

## FORGING AFRICAN COMMUNITIES: MOBILITY, INTEGRATION AND BELONGING<sup>1</sup>

SILVIA AMARAL<sup>1</sup> 

This book is part of the series *Global Diversities*, which aims to enrich the scholarship on Human Diversity with different dimensions of the phenomenon, analysed through the multidisciplinary lenses of Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, Law, Geography and Religious Studies. It highlights the diversity of human movement in the African continent, and the consequent dynamics of integration arising between those who move and the societies in which they move.

The editors draw from extensive knowledge and experience on the topic. L. Landau is director and Research Chair at the African Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; his work focuses on human mobility, citizenship, development, and political authority. O. Bakewell is Senior Lecturer at the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester, and former Director of the International Migration Institute, University of Oxford; he works on the intersections between mobility, development, and change, with an empirical focus in Africa.

Their goal in this publication is to uncover some of the ways by which mobility triggers spatial, social, economic, and political change in the continent, examining them through the agency of its actors – migrants, refugees, hosts, local and national authorities, and civil society associations.

To achieve it, they argue in the introductory chapter, it is necessary to address the scarcity of empirical research about integration in Africa, to overcome the conceptual limitations in its contemporary scholarship – dominated by Euro-American normative assumptions, state and policy-centred visions, and teleological orientations. These fall short to analyse some of the characteristics of African life, such as diversity, informality, translocalism, fluidity and kinship, among others.

Hence, the book intends to question the role of formal regulation and informal association in the integration processes of migrants, to challenge the idea of cohesive and homogeneous host societies, to uncover the specificities of African expressions of belonging, and illustrate commonalities with broader phenomena of global mobility. These happen in increasingly complex, diverse, and more densely inhabited urban settings, where migrants establish multi-sited, translocal lives and parallel identities, between communities of origin and of destination.

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<sup>1</sup> Centro de Estudos sobre África e Desenvolvimento (CEsA), Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão (ISEG), Rua Miguel Lupi, 1249-078, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal. E-mail: [silviaamaral@phd.iseg.ulisboa.pt](mailto:silviaamaral@phd.iseg.ulisboa.pt)

Through a selection of multi-scale and multi-method empirical studies, the editors aim to start a reflexion centred in the agency of the actors, conceptualizing space as a social construct, and breaking away from policy-oriented and normative assumptions.

The publication results from a collaboration between European and African-based universities, in a deliberated effort to propose rich and theoretically provocative case studies by scholars working on/in Africa, to mitigate conceptual and methodological imbalances in the scholarship on African migration and displacement.

The 11 case studies presented are divided in three thematic sections: the first explores gaps between formal citizenship rights and informal forms of community belonging; the second section illustrates how faith associations and economic entrepreneurialism shape interactions between hosts and guests; finally, the third section emphasizes the social products – socialities – of pragmatic choices for material benefit and utilitarian ethics among communities.

The Part I of the book, “Agents of Integration – Decentring Policy and the State”, is composed of four case studies.

In the first, L. Hovil shows how a proposal from the government of Tanzania, to naturalize Burundian refugees, came to destabilize informal dynamics of integration negotiated at community level, after decades of settlement and acceptance. The visibility granted by the prospect of citizenship undermined coping mechanisms for integration in the host society. Through qualitative interviews, observation and official reports, the author illustrates positive outcomes of informal strategies of belonging sabotaged by negative effects of state-centred policies, ignorant of local realities.

In the second chapter, D. Tati conceptualizes integration as a non-linear process of space appropriation, presenting the case of West African fisher migrants in the Congolese city of Pointe Noir. Their incorporation in the informal labour and housing markets provides arenas for social inclusion and communal cohesion. Drawing on the integration context theory (Schneider & Crul, 2010) through a longitudinal ethno-survey, complemented by historical information, the author demonstrates the significance of land for housing, livelihoods, and social representation.

The third case, by J. Berriane, deploys the concept of *The Stranger* to study the temporary permanence of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, focusing on the relation between temporality and the social impacts of migrants on the urban landscape of the host society. Through qualitative interviews, the author uncovers the transient social ties and the circumstantial solidarities established between mobile and settled migrants and locals, in their interactions in the spaces of the street and the neighbourhood.

The last chapter of this Part I revisits the phenomenon of refugee integration in a foreign country, but from the perspective of repatriation. Through longitudinal qualitative field work, O. Bakewell accompanies Angolan refugees settled in the borderlands of Zambia, outside of officially administered camps. He describes how they integrated economically and socially in the host villages with the support of customary authorities and tacit community acceptance. This process allowed for their refusal and evasion, decades later, to the repatriation by the Angolan and Zambian governments.

The Part II – “Negotiating Scales and Spaces of Belonging” – is another set of four case studies.

P. Bukasa investigates the strategies applied by migrant-led Pentecostal churches in South African townships to their ritual practices and cosmological languages, to reduce the social cost of diversity in the religious communities. Through analogic and digital ethnography, the author deploys the concept of tactical creolization, by which multicultural congregations in heterogeneous host societies facilitate integration.

In the second chapter, P. Mangezvo analyses the flea market, the church, and the residential district as spaces for integration of Nigerian traders in Zimbabwe’s capital Harare. Through an ethnographic study influenced by the situational analysis framework (Gluckman, 1940) and the interpretative methodology (Geertz, 1974), the author applies the notion of tactical cosmopolitanism (Freemantle & Landau, 2010) and space as a social construct (Lefebvre, 1991) to show the importance of spatially shaped social networks for livelihoods and belonging.

The third case, by G. Ngoie, compares the Nigerian and Chinese communities in Lubumbashi, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These establish interactions with the local society in different contact zones, defined by space, specific economic activities, and visual communication. Through diversified qualitative methods, the author suggests the phenomenon of social mixity – simultaneous physical proximity with social distance – to negotiate integration from the bottom up.

In the final chapter of this section, N. Binaisa conceptualizes belonging as an emotional experience rooted in shared collective activities, social locations, and political and ethical values, by presenting the perspective of Ugandan return migrants from London to Kampala. Through life histories, personal narratives and virtual ethnography, the author unpacks the notions of transnational and translocal geographies to capture the diverse effects of the colony, the diaspora, and the return in the experience of belonging for these migrants.

The last thematic section of the book, Part III – “Emergent Socialities and Subjectivities” – comprises the final three case studies.

S. Gordon presents the only quantitative study in the publication, hypothesizing that the integration of migrants depends, to a large extent, on the conceptions and feelings of the host society towards them. Through a multivariate regression analysis based on South African national survey data, the author identifies some of the drivers for social connectivity and tests the links between perceptions, stereotypes and heterogeneous contact, finding a statistic correlation between linking social capital and bridging social capital.

The second chapter, by R. Cazarin, revisits the phenomena of migrant-led churches, but from the perspective of the diaspora. Through participant observation, interviews and life narratives conducted with Congolese and Nigerian priests in Bilbao and Johannesburg, the author explains how foreign faith associations may remain disconnected from their local realities, but draw from shared challenges to build a sense of belonging among members, based on a diasporic consciousness and spiritual kinship.

The last case study, co-authored by L. Landau and I. Freemantle, documents modalities of coexistence in two periurban settlements in Nairobi and Johannesburg, where the ethnic heterogeneity among residents challenges the notion of a coherent host society. Through qualitative examination of surveys and interviews, the authors uncover utilitarian frameworks of tolerance and cosmopolitan ethics arising in urban places of extraction, not belonging, where everyone is a translocal migrant of some kind.

In the last chapter of the book, R. Cohen summarizes patterns of inclusion and exclusion in Africa through seven sites: agricultural societies, kingdoms, new societies formed by refugees, strangers' quarters in precolonial cities, colonial mines and cities, newly independent states, and contemporary cities. Based on the theory of anthropophagic and anthropoemic societies (Lévi-Strauss, 1995), the author suggests that policies at state level for integration of foreigners in African societies tend to be ideologically anthropoemic, while in contrast the informal mechanisms of incorporation in the neighbourhood, the church and the market are mostly anthropophagic.

The detailed and diverse examples in this compilation paint a rich image of the varied spatial, social, economic, ethical, and religious mechanisms developed by mobile people in Africa and the African diaspora, for co-existence, acceptance, integration and belonging in the communities where they pass and settle.

In its approach, structure and methodology, the book achieves the goals initially stated by the editors: to study the phenomena from the perspective of their agents, to enlarge the empirical knowledge in the African continent, and to do so from an Africa-oriented research framework. The 3-part division helps to situate each of the case studies in the broader theoretical departing points, highlighting conceptual commonalities between diverse migration realities and geographical contexts.

The selected cases indeed challenge normative assumptions about the role of formal state policies in processes of integration. Likewise, they do question the presumed homogeneity of host communities. They place these phenomena simultaneously in a specific Africanity and a common globality, both empirically illustrated and theoretically demonstrated. The authors deploy orthodox theories intertwined with contemporary ideas to describe the observed realities, embedding the discussions in reflexions from established philosophers, historians, urbanists and social scientists in the field of African studies, such as A. Mbembe and S. Nuttall (the African metropolis, ch. 1 and 12), AM. Simone (urban socialities in Africa, idem), J. Nyerere (pan-African socialism, ch. 2 and 13), A. Mafeje (tribalism and Africanity, ch. 9), E. Akyeampong (African diasporas, ch. 11), G. Myers (complexity in African cities, idem), among others.

However, among the relevant topics in the scholarship on African mobility selected for this book, three flagrant themes are missing: the experience of female migrants, the phenomenon of child migration, and the journeys of transnational African students.

Other than sporadic references to female interviewees, the distinct challenges women face in their transnational movements (Fleury, 2016; WHO, 2018), and the strategies they may deploy for acceptance and integration were not object of a specific inquiry. It is also mentionable, although not causally related, that only three chapters are authored by female researchers, which draws attention to the gender unbalance still present in published academia on migration, and may lead one to wonder what kind of different perspectives, methods and insights may be brought forward by more women scholars.

Likewise, accounts of minors who move forced or willingly, without their families, and the circumstances they face (Hashim & Dorte Thorsen, 2011), are absent from this compilation.

Finally, the phenomena of African student and high skilled mobility (Berriane, 2015; Kishun, 2011; Kritz, 2015; Mlambo *et al.*, 2020), can equally contribute to the analysis of other arenas of negotiation of belonging in the continent.

One can suggest that including these voices would add strength, depth, and legitimacy to the overall intention of the book to illustrate varied human phenomena of integration and diversity.

It is also noticed that only one of the 11 case studies results from a quantitative methodology. One may deduct that this unbalance between research approaches may be due to the difficulty of assembling solid enough data on human mobility in Africa to conduct quantitative investigation. However, the chapter shows that statistical analysis, when possible to employ, can be insightful also for fluid, heterogeneous and informal phenomena such as processes of belonging and integration. Simultaneously, that case study is also the only focusing specifically on the agency of the host society in these processes. The remaining chapters give prominence to the perspective of the migrants, referring the resident communities almost as a “background” for the events, with varied gradations of detail – ranging from the chapters where these are superficially considered in the research (ch. 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 11) to the chapters where the civilian and institutional components of host communities are also subjects of study, but always as a complement to the centrality of the mobile persons (ch. 2, 4, 6 and 12). It would be enriching to analyse and uncover more expressions from this side of the phenomena of integration and belonging.

In conclusion, this is a valid contribution to empirical research and theoretical scholarship on human mobility in the African continent and diaspora, an unmissable reference for reflections about social identity, community interaction, evolution of kinship, translocalism and the spatiality of human relations in Africa.

ORCID ID

Silvia Amaral  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8024-1319>

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