

Mariam Konaté and Fredah Mainah. 2023. *Sub-Saharan African Immigrants' Stories of Resilience and Courage*. London: Anthem Press. 177 pp.

Mariam Konaté and Fredah Mainah challenge the conventional argument that academic research must discount the lived experience of researchers to remain objective. They use phenomenological methodology, combining their personal experiences with their interviewees, to describe the obstacles faced by immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa in the United States. The authors argue that despite being equipped with advanced degrees and professional experience, sub-Saharan African immigrants in the United States are often not valued. They are subjected to racism and discrimination amid efforts to adjust and assimilate. While the book's central theme is immigration, the authors also discuss identity, success, language, and leadership. They reveal their empirical arguments in nine chapters.

In chapter one, the authors advance part of the research methodology. The book's empirical evidence is based on twenty-five interviews with sub-Saharan African immigrants in the US, representing three regions: West, East, and Southern Africa. However, 44 percent of the total study participants were from Kenya, leading to issues of both under and overrepresentation. Chapter Two expands on the methodological approach. The authors use the phenomenological method to support their arguments. They play the role of researcher-participants to prevent their stories being told by others with "omissions, misrepresentations, and stereotypes" (p. 7). They also embrace a holistic approach that takes into account participants' "experiences, thoughts, and emotions" to mitigate bias (p. 19). The authors include the interview protocol to ensure data collection transparency.

Chapter three examines the linguistic challenges that sub-Saharan African immigrants face while seeking to integrate into American culture. The authors argue that as opposed to European and Australian immigrants, sub-Saharan African immigrants are often perceived as "incompetent" due to their "foreign accents" (p. 44). While the authors recognize that emigration requires adjustment and assimilation, they reject the "concept of language purity and verbal hygiene" as tools to facilitate the integration of sub-Saharan African immigrants into American society (p. 50). They add that evaluating immigrants' linguistic competence based on "accent" rather than on their ability to communicate effectively is "unfair" (p. 53). Such practice perpetuates racism, classism, and gender-based stereotypes against minoritized groups. The fourth chapter is centered on how sub-Saharan African immigrants define success. African immigrants define it as completing education, securing a job, and sending remittances to their families back home. Contrary to conventional arguments, the authors debunk the idea that the US is a merit-based society where "the environment is the same for all" (p. 63). They argue that sub-Saharan African immigrants often have to deal with racism and discrimination as they seek to realize the American dream.

Chapters five and six expand on the arguments made in the previous chapter and describe the coping mechanisms that sub-Saharan African immigrants use to mitigate racism, discrimination, and the lack of validation. These mechanisms include the recreation of transnational identities by resorting to skin bleaching, accent reduction, and changing dressing and eating habits to fit in. Chapter seven challenges the argument in the existing research that war and poverty are the main reasons sub-Saharan Africans immigrate to the US. Africans

immigrate mainly to pursue education. However, the authors call the idea of returning home after obtaining education “a myth” (p. 111). Most sub-Saharan African immigrants remain in the US upon completing their studies, thus leading them to live in two worlds. In chapters eight and nine, the authors reflect on how the postcolonial African leadership style has contributed to the disillusionment of sub-Saharan African citizens with their leaders. They advocate that African leaders must embrace endogenous leadership values if they are serious about attracting African talent to remain on the continent. Such values require the building of social capital and networks that are suitable for community-oriented societies.

In a context where the construction of border walls “nice and tall” rather than bridges has become central to the socio-political debate in the US, Konaté and Mainah’s book is a relevant addition to the immigration conversation, offering immense value to existing literature and helping us understand the lived experiences of sub-Saharan African immigrants in the US, including the coping mechanisms these immigrants use to mitigate the racial, linguistic, and gender-based challenges they face while pursuing the American dream. Konaté and Mainah give voice to a marginalized yet important segment of American society.

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