

Migrations and Creative Expressions in Africa and the African Diaspora

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dedicated to

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Preface

Migrations and Creative Expressions in Africa and the African Diaspora brings together twenty-three chapters on the cultural and spiritual dynamics of migrations in Africa and the African diaspora. The contributors range in professional and interdisciplinary backgrounds as disparate as architects, cultural theorists, historians, literary critics, and linguists.

Migrations occur in different patterns including forced and voluntary paradigms. For the pilgrim souls of African origin who were displaced from their native homelands and who traversed African landscapes to other lands during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, migration represents the forced pattern. For later migrants especially those who relocated for sundry reasons from their homelands to the Americas and scholars of different academic persuasions who journeyed from different parts of the world (but mostly from Africa) to Texas to participate in the 2006 Africa Conference, "Movements, Migrations, and Displacement in Africa," migration is voluntary and purposeful. The journeys however find a common ground in the academic feast at the Texas conference where scholars unmasked burning issues on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, broke silences, reaffirmed positions, and opened new discourses on the displacement, transportations, migration, celebrations, trials, and resilience of African kindred scattered in the diaspora. They recall confluences of celebratory spirits (rising from the curse of slavery) and opened up new perspectives on Africa and its diaspora. By the "curse" of slavery, we mean the horrific experience of millions of human beings who were captured, shackled, wrenched from their families, branded, sold, packed into the holds of ships, sold once more, and put to work in American mines and fields; enslavement meant pain and horror. For them, slavery was an unmitigated and terrible curse.

Some of the engaging essays on the subject culminate in this collection aptly tagged *Migrations and Creative Expressions in Africa and the African Diaspora*. The studies address multiple issues ranging from diaspora, masked performances, identity formation, definitions and projections, group mobilizations, protests, self-reclamation and assertion, celebratory spaces, and food culture. Perhaps more than anything else, the chapters explore and discuss the nexus between Africans in the homelands and those of the diaspora including the hybrid forms generated by the contacts with other cultures. The essays in this volume have a forerunner in Falola and Childs' edited volume: *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, a book which addresses very similar and cogent issues:

migration, culture and resistance, contradictions of colonialism, complications of imperialism, tensions between host and guest communities in the diaspora, culture, language, and nationalism. Whether they comment on the lore of the Yoruba, the ethos of the Igbo in Nigeria, the tradition of the Fante/Ewe of Ghana in relation to the variants of their kindred use in the Americas or in the Caribbean, the essays engage, explicate, and complicate issues on the diaspora experience of Africans.

We want to thank all the contributors who, despite security and financial concerns, traveled long distances to be with us in Texas. Presenters and participants engaged in lively discussion throughout the three-day period. Such an undertaking does not come without copious debts. We are grateful to a host of graduate students (Roy Doron, Tyler Fleming, Matthew Heaton, Ann Genova, and Saheed Aderinto); the technical personnel (Sam Saverance); and many staff of the University of Texas (Gail Davis, Laura Flack and Martha Gail Moore). The organizations and departments that supported us financially include the Departments of History, Government, and English, the Center for African and African American Studies, the Office of the Vice President, College of Liberal Arts, Office of the Dean of Students, the Texas Cowboys Fund, The Louann and Larry Temple Fund, The Frances Higgenbotham Nalle Fund, and Dedman College, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. We are also grateful to Dr. Vik Bahl of Green River Community College in Auburn, Ms. Ronke Obadina of Austin, and Dr. Segun Fayemi of New York for their commitment to the conference.

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