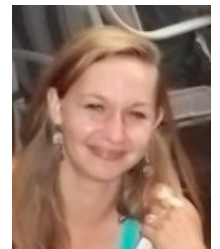


Book Review: Displacement Economies in Africa: Paradoxes of Crisis and Creativity edited by Amanda Hammar

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2014-10-23

*Based on empirical case studies from across sub-Saharan Africa, the contributions in this volume look to provide fresh insights into the unexpected changes, complex agency and persistent dynamism entailed in displacement processes. This book not only interrogates the many meanings of displacement but emphasises the under-researched agency and creativity inherent to displacement economies throughout Africa, concludes **Evan Easton-Calabria**.*

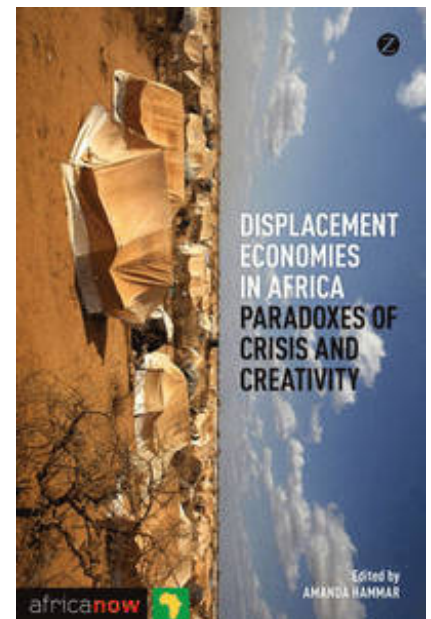


Displacement Economies in Africa: Paradoxes of Crisis and Creativity. Amanda Hammar (ed.). Zed Books. 2014.

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When the word ‘displacement’ is heard, it is easy to conjure up images of refugee camps in desperate conditions. Attach ‘economy’ to this and it is common to draw a blank or imagine only the livelihoods that displaced people have left behind. *Displacement Economies in Africa: Paradoxes of Crisis and Creativity*, edited by [Amanda Hammar](#), does neither. Instead, it challenges us to look beyond the crisis of displacement and examine the adaptation and innovation of the economies that persist in, and even result from, such situations.

This is a volume of varied, compelling discussions on displacement economies in Africa that seeks to shed light on the large influence of displacement on the continent’s economies, and address the lack of systematic research on this topic. It does so through unusual angles that range from the Somali economy of camel milk to the role that being ‘out of place’ plays in the identity and livelihoods of unarmed youth in Eastern DRC. Each of the ten authors admirably examines both the widening and contracting opportunities present in situations where unpredictability and uncertainty dictate both the economic market and peoples’ lives. All of the chapters in some way address the questions: What do we find when we broaden the lens on displacement economies? And, what is not just destroyed but *produced* by displacement?



The volume opens with an introduction by Hammar, who discusses the conceptual and analytical challenges of displacement economies, and provides useful conceptual overviews and the unifying basis for the explorations in the following ten chapters. Displacement is defined here as ‘enforced changes in interweaving spatial, social and symbolic conditions and relations’ (p. 9), which are discussed practically, metaphorically, and theoretically. Of note is a discussion in the Introduction on the evolution of ‘displacement’ from an operational concept after World War II to a relational concept that necessitates analysis of power relations and practices.

Some main themes that several authors carry through in individual chapters are the ‘places’ within displacement, ranging from emotional as well as physical dislocation, and the displacement that occurs within enforced confinement, or ‘displacement-in-place’. Exploring the varying spaces and places of displacement opens up discussions on unexpected livelihoods and new social roles, as well as the proper societal place for actors engaging

in illicit or informal economies, which in times of stability are often not traditionally recognised as belonging or 'having a place' at all.



Loitokitok market, Kenya. Credit: [Kerri Lee Smith](#) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Hannah Elliott's compelling 'life history' on camel milk in Nairobi's Eastleigh Estate in Chapter 6 examines the product's new place in the Somali refugee economy, and in doing so elucidates the adaptive economic and social strategies of this population in Kenya. The chapter begins with a description of a typical morning on Eastleigh's 7th Street, where Somali women wait to collect camel milk for their daily business. Leading into a brief history of the Somali influx into Kenya, which began with Somalia's collapse in the early 1990s, the chapter goes on to explain the significance of camel milk in Somali culture. We learn that owning camels has become common for contemporary Somali pastoralists, due to more extreme droughts and camels' resilience in arid environments. This new livestock has led to the selling of camel milk (formerly holding purely gift status) to enable pastoralists to retain their livelihood in spite of the external drive towards sedentarisation. This new trade, Elliott posits, has created local and transnational Somali linkages, as well as a strong role for Somali women as income generators, as they hold unclear clan identities and camel milk is traditionally only obtained by members of the same clan. Although at times the chapter felt too short for the many theoretical concepts presented, Elliott thoughtfully examines the socio-economic adaptations of the Somali refugee community in Kenya through a creative analysis of the micro-interactions that camel milk produces.

Another unconventional focus in the volume is Sarah Bracking's chapter (Ch. 8) on the displacement and relocation of Zimbabwe's wealthy and elite and their assets due to the financial crisis and structural adjustment programmes that began in the country in the 1990s. She begins with the premise that theoretical approaches on displacement economies have traditionally centred on the displacement of the most vulnerable and marginalised. However, she contends, the concept of displacement economies equally applies to the privileged, especially regarding their handling of assets in times of violence and upheaval. Her piece traces the processes of pecuniary and non-pecuniary externalisation and examines the effects of this on Zimbabwe's political economy. She finds that secret jurisdictions, or offshore financial centres, are often used to circumvent domestic laws, and result in rich Zimbabweans rechanneling illicit funds back into the country as generic foreign direct investment. The criminal and informal monetary networks formed also affect the poor, who increasingly rely on an informal economy run by the elite to meet their daily needs.

Despite its depth of analysis on varying aspects of displacement economies in Africa, the collection would have benefited from a wider breadth of case studies across the continent, as the chapters disproportionately focus on Eastern Africa. Three of the chapters discuss Zimbabwe, which, despite skilfully building on each other, result in the redundancy of much of the background on Zimbabwe's failing economy. Overall, however, the cohesiveness of the book – despite the various aspects of displacement explicated – is one of its many strengths; that novel examinations are often presented through individual testimonies and substantial quotations from displaced informants, speaks to the volume's aim of broadening the lens on displacement economies. As any reader of this book will find, widening this lens reveals paradoxes, where opportunities as well as limitations, and not simply the vulnerability of the displaced but their resilience, are manifest. The result is a book that not only interrogates the many meanings of displacement but emphasises the under-researched agency and creativity inherent to displacement economies throughout Africa.

Evan Easton-Calabria studied for a Master's degree in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies from the University of Oxford. She is a writer and consultant focusing on refugee livelihoods and international development. [Read more reviews by Evan.](#)

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