



Congolese Social Networks
Living on the Margins in Muizenberg, Cape Town

Joy Owen

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Congolese Social Networks: Living on the Margins in Muizenberg, Cape Town is a closely researched ethnography that focuses predominantly on the lives of three Congolese transmigrants (self-identified as such). This monograph situates them in a cosmopolitan South African space amongst dissimilar South African others, and similar national others. Unlike other contemporary international texts on transnational migrants, this book discusses entrée into the immigration country, and the diverse attempts of Congolese men to situate themselves within social networks.

In the intellectual move to focus on transnational spaces and transnationality, the reality of migration in a specific socio-political context—a focus on place—has been ignored. Migration on the African continent is more similar to the early migrations of Italian, Polish, and Jewish immigrants to the United States in the initial phases of arrival, adaptation, and reproduction of the national self. While these Congolese transmigrants maintain contact with those back home through various social media applications, their very real survival needs force a day-to-day living that secures survival needs, whilst those of a higher class maintain a focus on lola (paradise)—onward migration out of South Africa. An important aspect of securing one's survival needs is the creation of diverse social networks. Through these networks, Congolese transmigrants access information regarding employment, information on appropriate educational opportunities for children, information regarding safe residential areas, and a number of other forms of information that support their existence in an oftentimes alienating South African space.

REVIEWS

In *Congolese Social Networks* Joy Owen takes a path that few anthropologists have dared to follow—the intimacies that define relationships between immigrants—in her case Congolese immigrant men and non-Congolese women in South Africa. In a work that is beautifully written, Owen tactfully describes how transnational migration shapes a matrix of love and loss, fidelity and betrayal, and bonding and alienation—a truly remarkable work of cutting-edge scholarship.

— Paul Stoller, author of *Yaya's Story: The Quest for Well Being in the World*

This is a study of intra-African migration as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, with a focus on the thrills and challenges of forging relationships and the pursuit of personal and collective success by migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in South Africa. Owen critically engages the macro and micro conceptual currencies employed by academics to understand and explain various dimensions of human mobility in claiming and negotiating inclusion and belonging. Her recognition of the need for conceptual flexibility and empirical substantiation is commendable, and so is her integration of the personal and biographical.

— Francis Nyamnjoh, author of *C'est l'homme qui fait l'homme: Cul-de-Sac Ubuntu-ism in Côte d'Ivoire*