

## Review: Africa and Its Historical and Contemporary Diasporas<sup>12</sup>

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The subject of Africa and Its Historical and Contemporary Diasporas is particularly close to me, as my personal experiences have deeply connected me to the issues of diaspora and Pan-Africanism. I began my work in Malawi in 2005 as a volunteer, where I spent six months. From 2009 onwards, I lived there continuously for more than four years. My wife is also from Malawi, and I was a member of the Limbe Rotary Club, where I participated in several aid projects over the years.

My work was not limited to Malawi – I was active in several other sub-Saharan countries as well. In Uganda, I collaborated with the Jane Goodall Institute on joint projects, while with the Planetrise Association, I participated in tree planting, food security, education, and water purification projects in Malawi, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya. Additionally, as a local coordinator, I took part in 13 medical missions to Malawi and Ethiopia.

The experience I gained over the years, my close relationship with the region, and my active involvement in local communities have provided me with profound insights into the challenges African countries and diasporas face. Thanks to these personal experiences, I can critically assess the questions raised by this volume

The book spans 217 pages and presents the work of eight authors across eight chapters.

The volume *Africa and Its Historical and Contemporary Diasporas*, edited by Tunde Adeleke and Arno Sonderegger, is a fundamental collection that thoroughly examines various aspects of Africa's historical and contemporary diasporas, particularly emphasising their global significance. The authors adopt different approaches to exploring the diaspora's history and present-day challenges, covering economic, political, cultural, and religious factors related to the African continent and its diaspora.

The work plays a pioneering role in shifting the concept of diaspora beyond the history of slavery and colonization, placing it within broader, modern contexts. It is particularly important for readers interested in diaspora studies, postcolonial theories, and African history, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of African identities, cultures, and communities' roles in today's globalised world.

The book's structure is well-organized, featuring historical analyses and chapters addressing contemporary issues. The authors come from diverse academic backgrounds,

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resulting in a wide variety of perspectives. The chapters focus on the history, cultural expressions, and global political roles of African communities in the diaspora. One of the book's significant merits is its examination of both historical and contemporary contexts, offering a holistic view of the dynamics of the diaspora.

The authors' writing style is varied yet maintains a balance between academic rigour and accessibility to readers. However, the book's typographical presentation is perhaps overly minimalistic, as the text is accompanied by only limited illustrations and maps.

From my perspective, one notable shortcoming is the limited use of visual elements—such as images, graphics, or comprehensive maps—which would enhance the depth and complexity of the subject matter. Only one illustration is included (Figure 4.1: Pantheon of Vodou Spirits (c. 1990) by André Pierre – page 67), along with a few tables that assist in the analyses. Expanding the visual content would not only enhance the reading experience but also elevate the academic value of the volume.

For example, I would recommend:

Historical maps – illustrating the evolution of the African diaspora and the various migration waves across the Atlantic region.

Charts and infographics – depicting the socio-economic impact of the diaspora, such as labour market participation or access to educational systems.

Portraits and documentary photographs – of key figures discussed in the volume (e.g., Kwame Nkrumah or W.E.B. Du Bois), bringing these historical personalities closer to the readers.

Cultural representations – such as images of festivals, religious ceremonies, or memorial sites, helping readers grasp the cultural diversity of the diaspora.

These illustrations would complement, not replace, the academic content, making the analyses presented in the book more accessible and understandable for its audience.

From a critical perspective, the book offers valuable contributions to the discourse on African diasporas, although some conclusions may be subject to debate. In certain cases, the authors might overemphasise the positive aspects of the diaspora, while internal contradictions receive less detailed discussion. However, this does not detract from the book's merits; instead, it encourages readers to engage in further research and discussions on this topic.

Tunde Adeleke's opening chapter, "Diaspora: Paradigm Shift and Implications for Pan-Africanism in the Twenty-First Century," examines how the concept of the diaspora has evolved over the centuries, particularly in light of globalisation and modern migration. Adeleke argues that the diaspora can no longer be considered a homogeneous, unified community, as individuals from the African continent and the diaspora have diverse cultural, social, and political experiences. He also highlights that globalisation poses new challenges for African communities, especially in terms of identity, which becomes even more pronounced through education.

Based on my experiences working with different African communities, I fully agree that the diaspora cannot be seen as a homogeneous entity. The local community projects I observed in Uganda and Malawi clearly illustrate how difficult it is to establish

unified identities in today's globalised world.

Felix Kumah-Abiwu's chapter, "Trends and Complexities of the Africa-Black Diaspora Nexus," calls for a redefinition of the concept of diaspora, considering new migration waves and the diversity within the African diaspora. Kumah-Abiwu explains that the diaspora is not limited to historical communities forcibly displaced through the transatlantic slave trade but also includes newer, voluntary migrants who have settled in Europe and North America after the colonial era. He emphasises that education plays a crucial role in both the cultural integration of these diaspora communities and the preservation of their identities.

This chapter is particularly relevant to my research in Malawi, as improving education there can reduce rural migration and enhance food security. Furthermore, in my personal experiences in Malawi and other countries, I often encountered cultural differences and tensions related to the diaspora. These varying identities and expectations within African communities sometimes create challenges, particularly when implementing development projects.

Alma Jean Billingslea Brown's chapter, "New Dimensions of Diaspora, Modernity, Heritage Tourism and the 'Black Star of Africa,'" explores the reformation of diaspora identity through the example of Ghana. Brown explains the significance of heritage tourism and education for diaspora communities, particularly in processing the trauma of the transatlantic slave trade. Through education, diaspora members can reassess their African roots while participating in the modern global world.

This approach draws an excellent parallel with the Malawian education system, where one of the goals of education is to promote the economic and social integration of local communities. Based on my own experiences with aid projects and community development in Malawi, I have observed similar challenges to those Brown describes: visitors and volunteers from abroad often arrive with different expectations and goals, which do not always align with the needs of local communities.

Kyrah Malika Daniels's chapter, "An Assembly of Twenty-One Spirit Nations: The Pan-African Pantheon of Haitian Vodou's African Lwa," discusses the religious and cultural dimensions of the diaspora. Daniels provides a detailed account of how the spiritual world of Haitian Vodoo unites and honours African heritages, helping to preserve the cultural integrity of the diaspora. Vodoo maintains African traditions and connects them with modern diaspora experiences, highlighting the importance of education in the process. Ensuring that African culture and identity are preserved and transmitted through educational systems is crucial for diaspora communities. While working in sub-Saharan Africa, I also observed the pivotal role of local religious traditions and rituals in community identity and cohesion. This cultural diversity is an essential aspect of understanding the African diaspora, as it underscores the complex ways in which traditional beliefs contribute to both individual and collective identity formation.

Dominik Frühwirth's chapter, "'Nya-Binghi!' Rastafarian Pan-Africanism from Moscow to Ethiopia," discusses a remarkable example of the global mobility of the



diaspora. Frühwirth demonstrates how the Nya-Binghi movement became a driving force of Pan-Africanism, connecting the Jamaica-born Rastafari movement with Africans on the continent.

The Nya-Binghi movement originally emerged in East Africa, particularly in Rwanda and Uganda, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It began as a political and spiritual resistance against colonial rule and local oppression. Rooted in African spirituality, the movement stood in opposition to both foreign colonizers and internal despots. The term Nya-Binghi is linked to a female spiritual leader who became a symbol of resistance.

The Rastafari movement, born in Jamaica in the early 20th century, was largely inspired by Marcus Garvey's ideas, promoting the return of Black people to Africa and the reinforcement of African identity. At the heart of the Rastafari movement was Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia, regarded as a divine savior by its followers.

The connection between the Nya-Binghi movement and Rastafarianism interestingly developed through a propaganda message falsely claiming that Haile Selassie was the leader of a secret anti-colonial conference in Moscow. Although the story was untrue, it resonated deeply with Rastafarian communities in Jamaica, who embraced it as a symbol of a global movement uniting Black struggles across continents. As a result, the Nya-Binghi name and spirit became integrated into Rastafarianism as a symbol of resistance and spiritual power.

Rastafarian communities began holding Nya-Binghi ceremonies, which were spiritual gatherings aimed at fostering communal unity and honouring Haile Selassie. This integration further strengthened the movement's alignment with Pan-African ideals and the philosophy of Black liberation. Frühwirth emphasises that these diaspora communities actively participated in Africa's independence movements and economic development through education and cultural awareness. This chapter highlights that education is not only a fundamental part of migration processes but also a vital tool for diaspora communities to maintain their connection with Africa and contribute to its development.

Babacar M'Baye's chapter, "'Jes Grew' as a Metaphor for African American and Pan-African Resistance in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*," delves into the religious and cultural consciousness of the diaspora, focusing on the theme of cultural resistance. In my work across various African countries, I often observed how cultural identity and local traditions play a crucial role in social change, particularly in education and community development.

M'Baye's analysis of Reed's novel demonstrates how African traditions empower diaspora communities to engage in cultural resistance and preserve their identities. The chapter underscores the role of African-derived religious traditions, such as Vodou, in fostering and sustaining diaspora consciousness. These traditions not only provide spiritual guidance but also serve as pillars of cultural identity, helping diaspora communities navigate the challenges of modernity while maintaining a connection to their African roots.

The final chapters of the volume address the political consciousness of the diaspora and Marxist interpretations of Pan-Africanism.

Arno Sonderegger's chapter, "Questioning Diaspora: George Padmore, Colonial Fascism, and the Route to Marxist Pan-Africanism," analyses George Padmore's Marxist version of Pan-Africanism. Padmore argued that the solidarity between African and diaspora communities stemmed from shared colonial experiences rather than cultural or racial unity. Sonderegger's analysis highlights the need to rethink the concept of diaspora, considering that these communities are no longer homogeneous and have diverse historical and cultural experiences.

From my experience, particularly in development projects and medical missions, I agree that community cooperation often requires a pragmatic approach beyond ideological frameworks. Projects with different stakeholders, including diaspora communities, must balance ideals with practical solutions to effectively meet local needs.

Saheed Adejumobi's chapter, "On Memory, Reckoning, and Speculative Futures: Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism, and Afrofuturism," examines the legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois, with a focus on how his ideas contributed to the political and economic awareness of the diaspora. According to Adejumobi, education was one of the most crucial tools that enabled diaspora communities to achieve political and economic consciousness. Du Bois believed education was key to the liberation and development of African and diaspora communities.

In my own work, I have observed that communities often shape their visions of the future creatively, drawing inspiration from concepts similar to Afrofuturism. In such projects, respecting local needs and perspectives is essential, as this ensures that development initiatives align with the aspirations of the communities they aim to serve.

### *Summary*

The volume *Africa and Its Historical and Contemporary Diasporas* provides a rich and detailed analysis of the historical and contemporary status of African diasporas. The authors explore the cultural, political, and economic challenges faced by the diaspora through diverse approaches, emphasising the role of education in shaping the identity and consciousness of diaspora communities. One of the key conclusions is that education plays a crucial role in empowering diasporas, both culturally and economically. Education positively impacts the cohesion of communities, a finding that aligns with my own research on rural primary education in Malawi.

While the volume's references are detailed and relevant, I believe one essential work should have been included in the analysis: Zeleza's 2019 study on the evolution of the global African diaspora (Zeleza, 2019). Additionally, as noted in the introduction, the most significant shortcoming of the volume is the near-total absence of images, documents, and illustrations, which would have greatly enriched this subject matter.

This volume is especially useful for those seeking a deeper understanding of the connection between African diasporas and education. Several chapters highlight the importance of education in preserving cultural identity and facilitating the integration



of diaspora communities into global society. The book serves as a valuable resource for both researchers and the wider public interested in learning more about African diasporas and their contemporary challenges.

### *Bibliography*

Zezeza, P.T., 2019. African Migrations: Reshaping the Global African Diaspora. New York: Routledge.

- This book offers an in-depth examination of African migration patterns and the transformation of diasporic identities