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## Introduction

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## Introduction

This special issue of the *Journal of Global Initiatives* is dedicated to Kenya. It is the result of Kennesaw State University's annual country study (ACS) program and international conference on "The Role of the Kenyan Diaspora in Kenya's Development." The two programs are connected. We start with the annual country study program.

Each academic year, the ACS program delivers a series of lectures, performances, conference(s), exhibits, and films on a specific country or world region.<sup>1</sup> The weekly lecture series is linked to academic courses. The 2006-2007 academic year focused on Kenya. The program uses an interdisciplinary approach in order to provide audiences with a richer, more complex sense of place and community. It promotes intercultural learning and is part of a broader institutional commitment to fostering global learning. This country-specific program adopts a thematic approach and builds connections as it links curricular and co-curricular aspects of the learning experience.

The Year of Kenya (2006-2007) at KSU presented an exceptional learning opportunity for our faculty, staff, and students as many of them have had little prior knowledge of or exposure to Kenya, although Kenyan students have long been one of the largest international student communities on our campus and were one of the reasons that Kenya was chosen as the country of study. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Year of Kenya was the numerous opportunities for the KSU community to interact with Kenyans both here in the United States and in Kenya. For example, first, we hosted visiting Fulbright Professor Eric Aseka from Kenyatta University (KU) for the entire academic year. He engaged our students in the classroom and worked closely with faculty and staff as a colleague, friend, and mentor. In part, through his initiatives, KSU and KU signed a formal memorandum of understanding forming the basis for future exchange of faculty, students, resources, and ideas. Second, we hosted a wide variety of guest lecturers including some of the most renowned Kenyan scholars in the world (a list is provided in the appendix of this volume). Third, a group of KSU faculty who met throughout the year as a learning community reading about Kenya and discussing the lectures conducted a two-week travel seminar to Kenya establishing

numerous valuable professional contacts and firsthand knowledge of the country. Finally, as host and cosponsor of the international conference and investment forum on “The Role of the Kenyan Diaspora in Kenya’s Development,” we have, in partnership with several other organizations (listed below), set in motion a most important dialogue on emerging global citizenship networks.

This year was the first time that KSU hosted a conference in conjunction with the ACS program.<sup>2</sup> Our partners in organizing the conference included the Association of Kenyan Professionals in Atlanta (AKPA), Kenyan Development Network Consortium (KDNC), the Embassy of Kenya in Washington, D.C., Foundations for the Empowerment of Africans, Kenyan Community Abroad (KCA), Global Literacy Project (GLP), and the Kenyan Christian Fellowship in America (KCFA). The conference attracted over 700 people from the local Kenyan community as well as from other parts of the United States and from Kenya. The Kenyan Ambassador to the United States, Peter Ogego, participated in the conference. In addition, the Minister of Finance, Amos Kimunya, gave one of the keynote addresses providing an overview of Kenya’s economic health, fiscal policies, and the impact of remittances. Indeed, the conference far exceeded our expectations in its ability to bring together a wide array of stakeholders to learn from and share with each other.

The papers in this volume represent some of the important issues and ideas analyzed and discussed throughout the Year of Kenya. Indeed, some of these papers were first delivered at the conference. The issue is divided into three main themes: Diaspora and Development, Language and Identity, and Leadership and Ethnicity. The common thread present throughout this volume is the examination of the role of the Kenyan diaspora in aiding in Kenya’s development. Most of the articles assert a special role for diaspora Kenyans. The question that engages these works is whether this heightened sense of the diaspora’s role stems from its members’ unique position and perspective as global agents, at once removed from and connected to the struggles of their homeland, or from some other set of motivations and skills.

### ***Diaspora and Development***

This first section on the Diaspora and Development examines the effects of Kenyan emigration, Kenyans’ levels of success abroad, and the challenges of aiding family, friends, and communities back in Kenya. The first paper, “Brain Drain, Waste, or Gain? What We Know About the Kenyan Case,” analyzes the effects of emigration from Kenya for the country. Its country-specific focus provides richer analysis than the more generalized attention usually given this subject. It asserts that Kenya has experienced some of the highest intensity of

brain drain in Africa and in the world. It also notes that Kenya's brain drain has begun to decline and that brain waste for Kenyans abroad is not as significant as it is for other African nations. The primary beneficiary of Kenya's brain drain has been the United States.

The next paper in the Diaspora and Development section titled "What the 2000 U.S. Census Tells Us About the Kenyan Diaspora" focuses the reader's attention on the level of economic success and educational achievement that Kenya-born immigrants to the United States have attained in comparison to the broader U.S. population and how these Kenyans abroad may be tapped to aid in Kenya's development. It asserts that Kenyans are among the highest in educational achievement of any immigrant group and have lower rates of unemployment than the general population. Their annual median income on average is also higher than that of the general population. Finally, the paper asserts that these diaspora Kenyans are underutilized by Kenya and the United States but that following the example of other diaspora communities from India, China, and Israel, Kenyans abroad strategically linked through the Kenyan government and business community could have a significant impact.

The last paper in the Diaspora and Development section titled "Diaspora in Global Development: First Generation Immigrants From Kenya, Transnational Ties and Emerging Alternatives" represents original primary ethnographical research on first generation Kenyans living in the United States. It looks at the reasons Kenyans emigrate to the United States and makes recommendations for how these Kenyans abroad may contribute to Kenya's development. The paper describes some of the challenges faced by Kenyan immigrants to the United States and the challenges of maintaining ties with their homeland. It asserts that these recent Kenyan immigrants have succeeded in maintaining ties much more so than was historically assumed for previous groups. One of the many interesting findings of this research is that Kenyans abroad are making significant contributions to aiding development back in their homeland.

### *Language and Identity*

The second section, focused on Language and Identity, presents three very different perspectives; one looks at poor Nairobi street children, another the work of an internationally acclaimed Kenyan author, and the third a performance about Kenyans by undergraduate students at a predominantly white university in the southern United States. The papers are, however, linked by their interest in exploring the questions of language, culture, and multiple identities. The first paper titled "Nairobi's Street Children Redefining Their World: A Study of Language and Identity" focuses on the ways in which language is created by street

children in order to understand and survive a difficult world. It highlights the children's agency in contesting negative stereotypes imposed by the wider society even as they use and borrow ideas from the global society such as American hip-hop or Caribbean reggae cultures. This work is also original primary research and the methodology is described in detail. It is very instructional to others interested in carrying out similar studies. The response of the street children to the researchers is positive as the researchers gain their trust and learn of their struggles. The street children attempt to transform their world through language in ways that make it less oppressive, if not less dangerous.

The second paper in the Language and Identity section is titled "What Is My Nation? Visions of a New Global Order in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*." This paper highlights Ngugi's Kenyanness and global citizenship. It shows how his latest work exposes a patriarchal leadership working with the forces of global capital to bring a fictional African nation to ruin. It underscores the connection between Ngugi's exile and his insights into the complex relationships between the local and the global. It also connects women's marginalization with the exile experience. The author of the paper, like Ngugi, wonders how the nation can liberate itself from the grip of transnational capitalism.

The third paper on Language and Identity titled "Ethnographic Performance and Global Learning: Lessons From *You Always go Home*" is about the conception, development, and impact of a play performed at KSU based primarily on stories told by KSU Kenyan students as interpreted by their fellow American student actors. This paper discusses how performance can be a means of intercultural learning and understanding. The performance aimed to teach KSU audiences about Kenyan culture but accomplished much more in uncovering the stories of Kenyan students at KSU in particular and the United States as a whole, and the sacrifices faced by them and their families to enable an education abroad. The authors describe an inspiring, cathartic, and empathetic cross-cultural learning experience as they also carefully document the creative process.

### ***Leadership and Ethnicity***

The final section of this volume encompasses topics related to Leadership and Ethnicity. The first article recognizes the unique contributions of different ethnic cultures to national identity, the second emphasizes how one Kenyan community has been marginalized, and the third discusses the unique perspective of the diasporan community in advancing national culture. The first paper titled "The Emerging National Culture of Kenya: Decolonizing Modernity" asserts that national culture must complement the preexisting ethnic cultures of Kenya. It underscores the importance of a Kenyan identity while recognizing that Kenyans

have multiple identities. Indeed, the author asserts that these multiple identities are the foundation allowing for the rise of a national identity. He cites as examples the roles of traditional philosophies, world religions, African dress, ethnic cuisines, interethnic marriages, the Swahili and Sheng languages, government works, constitutional reforms, and popular artistic culture in the forging of modern Kenyan identity. One of the most interesting arguments he makes in support of developing national loyalties is how the strongest criticisms against corrupt politicians often come from people of the same ethnic background as the person being criticized rather than from people of other ethnic groups. While the paper supports the idea of modernity as an amalgam of world cultures where one culture builds upon its predecessors, it does so asserting pride in and primacy of African, Kenyan, and local ethnicity as equals in this process.

The second paper titled "Representation in Kenya, Its Diaspora, and Academia: Colonial Legacies in Constructions of Knowledge About Kenya's Coast" stands in stark comparison with the first paper. It asserts the historical and persistent underdevelopment of non-Swahili coastal peoples. This very culture-specific analysis reveals problems of uneven development within Kenya and the continued privileging of certain culturally dominant perspectives at home and abroad and especially within academia and the more "educated" elite classes. Through this paper's historical analysis of social relations, the reader is challenged to consider more deeply the meaning of modernity for marginalized majorities in Kenya's coastal regions. The author provides extensive evidence of the intentional and ongoing underdevelopment and marginalization of Mijikenda societies. He argues the need for a more nuanced understanding of human relations and identities of the Swahili coast, if social and racial hierarchies of power are to be adequately addressed in Kenya today. Finally, the author questions the ability of Kenya's diaspora communities to redress this historical legacy.

The final paper in this section and volume titled "The Role of the Kenyan Diaspora in Constructing a New Political Culture and Identity" focuses on the potential leadership role of Kenyans in the diaspora to mediate between global forces and local Kenyan realities to reshape identity politics and aid in national development. This paper links local problems to global problems and calls for people all over the world regardless of race or ethnicity to work together to resist hegemonic, imperialistic forces that have characterized much of human history. The author calls for an in-depth knowledge and awareness of history, a demystification of history, as a prerequisite for positive change. He notes the failure of Africa's first generation of postcolonial leaders to break with colonialist policies that privileged certain classes and ethnic groups. He calls for an authentic leadership of social responsibility in Kenya that recognizes the need to "promote health, prevent disease, improve literacy, and spur people into productive actions

and amicable social relations.” According to the author, cultural identity should be defined more in terms of its Africanness and its moral and ethical value, rather than limited to ethnic, religious, political, or economic forms. Furthermore, he asserts that a national cultural identity must be formed in relational spaces of unfettered public discourse. National identity, true patriotism, rests on establishing a profound sense and practice of inclusive development. For Africans and Kenyans at home and in the diaspora who are involved in academia such patriotism requires greater effort at fostering critical alternative perspectives.

All of the papers in this volume address the importance of cultural identity to the process of human development. They particularly emphasize the valuable role that history, language, social mobility, and education play in the construction of identity and the future. This volume owes a debt of gratitude to all those who participated in the Year of Kenya, the presenters at weekly programs and at the Kenyan Diaspora conference, and others too numerous to list here. I thank our partners in organizing the conference: the Association of Kenyan Professionals in Atlanta (AKPA), Kenyan Development Network Consortium (KDNC), the Embassy of Kenya in Washington, D.C., Foundations for the Empowerment of Africans, Kenyan Community Abroad (KCA), Global Literacy Project (GLP), and the Kenyan Christian Fellowship in America (KCFA). I also thank the many authors who submitted papers for consideration in this special issue and to those colleagues who gave their valuable time and expertise to review them. I would especially like to recognize Drs. Victor Edo, Nuru Akinyemi, Robert Devillar, Todd Harper, and Akanmu Adebayo for their careful readings and advice in bringing this project to fruition.

—*Dr. Daniel J. Paracka*  
*Guest Editor, Special Edition*

### Notes

- 1 See <http://www.kennesaw.edu/globalinstitute/yearofprog.htm>
- 2 See <http://www.kennesaw.edu/globalinstitute/kenyandiaspora.htm>