Communal Governance and Transnationalism: A Case Study of the Nigerien Forex Trading Community in Benin City

Martha Sambe*, Oreva Olakpe** &
Rafeeat Aliyu***

Abstract

Migrant community associations are well-structured and often engage in political transnationalism with their countries of origin. Nigerien migrants in Benin City, Edo State, occupy a dominant position in the unofficial foreign exchange market. Their communal governance structures reveal interesting parallels in the way the migrants govern themselves in relation to their status and the local nationals they work with. The politics within the migrant association suggest that, even in the absence of status, migrants are able to govern and protect their interests while contributing to the societies they find themselves in. This article looks at examples of Nigerien transnationalism in Nigeria at the micro level to reveal a complex network of communal governance. By studying the organisational lives of the Nigerien migrant community, we aim to understand how this group contributes to the maintenance of ties with Niger and enables their integration into their host community.

Keywords: transnationalism, migration, South-South migration, Niger, Nigeria, Benin City, Edo State, home-town associations, migrant niches, communal governance, integration, West Africa

* Independent Researcher. Email: martha.sambe@aun.edu.ng
** Researcher, CERC, Ryerson University. Email: oreva.olakpe@ryerson.ca
*** Independent Researcher, North Carolina University. Email: roaliyu@ncsu.edu

Résumé

Les associations communautaires de migrants sont très bien structurées et s'engagent souvent dans un transnationalisme politique avec leurs pays d'origine. Les migrants nigériens de Benin City, dans l'État d'Edo, occupent une position dominante sur le marché parallèle de change de devises. Leurs structures de gouvernance communautaires révèlent des parallèles intéressants dans la manière dont les migrants s'autogouvernent en fonction de leur statut et des nigérians avec lesquels ils travaillent. La politique au sein de l'association de migrants suggère que, même en l'absence de statut, les migrants sont capables de se gérer et de protéger leurs intérêts tout en apportant leur contribution aux sociétés dans lesquelles ils se trouvent. Cet article examine des exemples de transnationalisme nigérien au Nigeria au niveau micro pour révéler un réseau complexe de gouvernance communautaire. En étudiant la vie organisationnelle de la communauté migrante nigérienne, nous tentons de comprendre comment ce groupe contribue au maintien de liens avec le Niger et réalise son intégration dans sa communauté d'accueil.

Mots-clés : transnationalisme, migration, migration Sud-Sud, Niger, Nigéria, Benin City, État d'Edo, associations d'origine, niches de migrants, gouvernance communautaire, intégration, Afrique de l'Ouest

Introduction

The city of Benin, in Edo State, Nigeria, is a melting pot of diverse peoples and cultures that dates back to the twelfth century, when it served as the capital of Benin Kingdom, one of the most powerful kingdoms in West African history. The city was a major traditional urban centre in pre-colonial West Africa and has since retained its heritage as an economic and political hub in the region. Benin City is also an attractive destination for migrants both from within and outside Nigeria. Apart from the local residents, there are various migrant ethnic groups who now reside in Benin City. Some of these migrants, like the Hausa, have been there for at least a century; others, like the Igbo from South-Eastern Nigeria, also have a presence in the city.

Benin City was historically divided into special functional zones known as *owa*, with different guilds and professions operating in them (Ozo 2009). Sakponba Road, where a burgeoning market thrives to this day, was once the *owa* for blacksmiths and bronze-casters. Today, Sakponba market is the epicentre of the unofficial foreign exchange (forex) trade that operates outside the confines and regulations of the state. Sakponba is also home to Hausa Quarters, so-called because it is largely occupied by Hausa-speaking Nigeriens and Nigerians engaged in currency exchange within the market.

Initially, Nigerien migrants started business there trading jewellery and precious metals. The 1980s saw an increase in migration from Benin City to Europe, which resulted in the growth of the foreign exchange market as returning migrants sought avenues to exchange the foreign currency they had brought back with them. These returning migrants often assumed that the Nigeriens who sold jewellery were also involved in forex. The Nigerien migrants quickly saw this as an opportunity and expanded their businesses to become currency traders in the informal exchange market.

The focal group of our research is these migrants, originally from the Republic of Niger, who have settled in Nigeria. The Nigerien migrants in Benin City have created transnational linkages and governance structures that aid their integration and co-existence with their host community. The need for integration and proper representation of migrants has often led migrants to create informal social networks within their receiving communities. As Bosiakoh's (2012) research on Nigerian migrants in Ghana shows, several networks were useful in helping new migrants adapt to and integrate into their receiving communities. Additionally, the networks were important because they served as channels through which new and old migrants found representation to have their collective interests and needs met (Bosiakoh 2012). We add that these networks are not only social, they are also cultural and political in nature. Our research unpacks the political structures of these networks and how they contribute to the representation and integration of the Nigerien community in Benin City.

This article also studies the systems of communal governance in the Nigerien community, showing the inner workings of governance structures. Communal governance is used to frame our research because it explains how groups (including migrants) organise themselves in order to be empowered and to have influence on the issues that affect them. Transnationalism, too, frames our work because it attempts to explain how and why members of a community maintain strong political and economic ties across borders with their country of origin.

This article seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the systems of communal governance employed by Nigerien migrants in Benin City?
2. How have these systems aided relations between Nigerien migrants and members of the receiving community, as well as their integration into the community?
3. In what ways have these systems of communal governance aided transnationalism between the Nigerien community in Benin City and their home country?

We answer these research questions through the analysis of data gathered through interviews with over forty study participants. Our analysis is also tied to relevant theoretical frameworks on governance and transnationalism, as expounded further in the next section of the article. After explaining the theoretical underpinning of the research, we discuss our research findings on governance structures in the Nigerien community in Benin City. This is integrated with our theoretical frameworks. We then explore the issues of power asymmetries and representation in the structures we observed, which is followed by an examination of the significance and limitations of our research in the fields of transnationalism and communal governance. Finally, our conclusion draws out the most important results of our study.

Theoretical Framework

Relevant Literature

Towards the end of the twentieth century, researchers Jessop (1994, 2000), Rhodes (1994, Pierre (2000) and Stoker (2000) discussed a shift in academic discourse with regards to the concept of 'governing', in which the focus was no longer solely on the *government* but on *governance*. The difference between the two is centred around the role of the state. Whereas the state was the sole sponsor and executor of economic and social programmes within a typical government, the focus on governance indicated an increase in collaboration between the state and non-governmental organisations (Murdoch and Abram 1998). Somerville (2005) claims that the change in focus from government to governance is not a recent phenomenon and that the modern state has always comprised more than institutions of government. Somerville adds that the act of governing itself often includes a wide range of techniques beyond any sovereign authority.

Somerville (2005) refers to the interactions between government and governance as 'metagovernance', defining it as a system that sets the ground rules for governance. All aspects of metagovernance are geared towards a collective citizen empowerment throughout all institutions and levels of society, such that citizens are able to determine and influence the conditions in which they live. According to Somerville, communal (or community) governance is a form of metagovernance because it allows the highest degree of democratisation through public empowerment and by honouring the right of community members to participate in and determine issues that affect them, whether through direct control or through institutions such as neighbourhood forums and community councils.

Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis (2005) define community governance as community-level management and decision-making, which is undertaken by,

with, or on behalf of a community, by a group of community stakeholders. They also emphasise the role of the community, rather than corporations, organisations, local governments or the public sector, as the distinguishing feature of community governance relative to other forms of governance.

Communal governance and the way migrant communities organise and interact with the state has been linked to transnationalism in the social sciences. Transnationalism was first coined to explain the relations between states and groups that existed outside the realm of traditional military encounters (Clavin 2005). Faist (2010) suggests that available literature on transnationalism has tended to take divided positions that either focus on the role of the state or ignore it completely. Itzigsohn (2000) regards organisations that operate in ways that cannot be constrained by 'the territorial and political boundaries of states' to be under the banner of transnationalism. Earlier associated with remittances from migrants, transnationalism has come to be understood as being about people, encompassing their networks and the exchange of ideas (Clavin 2005).

The concept of transnationalism is not new; however, it started gaining novel perspectives from 2003 (Portes 2003). Scholarly interest in transnationalism continues to be renewed with the sustained movements of people across borders and nations. As a theory of interest to many disciplines within the social sciences, transnationalism takes on different meanings depending on the field of interest. Historians of international relations characterise transnationalism in terms of border crossing (Clavin 2005), whereas sociologists and anthropologists regard it as a social formation that spans borders (Vertovec 2009). In migration studies, it has been recognised in how migrants maintain contact with their homeland, for example, through sending remittances. Vertovec (2009) defines transnationalism as the sustained connections and exchanges between non-state actors across national borders. These non-state actors can range from businesses to religious bodies and other non-governmental organisations.

Going further, Vertovec draws attention to the relationships that take place regardless of distances and international borders in a common, virtual space. He identifies typologies of migrant transnationalism, including institutions 'from above' (media and political institutions) or 'from below' (local, grassroots activity), broad and strict, or linear and resource-dependent, to list a few. Vertovec also suggests that transnational theory can be refined through categorising different kinds of transnational migrants – for example, unskilled labour migrants, refugees, highly skilled workers, etc – or looking at degrees of mobility. Our research takes on this challenge by focusing on a community that is largely made up of undocumented forex traders. This is a 'from-below' typology of transnationalism.

Portes (2003) identifies emerging thoughts on the theory of transnationalism, noting that transnationalism has occurred throughout the history of migration. The advent of technological development in transport and communications has led to a rise in transnational exchanges, as migrants can now easily communicate across long distances. Portes also identifies transnationalism as a grassroots phenomenon driven by the desires of everyday people looking to establish ties across borders. In practice, not all immigrants are transnationals, as social and political exchanges are carried out by a minority of the population.

Faist (2000) defines transnationalism as 'the sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across the borders across multiple nation states'. On the other hand, Portes (2001) restricts transnationalism to civil society and their practices that take place outside the control of the state.

In exploring non-state organisations and their leaders, Kassimir (2001) connects transnationalism to communal governance in Africa. Non-state organisations can often act as middlemen that represent their members' interests, forming a united face when interacting with the state and other local institutions. Kassimir points out that, in international spaces, some non-state organisations can exercise governance and other forms of control over members, as in the case of transnational corporations and refugee camps.

The internal politics of organisations that sustain relations across borders are influenced by what happens in the larger community. They are well-run with formal constitutions that establish membership criteria and provide guidelines and codes of conduct to guide leadership roles. These organisations may also control the behaviour of members using internal guidelines. When they are formed along ethnic lines, organisations can act as loci of non-state political authority in African countries, as seen in the case of chiefs and other stakeholders of traditional authority who govern and represent members who share a common ethnic heritage. Our research delves into this aspect with the aim of understanding how internal politics shape the operations of the organisation as well as the relationship between the migrant community and non-members.

Morales and Jorba (2010) in their study of migrants' organisations in Barcelona, Madrid and Murcia, in Spain, note that transnational practices often transcend ethnic lines and are not restricted to a specific ethnic identity, as migrants can rally around religious, regional or professional identities. Ethnic-based organisations play a crucial role in the manifestation of political transnationalism, as organisations formed along ethnic lines

are usually more likely to engage in transnational practices. While defined ethnic identities can promote engagement in transnational activities, ethnicity is not crucial for the establishment of transnational links or even political transnationalism. According to Morales and Jorba, 'associations that define their primary identity along territorial lines and a single country of origin are more likely to maintain transnational activities or links'. The organisations they studied were formal, with members not receiving any payment for membership; they also were majorly run and represented by first- and second-generation migrants. The organisations covered in this article are formed along occupational and nationality lines. Nonetheless, smaller communities formed along ethnic and religious identity exist within the migrant community.

In addition to the literature on transnationalism and communal governance, there is very rich and significant work on home-town associations (HTAs) that deals with the 'voluntary organisations whose members share a common place of origin and generate support to carry out significant projects in migrant and home communities' (Lamba-Nieves 2013). Lamba-Nieves studies how HTAs reconstruct the political and social dynamics of their host communities and home countries. Lamba-Nieves highlights how the politics of HTAs create new outcomes in the two localities, including the formation of new groups that can deepen social hierarchies or create new ones. Our research on Nigerien communal governance takes a similar slant, studying the political and social dynamics of the organisations they participate in and the impact this has within the market.

Orozco and Garcia-Zanello (2009) define HTA as 'an organization formed by migrants living in the same community and sharing a common nationality'. Noting their importance in migrant communities in the United States, they found that African migrants largely tend to be members of HTAs. Through these associations, immigrants seek support and form relationships with local communities. Orozco and Garcia-Zanello found that HTAs often engage in philanthropy and thus play roles in the development of communities in their homelands and host countries. This is echoed in findings by Mazzucato and Kabki (2009) who analysed Ghanaian HTAs in their study connecting HTAs with the successful mobilisation of community development projects. Their research looked at villages and towns in Ghana and their respective HTAs in Netherlands, revealing the effective ways in which HTAs finance and mobilise to aid community development projects back home.

Bosiakoh's study of Ghana also makes a rich contribution to the study on HTAs. Bosiakoh (2012) identifies that HTAs do several things. Because HTAs contribute to migrant integration, sociocultural empowerment, intercommunal conflict resolution and development, HTAs should be studied and understood by policy-makers. Most importantly, Bosiakoh's research on HTAs in Ghana shows that because of sturdy organisational structures, clear-cut leadership roles and tenures, and recognised leaders, HTAs can serve as 'useful platforms for state-migrant engagement'. This is a very important contribution because it highlights the role that HTAs play in engaging migrants with state policies and laws, making them crucial in policy-making processes. Characteristics of HTAs, which Bosiakoh holds can be keyed into migration policy and management, include the influence that HTAs wield on the behaviour of their members, social cohesion and conflict resolution. Our research also contributes to this perspective by studying the organisational structures and leadership roles in our case study and how migrant sociopolitical structures are impacting on social cohesion, conflict resolution and migration law and policy in Benin City.

Research Context

Immigrants have created linkages that are social, political and economic with their countries of origin at an increased pace in modern times. Migrants today are better equipped to form and maintain communication with their countries of origin than those in the past. The impact of transnationalism in migrant communities is not yet fully understood. What exists largely studies specific groups and communities, and looks at the diverse organisations of the chosen ethnic and/or migrant community. Furthermore, studies on the relatedness between transnationalism and migrant associations are lacking (Dahinden 2010), with more attention focused on organisational transnationalism (Portes 2003).

Our research into communal governance among Nigerien migrants in Benin City adds to the study of transnationalism by looking at different organisations within the Nigerien migrant community. Specifically, we studied two key unions: the Haut Conseil des Nigériens de l'Extérieur (HCNE), through which migrants in Nigeria interact with the Nigerien government; and the Wazobia Traders' Union, which brings together traders in the foreign exchange market in Edo State and in which Nigerien migrants occupy key positions. Our research is in line with current research on communal governance and transnationalism as it is qualitative. Keeping in mind, as Clavin (2005) warns, 'transnationalism is in danger of becoming a catch-all concept', our work looks specifically at non-state actors engaged in the foreign exchange (forex) business in Benin City.

Research Findings

In gathering the research presented below, we conducted interviews with people in and around three major markets in Benin City: Sakponba, Ring Road and New Benin. The size of the unofficial foreign exchange market is hard to quantify, due to the informal nature of the market as well as the migration status of most of the Nigerien forex traders. Leaders of the Nigerien community informed us that there were thousands of Nigerien migrants living in Benin City. However, we were unable to confirm the exact number as many are undocumented. Although we could not get exact figures for the amount of money that goes through the market, our interviews reveal that large volumes of cash move through the market weekly—for example, around NGN 500,000 for individual agents. The foreign currencies that are mainly traded are the euro, due to linkages with European-based migrants, and the US dollar, which is the official currency used in the formal foreign exchange market in Nigeria.

Among our interviewees were Nigerien migrants as well as Nigerians who are established traders. Migrants from Niger Republic have dominated the foreign exchange market since the late 1980s when locals started emigrating to Europe. Their presence within the market was of interest to us because we wanted to understand how a migrant group came to dominate this niche. We employed market observations, and one-on-one and group interviews, as part of our methodology. In interviews, we asked about the support network between the community of trading markets and the challenges they faced in their line of work. We spoke to key members of the organisations discussed below, such as the union president, as well as community and ethnic leaders. We utilised informal, unstructured interview styles so that the conversation was driven by the interviewees.

Our research questions took shape during our field study in Benin City as we became familiar with the market dynamics, paying attention to the political and social dynamics of the organisations of which the Nigerien migrant community are part (Lamba-Nieves 2013). Based on our interactions in the markets, we observed that the market had a system of governance that was separate from the system that governed the community of Nigeriens, despite their dominant presence in the market. Without close observation of the political and social dynamics in the market, this dual governance structure is not evident. Thus, we set out to understand the systems of governance in place, the functions they served, and how they helped to maintain the ties between Nigeriens and their communities and government in Niger. Our research revealed an intricate governance

structure that has been in place since the establishment of the forex market in the early 1980s. We found two branches of governance in the migrant community in Benin City:

1. Haut Conseil des Nigériens de l'Extérieur (The National Union of Nigeriens)
2. The Wazobia Forex Traders' Union.

Haut Conseil des Nigériens de l'Extérieur (HCNE)

The Haut Conseil des Nigériens de l'Extérieur (HCNE) was created by the Nigerien government in 1999 to handle the affairs of Nigerien citizens abroad. This union is present in every country to which Nigeriens migrate, including Nigeria. The union has a leadership in Nigeria that is separate from the Embassy of Niger to Nigeria. The interactions between migrants, the HCNE leadership and government back home are an example of metagovernance, according to Somerville (2005); the HCNE enables individuals in the community to participate in and influence the conditions in which they live in the diaspora, as well as the level of engagement they have with their home country.

The HCNE has a Constitution in English and French, which regulates the powers and responsibilities of the elected leaders, guarantees rights and protections and delineates the duties of the members of the union. Within the union, the top leadership positions are the national chairman and national vice chairman. Zonal chairmen, state-level presidents and vice presidents are next in the chain of power, followed by treasurers, secretaries and the members of the union.

The national chairman and vice chairman of the union are elected by vote by all the members of the HCNE in Nigeria. Based in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, they relay issues from each region to the embassy if those issues require high-level intervention. They interface with the zonal chairmen to keep abreast with the affairs of Nigeriens in all six geopolitical regions of Nigeria: North Central, North East, North West, South East, South-South and South West. The union is present in four regions through zonal chairmen who oversee the affairs of Nigeriens in each region. Edo State is under the purview of the zonal chairman of the South-South region.

Zonal chairmen are also elected by vote and report to the national chairman. Tanimu Ibrahim, the current zonal chairman of the South-South region, was elected in 2005 and oversees Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Cross Rivers states. All the union leaders in those states report to him. Additionally, the zonal chairman intervenes when disputes grow beyond the state-level union president, and when third parties seek clarification on

exchange rates for forex and scrap metal, niches in which Nigeriens operate. According to the zonal chairman, every state where the HCNE is present has two delegates of the union. The zonal chairman of the South-South region is also the vice chairman to the overall chairman in Abuja. These chairmen are the minority engaging in transnationalism on behalf of their communities (Portes 2003).

Additionally, each of Nigeria's thirty-six states has a union leader (a president) who may be elected by vote or chosen by Nigeriens in the state. The local authorities and authorities of the country of Niger have no role to play in the election or nomination of the president. In Edo State, the president, vice president, treasurer and secretary of the HCNE have been chosen without election since 2004. Although state-level union presidents have tenures of two years, this is not a hard and fast rule. According to the existing president, a meeting is held every two years when his tenure is expiring to find out if members of the union would prefer to vote in a new leader, and in his case the members chose that he continue in his current capacity. In order to have a right to vote at state level, the union must pay fees to the Nigerien Embassy in Abuja. The headquarters of the HCNE in Edo State is at Sakponba Road, an area which also happens to be the largest forex market in the state and, arguably, the region.

The first leader of the Edo State union was based in Sakponba. According to our interviews, in the 1990s it was a more traditional, unstructured system, with no vice president, secretary, treasurer or advisers. Because of this unstructured system, the leadership of the union was not democratic or symmetric. The second leader changed this system in 2004 and organised governance by creating new leadership positions in order to foster a balance of power in the community. In this new system, all leaders including the president are open to critique and queries if members are dissatisfied with their performance or policies. As a result, the union has internal accountability that checks the behaviour of its leaders.

The Edo State union meets monthly or bi-weekly, and meetings centre on advising Nigeriens on getting or maintaining their documentation in Nigeria. According to the president, Nigeriens are supposed to have an ECOWAS card, which is stamped at the Nigerian border and lasts for a duration of three months. This card can be renewed twice, after which they have to get a residence permit if they wish to continue staying in Nigeria. Nigeriens also have the *carte consulière*, which is issued by the Embassy of Niger, and the union has a membership card for its members in different states. This membership card enables members to access support from the union when they have issues in Nigeria, wherever they are. It is also a way to identify who

belongs to the community and who does not. People who do not have the membership card cannot receive support from the union or participate in the decision-making processes. The card enables members to participate in Nigerien elections, censuses, union elections and events, etc. from Nigeria. This illustrates how the HCNE encourages transnationalism by keeping the members of the community engaged in the politics and affairs of Niger.

The Edo State union president gave an instance of the significance of membership cards. During the 2012 subsidy removal protests in Benin City, Nigeriens were attacked and robbed. Those with membership cards were protected by the union and the issue was escalated to the ambassador in Abuja. This illustrates the importance of belonging to the union as it shields Nigeriens from insecurity or political violence in Nigeria.

In addition to immigration issues, the union resolves issues relating to criminality and disputes in the Nigerien community. Challenges that cannot be dealt with in house are reported to the Nigerian authorities. According to the Edo State president, the HCNE usually works with the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) for ECOWAS cards and residence permits and collaborates with the police when Nigeriens commit crimes in the state. The president held that the collaboration with the NIS and the police made some members of the community unhappy. However, his role as leader of the community meant that he was responsible for keeping members of the community informed about how to remain law-abiding in Edo State.

Here, we see that for communal governance to be efficient in the migrant community, collaboration with the state may be inevitable. What this means is that there is usually some form of interaction or collaboration between the community and the state; it is impossible for migrant communities, including those who are largely undocumented, to operate outside some form of relation to the state. Collaboration with the NIS means that members of the union must have their permits renewed on time, as once they come into Nigeria without documentation it becomes difficult to protect them.

For instance, the Edo State union president stated that when a Nigerien had a problem with a Bini woman in an interpersonal relationship, the union took the woman and the Nigerien person to the state's Assistant Inspector General of Police. The first thing the union was asked to provide was the residence permit of the Nigerien, without which the case would not have been resolved. According to the zonal chairman, when a Nigerien accused of theft of money or property absconds, the union sends someone to Niger to bring back the person, and enforces restitution or hands them over to the police. If the offences are immigration-related, they are handed over to the NIS.

Members of the HCNE are encouraged to participate in the political, economic and social life in Niger. For example, in addition to participating in Nigerien elections, they contribute funds for different initiatives that the union carries out in Niger. All the older members of the union we spoke to send remittances to Niger, keep abreast with the news and developments in the country, visit often, and own properties and pay taxes in Niger, even though they have lived in Benin City for decades. This trend may or may not continue with the younger generation, who may be more integrated in Nigeria than in Niger.

In observing the dynamics within the HCNE, we learned what shapes relations within and outside the community, and how from-below transnationalism is taking place. The written Constitution, as well as unwritten social and cultural codes of conduct, shape the internal politics of the organisation as well as the behaviour of the documented and undocumented members of the HCNE, within the Nigerien community, within the market and in the wider community in Benin City.

Wazobia Forex Traders' Union

Unlike the HCNE discussed above, the Wazobia Forex Traders' Union is an occupational organisation that unites forex traders. The forex market in Sakponba was established in 1982 and the Wazobia union has had only two chairmen since its establishment. Rather than selection by vote, the union designates leadership positions by nomination. Both the first and second union chairmen were not voted into their positions; rather, they were offered the position by forex traders in the market due to the influence they wielded in the business and the market. We believe that election by nomination is the preferred method of selection because Nigeriens constitute a majority in the forex market and election by vote would give Nigeriens an unfair political advantage. The local authorities, the official Nigerien authorities, as well as the HNCE have no role to play in the election or nomination of the leader of the Wazobia union. Within the union, the leadership structure has the chairman at the top, followed by the vice chairman, a treasurer, a secretary and the union members. In this it is similar to the structure and leadership of the HNCE at the state level.

The first chairman of the Wazobia union was a Nigerian from Kebbi State, whereas the current chairman is from Niger and was asked to lead the union in 2008 after being the financial secretary and treasurer. The union is made up of Nigerian and Nigerien forex traders in the market and unites official and unofficial/undocumented forex traders under one umbrella in what appears to be a from-below typology of transnationalism (Vertovec

2009). According to one of our interviewees, 'Oga Fulani', Binis, Hausas, Igbos and Nigeriens have coexisted in the market for a long time under the aegis of the union.

The Wazobia union offers identification cards to its members and is registered under the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission. The union solves disputes between its members, regulates forex traders' behaviour and provides security in the market to its members. The chairman is responsible for solving problems at the market level, but when a problem is too big it is referred to security agencies like the police. Every business in the forex market has a leader who has (or is supposed to have) a Wazobia Forex Traders' Union membership, participates in monthly meetings, and pays dues and security fees. We observed that each business or office we encountered had a cluster of traders; members of the union with official forex licences often 'housed' a number of unofficial or undocumented forex traders as part of their businesses. This gave the unofficial forex traders protection within the market and the union. Wazobia is also present in the thirty-six states of Nigeria but it is unclear if the structure in Edo State is the same as elsewhere.

The main issues that the Wazobia union resolves relate to theft, insecurity, fraud and disputes between forex businesses and individuals, as well as between communities. From our observations and interactions, we learned that there have been numerous cases of fraud; Bini locals who bring large sums of foreign currency to invest have been defrauded by other forex traders who have then fled from the state and, in some cases, travelled to Niger. These cases are often escalated to the chairman or security operatives. The market is highly prone to crime because of the large flow of foreign currency; as a result, security is the highest priority of the union. Each member of the union must pay a security levy each month to ensure the safety of their offices. When levies are unpaid, the union locks up the office of the defaulter until the fees are paid.

The Wazobia union is a crucial part of communal governance in the Nigerien migrant community because the majority of Nigeriens in Benin City are forex traders and therefore members of the union. Because the majority of the members of the union are Nigerien, the union is inevitably an instrument of communal governance, particularly pertaining to the forex market. Having a majority of Nigeriens impacts on the power structure and representation in the union and shapes the experiences and perceptions of non-Nigerien members of the union, as well as how much Nigeriens rely on the union to address communal issues.

Power Asymmetries and Representation Within the Community

Our observations indicated that there are asymmetries of power between the leadership of the HCNE, the Wazobia union, the Hausa community leadership and Edo State locals. The Hausa community in Benin City was founded by Hausas who moved from northern Nigeria, where they are predominantly located, to settle in Benin City. According to Alhaji Badamasi Saleh, the leader of the Hausa community in Edo State, the first Hausa migrants to settle in Benin City worked as butchers, in an area now known as Butcher Street that was allotted to them by Oba Akenzua (who ruled from 1933 to 1978). Alhaji Saleh did not give us a specific date for when the Hausas started to move into Benin City. As a result, we cannot ascertain whether it was early in the reign of Oba Akenzua or more towards the end of his reign.

It is important to note that the Hausa community in Edo State is different from the HCNE. The Hausa community consists of various Northern Nigerian ethnic groups who speak Hausa as a lingua franca. This community has a chairman who is elected to office by the traditional rulers of the represented ethnic groups. The Northern Nigerian ethnic groups represented under the broader Hausa community include: Hausa, Nupe, Kanuri, Fulani and Zabarma. Alhaji Saleh informed us that Northern Nigerians face challenges arising from the difficulty non-Nigeriens and non-Hausa speakers have in telling Nigeriens apart from Northern Nigerians. We found that many Northern Nigerians are often mistaken for Nigeriens and get picked up by local authorities. Their only way of getting out is to prove they are Nigerians by stating precisely where they come from in Nigeria (state, local government, village, etc.). This notwithstanding, Saleh assured us that the community leaders all work together to support each other and the government.

Nevertheless, there has been friction between Nigeriens and Northern Nigerians. After the death of the first HCNE president, it was difficult to find another leader. Within this period, Nigeriens in Edo State faced numerous problems, including harassment and fraud. In addition, the lack of leadership in the community forced members to turn to the police instead of dispute resolution mechanisms within the community, which put members of the community at a disadvantage. At this time, the head of the Hausa community in Edo State was interested in the chairmanship of the Edo State union because of the perceived similarities between the Hausa and the members of the HCNE. However, the members of the community were not in support, which caused some tension between the Nigerien and Hausa communities.

HCNE leaders in Abuja and Lagos had to come to Benin City to ease the friction and explain that the Edo State union was only for Nigeriens in that state. Eventually, they were able to create mutual respect between the Sarkin Hausawa (the leader of the Hausa community) and the new Nigerien union chairman, which has ensured a level of harmony between the two communities since then. The friction between the Hausa community and members of the HCNE shows the issues of representation in Edo State; because Nigeriens are commonly mistaken for Hausa Nigerians, the politics of the two communities may be at odds often. A major challenge of the HCNE leadership is to ensure that the distinctions between the communities are clear, while maintaining cordial relationships with other communities.

Within the forex market, there are also frictions. The HCNE is charged with the wider affairs of Nigeriens in Edo State, and as a result, the zonal chairman and the state-level union president have a greater role to play and more executive powers within the Nigerien community than others. The Wazobia union is meant to focus solely on forex-related affairs in the markets. However, when there is an overlap between the affairs of Nigeriens and issues in the forex market, tensions may arise between the two unions.

For example, the relationship between the HCNE and Wazobia came under strain due to an overlap in the governance of the Nigerien community because the Wazobia chairman was also Nigerien. Our interviews revealed that, in 2016, there was an escalation of the conflict between the two union leaders, and the head of the HCNE in Abuja had to come to Benin to intervene. According to the Edo State HCNE president, he tried to stay out of matters relating to forex specifically because that is the jurisdiction of Wazobia. However, in matters affecting all Nigerien citizens, the responsibility falls on the leader of the HCNE.

Within Wazobia, there were also asymmetries of power between the different members. We noted that the official forex traders were placed higher in the union than unofficial or informal forex traders. The informal forex traders often had to rely on the few official forex traders for protection, access to business support, security, etc. Additionally, our research revealed imbalances between the different groups within the union. For example, even though Bini people bring the capital for the forex business as well as the customers, they were not actively involved in the union. In terms of representation, Nigeriens had an advantage over the locals because they were the largest population in the market. This gave the appearance of skewed power within the union in favour of Nigeriens. Additionally, some participants alleged that the allocation of

ID cards within the union had been politicised, and that some members had ID cards, whereas others did not. As a result, those with ID cards were more likely to participate in and benefit from the union than others, and more Nigerien traders tended to have ID cards than other members of the union.

Furthermore, ethnicity still occupies an important role within the community of Nigerien migrants in Benin City. Although the Nigeriens we spoke to operated under the banner of the HCNE, they also had groups along ethnic lines, whether Zabarma, Hausa or others. Just as there is a Sarkin Hausawa, there is also a Sarkin Zabarmawa, a title given to a man chosen as the leader of people from the Zabarma ethnic group who also engages in the forex business. These subgroups have internal community politics that shape their interactions with the larger community as well. The Zabarma have stronger representation because they are higher in number and dominate the forex market. We were not able to delve deeper into the interethnic politics in the HCNE and this is an area that can be developed in future research.

Both the HCNE and Wazobia union are male-dominated structures and women were underrepresented. For instance, in the multistorey complex that houses several bureaux de change at Sakponba Road there was no woman in the union structure. This meant that within the Nigerien community and in the forex market, women faced high levels of exclusion and the issues that affected them in the market and in the community might not be efficiently addressed. Although we did not find any female member of the HCNE, we did find female forex traders, but they were not active in the Wazobia union. One of the women we interviewed held that there were many women in the Wazobia union but it did not appear that they were greatly represented or active. Our interviewee, a local of Edo State, Ms A, felt that the Wazobia union was more of a Nigerien thing and stated this as the reason for her lack of participation in the organisation.

This means that in both the HCNE and Wazobia, gender exclusion is one of the power asymmetries that impact on communal governance. Also, it shows how identity shapes the politics of the unions: those who are not Nigerien or male are less likely to be active members of the unions. Another female interviewee, Ms B, held that many women struggle with handling the forex business because of the lack of security and of a support system in the union and the market for women. Nevertheless, she believed that as long as there was a cordial or formal relationship with the different groups in the market, she would be able to carry out her business.

The Future of the HCNE and Wazobia

We have discussed the communal governance structures in the HCNE and Wazobia in Sakponba in Benin City, and the asymmetries of power within and between these structures of governance. Based on our observations, we believe that the future of both unions will be shaped by certain factors. Firstly, in Edo State, because of the organised structure under the second president of the HCNE, future leaders will be able to manage the community more easily. Sharing the responsibilities of governing the union between the leadership removes the burden of governance from the president, who in the past had shouldered the responsibilities alone. This means that if the current structure is continued under a new leadership at state and zonal level, the chances of a cohesive community remain high. However, if these painstakingly created structures crumble, Abuja will find it hard to organise the governance of the community in Edo State. We believe this applies to other states as well. Cohesion at national level is highly dependent on how well the zonal and state leadership of the community performs at the grassroots level.

Mutualism and a cordial relationship will have to be maintained between the HCNE, Wazobia and the Hausa communities in order for peaceful coexistence to continue. As discussed above, there is an overlap of roles in the leadership of these different communities, which sometimes leads to tensions. This means that the maintenance of clear communication on the parameters of leadership and diplomacy is crucial for coexistence.

Trust is at the centre of the forex business; the Bini, Esan, Igbo, Hausa, Nigeriens and other traders in the market have to strengthen trust in order to coexist comfortably. As discussed above, the trust between the different people represented in the market has been eroded by fraud, theft and the lack of security, as well as a lack of representation of Edo State locals in Wazobia's political structures and decision-making. Many locals did not feel protected and represented in the union, and believed that Nigeriens enjoyed more rights in the union than others because of perceptions of representation. Exclusion within the union leads to disunity, lack of participation and lack of trust, which may impact the community negatively in the future. Some of our interviewees believed that it would be possible for the state indigenes to become more active in the union in the future but this would depend greatly on how the current leadership managed pluralism in the community. Leadership in the union would have to be opened up to include not only locals but also women.

Gender exclusion is likely to continue in both the HCNE and Wazobia because both structures are male-dominated; the social and cultural practices in both communities are also male-centred. This signifies that, foreseeably, Nigerien women and female forex traders will remain underrepresented and unprotected within both unions in the future. But female leaders are needed within the governance structures of the market in order for women to have a support system and a forum in which their needs and problems can be addressed.

Another factor impacting on the future of communal governance is the involvement of the next generation in the HCNE and other transnational initiatives the union is involved in. We observed and interviewed some of the children of forex traders, who seemed to be better assimilated into Nigerian life than in Niger. The children were born and educated in Edo State, having little to no affiliation to Niger, outside one or two visits. This may shape their connection to Niger and how involved they will be in sending remittances, owning properties in Niger, participating in elections or contributing funds to the Nigerien government through the union. What this means is that communal governance will evolve after the generation who first migrated from Niger are no longer leading the union. This evolution will depend on how well second-generation immigrants are assimilated into the activities of the union and if their connections to Nigerien politics and social and economic life continue. Most of the children we encountered were involved in the forex trade alongside their parents, so while they might be active members of Wazobia, it was not clear if they equally participated in the HCNE and its activities.

Discussion

This study is pivotal in that it assesses the structures and power dynamics of the governance systems that are central to the existence of the Nigerien community in Benin City and, by extension, in Nigeria. Other researchers (Little 1957; Twumasi-Ankrah 1995; Bosiakoh 2012) have studied how migrant communities organise and govern themselves for the purpose of integrating into receiving communities and maintaining ties with their home communities. Our research is enriched by the narratives and lived experiences of the migrant Nigerien community in Benin City and provides a unique perspective in the discourse on a key feature of migrant communities, which has been dubbed the 'forgotten area' of African migration, according to Bosiakoh (2012).

Our research findings from both the HCNE and Wazobia reveal well-structured associations that have developed over time, leading to defined

leadership roles and highly organised groups, recalling the hypothesis of Bosaikoh (2012) about HTAs. Although both the HCNE and the Wazobia Forex Traders' Union did not meet the definition of a home-town association as an organisation formed by migrants living in the same community— the HCNE was created by the Nigerien government while Wazobia is an occupational group—the structures that Bosiakoh noticed in his study of Ghana are very similar to what we found in Benin City. Organisational structures tend to have a leadership that is either elected by vote or nominated. Additionally, both the HCNE and the Wazobia union were involved in a wide range of activities that promoted peaceful coexistence, integration and conflict resolution. It is because of these activities that Bosiakoh states that migrant associations or HTAs achieve development and should be a policy focus.

Specifically, through the HCNE, Nigeriens in Benin City are able to maintain civic engagement in Niger and keep abreast of ongoing developments in the country, as well as in their local communities. This confirms the role of HTAs in guaranteeing social and political cohesion within the migrant community and also in their host country. Through Wazobia, Nigerien migrants are able to achieve security and representation in the unofficial forex market. As a whole, the objectives of both unions helped Nigeriens integrate better in the market and in the city and also maintain links to Niger.

Our findings also highlighted the role of metagovernance in democratisation by giving community members the space to participate in decision-making and accountability processes (Somerville 2005). As our research showed, the HCNE processes had to be democratised by the union president in order to enable members to remove leaders whose performance and policies they were dissatisfied with. The Wazobia union, on the other hand, was not as democratic, even though it also has a well-developed structure. The dominance of the Nigeriens in this union impacted on the representation of its non-Nigerien members. This means that the Wazobia union indirectly and inevitably was Nigerien-focused, like the HCNE. This is the reason there are more visible tensions within that structure than the HCNE. Nationality is the overarching feature of HCNE, which unites the association as a whole. Forex, on the other hand, is not a strong enough factor to unite the different groups within Wazobia.

By focusing on issues of documentation, the HCNE also plays a role in migration law and policy engagement; this, according to Bosiakoh (2012) is what can be leveraged by the state in migration management and migrant-state engagement. The Nigerian government benefits from the

engagement between the members of the community and the NIS through the HCNE. On the other hand, by focusing on security in the forex market and collaborating with the police, the Wazobia union is engaging Nigerien migrants with the security apparatus of the state. This shows that there are different ways migrant associations connect migrants to the state regardless of their migration status because these organisations represent the interests of the migrants and interface with the state and the local community as a bloc.

Our findings have shown the intricate details and power dynamics of the two unions that intersect the forex market and Nigerien community in Benin City. We uncovered the complexities of communal governance within a community where different identities exist and interests vary. Our work has also uncovered conflicts within the unions in the forex market which, if not properly mitigated, might severely threaten the fragile peace not only within the unions but in the greater community in Benin City. As has been discussed, differences within the occupational union, Wazobia, have left several members (coincidentally also members of the same ethnic group) feeling left out and disenfranchised from the activities of the union that was created to serve the interests of all forex traders in the market. Likewise, in the union for Nigerien migrants, we saw differences that have arisen along ethnic lines, which could potentially escalate and lead to division if not properly managed.

Another important implication of this study is the gender perspective. Even though women are responsible for a greater portion of the remittances coming into the forex market in Benin City, our research showed that women are underrepresented, generally in the forex market, and especially in the unions discussed in this article. This presents an opportunity for the HCNE to involve female Nigerien migrants living in the city who have been excluded from the association. HCNE is a very well-defined structure and it begs the question why Nigerien women are not part of the union or hold any leadership positions in it. Concerning Wazobia, there are women who work as forex traders in the unofficial forex trade, but they are missing from the governance structure. The Nigerian traders of Benin City are also largely excluded from the Wazobia union, as discussed in our research findings. These are things both unions will have to come to terms with if they want to maintain co-existence and integration with the host community.

While we have extensively studied the dynamics of the unions in Benin City, there are limitations to our research which present an opportunity for further research in this field. For instance, we focused on the Nigerien community in Benin City and thus studied the HCNE within that location only, even though we were told that Benin City has the fourth-largest

concentration of Nigerien migrants in Nigeria. The conclusions drawn herein are thus relevant only to the community of Nigeriens in Benin City and do not reflect the dynamics of other HCNE chapters across Nigeria. Thus, an area of further study might be to conduct a comparative analysis of the unions across states and regions in Nigeria.

Our research was also limited by the fact that we focused on Nigeriens living in Nigeria and did not have a chance to interview their community members, relatives and state officials based in the Republic of Niger. Consequently, we cannot speak about the strength of the ties that our interviewees claimed to have with their local communities back in Niger, neither can we confirm the level extent of their participation in local politics in Niger. This also presents an avenue for further studies, perhaps to measure the impact that Nigerian-based Nigeriens have on their communities back home.

Conclusion

Our case study shows how Nigerien migrants in Benin City navigate daily life using community governance to carry out their civic duties both within the receiving community, and their country of origin. Our research is relevant in that it shows how community governance has aided the settlement and integration of Nigerien migrants in Benin City. Our article shows that community governance is a useful tool for transnationalism because it creates the systems that sustain transnational relationships and allows them to govern themselves to achieve the purpose for which they were created. Using transnationalism as our grounding theory, our research shows how the community of Nigerien migrants actively maintains transnational linkages and exchanges with political institutions. The Nigeriens of Benin City have organised themselves in two primary ways: firstly, along the lines of their nationality, then also along the lines of their business interests. We have shown how this community, through the HCNE, relates formally with the government of their home country in a sociopolitical transnationalism. Through the HCNE, this migrant community is able to maintain strong political ties with Niger from within Nigeria, voting in elections for example.

Our research shows that communal governance in migrant communities particularly is intertwined with transnationalism. In our case study, without the structures of the HCNE, it would be difficult for the Nigerien government to keep Nigeriens in Nigeria engaged in the politics and economics of Niger at the grassroots level. Through these structures all members of the community, including the undocumented, can remain linked to their country of origin, in addition to accessing dispute resolution, security and other protections.

As a result, this article contributes to available research on transnationalism and migrant associations. Our use of interviews and case studies also makes a methodological contribution; West African transnationalism and communal governance is an area with a diversity of knowledge due to freedom of movement and ease of settlement. There are numerous communities with structures of transnationalism and communal governance that need to be unpacked for a clearer understanding of the contributions and engagement of migrants with their countries of origin and destination.

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