

Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa: The Case of the Lebanese in Ghana
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ABSTRACT

As we approach the post-colonial half century, transnationalism has become a major reality in Africa and the wider world with the proliferation of immigrants, refugees and displaced persons. But transnationalism is not a new development, and diaspora and globalization – both historical processes – have long served as contexts for the remaking of identity, citizenship and polity. Today, concepts such as ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘flexible citizenship’ are in vogue in a globalized world, as transnationalism challenges statist concepts of political citizenship. In this article, using the case of Ghana, I revisit the historic presence of a Lebanese diaspora in west Africa from the 1860s, and the intellectual and political obstacles that have worked against their full incorporation as active political citizens. I seek to understand why the prospect of non-black citizenship was considered problematic in black Africa during the era of decolonization, interrogating the institutional legacies of colonial rule and pan-Africanist thought. The intellectual rigidity of pan-Africanism on race is contrasted with current notions of the constructedness of identity. I probe the ways in which the Lebanese in Ghana constructed their identities, and how these facilitated or obstructed assimilation. As African governments seek to tap into the resources of the new African communities in Europe and North America, the article suggests the timeliness of exploring alternative criteria to indigeneity when defining citizenship in black Africa.