

## **Curated Conversations: Exploring the Politics of Migration through Ideas (Season I)**

Curated by Ali Nobil Ahmad and Linah Kinya, African Migration Hub, Heinrich Böll Foundation  
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### **Introduction**

This series examines the past, present, and possible futures of migration within and from the African continent. It approaches migration with a critical and philosophical lens, drawing on the expertise of leading experts, thinkers, and practitioners in a series of in-depth interviews and discussions about migration histories and policy regimes. The geographical scope of the series is broad, with coverage spanning the length and breath of the continent in all its global connections. Experts from across Africa and its Euro-American diaspora are invited to share their knowledge, lived experience, and diverse perspectives on the interplay between borders and social phenomena.

Curated Conversations seeks to forge a new discussion around African migration in Europe and the West, but also within Africa itself: one that foregrounds African knowledge, lived experience, and political thought towards a humane and socially just order of mobility. The questions it asks include: What kind of ideas inform current migration policies in Africa? Where do they fall short, and what kinds of alternatives can we imagine?

### **EPISODES**

#### **1. Race, Migration, and Decolonisation with E. Tendayi Achiume**

Despite the global shift in discourse about race following the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, international borders continue to be portrayed as race-neutral by those who design migration policies. Why is the sphere of migration governance so seemingly resistant to addressing or even naming racial inequalities, and how should we respond?

Reflecting on her tenure as UN Special Rapporteur on racism and xenophobia, Professor Achiume addresses the curious absence of race in the sphere of migration policymaking. At the root of 'racial aphasia', she argues, is a refusal to acknowledge the historical legacy of colonialism, on which today's international regime of global mobility is built. Tracing this history from the emergence of passports to decolonisation, her conclusions are unequivocal: "There's no modern racism that can be divorced from historical structures".

At the same time, she adds, some forms of xenophobia and discrimination, such as the treatment of Black African migrants in North Africa, cannot be reduced to the legacy of European colonialism, since they have roots in diverse histories of discrimination and exploitation. In a wide-ranging discussion of her own scholarly corpus and expert policy reports

for the UN, Achiume does what she regards is the duty of researchers and activists when it comes to African migration: from Morocco to South Africa, our job is to “keep putting race on the table” in forums that refuse to acknowledge it.

### **Speaker Bio**

Professor E. Tendayi Achiume is a Professor of Law at UCLA and former UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. She is the first woman to serve in this role since its creation in 1993. The current focus of her work is the global governance of racism and xenophobia; and the legal and ethical implications of colonialism for contemporary international migration.

### **Further Reading:**

E.Tendayi Achiume (2019) “Migration as Decolonization” (2019) Stanford Law Review 71 (6):  
LINK: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt8m83b98j/qt8m83b98j.pdf>

& “Racial Borders” (2022) Georgetown Law Journal 110 (3) LINK:  
[https://www.law.georgetown.edu/georgetown-law-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2022/05/Achiume\\_RacialBorders.pdf](https://www.law.georgetown.edu/georgetown-law-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2022/05/Achiume_RacialBorders.pdf)

Debra Thompson (2013) “Through, Against and Beyond the Racial State: The Transnational Stratum of Race,” Cambridge Review of International Affairs 26 (2013): 135.

## **2. Pan Africanism and Intra-African Migration, with Achieng Akena and Ibrahima Kane**

As an idea, a rallying call and people’s movement, Pan Africanism is integral to the history of political thought and mobilization in Africa and its global diaspora. But what is its relevance to policymakers in the field of migration?

In this episode, Achieng Akena and Ibrahima Kane provide an historical perspective on the way in which Pan Africanism solidarities and ideas have the potential to shape new approaches to mobility within Africa and beyond. They do so by surveying the ways in which Pan Africanism has already catalyzed key innovations in displacement governance since the 1960s, for instance, through the workings of the OAU, AU, and regional organizations such as ECOWAS, which have developed legislation and policies to support refugees and IDPs. Then, assessing the significance of this history of cooperation, Akena and Kane consider the untapped potential of the African Union’s 2063 vision, an initiative proposing free movement of people which has the potential to transform Africa into an inclusive space of circulation that boosts African self-reliance and prosperity.

### **Speaker Bios**

Achieng Akena is Executive Director of the International Refugee Rights Initiative in May 2019, bringing with her a wealth of experience and knowledge in strategic leadership, institutional resource management and advocacy networks in the UN and AU. A passionate and committed human rights and democracy advocate, Achieng has over 22 years' experience in the promotion and protection of human rights of marginalised people and democratic governance across Africa. Prior to joining IRRI, she was Executive Director of the Centre for Citizens Participation in the African Union (CCPAU)/The Pan African Citizens Network (PACIN).

Ibrahima Kane heads the Africa Union Advocacy Program of the Open Society's Africa Regional Office and is qualified as a lawyer in Senegal and France. Prior to joining the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa in 2007, he was a senior lawyer in charge of the Africa program at INTERIGHTS for 10 years. As a founding member of RADDHO, a Senegalese human rights organization, Kane directed a program that focused on public education and women's human rights in five West African countries—Cape Verde, the Republic of Guinea, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Senegal—for six years. Ibrahima has particular interest in economic, social, and cultural rights; women's rights; and the pursuit of justice through regional and international mechanisms.

#### **Further Reading:**

Achieng Akena and Rosette Nyirinkindi Katungye (2022) "Pan-Africanism, regional integration and migration", Chapter 8 of the Africa Migration Report: Challenging the Narrative, IOM.

Amanda Bisong (2022) "Labour mobility as a key element of the AfCFTA: What role for the AU's free movement protocol?": ECDPM <https://ecdpm.org/work/labour-mobility-key-element-afcfta-role-au-free-movement-protocol>

### **3. Kenya's Refugee Policy: Towards Coherence?, with Fabian Oriri, Rufus Karanja and Sumayyah Mokku**

Despite its relative generosity, Kenya's Refugee policy has been described by leading experts as contradictory and incoherent.

Why does a country containing some of the largest refugee camps in the world periodically threaten to close them? Why is it adopting progressive legislation on refugee management yet apparently hesitant to let refugees work?

In this episode, such questions are addressed by three leading experts in Kenyan Refugee law and policy. Fabian Oriri, Rufus Karanja, and Sumayyah Mokku discuss the history and current direction of law and policy. Could the Marshall Plan and new Refugee Act signal greater coherence and establish Kenya as a leader in refugee management? Or will refugees continue to struggle for rights and recognition?

#### **Speaker Bios**

Fabian is a distinguished and free-thinking lawyer specializing in human rights, particularly refugee and migrant and health policy laws. He is deeply committed to utilizing pragmatic and people-centered measures to effect positive social change by bridging legal frameworks.

Rufus Karanja has over 12 years' experience in forced migration issues across the East and Horn of Africa. He has expertise in forced migration governance with a focus on humanitarian-development programming and policy advocacy on durable solutions for displacement-affected communities in fragile contexts. His passion over the years has been championing innovative durable solutions for displaced populations. Rufus is currently working as a Policy Officer at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands focusing on durable solutions and forced migration in Somalia and Kenya.

Sumayyah Mokku is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya. She is a Litigation Adviser for Haki na Sheria Initiative (HSI), a Non-governmental Organization based in Garissa whose mission is to empower marginalized communities to understand, demand and effectively claim their human rights in pursuit of an equitable society. Sumayyah is also a fellow for the East Africa Emerging Public Interest Advocates Programme at the Center for Strategic Litigation based in Zanzibar, Tanzania. She is engaged in training on social justice issues in Kenya through advocacy, research and litigation with a view to promoting policy change."

#### **Further Reading**

Michael Owiso (2022) "Incoherent policies and contradictory priorities in Kenya", Forced Migration Review 70

#### **4. Migration and Displacement in African Cities, with Constant Cap, Rebecca Enobong Roberts and Taibat Lawanson**

Where does migration policy happen? Who devises and implements it?

Researchers and policymakers are increasingly cognisant of the fact that beyond interior ministries, borders and refugee camps, the stakeholders of migration governance encompass city-level decision-makers and municipal authorities. Most migrants do not cross international borders. They include the many millions of rural dwellers moving to cities for opportunities, or because they have been displaced by environmental factors.

What are the implications of this realization? Researchers Rebecca Enobong Roberts, Taibat Lawanson and Constant Cap draw attention to gaps in knowledge, policy and planning when it comes to migrants and internally displaced persons in African cities. Comparing and contrasting the challenges faced by migrants in East and West African contexts, they map pathways toward more effective urban migration governance that draw on the often informal strategies and preferences of urban dwellers themselves.

## Speaker Bios

Constant Cap is an urban planner and researcher based in Nairobi, Kenya. He has been involved in research, advocacy and practice in the areas of urban mobility, urban displacement, placemaking and environmental monitoring. He regularly comments on urban planning issues at [africancityplanner.com](http://africancityplanner.com)

Rebecca Enobong Roberts is a PhD candidate at the Technische Universität Berlin's Habitat Unit. Her dissertation examines the intersectionality between internal displacement and forced migration in the context of sustainable and inclusive urbanisation through a placemaking case study of IDP migrants from the North-East region of Nigeria to the metropolis of Lagos.

Taibat Lawanson is a Professor of Urban Management and Governance at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Her work focuses on the interface of social complexities, urban realities and the pursuit of spatial justice in Africa. She is well known for her transdisciplinary approach which engages students, policy makers, civil society and local communities.

## Further Reading

RE Roberts, O Okanya (2022) "Measuring the socio-economic impact of forced evictions and illegal demolition; A comparative study between displaced and existing informal settlements" in The Social Science Journal.

## 5. Between Risk and Reward: Migration to the Middle East from East Africa and the Horn, with Caroline Njuki, Dome Okuku Jagalo and Ayla Bonfiglio

Labour migration to the Middle East from East Africa and the Horn has grown considerably in recent years. In numerical terms, it exceeds Europe-bound movements but does not receive anything like the degree of attention or interest from policymakers. The real and potential rewards of this emergent migration system - for migrants, sending, and receiving societies are considerable. However, the risks, in terms of abuse and exploitation, are also very high.

Why is migration from countries such as Ethiopia along the so-called 'Eastern Route' so dangerous? How is it that Kenyan and Ugandan workers were so badly abused and exploited in Qatar before, during and after the World Cup despite the media attention this issue received? A wide-ranging discussion featuring Caroline Njuki (ILO) and leading researchers Ayla Bonfiglio and Dome Okuku Jagalo, this episode of Curated Conversations analyzes existing efforts to improve the working conditions of East African workers in the Middle East. It also presents a number of urgent recommendations for policymakers in Africa and Europe.

## Speaker Bios

Dr Ayla Bonfiglio is Head of the Mixed Migration Center Eastern and Southern Africa, Egypt and Yemen. From 2019-22 she was Head of MMC's North Africa Hub. For 15 years, she has worked on issues of forced migration and mobility.

Caroline Njuki considers herself a global citizen and has worked on policy and programming on mobility and employment in East Africa and the Horn of Africa with various international organizations. She is currently Chief Technical Advisor for the ILO in Kenya (but speaks here in a personal capacity).

Dome Okuku Jagalo is a data scientist and migration researcher for Equidem Consulting. He has conducted extensive research on migration from East Africa to the Middle East.

## **6. Queer and Trans African Mobilities, with B Camminga**

What's distinct about LGBTI experiences of migration and displacement within and from the African continent? How does the current system of international protection cater for the difficulties and discriminations faced by border-crossing sexual and gender minorities?

In a wide-ranging, in-depth interview conducted last November, Dr B Camminga addresses these questions to identify some of the key emergent challenges confronting humanitarians and policymakers engaged in governing international mobility. Drawing upon their own work and that of other leading researchers, Camminga provides a much-needed, accessible overview of some of the diverse scenarios described by the latest fieldwork across numerous countries and contexts. From Morocco to South Africa, Kenya to Gabon, a complex mosaic of diverse scenarios and trajectories is sketched – one that nonetheless contains discernable patterns shaped by colonial histories and contemporary legal, political, and constitutional developments.

Marked by stories of hardship and struggle, but also resilience and hope, this body of knowledge accords little with Eurocentric portraits of Africa as a barbarous, backward zone of undifferentiated homophobia. At the same time, it reveals an underlying reality that policymakers must urgently address: when it comes to the basic rights and needs of LGBTQI individuals and communities, the current system of international protection is badly failing, particularly (but not only) in camps, where the plight of trans people in particular can be desperate and isolating.

### **Speaker Bio**

B Camminga (they/them) is a fellow at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Berlin, and a research associate at the African Centre for Migration & Society, Wits University. They work on issues relating to gender identity and expression on the African continent with a focus on transgender migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Their first monograph, [Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa](#), received the 2019 Sylvia Rivera Award in Transgender Studies (with Aren

Azuira) and honourable mention in the Ruth Benedict Prize for Queer Anthropology. They are a co-convenor of the African LGBTQI+ Migration Research Network ([ALMN](#)), which aims to advance scholarship on all facets of LGBTQI+ migration on, from, and to the African continent by bringing together scholars, researchers, practitioners, and activists to promote knowledge exchange and support evidence-based policy responses.

### **Further Reading**

B Camminga with John Marnell (2022) [Queer and Trans African Mobilities: Migration, Diaspora, and Asylum](#)

& [Categories and Queues: The Structural Realities of Gender and the South African Asylum System](#)

[Global Roundtable on Protection and Solutions for LGBTQI+ People in Forced Displacement – Summary Conclusions](#) (2021)

### **7. EU- Africa Cooperation’ and its Discontents, with Amanda Bisong**

How are policies governing human movement between Europe and Africa formulated?

Political elites in both continents like to refer to migration diplomacy involving the EU and African countries as ‘cooperation’ based on partnerships between equals. Critics refer to it as ‘externalization’ - a process of domination in which Europe’s migration controls (and priorities) are foisted upon the Global South.

In this episode, Amanda Bisong of the European Centre for Development Policy Management considers both sides of this argument. Tracing the contemporary history of EU-Africa ‘cooperation’ in the field of migration to the establishment of the Schengen Area, she maps its drivers, dynamics and consequences for Africa – intended and unintended.

Drawing upon extensive research and close observation of EU policy in West Africa in particular, Bisong analyzes the direction of migration diplomacy since the so-called migration ‘crisis’ of 2015. Reflecting on contradictions and imbalances, she offers policymakers in Europe and Africa recommendations and considers future prospects for a change in direction.

### **Speaker Bio**

Amanda Bisong is a Policy officer in the AU – EU relations and migration and mobility workstreams of ECDPM, Maastricht, The Netherlands. She has a background in Law and Master degrees in International Law and Economics and International Trade Policy and Trade Law. Her focus research areas are on migration agreements, labour migration, exploring the linkages

between trade and migration in Africa, migration governance and the interplay between regional and national commitments.

**Further Reading:**

Franziska Zanker, “Managing or restricting movement? Diverging approaches of African and European migration governance” (2019) *Comparative Migration Studies* 7 (17)

**8. The Black Mediterranean, with Professor Camilla Hawthorne**

In recent years, thousands of migrants seeking to reach Europe have drowned in the Mediterranean. Mediatized images of travelers crammed into vessels have become all-too familiar. Horrific coverage of these boats capsizing has constructed a morbid notion of the Mediterranean as a space of death and desperation for African migrants.

This idea contains some truth (thanks to restrictive migration policies). But it renders the experiences of African migrants and their offspring in Italy and neighboring countries invisible, perpetuating the racial myth of Europe as a white continent in which the presence of Black populations is disavowed.

In this episode, Professor Camilla Hawthorne discusses her research into the lives of second-generation Italian-born immigrants of African descent, barred from citizenship by exclusionary laws demarcating them as foreign. Drawing inspiration from the vibrant mobilization of these communities, Hawthorne chronicles their struggle for inclusion and citizenship in the face of racism and xenophobia. In the process, the racial exclusivity of Italian citizenship laws are exposed – laws underpinned by absolutist notions of belonging that drive Italy’s increasingly militarised project of border fortification, and the externalisation of immigration control to the African continent itself.

Surveying political discourse on European ‘civilization’ and its African Others since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Professor Hawthorne contextualises today’s evolution of the EU into a racialised continental fortress in history. Italy’s formation as a perceived border between Europe and Africa, she explains, dates back millennia to antiquity, but also includes little-known histories of colonial expansion into the Horn of Africa - a history of connections that provides much-needed perspective on the resurgence of the contemporary Far Right under PM Giorgia Meloni’s Brothers of Italy Party in October 2022, around the time this podcast was recorded.

**Speaker Bio**

Camilla Hawthorne is Associate Professor of Sociology and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her work focuses on Black geographies and the racial politics of migration and citizenship. She is a co-editor of *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders, and Citizenship*, published by Palgrave Macmillan 2021 and author of *Contesting Race*

and Citizenship: Youth Politics in the Black Mediterranean, published by Cornell University Press in 2022.

### **Further Reading**

Camilla Hawthorne (2022) "Black Mediterranean geographies: translation and the mattering of Black Life in Italy" ORCID Icon Pages 484-507

& Contesting Race and Citizenship: Youth Politics in the Black Mediterranean (Cornell University Press, 2022)

The Black Mediterranean Collective (2021) "The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship" Palgrave, Macmillan

Paul Gilroy (1993) The Black Atlantic, Harvard University Press