June 2010

Book Review: Globalization and Transnational Migrations: Africa and Africans in the Contemporary Global System

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol4/iss2/12

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Book Review


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International contacts, exchanges and migrations are not new. Since the beginning of history, international and cross-border movements, travels, trade and migration have been taking place. International trading companies were formed, promoted and financed by states, groups of individuals and governments to explore and, at times, pillage and conquer distant and less privileged communities and countries for the benefit of the more privileged ones. In human history, the Romans, Phoenicians, religious crusaders, European slave dealers and their collaborators and the colonizers operated internationally and in the global world of their time. All these worldwide enterprises were “globalization” of a sort and were undertaken by almost the same group of countries and races that are the main protagonists of today’s “globalization.”

The book, Globalization and Transnational Migrations: Africa and Africans in the Contemporary Global System contains the scholarly contributions of twenty vibrant scholars from across the globe. Divided into eighteen chapters of six sections, it illuminates the travails and experiences of African migrants in a globalized world. The opening chapters of the first section of the book conceptualize transnational migrations, making it accessible for the non-academic and academic reader. The second section, which opens with Kunle Amuwo’s comparative analysis of the travails of the African skilled migrants in France and South Africa, familiarizes readers with the challenges of identity and citizenship facing the immigrants in foreign countries. Two other works in the section built on his stimulating approach. Although the significance of race and racial perceptions is implied in Marjolaine Paris and Angele
Smith’s contributions on racial discriminations against African immigrants in this section, both authors focus on the experiences of different sets of black people. While Marjolaine Paris concentrates on the predicament of the "black economic elite" in racialised French society, Angele Smith examines the plight of asylum seekers in creating a sense of identity as they settle in community and cross borders in Ireland. Both works complement Kunle Amuwo’s analysis of the situations in France and South Africa.

The activities of the police in Africa over the years have gained the attention of scholars, policy makers, diplomats, journalists to mention but few. In section three of this book, Chapter Seven by Kamau Moffat discusses the harassment and physical violence to which refugees in urban centers are subjected in Kenya. Moffat’s analysis on the travails of these refugees in the hands of the Kenyan police is well articulated and comprehensive, but it is quite shameful to state (as cited on page 128 of the book), that the Kenyan Police were kept uninformed of any accepted exceptions to the camp confinement policy. This is a major puzzle in this chapter that clearly articulates the experiences of refugees in Kenya where an administrative exception developed by the UNHCR in line with the Kenyan Ministry of Home Affairs enables those within the exceptions limit to live outside the camp. Yet, refugees are subjected to harassment and physical violence by the police. This flagrant human rights violation by the Kenya Police partly explains the perception that regardless of immigrants’ status, foreigners are not safe in the hands of Africa’s police. The chapter therefore creates the potential for change in this sector in every African country.

One may also read the volume as a major source of the significant changes wrought by globalization. Chapter eleven of this book examines the culture and identity of Yoruba women in a globalized world. It contributes to the understanding of the strength and changing position of women in the contemporary world. The work has become a veritable source of how Yoruba women are ensconced in the anxiety of influence. However, the number of field interviews conducted is inadequate, because the majority of those interviewed are educated elites and professionals. The voices of women who occupy the traditional space were thereby unheard. Does it mean that they were not affected by globalization?

The book sheds light on the fact that the global flow of capital and over concentration of industries and investment can create national migration on a large scale in addition to international migration across borders, and in other respects affect livelihood ranging from consumption patterns to religious matters and the crisis of memory. The book is a major contribution to knowledge in the sense that it examines transnational migration from an African perspective. More importantly, the language and engaging prose of this book is not saturated
with heavy literary jargon. It is thus accessible to scholars across fields who are interested in racial, ethnic and national discursive formations beyond borders.

Typographical errors occur on pages 111 and 290 respectively. There are other deficits. Africans' search for qualitative education in foreign universities, especially in Europe and America, has been on the increase in recent times in spite of the huge financial requirement and immigration constraints attached to it. Thus, a chapter on the experience of the Africans schooling abroad and the underemployed professionals doing menial jobs in these countries, and perhaps another one on remittances would have added more strength to this well packaged book. Aside from this, however, the book is a reader's companion from the beginning to the end most especially with the myriads of empirical facts and examples used by the contributors in their analyses of transnational migration and the African immigrants' experience. Finally, the index and other compiled data make the book useful for the reference library.