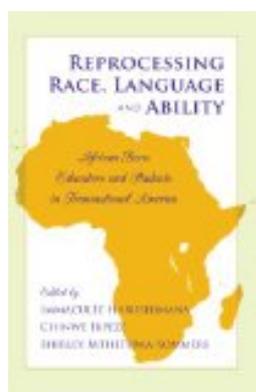


Professional Book Review

Harushimana, I., Ikpeze, C., & Mthethwa-Sommers, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Reprocessing race, language and ability: African-born educators and students in transnational America*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. 245 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4331-1751-0 (pb). \$37.00

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This book is composed of essays that explore the untold stories of African-born educators and students and their lived experiences in culturally inhospitable institutions. It specifically addresses the challenges and obstacles that African-born educators face both in and out of the classroom and the strategies they have used to overcome the barriers to achieve their academic goals and careers.

Framed by an introduction and an afterword, the 14 substantive chapters of the book divide into two sections. The first is titled, "Academic Knowledge Knows No Race: African-born Teacher Educators in the United States." In the first chapter, the author synthesises a critical review of the last two decades' (1991–2011) scholarly literature related to African-born educators in academia and details collective professional experience in colleges/schools of education. She employs critical race theory as the methodology to examine the lived experience of African-born educators and teachers that have been "epistemologically marginalized and silenced" from current scholarly literature on faculties of colour in the American institutions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for future research into the experience of African-born academics and educators.

Through personal narratives, Chapter 2's author explains how cultural stereotypes that manifest primarily through the intersections of racism, sexism, xenophobia, and accent perception distort the ways she is evaluated by students. Chapter 3 emphasises the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy to bridge the gap between African-born educators and American-born K-12 educators. In concert with Chapter 2, this chapter explains how the author's teaching skills are often judged by her students based on her accent, which might further undermine her role as an expert teacher of American-based subjects. Despite their experiences of the prevailing norms, the authors of Chapters 4 and 5 show how they successfully negotiated their academic careers by using their Africanness as a source of strength and discuss the strategies they have used to be successful in their academic careers. Drawing from an autoethnographic study, Chapter 6 presents the author's experience of providing professional development workshops on Africa for American-born K-12 educators. The purpose of the workshops is to remove the negative images of Africa and African people presented in both the media and

textbooks and to identify ways to improve schooling for African students in the education system. Chapter 7 provides specific examples of actual life experience in applying for an administrator role in high-ranking positions in US education institutions.

The second section is titled, "K-12 Teaching and Learning in the United States and Canada: African-born Teachers and Students Weigh In." The chapters are organised around an exploration of the unique challenges of both African-born teachers/educators and secondary school students. In giving the opportunity for these unheard voices to be heard, Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 explore factors that affect the academic success or failure of African-born secondary school youths in the US and Canadian school systems. The aim of these four chapters is to present first-hand knowledge of African-born newcomer students' schooling experiences and the obstacles they face because of their accents. Focusing on the small but growing number of francophone sub-Saharan Africans settling in British Columbia, Chapters 8 and 11 discuss how African French-speaking newcomers navigate their schooling process in Vancouver and how the teachers often lack the necessary training and resources to provide adequate teaching to African children whose education has been interrupted by war. Specifically, Chapter 8 identifies three areas of challenge that have hindered African newcomers in school integration: cultural, social, and academic. As a solution, it suggests building stronger relationships between schools, communities and parents that can be important in providing support for African refugee students. The African teens further discuss how teachers are "both passive and active agents" in perpetuating racial inequalities in education (Conchas, 2006, p.17). Chapter 9 examines the strategies that African-born students have adopted as individuals to overcome their academic obstacles. Chapter 10, in particular, is shaped by the author's account of her experience of schooling. Despite the fact that her previous education was predominantly in English, she was wrongly placed in the ESL class. The importance of Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 lies in the argument that African immigrant students were perceived as having an English language deficiency because of their accents. The implication of these four chapters can be extended beyond the issues of African children to touch on minorities and their ESL placement. This systematic separation also raises the question of whether language and accent have become the new source of segregation in schools.

Chapters 12 and 13 move the focus back onto the K-12 teachers' unique challenges when teaching in the USA. Despite the authors' being victims of linguicism, they have learned how to negotiate their new environment through African values and patience, silences, and perseverance. Chapter 14's author focuses on the importance of faculty mentoring that helped him to stay motivated throughout his professional journey. The chapter concludes by discussing how the institutional support system is critical for his academic career success. The final chapter offers a new perspective on assimilation and adaptation of African-born immigrants that is demonstrated in the African educators' present lives.

This book addresses a timely topic worthy of public consideration and is an original contribution to the debate in the field of African immigrants and their academic careers. In particular, this book is relevant because the rising

percentage of African immigrants is “changing the demographic of the majority population in the communities as well as in schools” (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011, p.35).

The strength of the book can be summed up in two aspects. First, African-born educators and teachers are categorised according to colour, which means they are always lumped in with native-born Americans of colour. As the stories of the authors have witnessed, African-born immigrants seem to have become the most invisible and discriminated against minority group in the United States school and academic settings.

Consequently, their unique experiences and needs have remained unrecognised. This study therefore challenges the suggestion of previous research that, since the civil rights movement, racial attitudes and the relations between White and non-White Americans have improved in the United States. In particular, the “new” racism that African-born educators and students face because of their accents and national origins has been overlooked by both policymakers and educational researchers (Moore, 2013). Sociologists of colour thus argue that, despite considerable progress in pursuing racial equality, “the new ‘kind’ of racism has not been detected because scholars have used the traditional measures of racism which fail to uncover the ‘new’ racism” (Moore, p.3).

Secondly, this study also challenges the classic model of immigrant assimilation, which proposes straight-line assimilation based on European immigration streams that assumes all immigrants assimilate if they work hard and speak the English language. This book, however, demonstrates that not all immigrants will assimilate the way Europeans can. Sociologists of immigration argue that, for some immigrants, “their ethnicity will be a source of strength and [they] will muscle their way up, socially and economically, on the basis of their own communities’ networks and resources”. However, there are still others whose race, ethnicity and accent “will be neither a matter of choice nor a source of progress but a mark of subordination” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p.45).

Indeed, this book demonstrates that African-born academics and students are subject to racism in American education institutions more than other foreign academics and students. Explicitly focusing on African-born academics and students, this book provides to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners a new insight and valuable knowledge “of those who have been marginalized and have become invisible to the academic discourse” (Rodriguez, 2006, p.1071).

This book is well written and thorough and explains the plight of African-born educators and students. It offers a good start to open more debate and research in this field.

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