

SCHOLARLY REVIEW ESSAY

The Scramble for the West? Debunking the Myths around Migration from Africa and the Global South

Massocki Ma Massocki. *The Pride of an African Migrant*. Buea, Cameroon: Pierced Rock Press, 2020. 178 pp. \$11.99. Paper. ISBN: 9789956465057.

Stephen Smith. *The Scramble for Europe: Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent*. Medford, MA: Polity, 2019. 197 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$64.42. Hardback. ISBN: 9781509534562.

Fareda Banda. *African Migration, Human Rights and Literature*. Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2020. 340 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$103.50. Hardback. ISBN: 9781509938346.

Nandita Rani Sharma. *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020. 372 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$30.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781478000952.

Irregular migrants' flows have, for several years now, been making the news headlines and are at the core of political debates. In a context of polycrisis—characterized by the post COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and its devastating impacts; the disruption of labor markets caused by the fourth industrial revolution and artificial intelligence; or geopolitical tensions in different parts of the globe that threaten the livelihoods of many communities—the desire to move from the developing and emerging world to the West can increase.

It is important, however, to recall a few facts while a lot of myths shape the rhetoric around migration. If we consider African migration, for instance, it is mainly driven by intra-continental migration. Moreover, due to liquidity constraints, people in a situation of poverty might not be able to migrate, even in the aftermath of shocks. But poverty is only one of the many root causes of migration, which is often a costly project that many people cannot afford. Migration, and irregular migration in particular, is the result of the combination of many factors; and not all people who would like to migrate will be able to do so.

These are the examples of myths that the four books covered in this review essay are debunking. These books tackle migration issues, in particular from developing countries to developed ones, from the perspectives of the migrant's experience, and from demographic, literary, sociological, and philosophical

points of view. These books are well documented and have the advantage of being accessible to not only academics working on migration but anyone interested in understanding the current and forthcoming migration dynamics.

What is fascinating is that despite being different and offering various perspectives and approaches, these books present a lot of commonalities. They all highlight the role of migration in order to look for more justice, equality, and freedom, especially for women and youth. Migration is a means to achieve emancipation. The books insist on the search for decent living conditions as one of the main root causes of migration; and the responsibility of African governments to create those favorable conditions at home. Irregular migration appears as the symptom of dysfunctional societies in economic and social terms but also as a clear manifestation of lack of opportunities and hope for the young generation.

The various authors highlight the contradiction between human rights claims by Europe and developed nations and the way migrants, especially those coming from former colonies or developing countries are treated or mistreated. Migrants are often in a vulnerable position. Their skills and qualifications are not always valued in their host countries. The books discuss the intersection between class and race in receiving societies where often a dominant class persuades the working class that the cause of their problems is mass migration rather than an unequal distribution of resources. On the issue of inequality, all four books agree on the difficulty of migrating throughout regular channels and rely on the concrete example of how challenging it can be for an African or someone from the so-called Global South to obtain a visa and migrate to the West through regular channels. The hardening of practical barriers to migration can thus have counterproductive effects and fuel irregular migration rather than reducing it.

This review aims to thoroughly discuss these issues raised by each of the four books.

The Pride of an African Migrant by Massocki Ma Massocki is a testimony of the life of a “young Cameroonian in the United Kingdom.” Massocki opens to the reader a window on the life of many migrants in the UK, in particular asylum seekers. The book is at the intersection of race, politics, economics, psychology, and spirituality. It describes the hardships which asylum seekers, in particular those from Africa, are going through. The book is a rare and honest testimony from a real-life experience of a migrant. By discussing migrants’ well-being, their mental health, issues of mistreatment and loneliness, the book provides a human-centric approach to migration. Building on his own life and many examples, such as the case of Jimmy Mubenga, who died while being deported from the UK to Angola, Massocki puts the pride, dignity, and humanity of Africans at the core of this book—issues that are often overlooked compared to the political and economic aspects of migration which are more discussed.

This book reminds us at every page that beyond politics, human rights and human values without any distinction of where human beings come from, should matter. It is a question of justice and equality, as people do not choose the country in which they are born. This directly speaks to the important issue of the criminalization of migrants and asylum seekers, which renders their situation

more precarious. Furthermore, while there are many discussions around the definitions of migrants and refugees, the book tackles the issue of the definition of migrants versus refugees and stands on the fact that “our definition of a refugee should also include economic migrants as they run away from structural violence.” Beyond numbers, laws, and political issues, first and foremost migration is about human beings with their strengths and weaknesses, desires, hopes, and legitimate ambitions of making their lives better.

Massocki aims to provide the right information to migrants on what a migration experience could look like, to allow them to take an informed decision—which is a noble purpose as information for potential migrants is crucial. This is even more important because once the decision to migrate is taken, voluntarily returning after an “unsuccessful” migration experience can be difficult, if not impossible. That is why the statement that “undocumented migrants prefer to sleep on the cold streets of Europe and experience various types of suffering rather than return home” (10) can be explained by the feeling of “shame” that is associated with unsuccessful migration. This feeling exists not only for the migrant, but for the family, relatives, and community in some cases, as it is well described later in the book (50). This can also explain why some migrants accept jobs that they would not be willing to take in their home country. This book has thus a pedagogical approach that can help potential migrants and their families avoid unrealistic expectations while making their migration decision. Massocki is trying to educate both people in the origin and host communities to avoid misconception on all sides.

The Pride of an African Migrant highlights the importance of the narrative around Africa and Africans. This narrative, often vehiculated by the media, is shaping the beliefs and prejudices that people from the Western world have on Africa. It is further shaping the belief of some Africans who perceive Europe as an El Dorado where everything is possible, as opposed to their own continent, and shaping their desire to migrate at all risks.

Massocki addresses the root causes of irregular and unsafe migration and points out the responsibility of African governments and authorities that do not create the necessary conditions to make their country livable places where citizens can have access to basic services, social justice, good governance, economic independence, and at the minimum some options to not migrate. This perspective gives a balanced picture of the situation with shared responsibilities between Africa and the West. The power of the book lies in the fact that the author does not shy away from the responsibility of migrants themselves and their families.

The book could, however, have been more nuanced and sometimes avoid making some generalizations. All migration experiences are not the same. Successful African migrants are not well represented in the book. A statement such as “There are African doctors, bankers, scientists and even nuclear scientists devoting their lives to the development of Europe and America and forgetting their continent in the process” (122) sounds like a blame and an unfair statement. There is no counterfactual that would tell us what these individuals would have become if they stayed at home. We will never know if they would

have been able to fully explore their potential in their home country; and if they could not, that would have led to some brain waste.

The issue of brain drain that is discussed throughout the book only explores one side of the story. Often people must leave because there is no other option or the ones that exist are not seen as such. Beyond brain drain, the way the continent harnesses the potential of Africans, wherever they are, is a key question. There are multiple factors at play. By migrating, many Africans send remittances to support the education and health of people left behind. There might be a cost of having highly skilled people leave the continent, but the benefits can also be large for migrants themselves, their families, and their countries. The book misses the perspective where migration is not a zero-sum game and can benefit all, if it is well managed.

The complexity of being a Black person is discussed throughout the book. The author's experience with his Jamaican boss highlights trust issues existing between Black people. At the same time, while the comparison of the situation between Black people across the world is interesting, it should be made with caution. Although they have their blackness in common and even similarities in their experience in the West, Black people do not constitute a homogeneous group.

With the example of Aisya, who chose to develop her own business in Cameroon and find herself successful, the author is rightfully deconstructing the myth of Europe as the only "promised land." Although many people can believe that Aisya is the exception rather than the norm, Aisya is an example that it is possible to be successful while remaining in your country.

The book is literally calling for a revolution with the change of mindsets of African people who must look at their continent differently as a land of opportunities and is a strong advocate of the fact that nothing can replace the feeling of being at home, even if it is difficult. This book is fascinating and is a must-read for potential migrants, policymakers, academics, and anyone who would like to understand, from a first-hand experience, what many migrants and asylum-seekers must go through during their journey.

Leaving the migrant-centric approach in Massocki's book for a demographic perspective, *The Scramble for Europe: Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent* by Stephen Smith uses stylized facts, to show how population from a young continent, Africa, will move or look to move to an old continent, Europe. The book is well documented with a lot of figures backing up the various arguments of the author who demonstrates a deep understanding of the African contexts.

Smith points out that the demographic imbalance is not only between Africa and Europe but also within Africa, between young and old people. This "numerical mismatch" means a loss of landmark for youth. This can be the source of a generational conflict between traditions and ancestral culture, and modernity, to which young people are aspiring. This mismatch is even more an issue in societies where the supremacy of the group prevails over individuality, and where elderly people are dominating all the spheres—political, economic, and social—which can further spark the desire of young people to leave the continent. The book is pertinent in explaining that the fundamental difference between Africa and Europe is that "Individual identity is secondary to collective

identity, and as a consequence, the demands of the group take precedence over any others.” (55)

The book relies a lot on demography as a root cause of migration from Africa to Europe. But the presentation of birth control as the main factor to regulate African demography and thus migration needs to be put in perspective. Birth control is important, but at the same time young people—if provided with quality education, access to health care and public services, or jobs—can be a fantastic asset for the continent. Beyond demography and birth control, the issue is thus how African governments can provide those opportunities to take advantage of a growing young population:

The number of Africans, and the population age structure on their continent, are not per se problematic. They only become a problem when the social organization and its corollary, productivity, do not allow for a basic quality of life, housing, of education and of care-giving to those in need; when the sheer number of people makes the well-being of each one impossible given the available resources. (39)

Still on the issue of demography, the argument that artificial intelligence is providing the needed labor force in Europe, which implies that migration may not be needed or at least not as much as it is happening now, is incomplete. The extent to which automation, new technologies, and artificial intelligence are substitutes for migration depends on the level of skills of migrants (at least in the medium term). Moreover, there can be some complementarity between skills in origin and destination countries, despite the existence of technology.

As highlighted by Smith, not all people who would like to move will migrate. It is thus important to say that there is no automatism in the emigration from Africa to Europe. The willingness to migrate is different from actual realization and not everyone is able to afford migration costs, as discussed above. Even if people want to move, they may not want to do it permanently.

Moreover, the book overlooks the trend for returnees who are of African descent—children of immigrants or migrants returning to the original countries of their parents or ancestors. It is thus important to recall here that Africans in general and migrants in particular are not a monolithic group.

The issue of remittances, which is presented as a rent for the left-behind and that do not necessarily induce development, is biased. Remittances can be a driver of poverty reduction for households. Beyond the discussion on the impact of remittances, what could have been interesting is to see how these migrants’ transfers could be invested in more productive activities that would ensure the autonomy of those left behind in the home countries.

In Chapter Five, the argument—similar to the one from Massocki—that the departure of migrants from the continent represents a “net loss” for the continent (134), even with the perspective of remittances should be nuanced. Once again, this really depends on what these migrants would have done in their origin country; and there is no counterfactual that can help answer this question. If without migrating, the well-trained engineers or doctors cannot find a decent

job and good working conditions in their home countries, to what extent could that be considered as a net loss? These highly skilled people are able to work abroad and send remittances to help their families left behind rather than not being able to work at home. This also reinforces the criticality of providing opportunities for young people in their countries so they can, at the very least, not have migration as the only option available. Moreover, migrants do not only transfer money—they can also transfer social norms, knowledge, and skills to their origin countries.

While the book discussed the cost for destination countries of having migrants, it is important to recall that many migrants also contribute to their host societies by participating in the labor market and paying taxes, for instance. In the particular case of irregular migration, there is a need to be more nuanced on the effect of repression that can be less effective as expected (see above). Moreover, it is critical to address the root causes of irregular migration, and make sure that migration flows, when they occur, remain safe and regular.

Smith briefly highlights towards the end potential solutions for better managing migration flows that are presented as inevitable. This indeed deserves to be fully part of the conversation and could have benefited from more discussion.

Better understanding of migration issues and thus better management of migration flows is one of the areas that *African Migration, Human Rights and Literature* by Fareda Banda explores through a literary lens. While literature is often overlooked by scholars, this book makes a good attempt to draw it into the discussion of migration by analyzing the role of fiction in understanding human rights violation and lives of migrants after departure. Banda's book is rich and builds upon an impressive variety of references. She gives a demonstration of how literature can help fight misconceptions and myths about migration. While migrant workers, undocumented migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers can be dehumanized and the reality of their lives not portrayed at all or wrongfully portrayed in the public opinion, Banda shows us that literature is a powerful tool to relate more to migrants, their journey, aspirations, and motivations.

The book starts by focusing on “artivism,” the commingling of art and activism. This concept highlights the importance of arts in human rights education and advocacy through activism. Banda shows how law, literature, and art in general are interlinked. She discusses how art in its various forms, such as literature through novels and poetry, but also photography or music, can provide different perspectives about justice and human rights.

Banda explores the history of African migration, highlighting the link between colonialism and migration and discussing the interesting fact that a migrant's destination is often linked to a history of oppression. For instance, forced migration in the case of slavery still have consequences on people from African descent. Moreover, the effects of colonialism—the impoverishment of countries, depletion of natural resources, destruction of institutions, to name a few—played a critical role in explaining the current political, social, and economic situation of the origin countries of migrants.

Interestingly, the book focuses on immigration law and policies through the prism of fictional literature. It elaborates on how citizens from rich countries and strategic ones can easily obtain a visa when they do not even need one, while

Africans must apply for visas that are difficult to get. Against this background, fictional literature gives good examples of asylum seekers and migrants' creativity to obtain a visa. It also gives illustrations of how states avoid respecting their legal obligations.

Banda points out the role of African governments in explaining the root causes of migration. But at the same time, she discusses the post-migration experience and the role that lawyers, volunteers, novelists, caretakers, other migrants, and refugees play in helping migrants in a difficult situation, thus restoring our faith in humanity.

The book focuses on groups in vulnerable situations that could be sometimes overlooked, such as women, gender minorities, and children. It mentions the status of women who wait for their men who have migrated—which is a topic that is not often studied—and by mentioning their case, this book is doing justice to them. However, the author could have elaborated more on these women and the perspectives of those left-behind in general.

Literature is used to illustrate the situation of women migrants. Without generalizing, many of them do not have options on the labor markets other than doing “body work.” This includes being maids, child nannies, or cleaners in hotels. Some women are also victims of human trafficking. In addition to being victims of all stereotypes attached to African women, a lot of these women are in a situation of exploitation; they can literally be in a trap because their irregular status makes them more vulnerable, not being able to receive care, and left without perspectives and opportunities.

The book also examines migration through the lens of asylum for sexual minorities. The author explores the stereotypes related to gay people while demonstrating that they are often met with skepticism when they are seeking asylum based on persecution.

Banda finally discusses the case of unaccompanied minors whose minority status are recurrently challenged by states, leaving them without protection. She also insists on how literature can be used to educate children about human rights for refugees.

Beyond all the insightful discussions provided by the book, what makes it even more remarkable is that it clearly explains the difficulty between integration and assimilation, above all for the young generation whose parents or grandparents are migrants. Banda brings an interesting discussion on the integration process of many young people. Literature helps us to understand how the new generation of people of African descent can feel alienated when being constantly asked where they are from in their own country. They are fully citizens but do not enjoy full rights as citizens.

The author could, however, have pushed the discussion further by exploring in the literature what could make a successful migration experience. Those experiences exist and while reading about the various references cited, one may wonder about the positive migration experiences that can exist despite the hardships that migrants can encounter.

The art and literature perspectives cannot be disentangled from the historical, sociological, political, and philosophical perspectives in *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* by Nandita Sharma. While the

promise of national sovereignty is to achieve equality and decolonization, Sharma explains that none of this happens once national sovereignty is gained. She argues that nationalism annihilates anti-colonialism efforts and curtails decolonization and demand for social justice.

The book explains how migrant workers, undocumented migrants, and people in remote areas, for instance, do not have access to the same rights, such as basic social services and opportunities compared to natives. The definition of this word “natives” versus “migrants” remains key to understand Sharma’s approach. The author explains how under postcolonial rule, this term from initially meaning “people of a place” and representing indigenous people, is now defining national belonging. On the other hand, migrants are seen as “people out of place” in national sovereignty. This distinction highlights the fact that in what the author names the postcolonial New World Order, not every citizen is part of the national community, which is an important source of inequality in national sovereign states. Not everyone has the same rights to get citizenship. By considering national determination, migrants are seen as unworthy of land, livelihoods, and rights.

These initial definitions and the way they evolve over time is interesting while knowing that these categories have been created and their meaning has been changed to serve nationalism purposes. For instance, the far-right in the former metropolises of imperial states claim to defend natives while forgetting about the history of colonization where to be natives meant being part of the European empire. To be native meant to be a colonized person. Interestingly that implies that migration can be seen by some groups of people as a colonization process, which is part of the rhetoric from far-right groups. From these definitions, Sharma shows how contemporary national liberation struggles are caught in a similar cycle of exclusionary practices caused among other things by the scarcity of resources.

Sharma argues that the big mistake of nationalism is that it fails to acknowledge the global scale and scope of society. The world is now a deeply interconnected place where every nation is reliant on other parts of the world. This point is extremely relevant in the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID-19 era. The disruptions caused by the pandemic in all sectors—ranging from travelling to supply chains of food and medicines, to name just a couple of examples—impacted the whole world and was a good reminder that no nation state exists in isolation. People depend on people and nations depend on nations. In that sense exclusionary practices are not only unfair but they are a misnomer in the world we are currently living in, and where interdependency for finance, trade, or labor is the norm. The interconnectedness and interdependency between nations across the world questions thus the relevance of even having different categories of people: those who belong on a space and those who do not. This book underscores that people are more than their category and there is a critical need to challenge who we think we are vis-à-vis others.

The argument around globalization can, however, be put into perspective if we take into consideration that globalization does not only have winners. Those perceiving themselves as the losers in the globalization process can be more reluctant towards openness and migrants. But it is important, even in this case,

to stress that migrants are not necessarily the ones causing the issues; in fact their decision-making process can be rooted in the consequences of globalization. In this sense, the book suggests that it is of paramount importance to be careful with the rhetoric trying to place migrants against natives, in particular those belonging to the low and lower middle-income class. Both categories may be closer to each other in terms of aspirations than one might think. The key issue is how do we make this world a fairer and more inclusive place for everyone; and migrants should not be the scapegoat in this process.

Sharma argues that we are in a crisis but contrary to what is conveyed in the public opinion, it is not a crisis caused by people moving but a crisis caused by violence, exploitation, and expropriation. This echoes Banda's book, which reminds us that the so-called "migrant crisis" is only a crisis because of our response to the phenomenon rather than a crisis caused by an influx of refugees, for instance. To this point, one would add that strong complementarities can be built between migrants and the so-called natives to offer a profound and positive change to the world.

Overall, this book is ambitious and sets an ideal for a society without categorization of people that is unfair and inefficient. While one may wonder how much the realization of such society is possible, this book helps us understand that we are at a turning point where we need to determine whether we are collectively able to build a common world for all where migration and mobility is seen as part of a natural process.

To conclude, it is clear that while migration is the result of the combination of factors, it is important to recognize that it is legitimate for all human beings to fulfill their basic needs, and have aspirations and dreams to realize.

From these four books, we can conclude that to be efficient, migration governance, regulation, and policies should be fair, pragmatic, consistent and concerted among destinations countries (in the European Union, for instance), but also between destination and origin countries. It is critical to have an appropriation of migration issues by countries of origin as well. This is key to ensure better integration in host societies but also positive returns of the migration experience for migrants, host countries, and people left behind. Equally important, is the respect for human dignity that should be at the core of these policies, which must consider a migrant-, refugee-, and asylum seeker-centric approach.

Finally, there is an absolute need to promote safe and regular migration when people have to move but also to promote options for those who would like to stay in their countries to be able to do so. This means addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement that are often anchored in situations of fragility and vulnerability including conflict, violence, climate-related disasters, poor economic conditions, inequalities, and lack of opportunities, above all for the youth. The review of these books confirm that it is only by restoring hope and the perspective of decent living conditions for all and everywhere that mobility and migration will remain a choice and a chance.

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