AFRICANS IN GLOBAL MIGRATION

SEARCHING FOR PROMISED LANDS

edited by

JOHN A. ARTHUR,
JOSEPH TAKOUGANG,
and THOMAS OWUSU

Africans in Global Migration
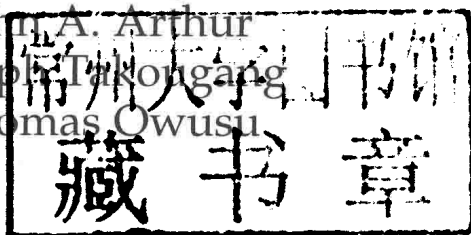
Searching for Promised Lands

Edited by
John A. Arthur
Joseph Takougang
Thomas Owusu

Preface

The first decade of the 21st century continues to witness the massive migration of Africans from the continent. Spurred by negative economic, political and social factors that have plagued the continent since independence in conjunction with the global economy and technological revolution of the last two decades or so, these African migrants are seeking refuge in the new global village, from Asia to the Middle East and from Europe to North America. As a result of its colonial and historical ties with the continent, Europe provided opportunities for most African migrants in the decades after the independence. Recently, however, the United States and Canada have become the favorite destination in this migration trajectory. While this change might be attributed to stricter immigration policies in many European countries especially in Britain, France and Germany, the relatively benign policies in the United States, including passage by the United States Congress of the Refugee Act of 1980, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and the immigration Act of 1990 have also contributed to the surge in African immigration there. It is currently estimated that there are about 1.7 million African immigrants in the United States.

In Canada, the major policy initiative that facilitated an increase in African immigration to the country was the liberalization of immigration laws in 1971, which removed all the race-based policies and other restrictions and enabled non-whites to enter into the country. The majority of African immigrants in Canada, therefore, arrived after 1970. Currently, there are about 280, 000 African immigrants in Canada. And, unlike their predecessors who came to the United States ostensibly to obtain an education before returning to their respective countries, many of these new immigrants are obtaining permanent residency status or American citizenship. According to figures from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), 583,594 African immigrants

obtained permanent residency status in the nearly four decades between 1960 and 1999 compared to 857,988 between 2000 and 2010.

These immigrants come from all regions and every country on the continent, with the largest coming from West (492,030) and East (397,262) Africa. Nigeria (209,908), Ethiopia (148,221), Egypt (138,194), Ghana (108,647), and Kenya (87,267) remain the leading nations, other nations such as Somalia, Sudan, and many of the Francophone and Lusophone states on the continent have also witnessed significant number of immigrants in recent years. While many of these immigrants are highly educated, there are also many without basic reading and writing skills. Women are also becoming important players in African migration. It is estimated that 46.6 percent of all the African immigrants in the United States are women. Indeed, these women are not just spouses who might have migrated to meet their spouses. In many cases they are pioneers in the global migration process

Regardless of their sex, country and region of origin, or their educational status, these diaspora Africans are all united by their common African origin and the quest to seek a better life for themselves and their families in the diaspora and for those still at home. The search for global economic and cultural opportunities is the primary motivation behind the migration of Africans. The intensification of this migration in recent times speaks to the increasing opportunities (technological, cultural, social, political, and economic) that are now available for Africans to engage in international travel. Persistence migration of skilled and unskilled Africans also speaks to the deterioration of opportunities for Africans to achieve their goals and aspirations. In this regard, migration has become a powerful agency of social change in Africa. Migration culminates in the fulfillment of unmet needs, structural inequalities, and the inability of African central governments to create the conditions that are conducive for Africans to thrive. Retaining their citizens at home and providing them with adequate opportunities and incentives to stay home and contribute their quota toward growth of the region will continue to prove a daunting task for African governments. The outcomes of this migration will certainly continue to impact the region, its peoples, and institutions for a long time to come.

The chapters in this volume, all by scholars trained in the humanities and social science with experience as immigrants themselves or extensive research in diaspora studies, explore various facets of the contemporary diaspora experience. The themes reflect the dynamism, complexity, and diversity of the African immigrant experiences. It explores the migration of Africans and the formation of African immigrant communities highlighting the cultural, economic, social, and political factors involved in the creation of these communities. In recognition of the complexity of the immigrant experi-

ence, the book also addresses the institutional factors in the host society that converge to shape how these immigrants define their migratory experiences. The book also explores the nature and types of transnational connections that African immigrants maintain with their homelands, the rationale for these ties, and their implications for the settlement, adaptation, and the relationships with both the host society and their homelands.

John A. Arthur, University of Minnesota, Duluth
Joseph Takougang, University of Cincinnati
Thomas Owusu, William Patterson University of New Jersey

Acknowledgments

We are delighted for the opportunity to contribute this edited work to the growing scholarship on the African diaspora. This volume is based on collaboration approached from diverse methodological and theoretical approaches. The interdisciplinary perspectives employed in this work provided us with multiple lenses from which to view the African diaspora. Today, international migration has become a powerful source of social change across Africa. Many Africans are crossing international borders to seek better economic and cultural opportunities outside the continent. The editors of this work are part of this dynamic process. So are the majority of the scholars who have contributed to this volume. Together, the editors and contributors have been guided by one central tenet: to depict the migratory experiences of African immigrants and at the same time give context to their diasporic hopes and aspirations. Special thanks to all the contributors for their tireless work and for taking the time to share their scholarship with us. We will forever remain in your gratitude.

We also remain appreciative and grateful to our various institutions and home departments for the opportunities and resources they have provided us in our professional and creative endeavors. We will like to acknowledge the Taft Foundation at the University of Cincinnati for its financial support which allowed Dr. Takougang to attend the twenty-seventh annual meeting of the Association of Third World Conference in Accra, Ghana where the paper they contributed to this book was first presented. We would also like to thank Professors Cheli Reutter and Billie Johnson of the Department of Africana Studies at the University of Cincinnati for their helpful comments on Takougang and Tidjani's chapter. We extend our gratitude to Joed Elich for granting us copyright permission to publish Dr. Mary Osirim's piece that appeared originally in volume 7, number 4 of *African and Asian Studies.*

In addition, we would also like to thank the University of Minnesota, Dr. Vince Magnuson, former Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Sue Maher, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, for their generous financial research support over the years in support of Professor Arthur's work. We are also grateful to the Benedykt Heydekorn Foundation of Toronto, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Canada, and the University of Toronto, Canada, for providing financial support which enabled Dr. Owusu to undertake extensive fieldwork in Toronto to collect data for his chapter in this book.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Lexington Press and Rowman and Littlefield for the efficient and diligent assistance that they have provided us in the course of preparing this manuscript. We could not have completed this work without their professional guidance and stewardship. On behalf of our contributors, the editors will like to extend a special and noteworthy appreciation to Mr. Justin Race and Sabah Ghulamali both at Lexington, the editorial board, and the external reviewers who worked with us to bring this volume to a successful end. We could not have done it without your guidance.

Our final thanks and acknowledgments are due to our families and friends who provided encouragement and shared their ideas about how to improve upon our research and scholarship. We appreciate your understanding and patience as well. Thank you all very much for your kindness and unflinching support.

Contents

Tables and Figures

TABLES

FIGURES

Chapter One

Searching For Promised Lands: Conceptualization of the African Diaspora in Migration

The aftermath of colonization brought about many social changes to the continent of Africa. One notable change is the systematic transformation and incorporation of African societies into the new global economy brought about by the dispersion of capital investments, technological innovations, improved communication and transportation systems, the ease of cross border population movements, cultural and human capital transformations (particularly the proliferation of educational institutions of and the growth in the literate population.) The postcolonial incorporation of Africa into global systems of economic and social production created new opportunities for Africans at the local and international levels. At the local level in Africa, interregional migration in the form of rural to urban migrations intensified as Africans from all walks of life started to search for better economic opportunities. Cities and commercial as well as administrative centers boomed as the rural population started drifting to the centers and spheres of economic production. This process is still unfolding in Africa today as hundreds of thousands leave their rural communities to join the caravan of urban migrants. Africa's megacities such as Lagos, Accra, Abidjan, Freetown, Nairobi, and Kampala are busting at the seams struggling to cope with the massive influx of new settlers. Upon arrival in these cities, these settlers come into contact with the new opportunities offered by the cities. Some may pursue educational goals; others may seek cultural innovation to anchor their new identities; and still others may engage in economic and commercial activities. City living and its varied forms of culture offers myriad of lenses through which to view not only what is happening in Africa but also opportunities available in far away destinations beyond the continent.

At the international level in particular, Africans started looking beyond the continent for the fulfillment of unmet needs at home. The postcolonial period

and the penetration of capitalist investments, coupled with improvements in human capital resources created aspirations whose fulfillment could not be had in Africa. Political and economic morass stymied the robustness of the postcolonial economic ascension of the newly independent nations. Several of the countries continued with the postcolonial monoculture economies often with the production of agricultural raw materials which were then exported to feed Europe and America's industrial and manufacturing establishments. Little or no regard was given to the development of an industrial and manufacturing base to bring added value to the raw materials by processing of these materials into semi-finished or finished goods for local consumption. This meant that these countries were not able to create the jobs needed by graduates and nongraduates alike. Meanwhile, several of the countries continued their reliance on imported manufactured goods and products from the countries that had colonized them thereby stymieing local production sectors. Without sustainable support being given to local economic and manufacturing production, masses of Africans continue to be unemployed and underemployed. This stagnation affects the youth and graduates from secondary and tertiary institutions of learning. For many of them who are faced with economic deprivation, outmigration from Africa (particularly to the advanced nations in the Western hemisphere) provides the best option to improve upon one's economic status and standard of living. This commenced the postcolonial exodus and diaspora of Africans. Compared with the pre-colonial involuntary resettlement of Africans in the New World through the slave trade of the Trans-Atlantic Middle Passage, the arrival of Africans to the United States and Canada is predominantly voluntary interspersed with involuntary displaced stateless refuges from Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Sudan.

Three waves of African migration to North America can be discerned. The first period consisted of Africans who were sponsored by their respective home governments to travel to the United States to pursue advanced degrees in the arts and sciences. This period started in the mid-to-late 1950s lasting until about the 1970s. During the two decades, thousands of Africans got the opportunity to travel to the United States and Canada. The postcolonial governments recognized the imperative of well-educated cadres of civil servants and skilled workers to work in both the public and private sectors following the end of colonization and the ascension of African political leaders to power. The postcolonial task of nation-building was a daunting challenge. The infrastructures of the newly-independent countries could not handle the high demand for skilled workers. In particular, the tertiary institutions of learning had to rely on the universities of the metropolitan colonial countries to provide further training of Africans. Governments concentrated

on the provision of primary and secondary education. The massive push for a highly-trained and skilled labor force occurred simultaneously with efforts to improve existing infrastructures such as roads, hospitals, water, electricity, and housing. The majority of those sponsored by their home governments to study abroad returned home after the completion of their courses of study. Several found jobs in an expanding civil and private sectors.

The second period of Africans to emigrate started leaving after the mid-1970 as country after country in the region were roiled in political and economic conflicts. In some of the countries (particularly in Ghana and Nigeria), incessant coup d'états marked the ascendancy of the military in African political culture. Constitutional governance structures and civil order deteriorated as democratic institutions were replaced with military regimes. The fragile coexistence of tribal, ethnic, and clan groups fractured resulting in civil wars and conflicts which led to the internal displacement of millions of Africans in their own countries. Some had to flee to less troubled spots to seek haven from the violence. The conflicts stymied the economic progress that several of the countries were making immediately following the end of foreign domination. More significantly, the civil conflicts made it difficult to incorporate diverse tribal and ethnic groups into the nation-states. Unmet economic and social needs created despair among Africans. Most started looking to the West or travel to other African countries where conflicts were minimal and people could go about their day-to-day activities without the fear of threats and intimidations. This phase of African transnational migration has yet to subside. Both regular and irregular migration has come to dominate the social and economic landscapes of the continent. Migration to other countries (preferably to the advanced Western countries) dominates the lives of both urban and rural African youths, including adult men and women from all walks of life. Migration is seen as a response to and a strategy for confronting the poverty, deprivation and the general lack of economic and cultural opportunities. The outcomes often associated with international migration is that it offers the possibilities to send money home to assist extended family members in meeting barest economic needs. Migration is also rationalized as a means to facilitate incorporation into a changing global economy characterized by the movement of skilled and unskilled labor from areas of low economic and industrial production to destinations of high economic and industrial concentrations. Chronic unemployment and underemployment among graduates from secondary and tertiary educational institutions continue to cause a brain drain leaving noticeable labor shortages in areas such as education, technology, and healthcare.

By all accounts, another wave of African migration is unfolding. Starting shortly after the beginning of this millennium, this migration is becoming an

important cog in the rush of Africans to join the global caravan of skilled and unskilled labor settlements in the advanced and developed countries. This migration and the mass movement of Africa's human resources and talents is a redefining moment in Africa's development. It has set in motion a never-seen-before rallying clamor and indomitable task for Africans to seek ways and strategies to become developed and share in global economic prosperity, something that has remained elusive for generations of Africans. One result of this unyielding desire to pursue global economic integration via migration and self advancement is the currently unfolding saga of the growing number of foot migrants from Africans who are bracing the harsh and unforgiving elements of the Sahara Desert with the hope of reaching a beachhead in the Mediterranean via North Africa (Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Spanish North Africa). From here, the European Union (EU) countries (Italy, Spain, and Malta) are in sight. Also in sight is the United States once some of the Africans are able to reach Europe. Again, escape from economic destitute in Africa is the driving force behind this mass migration which, at its current epoch, compares favorably with the transcontinental migration of Europeans to North America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The major urban centers of Africa have become the sites where plans to engage in desert crossing are hatched and implemented. Poorly educated and economically displaced urban youths joined by the counterparts from the rural areas sketch plans about how to implement their cross-border foot migration. Despite repeated official warnings from the central governments of Africa about the perilous nature of cross-border foot migration, the appeals often go unheeded. Would-be migrants rationalize that this is their only avenue to leave Africa and join the global market of unskilled agricultural labor in the Mediterranean and in the EU. Africa's porous borders serve as the channel of illegal interstate border crossings. Poorly paid border patrol agents may take bribes to assist these migrants. This form of irregular migration is a manifestation of the frustration and the pressures to emigrate. The reality is that only a few are able to arrive safely. Information about each successful crossing relayed home strengthens the resolve of many more prospective migrants willing to risk life and limb to make it to the Mediterranean or Europe.

Desert-crossing in Africa has created its own cultural fads and normative guidelines. For many youths unable to survive the harsh realities of life in urban and rural Africa, cross-border desert crossings have become rites of passage symbolizing the autonomy or the transition to adulthood. Family members may play a role in the formation of intent to migrate. While some may provide financial assistance, others may provide moral and spiritual support. Irrespective of how they show their support, one goal is certainly clear: a successful settlement or crossing means that the migrant would remit home

and provide economic support for other family members. Hundreds, if not thousands, may perish, be interdicted, incarcerated, and if fortunate will be repatriated home. Information about failed attempts resulting in deaths is usually hard to obtain. Elaborate enabling networks linking prospective irregular migrants with traffickers has become a permanent feature of the desert communities, including long distance cross-desert lorries, and fishermen. In the short and long term, the ability of governments in Africa to effectively manage irregular labor migration streams as part of a comprehensive plan to optimize the human capital resources of the region. Some of the countries like Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria have become labor or migrant-exporting nations for both skilled and unskilled workers. Deteriorating social, economic, and political conditions and the intense need to acquire foreign capital goods and assets continue to drive hundreds of thousands out of the continent every year. Recent recessionary and cyclical fluctuations in the global economy have disproportionately affected Africa's already poor and disadvantaged population. Rising prices in staple foods, agricultural commodity prices, including energy costs have further aggravated the economic conditions of Africa's rural and urban poor. The absence of government or private social security safety nets to cushion the effects of the global economic slump on Africa's poor means that many Africans continue to be among the biggest casualties of the worldwide economic depression. Structural adjustment programs and initiatives directed by world aid bodies have failed to trickle down to the average African. In most cases, these internationally-driven efforts aimed at restructuring and repositioning Africa for economic take-off have either failed or have had limited success. When they compare their economic situation to the rest of world, many Africans see structural imbalances in the economies of their respective countries. This imbalance (chronic unemployment, over urbanization, frequent food shortages, low production capacity) is often rationalized as the main cause of poverty in Africa. International migration is seen as panacea to this structural economic imbalance.

The Africans who are leaving the continent to seek economic fortunes are not a unitary group. They reflect the cultural, political, and economic diversity and multiple heritages of the continent. Some come from the Anglophone or former British colonies in the Western, Eastern, and Southern regions of the continent. Others are from the Francophone and Lusaphone parts where French colonial influences left its cultural and economic imprints. For others, the influences came from Arabia. Linguistic, ethnic, tribal, clan, and religious differences abound. In all of these social and cultural blending can be found indigenous African cultural forms which have been interlaced with foreign or imported influences to form a hybrid or mélange of cultures that are contextually rich and distinctively pluralistic. Irrespective of which region of