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West African 'Stone Boys' in the Ibadan Mining Frontiers Since the 1990s

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In the last two decades of the 20th century, the city of Ibadan, capital of Oyo state, Nigeria hosted migrant entrepreneurs, "stone boys" from the West African sub-region who were actively involved in the export of gemstones. This paper drew on fieldwork to explicate how culture of migration, prevalent among West Africans, intertwined with entrepreneurship in the international gemstones trade and its implications on the Nigerian economy. It argued that gemstones trade among West African migrants was an inherited commercial heritage. It further advanced that lack of government investment in the non-oil solid mineral sector provided a leeway for artisanal miners and unregulated export of gemstones; and social solidarity and identity empowered the migrants to dominate the export of gemstones.

Introduction

Mining involves migration. In West Africa, mining business has been characterised by constant mobility and migration. The linkage between mining and migration, and its socio-economic impact has been well documented (Walsh, 2012; Hilson and Clifford, 2010; Hilson and Garforth, 2012; Hirons, 2011; Werthman, 2007; Walsh, 2003; Hilson, 2002; Swindell, 1974). Existing studies have not made an effort to examine the linkage between mining, gemstones trade and migration of West Africans to Ibadan, Nigeria. Since the colonial period, the development of the mining industry contributed to the radical changes in population distribution (Swindell, 1974). Mining led to migration, the emergence of new towns and expansion of existing ones. After giving an historical outline of gemstones trade, this paper discussed the migration of the "stone boys" and their social networks, the emergence of mining frontiers in Ibadan region, Oyo state, Nigeria, export of gemstones and role of the government. The implication of the interconnectedness of culture of migration and entrepreneurship with reference to gemstones trade on the economy of Nigeria are further discussed. It is against this backdrop that this study adopted network theory which suggests that networks linking the homeland with kin and friends in the diaspora function as catalysts of further emigration (Brettell 2000, 104-106 and Akesson 2004: 18-19). It is evident, as Akesson (2004) suggests, that migration and economic considerations are often socially embedded and culturally informed. The "stone boys" operated from the logic of transnationalism which allowed them to move freely across the ECOWAS sub-region and beyond as well practice their entrepreneurship by exporting gemstones to the international market.

The "stone boys" discussed in this paper are West African migrants in gemstones business who were mainly from Guinea, Senegal, Mali and the Gambia.[1] They were principally Soninke, Madingo, Fulani and Jakanke. They spoke Bambara, Madingo and Madinka languages. At different periods, the power of language reinforced commercial identity and hegemony in the gemstones trade. Both Hausa and West African migrants were united by a commercial heritage dating back to the 16th century to dominate the informal mining sector in Ibadan region and throughout Nigeria. For the Guineans, Senegalese and Malians discussed in this paper, gemstone trade was an inherited business. According to Gratz (2004: 97), miners are fortune seekers, young peasants, impoverished artisans, entrepreneurs and businessmen, struggling to cope with the economic crises marked by the decline in agricultural production, droughts, political crisis and communal conflicts. This explanation captures the experiences of the "stone boys" who moved from one country to another in search of livehoods.

Gemstones trade had been carried out in West Africa before A.D. 400. It was one of the articles of trade which traversed the Western Sudan and Guinea to the shores of the Mediterranean and Red Sea. North African traders bought gemstones from West Africans in exchange for Saharan salt and North African commodities along trade routes, which connected Senegambia with Middle Niger country of Western Sudan, together with the forest region of Cote D' Ivoire a..d Ghana. The Madinka of Kangaba, Mali empire were middlemen in the gold trade of ancient Ghana and northern part of the Republic of Guinea. Dyula or Wangara traders of Mali also became famous for their enterprise in gold trade across Western and Central Sudanese states. Wangara was the corporate name for commercial groups controlling the external trade of Songhai, Bariba states, and Hausa cities (Lovejoy, 2005: 131). The best known of all the Wangara were the Dyula, a name which became synomous for 'a trader' (Levtzion, 1973: 167).

Several centuries on, it is important to underscore how the Soninke and Wangarawa monopolised gemstones trade, despite the intervening years of colonial rule. Over the years, the Soninke and Wangarawa held on to their commercial heritage and family tradition in the intercontinental gemstones trade.

West African migrants and Hausa artisanal miners (from northern Nigeria and Niger Republic) carried out mining trade in Ibadan region with modest involvement of the Yoruba host community. It is historically ironical that, in the early 20th century, gold and diamond mining stimulated migration of some Yoruba to the Gold Coast, Sierra-Leone and Guinea; and tin mining in Jos, northern Nigeria. By the end of the 20th century, Yoruba were virtually excluded from the lucrative mining business in their own society. This indicates how Yoruba society has changed economically since the Nigerian oil boom of the early 1970s.

As migrant entrepreneurs, the "stone boys" in Ibadan benefited from the benign neglect of the mining sector by the Nigerian state and Yoruba society. Between the 1990s and 2000s, migrant entrepreneurs made fortunes from the marketing of gemstones which they dominated. The "stone boys" represented a new process of capital accumulation in West Africa. They lived in Ibadan city and offered employment opportunities to Hausa artisanal miners in the rural areas. As young men between ages 18 and 40, they bought cars and other luxury items, and had enough money to enjoy life. This lends itself to the 'get rich quick' narrative, which is discussed at length in the small scale mining literature. Walsh (2003) analyses this phenomenon by demonstrating that young miners use "hot money" to consume "daringly" by spending money to fulfil immediate desires.

Mining and gemstones trade has generated employment opportunities for many migrants in Ibadan. According to a Malian gemstone trader, Ismail Diarra, in 1999 there were about 500 gemstone dealers in Ibadan.[2] By 2005, the population of gemstone dealers increased by more than 100 per cent due to the lucrative nature of the business. Some of the mining sites in Ibadan region had over 5,000 dealers at one time.

Migration of the "stone boys"

The culture of migration aided the entrepreneurship of "stone boys" who were highly mobile young men moving from one country to another in search of opportunities (Jonsson, 2008; Akesson, 2004; and Adepoju, 2005). From the 1990s, the political and economic history of the African continent rapidly transformed the migration streams. As demonstrated by Adepoju (2005: 1), historically, migrants regarded ECOWAS sub-region as an economic unit within which trade in goods and services flowed, and people moved freely. ECOWAS protocol on human mobility and free movement reinforced historical convergence in West Africa since pre-colonial era. From the 1990s, migrants continued to move as their mode of livelihoods were threatened by civil wars, communal violence, misgovernance and development quagmire on the African continent. Without education and capital for business, it was difficult for most of the youths to survive in their own countries. Jango Ceesay, a 39 years old Gambian gemstone dealer in Ibadan observed that, "I cannot make it in my country."[3] In most of the sending countries in West Africa, it was the responsibility of young men to supplement family income through remittances.

To find solution to these problems, youths migrated in search of commercial opportunities and money to enable them to enjoy life and assist their poor families. From the late 1980s, many Senegalese, Guineans, Gambians and Malians trasversed other African states in search of commercial opportunities as well as means of livelihoods. Therefore, most of the "stone boys" had lived in other African countries before settling down in Nigeria.

The influx of African migrants to Ibadan, in the era of globalisation and instability in the sub-region, transformed dynamic demographic base of the city. Since the early 1990s, Ibadan witnessed massive influx of people and business which helped the city to grow, demographically and economically. At the turn of the 21st century, Ibadan transformed from the largest indigenous city in West Africa to an inclusive globalising city. The population of Ibadan increased from 1,222,663 in 1991 to 1,338,659 in 2006. Indeed, the increasing level of West African migrants' population in Ibadan signified the most visible sign of integration in the Sub-region since the adoption of ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment in 1979. As young entrepreneurs, "stone boys" utilised their creative ingenuity to explore opportunities in various parts of Africa.

Migration involves numerous preferences. From the profiles of informants, the decision to migrate was overwhelmingly economic. The desire of most migrants was to (a) look for another means of improving business, (b) explore new sites of mineral deposits, and (c) be moved by ambition and money.[4] The ambition of some of the migrants was to migrate to Europe. When such ambition failed due to stringent migration policies in the EU, they explored opportunities in other African countries. It is evident from the fieldwork that young migrants from poor countries in West Africa tend to migrate for greener pasture and gain entrepreneurial experience in the sectors dominated by their kinsmen (Fanthorpe and Maconachie, 2010; Swindell, 1974). In addition, lack of education or search for it provoked migration. One informant confirmed that, if he had been educated, he would have stayed in the Gambia and serve his country.[5] On the other hand, another informant said he migrated to Nigeria in 1991 to further his education.[6] This was because there was no University in the Gambia at the time.[7] West African migrants believed that as Muslims, the dignity of labour and remittances to the family members is a *Jihad* (holy war) against poverty.

Some "stone boys" migrated through their kinsmen and joined the gemstones business. The lucrative nature of gemstones business attracted new migrants who came *en masse*. The affluence displayed by gemstone dealers, whenever they visited their home countries, influenced the migration of other young men.

Musa Toure, 33 years old, had the ambition of migrating to Libya and Italy at the age of 22. He was influenced by the Gambian migrants who returned with their wealth to buy or build houses in the country. Musa's parents were displeased with him when he dropped out of school to migrate to Italy and make money. He reached Libya in 2007 and lived with the Gambians who worked as labourers earning 15 dinars per day. Musa was employed by a British Landrover Company. In Libya, he experienced xenophobic attacks like other black Africans and was eventually deported in 2009. In order to raise capital for gemstones business in Ibadan, he got help from his brothers in Spain and the USA.

There were two categories of West African migrants involved in the gemstone business. Majority of migrants from Guinea, Mali and Senegal had experience in mining business. These West Africans migrated in continuation of an old economic orientation and practice but also in response to political and economic changes in post-colonial Africa.They were driven by cultural factors and economic orientation inherited from their ancestors. This category of gemstones dealers were familiar with the customs of the trade.

On the other hand, the recent migration of a new generation of Gambians to Ibadan was to benefit from the new sources of wealth offered by the gemstones business. For most Gambian migrants, gemstones trade was a new business experience different from what their predecessors in Nigeria had practised. They were independent of existing commercial interests of the first generation. Gambian migrants in Lagos and Ibadan were associated with *Kampala* (indigo tye and dye), trade in antiquities, imported clothes and wrist watches. By the mid-1990s, the *Kampala* business virtually collapsed due to change in fashion and importation of cheaper clothes from China. Thus, the new generation of migrants found it profitable to join the lucrative precious stone business. Following the decline in *Kampala* production, some of the migrants diversified into gemstone business. Only very few among the migrants had been employed in their countries before migration. Some young Gambians learnt gemstone business for two to three years.

The role of the "stone boys" was basically dealership. Between 1994 and 2011, Ibadan not only received a substantial number of gemstones dealers, but gradually developed into the main market of gemstones in Nigeria. "Stone boys" bought gemstones from the mines at Komu and Igbojaiye, Itesiwaju local government; and Ofiki in Atisbo local government, over 200 kilometres from Ibadan. Some stayed at the "bush" (mines) for weeks or months before they could get their supplies. Before 2005, a substantial percentage of gemstones trade passed through the "stone boys." Most of the gemstones in Oyo state and other parts of Nigeria were traded at Ojoo, Ibadan. During this period, gemstone dealers prospered as the prominent middlemen for the trade.

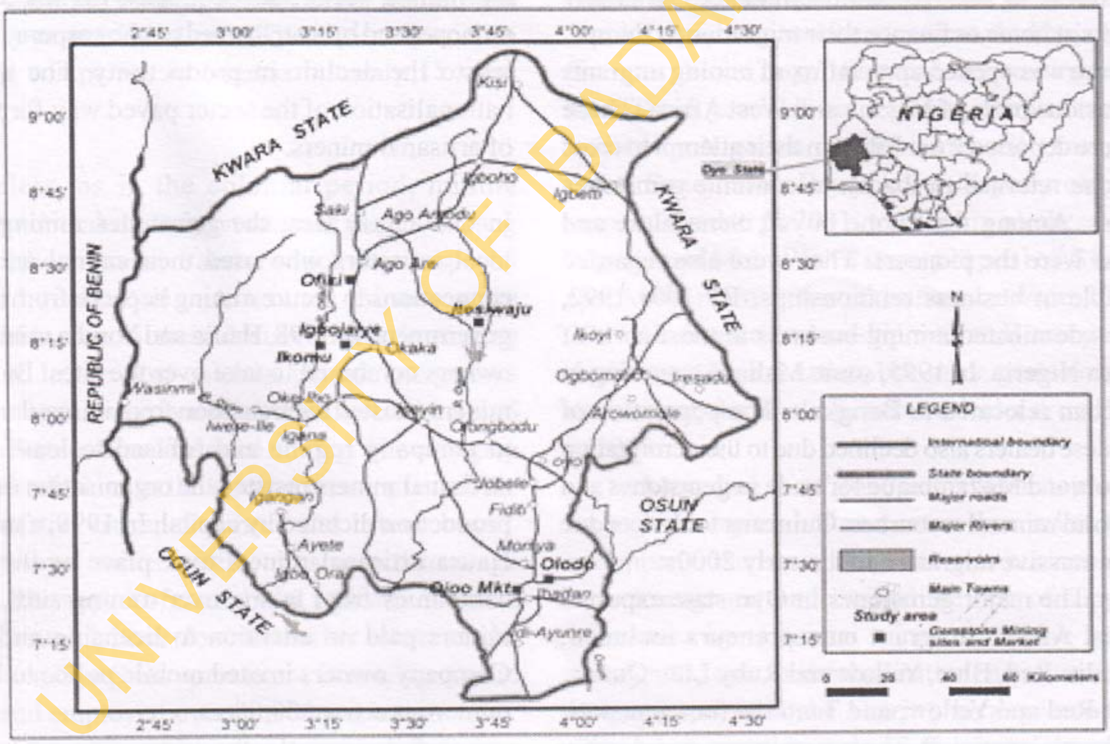
Gemstone dealers also received supplies from other parts of the country. Many dealers from Kano, Maiduguri, Abuja and elsewhere patronised Ojoo gemstone markets for both supply and demand, depending on the market situation. Gemstones are categorised into two: precious (first grade) stones and semi-precious (second-grade) stones. At the Ojoo market, a kilogramme of gemstones was valued at N4,000.00 ($24.79) and N5,000.00 ($30.99) while a kilogramme of semi-precious stones was between N1,000.00 ($6.20) and N2,000.00 ($12.40) depending on the grade. A ton of precious stone was valued at N4million ($24790.83) and N5million ($30,988.53). Except for the use of weigh measurements and torch lights to ascertain the value of gemstones, the market remains traditional. They bought gemstones from Hausa, Ebira, Igbo; Togolese and Nigerien artisanal miners. According to a Malian gemstones dealer, his start up capital was $200 and he sold his commodity to the highest bidder.

Emergence of Mining Frontiers in Ibadan Region

Post-colonial artisanal gemstones mining started in Southern Kaduna (Goma Lafia and Kafanchan) at Jamaa Local Government Area in the late 1970s. Subsequently, mining sites were discovered in Borno state; Idoyi and Okene in Kogi state; Keffi in Nassarawa state and Ijero-Ekiti, Ekiti state in the 1980s. When the gemstones became scarce in northern Nigeria, they migrated southwards to new mining frontiers in Ibadan, Oyo state in 1993. Gemstones were discovered at Olode area of Ibadan in commercial quantities. Mining activities also started in Komu along the Oyan River in Oyo State. The mining sites were discovered by Fulani pastoralists (called *pathfinders*). The discovery and mining of gemstones in Komu led to controversies over land acquisition as miners fiercely protected their "territories".

Geographically, the gemstones mining sites are located in an area widely referred to as Upper River Ogun (Oke-Ogun), Oyo state. The mining frontiers motivated migration of the "stone boys" to the hinterland areas, about 200 kilometres from Ibadan. They established major mining camps at Agate and Abuja Leather about 27 kilometers from Komu, Itesiwaju Local government; and Ofiki in Atisbo local government. Abuja Leather was developed by the massive influx of the miners.

Map of Oyo State, Nigeria showing Gemstone mining sites and Market



Source: Department of Geography, University of Ibadan, August 2013

In July 1998, Ofiki and Igbojaiye areas were swamped by "stone boys" when other mines were discovered at Ibudo Are (Igbojaiye area) about 3 miles from Komu. Miners live precariously in cramped and unhygienic conditions (Walsh, 2003). In 2009, about 40 Gambians lived at Abuja Leather and Ofiki mines to learn how to buy gemstones from their experienced kinsmen. They lived in thatched huts and encountered threats from armed bandits at nights. Subsequently, due to insecurity at the mines, each of the countries represented by the migrants paid N700.00 ($4.34) while individuals paid N300.00 ($1.86) per week to mine vigilante called *Bangers* that was set up to provide security. At Komu, gemstone dealers paid N240.00 ($1.49) security fee per person for entry into, and departure from, the mines. Majority of the young gemstones dealers engaged in the business to survive, send remittances to family members at home or finance their migration to Europe.

Komu was opened up to influx of mining migrants from various parts of Nigeria and West Africa. Those who were deported from Libya in their attempt to cross to Europe returned to Ibadan to continue gemstones business. Among the "stone boys", Senegalese and Malians were the pioneers. They were also regarded as affable in business relationships. By 1991/1992, Malians dominated mining business in most parts of northern Nigeria. In 1995, some Malians operating in Kafanchan relocated to Bangkok. The population of Senegalese dealers also declined due to their emigration to Angola and Mozambique for trade in gemstones and other solid mineral resources. Guineans took over due to their massive migration in the early 2000s.

The major gemstones in Oyo state exported by West African migrant entrepreneurs included: Tourmalin-Red, Blue, Yellow and Ruby Lite; Quartz; Garnet-Red and Yellow; and Tantalite (not gemstone but industrial material). These gemstones were largely unknown in Yoruba society where they exist in commercial quantities. Mining was pioneered by Hausa labourers who discovered and dug the sites. Many of them were involved in accidents while digging pits for gemstones. The manual labourers included some individuals from Niger Republic, Togo Republic, Hausaland, Yorubaland and Igboland. These retinue of artisanal miners were tolerated by the local population because mining provided greater source of cash for an impoverished rural economy. The rural population took up the advantage of unprecedented commercial opportunities created by gemstones trade (Hilson and Garforth, 2012; Walsh, 2012; Lange, 2011; Werthmann, 2009).

Company Regime and labour relations

There were competitions among the various stakeholders, especially between registered mining companies, "stone boys" and artisanal miners. Until 1972, several multi-national corporations operated in the mining sector. Subsequently, mining sector was monopolised by state-owned public corporations which led to the decline in productivity. The ineffective nationalisation of the sector paved way for thousands of artisanal miners.

In Oke-Ogun area, the gemstones mining attracted local investors who used their capital and political connections to secure mining licences from the federal government. In 1998, Hausa and Yoruba mining licence owners combined to take over the sites. But artisanal miners resisted the transition from unregulated mining to company regime and refused to leave the sites. Artisanal miners resisted the organisation of means of production dictated by capital. In 1998, a massacre of Hausa artisanal miners took place as they resisted companies from taking over mining sites. Artisanal miners paid no attention to licensing and taxation. Company owners invited mobile police to banish the numerous artisanal miners.

Subsequently, the companies employed some of the artisanal miners. Violent rivalries later ensued among the competing companies. Companies also clashed and the killing of several people led to the closure of mining sites by the government. Between

2004 and 2005, there were conflicts at Ofiki as artisanal protested underpayment and cheating by the companies. Artisanal miners also died as a result of risks involving mining activities. In June 2001, about 600 artisanal miners were killed in various mining operations at Ofiki, Ibudo-Are, Oro, Iganna, Sepeteri and other areas of Oyo state. At least, ten artisans died daily from peasant mining operations in Oyo state between 2001 and 2011 without compensation to their families.

Several companies were formed by individuals and partners for mining and export of gemstones. Most of the companies were owned by Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo but Malians, Guineans and Senegalese also established companies. Companies served as intermediaries between 1997 and 1998 in the host community-miners' relations. There were more than 50 mining companies in Nigeria but only 15 were active.[8]

Nevertheless, as in the colonial period, mining companies continued to rely on artisanal miners. Mining remains a labour intensive sector which require special skills and techniques. Artisanal miners were indispensable due to their decisive roles in mining production. In the post-colonial period, indigenous mining companies reproduced labour relations and clientship that sustained colonial mining. The changing production relations in the mining sector affected the fortunes of the artisanal miners and "stone boys." Hausa artisanal miners were transformed to wage labourers. The impact of capital was, typically, to create surplus casual labour for the sector. One of the companies in Oyo State operated in 30 mining sites in the state and employed over 20,000 workers.

Some of the West African migrants had their own companies. For example, two active Malian companies employed about 15 workers each. Sanoh Star Mining Company was established by a Guinean. It was very active in northern Nigeria but could not get a mining site in Oyo State due to competition with Nigerian companies. Another Guinean Mining Company in Nigeria was Alpha Memorial Gems that was only active in Kafanchan, northern Nigeria. Ismail Diarra, a 49 years old Malian who was born at Cote D'Ivoire, established a company in 2007 and employed Nigerian artisanal miners. Few "stone boys" formed partnership with Nigerian-owned companies to survive in the sector. This was because many of the "stone boys" lacked the capital outlay and commercial understanding for partnerships.

Mining business is characterised by several challenges of uncertainties, risks and unpredictability of investment and profit. The "stone boys" alleged that they were excluded from all sectors of mining operations by Nigerian companies. There were claims that Nigerian companies imposed themselves and forced migrants to work under them. At Abuja Leather, Guinean "stone boys" financed two mining pits, but after three years of hard labour, the artisans were bullied by Nigerian companies to sell gemstones to them. Bandjoucou Bajayoko, a 34 years old Malian came to Ibadan in 2001, trading in clothes between Nigeria and Mali. With a startup capital of $1,800, he sponsored many artisanal miners between 2005 and 2009. He formed partnership with an Hausa gemstone dealer at Abuja Leather but after gemstones were discovered, the Hausa gemstone dealer drove him out in 2009.

According to a "stone boy", "gemstones passed through a company before it enters the market. Without a company, there was no gemstones business."[9] This new arrangment undermined the rate of supplies of gemstones by artisanal miners to "stone boys." In some sites, due to mechanisation, artisans could no longer cope with the sharing arrangement which allowed companies to have ¾ of gemstones while artisans have ¼ of the output. Under the company regime, the mining sector is now well organised campared to what it used to be.

Companies often stockpile gemstones for six months before sharing and selling. The "stone boys" are required to buy from companies. But companies at the mining sites regulate the supply of gemstones to the market. Companies have offices in Bangkok and, therefore, export directly. In the process, they exclude other dealers, mostly "stone boys". Due to scarcity of gemstones, "stone boys" continue to experience hardship. Majority of gemstone dealers have become *Okada* (commercial motorcycle) riders. Indeed, there is no cordial relationship between the "stone boys" and companies. At a certain point, there was a conflict between Hausa dealers and "stone boys". This was because some of the Hausa artisanal miners prefer to sell their share of the gemstones to "stone boys" who were accused of encouraging pilfering of gemstones at the mines. In 2001 and 2003, they were asked to leave the mining sites to the city of Ibadan. Even though the controversies was resolved, the rivalries still exist. Company regime impoverished the "stone boys." However, the few "stone boys" in the business owed their hold on the lucrative trade to their commercial heritage.

Initially, the companies paid the artisanal miners for digging and mining but now, "stone boys" sponsor the process. They provide food and materials for the artisans throughout the mining process. The companies only engage in land lease, maintenance of peace and security, insurance and act as the link with the government. Gemstones are shared between the artisans and companies. The "stone boys" buy from the artisanal miners. However, less powerful companies do finance the operations of the artisans. In most cases, major companies monopolised the sector and excluded other players. In the rivalry over gemstones trade, the companies and Hausa traders used the politics of citizenship and official connections to dominate the sector.

The "stone boys" established clientele relationship with artisanal miners and petty traders. This business strategy was similar to Lebanese diamond traders in Sierra-Leone (Leighton, 1974: 25; Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010; Maconachie and Binns, 2007). They bind artisanal miners to themselves through cash advances and 'debt cycle.' The middlemen position was crucial to the mining sector and capital accummulation. Like the Lebanese in Sierra-Leone diamond sector, West African "stone boys" advanced money to artisanal miners to buy equipment, medical and food supplies. In this clientele arrangement, artisanal miners were obliged to bring gemtones to the benefactor for appraisal and purchase. Most of the "stone boys" had several peasant miners supply them with the commodity under the clientele arrangement (Hilson, 2010; Walsh, 2012). "Stone boys" also advanced money to itinerant Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo traders who were expected to purchase gemstones from artisanal miners and other small-scale diggers. In some cases, artisanal miners often default in supplying gemstones to the "stone boys" after several years of clientship and investment. As a result, some of the "stone boys" lost capital and became bankrupt in the process. In recent times, the challenges facing the "stone boys" have been compounded by the involvement of Chinese buyers who penetrate the mining communities and sites with huge capital. Some of the Chinese buyers also buy from West African dealers.[10] This situation forced many of the "stone boys" into emigration or liquidation of business.

Social Networks of the "stone boys"

Identity formation and articulation among West African migrants are in terms of temporality. The entrepreneurship of the "stone boys" led to the development of widely dispersed social relationships. "Stone boys" created kinship networks, connecting distant towns, communities and countries. The "stone boys" known as *Yan Dutse* in Hausa constituted a new generation of wealthy migrant entrepreneurs in Ibadan during the 1990s and early 2000s. Most of them visited their home countries frequently to take care of their family members. It has become a traditional obligation for African migrants to remit money to their home communities and families. Unlike

Hausa in Ibadan or elsewhere, West African migrants live and work among the Yoruba local population, engage in dialogue and daily interaction which reduces hostility.

More significantly, Ibadan developed cosmopolitan character and has been hospitable to foreign traders and internal migrants over the years. As one of the migrants described the relationship, Yoruba hosts are accommodating because migrants conduct themselves appropriately. West African "stone boys" considered Ibadan their second home. According to Muhammad Jabbi from Guinea who migrated to Ibadan in 2000, "I have lived peacefully in Ibadan. It is a place where people like me." Social intercourse in the neighbourhoods created trans-national practices. Majority of them lived in rented apartments. Only very few "stone boys" own houses in Ibadan.

Language is a crucial element in business relations. Language identity was prevalent among the West African migrants. In the precious stone business, Madingo has become a commercial language which allows migrants to construct inclusion and exclusion in the business. Madingo, Hausa and pidgin English were the predominant business languages among the "stone boys."

Malian, Guinean, Senegalese and Gambian "stone boys" worked together and formed networks. Gratz (2004) observes that friendship is an important social means shaping the social configurations in the mining region. Making friends among miners is an important strategy to reduce uncertainty and create trust. Among the miners, friendship integrate people of different ethnic and social backgrounds. However, partnerships among the "stone boys" were often short-lived due to lack of proper accounting, illiteracy and the different perspectives that partners had on the business. Most business partnerships were based on trust without any written records. There were cases of mismanagement of funds due to different lifestyles among partners. Most partnerships operated at a loss.

The " stone boys" developed their own internal mechanism of conflict resolution and management without the official interference. In 1994, non-Nigerian entrepreneurs formed Gemstone Dealers Association. Its primary aim was to have representation and to avoid confrontation with one another by settling business quarrels peacefully.

In 2000, Mali Youth Association was formed mainly by young gemstone dealers. The aim was to unite Malian youths, support them in developing their business and assist them in case of arrest by the police and immigration officials. Guinean Community Office, Ibadan was set up in 2000. It was established as an umbrella body of all Guinean clans represented in Ibadan. Members of each clan contribute to the development of their community. The Gambian High Commission set up an office in 2006. Migrants were encouraged to register with the federal government under a new name: The Gambian Welfare Association, Ibadan.

Although the "stone boys" preserved their cultural ethos and kinship system, they intermarried with the Yoruba host community and other Nigerians, inaugurating thus another process of integration in West Africa. The Association of Nigerian Women Married to West Africans was formed in 2009.

In some cases, Yoruba families often resisted the marriage of their daughters to foreigners whose cultures are different. There are also apprehensions that children from such marriages could be denied Nigerian citizenship. Most Yoruba women who married "stone boys" have separated due to difficulties of adjustment to a new culture and social life. Many of them had to ensure that the children are brought up as Malians, Guineans, Gambians and Senegalese. There were cases of "stone boys" who married Yoruba girls and took them to their countries or Asia. Malians, Senegalese and Gambians in Ibadan continue to live a communal and traditional life as opposed to the aspirations for modernity among urban Yoruba women.

Migrants were apprehensive of losing everything, especially business opportunities and cultural identity. It has been challenging for them to raise their children as Muslims, French and/or local (Mande) language speakers. Most of their children speak Yoruba and imbibed Yoruba cultural ethos. This was why many "stone boys" enforced that their local dialect should be spoken at home. In 2003, Guinean Muslim Association in Ibadan was formed. Its aim was to ensure that Guineans in Ibadan live as Muslims in a multicultural environment by following *Sunnah* and avoid social behaviour antithetical to Islam. Quranic studies were organised for children in various neighbourhoods occupied by the migrants.

The "stone boys" created leisure spaces, tea/coffee shops and restaurants in the vicinity of gemstones market, Ojoo to reproduce cultural habits of their homelands in the city. The drinking of *ataya*, Chinese tea was prevailent among West African "stone boys" in Ibadan. In these leisure spaces, migrants engaged in new debates on transnational forms of community, home and diaspora dialogue, travels, business opportunities and money.

Being a multi-cultural setting, different actors co-existed in the same space to earn a living. At Old Bank Ojoo, West African gemstones dealers co-existed with Nigerian women traders, food vendors, hair dressers; male artisans, traders, street hawkers and sex workers.

The clustering of traders, dealers, sex workers and artisans produced a new urban ethnicity. Majority of the Yoruba in Ibadan considered West African "stone boys" as Hausa and were treated as such. They were categorised as Hausa due to the religion of Islam and culture. In some cases, they were all regarded as Senegalese. They were hardly identified by their countries of origin, but collectively regarded as Hausa or Senegalese. This identification process was an offshoot of corporate commercial diaspora which disregarded, in some ways, the artificial colonial boundaries in order to maintain traditional socio-economic ties that existed among the various groups for several centuries.

The identification of West Africans as Hausa, in some cases, gave them advantage of being treated as Nigerians. The wider ethnic labels obscured a wide range of cleavages and rivalries that existed in the gemstones business. Identification with the Hausa gave the West African migrants power of legitimacy to engage in their entrepreneurial activities. The ambiguity of identity enabled "stone boys" to negotiate their belonging as citizens of ECOWAS, African brothers and economic migrants. However, most of the West African migrants were considered illegal migrants due to their high population in the city.

Export of Gemstones

Pioneer exporters of gemstones from Nigeria were Guineans, Malians and Senegalese. In the past, Yoruba and Hausa travelled with Malian, Gambian and Guinean passports. This was because during the 1990s under military dictatorships, Nigerian passports were not reckoned with abroad. In recent times, export of gemstones has been dominated by Hausa and Gambian dealers. They bought raw gemstones and exported to international market outlets. Gemstone dealers often had knowledge of the global market shared to them by their networks and kinsmen in Thailand, Dubai and elsewhere. Gemstones export usually passed through Lagos airport *en route* France to Asia. Exporters often paid customs duties on the gemstones at the airport.

Gemstones were sold to companies in Dubai during trade fairs. They also exported gemstones to Hong Kong, Bangkok and the USA. Due to their global mobility, "stone boys" were directly tied to the international economy. A substantial part of gemstones also find their way through overland routes to Niger and Benin Republics. Cotonou and Niamey are routes for the gemstones export to France. Illegal export of gemstones continued to flourish due to lack of enforcement of laws with regards to immigration and customs.

Mining and Rural Economy

Many businesses developed in the rural areas due to mining activities. These included transportation, food distribution, petty trading in provisions, cloth trade, sex work and so on. By this, mining sites became centres of attraction for economic activities (Banchirigah and Fisher; Gavin and Steven; Justice and Gavin, 2011; Banchirigah, 2009). The activities of "stone boys" and artisanal miners boosted petty trading and transportation in the rural areas.

Mining in Oke-Ogun area of Oyo was unchecked and unregulated by government agencies, leaving the area with large scale degradation and deforestation. With virtually no access road to the mines, it has become difficult to monitor the system of mining adopted and environmental impact on the people. Artisanal miners carried out their activities without any recourse to the environmental and social implication of their activities on the host community. Farmers were displaced, following peasant mining and land devastation from the main source of livelihood. Indeed, land previously available for agriculture was taken over by peasant miners and the unplanned mining (Banchirigah, 2009; Banchirigah and Gavin, 2010). The arrival of artisanal miners and gemstones traders led to unplanned expansion of the community in which socio-economic lives were dislocated. Local youths and women abandoned farming for mining activities (Kamlongera and Hilson, 2011; Hilson and Banchirigah, 2009).

Most of the hitherto farming communities were no longer sustainable for agricultural purposes due to deep holes, gullies and mining ponds which exposed land to the risk of erosion. As such, the abundant solid minerals were exploited without consumerate advantage to the rural community (Dondeyne, Ndunguru, Rafael and Bannerman, 2009). The striking economic change was the loss of farmlands and labour to artisanal mining. Komu was described as a community "where the ground has open wounds."[11] According to the traditional ruler, the Oniro of Komu, Oba Johnson Oyebamiji Oyedokun, "These people go about digging holes that they do not bother to fill back. Some of these holes are so big, that it would take a miracle for a person or livestock to survive the fall. And we have hunters going into these areas to hunt at night."[12] Some of the holes are more than 20 ft deep.

Due to federal government control and exclusive rights on solid minerals, states and local governments endowed with such resources do not benefit directly from the miners. It has become an ardous task for state governments to regulate the menace of peasant miners and mining companies who are mainly interested in economic gains. Mining activities were done without precautionary measures on either the safety of the labourers or land reclamation. Moreso, indigenous cultural lifestyle of the mining community was dislocated as miners introduced trans-national practices.

By learning from the Niger Delta uprising against oil companies, the Federal Government of Nigeria requested all mining companies to sign Community Development Agreements in the mining areas. As prescribed in the mining edit, AHMU has built Community Hall at Komu. The company offered scholarships to three indigenes of Komu, provided health care unit, donated 20 computers, classrooms and generating set to Itasa community at Iwere-Ile. Between 2003 and 2004, Guinean gemstone dealers built two Mosques and Community Houses (or and a Community House) at Aget village, Komu, Itesiwaju Local Government, Oyo State. They also established cordial relationship with community leaders and indigenous population.

Role of the Government

Gemstones was classified as "controlled" minerals by the Nigerian government. In actually sense, however, it has remained uncontrolled as manifested by the high rate of artisanal mining and illegal export. Before the oil boom in the 1970s, Nigerian economy was sustained partly by revenue from solid minerals which contributed about 10 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Since the oil boom era, solid minerals sector remained a peasant industry, dormant and unregulated. By 2011, the sector contributes less than one per cent to the GDP. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the sector contributes only 0.36 per cent to the GDP in the second quarter of 2011.

Due to over-dependence on crude oil, as the main source of export earning, there has been an apparent neglect of the solid mineral sector by the government. Attempts being made to regulate the sector and control multitude of miners has been very slow. This led to widespread informal mining activities all over the country. Informal miners and artisans deprived the federal government a veritable source of revenue, estimated to be $20billion per year. The Nigerian Mining Corporation (NMC) was formed in 1972 by the Federal government, and revived in 1990 with the mandate of prospecting for exploiting and trading in all solid minerals other than iron ore and coal. However, NMC remains a weak institution because it does not have the mandate, inclination or capacity to manage environmental and social issues.

Since 1999, a wide range of reforms were introduced to transform the sector in order to generate foreign exchange earnings and boost the economy. Government issued licences to companies owned by Nigerians and foreigners in an attempt to privatise the solid minerals sector. The new Mining Act was passed in 2007 and regulated in 2010, but it has not been fully implemented. It was meant to create an investor-friendly regulatory framework. Most of the West African gemstones dealers are not exploring these new regulatory regimes due to lack of capital and awareness. In 2006, government established Solid Minerals Buying Centres in the six geo-political zones of the country to promote the solid mineral business. The centres were meant to stabilise trade in solid minerals by buying the products from artisan miners and warehousing the minerals. Most of the Buying Centres were abandoned.

The new Act made provisions for ECOWAS citizens "stone boys" to participate in the sector. As a corollary to the above efforts, Oyo state government made attempts to control the operations of artisans and small-scale miners in the state. In 1999, the governor of Oyo state, Lam Adesina santioned small-scale miners and restricted their operations through deployment of police and soldiers (Hilson and Clifford, 2010; Lange, 2011). Some of them were repugnant by continuing with the business. Others went to Bangkok or returned to their home countries. There were those who engaged in petty businesses in Ibadan.

In 2004, the Oyo State government mandated dealers and artisanal miners to register with the Solid Minerals Association and formalise their operations. This was an attempt to monitor the activities of the gemstone dealers and artisans as a group in the state. On their own, stakeholders in the sector formed Grand Patron of Solid Mineral Workers Association, Oyo State. They also formed International Miners Association in Ibadan to prevent Police harrassment. The association was headed by Alhaji Dahiru Liman (Hausa from northern Nigeria) who served as Special Adviser on Mineral Resources to Oyo State government from 1999 to 2009.

In 2010, government planned the establishment of Gemstone Centre in Ibadan and Jos as part of the Gemstone Development Programme. It was meant to provide opportunities for government to collect Royalty at the point of export, create a buying and exporting centre, and a one-stop shop to fast-track government export control.

There were official and popular concerns over losses of foreign exchange earnings as a result of peasant mining and exports of solid minerals resources in Nigeria. But "stone boys" continued their economic roles as dealers, financials and exporters due to their entrepreneurial experience in gemstones business. Most dealers benefited from defects in the laws to export gemstones. Under defective laws, they continued to aid the perpetuation of artisanal mining. There are no laws to checkmate uncontrolled export of gemstones from the country or arrest unregistered gemstone dealers. Some officials were complicit in the unregulated export of gemstones. As a result, the collapse of official regulations led to a general informalisation of mining activities and illegal export.

Conclusion

The paper argued that lack of investment in the non-oil solid mineral sector provided a leeway for artisanal miners and unregulated export of gemstones; and social solidarity and identity empowered West African migrants to dominate the export of gemstones. However, the "stone boys" suffered from the profit maximization of the Nigerian mining companies and financial meltdown in European markets. Nigeria's potential of becoming a major exporter of gemstones to the global market was undermined by its underdevelopment. Government negligence of the mining sector encouraged the operations of artisan miners and unregulated export of the resources by the "stone boys." Government agencies and functionaries expressed concern over illegal mining and export of gemstones from the country, but enforcement of legislations remains ineffective. Due to policy inconsistency and instability, ambitious projects remained on the drawing board without implementation.

West African migrants maintained ties to their home countries and resisted assimilation to Yoruba society. These manifested in their social networks, remittances and diaspora voting. However, commitment to networks among the "stone boys" did not yield substantial capital mobilisation or safeguard entrepreneurs against the vagaries of a competitive sector. The "stone boys" were also affected by the global financial meltdown. Gemstone markets in Europe shrunk due to the ravaging economic crises since 2009. The market remained slow in Asia where demand had thrived. The declining demand for gemstone in Asia affected the business in Nigeria.

Consequently, rather than sending remittances, migrants received money from other diasporas and families, back home. Kinsmen in Europe, the USA or homelands often send money to strenghten their financial base or as transport fare to "evacuate" them home or migrate to other African countries. Rather than becoming strangers or face humiliation at home, "stone boys" prefered to stay in the diaspora until life was better. Others find lucrative opportunities in Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique but left their families behind in Ibadan. In 2007, about 1, 260 Malians formed part of West African migrants who travelled to Mozambique for gemstones trade. Many returned to buy properties in Ibadan. The gemstones market at Ojoo reduced drastically due to the exodus of the dealers. Many of the West African migrants coped with alternative businesses-*Okada* riding, importation of *tokunbo* cars, scrap business and so on. West African migrant women started trading to assist their husbands in household income. The population of Guineans in Nigeria plumetted from 14,000 in 2000 to 9,000 in 2011. In Oyo State, the population of Guineans declined from 3,500 to 800. Guinean clans in Ibadan reduced drastically from 18 in 2000 to 8 in 2011.[13]

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(Endnotes)

1 The term "Stone boys" was popularly used by the Yoruba host community as a commercial identity for the young West African migrants who engaged in the lucrative gemstones business in Ibadan region to represent their livelihood and lifestyle.

2 Oral interview with Ismail Diarra, Malian, 13 May, 2011

3 Oral interview with Janko Ceesay, Gambian, 14 December, 2011.

4 Oral interviews with Fode Mamadikaba, Guinean, 3 December, 2011; Muhammad Jabbi, Guinean, 6 December, 2012 and Oumar Maiga, Senegalese 23 July, 2011

5 Oral interview with Muhammed Dramme, Gambian 19 June, 2011

6 Oral interview with Abdou Dramme, Gambian 17 May, 2011

7 The first University in the Gambia was established in 1999.

8 Oral interviews with Oparemi Lawal Akinlabi, Yoruba, 15 January, 2012 and Fode Mamadikaba, Guinean, 3 December, 2011

9 Oral interview with Fode Mamadikaba, Guinean, 3 December, 2011

10 In February 2012, about 15 Chinese were arrested for illegal mining in Ghana. Illegal mining has destroyed water bodies and farmlands in the country. « 15 Chinese arrested for illegal Mining » in *Daily Graphic*, 7 February, 2012. 11 Dipo Fashina, 'Komu: Where the ground has 'open wounds,' in Nigerian Tribune, 5 November, 2010 12 Dipo Fashina, 'Komu: Where the ground has 'open wounds,' in Nigerian Tribune, 5 November, 2010 13 Oral interview with Baba Sanoh, Guinean 10 December, 2011

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