Immigrant Exclusion and Insecurity in Africa

Coethnic Strangers

This book explores the diverse immigrant experiences in urban West Africa, where some groups integrate seamlessly while others face exclusion and violence. It shows, counterintuitively, that cultural similarities between immigrants and their hosts do not help immigrant integration and may, in fact, disrupt it. This book is one of the first to describe and explain in a systematic way immigrant integration in the developing world, where half of all international migrants go. It relies on intensive fieldwork tracking two immigrant groups in three host cities and draws from in-depth interviews and survey data to paint a picture of the immigrant experience from both immigrant and host perspectives.

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For Jen, Gabi, and Mina; in memory of Chief Olujobi.
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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book germinated during a research trip to East Africa in 2005. I was a graduate assistant on a project on coethnicity in Uganda at the time. In the mornings, I enjoyed the luxury of reading the local newspapers while sipping Nescafé in a house overlooking Lake Victoria (subsequent fieldwork would never be as luxurious again); on a regular basis, anti-Asian incidents sprinkled the pages of the Daily Monitor and New Vision. This piqued my interest, and I began reading about Idi Amin’s expulsion of Uganda’s more than 50,000 Asians in 1972. Although this event attracted significant media attention, I soon discovered that a myriad other less-publicized expulsion events had occurred throughout sub-Saharan Africa since the 1960s. Clearly, anti-immigrant politics were alive and well in a region typically known for sending migrants elsewhere, not for hosting them.

And yet, systematic research on immigrant exclusion in Africa offered a rather desolate landscape. I saw in that a research opportunity, which – eight years later – has culminated into this book. With it I try to make a dent into our understanding of the immigrant experience in urban Africa. My approach has been to immerse myself into two migrant communities in three West African urban centers and to draw insights from the local dynamics I witnessed and that have been recounted to me in interviews and surveys. As a result, I owe countless individual
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