

Leif Manger and Munzoul A.M. Assal (eds), Diasporas Within and Without Africa: Dynamism, Heterogeneity, Variation, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2006, pp 200. ISBN: 91-7106-563-6

Reviewed by Taderera Hebert Chisi

For centuries there have been many movements of people into and out of Africa and many studies of such movements have been carried out. Therefore, this text is well intentioned as it provides further insight into understanding the African diaspora. The volume is a collection of papers focusing on two types of migration in and out of Africa. It makes use of empirical evidence to reflect critically on the concept of diaspora. It is unique and makes refreshing reading to scholars; first, in that the research's geographical area of coverage is the eastern or Indian Ocean side of Africa, as opposed to the over-researched diasporas linked with the western or Atlantic Ocean side of Africa. Secondly, it does not only focus on the almost conventionally accepted African diaspora characterised by the 'out of Africa' movement, but also on the 'into Africa' movement. This volume, thus, makes a major contribution to completing the picture of the African diaspora.

Also fascinating about the text is the approach taken in using "diaspora" as an analytical tool. Various contributors treated "diaspora" as a broader history of human migration and intercultural experience. Thus, their perspective took into consideration historically produced variation and dynamism. This is a departure from the conventional approach, which uses rigid or inflexible concepts of "diaspora", which when used as analytical tools fail to capture or unravel complexities posed by unfolding realities on the ground. The approach, adopted by various authors of articles in this volume, involves focusing on positioned cases and letting the material direct the analysis than working within confined parameters of "diaspora". Munzoul Assal, one of the contributors, even highlights that fixed or rigid concepts "...often fall short of capturing reality." Thus, by avoiding a rigid conceptualization of "diaspora" the contributors unearthed many salient and diverse issues of the diaspora.

The first chapter, by Leif Manger and A.M. Munzoul Assal, is a good introduction as it clearly outlines the aims of the project and provides the conceptual and analytical framework. They insist that any discourse on the diasporas should focus more explicitly on the complexity of the diaspora concept by paying more attention to the intersectionality of many processes. They emphasise that the purpose of their project is not to engage in a counter-factual argument over the concept of diaspora, but rather to bring in diversity to the concept so as to capture a wider spectrum of the diasporic dynamism.

In this chapter they raise the main issues that the various authorities grapple within the text, which are that (i) diasporic dynamics are not homogeneous, but are characterised by variation and historical specificity; (ii) the dynamics of the diaspora are not fixed or pre-given, but are constituted within the materiality of everyday life in the everyday stories told individually or collectively and they relate to issues, such as gender, race, class, religion, language, and generation; and (iii) even if the phenomenon of diaspora may be global it should not lead to an obliteration of differences produced within the same phenomenon.

The article by Sindre Bangstad is one of the three contributions focusing on the diaspora within Africa. In it he grapples with the concept of diasporic consciousness and the factors that influence it using a Cape Muslim Community in South Africa as a case study. He advances the view that the notion of diaspora is not a static notion, but must be understood on the basis of specific historical trajectories. He explores how various historical processes in both the host country and original homeland affect and shape diasporic identities and consciousness. He analyses the social transformation and identity shifts the community has undergone as a result of political, social, and economic exigencies from the time of its arrival in South Africa as slaves in the 19th century, through the apartheid era to independence and the post-apartheid era. His study reveals that some diasporic identities temporarily die in hostile conditions, only to reappear in more liberal environments and that some identities in the diaspora are adopted as a means to an end, especially to benefit from or to exploit some opportunities available. Bangstad unravels that a desire for a national homeland identity does not imply a longing for a return to the original geographical homeland and that time in the diaspora weakens ethnographical ties of people in the diaspora. Religion, especially among Islamic communities, is more powerful in determining identities than an imagined ethnographical origin. He concludes by arguing that people in the diaspora react

differently to pressures of life they are exposed to in the host country, so diasporic dynamics are not homogeneous but are characterised by variations.

The next two papers, one by Leif Manger and the other by Anne Bang, also pertain to the diasporas within Africa. Both of them focus on the little known Hadrami Diaspora in Africa, which started many centuries back. Leif Manger brings out two sorts of diasporic dynamics relating to Hadramis in the Sudan. One is the historical migration of people who managed to set themselves up as small traders and run small businesses in the Sudan, exploiting the different opportunities provided by policies of commercialization of both the colonial state and the independent nation state. He unearths some complexities of the diaspora where under some favorable political and socio-economic conditions diasporic communities become important actors in the political and economic life of the host nation. The second dynamic relates to the modern political developments in the Sudan as an Islamic state and the involvement of the regime with Usama bin Laden in the 1990's. He clearly shows how the diaspora can be a platform or launch pad for liberation or international political movements like the one represented by Usama bin Laden and other cases of Muslim resistance against perceived western colonialism and imperialism. He succeeds mostly in bringing out the intersectionality of processes in shaping and changing diasporic identities. One other major observation he makes is how, in some diasporic communities, links between various members of the communities are more important than links with the homeland.

Anne K. Bang's paper focuses on a Hadrami diaspora that was organized around the networks of religious scholars who played key roles in islamising the areas in which they lived and also played key roles in relating to colonial and national authorities. Thus, she gives a religious dimension to the discourse on the diaspora. Using examples of family history of biographies of two Hadrami religious scholars in Zanzibar and Comoro Islands, she warns against simplistic historical continuities and replaying of tradition and calls for an analysis and understanding of diaspora based on thick ethnographic descriptions. Her work shows many dynamics of the diaspora and how understanding them must be based on an exploration of interactions between different variables such as genealogy, kinship, religion, and relations with the host nation. She brings out that although some diasporic links are based on family ties, they are also formed and shaped by the various ways they interact with the broader

patterns of social and political contexts of which they are/were part of. She makes a greater contribution to methodology in the analysis of diasporic dynamics and variations.

The Internet has become an important medium of communication in everyday life. Using a case study of Eritrean diasporas in Germany, Bettina Conrad highlights how the Internet has become 'part of the diasporic experience'. In her paper, she assesses the impact of the Internet on interactions in the diaspora and between the Diasporas and the homeland. Focusing on the use of the Internet by Eritrean Diasporas during three political phases in Eritrea, namely, post-independent 1993-1997; fiercely nationalist phase of war with Ethiopia and the post war period when pre-independence rivalries re-emerged, she exposes how the cyberspace re-enacts and reinforces the political atmosphere of the homeland. She concludes, "Home politics is being played in the diaspora and the battleground is the Internet". She shows how Eritrean cyberspace mainly served to reinforce an all embracing transnational Eritreanism at one time and then notes the emergence of hostilities where supporters of the new regime and adversaries were engaged in a 'cyber-civil war'. She establishes that the Internet, instead of bringing diasporic Eritreans together in a sense of Eritreanness, creates segmentation among the groups and serves political fragmentation as much as unity. She, however, cautions against generalising and reducing the discourse to Internet dynamics alone, for as she argues, the Internet has not created a 'third space' that will radically change a diasporic society and the way people connect, but rather the real life exigencies, traditions, norms, and forms of organization in the homeland are the ones that play a dominant role in mapping out the limits and possibilities of interactions or/and relations between Diasporas and the home government. The other strength of her paper is in its ability to present a strong case to prove that diasporic communities are heterogeneous.

The last two articles focus on the diasporas without Africa. Both papers attribute the contemporary out-migrations to the failure of the independent or nation state in Africa to provide political, social, and economic security to the people. Thus, both contributors (Roqaiya Abusharaf and Munzoul A.M. Assal) devote great space of their papers among other issues to discussing the political problems of nation states of Sudan and Sudan and Somalia respectively.

Roqaiya Abusharaf uses the case of Southern Sudanese in exile in the USA and Canada to bring out many dynamics of the diaspora. He proves that diasporic communities are not homogeneous, even though they

might be coming from the same country. He sees the social categorization in the homeland remaining the key determinant factor in social interaction; hence, he concludes that religion, tribe, and culture are the key influences on social organization in the diaspora. Like Bettina Conrad, he also argues that the hatred and relations at home are replayed in the diaspora. He notes that among the Sudanese exiles in the diaspora, the dichotomy of southern/northern Sudan is vividly reconstituted. His analysis is also spiced by some gender sensitivity, as he brings out the women's vulnerability in the diaspora. He also analyses the process of socio-cultural transformation that Diasporas undergo in the host country as they try to survive in a new socio-economic and political environment. The key strength of this paper is that it is based on the life stories of many Diasporas of different social backgrounds. Thus, it makes wide use of empirical evidence.

In the last chapter, Munzoul Assal grapples with the impact of religion, ethnicity/clan, and home politics, on social identities and interaction in the diaspora. His work is a critical addition to the growing literature on diaspora and transnational subjectivities, based on field research on Sudanese and Somali migrants to Norway. In his contribution to the discourse on the diaspora he cautions against the use of the concept of "diaspora" to theorize about a lineal relationship between diasporic people and their homeland because by homogenising the immigrants, "diaspora" as an analytical tool errs by overlooking divisions along ethnic, religious, and political lines or other aspects that corroborate heterogeneity. Secondly, it errs by generalizing that all diasporic people long for a homeland to which they eventually return. He argues that the, *"...longing of a diasporic people for a homeland to which they eventually return is at worse a myth and at best an argument that must be empirically based and substantiated."* His argument is that not all Diasporas have that longing especially after staying in the host country for a while. He also sheds light on how newly established diasporic communities face challenges of adaptation in the new settings characterized by divisions along ethnic, political, and religious lines, as well as a problematic relationship with their homelands (Somalia and the Sudan). He shows how aspects of categorization and divisions in the homeland affect the ways they interact and adapt to their new realities in Norway. However, he admits that in the diaspora, transformation takes place and some features of the homeland fade away. He says that, *"When many Somalis were still fresh arrivals, there were simmering tensions between members of different clans, but such tensions are fading away"*. Thus, he argues that different backgrounds and histories have an impact on shaping social identities and patterns of interaction in the new areas and 'trust or mistrust' imported from the homeland remain an

important issue. He concludes by reminding his readers that rigid conceptualization of “diaspora” cannot be analytically adequate to unravel complexities posed by realities on the ground. Therefore, the best approach is to focus on specific positioned cases and let the material direct the analysis. This way more reality is captured.

I fully recommend this text to scholars with an interest in African studies, history, geography, development studies, and the broader field of cultural studies and migration and diaspora studies.

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