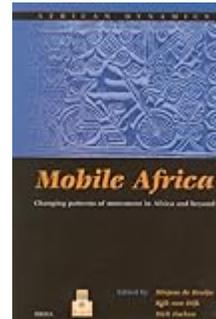




Mirjam de Bruijn Foeken, Rijk van Dijk, eds. Dick. *Mobile Africa: Changing Patterns of Movement in Africa and beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2001. x + 214 pp. EUR 31.75 (paper), ISBN 978-90-04-12072-3.



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Africa Moves

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Many times I have had Francophone African friends greet me with the query, “Ca bouge?” (“is it moving?”), a greeting which now means more to me after reading this book. *Mobile Africa* is the first in a new series called “African Dynamics,” published by the African Studies Centre at the University of Leiden. Most of the papers in the volume were presented at a Leiden conference in 2000 entitled “Moving People: Trends in Population Mobility in Africa.” The edited volume is a very useful contribution to both understanding the enormous role that human movement plays across every social and political component of African life and to methods of including that understanding in other African social research. The papers impress us with the centrality of movement to African life and provide rich detail in support of that point. Movement is classified in multi-dimensional ways providing explanation for other social processes as well. For example, the question is raised as to what we may have missed when we only consider the “sedentary phase” of a contemporary community or a larger society’s existence. While rural to urban move-

ment provides the context for four of the books chapters, that phenomenon is viewed through new lenses. The book is a critique of dichotomous explanations of mobility and challenges the idea that movement is always in response to societal rupture, following Janet Abu-Lughod’s twenty-eight-year-old observation of migration studies, whereby “human beings, like iron filings, were impelled by forces beyond their conscious control” (p. 107). While statistical data are limited in the study of African migration, the authors make clear that millions of Africans are on the move.

One of the greater advantages of an edited volume is the possibility of comparison across Africa’s social vastness. Here cases are presented from Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mali, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Cote d’Ivoire, and Cameroon. A few of the papers are comparative in their own right as well (East Africa, Ghana-Mali, Cote d’Ivoire-Mali), and these thoughtful comparisons help to build theory and critique western social science approaches to the study of Africa. The western assumption of community spatial boundedness, for example, can limit our understanding of social dynamics.

Taking off from the point of the conventional “push-pull factors” in migration studies as being too simplistic, this book addresses the role of spirituality, politics, and culture among other elements, that explain why African people move. The book explores people’s own explanations for movement and the meaning that they give to it. This being said, one glaring hole in the discussion is people’s oral historical explanations for why they may have moved from one place to another. Nevertheless, the description of Zimbabwe’s Mhondoro cult by Spierenburg (Chapter Four) indicates that rain patterns, soil fertility and spirituality come together in planning a move if the spirits suggest it is a good idea. This and other chapters present rich case study material to illustrate the theoretical points of the articles.

Chapters illustrate migration’s role in identity formation, such as with the Fulbe of Mali and Burkina Faso who move to northern Cote d’Ivoire, and in the wider politics

of exclusion with the case of peoples in southwest and northwest Cameroon.

With an enormous influx of African immigrants to Western Europe and the United States—comprising at least two generations at this point—the *Mobile Africa* volume points us in some interesting analytical directions for understanding the tremendous movement of these groups in and around the contemporary West. This is an excellent collection of human scale studies with much wider applicability.

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