

Historicized mixed embeddedness in West African immigrants' economic activities in Ghana

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Abstract

The mixed embeddedness model explains immigrants' economic activities, but lacks historical perspective to account for these activities over time. This paper deploys the historical and mixed embeddedness approaches, what I call the historicized mixed embeddedness approach to offer a more comprehensive explanation of West African immigrants' economic activities (WAIEA) in Ghana. It analyses historical/archival documents on WAIEA in Ghana and the extant immigrant entrepreneurship/business discourse from pre-colonial time to independence in 1957 to understand how immigrants chose Ghana as migration destination and for economic activities. The paper contributes to the discourse on immigrants' economic activities, adds historical breadth, places arguments in a historicized mixed embeddedness frame, and expands the voice of arguments from less developed societies.

Keywords: Mixed embeddedness; Economic activities; Trade; West Africa; Ghana.

1. Introduction

Migration history in Ghana¹, like the case of the West African sub-region, dates back to time immemorial (Anarfi *et al.*, 2003; Antwi Bosiakoh, 2009; 2017a; 2017b). As with their long presence in the country, immigrants in Ghana have long been participating in economic activities as part of their stay in the country. Long before formal incorporation of Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) and indeed other West African nationalities into colonial rule, trans-ethnic trade and other economic/commercial exchanges occurred, involving crafts and natural and mineral resources of different ecological zones (Davies, 1966; Arhin, 1979; Anquandah, 1985; Massing, 2000; Amenumey, 2008; Antwi Bosiakoh and Williams Tetteh, 2018). Archaeological investigations at Ghana's northern town of Ntreso show remains of a population of immigrants from southern Sahara and the Niger valley at the beginning of the iron age, giving evidence of early trade contact and exchanges with the indigenous people of pre-colonial Ghana (Davies, 1966; see also Anquandah, 1985). Though much of these trading/economic exchanges were itinerant or even nomadic because of the constant peripatetic activities involved (Arhin, 1980: 5), the extant literature suggests actors in these economic activities required longer period of time in order to exchange their goods and produce (Clarke, 1982).

Unlike contemporary migration patterns in the region and particularly in Ghana where the dominant focus has been almost exclusively on emigration to the more economically advanced western societies in North America and Europe (Manuh, 2006a; 2005; Anarfi, Kwankye, Ababio and Tiemoko, 2003; Peil, 1995), in pre-colonial times and the period before independence in 1957, I identify a huge episode of intra-sub-regional migratory phenomenon, reminiscent of an ancient migration corridor, from where I argue that, far larger numbers of West African immigrants crossed borders, much the same as the case in contemporary time, to adjoining territories and those close by, than those engaged in long distance movements to Western societies. Thus from these ancient episodes of migratory activities, i.e. narratives of West African, and indeed the general African immigrants in Ghana, it is possible to highlight certain immigrant groups such as Togolese, Burkinabe, Sierra Leoneans, Liberians and Nigerians, but also Ivorians and Malians, among others (Yaro, 2008, Adepoju, 2003; Anarfi, *et al.*, 2003).

¹ Ghana was previously Gold Coast. I employ contemporary names of West African nation states and places for purposes of convenience.

This paper draws on the major immigrant groups in Ghana from the period before colonisation to independence in 1957 to explore generally, the presence of foreign nationals in the country, and crucially investigate their economic activities in the process. The research question underlining this study relates to the ways in which people of other West African nationalities – those we may describe as strangers to Ghana/Gold Coast – chose the country as their migration destination and as a place for their economic activities. In the service of addressing this question, two distinct periods are examined, namely the pre-colonial and colonial periods. As in any historical writing, there are often no clear-cut breaks between different historical periods. The pattern for tracing continuity necessarily straddles across different periods – an earlier and subsequent one. The paper thus employs the approach in which, in the attempt to understand the morphology of immigrants' participation, it bestrides different historical epochs. And though by its nature the paper covers a broad time span of pre-colonial to colonial periods, it does not claim to offer an exhaustive account; instead, the accounts presented are highly selective, reflecting the particular circumstances in each period. The relevance of this work is not just in its survey of the extant literature on the historiography of West African immigrants' participation in economic activities in Ghana, but also in weaving them into a single coherent tapestry, the nature of their participation from the earliest times to the dawn of independence.

The paper therefore contributes to the growing discourse on immigrant economic activities in three distinct ways, namely to add an important historical breadth to the discourse, to place the arguments in a mixed embeddedness frame and finally expand on the arguments that emerge from less developed societies as majority of studies in this area analyse the phenomenon in developed countries, mainly in North America (USA and Canada), in Europe (Netherlands, Germany, UK, Spain, etc) and in Oceania (Australia) often without the needed historical link (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013). It draws on the activities of West African immigrants of Malian, Burkinabe, and Nigerian ethnic origins in Ghana in what can be described as an ancient West African trading enclave with its headquarters in the forest Kingdom of Asante, the present middle belt enclave of Ghana.

2. The historicized mixed embeddedness approach

This paper employs a *historicized mixed embeddedness approach* to understanding the evolution of WAIEA in Ghana. This approach blends both

history and mixed embeddedness theory in explaining WAIEA in Ghana. This is important for the reason that, a deployment of the mixed embeddedness approach alone in a study of this nature would be deficient in bringing out the rich historical factors that work(ed), both independently and in combination with others, to implicate how West African immigrants in Ghana in pre-colonial and colonial periods eked out a living in the country. Mixed-embeddedness is the outcome of a long period of theoretical journey that began from Polanyi's (1944) social embeddedness which suggested that economic activities are enmeshed in economic and noneconomic institutions. Later in the 1980s, Granovetter (1985) oriented us to social networks and social relations embedded in economic rationality, identifying what he called relational embeddedness and structural embeddedness. The idea of relational embeddedness hinges on a person's personal relations with other people. This includes all reciprocal transactions, normative expectations as well as the quest for mutual approval. Relational embeddedness may also include all the networks of social relations with customers, suppliers, banks, competitors, and, even law enforcers (Kloosterman, 2010). Structural embeddedness on the other hand refers to the network of social relations to which a person belongs (Granovetter, 1990. See also Portes, 1995).

Since the late 1990s, the role of context in immigrant economic activities has been highlighted, leading to the idea of mixed-embeddedness approach, first floated by Kloosterman, van Leun and Rath (1999). Unlike Polanyi and Granovetter's social embeddedness approach which focuses on general economic transactions, mixed embeddedness was developed to explain immigrant's economic activities. It focuses on the different contexts, both formal and informal, and includes social, economic, legal and regulatory, political, policy and institutional, among others in which immigrants' entrepreneurship/economic activities are embedded (Kloosterman, *et al.*, 1998). Its basic tenet is that immigrants' economic activities cannot be understood just by focusing on the micro-level characteristics of the immigrants, and their institutions and networks. Rather, and more importantly, the external context needs to be incorporated. Here I refer to the macro and meso structures of the immigrant destination society as they impact on the decisions and choices of the immigrants regarding the economic activities they can and actually pursue (Antwi Bosiakoh, 2017b; Jones, *et al.*, 2014; Moyo, 2014; Kloosterman, 2010, 2003; Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Kloosterman, *et al.*, 1999). Thus, at least in theory, the rise of immigrant entrepreneurial

activities is dependent on the existing dual structures of immigrants' institutions (i.e. their group characteristics including networks) and the socio-economic and political milieus of the host states as differences in these institutions would beget differences in local embeddedness as regards immigrants' economic activities.

However, the mixed embeddedness approach lacks historical perspective; it is unable to account for the development of immigrant businesses over time (see also Peters, 2002). To deal with this deficit, this paper proposes a historicized mixed embeddedness in the treatment of WAIEA in Ghana to understand the evolution process and the changing configurations. This proposed approach blends the historical and mixed embeddedness approaches – historical forces interacting with contextual realities to shape the nature and form of economic realities. Within this approach, it is possible to locate the economic activities of West African immigrants in Ghana in pre-colonial and during colonial periods, a sensitizing prism for understanding both history and context and the facilitating and constraining conditions within the West African economic enclave at different times. This helps to respond to the question of what historical epochs the immigrants' economic activities flourished and what were the objective historical and context-specific factors that accounted for the development of these economic activities. This process allows both change and continuity to be observed in addition to the needed specificity and context in drawing together the loose threads into a coherent form (Antwi Bosiakoh, 2017b). Change and continuity, two key features of this process help us to deal with the static view of history. As such, as observed by Sherman (1993) the historical approach is *historically specific* and characteristically fluid and dynamic, reflecting the grounded social time and location realities.

3. In the beginning were Dyula, Yarse & Hausa traders

i) The origin of economic contacts

West African migrants in Ghana have always participated in economic activities as part of their stay in the country. As pointed out earlier, long before formal incorporation of the Gold Coast and indeed other West African nationalities into colonial rule, various forms of migratory-related economic exchanges, mainly trading, occurred to offset differences in natural resources endowments in different ecological zones (Davies, 1966; Arhin, 1979; Arhin, 1980; Anquandah, 1985; Massing, 2000; Amenumey, 2008; Kobo, 2010). The processes of these exchanges led to the creation of markets and market

towns across West Africa as well as states particularly in pre-colonial northern Gold Coast (Arhin, 1979; Clarke, 1982; Amenumey, 2008; Kobo, 2010). In Amenumey's (2008: 95) accounts, smaller towns grew into bigger ones, including Begho, Bole, and Wa. Similarly, Clarke (1982: 59) argues that, along with the introduction of Islam in West Africa, trade in kola-nuts and gold, among others, led to the establishment of settlements like Bobo Dioulasso.

Generally, accounts on the early trading and other economic contacts between the people of pre-colonial Ghana and northern African people (often termed the caravan trade) goes back into the tenth century and was tilted with Muslim influence (Mustapha, 1973: 5. See also Clarke, 1982), but Arhin (1980: 5) traces the beginning of these relations to the period between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, arguing that, it was in response to demands for gold, at first by the medieval western Sudanese kingdoms. Kobo (2010: 70) corroborates both Mustapha's (1973) and Arhin's (1980) accounts and points out that, the 15th century marked the period when pre-colonial Ghana started engaging in commercial activities with Muslim merchants, which in his estimation contributed significantly to the Islamisation of the north but failed to Islamise the south which mostly comprised Akan speaking people (see also Arhin, 1980: 18), despite centuries of commercial relations.

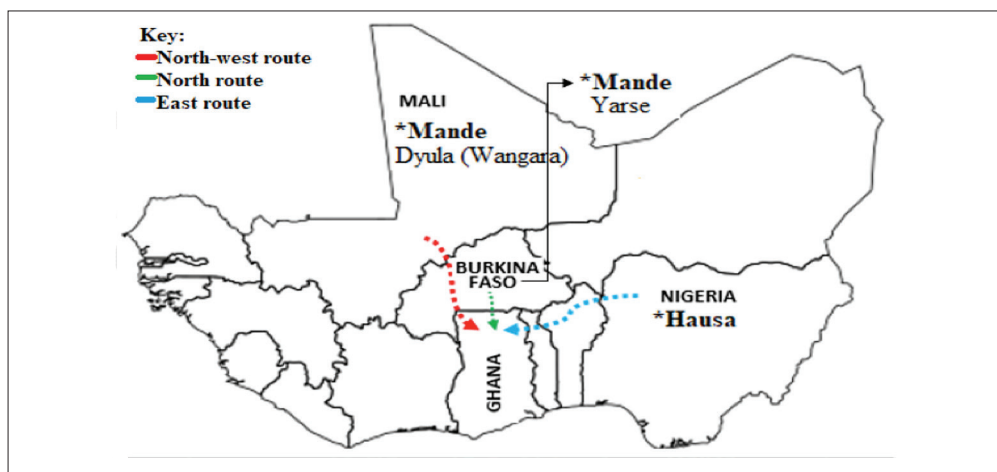
ii) Trading archetype

Cross-border trading activities in the Asante hinterland² before 1874 (i.e. the pre-colonial time), Arhin (1979) spewed from three directions, namely from the north-west (i.e. middle Niger); from the north (i.e. the Mossi 'country'); and from the east (i.e. the Hausa 'country'). Trade from the west was associated with the Dyula, a Mande speaking people of Mali (see location on figure 1) who established the 'Bergo complex of settlements' (p. 4). These Dyula people, known to the Akan ethnic group of Ghana as the Wangara, were based in Timbuktu and Jenne (also spelt Djenne, Djennéor or Djénno), and traded with the Asante people southwards, and also with the Moors of the Sahara in the north (Arhin, 1991: 3). They served as a link between forest Asante Kingdom and northern African kingdoms in the Magreb, Egypt and the Mediterranean for the redistribution of Asante forest produce including kola and gold. The caravans of the Mande Dyula, like those of the Hausas described by Lonsdale

² Using 'Asante hinterland' and 'cross-border' are for analytical purposes only. The first refers to the geographical areas and the tribes (ethnic groups) adjoining Asante and seeks to indicate the dominance of the Asante on these areas (see Arhin, 1974: 7), while the second designates movements across these ethnic groups and tribes.

(1882) as ‘moving markets’, plied between Segou, Timbuktu, and Jenne on one hand, and Bergo and its environs on the other, and as moving markets, these caravans served as distributive channels for goods produced in the areas covered by the trade tracks. Arhin (1979: 6) argues that caravan activities in the West African economic exchanges contributed to making ‘a large part of West Africa a single trading zone’ before the Portuguese started trading with the Gold Coast in 1471 (see also Arhin, 1991). This trading zone ensured that goods specific to the different ecological zones (mainly forest and Sahel savannah) moved north and south as were required to counterbalance both deficiency and cornucopia in different areas.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF WEST AFRICA SHOWING TRADING GROUPS AND ROUTES



Source: Map created by the author

The second direction from which the early trade flowed to pre-colonial Ghana was from the north (Mossi country – areas covered by present day Burkina Faso). Like the trade from the west, this trade was also associated with the Mande or more specifically a Mande-speaking trading group called the Yarse with long term residence in the Mossi country. The Yarse distinguished themselves as astute intermediaries in this trade which originated from far off Niger and Timbuktu through Mossiland to the forest-savanna fringes of Asante hinterland. Trading routes that serviced this north-south West African trade linked Wagadugu (Ouagadougou) to Salaga and Yendi, and eventually connected Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja lands to Mossi land in Ghana. The Yarse and Dyula Mande people thus established complex trade routes that connected Akanland to several West African settlements before imperial control of the region. Boaten (1973: 109-111) provides an elaborate outline of trade

routes from Kumasi northward to Salaga, the eastward Krakyi Dente route to Kwahu and Sokodee in Togoland, to Gyaman in the west, and to the coastal Ga area through the Kwahu scarp and Akwamu. There was also the Akyem route which passed near Lake Bosomtwe, through Akyem to Nkran (Accra) and Simpa (Winneba), and another one through Adanse and Twifo where it forked with one branch to Oguua (Cape Coast) and the other to Appolonia.

Arhin (1991) corroborates Boaten's (1973) accounts and further extends the routes to other places in pre-colonial Ghana and West African territories at the time. He observed that, these trading routes originated from Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao in Mali and crisscrossed several places including Kong, Buna, Begho, Manso, and Ahwenekoko in the Brong area, as well as to the Camoe river to the coastal lagoons of the Ivory Coast, through Aowin near the Pra river to Axim in Nzima; through Wassa, Tarkwa and Sekondi-Takoradi in Ahanta; from Twifo to Elmina; across Assin to Cape Coast, Mouree, and Kormantine; from Akyem to Senya-Breku and Accra (Arhin, 1991: 4).

The third direction of trade flow into Asante and its hinterlands before 1874 was from the east, from the Hausa region of present day Nigeria. This trade which started with the opening in 1433-1454 of trade routes between Bornu (Bono) and northern Nigeria, and 'Gwanja' (Gonja) when Beriberi (Hausa) traders settled in Gonja districts (Mabogunje, 1968: 54), was originally interested in kola-nuts, and led to the establishment of kola market centres at Gbuipe, Kafaba, Umfaha and Yendi (Goody, 1954; Arhin, 1979). In the early 19th century, Salaga became the 'grand market of the Gonja state' (Bowdich, 1819: 172) and thus became connected to the kola trading nexus at the time. After the collapse of the Salaga market between 1875-1881, Kintampo took its place (Kirby, 1884). From the accounts of Arhin (1970: 365), Atebubu, a non-kola producing town at the time also became a kola market town because, the Atebubuhene was able to effect a blockade of kola supplies enroute to Salaga from Asante. This compelled kola traders to do business at Atebubu. Hausa caravans in this third direction of trade flow to Asante hinterland, like the Mande-Dyula caravans, were 'moving markets' or what one may term 'mobile traders' and were also described as 'caravan' (Lovejoy, 1971). Often, they left Kano between March and May in different sizes ranging from one hundred persons and a similar number of beasts of burden (Clapperton and Lander, 1829: 102) to two thousand persons and a fairly large number of beast of burdens including asses, pack-oxen, mules, and horses (Meyer, 1898)³.

³ Details on the organizational structure of the caravan is provided by Arhin (1979: 7).

As in the accounts of pioneer students of West African affairs, Massing (2000:294) reports of the Wangara as an old Soninke diaspora in West Africa showing that, they traded in several parts of pre-colonial West Africa, including Ghana, particularly in the Volta, Birim, Pra and Offin river basins and their adjoining settlements (see also Addo, 1974). These basins and their adjoining settlements marked the southern end of the long-distance trade route from Jenne and Timbuktu (which together with Gao were three of the greatest trading cities that were once part of the famous Mali Empire) where precious goods from the forest zone (gold, kola) were produced. They additionally formed the border and link between the Mande-Dyula and Hausa linguistic and economic enclaves in West Africa (see also Arhin, 1979; Clarke, 1982: 58). By the early 15th century, Begho, an important ancient town, was already associated with the trade in gold, both as a route to the gold producing Akan forest southwards, and also as settlement for Muslim gold merchants (Clarke, 1982). This was to change towards the mid-15th century. According to Arhin (1980: 6), Begho was destroyed through civil wars about 1640. Following this, the Mande-speaking Dyula people who use to reside there, migrated to Bona, Kong, Bobo-Dioulasso and Bonduku. By 1740, Bonduku had succeeded Begho as the principal Dyula trading town in the Asante northwest.

Writing on foreign African workers in Ghana, Addo (1974) corroborates Massing's accounts and observes that, there were extensive movements of people of the Wangara ethnic group in Mali during the 15th and 16th centuries, in the service of Islamic proselytization (see also Rouch, 1954). Thus, as observed by Massing, the Volta basin of Ghana and settlements within its catchment area formed the territory of the Mole-Dagbane speakers, Mossi, Mamprusi, Dagomba and Dagari, who as state-forming groups, were more receptive to Islam (Massing, 2000: 294: see also Kobo, 2010: 70). In the process, the Wangara left their mark on traditional practices of several chiefdoms in Ghana including the Asantes, as some of them came to occupy important economic positions in local communities. As illustrated by Addo (1974: 48), they 'profoundly influenced mystical practices and the social administration of the Asante State', and provided spiritual services (in the form of divination and charms) to political elites and economic class (Depuis, 1824; Addo, 1974; Owusu-Ansah, 1983; Kobo, 2010). Thus, long before European travelers arrived in several parts of pre-colonial Ghana, some Mande and Hausa people had already taken residence and participated in the socio-economic and other daily activities of the people. But inquiries do not end with the Mande and Hausa

groups of people as Addo (1974: 48) has observed that, other groups of people like the Fulani, Moshi as well as those with Arab origin merchandised in slaves particularly in the upper parts of Ghana several years before the European traders entered the market there. Similar to Addo's (1974) observation, Daaku (1970: 3) notes that the Akan people of pre-colonial Ghana around the Offin and Pra river basins were engaged, quite intensely, in slave trade with people from the Sahara and North Africa. Perbi (2001: 4) corroborates Daaku's (1970) position, suggesting further that some slaves were obtained through this trade from as early as the 1st to 16th centuries, A.D.

4. The imperial period: 1844-1957

i) Colonial migration

The year 1844 marked the beginning of what turned out to be a long period of British colonial rule over the Gold Coast. The (in)famous Bond of 1844 was signed and signified the first official move by Britain to assure herself of control over the Gold Coast⁴. However, Gold Coast was proclaimed British colony in 1874 (Hymer, 1968; Austin, 2007) and remained so until 1957. During this period, just like the pre-colonial period, the Gold Coast colony witnessed systematic immigration (Boahen, 1975; Addo, 1974; Buah, 1980; Amenumey, 2008). Statistics from the 1921 census of the Gold Coast for example shows that, there were close to 49,000 foreign Africans (out of a total population of 2,298,000), increasing by more than five times to 289,000 in the 1931 census year (out of a total population of 3,164,000)⁵. This figure however dropped to 174,000 in 1948 (Kay and Hymer, 1972:312)⁶. Nigerian components in the 1921 and 1931 foreign African population figures (these were segregated according to nationality) show interesting increasing trend. In 1921, the Nigerian component was 21,200 (about 44 percent of all foreign Africans in the Gold Coast), increasing to 67,700 in 1931. Locally-born 'immigrants' had also become part of the population vocabulary as twenty-six percent (26%) of Nigerians in Accra at the time of the 1948 Census were born in Accra (Acquah, 1958).

⁴ The significance of the Bond was that, it provided legal backing for the illegal occupation and jurisdiction that had already been in place.

⁵ The total population of the Gold Coast from the two censuses were obtained from Birmingham, Neustadt, and Omaboe (1967). See also Ofosu-Amaah, (1974).

⁶ One of the reasons for the drop in the population from 289,000 in 1931 to 174,000 in 1948 relates to difference in enumeration technique. In 1931, the technique was based on the country of origin. Children of foreign nationals who were born in the Gold Coast were considered foreigners. In 1948 however, a 'foreigner' was defined as someone 'born outside of the Gold Coast'.

ii) Economic imperatives in colonial migration

Part of the reasons for the increased immigration into the Gold Coast colony at the time was that, new techniques for mining and cash crop agriculture for cocoa cultivation had been introduced. These new techniques, in mines and in agriculture, needed large manual labour force which was unavailable locally.⁷ This created huge platform for immigrants – mainly from the Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), the Ivory Coast, French Togoland and Nigeria – to enter the colony mainly as labourers on cocoa farms (Arhin, 1986; Eades, 1994). By 1905, some 3,500 labourers were entering the Gold Coast colony annually (Addo, 1975). Margaret Peil (1974) reports that, in the service of harbours and mines in the Gold Coast, several workers from Liberia entered the Gold Coast regularly every year. Additionally, recruitment centers were established in the Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) for labour migrants desirous to enter the Gold Coast. Eades reports that, the Yoruba population at the time came from major towns along the rail line in Nigeria including Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ede, Oshogbo, Offa, Oyan, and Ilorin (Eades, 1994: 27).

As has been described in the account of Peil (1974), migrants participated in all manner of commercial activities as part of their stay in the Gold Coast. While many of them worked in the mining and agricultural sectors of the colonial economy (Eades, 1994), over time, some entered other sectors. Addo (1974: 48) observes that, a number of immigrants took to ‘petty trading and small-scale commercial activity, while some found themselves as labourers in infrastructural development projects like the construction of roads, railways, bridges, harbours, schools, hospitals, etc.’.

Over time, some immigrant groups had begun to show predilections for particular types of work (Peil, 1974). It is said for example that, underground mining activities were preferred by the Vais, Mendis and Timmanis from Sierra Leone, and the Krus and Basas from Liberia, but these activities were refused by the Yorubas and Ibos from Nigeria for load carriage in the mines (see also Eades, 1994). Additionally, some Nigerians entrenched themselves in diamond digging and butchering while yam selling in the Kumasi Market in addition to wholesale activities relating to grains, beans and tomatoes were the monopoly for Gao men from Mali (Peil, 1974; Lyon, 2000; Clark, 2001). In the Konongo gold mining enclave, Kumekpo and Amakye-Ansah (1971) have

⁷ The local Gold Coast inhabitants were said to frown on manual labour and therefore avoided it (see Addo, 1974).

reported that, indigenous labour did not go in for any type of work that was available. They preferred 'cushy' jobs, thus paving the way for foreign labour recruitment. This, they explained, was the reason why there was no tension and conflict between indigenous and foreign workers at the time. A large number of Yoruba migrants who turned to mining were located in the Eastern region, particularly Akwatia, and Akim-Oda areas, which in the 1960s, had the highest concentration of Yoruba migrants in Ghana.

A recent account of commercial activities by immigrants in colonial Ghana by Ntewusu (2011:162-163)⁸ shows that, kola-nut trade was a key commodity immigrants traded in from years before 1874 until 1908. This trade involved a number of ethnic groups, indigenous and non-indigenous, with the most prominent being the Yoruba and Hausa traders from Nigeria. Ntewusu argues that, this trade was dominated by the Hausa despite the fact that, in population terms, the Yoruba were in the majority (see also Pellow, 2002). This kola-nut trade was closely associated with Alhaji Braimah, a prominent kola-nut trader of mixed Yoruba and Fulani parentage from Ilorin, Nigeria. Braimah left Nigeria in 1860 along with some of his family members on a self-imposed exile, and first settled in Salaga, one of the historically important kola-nut trading centres in West Africa. After succeeding in transforming the kola-nut trade in Salaga, he entered into new business frontiers including the supply of horses to the Gonja and Dagomba upper class men and women (Ntewusu, 2011: 1-2). Following the British-Asante war of 1874 and the subsequent destruction of Kumasi, there were several revolts by some ethnic groups in the north.⁹ In Salaga for example, the revolt led to the murder of the resident legates of the Asante¹⁰, prompting the Asante to cut the supply of kola nuts from Brong

⁸ This work explores the socio-economic history of northern traders and transporters in Tudu, a suburb of Accra from 1908-2008. It identifies Alhaji Braimah, an astute trader of from Ilorin, in Nigeria as the point of entry and discusses his presence in the Gold Coast in the 1800s and the establishment of Tudu, a zongo in Accra. The story of Alhaji Braimah is weaved into the urbanizing process of Tudu from colonial times to the contemporary period.

⁹ Before the war, the Brong (now Bono) people commanded Asante route to Salaga and Gonja land. Now, the war made trading with Salaga from Asante unsafe. Arhin (1974) observes that, it was under this unstable condition that Atebubu and Kintampo markets were established. Atebubu market was established by the Atebubuhene Kwaku Gyan about 1884, and the Kintampo market by Asantehene and Nkoranzahene to enable kola traders dispose of their kola and also to enable the chiefs to collect revenue.

¹⁰ In much of Asante political and economic relations with its hinterlands and subjects, it was a practice to send what can best be described as ambassadors or representatives of Asante to places they had dominion over. These ambassadors were often stationed in market towns, and remained there for market seasons for the purpose of collecting dues. Arhin (1979: 17) attests to this practice and adds that, the legates often 'reminded the traders of Asante military authority in the background' because the political organization of most of the market towns was one of segmented political authority.

Ahafo to Salaga. This action by the Asante dealt heavily on Braimah's kola-nut trade, forcing him to relocate his trading activity to Accra (ibid: 2), where he practiced his kola trade and later added cattle rearing and butchery, often employing several others. Nicknamed 'Braimah the Butcher' in reference to his exploits in abattoir activities, Alhaji Braimah was also appointed chief of Muslims in Accra in 1903, and died in 1915.

In addition to immigrants' role in the kola-nut trade in the Gold Coast, Hargreaves (1981) has observed that, British colonial rule of the Gold Coast allowed *stranger traders* (mainly Hausa Nigerians, but also other traders) to penetrate the forest enclaves of central Asante. In some cases, the colonial officials encouraged them to establish new zongos¹¹ in the hope of stimulating free trade in a myriad of goods and produce. Writing around the same period, Southall (1978: 198) reports that, there was a string of petty-brokers in the Gold Coast, many of them non-indigenous in the sense of being 'strangers', and points out the 'Hausas' or 'Lagosians' (as Nigerian elements were mainly known), as a category of stranger traders who maintained an unstable 'existence by scouring the villages for marketable cocoa and supplementing their income by employment as labourers on cocoa farms'. Dominated by Yoruba migrants, these traders served as money lenders, brokers and transporters at the same time and as money lenders, advanced loans against the coming crop season. In Koforidua, the largest group of Yoruba migrants came from the Offa town.

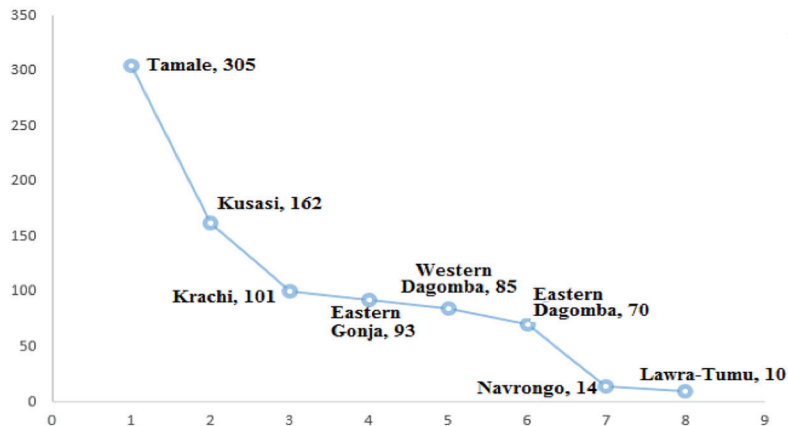
These trading activities, illustrated case of Boakye-Boaten's (1975) *bodwua-bodwua* trading categorization, or what in contemporary terms can be described as petty-trading, was also a familiar spectacle on the early 20th century market landscape in much of the Gold Coast, particularly in the Asante. Initially conducted on part-time basis by locals, because the traders regarded their trading activities as secondary to the cultivation of cocoa and other farm crops, ownership and dynamics changed before world war II when as observed by Boakye-Boaten (1975:32), 'small scale traders from Nigeria, especially from the Yoruba land, flocked to Asante and gradually took over this aspect of trade from the Asante'.

These traders were not only located in Asante and its hinterlands. They penetrated deep into the Gold Coast economy and were found in almost every

¹¹ Zongo is an Arabic word for Suk, which means market. Its usage often denotes an appendage of a town where strangers reside. Zongo is also a term for camping place of a carrier or a lodging place of travelers (see for example Shildkrout, 1978: 67). The use of the term in the late nineteenth century Atebubu and Kintampo designated a place where important trade exchanges were done. They constituted the hub of trade or central commercial institution (Arhin (1974: 12).

village. Eades (1994) reports of a handing over note read in Kumasi in 1931 in which sixty-four of stalls owned by government in Bawku market and thirty-four other stalls had been occupied by Yoruba traders. In Eastern Dagomba, the Yoruba traded in a large array of items including foodstuffs, cigarette, matches, leaf tobacco, as well as Japan goods¹², making their headquarters in Tamale, Yendi and Bimbilla. In the northern territories of the Gold Coast, archives on the distribution of the Yoruba migrants in 1931 (fig. 2) show that, they were found in almost every district, nearing 1000. The successes of these Yoruba traders were recognized, even in official records as the 1938/9 Annual Report of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast described the Yoruba, generally referred to as Lagosians, as ‘the most enterprising traders’ (p.18).

FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF YORUBA MIGRANTS IN NORTHERN TERRITORIES OF THE GOLD COAST, 1931, BY DISTRICTS



Source: Figures from Eades, 1994

Available records point two factors accounting for the success of the Yoruba traders in the Gold Coast. The first is their commercial ingenuity, a quality replete in the expounded historical narratives on Yoruba settlement in the Gold Coast and West Africa (Hill, 1970; Eades, 1994; Kohnert, 2010). The second factor relates to the then burgeoning cocoa industry which, according to Boakye-Boaten (1975), captured the attention of the Asante. In this context, Yoruba traders seized the opportunity to expand their trading activities. Their shops, just like Asante *bodwua-bodwua* trade shops, were the sources for

¹² The Annual Report of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, 1938/39 indicates that, ‘Japan’ had at that time become a word in most dialects of the colony to describe, just as we find in contemporary Ghana of ‘China’, goods that were of inferior quality.

manufactured consumer items in the Gold Coast in general and specifically in Asante settlements except in very remote villages, especially in pioneer cocoa fringes. These shops stockpiled incredibly, a wide array of goods, imported and non-imported, including preserved parts of animals (for e.g. lion, leopard, vulture, chameleon, etc. which were important in indigenous medicine), herbs, European consumer goods and drugs.

iii) World Wars: Shrinking population in-flows, recruitments and economic transformations

During the Second World War, colonial territories played important role, fighting on the side of their colonial masters. In the Gold Coast, much the same in colonial Nigeria and elsewhere in British West Africa, the colonial government recruited army officers - native and foreign - to fight on the side of Great Britain. Similar recruitment efforts have been documented for the period of First World War and before (Kirk-Greene, 1964; Thomas, 1973; Eades, 1994). Writing on military recruitments in the Gold Coast, Thomas (1973: 59) has observed that close to 10,000 African troops were employed in the Gold Coast Regiment of the West African Frontier Force from territories including Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Togo and Liberia. In the Northern Territory alone, the foreign component of recruits was 59% in 1914. This reduced to 42% in 1915 and increased to 52% in 1916. Between 1914 and 1918, the aggregate component of foreign recruits from the Northern Territory stood at 29%. The ethnic breakdown of those recruited in the Northern Territories showed that, there were several recruits who could only have originated outside the Gold Coast, although some of them may have had long term residence or been born in the colony. The ethnic origin of the recruits included a large contingent of Zabarima, Fulani, Hausa and Mosi. Others like the Grunshi, Sisala and Lobi were said to straddle borders. Other recruitment efforts have been recorded in the late 19th century for the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) involving not only West Africans but also Indians, among others (Kirk-Greene, 1964; Eades, 1994). J. S. Eades, in linking military recruitment efforts in the later part of the nineteenth century (1874-1900) to economic transformation in the colony observed that, troops from Nigeria were among the first to be attracted into the Gold Coast colony. Though majority of them were of Hausa origin, a substantial number of Yoruba men were also enlisted into the army until about 1905. Most of these troops eventually settled in the colony in Kumasi and Accra, and were involved in Gold Coast transport, mining and cocoa industries.

One corollary of the Second World War was economic slump in the economies of most West African colonies including the Gold Coast (Eades, 1994). This had shrinking implications on population in-flow into the Gold Coast, changing however after the war (Addo, 1974; Peil, 1974). Writing about the situation of immigration into the Gold Coast after the Second World War, Addo (1974: 49) argued that, 'immigration resumed' thereafter 'and continued to expand'. In following with the pre-war situation, new arrivals found work mainly in cocoa growing rural communities as traders and unskilled labourers at public construction sites. Nigerian immigrants at this time were said to have started prospecting for diamonds.¹³ In general, immigrants remained in lower-paid and low-status jobs, which, as pointed out earlier, were avoided by the indigenous population. But determined to succeed, some of these immigrants consolidated, sometimes monopolized their positions, and formed small companies and workshops (Addo, 1974; Peil, 1974). In the process, the Yoruba in particular firmly established themselves in retail of manufactured goods in both urban and rural Gold Coast. The wealthiest moreover did their businesses by buying goods in large quantities and selling them especially to retailers for resale (Eades, 1994: 27).

iv) Post World War II migration re-configurations for economic foothold

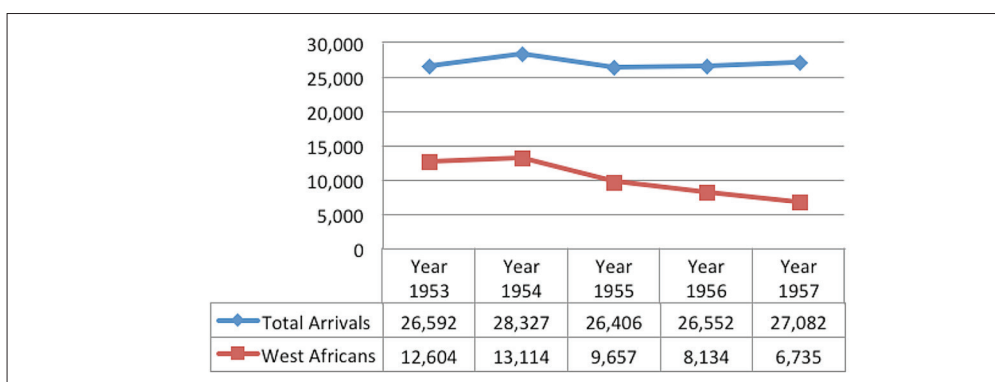
Post 1945 saw immigrants in many parts of the Gold Coast increasing their numbers with new in-flows. Additionally, children of immigrants had also become a formidable group in the colony. For example, thirty-five percent (35%) of all Hausas and twenty-six percent (26%) of 'Nigerians' in Accra at the time of the 1948 Census were born in the colony, specifically in Accra (Acquah 1958: 39). In some cases, immigrant settlements not only emerged but also expanded, constituting new districts for all manner of purposes including electioneering politics. Austin and Tordoff (1960: 133) report on the case of Kumasi where Hausa, Zaberma, and Gao migrants in the suburb of Aboabo formed important voting enclave in the north-eastern part of the city, voting, just like their north-western counterparts in Suame, because they were mainly Muslims even though residents of Suame were Asante converts to Islam, the *asante nkramo*. In the 1955 Population Survey of the Gold Coast, Asante, the indigenous people of Kumasi were outnumbered by migrants. Migrants (both internal and international) constituted 55% of the population of

¹³ At this point, Nigerians had monopolized the butchering sub-sector of the colonial economy (Peil, 1974: 368).

Kumasi. Families of Nigerian and other non-Gold Coast origin constituted 6% of Kumasi's population at the time.

Annual arrival statistics for migrants for the Gold Coast colony between 1953 and 1957 (Fig. 3) give indication of how the colony constituted a destination for migrants from the West African sub-region and elsewhere in the world. For all arrivals, two patterns are discernible. The first is that, for two periods (1954 and 1957), the arrival figures were above the five-year average (26,991.8), and the remaining three years being below. Secondly, there was reduction in the arrivals figure from 28,327 in 1954 to 26,406 in 1955, increasing marginally in 1956 before reaching 27,082 in 1957, the second highest in the five-year period.

FIGURE 3: ARRIVAL OF MIGRANTS IN GHANA, 1953-1957



Source: Ghana Central Bureau of Statistics (1958).

For West African arrivals, the statistics, apart from 1954 (13,114) which urged up marginally from the previous year's (12,604), showed a continuous downward trend, recording the lowest in the five-year period in 1957 (Fig. 3). This downward trend from 1954 to 1957 could be partly attributed to the nationalistic sentiments that characterized the preparations for the Gold Coast independence in 1957. Generally, migrants were caught up in the independence euphoria and not knowing their fate in independent Ghana, treaded cautiously. While some who were already in the colony left, for some prospective migrants, the attitude was to 'wait and see'. Males were generally more than females throughout the five-year period for both the total arrivals and the West African arrival figures.

As was the case in the post war period, migrants continued to have strong foothold on the Gold Coast economy. This was particularly highlighted by

political narratives at the time. In a speech in the National Assembly, Ofori-Atta is reported to have observed that, at the time of independence in 1957, non-nationals controlled as much as 98 percent of the import and distributive aspects of the economy, decreasing marginally to ninety-five in 1960 (Ofori-Atta, 1970; cf. Ofosu-Amaah, 1974: 456). Micro-level corroborative studies in the early 1950s provide more insights. In describing the findings of his inquiry into the ethnic origins of 3,612 traders in Kumasi in 1954, Rouch reported that, the Asantes with 472 (13%) were outnumbered by the Yoruba traders alone (805/22%) not to talk about all other immigrants engaged in trading activities there at the time (cf. Garlick, 1959: 6). In his study of 111 traders in Kumasi, Garlick also found that, nearly all the small scale haberdasheries were 'Lagosians', (that is, Yoruba); other Yorubas were in smoked fish trade; and yet others into the preparation of foods (e.g. 'agidi' and konkonte) for sale by hawkers. Additionally, Hausas from Nigeria (including those locally born) engaged in the sale of bagged maize. The Gao men from Niger, who were mainly into wholesale of smoked fish, sold to Asante and Kwahu retailers, and also controlled the dried and salted fish trade. Their women retailed fish in market stalls for their husbands (Garlick, 1959: 7).

5. A historicized mixed embeddedness in WAIEA in Ghana

History bestows us with the advantage of taking a glimpse of the evolutionary stages of society, and in this study, the key socio-economic, political, ecological and even geographical factors that conspired to create a platform and context for the evolution of WAIEA in Ghana. The geographical location of pre-colonial ethnic groups and kingdoms, their characteristics in terms of natural resource endowments and their particular historical connections with the rest of West African ethnic groups, among others lend useful outcomes to the historicized mixed embeddedness approach to understanding WAIEA in Ghana. Additionally, in historicizing the phenomenon of WAIEA in Ghana, I recognize the two historical milieu – pre-colonial and colonial periods. These two epochs had their own settings, endowments and demands, thus providing distinctive contexts for the evolution of these economic activities from the earliest time in pre-colonial era to the dawn of independence in 1957. In the process, immigrants' own characteristics (the networks and institutions) and strategies (in terms of trade organizational strategies) played useful roles.

First was the geography which provides pathway for understanding the historicized mixed embeddedness approach with regards to the phenomenon of WAIEA in Ghana. To better understand this, I offer two classifications, namely

locational advantage and the factor of ecology. Ghana's location within the ancient West African trading nexus was that of a central locality where, from the west, east and north, West African merchants met face-face and engaged in the exchange of their respective products. From the west were the Mande speaking Dyula people (the Wangara) all the way from Timbuktu and Jenne; from the north were the Yarse people from the then Mossiland, now Burkina Faso; and from the east were the Hausa people of present day Nigeria. Each of these three trading groups were themselves engaged in trade with other people and sought to extend their own trade to other places, particularly to pre-colonial Ghana where much of the trading activities terminated. For example, the Mande speaking Dyula people traded with the Moor of the Sahara in the north and brought some of the products of that trade eastward to what was then known as the 'Asante and its hinterlands'. Similarly, the Yarse people served as intermediaries to the historically important north-south trans-Saharan trade which terminated at the littoral (see for example Arhin, 1991). Added to the locational advantage was the factor of ecology and the products it offered. The forest-savannah ecology was the source of kola. The land of the forest-savannah was also the source of gold and other minerals. Kola and gold were the two most important trading items of the time which drew people from far off places. Thus the geography of Ghana in terms of location and ecology provided the context for WAIEA in the country. This was re-enforced by the historically specific need for kola – a forest product, and gold, an abundant fruit of the Asante-land (see Arhin, 1979; 1980; 1991; Ntewusu, 2011). Here I find embeddedness of the traders in ancient community resources, and in the external/structural and ecological context of states, ethnic groups/kingdoms and markets. The location of ancient Ghana and the fact of its accessibility by other ethnic groups and kingdoms mainly through the use of caravans (a key trade organization strategy by the immigrants), and the availability of the market specific products, among other factors created a fertile opportunity structure for immigrants to exploit, thus helping to convert almost the whole of the West African region into a veritable ancient trading enclave with differences in ecological endowments and products offset through trading exchanges.

There is no shortage of literature on the role of the Asante state in regulating market activity of stranger trading networks in the key international market in Salaga (see for example Lovejoy, 1971; 1980). This had important structuring implications for bargaining processes at the local level and thus fed into the embeddedness of the markets and states as well as the broader trading system. Also, Lovejoy's (1980) *Caravans of Kola* as well as the landlord system (see for

example Hill, 1966) offer important insights on the organizational structures of these economic activities in West Africa. Moreover, Walther (2012) talks about market-driven circulation processes of West African cross-border trading movements – an important part of the mixed embeddedness process of the trade which provided vital infrastructure through routes of the trading services to facilitate the ancient trade (see also Meagher, 2010). Additionally, Hashim and Meagher (1999) show how the British colonial state reshaped local cross-border trading activities with wide-ranging regulatory systems. Thus, the historicized mixed embeddedness of WAIEA should be grounded in multiple operational logics – the local Asante regulatory system (this includes Walther's idea of market-driven circulatory processes), the operational and organizational strategies and structures of the traders themselves (e.g. the caravan strategy and Hausa landlordism, etc.), and the impact of British colonial state policies and regulatory systems on the patterns of economic organization of the immigrants.

Also significant from historical point of view was the process of Islamic proselytization in pre-Colonial northern Ghana including the Volta basin and its catchment settlements to the north (see Rouch, 1954; Massing, 2000), a process which involved trading exchanges by Muslims who were themselves merchants, with the local Mole-Dagbane, Mossi, Mamprusi, Dagomba and Dagari people. This process was both peripatetic in the sense of moving from one place to the other but also involved settling for a period of time with both processes providing context for the exchange of 'Islamic' goods and other produce from the forest-savannah areas, and led to the development of markets centres, for example the kola market centres identified by Goody (1954) and Arhin (1979) in Gbuipe, Kafaba, Umfaha, Yendi, Salaga, Kintampo and Attebubu, among others, as well as Bergo which served as the gold trade route and settlement for Muslim gold merchants (Clarke, 1982). Other economic goods at the time included asses, pack-oxen, mules, and horses (Meyer, 1898; Arhin, 1979) for carriage and transportation purposes. Key to the development and growth of these cross-border economic activities was what can be described as an existing cordial commercial relations and permissive environment (Moyo, 2014) which allowed people of different ethnic groups/kingdoms – Dyula, Yarse, Hausa, Asante, Mole-Dagbane, Mossi, Mamprusi, Dagomba, Dagari, among others, to operate side-by-side and with each other.

The historical time also dictated the kinds of economic goods that formed the basis of this ancient economic/trading endeavour. Whereas in the pre-colonial times, the economic goods were mainly gold and kola, in the colonial times,

there were expansions in these economic goods to include diamond, cocoa and oil palm, as well as human labour. The introduction of new techniques in agriculture and mining made interest in other mineral resources – for example, diamond and cash crops, such as cocoa and oil palm – to be pursued and these required labour that was unavailable locally, thereby opening the way for immigrant labour from the West African sub-region to enter the country. Further, in extricating the significance of 19th century kola production/marketing in terms of the context it provided for cocoa cultivation/production, three pathways are identifiable following the classifications by Arhin (1970: 370-372; 1979: 14-15). First, the capitalist outlook and methods engendered by the kola trade were adapted to cocoa production and marketing. Secondly, the equipment and tools used in cocoa production were similar or same as those used in the kola production, and thirdly, the resources (capital and labour) acquired through the kola trade were switched to cocoa production. Thus, the need for the mineral resources and cash crops (the off-shoots of ecology), the need for labour in the mines and on farms, as well as in a myriad of infrastructural development activities – harbour, rail works, roads and bridges, schools, hospitals etc., point to the changing configuration of the economic goods in historically specific time and the forces that were at play with the contextual realities.

The Gold Coast continued to be the hub for a bustling economic activity within the West African sub-region. Different economic activities emerged including small-scale trading in beans, dried, salted and smoked fish, grains, tomatoes, yam, cigarette, matches, and herbs, in addition to those engaged in retail and wholesale of manufactured goods including drugs, and the so-called Japan and European goods. These were possible because of the presence of an enabling and permissive environment as the operational environment did not require any forms of registration and no policy to outline any ground rules. Elements of Granovetter's (1985) relational embeddedness also manifested between immigrants and indigenous labour engaged in mining activities for example in the Konongo mining enclave (Kumekpo and Amakye-Ansah, 1971) and in agricultural farms (Peil, 1974) – a kind of embeddedness evocative of arm's-length typology (impersonal, atomistic, and actors motivated by instrumental profit seeking) and as trustful co-existence and cooperative endeavor – a sort of good working relationship between them.

6. Conclusion

Two concluding thoughts emerge from this paper. First, the accounts point to three trading patterns from east, west and north, trading patterns which reflect diversity, not only in the economic pursuits of the immigrants but also the diversity of the immigrants themselves and the ways in which they organized themselves to eke out a living in foreign lands. These accounts reflect the specific historical context and grounded in the social and economic needs of the time and the terminus role of the Asante hinterland where the two most important products of the trading archetypes – kola and gold – originated and the whole of the trading activities terminated. The role of the ‘caste’ Mande traders, from north western direction, the Yarse from the north and the Hausa kola merchants from the east converged in the middle forest zone of Asante land. Thus Asante and its hinterlands constituted the melting point of the trading complex which connected kingdoms north, east and west, into a single trading commune. The key role of states and kingdoms in shaping this long distance trading activities and products of trade through regulatory and economic demands are apparent.

Secondly, this paper deploys historical and mixed embeddedness perspectives, i.e. the *historicized mixed embeddedness* approach to understand the WAIEA in Ghana. Historical accounts have periodization advantage and this helped to place discussions in their proper contexts to set boundaries and follow changes over time, and in addition, bring out the key determinants of the time in question. This created a historiography of West African immigrants' economic activities in Ghana from the pre-colonial time to the dawn of independence in 1957. The mixed embeddedness approach on the other hand helped to understand the contexts in which West African immigrants' economic activities in Ghana were embedded. The blended *historicized mixed embeddedness* approach expands on both the historical and the mixed embeddedness approaches operating individually. This paper thus contributes to the discourse on immigrants' economic activities and the embeddedness theories in unique ways. To immigrant entrepreneurship/business, it offers historical episodes from ancient West Africa, and to the embeddedness theories, the inveigling historical forces which interacted with contextual realities to shape the nature of the economic activities.

Biographical Note

Dr Thomas Antwi Bosiakoh was an Honorary Postdoctoral Associate at the Department of Sociology, Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia (April 2018-April 2019), where he completed his doctoral studies in December 2017

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