

BOOK REVIEW

Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet, eds. *Children on the Move in Africa: Past & Present Experiences of Migration*. Suffolk: James Currey, 2016. vii + 255 pp. List of Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. ISBN: 9781847011381.

Children on the Move in Africa contributes to the increasing corpus of literature that investigates childhood, and specifically childhood migration, in Africa. Migration is understood in this edited volume as any change of residence, ranging from local to international, that occurs outside a child's community, which can be temporary or permanent (2). The authors complicate the notion long held by international development agencies that childhood migration is characterized by victimhood as children are trafficked across communities for the purpose of physical and sexual exploitation as slaves, laborers, soldiers, or sex workers, or a child migrant's inherent vulnerability as orphan, street child, refugee, or witch (4).

They also contest counter-narratives that portray children as sole agents who break away from adults and kinship ties in search of independence and economic and social mobility. Instead, they present a nuanced perspective of the child migrant who contributes to the continuity of kinship networks through migration. While these children achieve a certain amount of agency and are able to adapt cultural, political, and religious structures to attain their goals, their position as juniors, who largely rely on adults for sustenance and support, renders them susceptible to exploitation and abuse. The authors question the very notion of childhood as a matter of biological fact and reassert the long-held perspective by researchers of Africa that childhood on the continent is a matter of social position and not biological age, as young men and women slip precariously between multiple categories of child, youth, junior, adult, man, woman, girl, and boy.

The volume is divided into three parts, each inquiring into a different aspect of childhood migration. The first, "Child migrants in Africa: Beyond the Dilemma of Vulnerability v. Agency," explores the various ways that Africans adapted colonial structures to facilitate migration. The first chapter, by Kelly Duke Bryant, considers how Senegalese students in Catholic Schools in France showed a remarkable capacity for co-opting nineteenth-century colonial and religious structures to defy their parents and kinship networks in order to complete their education (31–50). While their exercise in agency allowed them to use adult allies to improve their position in

society, the same cannot be said for Robin P. Chapdelaine's investigation into girl pawns, brides, and slaves in southeast Nigeria. In this case study, adults manipulated the colonial system to facilitate the movement, and in some cases trafficking, of young girls across boundaries. Chapdelaine shows how poverty and economic and resource insecurity led to the transfer of girls from one form of guardianship to another, sometimes with, sometimes without, parental consent (51–66).

Part Two, "Being a Child & Becoming a Gendered Adult: The Challenges of Migration in Childhood," explores childhood migration for labor in contemporary Africa. Whether migration is represented as domestic service in postcolonial Zambia, as is the case in Sacha Hepburn's essay, or child fosterage in Mali and Togo, as expressed in the contributions of Paola Porcelli and Marco Gardini respectively, these chapters express how widespread postcolonial economic decline compels people to increasingly call on kinship networks across rural and urban spaces for the purpose of transferring guardianship. This type of migration often occurs with the active consent of the child in search of "education, employment or independence" (70). While women often fulfill their quest to financially support their families, young men's aspirations for social mobility and financial independence are rarely realized, as their exploitation in domestic servitude delays their ascent to adulthood, despite their struggles to actively redefine the terms of manhood (104–22).

Essays in Part Three, "Mobility, Imagination and Making Nations," investigate the links between childhood migration in colonial Africa and identity formation. Contributions by Violaine Tisseau, Lacy S. Ferrell, Hannah Whittaker, and Harjyot Hayer explore how migration for education contributed to social trajectories and nationalist identities in Madagascar, Ghana, and Southern Sudan respectively. The authors argue that the physical journey to school represented the first psychological transformation a child migrant experienced. The kinship and familial links that made this migration possible, the ethnic, religious, and linguistic heterogeneity that they encountered at schools, and the collective perceived marginalisation experienced in these schools, bred a national consciousness that was often beyond the reach of their illiterate peers. Identity formation was, however, not exclusive to schools. It formed crucial aspects of the coming-of-age of most childhood migrants.

Dhupeli-Mesthie's chapter explores this search for identity among impoverished Indians who migrated to South Africa in the early twentieth century in search of greener pastures. The South Africa Indian population considered the migration of children to be so crucial to their success that they subverted every obstacle that the South African government placed, sometimes creating fictive familial relationships. While some young migrants found upward social mobility, many, like the foster children explored by Porcelli and Gardini, were left trapped in a cycle of poverty as their very presence in South Africa depended on adults who often sought to procure their labor for free. Finally, Oluwole Coker's investigation into

fictional childhood protagonists is markedly different from the other chapters. While previous authors examine real-world children, Coker investigates how third-generation fiction writers deploy the theme of childhood migration to explore the very essence of childhood identity formation, and in turn, question and interrogate issues of identity, parental custody, and political, social, and economic phenomena.

Children on the Move in Africa offers a timely and insightful perspective into the long-established phenomenon of childhood migration in Africa. Using diverse resources including oral testimonies, colonial and government archives, personal memoirs, and childhood fiction, the authors in this edited volume demonstrate that migration in Africa was, and still remains, a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that exists within, rather than in isolation of, kinship ties. It imbues children with agency without precluding exploitation and effectively renders the agent/victim dichotomy, pervasive in academic and international development discourses on childhood migration, obsolete. The volume effectively demonstrates that migration not only shapes the child migrant's identity, but it has also influenced the trajectories of the continent as adults call on their experiences of childhood migration to make value judgements on work, national identity, and social cohesion.

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For more reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Aderinto, Saheed. 2012. "Researching Colonial Childhoods: Images and Representations of Children in Nigerian Newspaper Press, 1925–1950." *History in Africa* 39: 241–66. doi:10.1353/hia.2012.0001.
- Grier, Beverly. 2004. "Child Labor and Africanist Scholarship: A Critical Overview." *African Studies Review* 47 (2): 1–25. doi:10.1017/S0002020600030833.
- Nathan, Martha A., and Elliot Fratkin. 2018. "The Lives of Street Women and Children in Hawassa, Ethiopia." *African Studies Review* 61 (1): 158–84. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.135.