

CHAPTER 1 - Editorial

Migration and Identity Construction in Africa: Implications for Policy and Practice

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Abstract

The discourse on African identities, mobilities and migrations has, in the past, lost its memories due to the violence created by both colonial and contemporary world systems. This special issue flips the narrative to develop ways to fuse knowledge about identity and migration in Africa and epistemological norms to meet the needs of Africa in the 21st century. The core argument is for an identity and migration dialogue that is aware of colonial impositions and can borrow from global knowledge. Bearing in mind the multiplicity of cultures in Africa, it becomes pertinent to explore the socio-economic and political implications of migration for and within Africa. Several research and opinion pieces have resonated on the migration discourse and its aftermath for migrants and host communities. More conversation is required on the identity constructed by migrants of themselves and their views/perceptions of their host community. This special issue addresses these concerns.

Keywords: Africa, identity construction, othering, integration, migration

Introduction

In Africa, the discourse on identity construction in terms of how individuals and groups understand themselves as well as their positionality in the world, are influenced by the complex interplay of migration, ethnicity, nationalism, and globalization influences. Within this proposition, several research and opinion pieces have resonated on the migration discourse and its aftermath for the migrants and the host community (Blanquart *et al.* 2012; Emmenegger & Careja 2012; Chi & Marcouiller 2013). The central argument is premised on the fact that migration experiences (either forced or voluntary migration) can lead to the reconfiguration of both individual and collective identities. While migration is said to propel social changes over time, the act in itself produces different forms of social stratification. As typical in the migration - resource allocation discourse, the aftermath of a movement of people produces a culture of othering in the competition and preservation of culture and resources for the host community as well as the migrants within the same geopolitical spaces (Patrick *et al.* 2021). In this instance, migration evokes some sense of cultural solidarity and identity among the same groups while arousing a culture of othering. For instance, the complexities encountered by rural migrants (in a rural - urban migration scenario), in their navigation of cultural landscapes in their new community may lead to the adaptation and uptake of new identities that incorporate urban norms and a mix of their original regional, ethnic, and national identities. This is also evident in the development of transnational and diasporic identities in inter and intra continental migration experiences.

While the debate on African migration focuses largely on the intercontinental migration of Africans transiting outside Africa, there has been a growing discourse on the implications of intra-African migration in recent years. It is important to note that migration presents both opportunities and challenges for identity construction in Africa. For example, within the South African context, the issue of xenophobia, among other issues, has mostly been argued from the premise of fear/hatred of migrants by the host community (Neocosmos 2010; Charman & Piper 2012; Adjai & Lazaridis 2013; Hickel 2014). However, the literature is relatively silent on the identity constructed by migrants of themselves and their views/ perceptions of the host community.

This special issue focuses on the debates around migration from several dimensions: from identity and identity construction to local integration, development paradigms, human rights, and environmental issues. The subject of migration remains complex and complicated, but nonetheless, it needs to be

extensively studied since it is an important phenomenon of population change. This special issue therefore critically examines the nature of migration, identity construction, and integration in relation to Africa.

Papers in this volume interrogate issues of indigenous knowledge systems and how to carefully calibrate mobilities and movements of people in order to generate a corrective feature in the discourse that responds to the imperative nature of identity, indigeneity, and knowledge production. The chapters collectively advocate for a deliberative fusion as opposed to pursuing the imposition and reproduction of epistemological knowledge imported from elsewhere to Africa. The core argument is for an identity and migration discourse that is aware of colonial impositions and can borrow from global knowledge. The fact that the discourse on African identities, mobilities and migrations has, in the past, lost its memories due to the violence created by both the colonial and contemporary world systems is not overlooked. This issue flips the narrative to develop ways to fuse knowledge about identity and migration in Africa and epistemological norms to meet the needs of Africa in the 21st century.

The Contributions in this Special Issue

Mandende, Rakgogo, and Cekiso's paper discussed the pragmatic impact of names in Africa using the Khelobedu and Tshivenda naming practices in South Africa as a point in focus. The paper, using speech act theory (SAT), brings to bear the idea around the communication process and understanding in the case of what a speaker implies and what is being decoded by the listener based on factors such as situational context, preceding dialogues, individual mental state among others. The paper argues that names are communicative and act as forms of identity formation. This contribution is important as African personal naming processes and patterns form communicative points and aid identity formation. This formation is aided in the alignment of meaning and places to names which carries with it a sense of history, culture, and identity of people spanning time and spaces. Hence, names are reflective of the beliefs and cultural systems of the people, which are passed on different messages to the communities at large.

Patrick and Teer-Tomaselli's paper brings to bear another discourse on identity with a focus on the integrative dynamics of migrants within host communities. The paper explores how social constructs such as culture, religion, and the media interact to define and influence human lives resulting in identity formation and [re]construction. It argues that responses to otherness and diasporic presence are mostly polarized and often attributed to cultural differentia-

tion, which widened disparity and unappreciation of otherness. This accounts for the hostilities found between migrants and host communities in various African settings. The paper investigates how music represents self or collective identity within diverse religious contexts. In this sense, music is seen as communicative and a medium for preserving culture and identity. Within the African setting, it is also a medium for group inclusivity and exclusivity based on shared or divergent characteristics. The paper concludes that through the medium of Christian music, the diasporic group has sustained its cultural heritage in the face of globalization and has become exposed to the heritages of others. These practices can be advantageous in facilitating interactions that promote cultural diversity to mitigate clashes and xenophobic attacks between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

Umejei’s paper assessed another aspect of identity in terms of the impact of modernization on migrants’ identity negotiation. This contribution’s key focus is to link migration, identity, modernization, cultural preservation, and tourism development/ preservation in Africa. The paper focuses on modernization’s increasingly significant impact on traditional religious practices in Africa in terms of the preservation and sustainability of traditional spiritual practices. It explores migrants’ identity negotiation and religious affinity to cultural heritage practices from their origin, using Nigeria’s Osun festival as a prism for analysis. The paper argues that while some diasporic community members found reintegration of the ‘self’ quite easy, others had to negotiate their transnational identity to fit in and ‘feel among’ people of their kin. Although the yearning to stay connected to one’s roots may be identical, the diaspora tourism experiences may differ because of different migration histories or national origins. Again, while some diaspora tourists always feel a sense of belonging when they return to their birth country, others may not, which eventually leads to them being more alienated from their immigrant origins and heritage. The connection between ‘diaspora tourism’ and ‘immigrants’ emotional attachment’ to their country of origin may not always be positive. In conclusion, Umejei posits that while the idea of and sense of belongingness remains a fundamental component of identity formation and construction, understanding migrants’ identity formation should include a consideration of the host or community locations, migration guidelines, cultural identifiers, the value system of the host countries, and the migrants’ country of origin.

Gordon’s paper provides an interesting quantitative dimension in assessing whether the COVID-19 pandemic increased migrant – host community hostilities in South Africa. Bearing on the need to understand human psy-

chology in the face of vulnerabilities to mass disease-related threats, the paper investigates whether the pandemic increased the welfare chauvinism of the adult populace as well as levels of anti-immigrant violence. The study focused on three different forms of antipathy: i) zero-sum beliefs about immigration; ii) welfare chauvinism; and iii) anti-immigrant violence. It also discusses the 'economic competition' thesis as prevalent among policymaking circles in South Africa, whereby materialistic motives are seen as occupying a superordinate role in the study of intergroup relations. It also considers the zero-sum thinking around resource availability and migrants emanating from this thesis. It argues that the early pandemic period worsened anti-immigrant sentiments in South Africa. It concludes with the need to develop a mechanism to monitor anti-immigrant attitudes, considering the unknown long-term effects of the pandemic on public attitudes toward foreign nationals. The implication of this contribution to policymaking for and with migrant and host communities for social cohesion, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and development is paramount.

John-Langba's paper on women, gender-related refugees and asylum seekers explores intersectionality as an analytical tool for refugee law and policy reforms. The paper maintains that women remain relatively invisible in refugee law and policy despite constituting approximately 60% of Africa's population on average. It argues for the need for law and policy, geared towards addressing women's needs. The paper provides an overview of the theory of intersectionality and its importance in analyzing women and gender in refugee law, policy, and practice. It further discusses the emergence of women and gender as subjects of analysis within refugee law, the important notion of vulnerability, and why these need to be questioned. It concludes with an analysis of the asylum regime in South Africa and provides reflections on implications for policy and practice.

Furthering and concluding the identity discourse, Masengwe and Dube's contribution examines the implications of labelling on migrant policy and practices in South Africa. Their paper debates the implications of these policies in emitting xenophobic tendencies against migrant individuals in South Africa.

Conclusion

The contributors in this special address issues around identity and identity construction, local integration, development, human rights, and environmental

issues arising from intra-African migration. The underlying position here is the multifaceted nature of migration in Africa and its influences on identity construction within the continent. The reoccurring summation is that Africa's diverse identities will continue to be redefined and reimagined in the light of the migration discourse. This reality holds significant weighting in future policy development for and within Africa.

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