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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Migration and the Path to a More Integrated Africa

We live in a world of unprecedented global migrations. Unlike many past large-scale migrations, driven by state-sponsored colonizing projects, many of today's migrants are either fleeing trouble at home or chasing better opportunities abroad. African economies endowed with young populations are often both the producers and receivers of migrants. According to recent Afrobarometer surveys, an average of 47 percent of young Africans across twenty-four countries polled expressed a desire to migrate to greener economic pastures. In sixteen of these countries, the desire to migrate has increased by 6 percent or more over the past eight years. But while North America and Western Europe are top destinations of choice, close to a quarter of these young Africans expressed a desire to migrate to other African countries (Afrobarometer, 2024). In fact, given the difficulty and cost of migration to the Global North, most Africans who do migrate do so regionally, with about 70 percent of migrants remaining on the continent (The Economist, 2021). Most migration in the world is intraregional, contrary to what one might expect. Africa is one of the smallest producers of migrants (with most of these going to other African countries as noted above) and Europe is both the greatest producer and recipient of migrants, with about 50 percent of these migrations being intra-European (UN DESA, 2025).

The rise in migration has had contradictory effects. On the one hand, it has led to an unprecedented exchange of cultures across the world. Today, any major city regardless of continent boasts access to foods, languages, and arts from across the world. These are often found in migrant enclaves, whether it be one of the ubiquitous China towns (like the one recently established in Nairobi) or Little Africa (also known as Chocolate City) in Guangzhou, China. But these trappings of migration do not remain in their enclaves. Often they feed into local communities, enriching these communities and creating new versions of local culture. The contributions of migrant diasporas to their new countries go even further. For example, every migrant worker in South Africa creates two jobs for citizens (Mbiyozo, 2026).

Migrants also contribute significantly to their countries of origin. This happens through ideas and skills transferred home and demand for culturally specific goods that can often be the basis of increased exports from their home country, not to mention the remittances they send back. In many lower-income countries, these remittances boost national economies, even surpassing the leading exports, foreign direct investment (FDI), or foreign aid, which traditionally have been the main sources of foreign exchange. Nowhere are the two-way impacts of diasporas better represented than in the recently completed

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Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup—whether it be African migrants and their children on European and American teams, or members of the diaspora playing on African, Caribbean, and American teams.

But the celebration of human movement must not obscure its problems: the poor conditions in migrants' home countries, the often arduous and dangerous means of migration—sometimes involving human trafficking—the exploitation of migrants in their new countries, and the failure of receiving countries to protect not only migrants but also the most vulnerable among their native populations. Often, vulnerable local populations have provided fertile ground for nativist politicians who seek power and influence by blaming migration as the source of social ills. Given that unprecedented migration has been accompanied by a global rise in inequality that has heightened feelings of disaffection among local populations in migrant-receiving countries, the scapegoating of migrants has proved unfortunately effective. A consequence of this is the insecurity and violence visited upon immigrants not only by the state (as in the United States or Europe) but also by the local community (as has been the case in South Africa).

In South Africa, anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and frankly Afrophobic sentiments have risen in the face of economic problems, the failures of the country to absorb young citizens into productive jobs. Economic problems are accompanied by increased crime and inequality. These, as well as myths and a lack of understanding of migration and its impacts, sustain widespread and enduring anti-immigrant sentiment.[1] Since 2008 there have been several major anti-immigrant incidents. Antipathy against migrants rose from 62 percent in 2021 to 73 percent in 2025 (Motsoeneng, 2026). If we are to address this, we need to better understand both the past and present of migration in Africa.

Migration in Africa and particularly southern Africa is not a new thing. In the context of contemporary states, there is a history of labor migration across the continent, tied to an extractivist mineral or agricultural colonial economy that depends on labor from surrounding areas and regions. The mineral basis of the South African economy has historically depended on such migration from as far as Congo and Angola.

Africa is increasingly interconnected, an interconnection driven by purposive policy arrangements such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, the increase in visa-free travel for African citizens across the continent, and the movement of capital across the continent. The increased interconnection means that there are many both receiving and sending countries on the continent. Given the crises in South Africa, one might be tempted to imagine that South Africa hosts an outsized migrant population relative to other countries on the continent. Yet South Africa is nowhere near the top in terms of migrants as a proportion of population and is second to Botswana in the Southern African region. On average, international migrants make up 2 percent of the population in African economies. Mayotte (44 percent), Gabon (17.7 percent), Réunion (15.4 percent), Equatorial Guinea (13.2 percent), Libya (12.2 percent), Djibouti (10.8 percent), Seychelles (10.2 percent), and Côte d'Ivoire (9 percent) all have a proportion of migrants that is twice as large as South Africa's (4.1 percent). In absolute terms, Côte d'Ivoire's migrant population is larger than South Africa's (UN DESA, 2025).

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Migrants are often assumed to be poor, low-skilled refugees coming from indigent countries. This is far from the truth. Most migrants are economic migrants, often with skills and education on average above that of their host country; the largest proportion having never lived in poverty in their originating countries (UN DESA, 2025). It is also the case that out migration from countries increases as the economy grows, peaking at a GNP per capita of around $10,000, well above the average African income of roughly $3,800 per capita (The Economist, 2021).

The movement of labor across borders is increasingly matched by the movement of capital between African countries, which has increasingly tied African economies together. The increased interdependence means that capital is exposed in ways that it would not be in its home country. For instance, Nigeria, Ghana, and Uganda threatened action against South African capital in these countries in response to the treatment of their citizens in South Africa. In Nigeria, the Senate spent a day debating the events in South Africa and sought to escalate the crisis with threats of nationalizing South African companies operating in Nigeria. In Ghana, there have been calls by university students not to renew the license of the South African mining company that runs the largest gold mines in Ghana. This coincided with the cancellation or postponement (depending on who is reporting) of a visit by the South African president to Ghana. In Uganda, a member of the Senate is trying to build support for a boycott of leading South African companies.

Prior to the most recent crisis in South Africa,[2] African economies were moving (albeit not smoothly) towards more open movement of both people and goods. If African countries truly desire the ideal of increased movement of labor and goods, if realizing the words of the South African constitution—"that South Africa belongs to all who live in it"—is an aspiration that South Africa and other countries on the continent want to attain, then African countries must begin to construct more humane migration policies. No one denies the right of countries to control who comes and lives within their borders, but countries cannot allow their companies to take advantage of unprotected foreign labor and then fail to defend migrants when crises hit and local politics turn against immigration.

A more humane migration policy starts with taking responsibility for those who make it into the country. This two-fold policy would entail both controlling the border and protecting those already within a country's border. African countries should take a page from countries within Africa that are more open to legal forms of migration (like Rwanda) and the regularization of the status of undocumented individuals being undertaken by Spain. There should be no space for vigilante justice such as has happened in South Africa. If there needs to be policing, African governments need to take the lead, and if deportations need to take place they need to be done by the state, protecting human dignity and safety and allowing for humane departure. African leaders must model a rejection of xenophobia and highlight the benefits of migration to host nations. Of course, African countries must also make it attractive for their own citizens to remain if they so desire. Africa is at a crossroads between moving towards a more open single Pan-African economy and retreating back into smaller nationalistic

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economies. Let us hope that the leaders can find a path towards a larger and more open Pan-African economy with opportunities for all.

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The September issue of *ASR* opens with an essay on the economic intricacies of one African country—Togo—as it concerns capital mobility and logistical governance, before turning to the afterlives of colonialism in Congo and sex work in postcolonial Nigeria. Gender underpins the rest of the scholarly articles, whether they examine the contributions and experiences of women cabinet members in Africa, women's poetry in South Africa, or the intersection of masculinity and tuberculosis risk in a South African township. Taken together, the essays present African states, communities, and individuals grappling with recalibrated sovereignty, economic empowerment, and gendered subjectivity in the face of colonial, postcolonial, and neoliberal pressures.

In "The Port at the Edge: Corporate Logistics and the Recalibration of Sovereignty in Africa," Nina Sylvanus examines the transformation of the Port of Lomé from "a modest colonial harbor on the Gulf of Guinea" into "a nodal point in the global maritime economy," with a particular focus on the recalibration of state sovereignty. With the governance of the port shifting from state control to private concessions, Sylvanus identifies not the surrender of state control but the redefinition and redistribution of sovereignty. In the author's telling, concessions in the Port of Lomé entangle state and corporate interests, resulting in continuous negotiations and tensions over power, control of labor, and rent in the quest to maintain the port as a crucial node in the global circulation of capital.

The specter that haunts Sylvanus's essay—the colonial imprint on the governance of the port—takes center stage in Moudwe Daga's contribution. Daga's "Brazza and the Affective Afterlives of Colonialism in Congo" analyzes the responses of ordinary people to the mausoleum of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, the Italian-born French colonizer who signed the treaty with the local king to dispossess the people of their lands. Building on scholarship on memory and heritage studies, Daga articulates how disillusionment with the postcolonial state drives the people's perception of the mausoleum as a sign of neocolonial dependency. The article illuminates an affective economy wherein people appreciate the aesthetics of the space and nostalgically recall fond memories of childhood around its garden while also critiquing what the mausoleum reveals about their country's neocolonial subordination to France. As Daga observes, "through the iconography of the monument, the colonial history returns as a phantom that haunts the unfulfilled promises of the postcolonial state."

The unfulfilled promises of independence that shape the views of Daga's interlocutors also account for the turn to sex work by women in Eastern Nigeria in Chisara Agoha's article, "From Colonial Shadows to Postcolonial Streets: Rethinking Sex Work in Eastern Nigeria, 1960–1980." Framing sex work as labor rather than moral decadence and the women participants as strategic actors rather than mere victims, Agoha offers a compelling economic history of women who sought to develop businesses and accumulate wealth despite their exclusion

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from the colonial and nascent postcolonial economy, and despite the ravages of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War. Agoha contends that "sex work emerged as one of the informal economic strategies through which women sought income and mobility," articulating in the process "broader patterns of informal entrepreneurship and wage negotiations, underscoring sex work as a rational economic arrangement."

Women—in their role as cabinet ministers in The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria—form the subject of Gretchen Bauer's essay, "'You Feel That You Can Make a Difference in the World': Contributions and Experiences of Women Cabinet Ministers from Five West African Countries." First delivered as her presidential lecture at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association in 2024, the revised essay uses thematic analysis and a feminist framework to examine the life histories of over twenty former cabinet ministers. It emphasizes their "paths to power," their efforts at promoting gender parity in their ministries, and their substantive and symbolic achievements while in office.

The interplay of women and power is taken up in the context of poetry in Natasha Erlank and Liz Gunner's article, "Reflections on Voice: Women, Poetry, and Power—Xhosa and Zulu Considerations." The background of Erlank and Gunner's study is the way that colonialism and the emergence of print culture sidelined the rich tradition of Xhosa and Zulu women's poetry and songs. The article, therefore, seeks to recover and curate works by women that were neglected in the foregrounding of praise poetry by men. Asserting that "praise poetry is also poetry of the everyday and women's praise poetry has been part of women's lives and poetic practice," the authors analyze everyday genres by women—sung at weddings and other family ceremonies—as instantiations of praise poetry while showing the impact of these forerunners on contemporary South African female poets, whose works are shaped by the performances of their foremothers.

The final article in the issue is also concerned with South Africa and gender, though it turns to masculinity. Edmond Madhuha's "Masculinity, Sociability, and Tuberculosis Risk: Sharing Practices in Gendered Spaces of a South African Township," is predicated on the disproportionate disadvantage that Black men face in the spread of tuberculosis. Drawing on research conducted in Modimolle, in the Limpopo province of South Africa, Madhuha argues "that rituals of sharing alcohol, cigarettes, and *zol* reinforce masculine belonging while concurrently increasing TB exposure, as these practices occur in close proximity in communal settings." Advancing knowledge in African masculinity studies and global health, Madhuha challenges these fields to harness, in their quest for behavioral change and to curtail infectious diseases, the cultural values of personhood and masculine bonding drawn from Northern Sotho values.

Besides these fascinating and engaging essays, the rest of the issue includes film reviews, book review forums, and individual book reviews on a wide range of recent works in African Studies. We owe gratitude for the excellence and diversity of the reviews published in the journal to the film reviews and book reviews editors. In closing, the editorial team would like to express its utmost gratitude to Christopher Day who completed his term as senior book reviews editor this summer. Under Chris's leadership, the book reviews section of the

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journal witnessed unparalleled growth in terms of the quality, quantity, and geographical and topical scope of reviews. It is also thanks to Chris's outstanding leadership that we have a thriving series of review forums and scholarly review essays. With appreciation for his dedicated service, all of us at *ASR* wish Chris success in his future endeavors. In the same vein, we are delighted to welcome Christian Alvarado who has successfully taken up the role of senior book reviews editor this summer. Christian has been an exemplary book reviews editor and is prepared to build on current achievements. Welcome onboard, Christian, and thank you for your willingness to serve.

Notes

1. The irony of a deep-seated antipathy towards international migrants is that in the context of poor economic conditions this antipathy easily shifts to other citizens of the country who are not from the region. There have already been reports in the South African context of citizens from Limpopo, for example, facing hardships in the Eastern Cape and vice versa. While the Western Cape has not been a flashpoint for anti-migrant incidents, there has been a movement to push out people from other provinces who arrived after 1994, especially those from the Eastern Cape.
2. Lest we assume that the South African deportations are unique, we should note that scale deportations have occurred in other African countries, most notably in Ghana (1969 and 1973) and in Nigeria (1983). An important difference was that these were initiated and managed by the government rather than by citizens.

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