



## Beyond Racial Capitalism: Co-operatives in the African Diaspora

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Beyond Racial Capitalism: Co-operatives in the African Diaspora*, edited by Caroline Shenaz Hossein, Sharon D. Wright Austin, and Kevin Edmonds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2023. 272 pp. ISBN: 9780192868336 (hbk.). US\$40.00.

Situated in the aftermath of the 2020 Black protests for racial and economic justice that followed the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the global Black Lives Matter movement, *Beyond Racial Capitalism: Co-operatives in the African Diaspora* is a collection of essays that aims to show the varied ways in which the Black diaspora resists and responds to marginalization under racial capitalism via the organization of collective economies. These contemporary collective economies, which are aimed at cooperation, self-help, and community building are rooted in the qualities of many precolonial African Indigenous societies, including communalism, collectivity, and mutualism.

The book follows the Black radical tradition, and as indicated by its title, takes as its starting point the theory of racial capitalism, as popularized by Cedric Robinson (1983), who viewed racism as a necessary feature of the development of capitalism given the historically contingent tendency of capitalism to differentiate and exploit racial difference. This theory is then built upon through the argument that Robinson misses the intersectional exclusions affecting women. By incorporating Black feminist analyses that draws on the theory of the Black social economy (Hossein 2017), a finer understanding can be generated of how racialized migrant women resist misogynoir within the racist environment of capitalism via politicized cooperation to bring about social transformation.

The theories of racial capitalism and the Black social economy are applied to the essays in this collection through empirical fieldwork and case studies to study and explain several cooperative economic efforts in local communities across a range of contexts. This is done in two parts, the first focusing on the varied forms of cooperativism in Canada and the USA, while the second broadens out to case studies of the African diaspora in non-Western contexts. This includes countries in the Caribbean, Brazil, and Ireland, although the extent to which Ireland is non-Western could be disputed. It is then apparent that the book is aimed toward an audience interested in the Black diaspora in the Americas given the Americas-centric focus of the collection. Thus, readers interested in economic cooperation and the use of co-operatives by the Black diaspora outside the Americas may also have to look elsewhere (van Wetering 1999; Ardener 2014).

A notable financial mechanism discussed throughout the book is a rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA) that involves “an association formed upon a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation” (Ardener 1964: 201). These ROSCA schemes can take different names and forms, including Ajo and Esusu (as Ajo is known in south-eastern Nigeria) that feature in case studies of Nigerian immigrants in North America and Ireland respectively. In the former, Salewa Olawoye-Mann underlines the importance of Ajo, and the women who lead them, in the adjustment and settling of new migrants to white-dominated economies. In the latter, Eburn Joseph and Kesiena Mercy Ebenade discuss how Esusu provides a cooperative network of finance for Black women unable to qualify for state services or unable to afford private services. Moreover, these studies emphasized that Ajo and Esusu are largely unknown outside of their communities and remain largely ignored African activities and cultures that have been passed on between generations including the diaspora.

Joseph and Ebenade’s chapter also draw on the African philosophy of ubuntu (“I am, because you are”) in both its importance to African Irish women in Dublin as an ethical concept that underpins the cooperativism and community in their practice of Esusu, as well as to the authors as a theoretical concept in explaining the appeal of Esusu. In her empirical study on ROSCAs in Jamaica, Haiti, Guyana, Trinidad, and Grenada, Caroline Shenaz Hossein also draws attention to Caribbean Banker women evoking Ubuntu when building their cooperative economies. Silvane Silva studies the similar Indigenous Latin American concept of *buen vivir* (good living) in her chapter on Black Brazilian women organizers in quilombo communities. Silva draws attention to how *buen vivir* promotes collectives and communal life rather than individualism and profit and is a guiding principle for Black women leaders in the Indigenous struggle for land rights and self-sufficiency.

The ideas of self-sufficiency and resistance through self-determination that counter racialized alienation are then brought together in Adotey Bing-Pappoe and Amina Mama’s chapter on Black cooperatives serving as a route out of racial capitalism. Bing-Pappoe and Mama note that although informal savings and credits systems can alleviate poverty, the basis of poverty remains untouched and is rooted in the dialectic of capital and labor in which the latter serves the former. They, thus, argue that Black cooperatives that democratize the ownership and governance of businesses provide not just a respite from oppression but construct meaningful alternative social relations that provide economic liberation. This argument is explored further in their three case studies of Black cooperatives in which interviewees highlighted the benefits they experience from being a member of a Black democratic and inclusive cooperative.

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The most notable benefit being the importance of being part of a queer-friendly collective and this is one of the few times queer politics is featured in this book. Bing-Pappoe and Mama link the influence of Black feminist and Black LGBTQ theory to the practice of Black women's equality and queer inclusivity as exemplified by two of their case studies as well as the Black-led class struggle of the Movement for Black Lives.

Similar to Bing-Pappoe and Mama's chapter that ends the first part of the book, Sharon D. Wright Austin's chapter on the politicized nature of the Black social and solidarity economy bookends the second part of the book and ties together the themes of cooperativism and collectivism that have run throughout. She highlights how *marronage* that previously entailed freeing oneself from slavery, now assumes a modern form in the process of achieving economic independence as a form of rebellion against societal oppression that impedes personal and financial wellbeing.

Much like the Black diaspora women who politicize the social economy because of the exclusion and violence they encounter in business and society under racial capitalism, the authors in this book have politicized their research to illuminate and promote Black cooperation and resistance. This is in response to the lack of attention mainstream cooperative and solidarity literature has given to Black-owned cooperatives and the Black solidarity economy more broadly, as well as the androcentric nature of the Black radical tradition. As such, this book is a much-needed addition to a field that has ignored it for too long.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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