ideas may or may not be realistic as they are from the experiences of the different hostland cultures, but they carry on sounding off, satisfied that they are representation of solutions to Nigeria's problems.

These pundits are unpaid. However, a few who manage popular websites welcome advertisements where earnings may come. The majority contribute for the sake of satisfying a passion to discuss. On the other hand, it could be to show that they like joining issues. Internet seems easiest to express these views and hence their punditry identity.

In addition, migrants like to use peculiar expressions. The words appear in the naming of websites, newsgroups and in conversations. The uniqueness of some of these words could confuse the uninitiated. Using the words helps socialisation of the stranger, the stimulation of interaction, and perhaps, the continuation of their "Nigerian" identity through language. The *homeland* location becomes a shared interest, when they use their languages, as a heritage, and as a variant of culture. Some of these words are *Baba Iyabo*, (Iyabo's father), which refers to the former president, because the first daughter's name is Iyabo, and *Carry go*, which is Pidgin English synonym for go-ahead. Yet again is *settlement*, usually used for bribing, and *ajebutter*, which they use to describe those, born into comfort. Naija-politics@yahoogroups.com is named after the *Naija* representation of Nigeria, as seen in the first half of the username.

Migrants are equally concerned with their original culture, either as imagined or practiced. Many wish

that their offspring were able to imbibe it, instead of a wholesale adoption of the Western culture, which to them is not good for their future. They believe that total Westernisation is a downside to migration, and could be a problem for identification. This bothers a contributor, Simi Abohwo who thinks migrants are worried about the future of their children abroad.

To make the children know Nigeria as an ancestral origin therefore, the writer recommends a few things including annual visits to Nigeria and reading literature on Nigeria and Africa. He also proposes the reading of African and Nigerian born authors. Other suggestions are the practising of common Nigerian courtesies, and ensuring that they have some traditional Nigerian dress. In addition, playing Nigerian music like *juju, Fuji, afro-beat, high-life,* and Nigerian *hip-hop* in their residences*;* eating Nigerian dishes; and the need to send children back to the *homeland* for a few years in secondary school are important. In contrast to this, some parents prefer to have "Westernised" children.

In growing up like that, many of the migrants' also lose a connection with some cultural trait they previously shared. Their accents are affected, just as their manners could become artificial. In some cases, they have not wholly imbibed their hosts' ways, just as they are not properly in touch with the ancestral the *homeland*. They seem misplaced in terms of identity.

Children's issues, which Abohwo refers to, are a reminder of their circumstance in the hostland. More often, they play a role in the parental or family decisions on migration. Because of dislocation, offspring regularly have problems of rootedness in cultures. Questions are asked about which culture should be imbibed and how? Is it that of the *homeland* or the culture of the hostland? Can they imbibe the *homelands'* when they inhabit hostland? Moreover, if it is the hostlands', what becomes of ancestral roots? Disorganisation invariably occurs in offline family life, as "scattered living". This implies where the husband is apart from the wife and children, or the wife is apart from the husband and children.

The three could also be apart, and in the worst-case scenario, everyone is apart, including sibling from sibling. Reunion may occur online, particularly when love is still alive. It may be when maturity comes, or when they are Internet users. Physical bonding, and socialisation may be absent, but virtual union rouses recollections. Sometimes however, it leads to identity problems for the distant person, probably translating into transnational or societal crisis in the longer run. (This is because mutual support in real life is likely to be more effective than simulation). The next section will give a further empirical insight into the reshaping of the self through virtual engagements.

7.1: CONCLUSION

The Nigerian diaspora members re-conceive the Nigerian identity, not only individually, but also through communal life. The reconstruction is filtered through experiences that relate to identifiers like gender, education and class. The shaping and the re-shaping of the self-evolve in a temporal and spatial context, essentially through the mediative possibilities of the Internet. The network helps the migrants to rediscover who they are, and who they can be. Though physically away from their origin, the *homeland* is re-imagined via cyber activities that cut across the reading of Nigerian newspapers online; Nigerian-related news sites; sending and receiving e-mails to loved ones with access in the *homeland*; and networking with fellow migrants. The online mediation of affairs with Nigeria may re-create logic of alliance, absent through the dominance of the "others" in the hostland. Participants therefore find a place in the virtual space, for the invention of a union with the source country. The invention is continual, while distance reduces upon connection.

The practice of engaging with the Internet remoulds identities at different levels, including individual, social, and religious. It also includes gender, education, class, marital and professional status. Though the phases could conflict, shaping occurs when they mediate affairs with the origin, with the hostland and with fellow migrants. The relationship evolves through "sameness and difference" (Gilroy, 1997:302), and then helps the location of a balance within.

Apart from playing a role in constructing identities, the Internet provides migrants with more space for claiming rights, and a greater right to place (Georgiou, 2002:4), in everyday life, where activity transpires even in passivity (Silverstone, 2001:13). The technology additionally influences the visualisation of origin; interactions and cross-cultural exchanges; and the alteration of identities (Gillespie, 1995:7; Appadurai, 1996). The changing identities reflect online via their viewpoints on their *homeland* and on their host community emphasising the fluctuation in the context of globalisation.

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