

# Seeing Women Migrants in Africa - Book Review

Kalpana Hiralal and Zaheera Jinnah, eds., *Gender and Mobility in Africa: Borders, Bodies and Boundaries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), xi + 259 pp., 10 illus., \$119

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In *Gender and Mobility in Africa*, Kalpana Hiralal and Zaheera Jinnah bring together a rich collection of multidisciplinary work on migration in Africa focused on women and gender. In the contemporary context in which African migrants are often featured in the news, and where the focus is most often on young men, the collection draws much-needed attention to women. This compilation of eleven chapters, plus the editors' introduction and conclusion, examine multiple important themes, exploring how African states have historically and contemporarily received migrants from across Africa and from overseas.

First, the authors devote considerable attention to exploring the ways women are active agents as migrants, even as their bodies are made vulnerable to violence and discrimination. In South Africa, Pragna Rugunanan and Ria Smit (chap. 5) examine the struggles of refugees in supporting themselves and families back home, and Monica Kiwanuka (chap. 6) demonstrates how migrant women create domestic violence discourses, effecting change from service providers. Elsa Oliveira and Jo Vearey (chap. 7) discuss how migrant sex workers in South Africa use a participatory photo project to represent the multiplicity of their identities through their experiences with livelihoods, violence, and personal aspirations. Fatima Ait Ben Lmadani (chap. 10) highlights Senegalese migrants' gendered experiences in Morocco, including transnational familial responsibilities, pay discrimination, violence, and the stigmatization of black women that draws associations with prostitution.

Second, contributors explore issues of identity construction and shifting social norms—including Ibtihel Bouchoucha's (chap. 3) examination of Tunisian women's migration in relation to changes in women's access to education and political participation, and Tinashe Chimbidzikai's (chap. 4) discussion of shifting gender relations in transnational settings. Sarah Matshaka (chap. 11) engages with Zimbabwean women migrants, while Marnie Shaffer (chap. 12) works with Somali women migrants to demonstrate how women work to honor cultural values that ensure a sense of respectability for themselves and their families while also exploring new opportunities that challenge gendered norms—for some even blurring their identity with that of men.

The collection also challenges mainstream representations of migration in Africa by complicating its historical landscape and examining African spaces as international and regional migration poles. Hiralal (chap. 2) draws attention to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Asian women in migrant households, where cultural, financial, and legal barriers kept Asian migration to eastern southern Africa overwhelmingly male. Sasha Rai (chap. 9) considers Pakistani migrants in South Africa, distinguishing

the Pakistani diaspora from more extensively researched Asian migration associated with colonial era indentured servitude and the demand for cheap labor; Ait Ben Lmandani (chap. 10) contextualizes the Senegal-Morocco relationship within a deep history of trans-Saharan migration and the contemporary landscape of Morocco as a border zone with Europe in the post-Schengen period; Lanre Olusegun Ikuteyijo (chap. 8), although not explicitly focused on women or gender, examines Nigerian state and non-state management of human trafficking.

The book reads well as a collection, and certainly finds strength in engaging with a diverse set of disciplinary and methodological approaches. Additional strength comes from the diversity of migrants considered across the chapters, with women originating in southern Africa (South Africa and Zimbabwe), East and Central Africa (Somalia, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo); West Africa (Nigeria and Senegal); North Africa (Tunisia); and overseas (India, China, and Pakistan). The introductory and concluding chapters highlight this geographical diversity, but it must be noted that South Africa dominates as the migrants' destination, with only three chapters considering migrants living elsewhere (Tunisia, Morocco, and Nigeria). Unfortunately, the editors' introduction and conclusion inject some confusion into the cohesion of the book—erroneously claiming, for instance, the book is divided into sections devoted to particular themes that are instead found scattered across the volume. The themes put forth by the editors, particularly understanding gender through the body, may have been clearer to the reader had such organization materialized in the final rendition.

As the research collected in *Gender and Mobility in Africa* illustrates, women are not simply passive migrants whose movements result from their attachments with migrant men. Women actively negotiate their mobility, shape the places in which they live, and navigate new circumstances that variously (and even simultaneously) challenge and reinforce gender relations. Furthermore, the intersection of being woman and migrant renders their bodies particularly vulnerable—vulnerabilities women actively confront and negotiate. Women are the central focus, but the significance of the gendered experiences might also encourage readers to look beyond the offering of the collection, towards a broader diversity of experiences—considering gender alongside other axes of difference such as ability, sexuality, and race—that certainly shape migration experiences in this region. This volume is an important contribution to mobility and migration studies in the region and will be of interest to scholars across disciplines interested in gendered experiences of mobility, as well as the agency and vulnerability of women's bodies in transnational contexts.