The Migration and Integration of Ejigbo-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire

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ABSTRACT

Uncensored cross-border movement of people and goods has been identified as a veritable means to enable inter-community development, especially at regional level, such as observable in the case of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nevertheless, ineffective implementation of relevant policies that seek to encourage 'free movement' by concerned member-states of the ECOWAS has remained the greatest threat to the goal of a 'borderless ECOWAS' region. Extant colonial undercurrents and inherent political instability among member-states of the ECOWAS have presented hindrances in this regard. By engaging an exploratory design, which combines case profiles, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs), this study investigates how subsisting cross-border relations between the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants and the Ivorian have presented desirable impetus to the regional integration project of the ECOWAS, which has remained largely elusive. The group of cross-border transporters, who are usually of Ejigbo-Yoruba origin, has been noted as the most visible facilitator of inter-community development across the borders because of their routine intermediary role between the 'home' and the 'host' communities, though in an informal way.

Keywords: Cote d'Ivoire, regional integration, inter-community development, migration, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Integration in West Africa, as being facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), is basically premised on productive enablement of unhindered cross-border movement among the region's estimated 300 million inhabitants. Such a development would assist in fast tracking the process of regional socio-economic development of the ECOWAS, which comprises of fifteen countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Indeed, a productive integration of the region will enhance its positioning within the larger global economy (Somda, 2011: 1–3). In this respect, the ECOWAS' Monitoring and Evaluation system (2011) has sought to develop a common understanding among all stakeholders in the process of executing priority activities ingrained in the regional strategic plan.

Inferring from the ECOWAS' fundamental principle of free movement of persons and goods, the modified regional strategic plan identified six priority areas for the region from 2011 to 2015. These were peace, security and good governance; cooperation and development; competition and fairness; economic and monetary integration; institutional capacity building, and finally international prospects (ECOWAS 2011: 1).

The pattern of cross-border migration within West Africa could be situated across three evolutionary paths: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. Meanwhile, a pre-colonial classification of related practices as intra-border or cross-border could be impracticable. For instance, during the pre-colonial period, the region was not identifiable as a composition of independent states (Nwosu 2003: 1). Nevertheless, cross-border migration among the existing kingdoms was evident in the movement of natives who either participated in or who were victims of slave capture and/or trade, inter-ethnic uprising and wars. The intra-tribal war within the Yorubaland between late 18th century and early 19th century caused massive migration across parts of West Africa (Adeniran 2009: 3676–8).

The advent of European colonialism towards the end of 19th century presented a new interpretation to the phenomenon of cross-border migration within the West Africa subregion. The policies and programs of the colonial administration resulted in the geographical and political demarcation of borders, and in the monetization of the economy. While the colonial economic policies within the emergent West African states encouraged migration from hinterland settlements to emerging urban locations, they indirectly discouraged crossborder interactions, especially along the Anglophone-Francophone divide (Adeniran 2009). This was basically due to conflicting intents of the British policy of association and the French policy of assimilation applied in respective countries within the sub-region. Yet ironically such colonial creation could not stop the people from sustaining their pre-colonial socio-economic interactive patterns in post-colonial West Africa. For instance, a good reference is the case of the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants from Anglophone Nigeria who have found it convenient to trade and live in the Francophone West African country of Cote d'Ivoire, despite inherent colonial, linguistic and geographical impediment (Adeniran 2010: 12–24). A good determinant of this process has been existing migrants' network along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor.

In this paper, the role of open migratory system in facilitating the emergence of a regional identity for the ECOWAS is explored. Open migratory system in this context entails the obliteration of physical borders in the process of transborder interactions. For instance, the subsisting 'ECOWAS Protocol on free movement' is quite apt here. The protocol emphasizes the significance of unhindered movement of person, goods and services within the West African sub-region. Aside from easing the process of socio-economic interactions across the borders, Olutayo and Adeniran (2015) have suggested that relevant developmental ideas and initiatives would be seamlessly spread across the borders with a 'free movement' policy. A highlight of migration trends within the ECOWAS region is presented in this research. The study equally analyses

possible outcomes of intrinsic cross-cultural relations between the Ejigbo-Yoruba and their Ivorian hosts, and how such relations could impact on specific developmental intentions of individuals, and the larger ECOWAS region. Specifically, the relationship between cross-border migration and intercommunity development within the region is explored; so also an explanation on useful actions at both individual and institutional levels is presented this work.

2. Methodology

The study utilized an exploratory design, which combines case profiles, in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect primary data. The case profiles engaged eight traditional leaders of the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants' communities (4 current leaders in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire comprising of 2 male migrants' leaders and 2 female migrants' leaders; and 4 returneemigrants' leaders comprising of 2 former male migrants' leaders and 2 former female migrants' leaders. First-hand information on transnational activities of the Ejigbo-Yoruba along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor were obtained through these 8 case profiles. The IDIs were conducted to seek for individual migrants and individual returnee-migrants' accounts of their migration's trajectory. 20 IDIs (which involved 5 males and 5 females in each of Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire and Ejigbo, Nigeria) and 8 FGDs comprising of 4 males: '18-39 years' and '40 years and above' (Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire), '18-39 years' and '40 years and above' (Ejigbo, Nigeria) and 4 females: '18-39 years' and '40 years and above' (Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire), '18-39 years' and '40 years and above' (Ejigbo, Nigeria). Each of the FGDs was made up of 8 participants. The FGDs presented the study with useful group reflections on migrants and returneemigrants' transborder experiences. Secondary data that probed into existing historical and policy-focused evidences were derived from archival and governmental sources. Purposive sampling (and snowball sampling) technique was employed in selecting the research subjects. The case profiles, FGDs and IDIs were conducted between June and September 2010. Meanwhile, the methods of content analysis and ethnographic summary are employed in the process of data analysis.

3. CONTEXTUALIZING THE ECOWAS FREE MOVEMENT PROTOCOL

Over the years, the ECOWAS Commission (which is the authority that coordinates the day-to-day running of the ECOWAS) has been making notable attempts at strengthening inter-community interactions within its regional framework on free movement of persons and goods (ECOWAS 2011: 2). For

instance, the ECOWAS Treaty on free movement of persons, residence and establishment (May 1979) aimed at creating a borderless West African region, where unobstructed movement of individuals of West African descent, their expertise and commodities would be guaranteed. Specifically, Paragraph 2; Sub-paragraph d; Article 2 of the ECOWAS Treaty enjoined all member-states to ensure a systemic "abolition of obstacles to free movement of persons, services and capital" within the sub-region. Paragraph 1; Article 27 of the ECOWAS Treaty actually confers a status of "community citizens" on all residents of ECOWAS countries (ECOWAS 2000). Of recent, the ECOWAS Commission, in conjunction with the World Bank's Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Organization (ALCO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) West Africa Trade Hub and other interested private sector partners, launched two Border Information Centers (BICs) along the Ghana-Togo border. All of these efforts are basically geared towards enhancing un-hindered human movement and trading across West African borders (Braimah 2011: 1–4).

Against the background of the foregoing, it has been conspicuous that the process of regional integration in West Africa has continued to be foot-dragging, or, elusive because none of the stated objectives in the Protocol has been functionally realized up till present, except for the institutionalization of a common travel passport for the sub-region. Subsisting colonial undercurrent, especially along the Anglophone-Francophone divide, within the region has been implicated in this respect. For instance, the region still relies on multiple monetary zones, multiple linguae francae, and of course, overlapping regional groupings in the likeness of the ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

While the developments that spurred the drive towards regional integration projects in the European Union (EU) and in the ECOWAS were contextually different, the goal in both cases has been similar; that is, the obliteration of borders. In the case of the EU, extant need for sustainable peace post-Second World War necessitated 'the beginnings of cooperation' (1945–1959) among its six founding nations of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Netherlands (Haas 1970). In the case of the ECOWAS, the need to overcome differentiating colonial tendencies (especially along the Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy) among emergent independent nation-states led to the signing of the "Treaty of Lagos", which focuses on creating a borderless ECOWAS, in 1978 (Adeniran 2014). While the EU has guardedly proceeded toward deeper integration (though with inherent strains, such as the challenge being posed to the Union by Brexit), the ECOWAS has persistently regressed toward deeper disintegration despite modeling its Treaty on "Free Movement" (1979) after the EU's "Treaty of Rome", which created the "European Economic Community" (EEC) in 1957. A good reference here is the case of Mauritania which has withdrawn her membership of the ECOWAS and the continued allegiance of all Francophone West African countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal to UEMOA.

4. EJIGBO-YORUBA MIGRATORY TREND

As observed in Iwe-Itan Omo Yoruba (1958) – which was obtained from the Palace Archive of Oba-Yoruba [King of Yoruba migrants] in Abobo-Abidjan in 2010 – by mid-1950s an estimated 55,000 Nigerian immigrants were living in various Ivorian regions. Of this figure, Ejigbo-Yoruba immigrants were estimated to be about 85% of the entire Nigerian immigrants in Cote d'Ivoire. As corroborated by Asiwaju (1992), such large number of Nigerian immigrants in Cote d'Ivoire (and in other West African countries) during this period was remarkable in the light of different colonial experiences of Nigeria and Francophone West African countries. The post-independence pro-immigration policies of the late Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny were considered favorable to immigrants from other West African countries; hence the increasing interest in migrating to Cote d'Ivoire (Adeniran 2009). The immigrants were treated as citizens, and not as immigrants by the Ivorian government and the Ivorian people. These regional immigrants were given voting rights by the Ivorian government and they also played notable roles in the building of the modern Ivorian nation. The stability of the regime of late Ivorian President could be partly traced to the granting of voting rights to most of West African immigrants in Cote d'Ivoire during his reign (Adeniran 2010). According to Kivisto and Faist (2010: 56), between gaining independence from France in 1960 and the first military coup in 1999, Cote d'Ivoire was relatively more stable than other countries in the region. Remarkable growths in its export economy were experienced. As noted by de Bruijin, van Dijk and Foeken (2001), the country attracted other West African nationals. Such attraction has been based on long standing traditions of trans-local and transnational networks of trade relations within the sub-region.

Meanwhile, a prevalent point of discourse amongst the Ejigbo–Yoruba migrants in Cote d'Ivoire as of present is that the situation is different from President Houphouët-Boigny's era.¹ In terms of social, economic and political participation, Cote d'Ivoire now offers limited opportunities to immigrants due to political instability in the country. Indeed, the ideology of 'Ivority' as espoused during the regime of the late President, which sought to integrate all West African immigrants into the socio-economic and political realm of the Ivorian society, has become obliterated (Bruijn, van Dijk and Foeken 2001, Olutayo and Adeniran 2015).

In spite of a setback in mobility and migratory practices amongst the people of West Africa, a recurring development is that boundaries between the peoples of the same or different culture (ethnic group) in different countries are routinely perceived by the people as unnatural, such as the case with the Ejigbo-Yoruba, who have been able to sustain the trend of cross-border interaction within the

¹ Observations, Abidjan, 20–30/06/2010; FGD, Male, 18–39 years, Abidjan, 27/06/2010; FGD, Female, 18– 39 years, Abidjan, 25/06/2010.

region from pre-colonial period up till present. They usually consider related process of cross-border movement as one taking place within the same sociocultural space rather than between two different countries. The Seme border between Nigeria and Benin Republic, the Aflao border between Togo Republic and Ghana, and the Elubo/Noe border settlements between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire are formidable references in this respect (Adeniran 2010).

Of all hindrances standing between mobility (and migration) and development in West Africa, improper implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement of persons and goods by ECOWAS member-states has remained the most intractable. To a considerable extent, it has served as the pivot around which all other difficulties have revolved (Adeniran 2011). In situations where free movement is even allowed, processing of documents for trade or residence purpose has routinely proved herculean for the migrants. However, through a process of informal arrangement, the Ejigbo-Yoruba have been able to deploy their transnational capabilities, such as social capital and social networking to surmount this challenge.

Often time, most national governments within the sub-region do engage in usage of the migrants' communities as scapegoats for obvious failure in delivering services to their people. For instance, during the economic recession of early 1980s in Nigeria, the Ghanaian migrants were accused of being the cause of mass unemployment in Nigeria. They were subsequently rounded up, and deported from Nigeria by the government, without following any due process (Adepoju 2005; Adeniran 2010: 4–8). Of recent, the Ejigbo-Yoruba have been used as scapegoats during the regime of the deposed Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo as well. They were roundly deported to Nigeria by the regime of the former President Gbagbo because the Nigerian government did not support his continued stay in power.

Besides, the persistent high handedness and corruption of border officials has been hampering most cross-border efforts targeted at development by individuals and institutions in West Africa. As shown in a transnational investigation by Adeniran (2010: 12), approximately 85 % of security and border posts between Lagos in Nigeria and Noe in Cote d'Ivoire forcefully solicit for bribes from Ejigbo-Yoruba travelers, even when all of their required travel documents are complete.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the problem that colonialism created in the process of migration and development in West Africa. Essentially, it put a stop to hitherto unrestricted cross-border interactive pattern amongst the then existing kingdoms and empires (Adeniran 2010: 6–10). Significantly, the colonial monetization of the West African economy, which was loosely patterned, has facilitated the operation of multiple monetary zones within the sub-region. Also, the implementation of three different colonial languages – English, French and Portuguese – in different areas created a linguistic divide. For instance, the Yoruba people on the side of Benin Republic became French speaking, while the Yoruba people on the side of Nigeria became English

speaking. Besides, the contradictory functioning of the ECOWAS and UEMOA has been antithetical to the process of free movement and socio-economic development within the sub-region. While the ECOWAS focuses on transiting the region into a single market with a common currency, UEMOA has focused on sustenance of a common monetary policy for only the Francophone members of the region (Adeniran 2014: 1–5; ECOWAS 2010; Olutayo and Adeniran 2015: 2).

5. THE CROSS-BORDER TRANSPORTERS

The entrance of numerous West African indigenes, especially the Ejigbo-Yoruba, into cross-border transportation from mid-1950s, has assisted the sustenance of the migratory trend, and the pre-migratory relationship between migrants and their relatives left back home. Courtesy of the connecting role of the cross-border transporters, implementation of various developmental ideas and initiatives like construction of public schools, worship centers, public lavatories and business centers across the borders, and the facilitation of larger regional integration have been made feasible. Contacting home and recruiting new migrants have become very easy compared with when travelers and mail took several months to arrive at their destinations at the outset of the Ejigbo-Yoruba migration expedition in mid-19th century. Even in getting funds for individual and community based projects across the borders, the transport operators have been the most important factor within the West African transnational space (Adeniran 2011: 112). As affirmed by a notable cross-border transport operator:

Our role [as cross-border drivers] has been the main 'tonic' that keeps the migrants' network growing and, indeed, alive...honestly, without us [cross-border drivers] . . . connecting Nigeria from Cote d'Ivoire would have been difficult....through us, individual migrants do buy lands in Ejigbo [Nigeria] and complete a whole building without visiting home we [cross-border drivers] do take money to Nigeria on behalf of the migrants . . . we do collect pictures of various stages of migrants' projects . . . even various contributions to the development of our town [Ejigbo, Nigeria] and school fees for the migrants' wards and relations are usually sent through us [cross-border transporters] (Case Profile, Male, Cross-border Transporter, 56 years, Abidjan, June 26, 2010).

Apparently, cross-border transporters, like the respondent above, have been sustaining the migrants' network growth and development in a remarkable way. Through the services they offer, individual migrants and their relatives back in Nigeria do not have to travel on every occasion that they have to communicate, particularly on proposed or ongoing projects.

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Cross-border vehicles, like the one in Figure 1 below, ply Ejigbo (Nigeria)-Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) route on a daily basis, and usually in convoy. Meanwhile, the inscription of "ECOWAS" on this particular vehicle (even though the owner has nothing to do with the regional body ECOWAS) calls for an immediate interest. As applicable to most of the operators, the operator of this particular vehicle (who is an Ejigbo-Yoruba) prefers a larger regional identity, which will take care of both Francophone and Anglophone concerns in the course of his transnational engagement; indeed, such fleet branding that depicts larger regional identity is a common practice amongst cross-border transport operators along Nigeria-Ivorian migratory corridor.



Figure 1. One of the Cross-border Vehicles. (Source: Author 2010)

Interactions between the migrants and their relatives back home have been mutually benefiting. Relations and friends at home have, often time, been helpful in monitoring projects belonging to migrant relatives based in Cote d'Ivoire, and in sending Nigerian made goods and wares to the migrants. So also, those in Cote d'Ivoire have often assisted their relatives in setting up businesses in Nigeria.

6. INTEGRATION IN COTE D'IVOIRE

Notable complexities subsist in the manner by which migrants tend to present themselves within the transnational space of West Africa. Nevertheless, two issues have remained paramount in understanding what transnational identity actually entails and how it is projected in related interactive processes (Adeniran 2011). Firstly, the migrants' ethnic network (or association) routinely plays a

significant role in creating a group-based sense of self-presentation by the migrants within the host society. Secondly, the social space within which specific interaction occurs is an equally crucial determinant of individuals' mode of self-presentation. Hence, an aggregate of network's structure and subsisting interactive space often determines the projectable transnational identity of individual migrants. This is surmised in the IDI session below:

Like me, no one knows that I am a Nigerian except I reveal it.... I have obtained the Ivorian permanent residence permit because of my business ... and I can speak French very well (IDI, Male, Trader, 40 years and above, Abidjan, 19/06/2010).

From the IDI's extract above it can be observed that personal business concerns necessitated initial identification with the host society. Subsequently, the need to enable sustainable existence in Cote d'Ivoire has facilitated continuous association with the country. Nevertheless, the migrant's action portends a positive "un-intended" impact on larger regional integration drive of the ECOWAS.

Preceding potent integration into the Ivorian social space, the need for language re–orientation wherein individual migrants are educated in colloquial Abidjan French is imperative. The migrants' native language, which is Yoruba, is usually employed in households' interactions but less so in public interactions. Indeed, of all the transnational requirements, the ability to overcome subsisting cross-border language barrier is deemed the most expedient (Adeniran 2010). A French learning center was established in Ejigbo, Nigeria in1969 by Cote d'Ivoire–based Ejigbo indigenes. Interestingly, the inscription on the center's entrance – "learn French for better tomorrow" (see Pix I below) – is conspicuously indicative of the significance of such language to the functioning of the Ejigbo society as a whole, though English is the lingua franca in Nigeria (Observations, Ejigbo, 01–10/08/2010).



Figure 2. French Learning Centre in Ejigbo, Nigeria. (Source: Author 2010)

It is important to note that such language versatility is most useful in the course of social and economic interaction within the public space in Cote d'Ivoire, for example, in processes of trading and acquisition of residence permit. It is also useful in interactive processes between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire (Adeniran 2010). Therefore, it has become a potent denominator for realizing individual and collective intents within the transnational social space.

At another realm, incidence of cross-cultural marriages has been a recurring event between the Ejigbo–Yoruba migrants and their Ivorian hosts. As noted by a male IDI respondent in Macoury-Abidjan:

Intermarriage is now very common between the indigenes and us [Ejigbo-Yoruba], but . . . it has had negative influence on our claim as Ejigbo-Yoruba, especially among our ladies and women who married Ivorian men (IDI, Male, Tyre Retailer, 40 Years, Macoury-Abidjan, June 19, 2010).

While various motives, for instance attainment of social and economic space within the host society, have often underscored such practice, what has been quite conspicuous is that such marital relationship routinely provides the migrants with the much-desired leverage in the process of entrenching themselves into the host society on one hand. On the other hand, Ivorian who are married to Ejigbo–Yoruba are routinely linked up with the Nigerian market and enjoy replicating some of Nigerian ways of life. For instance, the usual pattern of partying on roads and highways amongst the Yoruba in Nigeria is already infiltrating the Ivorian society (Adeniran 2010; Observations, Abidjan, 21/06–02/07/2010).

The practice of "transnational subsistence dualism" among the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants in Cote d'Ivoire has been a veritable platform for enabling the process of regional integration within the West African sub-region. This practice entails concurrent affiliation to two societies in terms of economic, social, and even, political participation, usually at regional level (Adeniran 2011: 132; Levitt and Schiller 2004). This pattern of migrants' affiliation with the host society and the home country has become more expedient in view of the ongoing intent of the ECOWAS Commission to transmute the region from "an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People", in which all of the obstacles on the path of regional migration and integration would become exorcised.

7. EJIGBO AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN COTE D'IVOIRE AND NIGERIA

Undoubtedly, prevalent cross-border interaction along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor presents a formidable prospect to inter-community development initiatives within West Africa. Of greater significance in this regard is the impetus it portends for larger regional developmental drive. Aside

from enhancement of individual and communal developmental possibility across the borders, subsisting cross-border contact routinely diminishes cultural differences, as observable in the case of the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants in Cote d'Ivoire. Such cultural variations have included colonial cleavage, language barriers, differing institutional peculiarities and so forth.

In West Africa, cross-border transporters (who are mainly of Ejigbo-Yoruba origin) have been playing a remarkable role in connecting individuals across the borders (Adeniran 2011: 114). In the process, human and socio-economic development amongst member-states of ECOWAS is enabled.

As a result of ongoing cross-border interaction in West Africa, tangible efforts are being geared towards the development of households and communities across the borders. For instance, the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants in Cote d'Ivoire have been contributing towards individual and communal projects in Nigeria (see Figure 3 and Figure 4 below). All of such assistance, however, is usually routed through the cross-border transporters. The migrants rarely use other means, such as, money or bank transfer (Adeniran 2011). Usually, trust on the basis of friendship, family or ethnic affinity is the impetus for sending money and goods between Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria. In addition to sending money back home, the migrant communities embark on personal and communal projects within the host society. This development has made inter-community development initiatives and practices feasible with the West African sub-region.



Figure 3. A Private Shopping Mall in Ejigbo, Nigeria owned by an Ejigbo-Yoruba migrant. (Source: Author, Nigeria, 2010)



Figure 4. A Community High School project funded by the migrants in Ejigbo. (Source: Author, Nigeria, 2010)

Individual and communal development initiatives on both sides of the migratory corridor (that is, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria) have presented potent promises to the larger ECOWAS regional development, if well harnessed (Adeniran, 2014).

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The case study of the Ejigbo-Yoruba migrants (both short-term and long-term participants) along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor has provided a potent platform for understanding an emerging trend in regional mobility. For instance, the capability of ongoing migratory pattern along the Nigerian-Ivorian migratory corridor in stimulating regional integration has been noteworthy. This would be relevant in contextualizing and explaining the significance of the removal of barriers in the course of cross-border-interaction, especially at regional level. Although all of the transnational processes discussed in this study have reflected a pattern of informal interaction, they have conspicuously presented a veritable lifeline for realizing the regional integration agenda of the ECOWAS Commission. Despite inherent clogs, the practice of 'transnational subsistence dualism' by the Ejigbo-Yoruba in Cote d'Ivoire has continued to present hope to eventual transmutation of the West African sub-region from 'an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People', wherein all identifiable hindrances to free flow of people and goods (such as colonial undercurrents, language barriers and dissimilar immigration and custom policies) would become obliterated.

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