

BOOK REVIEW

Hana Horáková, Stephanie Rudwick, and Martin Schmiedl, eds. *Africa on the Move: Shifting Identities, Histories, Boundaries*. Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2020. 164 pp. References. Figures. Suggested readings. \$44.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-3643911742.

Readers may be surprised to find scant mention of refugees or migration “crises” in *Africa on the Move* (edited by Hana Horáková, Stephanie Rudwick, and Martin Schmiedl). While much recent literature on movement through and from Africa tends to foreground these phenomena, particularly as they relate to international migration, *Africa on the Move* gestures instead toward the “mobilities paradigm” (see J. Urry, “Mobile Sociology” [*British Journal of Sociology*, 2000] and T. Cresswell, *On the Move* [Routledge, 2006]), with its dedication to movement as it is lived and experienced, as it occurs at different scales, and with specific attention to non-spatial movement. This edited volume proceeds from the 2017 Viva Africa conference at the University of Hradec Králové in Czechia, and its contributors exemplify the vitality of African Studies in Eastern Europe. The book’s six chapters cover vastly different ground, representing work on international and intra-regional migration, social mobility, shifting identities, and even changing political values. The heterogeneity of research within this volume leaves the reader certain that, as the editors argue in their introduction, there is “no unifying way to conceptualise such a complex and complicated phenomenon as human mobility” (20). However, a few key threads run through the book that will interest those who study gender, ethnic, racial, and national identities and the socio-political landscapes of South Africa.

Chapters One and Two highlight African women’s experiences of mobility. Sarah Lunaček, in a case study of the “continuous mobility” of Tuareg peoples in the north of Niger, argues that Tuareg women play central roles in maintaining a “diverse dynamic between settlement and mobility” for their families (26). While other scholars characterize Tuaregs as having undergone a process of sedentarization, Lunaček indicates that this process has not been one-way or complete, and that Tuareg women in particular experience simultaneous and complementary mobility and stasis. Dobrota Pucherová’s chapter on “African women’s migrant writing” also illustrates the contributions of migrant women to contemporary African literature, showing how a

new wave of feminist novels focusing on women's unique experiences of migration from Africa to Europe or North America has "redefined African feminism, opening African female identity to new horizons" (65).

Chapters Three and Five highlight different instances in which national and ethnic identities shift or are mobilized toward specific ends. Kateřina Mildnerová's contribution focuses on the biographies of the "Namibian Czechs," a group of Namibian child war refugees who were brought to Czechoslovakia for education in 1985 as a gesture of the Eastern Bloc's solidarity with the South West African People's Organisation, a "Marxist-oriented movement for the liberation of Namibia from the South-African apartheid regime" (67). These children, who were socialized as Czechs before returning to Namibia after the fall of the Soviet Union, found themselves racially and socially "othered" in both Namibia and Czechoslovakia. Mildnerová argues that these individuals "narratively construct" their particular identities toward a "positive praxis of capitalising on the ascribed otherness in the form of social or political engagement" (89). Similarly, Vojtěch Šmolík analyzes new forms of non-ethnic, national identity in post-genocide Rwanda. While not engaging directly with Chrétien's work on the region (see *Les ethnies ont une histoire* [Éditions Karthala, 2003]), Šmolík's study builds on other critical engagements with the European construction of ethnicity and race in Rwanda (e.g., D. Mayersen, "Deep Cleavages that Divide" [*Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, 2012]). Šmolík's chapter documents the contemporary Rwandan state's attempts to distance itself from European racial legacies by eradicating "ethnic identities" such as baHutu and baTutsi. Ironically, Šmolík argues, the Rwandan state's attempts to craft a "Rwandan" identity have led to new forms of social immobility by attempting to replace the socio-economic categories that Chrétien and others argued were more fluid forms of belonging.

Finally, Chapters Four and Six will be of special interest to those who study South Africa's racial and political landscapes. Stephanie Rudwick's research, drawing on a "racio-linguistic lens," highlights the association between language and racial mobility in urban South Africa, arguing that command of the English language may allow individuals to move from a "black" to a "white" racial presentation. Rudwick's study raises important questions about why "speaking in a certain way might be perceived as 'white' or 'black'" (105). Martin Schmiedl's research analyzes the mobility of political values related to democracy in South Africa, where many feel that "rainbowist" approaches to democracy have not addressed racial inequality or the lack of social mobility. This, Schmiedl argues, has led to a move away from democratic values, and towards populist policies.

While these chapters may seemingly lack the cohesiveness of other collections on migration and mobility, this is, in fact, one of this book's strengths. The dramatically different approaches to studying human mobility together illustrate how there are indeed no unifying categories through which to view human movement, and accurately reflect the goals of the

mobilities paradigm, which are to examine the myriad ways that movement is experienced, lived, and represented, both spatially and socially.

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Patterson, Tiffany Ruby, and Robin D. G. Kelley. 2000. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* 43 (1): 11–45. doi: [10.2307/524719](https://doi.org/10.2307/524719).