
This edited volume is a welcome contribution to the literature on the neglected topic of sub-Saharan African religious transnationalism. It clearly shows the complex internal social dynamics and external circumstances that shape and drive the processes which create and sustain religious transnationalism of Africans. Each contributor handles one aspect of African religious transnationality (migration process, transplanting of religious sensibilities, formation of social capital, and so on) with relevant depth and breadth. Collectively, they portray the connections between post-immigration religious practices and pre-migration experiences, especially relating to those of Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality.

The fifteen contributors and their editors, Afe Adogame and James Spickard, have achieved three noteworthy features in the book. First, the work reveals how Africans used religion to craft meanings and make their ways in strange worlds; and, further, Religion Crossing Boundaries uncovers what is happening to religion in the era of globalization. Secondly, the book documents the hopes, crises and despairs of Africans as they cross borders in new and complex ways to make a living, while holding tightly onto their religious visions, duties and practices. Thirdly, across the chapters the collection shows the multiform creativity of Africans in cross-border religious activities as they display several models of religious transnationalism. The combination of these three accomplishments provides the reader with a lens to examine the world-making activities, the mingled hopes and fears and the resourcefulness of Africans as they flee from collapsed states, political oppression and virulent poverty and settle in other African, European and North American countries. The book is a tale of human grit and tenacity; a portrait of humanity at the margins of society, holding onto religion as the source of vitality, meanings and dignity in harsh and strange environments.

Religion Crossing Boundaries does all this without succumbing to the common bane of all edited volumes: failing to maintain a common thread across the chapters and introducing wide variations in the quality of scholarship. Hence, the editors of this book deserve credit for harmonizing the quality, language and style of the twelve chapters.

This feat is all the more appreciable when the reader realizes that religious transnationalism is a multifaceted topic; each writer could only focus on a part, yet, refrains successfully from giving the impression that s/he is describing the whole. Each scholar reports his/her part within a shared understanding of the enormity of the multidimensional subject they are collectively trying to fathom. Thus, each chapter functions as a step along the way to delineating, deciphering and discerning the complexity of religious transnationalism.
Each contribution is consistent with the common theme: a hermeneutics of the interwoven reflection and praxis of believers living out their faiths as articulated across national political boundaries. Moreover, each chapter leads the reader into a deeper understanding of a religion’s teaching as lived experience in dialogue with the demands of the faith and harshness of reality. Thus the book, as a whole, valorizes the ethnography of praxis as the preferred lens through which to enter the discourse of religious transnationalism, albeit without always being careful enough to distinguish between multinationalism and transnationalism.

More negatively, the analysis of transnationalism as praxis is not without its problems, and the studies in the book are not linked to ethical demands and adjustments. For instance, there is no discussion of the necessity of ethics derived from faith in compromised (co-promising) transnational contexts. Similarly, the focus on praxis (trans-praxis, if you like) is carried out to the neglect of doctrine (transdoxy) and emotions, feelings and pathos (transpathos). Thus, the reader is left longing to know the significance of transnational religiosity across these three perspectives for social issues in the public square. It would have been splendid if the contributors had thrown some light on how religions that cross boundaries help or hinder the formation of the ‘general point of view’ necessary for formulating policies in the global public square.

Another major shortcoming of this book—especially as seen from the perspective of this journal—is that it has no discernible theological engagement. Given that the entries are all about phenomenological and ethnographical descriptions, there is no theological framework that undergirds and controls the multiple investigations; thus, there is no discussion of theology of religious transnationalism that can inform the ethos, critical issues and ferment emerging in the global civil society. In fact, this is even true of the way the bookhandles transnational religiosity itself; that is, while we have good descriptions and analyses of the manifestations of transplanted religious communities in concrete settings, we have no concerted effort at developing an overall theoretical thrust for the burgeoning field of study. A possible theoretical perspective is discernible in Samuel Krinsky’s and Marleen De Witte’s contributions in chapters 11 and 12; their efforts hint at the volume’s neglected huge potential.

All this notwithstanding, this volume makes a worthy contribution to the field of transnational religion and sets a new bar for the quality of scholarship on the study of Africans as they migrate with their religions. It is no longer viable to discuss migration from Africa without taking religious moods and motivation into account; explanations of migration on economic and political grounds must now be interwoven with religious dynamics.

On a wider note, the ethnographic materials and the perspectives of sociology of religion that the authors deftly bring to bear on their work have important implications for theories of (religious) globalization. Indeed, the book challenges the idea that there is a global civil society emerging in the midst of globalization, as Max Stackhouse and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue. According to this book, what is happening is