

Migrant Women of Johannesburg—Life in an In-between city.

Caroline Wanjiku Kihato. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013. 224 pp. EAN: 978 1 86814 755 7.

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Migrant Women of Johannesburg—Life in an in-between city (2014) is an engagingly written study of African migrant women living Johannesburg's inner city and the adjacent areas of Hillbrow, Yeoville and Berea. Caroline Wanjiku Kihato uses her own migrant status—a Kenyan woman living in Johannesburg—as highly personalised introduction to the notion of “home” and the theoretical conceptualisation of liminality as social practice. This insider-outsider perspective frames migrancy as a state of home(lessness) which is linked to everyday social rituals. Methodologically, the author makes the bold choice of employing self-photography as a powerfully visual complement to rich interview and archival material.

Migrant Women of Johannesburg—Life in an In-Between City skillfully interweaves the life stories of women from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda with a critical examination of gendered socio-political, economic and cultural (dis)location. The first chapter of the book, “Welcome to Hillbrow, You Will Find Your People”, draws upon the mythology of Johannesburg as an African Tower of Babel to examine the historical, economic and global construction of its liminality as a migrant-city. This chapter inverts the conventional schema of studying how the social, political and economic structures and policies of the city influence migrant agency and ethnography of how the migrant women's quotidian experiences shape the city.

The forces that (re)make and break Johannesburg as a migrant city are examined in the chapters “The Notice: Rethinking Urban

Governance in the Age of Mobility” (chapter 2) and “The Station, Camp and Refugee: Xenophobic Violence and the City” (chapter 5). The former takes Hobbesian readings of the modern state's maintenance of urban order through regulation, civil codes and municipal authorities and looks at how they are (re)configured by the survival strategies of female street traders operating illegally on the city pavements. Kihato illustrates how the coproduction of order (state law) and disorder (street law) (re)configures the city / home as “the creation of hybrid practices that meld official with unofficial, formal with informal, legal with illegal” (44). However, the study is not blind to the implosion of this liminal state of (dis)order. The latter chapter therefore explores (un)belonging and the dichotomy of inclusion/exclusion through the interrelated narratives of the May 2008 xenophobic violence that displaced thousands of foreign migrants across the country. Agamben's theories about the concentration camp as a “state of exception” are interwoven with the perspectives of a South African Police sergeant (98–102) and a refugee (108–11) shift the tones of the book to a humanitarian consideration of political liminality or statelessness. The skilful interrogation of terms such as *refugee*, *asylum seeker* and *immigrant* highlights the shifting boundaries of legality and illegality that make the refugee camp the ultimate symbol of homelessness.

The two middle chapters—namely “Between Pharaoh's Army and the Red Sea: Social Mobility and Social Death in the Context of Women's Migration” (chapter 3) and “Turning the Home Inside-Out—Private Space and Everyday Politics” (chapter 4)—avoid the conflation of women's quotidian lives within the domestic space by framing home(lessness) as a series of private and public negotiations. The former examines the trope of upward social mobility and the social embeddedness of success through the portrait of Rosine, a widowed Burundian migrant whose desire to

“save face” prevents her from going home despite the social precarity having to provide for her children alone (54–55). While the (im)mobility of Rosine who is trapped between being “nobody” here and “somebody” there depicts women’s liminality in terms of being in-between their home and migrant countries, the fourth chapter associates home with the domestic space.

This dual-conceptualisation is captured by a quote from Harriet, a Ugandan migrant: “There is home with a capital ‘H’ which is where I come from. And there is home ... small ‘h’ where I am living here in Johannesburg. The two are different; they are both my homes but one is more my ‘Home’ than the other” (76). The association of home with the domestic is cleverly nuanced by the interconnectedness of private and public spaces.

The visual aspect of the book comes into its own capturing intimate moments of mothering, domestic rituals, family meals and the aftermath of domestic violence in this chapter. Kihato’s analysis frames personal experiences in terms of their relation to collective codes of morality, gendered hierarchies and public law.

Caroline Wanjiku Kihato’s use of self-photography as a visual narrative is a gamble that more than pays off. It enables her to give fresh conclusions on materiality, agency and the ways in which migrant women see themselves. The invitation in the book to use gendered liminality as a lens through which we can reconsider normative visions of urban governance and belonging makes a meaningful contribution to migrant studies. This is made all the more seductive by the author’s attentiveness to the voice and vision of her subjects.

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