

# BOOK REVIEW

**Nathan Riley Carpenter and Benjamin N. Lawrance. *Africans in Exile: Mobility, Law and Identity*.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018. xviii + 337 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0253038074.

Although much scholarship in and beyond African Studies has focused on exile, scholars have tended to present displacement from one's homeland as if it were an exceptional experience. By contrast, this edited volume renders exile as a recurring, defining theme of modern African history. Drawing from twenty essays covering the histories of exiled Africans from across the continent over nearly 250 years, *Africans in Exile* forcefully asserts its central argument: That "exile is fundamental to any account of state power or critical rereading of colonial and postcolonial oppression" in Africa (4).

To frame the volume, Carpenter and Lawrance offer an introductory essay that draws the volume's wide-ranging contributions into conversation. Much of the discussion focuses on a few tropes which are often used to narrate experiences of exile but which are quite insufficient for rendering most African exile experiences. For example, although exiles include members of royal lineages and nationalist leaders, oppressive governments have also compelled countless other Africans to depart from their natal homes. Similarly, while exile has frequently been viewed as the "erasure" of a dissident from a political community, it has also, very often, produced "unanticipated consequences," including new forms of resistance. Finally, exile's association with "romantic isolation" is usually misplaced, centered as it is on the creative work of a handful of elites—not on countless people for whom exile has deeply undermined individual agency and creativity. To push beyond these tropes and engage exile more substantially, the editors exhort Africanist scholars to draw from and build "the African exile archive." This archive is globally scattered and highly diverse, including (to cite just a few examples from the text) colonial administration correspondence, letters and petitions, asylum testimonies, oral history collections, poetry, and music. Nevertheless, the archive is a coherent source of knowledge about the (post)colonial state and Africans' encounters with it. And it is in presenting this archive's coherence, rather than in projecting a meta-narrative or overarching theory of exile, that this volume's chief contribution lies.

Following the editors' introduction and a short foreword by Holger Hansen that precedes it, the volume unfolds in three parts, each organized around a distinct theme. Part One, titled "The Legal Worlds of Exile," examines genealogies of exile law in Africa, tracing them through case studies from Sierra Leone (Ruma Chopra, Trina Hogg), French West Africa (Nathan Carpenter, Marie Rodet & Romain Tiquet, Thaïs Gendry) and Kenya (Brett Shadle). Part Two focuses on "Geographies of Exile," highlighting how geographical sites have become nodes of projecting and resisting state power in Africa. Chapters examine Mozambican exiles in Dar es Salaam (Joanna Tague), Guinea-Bissauan exiles in Conakry (Aliou Ly), Ghanaian exiles in western Togo (Kate Skinner), South African exiles in London (Susan Pennybacker), and a Zairean exile, Cléophas Kamitatu, in Paris (Meredith Terretta). Finally, Part Three turns to "Remembering and Performing Exile," emphasizing how people have presented their exile experiences to others and contested their meaning over time. Contributions examine the poetry and song of São Tomé and Príncipe's exiles in Cape Verde (Marina Berthet), the Sufi poetry of Senegalese exile Shaikh Ahmadu Bamba (Sana Camara), the regional impact of Osama bin Laden's exile in Sudan (Kris Inman), identity formation among Mauritian exiles in the United States (Ann McDougall), and asylum testimonies of Togolese dissidents in the Global North (Benjamin Lawrance). The volume concludes with a poignant, personal Epilogue by Gambian exile Baba Galleh Jallow and a concluding analytical essay by Emily Burrill.

One of the volume's strengths is the degree to which the authors' respective contributions are integrated with one another. Indeed, it is not only the editors, but also the contributing authors, who do the work of integrating the text with extensive citation of one another's work. Emerging themes include the evolution of exile law across African colonial encounters (Part One) and the value of analyzing African exile experiences in terms of different "hubs" (Part Two). In addition to these points, which the authors themselves flagged, I found recurring discussion of identity formation in exile (see Tague, Ly, Inman, and McDougall) and of the entanglement of exiles' personal experiences and nation-state politics (see Pennybacker, Camara, and Lawrance) very illuminating.

Given the diversity of African exile experiences, the volume is likely to resonate differently with individual readers, according to their different associations with "exile." For example, in Namibia, where I conduct most of my research, it is widely accepted that exile was a mass experience with little opportunity for "romantic isolation." Moreover, there and across Southern Africa, citizens hotly debate how liberation movements' exile histories impact on the nations which these movements now govern—a topic which the volume does not address. To advance future Africanist scholarship on exile, scholars should work more on defining such regionally and temporally specific exile experiences as a point of departure for broader analysis.

The value of this volume is not in question, however. By drawing authors grounded in different exile histories into conversation, the volume compels

readers to consider shared social dynamics across and beyond the African continent. As such, it contributes significantly to African Studies as a field and will be essential reading for anyone seeking to better understand exile as a diverse yet defining feature of our age.

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doi:[10.1017/asr.2020.120](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.120)

**For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:**

- Hernann, Andrew. 2016. "Joking Through Hardship: Humor and Truth-Telling among Displaced Timbukians." *African Studies Review* 59 (1): 57–76. doi: [10.1017/asr.2016.4](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2016.4).
- Small, Audrey. 2014. "Reversals of Exile: Williams Sassine's Wirriyamu and Tierno Monénembo's Pelourinho." *African Studies Review* 57 (3): 41–54. doi: [10.1017/asr.2014.91](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2014.91).