

Study Session 10: DIASPORIC CULTURE AND NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT



10.1 Introduction

This study session will help you to understand the historical trajectory of diasporic culture and its attendant consequences on Nigeria's development. You will understand the Nigerian concept of Diaspora and the role which Nigerians in the diaspora have played in the development of the Homeland. The term "diaspora" is derived from the Greek word *diarropa*, which means "scattering or dispersion". It has also been described as "the movement of people out of their ancestral land to other areas for settlement". It has also been used to describe the historical exodus of people of the same origin.

The concept is usually associated with the dispersion of a particular group of people to foreign countries. Diasporic culture often assumes a different course from that of the population in the original place of settlement. In this session, you will learn about the origin of diaspora culture, particularly the impact and contributions of Nigerians in diaspora on the development of the country.



Learning Outcomes for Study Session 10

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the genesis of the Nigerian Diaspora.
2. Highlight the role of Nigerians in Diaspora in the development of the Homeland.

10.2 The Nigerian Diaspora

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, emigration was induced by factors ranging from political unrest and environmental concerns to religious conflict and the economic issues. Specifically, developments such as land alienation by the colonial government, deterioration of economic conditions as evident in high rates of unemployment, political instability occasioned by military intervention in politics, the civil war as well as social tension, all constituted the "push factor". The "pull factor" was mainly the existence of "greener pastures" abroad, especially in advanced countries of North America and Europe, emerging economies of Asia, and even some African countries such as South Africa and Ghana. A host of personal and other intervening factors also played a role in influencing the international migration of Nigerians. Today, Nigerians are found virtually everywhere in the world as evident in the establishment of Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East.

The issue of the number of Nigerians abroad has been a matter of controversy. The reality is that there is no reliable census figure or statistics of Nigerians living abroad. Thus, differing figures and various estimates have been presented. For instance, on 28 July 2006, Dahitler submitted that: "*I would estimate at least 20 million. This figure includes those that have one Nigerian parent.*" He also explained that, "Of course, I am basing this entirely off shady estimates I know about Nigerian population in Ghana (about 2 million), Ivory Coast (a little more than a million), South Africa (about 2 million) and then at least 5 million in UK and 4-6 million in America and the rest would come from other countries." The population of Nigerians abroad is significant enough to place the Nigerian phenomenon alongside diasporas like the Jewish, and thus merits intellectual enquiry.

The Nigerian cultural presence abroad is significant in different areas such as language, religion, dance, music, dress, food or other cultural aspects. Commenting on this in 2005, Uche Nworah contended that this is reflected in:

A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate. This has been variously demonstrated by intra-marriage relationships and friendships amongst the Nigerians in the Diaspora, also by setting up community associations which serve as social organisations as well. Nigerians still maintain and promote their culture in their new countries of residence, they still wear their traditional attires to churches and to weddings, they bear their Nigerian names and speak their native languages with one another, the only problem is with the generation born in the new lands, who are torn with the issue of double identity.

In respect to the composition of the Nigerian immigrant community, it is remarkable to note that that they are found in all walks of life, as professionals. There is no doubt

that Nigerians constitute a high percent of medical and health care workers, bankers, engineers and academics in the West, especially in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Nigerians are also prominent in several other occupations, such as the police, cab drivers as well as the operation of small businesses. In the Nigerian immigrant community are also found those who engage in criminal activities and vices who tend to smear the image of the country with dirt. In this realm, it has been estimated that about 10,000 Nigerian women in Italy earn their living as commercial sex workers and a good number also engage in advance fee fraud also called 419 in Nigerian parlance.

In the aspect of relations with host communities, the pattern discernible among Nigerian immigrants is much the same as the general trend of immigrant-host relations. Thus, Nigerian immigrants have enjoyed excellent relations with host communities in many parts of the world, but disagreement and conflict have also taken place in some cases. The pattern of relationship has reflected a typical immigrant-host community relationship with its characteristic co-operation and disaffection in line with the iron law of in-group and out-group attitudes.

In-text Questions

1. Diaspora refers to the physical and cultural presence of Nigerians:



- a. Outside the homeland as well as the relationships between peoples of Nigerian extraction at home and those abroad.
 - b. As seen in the movement from one town to the other on daily basis.
 - c. As seen in the migration of men and women from their villages to the urban centers.
 - d. In their motherland throughout their entire life.
2. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, millions of people were forced out of the territory that later became known as Nigeria through:
- a. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.
 - b. Industrial revolution.
 - c. Long distance trade.
 - d. Relocation to the urban centers.

In-text Answers

1. (a) Outside the homeland as well as the relationships between peoples of Nigerian extraction at home and those abroad.
2.(a) The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.



10.3 The Role of the Diaspora in the Development of the Homeland

You have learned about the origin and trend of the Nigerian diaspora phenomenon in the above section. We will now identify the role of the diaspora in the development of the homeland. Recent discourse on diasporas has attempted to examine the role of dispersed people in the development of the homeland. The feeling of nostalgia towards, and attachment to the homeland have always influenced positive attitude towards the homeland by diaspora communities. For Africa, the concept of the “old” and “new” diaspora has been introduced for clarity of analysis. “Old” diaspora refers to people of African descent who were involuntarily shipped as slaves to Europe and the Americas from the fifteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, while “new” diaspora is used to describe Africans who went voluntarily in search of the “golden fleece” in different parts of the world, especially in the post-independence period.

Developments in North America after the American War of Independence (1776-1783) and the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the end of the slavery trade led to the return of some Africans from Europe and America to their motherland. These were mainly descendants of Africans who had been shipped as slaves to Europe and the New World in the old diaspora. As far as Nigeria is concerned, repatriated slaves contributed greatly to the development of the homeland.

The Brazilian returnees settled mainly in Lagos and Abeokuta. Their influence was essentially in the area of culture and social development. They introduced Brazilian-style architecture which became prominent in Central Lagos from the late nineteenth century onwards. The African returnees from Brazil also introduced the Brazilian carnival to Lagos and its environs. The carnival featured music and dance with exotic costumes. It has always been a display of African culture fused with Brazilian elements. The festival went into abeyance for some time, but it has been revived in the past two decades and it has had an immense impact on the social development of Lagos and its environs.

Apart from the Brazilian returnees who came directly to parts of Western Nigeria, there were returnees and recaptured slaves that settled in Sierra Leone and Liberia who equally made immense contributions to Nigeria's development. The first set of African liberated slaves to return home to West Africa came from England in 1787. They settled in Freetown in the territory that was later named Sierra Leone. Another batch of African returnees came from Nova Scotia in North America under the supervision of the British. They came in 1792 and also settled in Freetown. The British moved them to Nova Scotia after the war for fear of being victimised by the independent United States of America. They were eventually moved to Freetown from Nova Scotia.

It is noteworthy that Thomas Peters, an Egba, who had fought on the side of the British during the American revolutionary war, was among the leaders who negotiated with the directors of the Sierra Leone Company in England which led up to the settlement of the liberated slaves from Nova Scotia in Sierra Leone. A third batch came from Jamaica in 1800 to join the returnees in Sierra Leone.

They were called 'maroons' because of their having been abandoned in the mountains in Jamaica before their relocation to Sierra Leone. The population of the Sierra Leone colony swelled in the course of the nineteenth century by slaves released from ships arrested by the British Naval Squadron. Some slave traders continued illegal trading after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the British navy had to patrol the waters to arrest the illegal slave dealers. A similar settlement to the Sierra Leone colony was established in Liberia in 1822. It was made up of slaves repatriated from the United States of America and the colony was organised by the American Colonisation Society.

The discussion on the establishment and development of Sierra Leone and Liberia, especially the former, is important because of the crucial contribution of some of the returnees to Nigeria's development from the second half of the nineteenth century. The returnees to Sierra Leone and the re-captives who joined them in the course of the nineteenth century developed a new and unique culture called 'Creole' which was a fusion of the cultures of the diverse peoples that came to settle in Sierra Leone. The Creoles embraced the Christian faith and Western education. A number of them also engaged in trade and commerce, positively exploiting their links with Europe and the Americas. The influence of the Creoles spread to other parts of West Africa especially in the second half of the nineteenth century and Nigeria was one of the territories where their influence was prominent. This was mainly in the area of education and missionary activities. There was also the influence of re-captives who made efforts to trace their original places of birth across West Africa and contributed to the development of the various communities.

The importance that many Creoles attached to education made them to send their children to Europe for higher studies in the early period of their settlement in

Sierra Leone. They also went a step further by establishing a higher school of their own, the Fourah Bay College that was established in 1827 and affiliated to Durham University in 1876. Fourah Bay became the hub of intellectual activities in West Africa and from it emerged professionals in different areas: Law, Medicine, Engineering and Administration, among others. Graduates from the institution spread across West Africa and occupied important positions in their different fields of endeavour. Some of these, in addition to other Creoles who had traced their roots to parts of Nigeria, returned to make important contributions to Nigeria's development.

In the area of education, the first secondary school in Nigeria, the CMS Grammar School, Bariga, Lagos, which was established in 1859, was founded by Thomas Babington Macaulay, an Anglican clergyman who had been trained in Sierra Leone and England. Babatunde Fafunwa states that the CMS assisted in the development of the school in different ways during the early period of its existence; but he also notes that even greater support came from ex-slaves from Sierra Leone who had settled in Lagos. The Sierra Leoneans also gave similar support to other educational institutions in the decades after the establishment of CMS Grammar School. Many other ex-slaves with links to Sierra Leone made important contributions to Nigeria's development. For instance, Ajayi Crowther wrote the *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* in 1843 and Samuel Johnson wrote his famous *History of the Yorubas* in 1897 both of which have become important source material on aspects of Yoruba history and culture. Many other Creoles worked as teachers, lawyers and administrators. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as European colonial rule was established, the ex-slaves and others that had moved to other West African territories were at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle. They used different mediums, including the print media, to mobilise the people to resist attempts by European powers to establish colonial rule in West Africa. In Nigeria, the *Lagos Weekly Records* published by the Jacksons and the *Lagos Observer* published by J. Bagan Benjamin were of immense value in mobilising the people against colonial rule and colonial policies.

In the area of Christian missionary activities, returnees from Sierra Leone went to different parts of Nigeria to spread the gospel. The career and work of Samuel Ajayi Crowther who was ordained the first African Anglican Bishop in 1864 was by far the most explosive. Crowther's missionary activities were concentrated in the Delta area, particularly Bonny where a missionary revolution was carried out as so many conversions were recorded so much that a clash with traditional religious worshippers broke out. Missionary activities were accompanied by cultural transformation and educational development. Nigerians with diaspora links were actively involved in missionary activities in other parts of Nigeria apart from Bonny.

Many missionary groups found it convenient to send educated Nigerians to the interior for evangelical work instead of white priests because of their familiarity with local

customs and ability to withstand the weather. Creoles of Islamic background followed the footsteps of their Christian counterparts to also advance the cause of Islam in the homeland. Prominent among these was Muhammed Shitta Bey, a Muslim Creole who gave a whopping 400 pounds for the building of a mosque in Lagos in the 1890s. Shitta Bey also encouraged Muslims to acquire Western education, stressing the numerous benefits it offers. The contributions of members of the 'old' diaspora to the development of the homeland were therefore multi-dimensional.

For the 'new' diaspora, their impact on the development of the homeland has come in the form of their individual and collective development efforts in different spheres of life. As earlier noted, Nigerians in different parts of the world have organised themselves into groups called Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) in parts of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East. The different NIDO



groups have identified needs in different areas such as education, health and infrastructure development. They have assisted government at different levels with information and, in some instances, resources for some projects, thereby contributing to the improvement the overall quality of life. In addition, a number of Nigerian intellectuals abroad have established linkages and provided valuable information to their counterparts at home which have benefited both the scholars and their institutions. Some others engaged in manufacturing and business abroad have returned to Nigeria to invest, thereby contributing to the country's economic development. Yet, others have drawn attention to business opportunities in Nigeria and encouraged the flow of foreign direct investment.

Different Nigerian diaspora groups have met with Nigerian leaders sometimes when the leaders go on official visits to other countries. They have utilised the opportunity provided by such meetings to offer constructive advice to government on how to improve Nigeria's development back home. Some of the ideas shared have positively influenced government policy on import and export, investment and external debt, among other areas. Apart from sharing ideas, almost, if not all Nigerians abroad remit money home to family members for construction or business. Monies sent by Nigerians in diaspora sum up to billions of Naira every year and economic analysts state that such financial stimulus has contributed to Nigeria's economic development, especially in the past three decades. In many respects, therefore, Nigerians in diaspora have made important contributions to the development of the homeland.

In-text Questions

1. The Brazilian returnees settled mainly in:
 - a. Abuja and Lagos
 - b. Lagos and Ibadan
 - c. Republic of Benin
 - d. Lagos and Abeokuta



2. Ajayi Crowther wrote the Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language in:

- a. 1843
 - b. 1929
 - c. 1678
 - d. 1900
3. Samuel Johnson wrote his famous *History of the Yorubas* in:
 - a. 1912
 - b. 1897
 - c. 1906
 - d. 1898
4. Shitta Bey, a Muslim Creole gave a whopping 400 pounds for the building of a mosque in Lagos in the:
 - a. 1890s
 - b. 1950
 - c. 1978
 - d. 1980

In-text Answers

1. (d) Lagos and Abeokuta
2. (a) 1843
3. (b) 1897
4. (a) 1890s



10.4 Summary of Study Session 10

We have established in this session that the Nigerian cultural presence abroad is significant in different areas such as language, religion, dance, music, dress, food or other cultural aspects. We have also noted that the genesis of the Nigerian Diaspora pre-dated the 1914 amalgamation of the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria. This is because millions of people were forced out of the territory that later became known as Nigeria through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. During the colonial and post-colonial periods, emigration was induced by factors ranging from political unrest and environmental concerns to religious conflict and the economic issues.

Apart from the Brazilian returnees who came directly to parts of western Nigeria, there were returnees and recaptured slaves that settled in Sierra Leone and Liberia who equally made immense contributions to Nigeria's development in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Several Nigerians abroad have made tremendous impact on the social, economic and political landscape of Nigeria since the twentieth century.



ACTIVITY

Now that you have completed this study session, you should assess how much you have learned by attempting the following questions. You can write your answers in a note book so as to be able to discuss extensively on it with your tutor at the next interactive session.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQs)

- ✓ Trace the genesis of the Nigerian Diaspora.
- ✓ Analyze the contribution of Nigerians in the Diaspora to development of the Homeland.
- ✓ What are the challenges faced by Nigerians in Diaspora?

10.10 References/ Suggestions for Further Reading

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