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Introduction

The vision behind this special issue was initiated during an online conference organised by myself at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, in April 2023 titled, “Ubuntu and Migration”. The contributions are driven by the enthusiasm and passion of scholars who are committed to harnessing theoretical frameworks from Africa in ways that offer rigorous intellectual contributions to existing positions on migration. Their response to this invitation has resulted in this phenomenal special issue from a cross-disciplinary perspective. The commitment of the contributors is driven by the fact that in recent times, some African countries have responded to calls to dismantle the world of visible and invisible borders, exclusion, insider versus outsider division, strangeness, xenophobia and Afrophobia. While these calls have not been really effective, especially due to the inability of African leaders to systematically resolve or minimise the consequences of the quilt work of colonialism/neo-colonialism and its effects in post-colonial African societies, the understanding of borders in African societies require a new appraisal that challenges the rubric, foundations and intended goals of the lines that divide and the walls that exclude. The nature of borders may not be as systematic and explicitly racial as was the case during the scramble and subsequent colonisation of Africa, but the divisions remain a reality that promotes fear, hate, violence, negative conceptions of strangeness, spaces, and othering. Contemporary discourses on borders are not only directed toward historical injustice, oppression and domination of spaces as such, but also to existing structures of systemic exclusion, oppression and marginalisation in the various forms they present themselves and are sustained across the world.

This edited volume is informed by pertinent questions such as: (1) what role can the various understandings and conceptions of Ubuntu play in addressing the discourse on migration? (2) What are the precolonial conditions for migration and might these conditions enlighten how we understand and grapple with contemporary migration challenges? (3) How does Ubuntu help address forms of strangeness and othering that are invoked in the world today? (4) Might Ubuntu provide reason to limit or filter migration, for instance, does it prescribe admitting those with a similar cultural background or prioritizing the interests of compatriots? (5) What would the decolonisation of constructed borders

and geographies entail? (6) Should agitations for human dignity, especially as they pertain to migration, articulate a new language to understand contemporary patterns of migration, violence and oppression? (7) What social, political and economic initiatives have to be considered in any attempt to address the push-pull factors that promote brain drain and economic inequality? The questions are endless, but there have been attempts in this special issue to address some of the questions raised.

This special issue features theoretical and multidisciplinary interventions in the discourse of migration from African perspectives. It also explores how various philosophical and related frameworks shed light on migration in ways that reveal past and present forms of violent exclusion and marginalisation. Ultimately, the goal of the five articles in this special issue is to add and hopefully augment existing debates, concerns and challenges on migration in Africa, and how this bare on the increasing exclusionary measures currently being implemented in global anti-immigration policies. Drawing on the works of existing migration scholars in Africa, Edmund Ugar's article bemoans the reality of xenophobia in South Africa. While referring to the migrants in South Africa in particular, Ugar alludes to the recent mob attacks and the infamous Operation Dudula, which led to the death of a Zimbabwean citizen. He argues that horrendous acts of this nature negate the core values of ubuntu, especially from the view point of intra-African migration. Scholars like Christopher Nshimbi (2023; see Moyo, 2014) argue that these violent socioeconomic exclusionary tendencies have their foundation on the history of injustice in South Africa. Ugar appears to argue that amidst these economic disparities, there is need to remain true to the core values of ubuntu in ways that promote hospitality and humanness.

The article by John Sanni explores the dominant themes on migration and how these themes speak to the reality of visibility. Trade-offs, for Sanni, have been the major challenges when theorising migration. He asks questions such as 'who gets what, and at whose expense?' to illustrate the complexities of migration ethics. In order to weave ubuntu into the fabric and service of migration discourse, he theorises ubuntu from the perspective of visibility, 'to be seen'. He goes on to explore the ethical implications of 'being seen' for migration ethics, and how 'not to be seen' is a perversive disposition towards the Other. Sanni's main contribution is that both the cosmopolitan and statist trend of migration lack a genuine commitment to the conditions of visibility that he appears to propose. He offers ubuntu, especially the inclusivist kind, as a suitable alternative.

Ovett Nwosimiri offers a critical diagnosis on the state of migration in Africa and the general leaning of African leaders and the African Union's drive

to implement open borders. He observes that any commitment to migration, especially intra-migration in Africa, must take cognisance of the realities of xenophobia, ethnic rivalries and other modes of negative othering and identity. He rightly observes that there is more intra-state migration in Africa than migration out of the continent (see Mercandalli and Nshimbi, 2016). Drawing on Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindigwi (2013), Nwosimiri doubts the relevance of ubuntu as a plausible theoretical framework for theorising open borders in Africa. If ubuntu were to be considered plausible for thinking about open borders, its practical plausibility hinges on a serious consideration – in ways that put measures in place – of potential xenophobic conflict, ethnic violence and other related wars.

Septla Malapo's article offers an important starting for the way we think about migration from an African perspective. He problematises the vulnerability that migrants face in South Africa. He begins by drawing from the naturalistic position of Mohlomi, an 18th century Afro-pagan intellectuals of southern Africa, to reflect on whether botho (ubuntu) offers any normative substance for reflecting on the vulnerability of migrants in post-apartheid South Africa. Different from the ideologies embedded in neo-liberal hegemony, Malapo argues that an understanding of botho (ubuntu) has to be grounded on nature. This understanding, according to him, offers a new notion of freedom that is driven by a stronger disposition towards hospitality.

Frank Abumere's contribution does not directly address the questions of ubuntu as it pertains to migration, but a relation can be drawn. He argues that both the relational and non-relational positions on migration are insufficient for addressing global justice. Focusing on migration justice, he notes that on account of being partly conditioned by colonial historical relations –citizens of former colonies have right-claims against former colonisers. Put differently, former colonisers owe citizens of former colonies duties of justice. He offers, what he refers to as 'special kind of postcolonial relational account' to justify his position as he considers main-stream accounts of justice insufficient for attaining the justice he proposes.

There is a general recognition in the contributions that existing accounts – taking into cognisance the reality of colonial injustice, systemic injustice, inter and intra state rivalries, ethnic difference, dominant policies on postcolonial migration – are either theoretically implausible or practically insufficient for addressing the challenges of migration. Therefore, this special issue does not only add to dominant discourse, it invites and encourages a continuous commitment to migration discourses in ways that offer systematic and critical responses to the challenges of migration in and outside Africa.

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