

BOOK REVIEW

Daniel Makina and Dominic Pasura, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary African Migration*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024. 450 pp. Figures. Bibliography. Index. \$58.99. Paper. ISBN: 9781032551937.

In the *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary African Migration*, editors Daniel Makina and Dominic Pasura present collaborative chapters on historical and contemporary migration in Africa. The twenty-nine contributions all support the premise that while African migration is most often thought of as the movement of people leaving the continent in search of better opportunities elsewhere, data indicates that migration predominantly occurs internally, that is, with individuals moving between regions and countries within Africa.

Based on this premise, the book guides readers from historical migration to contemporary issues. Titled “History of African Migration,” the first part of the volume examines some of the historical factors behind African migration, including the impact of slavery, which saw millions of people forcibly taken from the continent by Europeans and Berbers. The second part, “Patterns and Trends of Contemporary African migration,” highlights the significant number of young African among migrants, specifically those who relocated to North America and the Middle East. Part III, “Migration Governance, Forced Displacement and Irregular Migration,” considers migration policies, namely in relation to contexts of conflict, violence, disasters, and climate change. The fourth part of the book, “Migration, Diaspora Engagement, and the Politics of Development,” investigates the ways in which the African diaspora engages with families left behind. Namely, the contributors demonstrate that remittances constitute a crucial economical component that can bolster the economies of migrants’ home countries. This section also considers return migrants, who often enrich their societies, arguing that South-South migration patterns of migration impact marriage dynamics across the African continent. The last part, “Future Trajectories of African Migration,” reflects on future migration trends both within and outside the continent, with contributors analyzing the potential of an Africa with open borders, as well as stressing the need to restructure migration data collection in view to inform better policy management.

Two key themes traverse this edited volume. First is the necessity to challenge the misleading conceptions of African migration that only take into account movements away from the continent, and second, is the significant impact of remittances on those who remain behind. By placing these themes at the forefront of its analysis, the book makes a valuable contribution to the field of migration studies, placing internal African migration at the heart of various examinations, and contesting prior accounts that tend to prioritize illegal

migration and South-North movements. In this vein, concepts such as “cognitive return migration” (or mental migration) (see Mary Setrana and Adold Bekoe’s chapter “Reconsidering the Concept of International Return in the African Context”), underscore the potential of various forms of returns, particularly for migrants who initially intended to leave their country or region of origin, but who ultimately chose to stay. This notion of mental migration constitutes a crucial addition to migration studies since it proposes that migration is as much as a psychological process as it is a physical one. Indeed, while return migration is often viewed only as a physical journey, cognitive return emphasizes the changes experienced by migrants once they abandon their plans to leave. In fact, Setrana and Bekoe note that giving up on migrating often allows the prospective migrants to contribute socially and financially to the development of their home country.

As aforementioned, the collection of essays also encourages scholars and governments to consider the possibility of a borderless Africa, enabling free circulation among national frontiers. While such an idea may seem utopian, Khabele Matlosa’s analysis of the relationship between Lesotho and South Africa in Chapter Eight illustrates the potential benefits of such a proposition. Indeed, although Lesotho’s landlocked status within South Africa complicates migration patterns for the Basotho (who live in both countries), enabling free circulation between citizens of both countries could foster an economic growth for the two nations, as well as a better quality of life for the Basotho. That said, issues like xenophobia and racism currently faced by migrants on the continent remain a significant concern, raising questions about the feasibility of a borderless Africa that would not exacerbate such issues.

This excellent collection of essays should be of great interest to migration scholars, as it provides a comprehensive overview of African migration, from the Berlin conference in 1884 to this day and into the future. Moreover, by debunking the idea that Africans mostly migrate outside the continent, the collection also reframes the agency of millions of migrants who are actively working on building a better life for themselves and their families within the contours of the continent. That said, with the rise of technology and offshoring works, future studies could analyze the impact of virtual migration, specifically focusing on how individuals in Africa are employed to work remotely for companies in other countries. This analysis could center how virtual migrants navigate and balance this dual existence in local and international contexts, as well as the implications for their social and economic lives. Additionally, future research could investigate the emotional and physical toll that remittances take on migrants who, despite facing their own financial challenges, feel compelled to support their families back home.

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