



E-motions: A History of Unrecorded Female Rural Displacements in Post-Slavery Africa

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Abstract

This special issue introduces the concept of *e-motions* in (post-)slavery Africa to analyse movement or motion that is not so much driven by labour and economic survival but rather by relational/emotional (dis-)connection. We introduce the term *e-motions* to qualify the gendered mobilities mainly of subaltern girls and women who have been voluntarily or forcedly moving in the past and present to establish and consolidate emotional ties. These ties exist in intimate spheres that are profoundly entangled in histories of slavery and asymmetrical dependencies. In this special issue, we use the concept of *e-motions* to flesh out the link between small-scale and rural (im-)mobilities executed by subaltern women and girls, who are expected to fulfil important ritualised roles in various emotional stages of life through pathic labour and care work. While not denying we are living in a world with exponential digitisation, mobilities and extreme forms of exclusion, we wish to historicise less spectacular but acute, highly impactful

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and often implicitly violent *e-motions* that mostly women at the lowest echelons of their societies faced and continue to face in a male-dominated world.

Keywords

Africa – emotions – gender – rural displacement – mobility – post-slavery – slavery – migration

This special issue introduces the concept of *e-motions* to analyse movement or motion not so much driven by labour and economic survival but rather by relational/emotional (dis-)connection. We introduce the term *e-motions* to qualify the gendered mobilities of mainly girls and women who have been moving, including forcedly, in the past and present to establish, consolidate or move in and out of emotional ties in intimate, affective and private spheres.

We argue for using the concept of *e-motions* to flesh out more clearly the link between often rather small-scale and rural, but very significant and emotionally demanding, mobilities executed by women, not necessarily linked to labour and economic survival as such but rather to the fulfilment of the main ritualised emotional stages of life. We focus on how these women are often required to engage in movement to rework, solidify or tighten different types of emotional bonding, with in-laws, children, parents, sexual partners and so on. In other words, *e-motions* are the spatial movements of women that are physically undertaken in order to sustain relations, care and social connections that are often directly linked to profound emotions, intimacies and affects. Indeed, highly emotive occasions – such as, for example, getting married, giving birth, getting divorced – often involve movement on the part of women in predominantly heteropatriarchal societies: women move in with their husbands' families; women pass their children to the patriline; and when women get divorced, usually they – and not their husbands – have to return home.

We developed this notion by revisiting our own research from the last two decades on slavery and migration (referenced across this introduction). Our research time and again pointed to how, in contemporary African post-slavery societies,¹ subaltern women usually bear the burden of moving, adapting and changing contexts and environments or being obliged to do so, rather than men. We were inspired by the 'emotional turn', also referred to as the 'affective

1 Baz Lecocq and Eric Komlavi Hahonou (eds), 'Exploring post-slavery in contemporary Africa', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48:2 (2015) 181–192; Baz Lecocq and Lotte Pelckmans, 'Post-Slavery', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, 2023, <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-956> (2 April 2024).

turn', in social sciences and humanities,² whereby affect is seen as 'never only a matter of individual (mental and/or bodily) states, but always part and parcel of a particular "discursive material" and socio-political formation that unfolds in open-ended and – nevertheless, patterned – ways'.³ The theoretical and interdisciplinary debates about the connections and differences between affect, emotions and sentiment have been lively, and often reflect a particular intellectual and political trend.⁴

For us, the added value of the turn to emotions/affect/sentiment is that it draws attention to how these factors actively structure societies on the African continent politically, socially and economically. While much scholarly attention has been paid to individual emotions, Scheer's approach of taking emotions as practices is helpful for analysing emotions in their collective dimension and going beyond the dominant language of emotions and affects as essentially triggered responses.⁵ Focusing on the intersubjective dimensions of power relations in different settings, we argue that emotions – because of their concomitant engagement with the individual and the collective – continuously unfold and are being (re)shaped while also (re)shaping people's cultural registers in specific historical circumstances. Emotions are thus inherently political phenomena.⁶

In this special issue, we specifically propose to connect and combine the 'emotional turn' with the 'mobility turn' in (post-)slavery Africa.⁷ The mobility turn centres on the acceleration of flows of people, goods and information

2 Maruška Svašek, 'On the move: emotions and human mobility', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36:6 (2010) 865–880; Maruška Svašek (ed.), *Emotions and human mobility: Ethnographies of movement* (New York 2012); David Lemmings and Ann Brooks, *Emotions and social change. Historical and sociological perspectives* (New York 2014); Katie Barclay, Jeffrey Meek and Andrea Thomson (eds), *Courtship, marriage and marriage breakdown* (New York 2020).

3 Heike Drotbohm and Hansjörg Dilger, 'Rethinking affects of care through power: an introduction', *Focaal* 98:1 (2024) 1–14.

4 Debates are ongoing in several disciplines. See, for example, Robina Mohammad and James D. Sidaway, 'Reflections on affect: a meta-commentary occasioned by Pile (2010) and subsequent exchanges', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37:4 (2012) 655–657; See also Thomas Dixon, *The history of emotions. A very short introduction* (Oxford 2023).

5 Monique Scheer, 'Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion)', *History and Theory* 51:2 (2012) 193–220; Stephanie Trigg, 'Introduction: emotional histories. Beyond the personalization of the past and the abstraction of Affect Theory', *Exemplaria* 26:1 (2014) 3–15.

6 Sara Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion* (Edinburgh [first published 2004] 2014); Sarah Benesch, 'Exploring emotions and power in L2 research: sociopolitical approaches', *The Modern Language Journal* 103:2 (2019) 530–533; Jan Slaby and Christian Von Scheve, *Affective societies: Key concepts* (New York and London 2019).

7 John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge 2007).

across borders,⁸ but it has been critiqued for its celebration of movement while overlooking immobility and permanence as important constitutive elements of mobility, leading to its reframing as an ‘im/mobility turn’:⁹

Emotions in the most literal sense are movements: etymologically, ‘emotion’ comes from the Latin verb *emovere*, meaning both to move out and to disturb.¹⁰ Building further on the work of Ahmed,¹¹ we focus on the way in which emotions circulate and find expression in and/or require physical movement for their establishment. By connecting emotions to actual ‘doings and sayings’, but also to movement, we can retrace in the sources how *e-motions* have been historically experienced, performed and mobilised in specific social, cultural and political frameworks.¹²

Psychologists and social geographers have paid attention to the socio-spatial settings of emotions.¹³ As highlighted by Anderson, affects indeed emerge from, and are part of, socio-spatial processes.¹⁴ Glaveanu and Wormley have used the term ‘affective mobilities’, which pays attention to the intricate connections between positionality, movement, emotion and possibility.¹⁵

We propose the notion of *e-motions* to represent the entanglements of affective symbolic and spatial physical movements as performed by subaltern women in Africa, to underline how they move for reasons beyond mere economic purposes.

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- 8 Mimi Sheller and John Urry, ‘The new mobilities paradigm’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 38:2 (2006) 207–226.
- 9 Danièle Bélanger and Rachel Silvey, ‘An im/mobility turn: power geometries of care and migration’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46:16 (2020) 3423–3440; Paolo Gaibazzi, ‘The rank effect: post-emancipation immobility in a Soninke village’, *Journal of African History* 53 (2012) 215–234; Paolo Gaibazzi, *Bush bound: young men and rural permanence in migrant West Africa* (Oxford 2015).
- 10 Dixon, *The history of emotions*.
- 11 Ahmed, *The cultural politics*.
- 12 Trigg, ‘Introduction’.
- 13 Elisabeth Olson, ‘Geography and ethics II: emotions and morality’, *Progress in Human Geography* 40:6 (2016) 830–838; Kye Askins and Matej Blazek, ‘Feeling our way: academia, emotions and a politics of care’, *Social and Cultural Geography* 18:8 (2017) 1086–1105.
- 14 Ben Anderson, ‘Affect’, in: D. Richardson et al. (eds), *International encyclopedia of geography: people, the Earth, environment and technology* (2017) 1–3. On line <http://online.library.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9781118786352> (accessed 6 July 2024).
- 15 Vlad P. Glaveanu and Gail Womersley, ‘Affective mobilities: migration, emotion and (im) possibility’, *Mobilities* 16:4 (2021) 628–642.

Post-slavery: Subaltern Women in Relations of Asymmetrical Dependencies

Why look at *e-motions* in the specific context of African (post-)slavery? First, it is necessary to embed research with/about women and on gender in Africa in the broader context of contestation of hegemonies.¹⁶ Post-slavery can be understood as societal circumstances in which, despite the legal abolition of slavery, the social, economic and political hierarchies deriving from past slavery persist in hegemonic ways.¹⁷

In this special issue, we apply the concept of *e-motions* in its complex relations with slavery legacies specifically to the highly invisibilised category of low-status girls and women with limited life choices due to low degrees of freedom and/or high degrees of dependence. These can be women/girls categorised in their society as having a 'slave status' and/or women/girls subjected to various forms of 'asymmetrical dependencies'.¹⁸ This special issue explores both past 'asymmetrical dependencies' (Chapdelaine and McMahon in this issue) and present ones that can result from historical continuities surrounding descent-based slavery (Oxby, Diallo and Ould Brahim in this issue) and/or from contemporary forms of exploitation and servitude (Kiconco, Declich in this issue). Even though the concept of *e-motions* could certainly be applied as an analytical tool to elite groups and with a focus on urban contexts, we have chosen to focus on predominantly small-scale rural and rural/urban movements, since these are often overlooked. Indeed, important scholarship focuses on maids and domestic workers in African urban settings,¹⁹ but how

16 Hibist Kassa, 'Researching women and gender in Africa: present realities, future directions', in: Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (eds), *The Palgrave handbook of African Women's Studies* (London 2021) 217–233.

17 On African post-slavery, see: Lecocq and Komlavi Hahonou, 'Exploring post-slavery'; Lecocq and Pelckmans, 'Post-slavery'.

18 Julia Winnebeck et al., 'The analytical concept of asymmetrical dependency', *Journal of Global Slavery* 8:1 (2023) 1–59.

19 The literature on maids, domestic servants and child trafficking in African urban settings is extensive. For a comprehensive sociological study of the phenomenon of 'young maids' in Côte d'Ivoire, see Mélanie Jacquemin, *"Petites bonnes" d'Abidjan. Sociologie des filles en service domestique* (Paris 2012). For a critical historical perspective on domestic servitude and trafficking in post-slavery Mali, see also Marie Rodet, 'Under the guise of guardianship and marriage': mobilizing juvenile and female labor in the aftermath of slavery in Kayes, French Soudan, 1900–1939', in: Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts (eds), *Trafficking in slavery's wake. Law and the experience of women and children in Africa* (Athens 2012) 86–100. Important case studies can also be found in Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet (eds), *Children on the move in Africa: Past and present experiences of*

much do we know about these same maids and domestic workers in post-slavery rural contexts?

By using the concept of *e-motions* in this special issue to recover primarily female subaltern experiences, we do not want to deny the possible consequences for men (see Diallo in this issue) nor suggest that the concept is solely applicable to women and girls.

Moreover, while there is some valuable work and multi-disciplinary analysis of historical and contemporary work on *transnational* 'intimate mobilities',²⁰ the emotional labour of moving to break, sustain or create familial, sexual and social relations by dependent *rural* girls and women has, to our knowledge, received scarce attention. This seems to be even more the case when it comes to women and girls who, compared with their ruling-class peers, are less free in defining, choosing and deciding their movement, due to asymmetrical dependencies and forms of servitude. It is crucial to gain a better grasp of the important long-standing role of *unfree* women and their labour in the reproductive and affective social and economic spheres of African societies. Several studies have already highlighted elite women's political role in sustaining lineages, forging marriage alliances and promoting the stability of the home in Africa.²¹

We call for a special focus on girls and women in asymmetrical dependencies, such as girls and women with classificatory 'slave status' and/or those subjected to contemporary forms of servitude in post-slavery Africa, because these are arguably the most invisibilised and neglected migrants in current African migration and displacement studies. Moreover, like enslaved women in the past,²² girls and women continue to be more affected by the

migration (Woodridge 2016); see also: Lotte Pelckmans, 'Memoryscapes of slavery? Dependent mobility by "related" domestic workers in Fulbe elite families in Mali', in: Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran (eds), *Slavery, migration and contemporary bondage in Africa* (Trenton 2012) 149–180.

20 Andrew Gorman-Murray, 'Intimate mobilities: emotional embodiment and queer migration', *Social & Cultural Geography* 10:4 (2009) 441–460; Clare Holdsworth, *Family and intimate mobility* (New York 2013); Christian Groes and Nadine T. Fernandez (eds), *Intimate mobilities. Sexual economies, marriage and migration in a disparate world* (New York and Oxford 2018).

21 Emily M. Osborn, *Our new husbands are here: households, gender, and politics in a West African state from the slave trade to colonial rule* (Athens, Ohio 2011); Jan Jansen, 'When marrying a Muslim: the social code of political elites in the western Sudan, c. 1600–c. 1850', *Journal of African History* 57:1 (2016) 25–45.

22 Martin Klein and Claire C. Robertson, *Women and slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth 1997).

legacies of descent-based slavery than men are, especially in the realm of sex, kinship relations, domestic work and affective (dis-)connections.²³

This special issue will explore in more depth why small-scale, gendered and predominantly rural intimate mobilities of marginalised girls/women have remained so 'invisible', or rather 'illegible'. In her article about neo-slave narratives in contemporary African literature, Murphy underlines the issue:

Understanding victims of enslavement (or other forms of extreme abuse) as invisible puts the burden on the victim to come into the spotlight, whereas reconceptualising modern slavery as a problem of illegibility puts the onus of responsibility on the reader. The signs are there; we simply need to learn how to read them.²⁴

We endeavour to apply this idea of learning how to read the signs, to women in asymmetrical relations of slavery and/or servitude, and we aim to unpack the 'illegibility' and oblivion of *e-motions* in the broader field of forced displacements within local African (rural) contexts. Despite the challenges in accessing these displaced lives, in terms of sources/traces (whose sources and traces?) and gaze (who is telling whose story?),²⁵ we are convinced that this is not an impossible endeavour. This special issue is about how *e-motions* allow us to look for other traces that tell us, even if in a sketchy or even truncated way, what these lives are about. We do it consciously to re-historicise subaltern lives and make them visible in the global history of migration.

The spotlight is thus on rural girls and women in relations of asymmetrical dependency and the forms of intimate labour mobilities they are engaging in. This will allow us to contribute to more systematic reflections on mobilities and ideologies of affect in relation to sex, gender, social class and ethnicity in Africa.²⁶

23 Bakary Camara et al., 'Under-the-radar: descent-based slavery as a form of contemporary slavery', *The Republic* (June-July 2021), <https://republic.com.ng/june-july-2021/under-the-radar/> (on line only, accessed 7 July 2024).

24 Laura T. Murphy, 'The new slave narrative and the illegibility of modern slavery', *Slavery & Abolition* 36:2 (2015) 382–405, 392.

25 Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in two acts', *Small Axe* 12:2 (2008) 1–14; Ousman Kasmani, 'Migration: an intimacy', in: Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell (eds), *The affect theory reader 2* (Durham 2023) 214–230.

26 Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas (eds), *Love in Africa* (Chicago 2009).

E-motions: Emotions that Move

We argue that the emotions inspiring female movements *within* the African continent have been largely overlooked in both historical and contemporary studies of slavery, mobility and migration. Clearly, more spectacular and large-scale, and indeed explicitly global, forms of what we define here as *e-motions* have attracted much attention in the past three decades, ranging from studies on ‘intercontinental marriages’,²⁷ ‘transnational families’²⁸ and ‘transnational parenthood’,²⁹ to studies on ‘long-distance intimacies’,³⁰ ‘transnational intimacy’,³¹ ‘transnational affective circuits’,³² ‘emotions in transmigration’,³³ intercontinental trafficking of sex workers³⁴ and the global economy of ‘intimate mobilities’.³⁵

In contrast to these highly visible and sometimes extreme forms of globe-spanning *e-motions*, we want to examine less spectacular, rather small-scale and often rural movements of women who engage in the emotional and subtle work of love, care, kinship and relationality.

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- 27 Kathryn Robinson, ‘Of mail-order brides and “boys’ own” tales: representations of Asian-Australian marriages’, *Feminist Review* 52 (1996) 53–68; Nicola Piper and Mina Roces, ‘Wife or worker?’ *Asian women and migration* (New York 2003).
- 28 Deborah Fahy Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (eds), *The transnational family: new European frontiers and global networks* (Oxford and New York 2002); Elisabetta Zontini, *Transnational families, migration and gender: Moroccan and Filipino women in Bologna and Barcelona* (Oxford and New York 2010); Deborah Fahy Bryceson, ‘Transnational families negotiating migration and care life cycles across nation-state borders’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45:16 (2019) 3042–3064.
- 29 Jørgen Carling, Cecilia Menjivar and Leah Schmalzbauer, ‘Central themes in the study of transnational parenthood’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38:2 (2012) 191–217.
- 30 Rhacel Parreñas, ‘Long-distance intimacy: class, gender and intergenerational relations between mothers and children in Filipino transnational families’, *Global Networks* 5:4 (2005) 317–336.
- 31 Megan Lafferty and Kristen H. Maher, ‘Transnational intimacy and economic precarity of Western men in Northeast Thailand’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46:8 (2020) 1629–1646.
- 32 Jennifer Cole and Christian Groes (eds), *Affective circuits. African migrations to Europe and the pursuit of social regeneration* (Chicago 2016).
- 33 Ann Brooks and Ruth Simpson, *Emotions in transmigration: transformation, movement and identity* (New York 2013).
- 34 Erlend Paasche, May-Len Skilbrei and Sine Plambech, ‘Vulnerable here or there? Examining the vulnerability of victims of human trafficking before and after return’, *Anti-Trafficking Review* 10 (2018) 34–51.
- 35 Christian Groes and Nadine T. Fernandez (eds), *Intimate mobilities. Sexual economies, marriage and migration in a disparate world* (New York and Oxford 2018).

Motions: Rural/Urban/Global Mobilities

Certainly, this illegibility/oblivion is first and foremost part of the broader trends whereby studies on mobility/migration in and from Africa have focused on movements between countries and continents rather than within countries and their rural areas.

Indeed, it is easier to find studies on national outmigration – that is, international mobilities between African countries (for example Mali to coastal Ghana/Senegal) and/or inter-continental movements between West and North Africa/Europe – than it is to find studies on migration within African rural areas.³⁶ Both the rise of the lens of transnationalism and the heavy politicisation and racialisation of south–north migrations have produced many studies about African (primarily male) migrants to Europe.³⁷ The presentism characterising such transnational studies has come to overshadow both long- and short-distance as well as forced and willing migrations within Africa, which occurred well before the construction of nation states worldwide.³⁸

Moreover, studies that *do* address mobilities on the African continent or within a single African region, tend to focus on labour migrations. This bias is particularly acute for francophone West Africa, with its longstanding patterns of circular and seasonal migrations in the sub-region.³⁹ Contemporary

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- 36 Some exceptions: Mirjam E. De Bruijn and Lotte Pelckmans, 'Facing dilemmas: former Fulbe slaves in modern Mali', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39:1 (2005) 69–96; Marie Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal, 1900–1946* (Paris 2009); Marie Rodet, 'Historical perspectives on marriage, migration, and family networks in the region of Kayes, Mali', *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 31:1 (2015) 39–55.
- 37 Ralf Grillo and Valentina Mazzucato, 'Africa < > Europe: a double engagement', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34:2 (2008) 175–198; Abdoulaye Kane and Todd H. Leedy, *African migrations: Patterns & perspectives* (Bloomington, Indianapolis 2013).
- 38 Francesca Declich and Marie Rodet, 'Introduction: (re)thinking migration memories and diasporic practices from the perspective of the African continent', *Africa, Journal of the International Africa Institute* 88:3 (2018) 443–451; Lotte Pelckmans, 'Fugitive emplacements: mobility as discontent for Wahaya concubine women with slave status in the transnational borderlands of Niger–Nigeria, 1960–2016', in: Jesper Bjarnesen and Simon Turner (eds), *Invisibility in African displacements: from structural marginalization to strategies of avoidance* (London 2020) 216–234.
- 39 See among others: Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *La société Soninke (Dyahumu, Mali)* (Brussels 1971); Florence Boyer, 'Slavery among the Bankilaré Tuareg in light of circular migrations', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 179–180:3 (2005) 771–804; François Manchuelle, *Willing migrants: Soninke labor diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens 1997); David Rain, *Eaters of the dry season: circular labor migration in the West African Sahel* (New York 1999); Brian Peterson, 'Transforming the village: migration, Islam and colonialism in French southern Mali (West Africa), 1880–1960' (Yale 2005) Thesis Yale University; Isaïe Dougnon, *Travail de Blanc, travail de Noir. La migration des paysans dogon vers l'Office du Niger et au Ghana (1910–1980)* (Paris 2007).

African mobility studies have been predominantly framed as 'male', and their study has focused almost exclusively on economic migration,⁴⁰ in which, exceptionally, some women have made their way and received recognition or gained visibility, for example as pioneering and successful traders in the urban political economy.⁴¹

This triple bias of (inter-)national outmigration, male and labour migration has therefore overshadowed very rich and longstanding patterns of intense affective and intimate female movements within Africa, and especially those difficult to quantify in terms of economic labour/value, such as the movements by girls and women with ascribed 'slave status' and/or subjected to servitude.

Female Motions

Female motion has usually been considered if it fits into the same criteria and patterns of male migration, such as work or education, but much less so on its own terms.⁴² Elyachar analysed seemingly unimportant daily mobilities of women visiting friends and kin in the city of Cairo as 'phatic labour', and she demonstrates how the social infrastructures built by these women through their daily mobilities make a real impact on, and contribution to, the urban political economy of their families.⁴³ While not neglecting that also men could engage in this social infrastructural work, we argue that 'phatic labour' is indeed often expected of and central to the movements of mainly women in rural Africa. Yet, despite the numerical prevalence of rural-rural female mobilities (e.g. marriage migration) in Africa, these mobilities have, for multiple reasons, a long history of being under-documented and undervalued.⁴⁴

When it comes to recognising just how crucial female movements and indeed *e-motions* are for social regeneration and kin-making, the edited volume by Cole and Groes provides important insights into the 'intimate matters' (love

40 Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*.

41 Ebbe Prag, 'Women leaders and the sense of power: clientelism & citizenship at the Dantokpa market in Cotonou, Benin', in: Ilda Lindell (ed.), *Africa's informal workers: collective agency, alliances and transnational organizing in urban Africa* (London 2010) 65–81; Gunvor Jonsson, 'The need to travel: Malian women shuttle traders, autonomy and (mis)trust in neoliberal Dakar', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 89:4 (2019) 739–758.

42 On a critique of the over-focus on African male migration, see Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*; Lotte Pelckmans, *Travelling hierarchies: moving in and out of slave status in a Central Malian Fulbe network* (Leiden 2011); Rodet, 'Historical perspectives'; Pelckmans, 'Fugitive emplacements'.

43 Julia Elyachar, 'Phatic labor, infrastructure, and the question of empowerment in Cairo', *American Ethnologist* 37:3 (2010) 452–464.

44 For example, Rodet, 'Historical perspectives'.

relations, marriage, childrearing, etc);⁴⁵ nevertheless, their volume focuses solely on the transnational Africa–Europe setting. In later work, Groes and Fernandez highlight north–south and south–north mobilities motivated by love and desire, coining them as ‘intimate mobilities’, which they define as involving:

[...] all forms of mobility shaped, implied or facilitated by bodily, sexual, affective or reproductive intimacy, spanning what has been coined as marriage migration, family migration, sexual migration, romance travel, erotic adventure, sex work migration and sex tourism, as well as any kind of mobility motivated by emotions, desires or pleasures, or conditioned by kinship, family ties or reproductive ambitions.⁴⁶

Following in those footsteps, this special issue will demonstrate the specific entanglements of mobility, affects and intimacy applied to inegalitarian settings in African (post-)slavery societies, whereby slavery legacies are very present and real, precisely when it comes to the domain of family, gendered social relations, kinship, reproductive ambitions and sustained daily social connectivities. The focus is on African societies where contemporary forms of servitude (e.g. exploitative domestic work) or the ongoing power differentials based on classificatory ‘slave status’ have real consequences, especially for girls and women with ascribed ‘slave status’. These girls and women move in ways that are qualitatively different from, or cannot be compared with, the *e-motions* or intimate mobilities of elite women. While the emotional work of elite women remains little studied in African studies, the affective journeys of low-status women are even more invisibilised in post-slavery African studies of migration.⁴⁷

45 Cole and Groes, *Affective circuits*. See also: Francesca Declich, ‘Kinship ties on the move: an introduction to the migratory journeys of kindred’, *Anuac*, journal of the Italian Society of Cultural Anthropology (SIAC) 9:1 (2020) 87–109.

46 Groes and Fernandez, *Intimate mobilities*.

47 Exceptions include the following: Ann E. McDougall, ‘Living the legacy of slavery: between discourse and reality’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 179–180 (2005) 957–986; Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*; Pelckmans, *Travelling hierarchies*; Marte Bogen Sinderud, ‘Royal concubinage in Ngaoundere, Northern Cameroon, ca.1900–1960’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46:1 (2013) 1–25; Marie Rodet, ‘I ask for divorce because my husband does not let me go back to my country of origin with my brother’: gender, family, and the end of slavery in the Region of Kayes, French Soudan (1890–1920)’, in: Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (eds), *Sex, power, and slavery* (Athens 2014) 182–202; Rodet, ‘Historical perspectives’; Benedetta Rossi, ‘Periodizing the end of slavery: colonial law, the League of Nations, and slave resistance in the Nigerien Sahel, 1920s–1930s’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 72:4 (2017) 983–1021; Katherine A. Wiley, *Work, social status and gender in post-slavery Mauritania* (Indiana 2018); Pelckmans, ‘Fugitive placements’.

Beyond the Individual: Historicising E-motions as Collective Practices

The history of emotions analyses how emotions are the products of their cultural environments, and thus vary across time and space.⁴⁸ Stimulated as much by psychology, cognitive sciences and cultural anthropology, the history of emotions asserted itself above all as a cultural history studying individual emotions, such as love or honour.⁴⁹ In the same way, the research literature on emotions in Africa has been primarily concerned with definitions of intimacy and expressions of emotions and love, as embodied by the landmark 2009 edited volume by Cole and Thomas.⁵⁰ Philosophical and psychological interest in embodiment has recognised emotions as situated, and affects as constitutive, not just of social beings but also of relational social bodies.⁵¹ Yet, cognitive studies, psychology and philosophy still approach emotions largely from an individual perspective. Historicising emotions as situated social practices is useful to analyse the collective emotions experienced by oppressed communities over time, and their changes. This counterbalances dominant discourses of their (passive) reactions to events affecting their lives, and thus de facto denying their being legible historical subjects.⁵²

Collective emotional experiences may enable identification with the group, giving rise to 'emotional communities' but also to solidarity, creating conditions for collective action.⁵³ Rosenwein defines 'emotional communities' as 'a system of feeling' reflecting a social group and milieu sharing the same economic, social and political interests.⁵⁴ African (post-)slavery societies were/are also 'emotional regimes'⁵⁵ that, by controlling emotions and *e-motions*, found

48 Katie Barclay, 'Introduction: emotions and change', *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 1:2 (2017) 1–9.

49 Piroska Nagy, 'Histoire des émotions collectives. Éléments pour la trajectoire d'un phénomène et d'un concept', in: Piroska Nagy et al. (eds), *Histoire des émotions collectives. Épistémologie, émergences, expériences* (2022) 9–64.

50 Marie Rodet, "'Bigamy', "marriage fraud" and colonial patriarchy in Kayes, French Sudan (1905–1925)', in: Katie Barclay, Jeffrey Meek and Andrea Thomson (eds), *Courtship, marriage and marriage breakdown* (London and New York 2020) 96–110.

51 Ahmed, *The cultural politics*; Slaby and Von Scheve, *Affective societies*; Trigg, 'Introduction'.
52 Scheer, 'Are emotions a kind of practice'; Trigg, 'Introduction'.

53 Stephen Reicher, 'Crowds, agency and passion. Reconsidering the roots of the social bond', in: Ruth Parkin-Gounelas (ed.), *The psychology and politics of the collective. Groups, crowds and mass identifications* (London and New York 2012) 67–85.

54 Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the early Middle Ages* (Cornell 2006).

55 William Reddy, *The navigation of feeling. A framework for the history of emotions* (Cambridge 2001).

a way of forging social bonds between children and adults, free and unfree (see Oxby, Chapdelaine, and Diallo in this issue). This in turn opened the door to 'deviance' and 'space and movement reappropriation' on the margins or outside of societal control (see McMahon, Ould Brahim, Kiconco, and Declich in this issue), but these regimes could also compete, overlap or conflict with other local and translocal emotional regimes, spaces and multiple belongings at the intersection of nationality, gender, ethnicity, class, age, generations, religion and sexuality.

Care: Emotional Investments in the Labour of (Taking) Care

In the past two decades, several important publications in the social sciences have explored the notion of care, looking at the intersection of work, gender, ethnicity, affect and mobility.⁵⁶ These studies have argued for no longer analysing care as mere 'work' but rather as lying at the intersection of kinship and social belonging. Indeed, care is increasingly also studied for the emotional work or 'pathic labour' underpinning it.⁵⁷ As such, care relations are central contributions to the making and maintaining of kinship and social bonds.

However, in the context of African post-slavery class differences, care as a positive relation of belonging and of maintaining kinship ties easily turns to fiction when it becomes forced and imposed on highly dependent, low-class individuals. In post-slavery contexts, we see that dependent women are forcedly engaged in the emotional labour of care and are thereby also often moved away from the possibilities to care for their own families and loved ones (see Chapdelaine in this special issue).⁵⁸ The kinship continuum proposed by Miers and Kopytoff tends to overlook the violence and the forced displacements intrinsic to slavery and post-slavery rural *e-motions* (Kiconco in this special issue).⁵⁹

Indeed, this fiction of positive care and belonging invisibilises and masks the fact that it is mainly dependent/enslaved girls and women who have often been moved around to accompany either male or female slave owners who got married (Oxby and Ould Brahim in this special issue). These enslaved girls and

56 See, among many others: Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (eds), *Intimate labors. Cultures, technologies, and the politics of care* (Stanford 2010); Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of care: immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France* (California 2011); Erdmute Alber and Heike Drotbohm (eds), *Anthropological perspectives on care: work, kinship, and the life-course* (Basingstoke 2015).

57 Elyachar, *Phatic labor*.

58 See also Pelckmans, 'Memoryscapes'.

59 Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds), *Slavery in Africa: historical and anthropological perspectives* (Madison 1977).

women, just like the free women they accompanied, had to adapt and make do as women in new linguistic, geographical and ethnic communities without being asked, and often being forever disconnected from their kin elsewhere.⁶⁰ Generations of women and children with ascribed slave status have been torn apart, out of kinship, both past and present.⁶¹

Thus, while both elite women and dependent women have long histories of being 'strategically' moved around to maintain peace or buy time, the latter have been deemed unimportant, whereas, in fact, they have often done, and continue to do, the most fundamental emotional care work, with hardly any reward or visibility. For example, women with ascribed slave status in post-slavery Mauritania continue to breastfeed the children of the historical ruling classes, a practice called 'milk kinship'.⁶² Many other examples exist – not least in contemporary studies of transnational classed forms of labour – of how low-class dependent women have undertaken exhausting 'phatic labour', in service to others who deny them care for their own families and income possibilities.

What do we know about these girls and women being strategically moved towards other women or men to emotionally support and care for them? How can we gain insights into what their movements have meant both for themselves and others and for their communities? How is the value of their (forced) movement for care, indeed their *e-motions*, to be assessed, and what kinds of (non-)recognition can we trace from the very ephemeral archives and empirical realities of their lives? How have these girls and women chosen to strategically move away from or out of contexts that were too exploitative and unrewarding, and what does this tell us about their predicament (McMahon in this special issue)? How have mixed communities been constituted through their labour, and what has become of the generations of children born out of this forced mobility (Diallo and Declich in this special issue)? What kind of strategies, entailing emotions and intimate relations, do women adopt to migrate and/or make their paths smoother while on the move (Declich in this special issue)?

By placing, centre stage, the value of affective movements of dependent, subaltern girls and women, we wish to demonstrate exactly how much significance these female mobilities have in the making and unmaking of

60 Francesca Declich, 'Translocal relations across the Indian Ocean. An introduction', in: Francesca Declich (ed.), *Translocal connections across the Indian Ocean. Swahili speaking networks on the move* (Leiden 2018) 1–46.

61 Pelckmans, 'Fugitive emplacements'.

62 Ann E. McDougall, 'Living the legacy of slavery: between discourse and reality', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 179–180 (2005) 957–986; Urs P. Ruf, *Ending slavery: hierarchy, dependency, and gender in Central Mauritania* (Bielefeld 1999).

families and class, and in acting as the smoothening ‘social glue’ in highly hierarchical societies and between different ethnic groups and potentially antagonistic communities.

We argue that the diachronic analysis of historical and contemporary intimate mobilities of girls and women in relations of asymmetrical dependency, is crucial if we wish to understand the importance of longstanding practices of intimate labour and mobility for upholding the political economy of African societies.

Contributions

By introducing the concept of *e-motions*, and in addition to facilitating a direct analytical grasp of motion and emotion in a single conceptual framework, our aim with this issue is to argue against the current focus on the spectacular sides of the digital world, exponential mobilities and slavery. Even though the term *e-motions* may suggest an electronic, digital approach to emotions, our argument runs largely in an opposite direction, not at all referring to online experiences and thereby avoiding the current bias towards focussing on the world of social media and human lives governed by technology. While not denying we are living in a world with exponential digitisation, mobilities and extreme forms of exclusion, from our backgrounds as historian (Rodet) and anthropologist (Pelckmans), we seek to historicise the current politicisation of these issues, and refocus researchers’ gaze on the unseen and often less spectacular female daily life mobilities present in usually less studied rural contexts. It is important to continue looking at, and engaging with, those who both in the past and present did not, and do not, have access to the latest technologies to connect with family and loved ones.

Finally, even though the topic of slavery is still making waves in academia and beyond, much focus is on materiality, uncovering alternative sources, and practices of memory and commemoration. In this issue, we wish to draw attention to acute, highly impactful and often implicitly violent *e-motions* that usually women at the lowest echelons of their societies faced, and continue to face, in a male-dominated world.

In their own way and style, each of the contributions gathered in this special issue covers a wide range of *e-motions* in mainly West Africa (Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Mauritania) and East Africa (Uganda, Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya) and across a long historical stretch of time (from 1890 to 2021). We also managed to gather a remarkable variety of primary sources, from missionary and colonial archives (McMahon, Chapdelaine), in-depth life stories (Ould Brahim, Kiconco), and

individual interviews and ethnographic observations (Diallo, Declich, Oxby), to ritual, songs (Oxby), proverbs and tales (Ould Brahim). They uncover the complexities and richness of *e-motions* as described and experienced by diverse actors at various stages in their lives: forcibly displaced children with ascribed slave status, formerly abducted girls, elderly women, and various types of men (colonial officers, missionaries and refugees) reporting about female *e-motions*.

In the first article of this special issue, Elizabeth McMahon explores the emotional lives of enslaved and emancipated girls and women in East Africa by the end of the twentieth century by analysing their movements as expressions of their emotional ties in intimate, affective and private spheres. The article highlights how motherhood was reclaimed through, and embedded in, mobility for East African women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The paper also demonstrates the important role of marriage and children in building emotional support and lasting kinship ties for enslaved women. McMahon argues that the emotional experience of motherhood was profoundly embedded in mobility for East African women, and emphasises the remarkable tenacity with which these women renegotiated their circumstances.

In the second article, Robin Chapdelaine explores the intimate mobilities of girls and women who occupy subordinate social statuses in South-East Nigeria from the 1940s to the 1960s. The author analysed five court appeals, related to child betrothal agreements, marriages by proxy, custody disputes involving unwed mothers, and a case of physical and emotional abuse. The article provides a detailed analysis of the complex dynamics of personal relationships and intimate mobilities in South-East Nigeria, shedding light not only on the vulnerability of subaltern girls and women but also on their agency in cases of emotional and physical abuse.

Clare Oxby analyses the historical and cultural background of the Sahelian practice of separating young children from their low-status parents to put them forcibly to work, particularly among the Tuareg in postcolonial Niger. The author argues that culturally valued family ties through women, and emotions of loss and nostalgia, were expressed communally through female music and dance performances, which softened the impact of separations. But European and Islamic family ideals, as exerted through national and local courts in Niger since the colonial period, have gradually hardened the impact of childhood separations for families of low status, because of different notions of family and repression of emotional expression.

Elhadj Ould Brahim explores the question of slavery, migration and emotional norms in contemporary Mauritania through the personal experiences of four

Haratine women. The study shows how migration and urban environments played a significant role in boosting emancipation aspirations of formerly enslaved Haratine women, helping them regain their humanity as individual subjects first, and of their family entities second. Emotional norms associated with descent-based slavery and the transformation of emotional labour, family bonds and social responsibilities through migration to the city, are a central focus of the study. The physical mobility of the four women central to the text, provided them with new social and spatial agency, enabling them to own a space of their own and enjoy certain privileges that used to be exclusive to so-called masters.

Souleymane Diallo discusses how humanitarian regulations and policies affect the emotional bonds, gender relations and activities of the formerly enslaved Tuareg – the Bellah – from Mali since 2012, displaced in the refugee camp of Abala, Niger. The study draws on the emotional experiences of honour and shame among both men and women in Tuareg culture, and analyses the changing affective experiences of up- or downgraded social status for these refugees.

In her article, Francesca Declich explores the role of intimate relationships in forced migration, particularly in the context of Somalia's civil war and the subsequent forced displacement in the early 1990s towards Tanzania and Kenya. Specifically, the author looks at how women navigated the challenges of displacement by entering various forms of intimate relationships, some of which might not be considered desirable under normal circumstances. These relationships were often seen as a way to survive and gain mobility in a context of poverty, dispossession and discrimination. Overall, the article highlights the complex ways in which intimate relationships intersect with poverty, emotions and migration, and how women's agency in these contexts is not fully absent but is highly constrained to limited sets of options.

The final article, by Allen Kiconco, focuses on the challenges faced by women who were formerly abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda. During their reintegration into their home communities since the end of the conflict in 2006, the women experienced stigmatisation from never-abducted community members, making them feel like outsiders. The article demonstrates how *e-motions* inform postwar and reintegration decisions. Fear, anger and mistrust drive the movements of the informants as they navigate the reintegration process, and emotions are critical in explaining the tense relationship between agency and social structure.

Ultimately, and by covering a large stretch of time, these contributions demonstrate that combining the affective with the (im-)mobility turn is

a productive endeavour that unveils highly neglected forms of (forced) mobility and patterns of (forced) care, in which past and present cultural norms regulating affect, intimacy, emotions and care, regulate a large range of female rural mobility patterns on the African continent. We believe we have demonstrated that the concept of *e-motions* allows for a fruitful analytical notion to capture the direct relation between care/affect/emotions and movement/motion, and how this unfolds in the unspectacular and usually unrecorded, or at least not officially recorded, daily lives of people that powerful societal hierarchal structures have attempted to write off.