Chapter 1
Researching African Diasporas:
A Life Course and Qualitative Approach

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ABSTRACT

Intercontinental migrations, forced or volitional, are not new to Africans. While several research and studies have been conducted on the impact of migration on host countries as well as the brain-drain experienced by African countries, there is a scarcity of research on the real experiences of African migrants. This chapter proposes such research, using the life course perspective and qualitative research strategy in order to get a broader understanding of the lives of African diasporas. The life course perspective highlights the transitions, social meanings, and cumulative nature of the migrants' experiences, while the qualitative approach allows for tapping into the lived experiences of individuals through their personal narratives. Both are necessary for a more purposeful examination and realistic understanding of the African diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

International migration is a centuries-old phenomenon. Such migrations out of Africa resulted in what is now termed the *African Diaspora*. One of the earliest known migrations of this form out of the continent, was the Atlantic Slave Trade, a forced movement that involved thousands of Africans being taken away as slaves to the Americas, Europe and other places. These migrations, forced and voluntary, had an enormous impact on black struggles for rebirth, identity, assimilation, justice and progress, particularly in the United States of America, as captured by Falola (2013), in the book, *The African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization.*

Studies of African Diasporas have tended to exclude their experiences as a dynamic process, involving transitions and trajectories that are context-influenced. African immigration has had cultural and religious impacts that involve the culture of African people whose lives were shaped by inequality and oppression as they come in contact with other dominant and diverse ethnic and cultural influences. Political turmoil, socio-economic hardships, the pursuit of greener pastures have also motivated people to migrate from one place to another. Africans had also been involved in migration since the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the periods of colonialism and imperialism in the 18th century, and Fascism and Nazism in the 20th century. These experiences inform the biography and identity of Africans in the diaspora.

This chapter, therefore, proposes the life course model and qualitative research strategy in studying the African Diasporas. This theoretical and methodological linkage provide a base for understanding cultural manifestations, attitudes, and expressions that are embedded in the diaspora identities. The diasporas should be explored, paying attention to the stages of pre-migration, during migration, after migration, and their stage in the acculturation process to give an understanding of the processes, transitions, and the social meanings formed at each stage. The model takes note of the timing and transitions of cohorts within the different contexts the individuals dwell, which can be influenced by the historical circumstance of the place, time, place, and context (Elder, 1984; Hutchison, 2005). Being in the diaspora is a process. Therefore, the cumulative nature of experiences needs to be explored because the past bears upon the present and they stake a claim on the future (Elder, 1984). Examining the African Diaspora against the backdrop of the historical dimensions of their individual and family life helps appreciate dimensions of time (historical, social, family, and individual) that impacts and shapes the lives of individuals (Hareven, 1982).

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