# Hegemony and Transnational Practices of Nigerian-Yorùbás in Toronto

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### Abstract

This paper discusses transnational practices of Nigerian-Yorùbá immigrants in Toronto. It is argued that Yorùbá transnational practices stem from their 'lived experience' of exclusionary practices and their material positions in Canadian society, and their pre-existing conception of 'ethnicity' as 'real' in post-colonial Nigerian society.

Using the Gramscian notion of hegemony, it is pointed out that the reaffirmation and reconfiguration of unequal social relations within the Yorùbá transnational social fields has some materiality in the sense that it taps into what Gramsci calls 'feeling passion'--the moment where Yorùbá individuals' understandings of their social position emotionally and normatively resonate with their lived experiential consciousness/common sense. Further, the paper argues that diverse discourses and ideologies focusing on 'ethnicity'/ 'race' are articulated by the dominant members of both host and home societies to 'naturalize' and 'normalize' the existing unequal social relations. A grassroots approach for the displacement of continued racial, gender and class inequalities adumbrated by the existing transnational activities is necessary.

KEYWORDS: Yorùbá; Nigeria; Racism; Transnational Migration; Feeling Passion; Hegemony.

## Introduction

> We take hegemony to refer to that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field—that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it…This is why its power has so often been seen to lie in what it silences, what it prevents people from thinking and saying,

what it puts beyond the limits of the rational and credible. In a quite literal sense hegemony is habit forming. For these reasons, it is rarely contested directly; save perhaps in the roseate dreams of revolutionaries (J. and J. Comaroff, 1991: 23).

Recent studies in the social sciences have focused on immigrants, whose social activities traverse more than one nation-state (Basch, et al., 1994; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). These immigrants are referred to as 'transnationals' or 'transmigrants' because they "develop and maintain multiple relations--familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders" (Glick Schiller, et al., 1992: 1-2). In American academia, and in other industrially developed countries of the West, there is an upsurge in transnational projects on immigrants from diverse countries of origin (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1998; Goldring, 1996; 1998; Rouse, 1991; Mahler, 1998; Basch, et al., 1994; Gold, 2001). In recent work on international migration, from a transnational perspective, there has been a shift in emphasis from immigrants as 'victims' of global capitalist exploitation to immigrants as 'challengers' and social actors (Cohen, 1996). Ipso facto, the classical conception of international migration driven by labor needs, and as job/skills enrichment for the developed countries (Satzewich, 1991; Singh, 1989; Burawoy, 1980; Portes, 1978) is inadequate in its explanation of the human condition in relation to human migration; principally because the study of transnationalism now brings to the fore ways that 'ordinary immigrants' contest power, and struggle with the powerful in the globalized world. These dialectics, between the 'powerful of the world' and the 'powerless ordinary people', are aptly enunciated by Smith and Guarnizo (1998) as 'transnationalism from above' and 'transnationalism from below' respectively. Obviously and crucial to the study of transnationalism is an emphasis on the imposing structure of global capitalism and the accompanying immigrants' agency under the 'postmodern capitalism' (Miles & Satzewich, 1990). Analytically, a critical study of transnationalism must combine the agency of immigrants with the structure that precipitates it, or what Giddens (1981) calls 'structuration'. In other words, immigrants are engaged in a process in which the agency of their action and the structures that channel their decisions are interwoven over time and space.

What has been less critically analyzed in transnational studies is the process in which transnational practices continue to sustain the existing unequal social relations at global and local levels. Considering this omission in recent work on transnationalism, this study uses the case of Nigerian-Yorùbá transnationals to

examine how the struggles of immigrants inadvertently accentuates inequalities based on class, 'race', and gender. Using Gramsci's notion of hegemony, I argue that Nigerian- Yorùbá transnationals' quest for social and economic empowerment often reproduces inequalities, and reaffirms existing ones, along racial, gender, and class lines. Still, I contend that these transmigrants are not victims of 'interpellative hailing' as espoused by structuralist Marxist Althusser (1971); rather, Nigerian-Yorùbá transmigrants are conscious agents whose responses are in connection with how they understand their social positions in relation to their external material reality. My application of hegemony to interpreting Yorùbá transnationalism traverses their two localities—Toronto and Yorùbáland; that is, on one hand, Yorùbá transnational practices reinforce and reaffirm pre-existing social inequalities—class and gender—within their Yorùbá local communities—Toronto and Yorùbáland in Nigeria; on the other hand, their practices legitimize the hegemonic construction of Canada as a 'white country'. Put differently, transnationally-induced hegemony holds firm when immigrants valorize their social standings within the Yorùbá community in the local Toronto area and in Yorùbáland, Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Methods

The current study is based on data gathered from an 8-month ethnographic fieldwork project (May, 1999 to December, 1999) among the Yorùbá in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Qualitative research methods, including participant observation and unstructured and semi-structured interviews, were employed to collect data. Fifty members (all were between the ages of 18 and 60 years with the exception of a 78-year old man; thirty-three male adults and seventeen female adults) of the community were interviewed for this study. Seven of them (five men and two women) were selected for in-depth unstructured interviews, lasting from one to three-and-a-half hours. Six community association leaders took part in semi-structured interviews for one and a half to two hours each to complete. Participants were found through snowball sampling, with initial contacts made through a friend or a leader in the community. In the course of taking part in community events, as a participant observer, more members of the community became involved in the study. As a participant observer, I attended the Yorùbá series of summer picnics, eré ìbílè (traditional dances) Yorùbá alâdúrà (indigenized Christian church) Sunday services, Yorùbá Muslim Sunday asalat/prayer meetings[1], an ìwúyè/chieftaincy

ceremony and association meetings. The sample reflects, to some extent, the diverse social strata and classes in the community: it includes small business owners, working class/blue collar, white collar and professionals (doctor, management consultant, musician, insurance broker, lawyer, etc.), etc. Other members of the community encountered at various participant observation sessions include students, priests, refugees/refugee claimants, permanent residents, Canadian citizens, traders, unemployed, and the so-called omo olódù/fraudsters. Interestingly some members of the community, including those in the non-random sample of the study, can be described as occupying what Olin Wright (1989) calls 'contradictory locations'. For example, I encountered a small business owner who also worked in a factory to supplement his income, and a high school teacher who drove a cab at night.

One major limitation of selecting participants non-randomly for a study is obvious: the outcome and the findings of the study may not be generalized to the whole population being studied. Nevertheless, social researchers, ethnographers in particular, employ qualitative methods because they have proven very effective for understanding the human inter-subjective lifeworlds. They are very interactive, and thus enable researchers to learn about the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). As Collins (2000) persuasively argues, ethnographic observations are indispensable as a mode of research method because they are helpful in unraveling the interface of macro-micro situations of human existence as they happen. Through an ethnographic study approach, I was able to understand how individual members of the Yorùbá community interpret, and react to, their structural situations and everyday experiences.

## Articulation: Migration, Racism, and Transnationalism

Several studies have dwelt on how racism is experienced at the interpersonal level or at the level of 'everyday experience' (Essed, 1991; Barrett, 1994; 1984) and at systemic levels or in terms of 'institutional racism' by minority populations and immigrants of color in Canada (Simmons, 1998; Li, 1998; 1988; Barrett, 1987). In the body of literature on racial and ethnic group relations, there is a strong relationship between international migration and racialization. In a pivotal work on ethnic stratification by John Porter (1965), there is strong indication that social inequalities based on 'race'/ethnicity have historically patterned social relations in Canada. Porter argues that ethnicity determines social mobility of immigrants in Canadian society. Although Porter's work has undergone some criticism over the

years (see Brym and Fox, 1989), later studies by Peter Li (1998; 2003) empirically show a strong relationship between what he calls a 'social value' of race and 'market value' of race. Li makes a compelling argument that the racialization of minorities leads to their 'devaluation' in the labor market. In other words, racialization from the perspective of Li leads to the exclusion of immigrants of color in economic and non-economic spheres. In a recent report, based on the 1996 census, Ornstein (2000) affirms that immigrants of color in Canada, most especially Africans, experience 'the most severe disadvantage', as shown by their high level of poverty and unemployment.

Some political economists aver that racialization of immigration and immigrants of color are not fortuitous phenomena for capital accumulation; ipso facto racialization of immigration is a strong basis for legitimizing exclusionary practices. In the work of Satzewich (1991), post-war Canadian labor needs were met by the incorporation of immigrants into Canada based on their ethnicity and somatic features: in post-war Canada most immigrants of European extraction were admitted into Canada as 'free immigrants', while those of non-European descent were allowed into Canada as 'unfree migrants'. In the case of the latter, the Canadian state aimed not only to externalize the costs of renewal of labor to alternate economies (see Burawoy, 1980), but to prevent people of non-European descent from being part of the Canadian 'imagined community'. Bolaria & Li (1988) have argued that the oppression of non-white immigrants in the Canadian labor market is justified by the ideology of race. In a similar fashion, in his study of Indian farm workers in British Columbia, Singh (1989) documents how Indian farm workers do not only perform less congenial work than other Canadian workers, but have been precluded by the Canadian state from circulating freely in the labor market.

Other studies have shown that racial minorities are not passive to racial oppression; they react to it. Racialized members of society may perceive racism as a rejection and struggle against it by creating their own 'exclusive institutions' (Tilly, 1997; Chavez, 1994; Breton, 1964). The major oversight of the version of political economy discussed above is its inability to recognize and identify the 'agency' and subjectivities of immigrants and racialized minorities. The study of transnationalism now provides key insights into understanding immigration and racism from the standpoint of transmigrants' social agency and social action. While immigrants are classically conceived of as objects of labor-capital dialectic (Portes, 1978; Burawoy, 1980; Singh, 1989; Satzewich, 1991), the transnational

framework acknowledges immigrants' subjectivity and agency. Thus immigrants make use of transnational migration as a means of overcoming racially-motivated exclusionary practices in their social fields. In a study of Mexican transnationals in the US Goldring (1998) confirms that the transmigrant not only uses his or her transnational social fields to improve his/her social and economic condition, but also that of the community as a whole. Individual members of the Mexican transnational community use transnationalism to valorize and contest power and status denied to them in the mainstream American society within their local communities. In a related study, Kyle (1999) documents the benefits of transnationalism to the semi-permanent Otavalan communities overseas. Otavalan communities in various parts of the West are able to avoid what they perceive as the difficult aspect of the capitalist mode of production—low wage labor--by marketing their indigenous Ecuadorian goods. All of these reveal a liberatory perspective on transnationalism. These studies point out how racialized immigrants are not passive to social exclusion by the structures erected by the dominant economic system; transnationals are constantly reacting to both real and perceived social inequality caused by global capitalism.

Tilly (1997), in his study of enduring social inequality, indicates that a minority immigrant group in its quest for survival under an unfavorable market situation engages in 'social closure' that often leads to 'durable inequality'. In other studies on immigrants, racialized members of society attenuate 'self' and 'other' by becoming less committed to their host society and finding social security in an 'exclusive imagined community' (Chavez, 1994). In a similar vein, Li (1988), using the Chinese as a case study, argues that ethnic particularism among the Chinese is a consequence of exploitation and social exclusion by the white population in Canadian society.

Drawing on case studies of immigrants from St. Vincent, Grenada and Haiti, on one hand, and immigrants from the Philippines on the other, Basch, et al. (1994) argue that immigrants from these two regions use transnational migration as a sine qua non to overcoming the socio-economic problems caused by the rapacious global capitalism and racism associated with American market expansion. By the 1990s, leaders of both regions had started to use the state apparatus to undermine their home population by extracting wealth from the majority of their population in favor of the ruling class. As a result of this, both regions are confronted with vast inequalities in their population. Ever since the 1990s, all classes in various societies of both regions have been involved in emigration to the US. In Basch et

al's findings, transnational migration becomes reactionary for the people of the Caribbean countries and the Philippines because it does not structurally transform their societies. Rather, transnationalism has continued to support multiple layers of domination within sending and host societies. Basch, et al.'s (1994) conclusion is that transnationalism only provides a short-term solution to the socio-economic problems of immigrant producing countries, and therefore it is a prophylactic for suppressing internal and external social reforms.

Apart from not leading to grassroots transformation of host societies, Basch et al. (1994) maintain that transnationals' assertion of their ethnic/racial particularism is an imprecation because it legitimizes the dominant ideological framework that constructs America as a "white country". In a typical case, Bertrand Aristide articulates a discourse around patriotism and nationalism by appealing to Haitian nationals in the US to view themselves as Haiti's 'Tenth Department' in order to attract their financial support (Basch, et al., 1994: 267). For Basch, et al. (1994), incorporative politics of the nation-state like Haiti not only lets the political leaders of home society off the hook of accountability, it also further alienates Haitian immigrants from American society. This argument is substantiated by Mahler (1998: 70-71), who points out that states are incorporating their citizens overseas because transnationals sustain the local economies of the sending states with remittances—'migradollars'. Using Salvadorian refugees in the US as an example, Mahler claims that the state of El Salvador is using its state apparatus—the consulate in the US--to assist Salvadorians in the US gain their temporary legal status.

## YORÙBÁ TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS[2]

### Background to Yorùbá Transnationalism

The Yorùbá are one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are found in six out of 36 states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, namely: Ogun, Lagos, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, and Oyo. Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960. For a period of about 20 years after independence (1960 to 1980), the Nigerian economy experienced a boom based on the exportation of primary resources, especially oil in the 1970s. As a result, during the early stage of independence Nigeria was a sub-regional economic power (Wallerstein, 1979: 100). But like other ex-colonies, since independence, Nigeria's major economic sectors have been in the control of multinational corporations. As nationalist political

economists (Rodney, 1981; Frank, 1979; Clement, 1977; Naylor, 1972) aver, there are two paths to capitalist economic development, namely: commodity circulation and industrial production. The former is characterized by a low ratio of fixed capital (the plant, equipment, and tools) to circulating capital (raw materials, wages, and commodities); it favors low risk and short-term investments. In the case of the latter it is characterized by a high ratio of fixed to circulating capital; it is high risk and accumulates on high-risk investments (Macdonald, 1975: 265). Most colonized nations of the world fall into the first type, while most colonizing countries belong to the second group. This typology gives an insight into why, since independence, the Nigerian economy has been dominated by European and American multinationals (Badru, 1998; Osoba, 1996; Onimode, 1982). Sectors which are dominated by them include, but are not limited to the following: petroleum and other minerals such as tin, columbite, iron ore, and zinc; some aspects of manufacturing; banking and insurance; distribution and construction; transportation and communication (Onimode, 1982: 141-156).

Yorùbá migration to North America or to other parts of the world is largely connected to the poor socio-economic condition in Nigeria in the 1980s, coupled with political tyrannies of Generals Buhari and Idiagbon (1983-1985), General Babangida (1985-1992) and General Abacha (1992-1998) that sent a number of Nigerians into exile. By the mid-1980s, the Nigerian economy had failed to meet the needs of the vast majority of the Nigerian people. Apart from the fact that the Nigerian economy reacted to the fall in revenue from oil, $25 billion in 1980 to about $6 billion in 1984 (Badru, 1998: 92) the succession of weak, and corrupt military and civilian governments who siphoned off public funds to foreign owned accounts, has been largely blamed for the poor state of the Nigerian economy (Lewis, 1996; Osoba, 1996; Turner & Badru, 1984; Achebe, 1983).

In the mid-80s the Nigerian government adopted the neoliberal Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). In the few months following the adoption of the SAP, the socio-economic situation of Nigeria had begun to deteriorate and many Nigerians, mostly from the middle and working class, began to migrate to the industrial capitalist countries of the West. All in all, various reasons are responsible for emigration from Nigeria to North America. In Odunsi's (1996) findings, most Nigerians working in the US attribute their decision to migrate to a number of factors, including better educational opportunities; opportunities to fulfill occupational and professional aspirations; unavailability of employment opportunities at home; political and socio-economic instability in Nigeria; and lack

of information about employment opportunities in Nigeria. Apparently incentives for migration are found in a multiple combination of unfavorable social, economic, and political situations of Nigeria as a nation-state from the mid-80s.

There is a particular pattern to Yorùbá migration and transnationalization. It is evident that in the period preceding 1960 that Africans and people of African descent were under-represented in Canada because the Canadian immigration policy barred most, but not all, non-Europeans from immigrating to Canada as it was believed that they were not culturally suitable to be part of the Canadian 'imagined community' (Satzewich, 1991; Bolaria & Li, 1988: 21). Apart from this, Canada was not attractive to early Nigerian travelers, who were mostly students; Britain was a more popular destination for students because of the "colonial affinity" of Nigeria with Britain. Part of the findings from this study reveals that very few Yorùbá and Nigerians were in Toronto in the early 1960s. Most Yorùbá in Toronto in the 1960s came to study, and went back to Nigeria after their studies to partake in post-colonial nation-building projects. Some of those who came in the early period still remain (and will henceforth be referred to as 'the stayers'). Quite a significant number of these early migrants who left with their children born in Canada started returning to Canada from Nigeria from the mid-1980s (and will henceforth be referred to as 'the returnees'). While most of those who came in the early years came to study, those arriving since the mid-1980s have been coming chiefly for economic reasons. Pa Adeola[3], one of the oldest members of the community and a stayer, differentiates between the motives of the early migrants and the later ones in the following words:

> In those days, those who traveled overseas returned as heroes. All women loved you, and would want to marry you. Everyone, including the children and adults alike loved you . . . They all appreciated you for bringing honor to the community…unlike now when migrants are respected for their money, then they never asked you for a brass farthing…

A returnee, who became a chief when he returned to Nigeria in the late 1970s, and returned to Canada in the early 1990s reminisces and recounts how members of the community glorified early migration to the West, in the pre-colonial and at the early stage of independence, in songs as follows: "Ma di eni àtàtà, ma di eni àpónlé. Ìlú òyìnbó wù mí lópò lopò, mo sì ma dé bè o!" ("I will become a respectable person, I will be revered. I love the white man's land with all my heart;

I will get there some day!”).

**Fig. 1: Pattern and Nature of Yorùbá Migration/Immigration[4]: 1960-1999**

|  | 1960-1984 | 1985-1999 |
|---|---|---|
| Push/Pull Factors: | Extra-Economic factors: status, prestige, and honor motivate migration. | Economic factors are major influences on migration/immigration as are political instability and persecution, especially in the 1990s. |
| Level of migration/immigration: | Low level of migration/immigration: Most migrants return after accomplishing their goals (education and training). | High Level of immigration: Most immigrants do not return permanently, thus leading to transnationalism. |
| Variation in community's membership composition: | Relatively homogenous categories of people constitute the community: Most purposely came to study and train for career advancement in the hope of returning to Nigeria to partake in post-colonial nation-building projects. | Relatively heterogeneous categories of people constitute the transnational circuits, including skilled and unskilled, musicians, pro-democracy activists, retirees, students, priests, undergraduate Nigerian students completing their education, etc. |

**Incentives to Transnational Practices**

While most early Yorùbá migrants were principally motivated less by economic

factors and more by prestige/honor/status, economic factors, and political instability in Nigeria have largely been responsible for those arriving in Toronto since the mid-1980s. In the early period, most migrants were expected to return to Nigeria to take part in nation-building projects, whereas most of those who came in the later period did not anticipate returning to Nigeria in the immediate future to settle. The current nature of Yorùbá migration is summarized by a returnee as follows:

Question: What would happen in a situation where an immigrant leaves Canada and returns to Nigeria for good?

Leader Adéògún: That would be a very foolish decision…nobody would entertain that . . . if you go to Nigeria and you do not want to return to Canada, they gonna get rid of ya…this is because they do not want a pest, they get rid of you. As an immigrant you are expected to help them economically.

Compared with the previous period when most migrants were mostly individual Yorùbá males, the new immigrant population is heterogeneous in terms of its class and gender composition. Mr. Adéólá, a stayer, reacts to the perceived lower social status of new immigrants from Nigeria in Toronto and casts this shift in a negative light: "Canada is now rubbish, not as it used to be any more, every Tom, Dick, and Harry now come from Nigeria to live here…I am sick of this place now".

Although several economic, social, political and ideological factors converge to explain transnational social practices, two factors are considered primary to Yorùbá transnational practices. They are: first, economic insecurity in the face of global capitalism; and second, racial categorization in Canada, the host country.

1. *Economic Insecurity*:

The adoption of the constituent macro-economic policies of the neoliberal Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), by the Nigerian government in the mid-1980s necessitated cuts in government expenses in the area of social services, including health, housing, and education. The results of the SAP include inflation, food shortages, hikes in tuition fees, and the high costs of medical care. One reaction to these changes in social policy is the migration of a significant number of the Yorùbá in an unprecedented manner to the West and for long-term stays

beginning in the mid-80s.

As Goldring (1996) indicates in her study of Mexican transmigrants in the US, transmigrants live in a divided world along production and consumption lines. The host society of the transmigrant is a world of production, while the home country is that of consumption. Similarly, the reliance of Yorùbá transmigrants' nuclear and extended family members and friends on financial support from the transmigrant, in the form of remittances is a crucial aspect of Yorùbá migration. The conversion rate of the Canadian dollar, from about (cdn) $1 to Nigerian 65 naira or more, is an impetus for those Nigerians in Toronto and elsewhere, not only to send money to their family members in Nigeria but also to visit Nigeria because of the higher consumption power that the Canadian currency has gained since the devaluation of the naira in the mid-1980s.

Some older members of the community interviewed confirmed that many stayers could not visit Nigeria in the period before the mid-1980s because the Nigerian currency was equivalent to the US dollar. During this period, the expanding Nigerian public service of the 1970s and the early 1980s was able to absorb its skilled population. Those Nigerians living and working in Canada would have less money to spend than their counterparts who had never traveled overseas. Chief Thomson, one of the interviewees, said that when he visited Nigeria in 1978 his old high school mates working in the expanding Nigerian civil service were doing better than him socio-economically; but on another visit in 1990 there was a reversal of conditions as the standard of living had deteriorated.

> In 1990 when I was visiting home, the country had changed a lot. The value of naira had fallen, unemployment was high and basic needs were not within the reach of those who were doing well during my last visit. Family members and some old friends, who would never have asked me for financial help did so.

Most of those interviewed indicated that they support their family members financially. Most dependents on remittances are children of immigrants in school, their retired parents, and extended family members, such as cousins, nephews, brothers, sisters, uncles, etc. Remittances from overseas are utilized for education, and improvement of the social welfare of women and the aged, traditional festivals' expenses, and medicals.

2. *Perception and Experience of Racism*:

Racism and racial categorization, as some writers argue, is not only structural to Canadian society (Simmons, 1998; Li, 1998; Barrett, 1984), but immigrants of color are confronted by 'everyday racism' and public opprobrium (Essed, 1991). Rather than the state acting as an impartial mediator between and among diverse social groups in the state, some of its policies, by implication, have often legitimated racism and racial divides (Nagel, 1994; Satzewich, 1990; Li, 1988; Bolaria & Li, 1988). According to Bolaria and Li, non-white immigrants are faced with labor market exploitation and racism which "confines them to a socially and economically inferior position" (1988: 222). In this study, it is evident that the Yorùbá lived experience of social exclusion leads to the maintenance of Yorùbá identity, and social closure around that identity.

Most of the Yorùbá immigrants interviewed for the study respond that they have suffered from different forms of racism in Canada. Many claim that they have experienced a high level of unemployment and underemployment, are mocked for their accents, are accused of having offensive body odor, are called names, and have their capabilities underestimated. Most members of the community interviewed for the study claim that they suffer from both 'systemic' and 'subliminal' forms of racism (Fleras and Kuntz, 2001: 37), and recount their experiences in the following selected cases.

Question (probe): In what ways do you experience racism?

Mrs. Babátólá: In many ways. I was an accountant in Nigeria for many years. I came to Canada to better myself, but could not find a decent job. They are always asking for Canadian experience. Right now I work in the factory. In the factory the supervisors discriminated against black people. White workers are assigned easier tasks than us. People have no respect for women in the factory. Fellow male workers use sexist words all the time.

A young woman, Aminat, was born in Canada, and left with her parents, at the age of two in 1977. She came to Toronto, Canada, in 1994 as a returnee after her polytechnic education in Nigeria. Her own encounters with racism are as follows:

      I have moved from one factory to another, earning $6.85 an hour. I

finally found an office job, carrying files from one spot to another. They were paying $11/hour. On the second week, the supervisor summoned me for a "sensitive and private" matter. She told me that I had an offensive body odor, and that everyone had been complaining about how I stank. As the supervisor was talking to me, she covered her nose (tears in her eyes). Immediately I went straight to the doctor. I did not tell the doctor what had happened at work, but told him that someone complained that I had an offensive body odor. The doctor examined me, took my blood pressure, and sniffed me. Finally, he told me that he did not smell anything from me. It was not the supervisor's fault.

Mr. Ògúndélé: I had worked with the Ontario Ministry of Health for many years before this incident. As a supervisor, I went to supervise a group home one day, and found that the owner of the facility did not comply with the stipulated regulation. I told her that if she did not follow the guidelines the facility might be closed down. The woman reported me to her union, alleging that I threatened her. The union took the case to the administrator of the ministry. I was called to a meeting, and without being given an opportunity to defend myself, I was given a letter of demotion. What was most devastating for me was the personal humiliation I suffered that day. In the presence of the administrator, I was called names, such as 'nigger', 'monkey', 'kuku', and 'sambo'. The administrator never showed any intolerance to her disparaging remarks, but was laughing.

Dr. Akínfénwá: Several times I have been asked by my white patients if I was really a surgeon. I have the impression that they think I was not as qualified as my white colleagues.

In another instance, I probed a respondent:

Question: Why don't you have 'white Canadians' as bosom friends?

Chief Sasere: how can you be friends with them? I am a cab driver, when I pick them up in cabs at night, that is the only time I interact with them. For those working in the factory, they do not see many of them there.

There is apparent underemployment among members of the community, which

members interpret to be caused by racism. Samuel, who is a factory worker says:

> I studied both in Nigeria and overseas, and I hold a Master's degree.
> I work in the factory making minimum wage. You see, those white
> folks in the factory have no education, but when they see you, they
> think you are a fool, regardless of your education.

The import of subjects' stories is that racism, be it the institutional type or an individual casual encounter on the street, attenuates the 'self' and the 'other'. Racism is perceived by most members of this community as a sign of rejection. As Li (1988: 2) points out, racial discrimination makes the subordinate groups withdraw to their ethnic enclaves to avoid competition and hostility from the white dominant group. The experience of discrimination also results in the Yorùbá not psychologically considering Canada as worthy of their full loyalty.

Basch et al. (1994) find a very strong relationship between the pervasive nature by which foreign capital penetrates 'post colonial countries' and migration to industrialized countries such as the US. As Gabriel & McDonald (1996) indicate, corporate restructuring creates low employment in industrial sectors, and makes it difficult not only for immigrants, but also for the indigenous workers to have access to gainful employment as well. In the case of the Yorùbá and other immigrants of color, their job insecurity is magnified by the factor of 'race'. The exclusion of immigrants of color from gainful employment augments the likelihood that they will construct a transnational community with requisite practices.

## RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IMPLICATIONS

Contrary to Gramsci's insistence that hegemony is confined to civil society—associations, schools, trade unions, media, family, etc--, while 'force'/'coercion' is used by the state, the study of transnational migration has shown that hegemony is also deployed by the state. In reality both consent and coercion may be deployed by the ruling class to assert its domination. Basch, et al. (1994) indicate in their study that nation-states make use of hegemonic constructs as a means of maintaining the status quo. They further argue that the US often favors certain groups, in its incorporative practices, in the form of articulation of race discourses that resonate with the naturalized commonsense of diverse members of American society that the US is indeed a white country. Studies by

Porter (1965), Satzewich (1991; 1990), and Nagel (1994) corroborate the fact that in Canada and the United states, the states 'otherize' their minority immigrant populations by incorporating and integrating them differently from those of white European descent. As a reaction to how the dominant white population constructs the social reality, immigrants of color perceive their social positions based on their lived experiential consciousness; that is, immigrants, as subjects, react to their subordinate position by using 'race'/ethnicity as a resource for mobilization (Olzak, 1983). For immigrants, their distinct and socially constructed particularisms become a naturalized world view, and are manifested in their everyday practices, such as in songs, and symbols, and are expressed through their social voluntary associations—schools, mosques, festivals, social agencies, etc.

In their reaction to the hegemonic construction of Canada as a European bastion, Yorùbá transnational practices become embedded within the notion of Yorùbá as mutually exclusive of the 'white population' and other racialized groups, with a distinct culture and a primordial image of a 'nation'. This is also in part a reflection of their Nigerian experience, where ethnic particularism fomented by the ruling elites to divide and rule the masses is hegemonic, and has surged in recent years (Bala Usman, 1999). The Yorùbá pre-existing conception of who they 'are' as a people conflates with the racio-ethnic conception of 'nation-state' in Canada, especially in its differential incorporation of white immigrants versus non-whites (see Li, 1998).

As mentioned earlier, in the face of social exclusion a minority group asserts its ethnic identity. Abu-Lughod (1991) persuasively argues that ethnic particularism glosses over intra-group inequalities, and leads to 'race'/cultural essentialism. In the context of Yorùbá transnational migration, existing social inequalities within the Nigerian and Canadian communities are adumbrated in immigrants' struggle against racism and class exploitation in Canada. This gets played out in the emphasis placed on Yorùbá as a homogeneous and culturally exclusive group. For the current study, I witnessed an important social function in the community: one of the longest stayers in the community was conferred with a chieftaincy title. A prominent and wealthy Yorùbá chief, with a base in Toronto who is well respected by the community, addressed the social gathering after he was given a long introduction by the Master of Ceremonies. In his presentation, the chief began by acknowledging the presence and contribution of those Yorùbá individuals of traditional and modern elitist antecedents thus:

. . . The chairman central committee of Adéjùwón's installation, Mr. Badmus Manley, a scion of the legendary Herbert Manley of Lagos . . . the coordinator outreach committee, Mr. Táíwò Adékéyè, a great organizer and tireless organizer and tireless community worker from Ògbómòsó . . . The Master of Ceremonies, omo oba (prince) Daniel Yemí Dawson whose grandfather founded the town of Odò Èrìn Ìjèbú and Princess Tèmítáyò Àsàké Bánkólé, daughter of Justice Adépéjú from Ègbáland5.

Later in his presentation, he lauds Yorùbá civilization:

. . . unlike Europe and several regions of Africa with peerage, lordships and other titles, where people could buy lordships and other titles, the honor was given to him purely on merit, and merit alone nothing to do with the size of his purse…Ilosho, which is about three hundred years old is having the first Ajagun . . . by the way Ilosho is older than Canada. . . . Ilosho is about 300, 400 years old. The Yorùbá of Nigeria, to our guests here, the Yorùbá of Nigeria are a very enlightened race, as a matter of fact, history and writers attest to the fact that they are the most urbane of all the people in Africa, and their organization dating back to pre-colonial times and in several books written, which you might check in the library…the urbanization index is higher than that of France, it's higher than that of Poland, it's higher than that of Germany. They've always lived in cities while they go to farm and work, and so on. The Yorùbá are about 31 million people within Nigeria . . . and worldwide we are talking about some 48 million of them. So when you talk about a Yorùbá person speaking the Yorùbá language, it is not a dialect, it is not vernacular, it is a language spoken by some 40 million people . . . according to World Bank sources it's the 28th largest collection of people in the world . . .

Apart from using their voluntary associations for 'glorifying' Yorùbá culture, voluntary associations provide opportunities for leaders and members of these associations to contest for, and valorize local statuses both in the home and in the host societies. As a participant observer among a group of Yorùbá association members preparing to host their state governor in the summer of 1999, I witnessed how those who hosted the governor were ordinary Yorùbá individuals who would

never have had an opportunity to get close to public figures in Nigeria by virtue of their pre-migration statuses. For Yorùbá leaders, associations are a means to establishing social and economic connections not only in the country of settlement, as when they meet the Mayor, Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), the Prime Minister, or dignitaries visiting from Nigeria, on behalf of members of their community; but also in the home country, as when they meet important political figures while they are home visiting and working on transnational projects.

Voluntary associations, such as hometown organizations, churches, philanthropic groups and old boys/girls school build relationships across multi-national borders. Nigeria's political leaders, Yorùbá traditional rulers, and members of various local communities across Yorùbáland solicit financial support toward community projects and activities, including building roads and renovating community centers/monarch's palaces and annual traditional festivals. Other forms of support that transnationals provide for the community are in the form of supplying equipment for hospitals, donating books and stationery for schools, and providing scholarship funds for indigent students.

Yorùbá transnational associations do not restrict their activities to the development of their homeland, but also help their members in Toronto. For instance, the Yorùbá Community Association in Toronto has a settlement program for newcomers, which includes legal assistance for members with matters concerning immigration. In addition, most voluntary associations organize picnics in the summer, and various social events at other times, that attract members of the community, and newcomers have opportunities to mingle with other new and old members of the community.

These transnational associations often express their uniqueness individually and collectively through their community's voluntary associations. It is not unusual for members of ethnic groups in the Diaspora to distinguish themselves from the dominant population and other ethnic minority groups. Differing with the Marxist explanation that ethnic divides are 'irrational' because they conceal underlying class contradictions in capitalist society (see Cox, 1948), Barrett (1987) has contended that ethnic particularisms, as expressed collectively and individually are not products of 'false consciousness' because they help immigrants to "overcome structural disadvantage, and the overwhelming psychological damage that makes them doubt their own worth" (Barrett, 1987: 343). The ethnic particularisms of the Yorùbá can be understood from the perspective of the modern theory of ideology.

The reconceptualization of ideology as real, as a practice and as the lived experience of a group of people is central to Althusser's work (1971). The politics of ethnic exclusivity among the Yorùbá is a response to the hegemonic construction of Canada as a naturally white society.

As previously documented, Yorùbá ethnic particularism is largely promoted by Yorùbá association leaders, who have seized on the Diaporic experiences of ordinary members of the community to construct a Yorùbá nation 'socio-biologically'. By appealing to primordial sentiments and glorifying the pre-colonial Yorùbá civilization, the dominant class is able to fuse what Gramsci calls the 'feeling passion' of ordinary Yorùbá with their external material understanding of their situations (common sense). Feeling passion, according to Gramsci, is a moment when subjects find identification with variegated discursive formations as they normatively and emotively resonate with their lived day-to-day experiential consciousness of the social world (Hier, 2002: 318). It is in this sense that the discursive emphasis on 'homeland', 'kinship', and 'human fecundity of Yorùbá race' by the Yorùbá leader has resonance with the lived experiential consciousness of ordinary members of the Yorùbá transnational community. In other words, the discursive configuration around 'Yorùbá nationhood', and its 'difference' from 'other peoples', becomes a 'naturalized common sense'.

What is largely missing in my discussions with members of the Yorùbá community, and in my role as a participant observer, are issues related to gender and class as contributing factors to the curtailment of their life-chances. Class and gender inequalities in Nigeria are not only transferred to the host society of Canada, but are also reaffirmed in Nigeria. For example, certain members of the community who had served under the disreputable military and civilian administrations of the past continue to be leaders of the community. I observed on several occasions in the field, as a participant observer, 'ordinary members' of the community deferring to some individuals who had participated in previous disreputable governments in Nigeria. It is obvious that these individuals and a host of others, by virtue of their pre-migration socio-economic positions have more consumption power than ordinary members of the community. Also when political leaders from various communities come to visit for financial support, issues around the harmful elements of Nigeria's political economy and their impact on ordinary people do not arise in conversations. Instead, members of the transnational community continue to defer to these leaders.

Minority women suffer from the triple oppressions of class, race, and gender inequalities (Daenzer, 1997; Stasiulis, 1990). Ethnicity is an additional imprecation for women if an ethnic group possesses cultural values that are devalorizing to women's status (Fleras & Elliot, 1999: pp. 147-148). While by virtue of their relatively high access to a paying job, and the sharing of household responsibilities between spouses, the socio-economic condition of most Yorùbá women in Toronto seems to have improved in relation to their female counterparts in Nigeria, as in some other Western and non-Western societies, most Yorùbá women still defer to the authority of men. On other gender-related issues, the following are responses obtained from the research participants: about one-third of respondents, both male and female, believe that men need not to take part in household chores; and approximately one-third believe that a wife is not entitled to know her husband's salary.

Apart from the Yorùbá cultural influence on Yorùbá women's sexuality, the study shows that Yorùbá men also assert their dominance in other social spheres. One male association leader comments: "It is going to take time for our men to admit there can be equality between men and women. At meetings, men do not take it lightly when their points of view are faulted by women". Another leader of an association that contributes money on a rotational basis, èsúsù, and which restricts membership to men but makes their wives prepare refreshments for their meetings, says the following: "We cannot allow women to be part of this association. As you know, women cannot be taken seriously. They gossip a lot and cannot focus on serious matters". Furthermore, there are stories in the community of men who usually travel to Nigeria on holidays and have multiple sexual relationships with younger women because of their relatively higher socio-economic status as immigrants.

## Conclusion

There are a host of Nigerian and African communities that operate independently of each other in Toronto. As Griswold (1994: 150) indicates, exclusive communities can emerge in the Diaspora as a reaction to the homogenizing effects of globalization. They can also emerge as a security in a period of uncertainty, anxiety and social transformation. Exclusive communities can become an 'ethnic trap', due to the danger of essentialism, especially for those members of society who may be more vulnerable, such as the poor, women, the disabled, sexual minorities, etc. In opposition to Kyle (1999) and Goldring (1998), the study of

Nigerian- Yorùbá transnationals does not find that transnational migration consistently results in emancipation for the participants. On the contrary, pre-existing class and gender divisions are sometimes reinforced as part of the process of re-ethnicization that the migrant community engages in as a defense against the hegemonic racial order of the host society. In corroborating other studies (Guarnizo & Diaz, 1999; Goldring, 1996; Chavez, 1994), it can be argued that Yorùbá 'transnational practices' in Toronto have emerged without a Yorùbá 'transnational community'; considering that pre-existing social inequalities are glossed over in both home and host societies and within the larger Canadian society.

Yorùbá transnational migration and its challenges cannot be decoupled from the rootedness of the transmigrant communities in the Nigerian nation-state. In their findings, Guarnizo and Diaz (1999) discover that successful transmigrants are more likely to be of higher-class origin and higher status occupations in their own country of origin (Guarnizo & Diaz, 1999: 405-407). In the case of Nigerian-Yorùbás in Toronto, their pre-existing social conditions have some influence on their activities and practices in Toronto. Their other locality—Toronto, Canada--also has some impact on their transnational practices. It is obvious that cuts to social services by the federal government and the provincial government of Ontario will further alienate immigrants from 'developing countries' from mainstream Canadian society.

Nigerian-Yorùbá transnationals' action agenda for socio-economic improvement in the age of neoliberal capitalism needs to move beyond ethnic particularism in both of their social fields. In consort with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) notion of 'articulation'--a convergence and configuration of diverse elements, from different sources as a tool for emancipatory politics--mobilization on the basis of not only ethnicity/ 'race', but also gender, and class oppression may strengthen Yorùbá transnational social fields and make transnational migration a progressive practice.

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## Notes

[1] Unlike some Yorùbá Christians in Toronto who worship in their indigenized Christian churches on Sundays, Yorùbá Muslims worship with other Muslims, including non-Africans and Africans, Arabs, etc., on Fridays in various mosques in the Toronto area. On Sundays, when most Yorùbá Muslims are not working, they hold prayer meetings, exclusively for Yorùbá Muslims, in a location in Toronto. Other social activities, such as welcoming new members, job opportunities, announcements of upcoming social events, etc., are held after the prayer meeting.

[2] Existing data on the population of Nigeria, and of the Yorùbá, residing in Canada and elsewhere is unknown because many migrants/immigrants avoid official registration. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2003) put the Nigerian population in Canada for the period of January 1990 to December 2002 at 8,980: Nigeria has the fourth largest population of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa in Canada, after Somalia, South Africa, and Kenya. The population of Nigerians in Ontario is 6, 293; the proportion of the population in Toronto is not known. Citizenship and Immigration Canada does not stratify Nigerians into their ethnic groups. Yorùbá association leaders do not know the exact population of the Yorùbá in Toronto because it seems a large number of them do not partake in association activities. Nevertheless, the population of the Yorùbá in Toronto is significant considering that they have evolved their own social institutions and agencies, such as the church, improvement associations, Yorùbá language schools, legal clinics, etc.

[3] Titles, such as Pa, Mr., Mrs., Leader, Dr., etc., are used to address the participants in the study as they would be addressed in non-research settings. In instances where participants are addressed by their first names, they are either younger than me in age or are my age. For more information on rules of seniority in Yorùbá culture, see Fadipe The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1970, pp. 129-134. Also note that all names used for the participants are pseudonyms. In some situations, information about social settings is slightly altered to protect participants' confidentiality.

[4] Here I use 'migrant' and 'immigrant' as 'ideal types'. In the early period of emigration from Nigeria to Canada, most Yorùbá did not intend to stay 'permanently', but came in the hope of returning to Nigeria after accomplishing their career or academic goals. In the later period, from the mid-80s up to the present period, the Yorùbá are staying longer and using transnational migration as a means of connecting with both home and host societies, and are thus referred to as 'immigrants', and not 'migrants'. For conceptual clarifications of 'migrants' and 'immigrants', see Vic Satzewich, Racism and the Incorporation of Foreign Labor: farm labor Migration to Canada, London: Routledge, 1991.

[5] I have italicized parts of the speech to emphasize the point I am making.

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