
Toyin Falola & Aribidesi Adisa Usman (eds.) –
Movements, Borders, and Identities in Africa

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- 1 The book *Movements, Borders, and Identities in Africa* edited by scholars Toyin Falola, and Aribidesi Usman offers an overview of different aspects of migration in the African continent. This solid volume contains thirteen chapters, essentially based on the drafts presented at the conference “Movements, Migrations, and Displacements in Africa” held at the University of Texas in March 24-26, 2006. In the various chapters, authors use oral, archeological and written sources to study numerous aspects of migrations such as slavery, commerce, gender, religion, colonialism, poverty, and development in different parts of Africa. The descriptive introduction, organized chronologically, surveys the history of migrations within African and from Africa to other continents. Falola and Usman detail the various types of internal, and international migrations among different African ethnic groups and societies during the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. Particular attention is given to the migration movements provoked by the Muslim slave trade and the Atlantic slave trade. Although these topics are not really addressed in the thirteen chapters presented in the book, the introduction also discusses African female migration, the groups left behind as well as those groups who after migrating returned to their region of origin.
- 2 The chapters examine diverse areas, such as Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern Africa, and different historical periods. The various authors examine concepts and

methodologies employed in migration research. They study the causes and consequences of migrations, large population movements and dis-placements, experiences of migration, patterns and strategies of settlement, labor mobility, immigrant societies, and identities.

- 3 The book is divided into two parts chronologically developed. The first part, “State Formation and Migration Crossroads”, containing five chapters, deals with Yoruba migration, culture and identity in the Bight of Benin up to the nineteenth century. In the first chapter, Akinwumi Ogundiran uses archaeological and oral sources evidence to question Igor Kopytoff’s model of “internal African frontier”. Focusing on what he calls the Atlantic period of Yoruba history, Ogundiran’s essay highlights the role played by “peripheral” centers during the period of the Atlantic slave trade. Bringing material culture to the center of his analysis, Ogundiran brilliantly demonstrates that far from being an isolated region, Early Osogbo was a prosperous center (that probably produced goods such as glass beads, dyestuffs, and dyed fabrics), which entirely integrated in the Atlantic economy. Chapter 2 “The Root is Also Here : The Nondiaspora Foundations of Yoruba Ethnicity” by Olantunji Ojo discusses two different points of view on pan-Yoruba ethnicities. The first places Ile-Ife as the origin of Yoruba people. The second view states that Yorubaland was divided into several ethnic groups. Thus, a Yoruba ethnic consciousness emerged among Yoruba speakers in the Americas as a result from the Atlantic slave trade. Based on the existing literature, Ojo attempts to reconcile these two different visions. He explains how the construction of pan-Yoruba ethnicities was complex and the result of reinvention and interactions within the West Africa and in the diaspora. Yoruba ethnicity faced numerous challenges.
- 4 Indeed, the collapse of Kingdom of Oyo accelerated political instability in Yorubaland leading to rivalries and warfare among different Yoruba states. As a result, Yoruba groups enslaved individuals from other Yoruba groups. Contending that slaving and warfare provoked population displacements, leading to cultural, and religious interactions, that blurred ethnic boundaries among these various Yoruba-speaking groups, Ojo makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship on Yoruba ethnicity. Chapter 6 “Migrations, Identities and Transculturation in the Coastal Cities of Yorubaland in the Second Half of the Second Millennium : An Approach to African History Architecture”, by Brigitte Kowalski Oshineye examines “Afro-Brazilian” architectural style introduced in Lagos by former slave returnees. Oshineye argues that the study of Bight of Benin “Afro-Brazilian” buildings can help to understand the dynamics of cultural transformation that helped to strength Yoruba culture in this coastal region. In the introduction of the chapter, Oshineye argues that the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade had more impacts than colonialism in coastal regions of West Africa. However, further in the chapter, the author does not attempt to explain which abolition she is referring to, and what were these impacts. In the various sections of the chapter the author essentially describes different formal features that characterize “Afro-Brazilian” buildings located in Porto-Novo, Badagry, Abeokuta, and Lagos. Unfortunately, Oshineye does not clearly explain the context that gave birth to this “Afro-Brazilian” style, what were the elements characterizing what she calls “classical Brazilian type” or “classical Brazilian plan”, and in which ways these various “styles”, are connected or not to architectural “styles” found in Brazil. Although the author explains that “Afro-Brazilian” architectural style was introduced by former slaves returnees who settled at the Bight of Benin, the first example provided is the old house of Francisco Félix de Souza, a Brazilian slave merchant established in the Bight of Benin

prior to 1835, when the first migration wave of former slaves returnees occurred. She also announces that the chapter will show how this mixture of people “creolized” architectural styles, but later she does not explain how other local elites appropriated this “Afro-Brazilian” style during the French and English colonial rule. Overall, despite the promising subject and some pictures of interest, this confusing essay lacks of focus, and does not provide answers to the questions initially addressed.

- 5 The second part of the book “Movements and Identities” comprises eight chapters, focusing on West Africa, South Africa, Central, and East Africa. The authors examine different aspects of migration from the colonial period to the present. Chapter 6, “Squatting and Settlement Making in Mamelodi, South Africa”, is rather a quick report of illegal urban squatter as a result of ruralurban migration, through the example of Mamelodi shantytown in Pretoria, South Africa. In the seventh chapter Meshack Owino examines Jo-Ugenya resistance and displacement during the British colonial conquest in the western Kenya. The next chapter, “Traders, Slaves, and Soldiers : The Hausa Diaspora in Ghana (Gold Coast and Asante) in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries”, by Edmund Abaka explains that Hausa migrations to the Gold Coast and Asante regions were both forced, and voluntary. Migration was caused because of the kola trade, and general trade activities, and because Hausa individuals were employed as soldiers as well. Akaba sustains that Hausa contributed to develop links between the Sokoto Caliphate, Asante and the Volta-Afram basin.
- 6 Moreover, during the period of the Caliphate, Hausa were sold as slaves to the Atlantic network, to the Asante and also in the Volta basin where they developed various tasks. In Chapter 11, “Shifting Identities Among Nigerian Yoruba in Dahomey and the Republic of Benin (1940s-2004)”, Jean-Luc Martineau examines Nigerian Yoruba communities living in Dahomey, modern Republic of Benin. In this well documented chapter, Martineau demonstrates that local organizations and associations contributed to shaping, changing and adapting Yoruba migrant identities over the last sixty years. In Chapter 13, Issiaka Mande gives an insightful overview of the movement of migrant workers from modern Burkina Faso, who were recruited to work in Senegal and Ivory Coast. The chapter discusses the contradictory nature of European colonization in West Africa that whereas focusing on the colony’s growth also invested on its exploitation by encouraging the introduction of migrant workers from other regions. Despite some exceptions, Falola and Usman gathered an excellent selection of chapters presenting original scholarship. The volume is surely a valuable contribution that graduate and undergraduate students in African history will appreciate.