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Klaas van Walraven (editor), *The Individual in African History: The Importance of Biography in African Historical Studies*. Publisher: Brill, 2020. 316 pages. ISBN- ISBN-10: 9004407812.

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*The Individual in African History* is trekking into African biographies about individuals. The book is a gestalt of life histories and life-history studies. In addition, this volume sketches out several recurrent thrusts on individual lives as a vista to comprehending societies and the undertaking of social and historical revamping. Diverse chapters are testimonies to what complex shifts in individual lives required and how the latter endeavored and succeeded or failed in impacting them and striking a novel *modus vivendi*.

The ten gathered contributions epitomize the inclination towards relying on biographies in African historiography. The volume encompasses three parts that revolve around several affluent themes, such as history, historiography, biography, and research into Africa's past. While the first part's contributors outline and discuss germane issues towards the methodological cognizance, the second part encases biographical scrutiny of individuals whose life trajectories were typified more or less by adjustments, be they of individuals and/or societies. The third part, which encompasses four chapters, elongates the theme of discursive worlds through nailing and debating diverse discursive forms that the personas' resilience in a different milieu.

The first part has morphed into three chapters. The first one, by Lindie Koorts, canvasses the function of highly contentious figures – or loathed by a great number of people – in the milieu of South Africa's contemporary history. While pondering on her late published biography of D.F. Malan who was the designer of Apartheid blueprint, she put forward an agonizing assumption; one wherein she depicts how human and ordinary her biography's protagonist was: evocative of the idea of the platitude of evil. She debates the political and intellectual controversies occurring in contemporary South Africa, wherein scholarly handiworks, such as biography, could be assessed on academic rationales. In addition, Koorts contends that there is the entanglement of milieu, which encompasses that of life- histories' readers, still cannot be superintended by the biographer. Hence, the biographies' subjects are not only individuals but also symbols mainly contended ones. For instance, this is well exemplified in regard to diverse life, historical texts about South African public figures, primarily Eugene de Kock. Although this latter was an apartheid murderer, the biographies were written about him complicated and humanized him, and thus arousing public wrath.

Elena Moore's essay debates a pertinent point that sketches out life under apartheid by foregrounding retaliations to political cruelty through the abetment of a minute perspective. To achieve this target, she made use of sociologically-oriented life histories. Meanwhile, her chapter is a biography that narrates a family's daily life and delineates its private life indoors during apartheid. She zeroes in on ideas of "the home". This latter

became loci for resistance. Therefore, she substitutes how individuals grapple with the apartheid violence through family daily practices, which were vital for bolstering notions of dignity and decency through sustaining inter-racial friendships. However, there was a constant assault orchestrated by segregationists towards these people. Accordingly, the ultimatum of apartheid was imperiled and evincible. On the other hand, the collapse of apartheid would engender paradoxical ramifications. For instance, even though Wilma and Charlton Pieterse were liberated from the racial-spatial segregation during apartheid, they lost their solace and allegiance to their bygone community, and thus they were affronted with violence from whites snuggled to an erstwhile era. Moore's essay is a vivid acme of how biographical inquiry could aid in humanizing our outlook of history.

The third chapter allocates a substantial debate over methodological defiance of biography research so that they can aid rarefy ancient metanarratives of life-stories. In this chapter, Iva Pesa utilizes multifarious thorough biographies amassed during her terrain research in north-western Zambia to obfuscate received theories of labor immigration in colonial Southern Africa. Her account on colonial labor migration ratifies the pursuit of individual incentive rather than structural stigma, which flunked to mirror the enigmas and inconsistencies of labor migration. Therefore, in one of her beguiling stories, wherein the portrayal of its sheer distinctive characters was aberrant, she exhibits how the conceptions of modern vogue regulated the maneuvering of a labor exodus. In the same vein, Pesa narrates the accounts of Lucy Chiyengi and Gladys Sanakoko to portray how gift-offering of modern consumerism may impact social kinships in Zambia's rural localities.

The second part polarizes on shifts and adjustments. For instance, Grant's chapter is a tale about Corneilius that occurred during the late nineteenth century; this chapter sketches a captivating story of an African, who experienced and was nurtured in the cross-cultural milieu of the West African coast and zealot schooling in Europe, and thus discovered the European reality from within while he got accosted with multitudinous drawbacks. Badu epitomizes the mutations of cross-cultural settings into acclimatized imperialism of the colonial remission. Within the same part, the fifth chapter by Jacqueline de Vries sketches out this unfolding through perusing the political mutations occurring in an African society under the colonial shackles in German Cameroon. De Vries' account is about an authority who was at the helm of the pre-colonial Kom realm. Since this latter was deluged by the fluctuations induced by colonial rule in the upheavals of World War 1, his traditional governance became crescently contingent first on both German and then, in the post-war period on British indulgence; here I mean Michael Timneng.

De Vries has excavated in Timneng's substantial and captivating autobiography and also relied on interviews she conducted with his descendants in 1990s. As a result, her biography of the protagonist is a vivid incarnation of self-fashioning. In other words, she portrayed how Timneng deliberately tailored himself as dignitary who embodied both traditional and modern tropes in his public deadlocks with Kom's customary ruler. Overall, the shock and change that Timneng helped to unshackle Kom society also uncovers that political mutation scarcely happens peacefully.

Not only does chapter six by Duncan Money address the transition at a specific personal condition, but also sketches this out in ways to accentuate its intermittence. In this respect, Money attempts to shed light on the absence of a biography of Percy Jack Hodgson although biographies are deemed as a foremost entity of South African historiography. Hodgson was a famous white member of the African National Congress struggle against Apartheid. Money's chapter, which is a biographical investigation, delineates the amazing veer that a white mine worker's life took because of diverse impacts, be they structural or mainly unforeseen such as Marxist ideology, the ramifications of the war against Nazism and Hodgson's encounter with his late second wife. All these latter emulate in accounting

for what was a chaotic biography articulated by a metamorphosis of identity in reflection of material state of affairs.

The third part zeroes in on the multifarious discursive manifestations which such introspection may endorse inasmuch as these are crucial to how individuals interrelate with their surrounding, wherein culture, ethnography, religion, cosmology and political ideologies may interplay. In this respect, chapter seven by Morgan Robinson sketches out how unshackled slave's offspring and progeny voiced their social genesis through their religious conversion. Meanwhile, the author profusely pursues what others may disregard as homogenized life-historical portrayals of missionary venture. As an exemplar, the children at a mission on Zanzibar were exhorted to ventilate their narrative of enslavement, emancipation and conversion. Therefore, these tales are not samples of the emulating of Christian credo; yet they provide substantially bona fide findings. While catering for ganders of the pre-colonial stances, the students at the mission equated the new worldview with their old lives without thoroughly decrying the latter. This process of change was not *ipso facto* collateral to Christian church doctrine but to a profoundly personal experience that is galvanized by an individual's juxtaposition of the past with the present.

Similar to Duncan Money's essay, Eve Wong, in chapter eight, revives Abdullah Abdurahman, an emblematic defendant for political right for South African's non-white communities. He was the first colored city councilor; however, his political reputation was arraigned by latter generations due to his alliance with white liberals. Hence, in this chapter, Wong attempts to upgrade a "great-man" biography. Her contribution is twofold. Primarily, she delineates the diverse religious repercussions that Abdurahman undertook during his early life, such as Islam and an array of Christian creeds (Dutch Reformed Church doctrine, New England Transcendentalism and the teachings of the French Catholic Marist Brothers). In fact, Abdurahman did not convert to Christianity. Yet thanks to this milieu, he learnt to erect his own more spiritually impartial airs. Secondly, Wong's chapter entitles the significance of childhood while construing the ripening of her character because she contends that childhood life-stories are still scarce. Nevertheless, she recounts the multifarious parental and educational impacts that aided in erecting this multiplex biographical subject.

In chapter nine, Klass Van Walraven discusses Barthelemy Buganda's biography wherein both childhood and religion are also highlighted. The protagonist was a priest and politician in French Equatorial Africa. In this chapter, the author endeavors to explicate his erratic demeanor through two issues. Firstly, there are the long-term ripples of his childhood trauma, mainly family loss. Secondly, the chapter sketches out cultural morals from the pre-colonial religious cosmology, wherein Boganda was reread prior to his being sent to an orphanage. Chapter nine conjectures that pre-colonial religion may have wielded a perpetual impact in terms of cultural behavioral aspects that Boganga manifested now and then in his work as a priest and politician. Boganga also betrayed a religious syncretism that nourished his political outlook.

Erika Kennes' contribution is the last chapter, which concentrates political ideology in the travails of its persona. As in the previous chapter that hones in on great-man's life-story, Erika Kennes portrays the ideological impacts on the personality of Laurent Kabila; he was formerly a lumumbist, then Maoist, but he has always disapproved Western hegemony in what became the Democratic Republic of Congo under his helm. Kabila's itinerary trusses together the whole history of deviance in post-colonial Congo. Hence, he established rebel groups as an alternative to counter the Western-dominated governance, whose structure appertain similitude to Mobutist regime while inserting its personality credo. Finally, Kennes contends the exigency for comparative research of Congo's political generations to marshal the political introspection in a country where cynicism overlooks the virtues of individual drive and action.

This volume is an outstanding gain for African biographical studies in as much as the contributions reflect an enormous plethora of biographically germane writing, whose personas encompass children and adults, slaves and free, the plebeian and the puissant. These writings bestow an in-depth cognizance on matters as multifarious as religion, education, inter-cultural contact, social interrogations and the political in Africa. This well-structured volume makes an important contribution to scholarship and fills a substantial gap in the literature on the individual in the African history through scrutinizing and compiling biographies on different individuals. After having read this rich and meticulous project, I am sure that that the book is so inspiring, content- wealthy and thought-provoking that it opens several vistas for research, interrogation and methodology in African history and studies.

Since the recorded history of Africa, there have been several female subjects in African history; nevertheless, although six out of ten chapters were composed by female academics, no single one has dared to bring up a female biography. Hence, the volume failed to account and devote at least one single chapter to a female subject. Moreover, most biographies are about subjects on the southern hemisphere of Africa. In a nutshell, I sincerely recommend that future projects endorse more voices and be more inclusive since the notion of biological subject in the realm of African studies entails heedful cogitation.

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