

Rhea Maria Richter (2016): Women Sport in Kenya – Transnational Running Culture between Kenya and the USA

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Summary:

Kenya's male and female runners have caught the world's athletic attention for many years. Their remarkable running performances have been noticed worldwide since the 1960s. Beginning in the 1980s – around twenty years after male Kenyan runners have started running professionally – the first female runners have started to develop their running talents. Discovering the secret of Kenyan runners has been the goal of many researchers and writers. They seek to understand why Kenyan runners are so successful, wonder if there is a Kenyan running gene, and analyze their training as well as diet and daily routines. This book is not answering the ongoing questions about the Kenyan running secret. It will, however, provide an insight understanding of the Kenyan running culture. It will be argued that gaining an understanding of local Kenyan running scenes' dynamics provides an immense insight into the athletic phenomenon that captures international attention. Following John Bale's concept of a global sport system, Kenya's local running culture is located in a global sport system. As part of a global sport arena, Kenyan athletes gain the opportunity to compete overseas or to migrate to sport nations.

The main focus of this book is the development of women sport (running) in Kenya as well as the transnational sport migration of female runners from Kenya to the United States of America in the context of college sport. Women runners have faced social obstacles stepping into the sport of running. One of Kenya's pioneers opening the door for female runners – besides any female runner herself – is Coach Brother Colm O'Connell. Establishing a training camp for young female runners in 1989, he introduced new social circumstances and a general acceptance of female athletes in Kenya. While accepted by male runners, female runners have faced difficulty in terms of social acceptance, especially in rural and remote communities. As a result, female runners have been moving to training centers such as Iten or Kaptagat. These two places are no exception to a new tendency that has shaped Kenya's running culture since the late 1990s: athletes seek athletic scholarships in the United States of America.