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Time, Migration and Forced Immobility: Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Morocco

Inka Stock

Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2019, pp. 192.

Time, Migration and Forced Immobility is an important contribution to research on migration politics. Based on over ten years of ethnographic field research in Morocco, Inka Stock's insightful book explores the existential impacts of European migration-control policies—and the responses of the Moroccan government to them—on migrants “stuck” or trapped in Morocco. The book argues that an understanding of these experiences necessitates a shift from the notion of “transit migration”—which has captivated policy-makers in recent years—towards the concept of “forced immobility.”

The book is organized thematically across seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, and chapter 2 provides an overview of European migration policy and the ways in which it has influenced the Moroccan government's approach to irregularized migrants. Chapters 3–6 draw on interviews and observations carried out with 40 sub-Saharan African migrants between 2007 and 2017. Chapter 3 focuses on individuals' motivations for migration, while chapter 4 analyzes the policy environment in Morocco that produces the rightlessness they experience. Chapter 5 explores how rightlessness and forced immobility affect migrants' experiences of time and chapter 6 examines the contradictions or ambivalences of migrant social relations while forcibly immobilized in Morocco. The final chapter focuses on the strategies employed by the migrants when trying to leave Morocco and it examines how these intersect with a “politics” of waiting.

One of Stock's primary goals is to “make visible” the experiences and stories of the migrants she has come to know and the “existential consequences of forced immobility” on their lives (3). This is one of the book's greatest successes, largely due to the ethnographic work. The reader “meets” a number of migrants in chapters 3–6 and often encounters the same individuals several times, coming to “know” or understand their experience—as it relates to rightlessness, temporality, waiting, and their changing understandings of themselves as people. Stock shows how the everyday experiences of migrants in Morocco reveal the nature and functioning of migration control systems, mapping the regional and domestic implementation of regulatory frameworks in addition to the global migration management system with which many readers will already be familiar. Paying attention to the experiences of Jean, Pierre, Silvester, Angelique (all pseudonyms), and others reveals how “migrants slip in and out of

different migratory categories during their trajectories and according to the places they are travelling to” (155); how state authorities are often deeply implicated in trafficking and the circulation of forged documents, making it difficult for many to comprehend or navigate murky legal environments (52); how one's ability to keep moving depends on the development of local ties (110); and how these possibilities are structured by political, economic, and social contexts, which are differentially experienced according to gender, class, or country of origin. In personalizing what often appears, in migration scholarship, as deeply impersonal, Stock draws attention not only to how such impenetrable structures work but also to the strategies employed by migrants to circumvent them. Bribery, purchasing of identity documents, and reliance on smuggling networks, for example, emerge not only as actions the migrants' deemed necessary in order to facilitate their movement, but also as areas of blurred legality/regularity that are important for understanding how unauthorized migration works. Stock recounts the story of Peter, from Nigeria, who travelled to Niger on his Nigerian passport, for which he had to bribe an official in order to receive it quickly. Once in Niger, he needed to purchase a Malian passport in order to cross the border between Niger and Algeria, as the result of visa restrictions on Nigerian nationals. Since, for Peter, visas and passports are documents acquired through payment/bribery, “the distinction between regular and irregular travel in terms of documents became blurred” (50).

The book's most important contribution is its conceptualization of “forced immobility” as a novel analytical framework for understanding the experiences of irregularized migrants, particularly those trapped in Morocco—unable to continue their migratory journey, often rightless, and unable or unwilling to return “home.” While the concepts of “forced” or “voluntary” migration, and the immobility-of-most versus the hyper-mobility-of-the-few will be familiar to migration scholars, Stock argues that immobility can also be experienced by migrants during their journey: it is not only that migrants can be forced to move but they can likewise be forced to stop moving. Such forced immobility should not be confused with forced settlement, or with lack of migrant agency. Rather, the concept of forced immobility draws attention to the ways in which “migratory projects” (10) can be shaped or curtailed, in different places, and for

different periods, by regulatory frameworks that not only structure migrants' journeys—intersecting with their class, gender, and nationality—but also have an impact on their ability to live *meaningfully* where they find themselves. The notion of “transit migration,” Stock argues, has proven to be a particularly useful policy tool for the Moroccan government to justify excluding migrants from settlement, citizenship, and rights (11). If we approach such migrants not as people in transit—with the linear and compressed temporality that this implies—but as forcibly immobilized—with the experience of existing “out of time”—Moroccan and European policies toward migrants might begin to look different and could allow us to ask important questions about challenges that migrants might face. Here Stock's ethnographic fieldwork and conceptual innovation combine to produce a compelling account of migration under contemporary political, social, and economic conditions.

One of the book's weaknesses rests in what Stock herself acknowledges: the comparatively limited analysis of migrant

community experiences in Morocco. Largely as the result of methodological constraints, the reader is given only a glimpse of the complex social relations that migrants build with each other. Through a brief exploration of the activities of a Pentecostal Nigerian church community, and the migrant “governments” of the Cameroonian, Congolese, and Ivory Coast communities, Stock highlights the dialectical nature of these relationships—as sites for recovering identity and social significance on the one hand, but creating dependency and the potential for exploitation on the other hand (108). A fuller account of how forcibly immobilized migrants interact with, support, and exploit each other would contribute to a more well-rounded narrative analysis of the existential experience of forced immobility.

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