

concise, focused nature of each chapter. That said, as I read it, I often found myself wishing that Robertson showed more of her data, weaving more of the voices of her respondents and vignettes from her field observations into the analysis. The book is theoretically rich, and I longed for it to be empirically rich in equal measure, even if that meant compromising on brevity. But perhaps this was a trade-off that Robertson made wisely, because the clarity, focus, and concision of the book make it especially well-suited for classroom use.

*Growing Up Queer* draws on, and contributes to, several important theoretical conversations within the sociological study of gender and sexualities, including hetero- and homonormativity, queer-of-color critique, sexual scripts, the interrelatedness of sexuality and gender, and, of course, the social construction of gender and sexual identities. It therefore would make an excellent text for use in graduate seminars that engage with these theories and debates (and in fact, I have assigned it in my own graduate Gender and Sexuality seminar this semester). That said, the clear, accessible writing and timely, fascinating topic make it very undergraduate-friendly as well, and I would recommend it for use in undergraduate courses on gender, sexualities, childhood, or identity.

---

*Mobile Entrepreneurs: An Ethnographic Study of the Migration of the Highly Skilled*, by **Katrin Sontag**. Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018. 171 pp. \$55.00 paper. ISBN: 9783863887902.

VICTOR TAN CHEN  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
vchen@vcu.edu

---

In *Mobile Entrepreneurs: An Ethnographic Study of the Migration of the Highly Skilled*, Katrin Sontag provides thought-provoking glimpses of the inner life of highly skilled migrant entrepreneurs, who embrace risk and see work as “not work, but fun” (p. 13). A start-up consultant in Switzerland talks about how the “American attitude” that “failure is part of success” has grown more

popular in Europe, while an entrepreneur describes how risk makes for a fuller, less boring life: “If you’re not afraid, then you’re missing something” (p. 75). Likewise, the work of building a company is “not work” because it is ultimately about building oneself, achieving what Sontag refers to as *Passung*—here, a personal “fit” that involves “meaningful self-production” (p. 93). As one respondent tells Sontag, the “entrepreneurial way of thinking” is about “mak[ing] something of yourself” and learning a “way of presenting yourself” (p. 54).

Broadly speaking, *Mobile Entrepreneurs*—which has a Creative Commons license and can be downloaded for free from the publisher’s website—examines the process and extent of mobility (loosely defined) that highly skilled migrant entrepreneurs experience and how this mobility affects their perceptions of themselves as well as their work of building enterprises. It draws from interviews with twelve respondents—a small but diverse sample that includes four women, a mix of twentysomething and middle-aged respondents, and a range of start-up ventures encompassing different tech and business fields and states of funding and growth. The majority of the respondents grew up in Europe, and the definition of “highly skilled” that Sontag uses basically includes those with college or more advanced degrees—though one of her aims is to challenge these simplistic notions of “skill,” which, especially in the domain of entrepreneurship (where there are no official credentials required), seem more a proxy for privilege. Sontag supplemented the data from these twelve informants with four expert interviews with entrepreneurship consultants and managers of start-up co-working spaces.

Importantly, all the start-ups discussed are “born global” enterprises connected to Switzerland but operating across multiple countries, including in Asia. Their ventures are innovation- or technology-driven and meant to be scalable—and in this way they differ from conventional, smaller-scale “ethnic entrepreneurship” of the mom-and-pop storefront variety, even though their founders are also migrants. In fact, this distinction is part of Sontag’s larger theoretical

argument: the study of “ethnic entrepreneurship” tends to place too much emphasis on ethnicity itself, when the factors driving such entrepreneurial behaviors and success depend on socially and spatially located resources (or lack thereof) and the mobility of individuals that are shaped by ethnicity, but not reducible to it.

Likewise, the book critiques the term “migrant” as a simplistic—and, as entrepreneurs point out to Sontag, possibly pejorative—label. (Tellingly, when Sontag asked a start-up center if she could interview the founders there for her study of “highly qualified migrants,” the center responded that “there are no migrants here—only global people” [p. 111].) Sontag’s entrepreneurs are “migrants” by a loose definition of having moved from one place to another: her sample not only contains people who operate multilocally—having homes or offices in different locales—or move continuously, but it also includes one respondent who has never moved from Switzerland—his parents made the move. Ultimately, Sontag argues that rather than distinguishing between migrants and non-migrants, we should think of individuals as existing along a spectrum (or rather, spectra) of mobility. At least for well-educated middle-class professionals, a person’s move from one place to another is typically not a single decisive event or disruption, but oftentimes a series of decisions, driven by a host of personal and professional strategies (Sontag provides a typology) that push and pull people across locales. Sedentariness, or a lack of mobility, is also a conscious choice.

Scholars’ “methodological nationalism”—a narrow focus on movement between national borders—can obscure these dynamics, Sontag argues, neglecting the role that, say, innovation-hub cities, rather than nations, play in attracting and activating talent, ideas, and networks. Furthermore, she describes mobility not just as physical mobility, but also—rather creatively—in terms of mental mobility (the greater steepness of the emotional rollercoaster that one rides as an entrepreneur, as opposed to a worker, for instance) and social mobility (not used in its typical sense, but describing greater or lesser interaction with people of different

social and professional groups). As one respondent puts it: “I jump between a shirt and presentations in companies and foundations to shorts and daypack. It’s very, very diverse, very different what I am doing” (p. 74). Granted, one can question the real breadth of such “diversity,” and it is worth considering whether the choice of a European country to study “migrants” and “born global” enterprises shapes perceptions of mobility in unique ways, given how relatively fluid and ubiquitous national boundaries are for Europeans compared to, say, those living in China or the United States.

In ways that Americans will find familiar, Sontag’s respondents use narratives from their own lives to show the power of the proper choices that lead to achievement. At an extreme, their constant and varied pursuit of self-optimization (and self-aggrandizement) makes elite entrepreneurs into perpetual-motion machines of expansion and innovation—of the self, above all. This fetishizing of mobility even includes motion on a spiritual path: one of Sontag’s respondents talks (without apparent irony) about practicing meditation in order to further his personal and professional growth. If the mark of a true intellectual is a comfort with ambiguity, the mark of a global entrepreneur is a comfort with mobility, ambiguously defined.

Perhaps it is due to disciplinary differences in approaches, but at times the book summarizes the views of respondents without offering much in the way of quotations to buttress the claims. Other times, a long quote is provided without much unpacking of its ideas. Also, for a book about migrants, the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of the respondents (and what migration looks like in Switzerland overall) seemed murky. Clearly, though, Sontag has rich material here, as hinted at with the heart-breaking story of Deborah, a West African migrant who married a Swiss person and struggled to fit in. Later, her marriage broke up, and she became estranged from her homeland, having given up her citizenship to become Swiss. “You return home and everybody is a stranger,” she says (p. 60)—it seems that in our interconnected modern society, one can become too “global.”

The book is also illuminating in its discussion of methodology. In reflecting on her vantage point as a researcher, Sontag comments on her personal background—not just the fact that she is a migrant or “global person,” too (German passport, born in France, working in Switzerland), but also that she had previously worked in business and founded her own venture a year before starting her research. She admits to valuing the opportunities her study afforded her to meet potential friends and professional contacts, and yet she “struggled with this situation” of multiple identities and roles, she notes (p. 46). It’s an interesting issue to mull, as the social sciences have been mostly concerned with the reflexive tensions that face “ethnographer-activists”—not ethnographer-entrepreneurs.

As part of her data collection, Sontag allowed her respondents to draw pictures—“mental maps” of the “places or paths they moved in,” or life “line charts” to prompt discussion of the “experiences and feelings of each period” of one’s life (p. 42). As a service to the artistically challenged, Sontag even gave them the option of using Legos she brought along to the interviews. She briefly describes and includes pictures of a few of the respondents’ creations, and I felt—though I am biased as a Lego fan—that they fit well within the book, given its focus on space and self-perception. She does not indicate in her methods section how many Lego pieces were lost or stepped on during the conducting of this research.

---

*The Mismeasure of Minds: Debating Race and Intelligence between Brown and The Bell Curve*, by **Michael E. Staub**. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 207 pp. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781469643595.

CATHERINE BLISS  
*University of California-San Francisco*  
 Catherine.Bliss@ucsf.edu

---

Michael E. Staub’s *The Mismeasure of Minds: Debating Race and Intelligence between Brown and The Bell Curve* is a much-needed exposé of the production of race science in the late twentieth century. Though much has been

written about the production of racial knowledge at this time, and about scientific discourses in particular, there is still so much scholars have overlooked for one very important reason. Those who study scientific racism normally begin with discourses of race themselves, bridging outward to related material that may or may not directly deal with race. Staub takes a different tack. He looks at the emerging science marshaled in public policy debates, mostly to do with education funding. This science often purports to prove the basis for innate differences in humans, often without addressing population differences of any kind. However, as Staub cogently demonstrates, these novel metrics (or “mismeasures,” as he shows) fuel racist ideas and serve as the foundation for racist policy.

*The Mismeasure of Minds* cleverly asks: what happened between, and more specifically how did we get from, the momentous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to the publication of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*? This is a question many sociologists of all backgrounds have asked themselves, and it is one we are currently asking ourselves as we experience the backlash against what seemed like substantial and permanent political progress around race. With in-depth analysis of scientific and public policy disputes, Staub instructs us that progress is a pipe dream. What’s more, coherent positions are an illusion. Discourses are mobilized in complex and contradictory ways by so many people acting in equally complex and contradictory ways. They entwine with meaning around race in unexpected ways that perpetuate the overwhelming status quo of racist social structuration. If scholars and policy-makers once believed that World War II marked a great awakening in racial consciousness for Americans, buoyed by the common belief that Nazi science was dead wrong and America would eradicate apartheid in its midst, this book sounds a wake-up call. A single court decision is no match for four hundred years of white supremacy. Racism is the foundation of American society, no less than when legislators first attempted desegregation.