This edited volume is separated into eight essays and includes ten authors who explore the dimensions of Black women’s religious practices in several countries. The authors engage with the varying ways in which Black women enact the social and spiritual aspects of their Pentecostal faiths under four subheadings: “Saving Race,” “Scrutinizing and Sanctifying the Body,” “Sonic Power,” and “Modeling the State.” Highlighting the ways in which Pentecostalism has affected Black women’s lives, Spirit on the Move makes an argument for conceptualizing Black women as central to discourses about Pentecostalism in particular and religious practice in general. The book’s recurring statistics about Pentecostalism’s spread do well to show how much influence the religion has garnered all over the world—from Brazil to Accra—and prove just how global and interconnected these Black women’s faith networks are. One of the key themes of the book is how women mobilize these networks in deeply political struggles. Paula Aymer addresses this idea in her paper about the Wailing Women Worldwide Intercessors, Nigerian and Grenadian women who connect over the practice of wailing—a sonic performance of faith they enact to transform their lives and the world around them. The connections born through mutual struggle resurface in Linda van de Kamp’s and John Burdick’s respective articles about Mozambican women’s Afro-Brazilian Pentecostal practices and Black Brazilian gospel musicians’ racializing acts of incorporating Black American gospel sound into their performances.

Abounding connections aside, the Black women’s lives discussed in this book are distinctly different from each other. Although much of the conversation is framed in the language of power—in fact, the editors encourage readers to view the book this way in the introduction—power’s varying forms and pressures are not taken for granted but are explained in relation to particular national and social orders. The editors explain that a study of power requires “sensitivity to the full range of power’s frequencies: persuasive and coercive, material and spiritual, subtle and palpable, hidden and ostentatious, injurious and expansive, exploitative and accountable” (12). Following this lead, the authors in this volume seek to understand and situate the dimensions of Black women’s religious practice within their national, gendered, classed, and racialized contexts so as to make sense of the different registers of power that Black women have to confront, manage, and sometimes acquiesce to. Paula Aymer plays with these dissimilarities by highlighting the class differences between married, middle-class Nigerian women and their unmarried and not-as-well-off Grenadian counterparts, while Judith Casselberry and Jane Soothill take up the methodological aspects of how to address power in anthropological inquiry.
In contrast to scholars who either prioritize the spiritual dimensions of women’s power or underscore the social and cultural constraints women experience within their churches, Soothill attempts to do both in her study of the Charismatic spiritual power Ghanaian women use in their daily lives. She argues that scholars should understand these women as existing within a “set of social structures and constraints that shape, and sometimes limit, their actions and experiences” (177). She also argues that spiritual agency is often shaped by these structures. While Casselberry recognizes the influence of the state and the patriarchal norms in governing these women’s lives, she pays more attention to the spiritual dimensions and interpretations of Black women’s aesthetic work within the True Deliverance Church of the Apostolic Faith. Discussing the pervasive racism and sexism Black women face in America, she explains how these women use declarative utterances and bodily performances as an “aesthetic sense of paradox” (139) to cultivate alternative forms of power and express both the sorrow and joy of black life—in this instance, to ameliorate the passing of a fellow parishioner despite robust prayers for healing. She explains how these acts sustain the congregation by bridging “gaps among theology, doctrine and experience;” in effect, transforming the disappointments of both the spiritual and structural worlds into spaces of hope and rest (144). I linger on Soothill and Casselberry’s works to draw attention to fundamentally different approaches to questions of power and community and to pose certain questions of how to push these approaches further: What is the place of aesthetics in Soothill’s discussions of power? For Casselberry, what are the limits of aesthetic work as a practice of respite and healing? How might the paradoxes produced by power and agency be imagined differently across geographies? How might methodology and categories of study—the “global south” or the “Black church”—shape the kinds of arguments and discussions being prioritized?

Perhaps the challenge—and promise—of a body of work such as Spirit on the Move is the opportunity it affords to map out a sense of collective practice among Black Pentecostal women across the world while still maintaining space for disjunctions and, indeed, oppositional theologies. These disparate ways of utilizing theological frameworks reveal what Elizabeth McAlister calls “theo-geographies,” a term which alludes to the ways in which different theologies adapt to the varying dynamics of a place and/or space. As a body of work that focuses on the varying dimensions of Christian practice among Black women globally, Spirit on the Move would have benefited from an exploration of how Blackness itself takes on different forms across geographies. The conditions under which Blackness is made legible, understood, or performed may indeed tell us more about why and how various Christian groups practice particular theo-geographies. For instance, while authors writing about US contexts—especially Burdick—made reference to “a North American ear” or American formulations of race and Blackness (25), distinct references to Blackness and race were absent from texts on Africa outside discussions about the history of colonialism. This tension, which often underscores colonialism’s relationship to contemporary understandings of Blackness, is perhaps most present in McAlister’s work. She discusses how Haitian Christians blame the French for enslaving them while they simultaneously condemn a ritual their enslaved ancestors performed to overthrow French rule. In this way, practitioners of this form of Christianity recast a Haitian nationhood that is suspicious of—and, in fact, averse to—African traditions and forms of being. Subsequently, Haitian Christians seek freedom from the colonial sin of slavery and from the bondage of demonic ancestral spirits through Jesus Christ. McAlister explains that while these ideas may be understood as emerging from the White American racism of missionaries, for Haitian Christians they represent participation in a genuine quest for spiritual and material freedom (55). This is a distinct contrast from musicians in the Black Gospel Pentecostal music scene in Rio who develop a Black identity politic that pushes back against ideas of racial democracy in Brazil, and thus raises questions about how we should understand such divergent positionalities and practices on issues of race, anti-blackness and spirituality. Consequently, while the essays provide important ways to think through Black womanhood as central
to Pentecostal communities around the world, additional commentary on navigating variations in Blackness could have provided a deeper understanding of these contentious dynamics.

Despite this oversight, *Spirit on the Move* presents a formidable take on Black women’s spiritualities, their engagements with power, and their relationships with each other. Its centering of Black women within the Pentecostal tradition is immensely important to the study of Africa and the Diaspora, and this book will be insightful for graduate-level students and scholars across all fields who are interested in these discussions.