

BOOK REVIEW

Tunde Adeleke and Arno Sonderegger, eds. *Africa and Its Historical and Contemporary Diasporas*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023. 234 pp. \$100. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-66694-019-0.

The stated objective of the edited collection *Africa and Its Historical and Contemporary Diasporas* is to offer new insights into the conceptualization of the complex and evolving relationship between Africa and its Diasporas (in the plural). It proposes to do so by assembling original contributions from early career and established scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds, including historians, political scientists, literary and religious scholars. Although this is not clear from the table of contents, the book is divided into three main themes, and is comprised of a total of eight original essays, not including the very short introduction. The three thematic foci start with theoretical debates and definitions (Chapters One to Three), continuing with a thematic approach interrogating the African diaspora from literary, religious, cultural, and ideological perspectives (Chapters Four to Six) and ending on biographical accounts focusing on key figures of Pan-Africanism (Chapters Seven and Eight).

The book interrogates the tangled relationship between the diaspora and the African continent, starting with the African Union's political designation of the Diaspora as the "sixth region" of Africa. The authors grapple with the concept of Pan-Africanism, which maintains that Africans on the continent and in the diaspora constitute a diverse yet unified people with intertwined destinies. In the first chapter, the editor Tunde Adeleke problematizes Pan-Africanism by juxtaposing it with the thought-provoking "Pan-African-Americanism," tracing the historiography of the concept and foundational scholars such as W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and Kwame Nkrumah. However, in the same chapter, "Diaspora: Paradigm Shift and Implications for Pan-Africanism in the Twenty-First Century," Adeleke's take on race is most surprising and unsubstantiated, making such statements as "race has lost its potency as an identifying and unifying force" (17). Perhaps if this was written in a pre-Black Lives Matter, so called "color-blind" Obama era, it might have gained some credence, but an African diaspora scholar who espouses such view in our present-day era is mind-boggling. Discussing the "complexity" of racism, the author states "The racial enemy of the past; the European is not the only 'racial' enemy of today. Thus, racism is not a clear-cut Black and white issue" (20). The author then goes on to equate racism with what he terms as African "tribalism" (21). While seemingly trying to be provocative, the argument not only falls flat, but leads one to question the entire premise of the book. Just because other axes of difference have always existed, it does not take away from global white supremacy

established as a direct result of the past five hundred years of an exploitative capitalist system which demarcate racial lines that are still fundamentally important in our present-day world. The demarcation of racial lines has historically determined and continues to shape the trajectories of the African diaspora, and people of African descent everywhere.


If one is able to overlook this blunder, readers would be rewarded with subsequent chapters' fruitful reflections on the various definitions of "diaspora" and where dispersed Africans fit within these definitions. The various contributors bring into conversation Africa's historical diaspora which mostly emanates from various slave trades in previous centuries with the multiple contemporary diasporas, each with its own complex history from various national origins and other loyalties along ethnic, religious, and linguistic axes.

The chapter on heritage tourism in Ghana (Chapter Three) is particularly compelling, linking the country's independence with "return" policies such as the Joseph project, Afro-Brazilian returnees in the 1830s and the "Year of Return" in 2019. The chapter dissects the intertwined commercial aspect of heritage tourism and the importance of ancestral linkages. Similarly, the contributions on religion and culture offer important generative discussions and conceptual insights on diasporic identity formation. More specifically, the juxtaposition between Haitian Vodou (Chapter Four) and Rastafarian Pan-Africanism (Chapter Five) in different geographies allows for a thoughtful comparative analysis. Likewise, although the selection process on why these individuals and not a plethora of others is unclear, the biographical approach focused on two main actors, the Pan-Africanist George Padmore (Chapter Seven) and novelist Ishmael Reed (Chapter Six), is deeply engaging and informative.

While, individually, the chapters are very strong, the weak introduction does a poor job of laying the groundwork for the important discussions in the rest of the book. The introduction provides nothing more than an overview of upcoming chapters and fails to connect the individual chapters together in a cohesive and convincing manner. Similarly, the book would have benefited from a strong concluding chapter where the editors bring the dispersed arguments of the individual chapters together and highlight the key takeaways for readers. As a result, the individual essays, when read together, do not present a sustained argument, and can at times be repetitive (in their theoretical discussion of diaspora and Pan-Africanism, for instance). Although the book hints at strong conceptual interventions and methodological innovations, it unfortunately fails to deliver on these promises. Moreover, while the book does not deal exclusively with the Black Atlantic, it does not engage as deeply with the Indian Ocean side, an important geography for the African diaspora which receives only passing mention. Part of the challenge is that this book takes on a significant undertaking—the "changing and complex nature of the Africa-Black Diaspora relationship"—without delineating a specific geography, time-period, or thematic foci, an impossible task to accomplish in a single volume.

As a scholar of the African diaspora, I was initially excited at the possibilities offered by such a volume. Unfortunately, the book falls disappointingly short of its promise. Perhaps a more focused approach, such as the strategy my co-editors and I employ in our recently published volume *The Global Ethiopian Diaspora*:

Migrations, Connections and Belongings (University of Rochester Press, 2024) might avoid some of the shortcomings I highlight above.

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