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## Book Review: Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora

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## Book Review

**Spickard, James and Afe Adogame. (2010). *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora*. Leiden: E.J. Brill; ISBN-10: 90 04 18730 8**

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*Religion Crossing Boundaries* is a welcome addition to the growing literature on transnationalism, especially by focusing on African religious transnational experiences in the age of globalization.

In their general introduction to the volume, James Spickard and Afe Adogame indicate that Africa's religious transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, at least as far as African Diaspora history is concerned. For example, through the slave trade, Africans brought various traditional religious expressions and Islam into the Americas. In the case of the traditional religious practices, they syncretized them with Catholicism and other New World elements to produce such powerful new religious forms as Santeria, Candomble, and Voudon. Globalization—especially its features such as economic interconnectedness, instant communication, high technology, fast travel, and disappearing borders—makes this new phase of transnationalism significant. Technology use has become so pervasive that there are numerous African teleconference prayer groups all over the United States.

The book covers critical subjects in the search for meaning and relevance by millions of Africa's new migrants in their new environments or adopted countries. The book also demonstrates that these new migrants are as varied, and their religious experiences are as complex, as the countries of destination and the processes of getting there. Not satisfied with transnational religious experiences among the New African Diaspora in the West, the book also examines religious transnationalism within Africa. And, it discusses the impact of religious crusades and revivals led by foreign evangelists on African religiosity and Pentecostal leaders' search for validation and recognition.

The organization of the book is effective. After the general introduction by the editors, the book's twelve chapters are divided into three parts. Part 1 is on

religious transnationalism in the West and it has four chapters. Part 2 is on religious transnationalism within Africa, and it has six chapters. The last two chapters are placed in Part 3, which examines the global implications of transnational African religions. The editors' general introduction summarizes the content of the chapters. I will only refer to a few as they relate to this review.

The book has many strong points. First, the general introduction is robust and well written. It does not engage in a complex definition of transnationalism; rather, it provides a simple, straightforward characterization: "Quite simply, people move and they take their religions with them" (pp.7-8). One only needs to add that "move" refers to crossing borders, which may be national or ethnic, real or imagined. Secondly, the book looks at religion in its glocal (simultaneously global and local) setting. According to the editors, "This book explores such transnational localism for one particular set of religions—those that are based in, or connected to, sub-Saharan Africa" (p.2). The editors further state that: "We have further decided to center our chapters only on those religions that have at least one foot in Africa, so to speak—leaving out those groups that operate solely in migrants' new homes" (p.22). Thirdly, the book examines models of transnational religious experiences based on current literature. Seven such models were examined and presented.

We have identified six other patterns of such border-crossings, which we call "religious bi-localism," "religious cacophony," "reverse missions," "South-South religious trade," "transnational organization theory," and "deterritorialized religious identity."... Together with the Ellis Island model, these patterns describe a very complex transnational religious scene. (p. 11)

Fourthly, the book compares religious transnationalism to business transnationalism thus:

Running a transnational religious organization is no easier than is running a transnational business, and poses many of the same problems. Cross-cultural misunderstanding, economic inequality, bureaucracy, and offensive power relationships all get in the way of smooth operation... Organizationally speaking, hierarchical transnational religions do not seem to work any better than do hierarchical transnational corporations. (pp.15-16)

Indeed, many transnational religious organizations are a business. And, we might add, a million dollar business globally. Prosperity preachers are all over the place. From the poverty-stricken families looking to God for sources of their next

meal, to their affluent cousins anxious to launder their ill-gotten wealth, all seem ready to “sow” so that they might reap abundant blessings and prosperity.

A number of chapters make interesting reading. First and foremost is Chapter 1 by Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebaniwi, with the main title of “The Visa God.” What a lucid chapter on a subject that is almost taboo! The chapter examines the “the role that religion plays in transnational migration *before* actual migration... how would-be migrants turn to and instrumentalize religion in a context in which the entire migration process” (pp.32-33). This chapter should be placed in the hands of every consular officers of Western countries in Africa, particularly those of the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

Chapter 9 and Chapter 12 are two other very interesting chapters. Chapter 9 focuses on gender in transnational religious movements in Kenya and the Kenyan Diaspora. Chapter 12 discusses the creation of Afrikania, a religion-nationalist movement, created in postcolonial Ghana, drawing heavily on Egyptian religion.

The book has several weaknesses, though. I refer to three of them. First, there are obvious gaps or omissions. The book does not address transnationalism in Islam. It focuses predominantly on Pentecostalism, but even then many of the big transnational religious organizations, such as Nigeria’s Redeemed Christian Church and the Deeper Life Bible Ministry, are not examined; and even then, the chapter that focuses on Winners Chapel (Chapter 11) is not truly transnational, rather it is an analysis of one of the church’s revivals in Nigeria. Indeed, the subtitle may be changed to reflect this focus on Pentecostalism. None of the chapters addresses transnationalism among other Christian denominations, such as African reverend fathers and sisters serving in Catholic Churches across Canada and the United States. Also, there are only two chapters on aspects of transnational African traditional religions, and one of them does not involve border crossings of any sort.

Second, the relevance of a few chapters is doubtful. There is no doubt that the chapters are of great quality, based on original research, but the authors seem to be struggling to re-orient their discussions to fit the subject of transnationalism.

Third, the book is overly qualitative, but perhaps that is the nature of the discipline. A few theoretical notions are suggested, but not sustained. Moreover, there are no quantitative details. A book like this could help readers by providing

such details as number of migrants, number of members of particular religious organization, size of budgets, list of activities, etc.

To conclude, Afe Adogame and James Spickard have given us a very important book on a very important subject. A scholarly and complex volume, *Religion Crossing Boundaries* is very readable and several chapters are quite enjoyable