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African migrants in Japan: Social capital and economic integration

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Abstract

This study examines the strategies that African migrants in Japan adopt to build networks and utilize the social capital derived from the networks to achieve socio-economic integration and mobility in Japanese society. It is based on a field study conducted within the Tokyo metropolitan area in 2012. The study shows that in spite of racial prejudice, the African migrants in Japan build and draw heavily on bridging and linking social networks to promote economic integration. They develop these cross-cultural networks and capital through intermarriage with Japanese women, friendship and business ties with African Americans, Japanese youth and Japan's business community. For some migrants, their high educational background facilitated their economic integration in Japanese society.

Keywords

African migrants in Japan, social capital, economic integration

Introduction

Faced with demographic challenge and labor shortage resulting from low birth rates and aging, Japan embarked on massive reforms of its immigration law in the late 1980s to admit overseas migrant workers (Yamanaka, 1993). The reform paved the way for the sudden influx of migrants, particularly from South America and neighboring Asian countries (Higuchi

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and Tanno, 2003; Nagayoshi, 2011; Sato, 2004). Other than the increase in absolute numbers, the national and ethnic origins of migrants have also become diverse. While North and South Korean nationals constituted 87.7 percent of the foreign population in Japan in 1964; by 2002, their share had diminished to 33.8 percent (Kojima, 2006; Sato, 2004), and as of 2013, their share had further gone down to 21 percent due to increased immigration from China (31 percent), the Philippines (10 percent), Brazil (9 percent), Peru (2 percent) and several other countries as a result of the immigration reforms (Higuchi and Tanno, 2003; Nagayoshi, 2011; Statistical Research and Training Institute, 2015).

Among the newcomers were also a small but visible group of sub-Saharan African[1] migrants who started to establish a presence in the Japanese peninsula during the early 1980s, long before the immigration reforms were introduced (Kawada, 2007; Schans, 2012). The pioneer settlers in Japan were made up of educated elite, comprising students undertaking postgraduate studies on Japanese government scholarship, members of the diplomatic corps and a few bureaucrats working in international organizations. From the mid-1980s, the African community started to expand and it became more vibrant and visible with the arrival of African migrants coming from neighboring Asian countries. This group initially comprised unauthorized Ghanaian migrants (Schans, 2012), whose main objective was to seek greener pastures in Japan. They entered Japan as tourists and managed to survive as unauthorized settlers during the initial stages (Kojima, 2006; Richard, 2011; Schans, 2012). Today, there are approximately 12,000 African nationals in Japan. The majority is made up of male migrants from West Africa, particularly Ghana and Nigeria, as well as from Southern African and Central countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Cameroon. They are concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka (Statistical Research and Training Institute, 2015; Richard, 2011; Schans, 2012).

However, as varied groups of immigrants began to settle in Japan, questions started to be raised about the degree of participation that they would be allowed in the socio-economic and political life of a country known for its insular mindset (Burgess, 2007; Chapple, 2009; Nagayoshi, 2011; Yamanaka, 1993). Studies that focused on migrants' labor market participation singled out the numerous obstacles migrants faced to access regular[2] employment status, which is the preserve of Japanese male employees. Findings suggested that most employers (particularly in the manufacturing industry) were reluctant to hire migrant workers of different physiological and racial traits. For example, some authors noticed that Brazilian migrants of Japanese descent (*Nikkeijin*) had greater chances of being accepted and hired than migrants who had the least blood ties to Japan (Higuchi and Tanno, 2003; Tsuda and Cornelius, 2002). In addition to ethnic origin, migrants' social networks and connections were seen to play a more important role than education and experience in finding a job in Japan (Higuchi and Tanno, 2003; Takenoshita, 2006).

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[1] The term 'sub-Saharan African' refers to Africans who live south of the Sahara. It is often used to distinguish black Africans from other racial groups in Africa (north Africans in particular). In this article, the term refers to Ghanaians, Nigerians and other black Africans living in Japan.

These issues then raise a lot of concern regarding the situation of sub-Saharan African migrants who constitute an ethnically and racially distinct group in Japan. Given their distinct racial traits, what level of economic integration do they attain? What strategies do they adopt to achieve economic integration? What type of social networks do they depend on to leverage their economic incorporation and social position?

Existing literature has shown that due to racial profiling, the settlement of black people in Japan has been anything but smooth (Cornyetz, 1994; Russell, 1991; Schans, 2012; Yamashita, 1996). This has been attributed to the image that Japanese people have of Africa and of black people. In 1986 Japan's former prime minister Yasuhiro Nakasone claimed that black people, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans should be blamed for declining intelligence level in the USA (Hughes, 2003; Russell, 1991). An ethnographic work by Yamashita (1996) showing the difficulty for black people in gaining acceptance in Japan during the 1970s and 1980s brings this argument into perspective. In one case, which happened in the 1970s, she (Yamashita, 1996: 735) wrote:

> During the fourth year of the exchange program, one black student, a female, came in a group of 20 students. The program office had no problem finding homestay families for all the students except for the lone black student. The exchange program coordinators tried very hard to find a family that would accept her into its home, but they were unable to find one. They

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[2] Regular workers constitute the core employees of Japanese companies and are hired under unlimited term contracts to perform the normal functions of a firm. Usually male, they work in larger firms enjoying long-term employment and are covered, along with their family, by corporate welfare arrangement. Moreover, they enjoy high salaries and have mobility channels. Non-regular employees, however, are hired under various forms of short- or long-term contracts to fill 'the temporary needs for labor and skills' of firms (Imai, 2011: 27–28). This has traditionally been the reserve of Japanese women, retired persons and youth, and, more recently, migrants. Workers in this category lack job security, some corporate welfare protection, mobility channels and earn lesser income (Imai, 2011).

> ended up pairing her off with a blue-eyed, blond-haired girl to persuade a family to accept her in a kind of package deal.

In the second case, which took place in the summer of 1993, Yamashita (1996) wrote that another black American who had come to Japan on a university exchange program was facing several social and health problems due to lack of acceptance. First, he could not find accommodation as he was being turned away by landlords and real estate agents, apparently because of his skin color. Second, he reported that he felt watched whenever he entered the supermarket, and had been stopped before by the police to search for stolen items. Third, people around him and those he met expected him to be a performer and not a scholar. In 1984, Kyei Amoabeng from Ghana, then a postgraduate student, complained in *The Japan Times* about what he saw to be a conscious attempt to mock, belittle, and humiliate the African continent and its people in Japanese television.[3] Recent literature also indicates that racial prejudice persists in Japan against Africans and other non-white migrants (Kudo, 2014; Richard, 2011).

But why do Japanese see black people in this way, given the historically low contact between these two groups? According to Russell (1991), this behavior should be attributed to Japan's uncritical adoption of Western racial conventions to mediate its own position. As a result, it has ranked the African continent and its people at the nadir of civilization, and has propagated these perceptions over the course of centuries through literary works, popular culture, commerce, and education.

In spite of racial prejudice, the post-World War II presence of black people in Japan also saw these attitudes change or shift over time. This was particularly so towards the end of the 1980s when the fad for hip hop culture and the desire for African American boyfriends among Japanese women started to develop in big cities (Cornyetz, 1994).[4] African migrants who started to settle in Japan around that period capitalized on the new situation to construct various ties with young Japanese to secure the right to live in that country. They befriended and later married young Japanese women and started hip hop shops, night clubs and restaurants targeting Japanese youth (Kojima, 2006; Schans, 2012).

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[3] Amoabeng's article was in reaction to the abuse of Kenyan herdsmen invited to Japanese TV shows in that year. The article also revealed the degree of frustration he faced in his daily life in Japan (Amoabeng, 1984).

[4] This behavior was the theme of the prize-winning novels by Amy Yamada during the 1980s and 1990s in which she narrated sexual affairs between Japanese women and their black American boyfriends. The novels include: Bedtime Eyes (1985), Jesse's Spine (1986), Soul Music Lovers Only (1987) and Trash (1991). These popular novels may have contributed to fanning the romantic interest of young Japanese women for black boyfriends.

In this article, I attempt to reconstruct how African migrants developed and used different forms of social networks and capital for economic integration and mobility. My argument is that, due to Japan's strong insular culture and the degree of rejection migrants faced during the initial stages of settlement, they achieved economic integration not by building a separate and detached community, but by establishing networks across group boundaries, particularly with the host society members.

Social capital and migrants' integration

Social capital is the advantage a person or group accrues in society by virtue of acquaintances and membership to social groups and networks. Scholarly works by Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993) are credited for the conceptual development of this theory (Portes, 1998; Woolcock, 2002). However, its origins can be traced to classical sociological theories developed during the 19th and 20th centuries by Durkheim, Simmel, Marx and Engels, and Weber to explain social groups, norms, and behavior (Portes, 1998; Portes and Sensenbrener, 1993; Woolcock, 2002).

Depending on the extension and function of the network, social capital can be bonding, bridging, or linking. When the level of relation is between people of similar demographic characteristics (e.g., family members, co-ethnics, or co-nationals), it is bonding; when it connects people of varied demographic and socio-economic backgrounds, it is bridging; and when the network connects people to individuals in position of power and to powerful institutions, it is linking (Woolcock, 2002).

In migration scholarship, it is argued that migrants not only depend on social capital to migrate but also to integrate[5] in the host society (Massey, 1986, 1990a; Massey and España, 1987). However, there are varied positions regarding which type of social capital migrants depend on to improve their socio-economic position in the host society, and whether the use of one form or the other of social capital fortifies existing stratification systems.

Proponents of the segmented assimilation theory[6] hold that migrants under high risk of exclusion depend on 'moral and material resources' provided by their ethnic community and its members to improve their lot. For them, *bonding* (ethnic) social capital is an indispensable ingredient for migrants to create an *enclave economy*, the main pathway to achieve socio-economic mobility and equality (Portes and Jensen, 1989; Portes and Zhou, 1993, 1996). This position, however, contrasts with the classical assimilation theory according to which migrants achieve integration by developing progressive personal and institutional ties with host society members and institutions to the extent of becoming part of them, particularly in the socio-cultural domain (Gordon, 1964; Park and Burgess, 1921; Shibutani and Kwan, 1965).

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[5] Underlying this article is the 'complex and multi-faceted notion of integration,' which indicates the different grades of incorporation and participation of migrants in the socio-economic, cultural and political life of the host society.

[6] According to this theory, migrants achieve different levels of integration in the host society along race and class-conditioned lines.

But critics of the segmented assimilation theory hold that migrants do not integrate as a detached community but as assimilated members of the larger community in the long run (Alba and Nee, 1997). They argue that enclave economies perforate the mainstream economy, and, apart from business owners, most migrants improve their socio-economic position by entering the mainstream economy (Sanders and Nee, 1987, 1996). Studies that focus on residential segregation also indicate that migrants achieve social mobility by moving away from poor ethnic neighborhoods to localities and suburbs occupied by the dominant group (Massey, 1990b).

In Japan, some studies have indicated that African migrants rely on co-ethnic community networks to start their businesses (Kawada, 2007). But others have rather seen a disintegrated community fractured along ethnic boundaries, even among Africans of the same nationality (Richard, 2011). Others have emphasized the importance of intermarriage between African men and Japanese women as leverage for the migrants to achieve socio-economic integration (Schans, 2012). However, these studies are limited in scope due to their reliance on an extremely small sample size. They also fail to establish the manner in which the migrants utilize bonding, bridging and linking networks and capital differently for their economic integration, and the level of integration that the use of one type of capital or the other leads to.

Formation of the African diaspora in Japan

According to the Ministry of Justice (2011), there were approximately 12,000 African migrants in Japan from over 50 countries as of 2011.[7] They are of myriad ethnic, cultural, and religious background. However, the majority is from the Anglophone sub-Saharan countries, with more than 40 percent coming from Nigeria (2,730) and Ghana (1,891) alone. South Africa (553), Kenya (542) and Uganda (523) are the other Anglophone countries with significant representation. Migrants from Cameroon (365), Senegal (348) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (298) constitute the major representation of those from Francophone sub-Saharan African countries. The only non-sub-Saharan country with a significant number of migrants in Japan is Egypt (1,382). In total, sub-Saharan Africans represent over 82 percent (9,863 persons) and males are around 80 percent overall. The migrants are concentrated in the metropolitan areas, including Tokyo (58 percent), Osaka (10 percent) and Nagoya (8 percent).

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[7] Figures for 2013 are the latest data available on foreign nationals in Japan. However, since 2012, the counting is based on a different legal regime and this has seen a drop in the African population from 11,972 in 2011 to 10,879 in 2012 and 11,545 in 2013 (Statistical Research and Training Institute, 2015). Therefore, for the sake of convenience, we have decided to keep the figures up to 2011, which were based on the Alien Registration Law.

Regarding their residence status, over 30 percent have permanent residency, 11 percent have family-related residency, while a further 17 percent hold spouse of Japanese residency. Only 8 percent are temporary residents. Of the two major groups, 70 percent of Nigerians and 67 percent of Ghanaians have permanent, family, and spouse of Japanese citizen residency.

The Ghanaian community is believed to have developed first in Japan, but was later outnumbered by the Nigerian community after the mid-1990s.[8] A lot of the Ghanaians who first settled in Japan as unauthorized migrants had fled from Nigeria where several Ghanaian professionals and volumes of school leavers had migrated during the 1970s to find jobs. In 1983, the Nigerian government passed an Alien Order to deport the over two million West African nationals in the country, comprising mainly Ghanaian nationals (Gravil, 1985). However, those who did not want to return to Ghana moved towards North Africa, particularly to Egypt, Libya and Morocco. From there, the majority moved to Europe, while a few entered Middle Eastern countries and headed toward Southeast Asia, notably Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore or to China, and then moved on to Japan or South Korea. They adopted a step-migration strategy, moving in small groups, reconnecting with other groups, seeking information and assistance from colleagues and Ghanaian embassies, while at the same time offering assistance to those stranded en route. In order to finance their onward journey, most of them spent several years working in Libya, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The majority were young men in their early twenties.[9]

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[8] In 1990, there was a total of 2,140 Africans (including north Africans) in Japan. Ghanaians constituted the largest majority with 598 persons, followed by Egyptians (368) and Nigerians (193). However, by 1995, the Nigerian population had topped the table with 1,252 nationals, relegating Ghana to second place with 1,171 nationals and Egypt to third place with 636 persons (Statistical Research and Training Institute, 2015).

[9] This information is based on accounts by the migrants during the interview sessions.

Through a process of chain migration, the settlers provided information and sponsored the subsequent immigration of family members and friends to Japan. Additionally, Japan's participation and hosting of key international sporting events, particularly, the 1993 FIFA Under-17 World Cup won by Nigeria and with Ghana as runner up, and the 2002 FIFA World Cup co-hosted with South Korea, gave additional opportunity for migrants from Ghana and, more particularly from Nigeria, to enter and settle in Japan. After the mid-1990s, the Nigerian population grew at a faster rate than that of the Ghanaians to become the largest migrant community in Japan.

Furthermore, Japan's immigration reforms and programs to attract skilled migrants and international students also scaled up the inflow of African migrants, particularly from southern and eastern Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) and from Ghana and Nigeria as well. Graduates and professionals from Francophone African countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon, benefited from this policy to migrate to Japan. They came principally for postgraduate studies and stayed on after graduating. Additionally, though Japan is not a key international player in accepting refugees, few African migrants from war-torn East and West African countries have successfully applied and obtained asylum status in Japan since the 1990s (Schans, 2012).

Methodology

Primary data were obtained through a survey conducted face to face with 116 African migrants in and around the Tokyo metropolitan area between June and September 2012. The main criterion was all first-generation Africans who have lived in Japan for over three months. We used a snowball sampling technique. Due to the fact that the migrants are scattered over a wide geographical area, those captured in our sample were met in African business hubs, religious service places, gatherings, African bars, restaurants and clubs, and on the streets. The interview gathered personal information and explored vital issues regarding the migrants' experiences in Japan, employment activity, and social relations. Additionally, for each respondent who was married or had a partner at the time of the survey, ample information was gathered about the partner. Of the 116 respondents, 100 were married or had partners. The survey gathered information from the 100 spouses or partners, of whom 66 are Japanese. However, for this article, only the data from the 116 main respondents are discussed. The profile of respondents is illustrated in Table 1.

To complement the survey, I used various ethnographic techniques to collect additional data. This involved 20 in-depth interviews targeting

Table 1. Profile of respondents.

Variable	Number	%	Variable	Number	%
Sex			Spouse's/partner's country of birth		
Male	106	91.0	Japan	66	66.0
Female	10	9.0	Ghana	17	17.0
Total	116	100.0	Nigeria	11	11.0
Country of birth			Other	6	6.0
Ghana	51	44.0	Total	100	100.0
Nigeria	49	42.2	Household composition		
Other	16	13.8	Wife/Wife and children	73	62.9
Age			Other family member	5	4.3
21 to 30 years	25	21.6	Friend from home country	11	9.5
31 to 40 years	40	34.5	Alone	23	19.2
41 to 50 years	34	29.3	Other	4	3.4
51+ years	17	14.6	Employment		
Years in Japan			Yes	108	93.1
0 to 9 years	52	44.8	No	8	6.9
10 to 19 yrs	34	29.3	Annual income (in yen or JPY)		
20+ yrs	30	25.9	Less than 2 million	16	15.2
Education			2 to 4 million	70	66.7
Elementary	28	24.1	5 to 9 million	14	13.3
Secondary	26	22.4	10+ million	5	4.8
Post-secondary	14	12.1	Total	105	100.0
University	48	41.4			
Marital status					
Married/with partner	100	86.2			
Single/Divorced	16	13.8			

association and church leaders, the earliest settlers, business owners, and embassy staff from Ghana and Nigeria. I also engaged in participant observation in the migrants' group activities including religious services, parties, funeral celebrations and other forms of festivities during the summer in and around Tokyo. In addition, I spent long hours in African business hubs, restaurants, clubs and public gathering places. Home visits also played a central role in my research. I stayed two weeks in the house of one of my research participants. This enabled me to have first-hand knowledge about the migrants' living conditions and settings. Secondary data were also drawn from official sources, literature reviews, migrant newsletters, brochures and documents obtained from embassies, group leaders, and business centers, and through Internet search.

Migrants' profile and economic integration

The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the 116 migrants surveyed depict a group that is permanently established with a mixed composition of people with very high and very low educational levels. Out of the total surveyed, of which 44 percent are from Ghana, 42 percent from Nigeria, and 13 percent from other sub-Saharan African states, around 41 percent have university education, 34 percent have secondary and post-secondary education, whereas 24 percent have only elementary education as shown in Table 1. About 64 percent are between 31 and 50 years old and 86 percent are married or have partners. Most of the migrants are long-term settlers. About 26 percent have lived in Japan for 20 years and over; 29 percent, 10–19 years; and 45 percent, less than ten years. Most of the migrants surveyed are males (90 percent),[10] and have jobs (93 percent).

The positions that African migrants occupy in Japan's occupational scale vary as shown in Table 2. This is, perhaps, due to the migrants' different educational qualifications, motives for admission, immigration statuses, and the different manner in which each person has utilized opportunity structures.

Around 17 percent of those who had jobs occupy managerial and professional positions in Japanese companies and in public and private educational institutions. This group is made up of the educated elite, the majority of whom came to Japan initially for studies. Their migration and integration pathway is different from those who came initially as tourists. After their education, some of them (5 percent) found jobs in Japanese companies as IT specialists, systems engineers, programmers and the like, and a few have risen to the managerial level (3 percent). Others were employed in public and private universities as professors,

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[10] Females comprise 10 percent of the sample, whereas they account for 20 percent of the total African population in Japan. This discrepancy indicates a sampling bias. This was largely because most females contacted did not want to participate in the survey, which could be attributed to their undocumented immigration status. In spite of assurances about confidentiality, many declined to participate in the survey.

Table 2. Occupations of African migrants in Japan.

Occupation	Number	%
Managers	3	2.8
Professionals	16	14.8
University staff	4	3.7
English teachers/translators	7	6.5
Specialists	5	4.6
Production/laborers	25	23.1
Manufacturing	11	10.2
Construction	2	1.9
Food processing/production	8	7.4
Other	4	3.7
Service	64	59.2
Sales	17	15.7
Hospitality	24	22.2
Transport	3	2.8
Export/import	13	12.0
Clerical/office	5	4.6
Other	2	1.9
Total	108	100.0

Note: Seven of the 116 respondents were unemployed at the time of the survey and were thus excluded from this table.

lecturers and researchers (4 percent). Those who did not find any such prestigious positions became English language instructors in elementary and high schools, or found related jobs such as translators (6 percent). Those who engaged in English-teaching activities include migrants who came as tourists with a university or professional education.

Around 23 percent of the migrants, mostly those who came as tourists, have secured blue collar jobs in Japanese companies, particularly in the production sector: 10 percent are in manufacturing; 7 percent, food processing; and 2 percent, construction. Some 60 percent are in the African migrant economy as self-employed or as employees (60 percent). The migrant economy is mainly specialized in the service sector: hospitality (bars, restaurants, and night clubs), trade (clothing and food stores), transportation (export, import), fashion, and clerical or administrative services.

Although the migrants are spread over different classes of occupations, only a small percentage have 'regular' employment status (including those working in both Japanese and migrant economies).

Table 3. Change of employment status by type of work contract.

	First employment		Current employment	
Status of employment	Number	%	Number	%
Regular employee	23	19.8	32	27.6
Non-regular employee	76	65.5	45	38.8
Self-employed	16	13.8	31	26.7
Unemployed	1	0.9	8	6.9
Total	116	100.0	116	100.0

As Table 3 shows, the rate of occupational mobility (in terms of employment status) is low for those who move from non-regular to regular employment status. However, self-employment rates also increase over time. As shown in Table 3, 65.5 percent of those surveyed obtained their first job as non-regular employees, 19.8 percent as regular employees and close to 14 percent as self-employed; but at the time of the survey, 38.8 percent still had non-regular employment status, whereas the percentage of those in regular and self-employment conditions had increased to 27.6 percent and 26.7 percent, respectively.

The slow mobility rate from ‘non-regular’ to ‘regular’ employment status could be the reason behind the high self-employment rates among the migrants. However, the fact that some migrants are able to start their own business enterprises suggests that there is mobility leeway for those trapped in non-regular employment. In subsequent sections, I will explain how the migrants profit from various forms of social networks and capital to achieve their socio-economic positions in Japan.

Use of networks and social capital for economic integration

Bonding

African migrants in Japan depend on intimate relationships including family, friendship and ethnic ties during the process of migration and settlement. A Nigerian who arrived in Japan in 2002 said:

> I had the contact of a friend who was a businessman in Japan. I did not know him personally, though. Somebody gave me his contact. When I got here I called him, and he sent somebody to pick me from the airport. I stayed in his home until I got a job.

Moreover, within the black African community, the sense of a common racial identity and African ancestry serves not only as a strong bonding factor among the members irrespective of their diverse ethnic, cultural, national, and language backgrounds, but also as a cohesive force reuniting them with the African American community that had already established itself in Japan. As a result, all black people in Japan see themselves as one people and seek mutual help from one another (Schans, 2012).

In addition, the African migrants started several hometown, ethnic, and national associations as well as religious groups (particularly Ghanaian/Nigerian Pentecostal churches) from the early 1980s. A founding member of the Ghanaian Migrants Association, which is the first African association to be established in Japan around 1989, said that at the time the association was established, membership was not limited to Ghanaians but was open to all Africans. The Nigerians also started their own community in 1998, but before then, there were several other ethnic associations, such as the Igbo Union. According to Kawada (2007), it is through such institutional structures that the African migrants were able to develop mutual relationship and support systems in order to establish a business niche in Japan.

However, in spite of the opportunities that the migrants accrue from bonding social capital, those who depend entirely on such capital experience very low social mobility. Though the African entrepreneurs have easy access to cheap labor from the African community, migrants who are employed within the African businesses sometimes work under inhumane conditions, have no social security protection, and receive low pay. Moreover, most migrants in an irregular situation are unable to establish networks outside the ethnic community. A case in point is a 62-year-old Ghanaian who has lived in Japan for 23 years without a residence permit. He is an 'elder' in one of the Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in which the majority of the church members are Ghanaians. The pastor is himself a Ghanaian, and *Akan* is the main language used during worship. The 'elder' and other church members in similar legal situation receive a lot of support from other church members. The apartment he shares with his wife was rented in the name of one of his church members. Neither he nor his wife spoke Japanese. They are not covered by the national health insurance and have to visit private health facilities when they need health care. The man is employed in a coal factory where he has worked ever since he came to Japan. It was one of his church members who introduced him to that job. He said since he started work in that company, his initial hourly wage of JPY800 has never gone up. His wife also worked there for about four years when she arrived in Japan, but at the time of the interview, she was unemployed. During Sundays, she sells

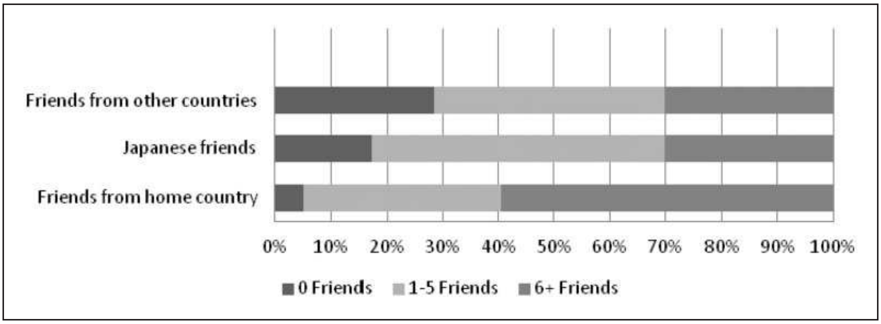

Figure 1. Friendship networks of African migrants in Japan.

Ghanaian ethnic foods at the premises of the church. The man is an accountant by profession, and before traveling to Japan, he had worked for several years as an accountant in a government institution in Ghana. Due to his undocumented immigration status and his sole reliance on bonding social capital, he has been unable to benefit from his rich human capital in Japan. Therefore, irrespective of migrants' level of education, the level of success in Japan depended on how much they were able to expand their network beyond the in-group ties in addition to attaining a legal immigration status.

Bridging

Some of the African migrants also build and rely upon a wide range of networks with the Japanese people, fellow Africans from different countries, African Americans, and people from the English-speaking world. They build these ties through intermarriage with Japanese women, friendship ties with Japanese youth, and business ties with Japanese entrepreneurs.

The extent and degree of the migrants' friendship networks is shown in Figure 1.

The intermarriage rate between African men and Japanese women is indeed very high. Out of the total of 100 participants who were married or had a partner at the time of the survey, 66 percent had Japanese spouses or partners. The migrants' ability to learn Japanese has facilitated their relations with the host society members. Asked to rate their facility with Japanese language, approximately 60 percent and 20 percent rated themselves as good and average, respectively, in terms of speaking Japanese. Only 12 percent reported they had little or no Japanese language ability whereas the remaining 8 percent said they spoke a little Japanese.

Most African entrepreneurs depended on these relations to start their own business enterprise. A case in point is a Ghanaian entrepreneur who used to own several hip hop shops and is now a dealer in the used car trade. He was born in a poor Muslim neighborhood called Nima in Accra. He left school at fifth grade. During the late 1970s, when many Ghanaians were trooping to Nigeria, he joined them and, through the process of step migration, ended up in Japan in 1988. He said he did several menial jobs during his early days in Japan, and started his hip hop clothing business initially as a street vendor. He got his wares from African wholesale dealers and from friends in the United States and sold them on the streets of Tokyo. He was able to improve his business after he got married to a Japanese woman with whom he now has three daughters. He said:

> In those days, you did not need any certificate or license to open a shop. However, you needed a guarantee in order to rent the storeroom. The Japanese people did not trust us, the foreigners. Your wife's family had to do it for you. In most cases, you opened the shop in the name of your wife as owner and her father will guarantee. That is what I did after I married in 1994.

Furthermore, most migrants who entered Japan as tourists relied on intermarriage as a stepping stone to acquire the necessary immigration status to legally engage in any economic activity in Japan. A closer look at the residence permit acquisition pattern of the migrants surveyed show that, at time of entry, 56.0 percent were tourists, 14.7 percent were students, and 10.3 percent were professionals or businessmen, while 6.9 percent and 1.7 percent were family dependents and refugees, respectively (Table 4). However, during the time of the survey, 4.3 percent had Japanese nationality, 36.2 percent had permanent residency, 29.3 percent had a spouse of Japanese citizen residency, and 6.9 percent were family dependents, whereas 11.2 percent were in an irregular situation as shown in Table 4.

In Japan, migrants who acquire permanent, long-term, and spouse or child of Japanese residency have no employment restrictions (Hayakawa, 2010). Apart from that, those who naturalize acquire full citizenship rights. Moreover, some of the migrants' businesses were started and run in partnership with Japanese entrepreneurs, who in some cases also provided the starting capital. To attract Japanese clientele and make inroads into the Japanese business structure, some of the African business owners have employed Japanese people to work in their companies.

Table 4. Entry visa versus current residence status.

Type of entry visa			Current residence status		
	Number	%		Number	%
Tourist	65	56.0	Japanese nationality	5	4.3
Student	17	14.7	Permanent residence	42	36.2
Professional/business	12	10.3	Spouse of Japanese	34	29.3
Dependent	8	6.9	Dependent	8	6.9
Refugee	2	1.7	No status/unknown	13	11.2
Other	12	10.3	Other	14	12.1
Total	116	100.0	Total	116	100.0

Linking

Most African migrants in our sample survey who came to Japan for higher education profited from the rich social influence of their professors (usually their dissertation advisors) and institutionalized recruitment practices of big Japanese companies in cooperation with higher educational institutions (Imai and Sato, 2011) to secure life-long employment.[11] The case of a 58-year-old Ghanaian, who is a department head of one of Japan's largest cooperatives, better elucidates this point. He came to Japan in 1988 on a government scholarship to pursue MSc and PhD degrees in engineering. Later, he was joined by his wife and their four children aged between two and ten years. However, his scholarship stipend and the additional income he was earning through private English language lessons were inadequate to support his family. He planned on sending two of his children back to Ghana, but his dissertation adviser intervened to let the children stay in Japan, promising to help him find a job after he had graduated. True to his word, his dissertation adviser facilitated his employment in this company after his graduation. Since then, he has remained like a godfather to him, ensuring that he is given fair treatment in his workplace. The engineer believes that the dissertation adviser had a hand in his last promotion to department manager. He said:

> Six years ago when I was going to be transferred to Tokyo to become the manager of the international department of our firm, my adviser called to

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[11] Based on mutual trust between Japanese companies and higher educational institutions, there is the institutionalized practice of 'recruiting new graduates all-at-once,' which permits the newly graduated to secure life-long employment contracts in big companies (Imai and Sato, 2011: 1–31).

> inform and congratulate me about the impending promotion even before I knew about it.

The role of godfather or a sponsor is important not only for the migrants' access to Japan's elite institutions, but also for their survival and progress in such institutions. But, at the same time, things are not as smooth for the highly educated African migrants as it may appear. One informant who is a professor in one of Japan's top universities shared his observation that there is an inner Japanese society, which is the exclusive preserve of people of Japanese ancestry, and an outer social space, which is where foreigners are allowed some level of participation. Therefore, even if migrants feel welcomed in Japan, they can never be accepted into the inner society due to their different ethnic and racial origin. As a result, foreigners continue to feel some level of discrimination, even when they appear to be occupying higher rungs of the social ladder. The professor said that his previous university where he graduated and taught for twelve years never treated him on equal terms with his Japanese co-workers. He said that while his Japanese colleagues were offered tenure track positions, he had fixed-term contracts. On his twelfth year, he was expecting a promotion; instead he was sacked. Another informant who graduated in a technical school said he got a job in a printing company through his school's job recruitment program. However, he resigned from his company though he was receiving a very good salary (about USD7,000 a month), because he never received a promotion, whereas his Japanese co-workers, some of whom he trained, were being promoted.

The positions attained by the elite Africans (as university professors, systems engineers, managers, or corporate heads in Japanese companies) have privileged them with a unique linking capital, which other members of the African community are able to draw on for their socio-economic mobility within the Japanese society. Some of these persons are also leaders of African national and ethnic associations. Their social positions and the prestige they enjoy enable them to mediate between their migrant communities and Japanese government institutions and authorities. Moreover, most of those who have businesses also have connections with Japanese corporations and businessmen. Besides these personal ties, embassies and migrant interest groups in Japan serve as linking social capital that facilitate migrants' employment and incorporation in Japan.

Discussion

Evidence from our sample survey and in-depth interviews indicate that African migrants rely heavily on bonding, bridging, and linking social capital to achieve some degree of integration in Japan. However, contrary to all expectations, it is the latter two (bridging and linking capital) that facilitate migrants' socio-economic mobility. This study, therefore, does not support the enclave economy hypothesis as expounded by Portes and his followers but is rather in line with mainstream assimilation literature and, thus, supports the position of Sanders and Nee (1987, 1996).

Constructing social ties between African migrants and Japanese hosts

In the introduction of this article, I discussed how black people were rejected by Japanese society during the early stages of immigration. The question is, what factors accounted for the construction of social ties between African migrants and Japanese people in subsequent years? In other words, what strategies did the migrants adopt to gain the level of acceptance they now have in Japanese society? In fact, the origins of these ties can be traced back to opportunities that the migrants, mostly Ghanaians, seized upon during their early years in Japan. As a strategy to gain societal acceptance, most of the migrants claimed they were African Americans after they realized that this group was relatively welcome. One informant said:

> When we arrived, they [Japanese people] really regarded the Americans very highly. (Male, 55 years, from Ghana, 30 years in Japan)

Not only did the migrants claim an African American identity, but they also behaved like them and befriended the African American expatriates in Japan at the time, attending night clubs and other social activities with them.

> During the day we dressed in jackets, very nicely for [Japanese] people to perceive us to be black Americans . . . If you said you were an African, they thought you lived in a jungle, in trees . . . They would ask whether you had food, rice in your country . . . So we claimed to be Americans . . . When you went to a company [to work] you had to say you were a black American, because if you didn't say so they would not respect you . . . if you didn't claim to be an American you would not survive in this country . . . I claimed I was British because I did not want to lie too much. (Male, 48 years old, from Ghana, 26 years in Japan)

This strategy paid off in several ways. First, it weakened the formation of a closed immigrant community and forced them to open up. Second, the invented identity gave them the opportunity to find jobs in Japanese companies. Third, since it was popular during the late 1980s and 1990s[12] for young Japanese women to have a relationship with black American men (Cornyetz, 1994; Yamashita, 1996), it was relatively easy for African migrants to attract Japanese girlfriends because of their invented identity. Fourth, the migrants introduced hip hop culture to Japanese youth by establishing the African hip hop trade, night clubs, restaurants and related businesses. Young Japanese not only became the target market, but were also engaged in the business as employees or partners, while the women who married the migrants became secretaries and provided the necessary guarantees for bank loans or for renting property (storerooms) to start the businesses. Finally, these processes continued even after the incorporation of other African migrants from different countries, particularly Nigerians, who later became the largest African community.

Perhaps we also need to consider that these processes of inter-group relations took place at a time when Japan was undergoing socio-economic and cultural transformation that may have diminished its insular culture. The expansion of Japan's corporate organizations and businesses on a global scale had made it vulnerable to forces of globalization, as indicated by the increased interest in learning foreign languages, particularly English, increasing immigration to Japan and increased contact with foreigners (Burgess, 2007; Shipper, 2011). These conditions also worked out well for the African migrants. For instance, some of those with higher education went into English language teaching in Japan. In one of my group discussions in Yokohama, the three participants were English teachers (one was a woman from Ghana who had been teaching English in Japan for 28 years, a man from Benin who has been in Japan for 13 years, and a Kenyan woman who has been living in Japan for seven years) who expressed pride in their job and for teaching English to the Japanese. The Ghanaian woman said she had gone to Ghana with some of her students and one of them visited Ghana with her husband after she got married.

Marriage to Japanese women, served as a means for African migrants who came as tourists to obtain legal residence status and to legally engage in economic activity. The same finding was observed by Kudo's (2014) study of the Pakistani community in Japan. He noted that marriage to Japanese women enabled the Pakistani men to obtain a spouse visa in order to stay and work in Japan, whereas those who did not marry Japanese nationals 'remained vulnerable in socio-economic and legal terms and their movement tended to be confined for fear for being arrested and sent back to their home country' (Kudo, 2014: 104). This gives rise to perceptions that some marriages between migrants and Japanese nationals are for the sake of convenience. During the interviews, however, the participants denied this. A 33-year-old Ghanaian who has been in Japan for six years said that to prove to his (Japanese) wife that he did not marry her just for the 'papers,' he waited for a year before taking the spouse residency. A young Nigerian who is also married to a Japanese woman said: 'Brother, I did not marry my wife for papers. Listen, before I married her I had four girlfriends. She begged me to marry her.' Moreover, some of the migrants met their future Japanese spouse outside Japan. Some recent studies have also indicated that the increasing rate of Japanese women's marriage to foreigners, particularly to black men, is a sign of self-affirmation in a traditionally male-dominated society (Cornyetz, 1994). This observation is also alluded to in Amy Yamada's novels which challenge gender norms in Japan.[13] Whatever the main reasons for the intermarriages, those between an African migrant and a Japanese national provided an easy pathway for the migrants' socio-economic integration and mobility in Japanese society. The majority of migrants in an irregular situation are mainly those who failed to secure a Japanese spouse, or those who came to Japan with their African wife. This may further explain why the position of African women is very weak in Japan; there is low intermarriage between Japanese men and African women, and thus, marriage as a pathway for integration is closed off to African women.

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[12] Marriages between young African migrants and Japanese women continue to take place these days. However, the popularity of such relationship appears to be waning due to the decline of the African hip hop business, persisting racial prejudice and suspicions and allegations that some of these marriages are for convenience and are fraudulent (Richard, 2011).

Conclusion and policy recommendations

In this research, I have shown that in spite of racial prejudice, African migrants in Japan build and rely heavily on bridging and linking social networks for economic integration. They forge these ties through intermarriage with Japanese women, friendship ties with Japanese youth, business ties with Japanese entrepreneurs, and connections to higher educational institutions. As a result, and also due to the high educational background of some, the migrants are spread over a wide range of occupations. Some of those who received higher education in Japan are professionals in corporations and educational institutions. But due to structural constraints to fully integrate in the mainstream economy, many migrants, particularly those with lower education, are self-employed and have accordingly established a business niche. These findings have important policy implications.

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[13] In most of Yamada's novels, her female characters are depicted as despising the Japanese male and yearning for the black phallus, which the characters consider as superior to that of the Japanese male. This, according to Cornyetz (1994), is Yamada's strategy to affirm Japanese women's agency in contemporary post-war Japan.

In the first place, the migrants' ability to forge social ties with native Japanese, particularly through intermarriage, is an important step toward integration. Yet, in most migrant-receiving countries, the conventional wisdom is that migrants marry natives for convenience, therefore policy effort is often geared toward discouraging such marriages. However, as this study has shown, the intermarriage between Japanese women and African men go beyond convenience and helps the migrants to improve their socio-economic position in Japan. Therefore, policies and programs, such as language courses, intercultural education, and training for cross-cultural couples, their families and children, will further enhance the integration of African migrants and enhance family relationships.

Second, in recent times, development experts have highlighted the role that social networks and capital play in bridging and linking communities and institutions for development (Woolcock, 2002). The social networks and expertise of African migrants could be tapped by both host and home country governments in their development cooperation programs; for example, in the areas of international trade and investment, knowledge transfer, and cultural exchange. This will go a long way not only to enhance the cooperation between Japan and African countries, but also to enhance the integration of migrants and their families. The future of children born from cross-cultural marriages also poses broader implications for the ties and cooperation between the countries of their Japanese and African parentage.

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