

## AFRICAN WOMEN AND THE ETHICS OF MIGRATION: FAITH, POLICY ASYMMETRIES, AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN AFRICA–EUROPE RELATIONS

### LES FEMMES AFRICAINES ET L'ETHIQUE DE LA MIGRATION : FOI, ASYMETRIES POLITIQUES ET INTEGRATION ECONOMIQUE DANS LES RELATIONS ENTRE L'AFRIQUE ET L'EUROPE

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#### **Abstract:**

Migration from Africa to Europe is frequently framed through the lenses of crisis, security, and irregularity. Yet such framings obscure the ethical, gendered, and epistemological dimensions of mobility, particularly as experienced by African women. This article examines African women's migration through three interconnected analytical lenses: (1) the role of faith and belief in God as a moral and epistemic framework shaping migration decisions and resilience; (2) the structural asymmetries embedded in Africa–European Union (EU) migration governance, particularly the lack of equitable cooperation agreements; and (3) the potential for the economic integration of African women migrants to generate shared value across both regions. Drawing on African gender theory, political economy, and postcolonial thought, particularly the works of Mbembe, Appadurai, and Sen, the paper argues that current migration regimes reproduce colonial hierarchies and constrain migrant agency. The paper concludes by proposing an ethical framework for migration governance grounded in reciprocity, dignity, and capability expansion.

**Keywords:** African women, migration ethics, Europe, faith, integration, capability approach, postcolonial theory

#### **Résumé :**

La migration de l'Afrique vers l'Europe est fréquemment envisagée à travers les prismes de la crise, de la sécurité et de l'irrégularité. Pourtant, ces cadrages occultent les dimensions éthiques, genrées et épistémologiques de la mobilité, en particulier telles qu'elles sont vécues par les femmes africaines. Cet article examine la migration des femmes africaines à travers trois axes analytiques interconnectés : (1) le rôle de la foi et de la croyance en Dieu en tant que cadre moral et épistémique influençant les décisions migratoires et la résilience ; (2) les asymétries structurelles inscrites dans la gouvernance migratoire entre l'Afrique et l'Union européenne (UE), notamment l'absence d'accords de coopération équitables ; et (3) le potentiel de l'intégration économique des femmes migrantes africaines à générer une valeur partagée dans les deux régions. S'appuyant sur la théorie africaine du genre, l'économie politique et la pensée postcoloniale, en particulier les travaux de Mbembe, Appadurai et Sen, l'article soutient que les régimes migratoires actuels reproduisent des hiérarchies coloniales et limitent l'agentivité des migrantes. L'article conclut en proposant un cadre éthique pour la gouvernance des migrations, fondé sur la réciprocité, la dignité et l'expansion des capacités.

**Mots-clés:** femmes africaines, éthique de la migration, Europe, foi, intégration, approche par les capacités, théorie postcoloniale

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Migration between Africa and Europe represents one of the most politically charged and ethically complex dimensions of contemporary globalization. While dominant narratives emphasize irregular migration, border securitization, and humanitarian crises, these frameworks often marginalize the lived realities of migrants themselves, particularly women.

African women migrants occupy a paradoxical position. On one hand, they are frequently portrayed as vulnerable subjects exposed to exploitation and trafficking. On the other, they are active agents who sustain households, contribute to economies, and reshape transnational social fields. This duality demands a more nuanced ethical analysis.

This article advances three central arguments. First, African women's migration is deeply embedded in spiritual and moral frameworks, where belief in God functions as both a motivational force and a coping mechanism. Second, Africa–EU migration governance is characterized by asymmetrical power relations that limit equitable cooperation. Third, the integration of African women migrants offers significant opportunities for shared economic value, yet remains underutilized due to structural barriers.

By integrating postcolonial theory, capability theory, and globalization studies, the paper situates African women's migration within broader debates on justice, agency, and global inequality.

## **I- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **I-1. Postcolonial Power and Mobility (Mbembe)**

Achille Mbembe's theory of postcolonial power offers a foundational framework for understanding how contemporary regimes of migration governance are shaped by enduring colonial logics. Rather than viewing mobility as a neutral or purely economic process, Mbembe conceptualizes power in the post colony as operating through forms of control that are both diffuse and deeply material, particularly in relation to the movement of racialized populations. In his broader work on necropolitics, Mbembe (2003; 2019) demonstrates how sovereign power is exercised through the regulation of life chances, exposure to precarity, and differential access to mobility, producing hierarchies of human value that are historically rooted in colonial governance.

Within this framework, contemporary global mobility regimes can be understood as extensions of colonial ordering systems. Borders, visa regimes, asylum procedures, and deportation infrastructures do not simply manage movement; they actively produce it as stratified and unequal. As Mbembe (2019) argues, the postcolonial world is marked by “worlds of separation,” where access to mobility is distributed according to racialized and economic hierarchies that reflect the afterlives of empire. African migrants, in particular, are often positioned within these regimes as subjects of suspicion, containment, and selective inclusion.

Migration policies, therefore, function as technologies of power rather than neutral administrative tools. First, they regulate who can move, under what conditions, and at what cost, producing a system of differentiated mobility rights. Highly skilled migrants, investors, and selected professionals are often granted relatively open pathways, while low-income and informal workers face restrictive visa regimes and heightened surveillance. Second, these policies reinforce global hierarchies of race and labor by systematically privileging mobility for those from the Global North while constraining movement from the Global South, particularly Africa (De Genova, 2017; Mbembe, 2019). Third, they produce and institutionalize categories of “desirable” and “undesirable” migrants, often aligned with economic utility, perceived cultural compatibility, and racialized imaginaries of threat or dependency.

African women migrants occupy a particularly precarious position within this global hierarchy. Their mobility is frequently shaped by intersecting structures of race, gender, and class that render them both economically essential and politically marginal. On the one hand, they are incorporated into global care economies, domestic work

sectors, and informal labor markets that depend on their flexibility and precarity. On the other hand, they are often excluded from pathways to long-term settlement, citizenship, and full social recognition. This reflects what Mbembe (2019) identifies as a broader logic of differential inclusion, where individuals are incorporated into global systems not as equal subjects but as laboring bodies whose value is contingent and conditional.

In this sense, African women migrants are not simply restricted by migration regimes; they are actively produced through them as “manageable” laboring subjects. Their mobility is enabled insofar as it serves global economic demands, yet constrained insofar as it challenges national imaginaries of belonging or citizenship. This tension underscores the biopolitical and necropolitical dimensions of migration governance, where life is not equally protected but selectively valued.

Ultimately, Mbembe’s postcolonial critique reveals that contemporary mobility regimes are deeply embedded in historical structures of domination. Far from overcoming colonial logics, global migration governance often reproduces them in updated forms, structuring the movement of African migrants, particularly women, through systems of unequal recognition, constrained agency, and hierarchical valuation.

## **I-2. Globalization and Aspirational Mobility (Appadurai)**

Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the “capacity to aspire” provides an important cultural lens for understanding migration as a socially embedded and future-oriented practice. Rather than treating aspiration as an individual psychological trait, Appadurai conceptualises it as a culturally shaped navigational capacity through which people imagine, evaluate, and pursue better futures within specific social and material conditions (Appadurai, 2004). This framework is particularly useful for analysing migration among African women, for whom mobility is often shaped by intersecting structures of inequality, transnational imaginaries, and evolving livelihood strategies.

Appadurai (2004) argues that the capacity to aspire is unevenly distributed across societies. It is strengthened by access to cultural resources, including education, media, religious narratives, and collective social experience. In contrast, impoverished or marginalised groups often have a thinner “aspirational horizon,” not because they lack aspirations, but because they have fewer socially sanctioned means of organising and articulating them into actionable pathways. Aspiration, in this sense, is deeply relational and infrastructural, dependent on exposure to alternative life possibilities and the social legitimacy to pursue them.

Within the context of African women’s migration, this concept is particularly illuminating. Migration is not only a response to economic deprivation or political instability; it is also an aspirational project shaped by global cultural flows, diasporic storytelling, and local experiences of inequality. Appadurai’s broader theory of global cultural economy, especially his notion of “mediascapes” and “ideoscapes”, helps explain how images of prosperity, mobility, and gendered independence circulate transnationally and inform women’s decisions to migrate (Appadurai, 1996). Through television, social media, migration narratives from returnees, and diaspora communication networks, African women are exposed to comparative frameworks that allow them to imagine alternative futures beyond their immediate environments.

These aspirational imaginaries are reinforced by structural constraints in local economies, including limited employment opportunities, gendered labour segmentation, and restricted access to capital. In many contexts, women face persistent barriers to economic mobility, which makes migration appear not only as an opportunity but as a rational extension of survival strategies. However, Appadurai’s framework is crucial in highlighting that this decision-making process is not purely reactive. Rather, it is forward-

looking and future-oriented, grounded in the ability to imagine improved life chances and to map pathways toward them, even under conditions of uncertainty.

Diaspora networks play a particularly important role in expanding the capacity to aspire among African women. These networks provide both material resources (such as financial support for travel or job placement abroad) and symbolic resources (such as narratives of success, empowerment, and social mobility). Research on transnational migration has shown that such networks reduce informational asymmetries and help potential migrants construct more concrete and achievable visions of mobility (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

At the same time, Appadurai's framework also draws attention to inequality in aspirational capability. Not all women have equal access to the cultural and social resources necessary to translate aspiration into mobility. For some, aspirations may remain constrained within locally defined possibilities, while for others, migration becomes a viable and structured life project. This uneven distribution of aspirational capacity reflects broader global inequalities in information, mobility rights, and economic opportunity.

Importantly, understanding migration through the lens of aspiration complicates purely economic or push-pull models of migration. It reveals that migration decisions are embedded in cultural narratives about progress, success, and self-realisation. For African women migrants, the act of migrating often represents not only economic necessity but also an attempt to reconfigure social identities, expand life opportunities, and negotiate autonomy within restrictive local structures.

### **I-3. Capability and Human Freedom (Sen)**

Amartya Sen's capability approach fundamentally reshapes how development is understood by shifting attention away from purely economic indicators toward the substantive freedoms individuals have to live lives they value. In *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) argues that development should be assessed in terms of the expansion of human capabilities, the real opportunities people have to achieve well-being, agency, and dignity. Rather than equating development with income growth alone, Sen emphasises a multidimensional understanding of human flourishing that includes political freedoms, social opportunities, economic facilities, transparency guarantees, and protective security.

Within this framework, migration can be understood as both a mechanism for and a site of capability expansion. For many individuals, particularly in the Global South, migration offers access to enhanced income opportunities, improved education, better healthcare, and expanded social freedoms. These changes are not merely material but also transformative in terms of agency, as migration can enable individuals to make choices that were previously unavailable within their countries of origin. As Sen (1999) argues, the expansion of substantive freedoms is both the primary end and the principal means of development, meaning that migration can function as a pathway through which capabilities are broadened.

For African women migrants, the capability approach provides a particularly useful analytical lens because it highlights the intersection of structural constraints and individual agency. Migration may allow women to escape restrictive gender norms, limited labour markets, or political instability, thereby expanding their ability to participate in economic activities, pursue education, and gain financial independence. Empirical research has shown that migration can increase women's bargaining power within households and improve access to autonomous income sources, particularly in contexts where local opportunities are severely constrained (Kabeer, 2000; Sen, 1999).

However, Sen's framework also draws attention to the fact that migration is not inherently empowering; its impact on capabilities depends heavily on the conditions under which mobility occurs. Restrictive migration policies, exploitative labour arrangements, and insecure legal statuses can significantly limit the freedoms that migrants are able to enjoy. For instance, undocumented or temporary migrant workers often face precarious employment conditions, limited access to healthcare, and vulnerability to exploitation, which can undermine rather than expand their capabilities (De Haas, 2010). In such cases, migration may increase income but simultaneously reduce other dimensions of well-being, including security and autonomy.

African women migrants are particularly affected by these uneven outcomes due to the gendered nature of global labour markets and migration regimes. Many are concentrated in low-wage sectors such as domestic work, caregiving, and informal services, where labour protections are weak and mobility is constrained. While these roles may provide income opportunities unavailable in their home countries, they often involve significant trade-offs in terms of dignity, legal protection, and personal freedom. From a capability perspective, this highlights the importance of evaluating migration outcomes not solely in economic terms but in relation to broader dimensions of human well-being, including social recognition and bodily integrity.

Sen's emphasis on agency is especially relevant in this context. Agency refers to the ability of individuals to pursue goals they have reason to value, even when these goals extend beyond personal welfare (Sen, 1999). Migration decisions by African women are often shaped by a complex interplay of necessity and aspiration, where economic survival, family obligations, and personal ambitions intersect. A capability approach thus allows us to recognise migrants not as passive victims of structural forces but as active agents navigating constrained but meaningful choices.

At the same time, capability expansion through migration is deeply mediated by institutional and policy environments. Migration governance regimes, including visa restrictions, labour recruitment systems, and border enforcement mechanisms, play a decisive role in shaping whether migration enhances or restricts capabilities. Sen's framework therefore implies that just migration policies should not only facilitate movement but also ensure that migrants can convert mobility into real freedoms, such as secure employment, access to services, and protection from exploitation.

#### **I-4. African Gender Theory on Migration**

African gender theory scholars have long argued that migration cannot be understood as a gender-neutral process. Instead, it is deeply structured by social norms, economic organization, and power relations that systematically shape the opportunities and constraints faced by men and women differently. From this perspective, migration is inherently gendered, reflecting broader patriarchal systems embedded in both local African contexts and global labour markets (Mama, 1996; Ampofo et al., 2004). Rather than being simply a response to economic conditions, women's migration is shaped by intersecting structures of labour market segmentation, unpaid care responsibilities, and persistent social discrimination.

A key insight from African gender scholarship is that labour markets are highly segmented along gender lines, both within African economies and in global migration systems. Women are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage, informal, and precarious forms of employment, while men are more likely to access formal and higher-paying sectors. This segmentation is not accidental but socially produced through institutional practices, hiring norms, and cultural expectations about gender roles (Elson, 1995; Chant & Sweetman, 2012). In migration contexts, these patterns are often

reproduced and intensified, as global demand for cheap and flexible labour aligns with existing gender hierarchies.

Care responsibilities are another central factor shaping African women's migration experiences. Political economy approaches highlight that social reproduction—the work required to sustain households and communities—is disproportionately borne by women and remains largely invisible in economic accounting (Elson, 1995). When women migrate, they often do so within the constraints of “care chains,” where their labour in destination countries is made possible by the transfer of caregiving responsibilities to other women, either within their families or across transnational networks (Hochschild, 2000). This creates what scholars describe as global care chains, in which reproductive labour is redistributed across borders but remains structurally undervalued.

A particularly significant dimension of African women's migration is their concentration in reproductive labour sectors, including domestic work, childcare, eldercare, and other forms of caregiving. These roles are essential for the functioning of both households and broader economies, yet they are systematically undervalued in terms of wages, legal protection, and social recognition. As Parreñas (2001) and Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) demonstrate, migrant women often occupy the lowest tiers of global care economies, where their labour is both indispensable and precarious.

Importantly, African gender perspectives also highlight that while these forms of labour are exploitative, they can simultaneously provide women with income, mobility, and partial autonomy. This ambivalence underscores the complexity of migration as both an empowering and constraining process. Women may gain financial independence and expanded social roles through migration, yet still remain confined within gendered labour hierarchies that limit upward mobility and reinforce structural inequality.

In addition, intersectional approaches within African gender theory stress that gender cannot be analysed in isolation from other axes of power such as class, race, and migration status. African women migrants are often racialised and positioned as “migrant others” in destination societies, which compounds their vulnerability in labour markets and social institutions (Crenshaw, 1991; Nnaemeka, 2005). This intersectional marginalisation further entrenches their concentration in undervalued reproductive labour sectors.

## **II- FAITH, GOD, AND THE MORAL ECONOMY OF MIGRATION FOR AFRICAN WOMEN**

Migration among African women is not only an economic or political process but also a profoundly moral and spiritual one. Across diverse African contexts, religious beliefs and practices shape how migration is understood, justified, and experienced. Faith in God, expressed through Christianity, Islam, and indigenous spiritual traditions, provides moral frameworks through which migration is interpreted as both a necessity and a divinely guided journey. Within this moral economy of migration, decisions to move, endure hardship, or remain in precarious conditions are often embedded in theological understandings of destiny, providence, sacrifice, and blessing.

The concept of a “moral economy” is useful for understanding how economic actions are shaped by shared norms of justice, obligation, and moral reasoning rather than purely rational calculations of utility (Thompson, 1971; Scott, 1976). In the context of migration, this means that African women do not simply migrate in response to labour markets or structural inequality; they also interpret mobility through moral and spiritual registers. Migration is often framed as a form of sacrifice for family well-being, a test of faith, or a pathway ordained by God for upward mobility and survival.

Faith traditions play a central role in legitimising migration aspirations. In many Christian and Muslim communities across Africa, migration is frequently interpreted as part of divine providence, something that unfolds according to God's plan. Women migrants may view their movement as "God opening doors," particularly when migration is uncertain, risky, or irregular. This theological framing can provide psychological resilience in the face of hardship, exploitation, or legal precarity in destination countries. As Levitt (2007) shows in her work on transnational religion, migrants often carry religious beliefs across borders, where faith becomes a key resource for coping with displacement and maintaining moral orientation.

For African women, migration is also deeply embedded in moral obligations to family and community. In many cases, women migrate to fulfil socially recognised duties such as supporting children, caring for extended family members, or contributing to household survival. These obligations are frequently reinforced by religious teachings that emphasise sacrifice, care, and responsibility. Within this moral framework, migration becomes not only an individual project but also a collective moral act, where success is measured in terms of the well-being of others rather than personal gain alone (Trager, 2005).

Religious institutions and networks further shape migration trajectories. Churches, mosques, and faith-based organisations often provide material and symbolic support for migrants, including financial assistance, information networks, and spiritual counselling. These institutions also construct narratives that frame migration as morally legitimate, especially when linked to poverty alleviation or family support. In some cases, religious leaders encourage migration as a pathway to fulfilling God-given potential, while also warning against moral dangers associated with migration, such as exploitation or loss of faith (Adogame, 2013).

However, the moral economy of migration is not without tension. While faith can empower women by providing meaning and resilience, it can also produce moral burdens. Migrant women may experience guilt, pressure, or spiritual anxiety when they are unable to meet family expectations or when migration outcomes fail to deliver promised improvements. In such cases, failure may be interpreted not only economically but also spiritually, as a test of faith or moral inadequacy. This highlights the ambivalence of religious frameworks, which can simultaneously support and constrain migrant agency.

Moreover, the intersection of gender and religion is crucial in shaping migration experiences. African women often navigate religious expectations regarding femininity, motherhood, and respectability while participating in transnational labour markets that may challenge these norms. For example, women working in domestic or care sectors abroad may be praised for their sacrifice yet simultaneously stigmatized for their absence from the household. This dual moral positioning reflects broader tensions between economic necessity and cultural expectations of womanhood (Grillo, 2018).

At the same time, faith can also be a source of empowerment and resistance. Religious belief systems often provide women with narratives of dignity, hope, and divine justice that counteract experiences of exploitation or marginalisation. Prayer, ritual practices, and participation in diasporic religious communities help sustain identity and provide emotional stability in contexts of uncertainty. In this sense, faith functions as a transnational resource that enables women to reinterpret migration not only as survival but also as meaningful transformation.

### III- AFRICA–EU MIGRATION GOVERNANCE: STRUCTURAL ASYMMETRIES

Africa–EU migration governance is characterised by deep structural asymmetries shaped by historical legacies of colonialism, unequal economic integration, and divergent security priorities. While officially framed as a partnership, the relationship between African states and the European Union (EU) is often marked by unequal bargaining power, where the EU largely sets the terms of migration cooperation. This asymmetry is embedded in policy architecture that prioritises border control, migration containment, and return management, often at the expense of mobility rights, development-oriented migration pathways, and African policy sovereignty (Geddes & Scholten, 2016; Reslow, 2012).

At the core of Africa–EU migration governance is a complex institutional framework that includes bilateral agreements, regional compacts, and multilateral initiatives. Key instruments such as the Rabat Process (2006), the Khartoum Process (2014), and the Valletta Summit on Migration (2015) reflect the EU's externalisation strategy, which seeks to manage migration beyond its territorial borders. These frameworks are complemented by financial instruments such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), which funds border management, capacity building, and return and reintegration programmes in African states (European Commission, 2015). While these initiatives are presented as cooperative, they are often driven by EU priorities related to irregular migration reduction and security management.

Structural asymmetries are evident in agenda-setting power. The EU possesses significantly greater financial, institutional, and diplomatic leverage, allowing it to define the terms of migration cooperation. African states, by contrast, often engage from a position of dependency, particularly due to development aid linkages and limited bargaining capacity in global governance forums (Betts, 2011). This imbalance results in policy frameworks that prioritise European concerns about border security and irregular migration flows, rather than African priorities such as labour mobility, diaspora engagement, and development-oriented migration governance.

A central feature of Africa–EU migration governance is the externalisation of border control. This refers to the shifting of migration management responsibilities beyond EU borders into transit and origin countries. Through funding agreements, training programmes, and technological support, African states are encouraged—or incentivised—to strengthen border enforcement, prevent irregular departures, and cooperate in readmission agreements (Lavenex, 2006). While this approach is framed as collaborative governance, it effectively extends EU migration control regimes into African territories, raising concerns about sovereignty and human rights.

However, this policy architecture also produces significant structural limitations. First, it tends to treat migration primarily as a security issue rather than a structural development phenomenon. This securitisation narrows policy responses to enforcement and deterrence, neglecting the socio-economic drivers of migration such as inequality, labour demand, demographic pressures, and climate change (de Haas, 2010). As a result, migration governance often addresses symptoms rather than root causes.

Second, return and readmission policies remain highly contested and unevenly implemented. Many African states resist large-scale readmission agreements due to political, economic, and social constraints, including limited reintegration capacity and domestic political resistance. This creates a gap between formal policy commitments and actual implementation, undermining the effectiveness of cooperation frameworks (Carrera et al., 2016).

Third, the asymmetrical nature of funding mechanisms reinforces dependency relationships. While instruments such as the EUTF provide significant financial resources, they are often tied to EU-defined priorities, limiting African ownership of migration governance agendas. This conditionality risks undermining long-term institutional development in African migration governance systems by prioritising short-term containment objectives over sustainable mobility frameworks.

Despite these limitations, African states are not passive actors within Africa–EU migration governance. They actively negotiate, resist, and reinterpret external pressures based on domestic political interests and regional priorities. Regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) have increasingly advocated for more balanced migration frameworks that emphasise free movement within Africa, skills mobility, and diaspora engagement as part of broader development strategies (African Union, 2018). This reflects a growing effort to reframe migration governance beyond EU-centric security paradigms.

Nevertheless, the structural imbalance remains persistent. The EU's ability to leverage development aid, visa regimes, and security cooperation gives it disproportionate influence over migration policy outcomes. Meanwhile, African states face constraints in translating regional migration frameworks into enforceable policy alternatives that can compete with EU-driven externalisation strategies.

#### **IV- ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND SHARED VALUE**

African women immigrants in Europe occupy a strategically important position within transnational labour markets, contributing to both European economies and African development through remittances, knowledge transfer, and social reproduction work. Their economic integration is shaped by gendered labour segmentation, migration governance regimes, and global care chains, yet their contributions generate shared value across continents. Understanding this dual impact requires moving beyond deficit-based narratives of migration toward frameworks that recognise migrants as active economic agents embedded in transnational systems of production and reproduction.

##### **IV-1. Economic Integration in European Labour Markets**

African women's economic integration in Europe is largely concentrated in service sectors, particularly domestic work, eldercare, childcare, hospitality, and cleaning services. These sectors are characterised by high demand for flexible, low-cost labour due to demographic ageing, welfare retrenchment, and dual-income household structures across many European states (Anderson, 2000; Kilkey, 2010). African women migrants fill structural labour shortages in these care economies, making their work essential to the functioning of European social reproduction systems.

This integration, however, is often marked by segmentation and informality. Migrant women are disproportionately represented in low-wage and precarious employment, frequently outside formal labour protections. This reflects what feminist economists describe as the “care deficit” in advanced economies, where reproductive labour is outsourced to migrant women under conditions of inequality (Hochschild, 2000). Despite these constraints, African women's labour participation contributes significantly to household welfare, tax bases, and the sustainability of European welfare regimes.

In economic terms, their integration enhances productivity by enabling native-born women to participate more fully in formal labour markets. By filling gaps in unpaid care work, migrant women indirectly support labour force participation and economic output in host countries. This demonstrates how migration is not merely a labour supply

issue but a structural component of contemporary capitalist economies (Williams & Gavanas, 2008).

#### **IV-2. Contributions to African Economies: Remittances and Development**

On the African side, women migrants play a critical role in sustaining household economies and contributing to national development through remittances. Remittance flows from Europe to African countries constitute a significant source of foreign income, often exceeding official development assistance in several contexts (World Bank, 2023). Women migrants frequently prioritise remittances for household consumption, education, healthcare, and small-scale investment, thereby enhancing human development outcomes in their countries of origin.

Research suggests that women are more likely than men to allocate remittances toward family welfare and community well-being, reinforcing their role in social reproduction across borders (De Haas, 2007). This transnational economic participation challenges traditional assumptions that place women at the margins of economic production. Instead, African women migrants act as key economic actors embedded in what Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) describe as “transnational social fields,” where economic activity spans multiple national contexts simultaneously.

Beyond remittances, return migration and circular migration also facilitate knowledge transfer, entrepreneurial activity, and skills development. Women returning to African countries often invest in small businesses, education, and community projects, contributing to local economic diversification and development (Ratha et al., 2011).

#### **IV-3. Shared Value and Transnational Economic Systems**

The concept of “shared value” is useful for understanding how African women migrants generate economic benefits across both origin and destination countries. Their labour sustains critical sectors in Europe while simultaneously supporting household economies and development processes in Africa. This dual contribution reflects the interconnectedness of global labour markets and the dependence of advanced economies on migrant reproductive labour.

From a structural perspective, this shared value is produced through global care chains, where the reproductive labour of African women supports the reproduction of households and economies in multiple countries simultaneously (Hochschild, 2000). These chains illustrate how economic integration is not a one-way process but a transnational system of interdependence.

However, the distribution of this value is highly unequal. While Europe benefits from subsidised care labour and increased labour force participation, African countries often bear the social costs of family separation and care deficits. At the same time, migrants themselves frequently experience precarious working conditions and limited mobility rights, raising questions about equity in the distribution of migration’s benefits.

In addition, the reliance on migrant care labour in Europe raises ethical and policy questions regarding sustainability and fairness. Scholars argue that without structural reforms in care systems, migration will continue to reproduce global inequalities by outsourcing care work from poorer to richer countries (Parreñas, 2001).

On the African side, overreliance on remittances may create dependency risks and reduce incentives for domestic employment creation if not complemented by broader development strategies. Therefore, migration governance must be integrated into broader economic planning frameworks that address both labour rights and development objectives.

## **V. POLICY IMPLICATIONS: ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MIGRATION**

Contemporary migration governance is increasingly shaped by securitisation, border externalisation, and unequal global mobility regimes. These systems often prioritise control over mobility rather than justice, producing hierarchies of movement that reflect colonial legacies and global inequalities. In response, scholars and policy debates have called for an ethical framework for migration grounded in reciprocity, dignity, capability expansion, and decolonisation. Such a framework shifts the focus from managing migration as a “problem” or “crisis” to governing mobility as a shared human condition embedded in global interdependence (Betts, 2011; Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014).

### **V-1. Reciprocity in Migration Governance**

Reciprocity refers to the principle that migration systems should be based on mutual benefit and shared obligations between sending, transit, and receiving countries. In current global arrangements, however, reciprocity is often uneven. High-income countries benefit significantly from migrant labour while imposing restrictive visa regimes, limited mobility pathways, and selective admission policies (Geddes & Scholten, 2016). Meanwhile, low- and middle-income countries bear the social costs of migration, including brain drain, care deficits, and family separation.

An ethical migration framework would require more balanced forms of cooperation, including fair labour agreements, circular migration schemes, and recognition of skills across borders. Reciprocity also implies that migration should not be treated as a one-sided extraction of labour but as a mutually beneficial exchange that respects the contributions of migrants and their countries of origin (Hollifield, 2004).

### **V-2. Dignity and the Moral Foundations of Mobility**

Human dignity is a foundational principle in international human rights law and provides a normative basis for migration ethics. Migration systems that expose individuals to detention, exploitation, or precarious legal status undermine this principle by treating migrants as instruments of labour rather than as rights-bearing persons (Gündoğdu, 2018).

African gender theorists and postcolonial scholars further argue that dignity is closely tied to recognition and social value, particularly for marginalized groups such as migrant women. Many African women migrants in global care economies experience undervaluation of their labour and limited social recognition despite their essential contributions to household and national economies (Parreñas, 2001; Anderson, 2000). An ethical framework must therefore ensure that migration governance protects not only physical security but also social dignity through fair wages, legal protections, and pathways to citizenship.

### **V-3. Capability Expansion and Human Development**

Amartya Sen’s capability approach provides a powerful normative foundation for ethical migration governance. Sen (1999) conceptualises development as the expansion of substantive freedoms—the real opportunities individuals have to lead lives they value. Applied to migration, this means evaluating migration policies based on whether they expand or restrict human capabilities.

Migration can enhance capabilities by improving access to income, education, healthcare, and personal autonomy. However, restrictive visa regimes, irregular status, and exploitative labour conditions can significantly limit these freedoms, reducing migrants’ ability to convert mobility into well-being (De Haas, 2010). For African women

migrants, capability expansion is particularly relevant, as migration may offer escape from structural gender inequalities while also exposing them to new forms of vulnerability.

An ethical framework must therefore ensure that migration enhances substantive freedoms rather than merely enabling labour mobility. This includes guaranteeing access to social services, labour rights, and pathways for long-term integration.

#### **V-4. Decolonizing Migration Governance**

Decolonising migration governance involves challenging the historical and ongoing influence of colonial power relations in shaping global mobility regimes. Current migration systems are deeply rooted in colonial histories of labour extraction, racialised border controls, and unequal global development structures (Mbembe, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These legacies persist in contemporary practices such as visa hierarchies, externalised border controls, and asymmetrical mobility rights between the Global North and South.

Decolonial approaches call for rethinking who has the authority to define mobility rules and whose interests are prioritised in migration governance. This includes strengthening regional mobility frameworks in Africa, such as the African Union's Free Movement Protocol, and reducing dependency on externalised European border regimes (African Union, 2018). It also involves recognising migrants not as security risks or economic tools but as political subjects with agency and rights.

Decolonising migration governance further requires epistemic justice—valuing African knowledge systems, migration experiences, and policy frameworks rather than relying solely on Eurocentric models of control and securitisation (Mignolo, 2011).

### **CONCLUSION**

The theoretical perspectives explored in this study demonstrate that migration, particularly African women's migration, is a deeply complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to economic push-pull factors or state-centric policy frameworks. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of global power relations, gendered labour systems, moral economies, cultural imaginaries, and ethical struggles over mobility and belonging.

From Achille Mbembe's (2019) postcolonial analysis, we see that contemporary migration governance is embedded in historical continuities of colonial control, where mobility is unevenly distributed through regimes of surveillance, exclusion, and differential valuation of human life. Migration policies are therefore not neutral administrative tools but instruments that reproduce global hierarchies of race, labour, and citizenship. African women migrants, in particular, are positioned within these hierarchies as both essential labour providers and structurally marginalised subjects.

Arjun Appadurai's (2004) concept of the "capacity to aspire" further deepens this understanding by showing that migration is not only a response to deprivation but also an imaginative and future-oriented project. African women's mobility is shaped by aspirations formed through global media, diaspora networks, and local inequalities. Yet this capacity to aspire is unequally distributed, reflecting broader structural inequalities that shape whose futures can be imagined and pursued.

Amartya Sen's (1999) capability approach reinforces the need to evaluate migration in terms of substantive freedoms rather than income alone. Migration can expand capabilities by increasing access to education, income, and autonomy, but restrictive policies and precarious labour conditions can just as easily undermine these freedoms. For African women migrants, the central ethical question becomes whether migration enhances dignity, agency, and real opportunities for well-being.

African gender theories further demonstrate that migration is fundamentally gendered, structured by labour market segmentation, care responsibilities, and social norms. African women are disproportionately concentrated in reproductive and care labour that sustains both European economies and transnational households, yet this labour remains undervalued and often invisible. Their experiences highlight the persistence of global care chains and the unequal distribution of reproductive labour across borders.

Faith and moral frameworks add another dimension to migration, showing that mobility is also a spiritual and ethical practice. Faith in God, moral obligations to family, and religious interpretations of destiny shape how African women understand migration, endure hardship, and assign meaning to success or failure. Migration is thus embedded in a moral economy where economic decisions are inseparable from spiritual and ethical reasoning.

The Africa–EU migration governance analysis reveals how these individual and social dynamics are embedded in broader structural asymmetries. Despite the language of partnership, migration governance between Africa and Europe is characterised by unequal power relations, securitisation, and externalisation of border control. These structures limit African policy autonomy and reinforce Europe-centric migration priorities, particularly around containment and return.

Despite these constraints, African women migrants generate significant shared value for both Europe and Africa. They sustain European care economies while contributing to African households and development through remittances, skills transfer, and transnational engagement. However, this value is unequally distributed and often extracted under conditions of precarity, reflecting broader global inequalities in labour and mobility governance.

Finally, the proposed ethical framework, grounded in reciprocity, dignity, capability expansion, and decolonization, offers a normative direction for rethinking migration governance. It challenges securitised and asymmetrical systems by emphasising mutual responsibility, human rights, substantive freedoms, and the need to dismantle colonial continuities in global mobility regimes. Such a framework recognises migrants not as threats or instruments of labour, but as full human subjects with rights, aspirations, and agency.

In conclusion, African women's migration sits at the centre of multiple overlapping systems of power and possibility. It is simultaneously shaped by constraint and creativity, exploitation and empowerment, exclusion and transnational belonging. A comprehensive understanding of migration therefore requires integrating political economy, gender theory, cultural analysis, moral philosophy, and decolonial critique. Through such an interdisciplinary and ethically grounded approach can migration governance move toward systems that are more just, equitable, and responsive to the lived realities of migrants themselves.

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