



University of Ibadan



Institute of African Studies

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Call for Papers

Enfranchising the African Diaspora: Comparing Notes across Sub-Saharan Africa

Two-day Symposium at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Date: 20 -23 June 2017

Organisers: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, and the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden

The turn of the 21st century coincided with the conceptual and experiential revolution of discourses that were previously on the margins of critical attention. In the formerly colonized societies and developing nations generally, the significance and potential of Diaspora as a discursive category took an unprecedented and decisive turn; not least because Diaspora's relevance could no longer be undermined in the rendition of development of nation states and regions. To that extent, even when the notion of Diaspora is suggestive of absence and not being at home, the shortcomings manifesting as the void created in the homeland are increasingly being compensated for by the prodigious volume of remittances that Diaspora facilitates in contemporary African countries. Statistics continue to indicate that the value that Diaspora adds to present African economies is such that it is now read as vitally constitutive of the GDPs of individual countries. Of the estimated \$414 billion remitted globally in developing countries in 2013 and the estimated projection of \$540 billion for 2016, the African share continues to indicate a significant percentage. Beyond the financial remittances are the social remittances particularly in the realm of knowledge and skill transfer. All these have translated into visible developmental impacts mediated by Diaspora. They also index undeniable visibility for the Diasporas, going by the increasing recognition they continue to receive in their respective homelands. Not surprisingly, the AU in 2003 declared the Diaspora Africa's sixth region. The formal declaration has since been followed by a series of state initiatives and policy formulations in various African states to affirm the centrality of Diaspora to their development; yet many more are still in the process of formulating and implementing such policies.

While the place of Diaspora in homeland development in African countries is beyond contestation, the question of franchise, beginning with the right to vote from their various countries of destination without travelling to the homelands, provokes a great deal of controversies. The question of African Diaspora and election rights provokes debates precisely because of the complex if not complicated responses it has continued to receive from various African states. To date, going by Bongila's analytical paradigm, there are three categories of responses to the question of Diaspora election rights on the African continent. In his summary of existing literature on the categorization, a negligible number of African countries, among who are Botswana and Cape Verde, grant full voting rights to their Diaspora, having acknowledged that by virtue of their remittances, they demonstrate nationalism deserving of such rights, irrespective of their location. The second category of African nations demonstrates a sort of ambivalence that is expressed in making provisions for Diaspora voting rights in principle but never bothering to implement them, or at best making exclusionary concessions to only citizens in the diplomatic corps. The third category makes no provision, thereby leaving the Diaspora voting rights of their citizens to hang in the limbo. As Bongila reveals further, the disequilibrium in homeland responses is further compounded by certain categories of African Diasporas who think not paying taxes to their homeland governments and not having the intention to return should disqualify them from seeking to exercise such rights. Despite the complications, one thing is clear: the place of the African Diaspora in the homeland cannot be denied, which Bongila argues raises questions about ethics and dilemma: ethics because by receiving remittances from the Diaspora there must be an unequivocal affirmation of its voting rights in the homeland; dilemma because of the associated complications about the prospects of implementing voting rights for the African Diaspora.

Therefore, divergent situations across African nation states in relation to Diaspora franchise call for serious critical examination in as divergent forms. What, for instance, are the ethical considerations at play when a certain group of nations puts machinery in place to ensure their Diaspora population can participate in elections without returning home? How does the reluctance to implement Diaspora voting rights in certain African countries an indication of the rendition of the Diaspora as a suspect category? In what ways does the refusal to pass the Diaspora Bill coupled with the non-existence of Diaspora policies in many African countries stand in the way of the Diaspora franchise? How do these experiences compare and contrast with one another? What lessons are there to learn from countries already implementing Diaspora franchise? In what ways can the anxieties and misgivings about Diaspora franchise be allayed by a strong will on the part of the African states to implement the ethical mandate? These questions and more will occupy the front burner during the two-day symposium at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, from 20 to 23 June 2017.

The meeting will reflect on issues around, but not limited to:

- African Diaspora and political development in the homeland
- African Diaspora and elections in Africa
- Legal and institutional frameworks for African Diaspora franchise

- Comparative experiences on Diaspora franchise in Africa
- African Diaspora franchise and the use of modern technology
- Economics and politics of Diaspora franchise in Africa
- African Diaspora franchise and the support of the host countries
- Gender questions and prospects of spatial inclusion and exclusion
- Diaspora and election disputes, post-election conflicts & conflicts resolution
- African Diaspora and opposition politics

Abstracts of not more than 300 words should be sent no later than 31 March 2017 to:

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