

Editor's note

by Larbi Touaf

In the summer of 2019, The Identity and Difference Research Group hosted the Afro-Mediterranean Forum for Migration Studies with the objective of bringing together academics and civil society actors around the issue of migration in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean and beyond. It was an invitation to reflect and debate on the epistemological and methodological issues and approaches relating to the changes in the phenomenon of migration, particularly the diversification of movements, itineraries and profiles.

At a time when exchanges between countries are excessively mercantile and security-oriented, the globalization of the labor market, the environmental crisis, the political and social instability of entire regions are constantly being reshaped and deformed by mass human mobility. Consequently, the single most determining character of migration is shiftiness. With the help of new technology and social networks, motivations, objectives, routes, demographics are constantly changing. On the other hand, despite multiple constraints exercised by governments, new forms of solidarity and humanitarian support are emerging thanks to the work of civil society organizations. A whole economy is also emerging around care and assistance to refugees and migrants where funds are made available to major international NGOs and their local branches or partners. Employment and career prospects in this branch of the CARE Economy appeal to hundreds of young people. On the negative side however, populism is feeding on the issue of migration to advance its political agenda in receiving western countries that continue to benefit from the cheap labor and qualified human resources that migration provides.

Therefore, we witness today that worldwide, new paradigms of human mobility concomitant with new systems of support and assistance are being set up, yet only geopolitical issues, particularly those relating to borders, are the focus of media attention and political debates.

Building on this, this issue of *Ikhtilaf* presents a diversity of perspectives to rethink the migration and its connection to the inequalities and the disparities, spatial or otherwise, with a focus on migrants' lives as well as the socio-cultural and the sociopolitical dynamics in migration spaces . Indeed, transnational circulations and mobility in the context of multiple disparities give rise to fragile and contingent forms of local cosmopolitanism where multiple affiliations and multiple ascendancies generate diverse forms of tensions, but also solidarities. Migration as a process of humanizing global mobility is a form of bottom-up globalization. It is a direct effect of the economic and financial globalization, which is a top-down process that generates a globalized stratification based on unequal distribution of resources.

In fact, the current context of spatial hierarchies, ethnicization of labor markets and polycentric economies, produces a "cosmopolitization" and an individuation of

migrants' histories and itineraries. These are set in emergent tense transnational spaces and in migratory fields built from solidarity, reciprocity, and where migrants circulate, as individual and collective actors, producers of mobility skills.¹

Therefore, the objective of this issue is to focus on individual cases of migration and to look at the impact on different migration spaces and the dynamics within communities. The narratives produced in and on those contexts are diversely examined in attempts to shed light on the living experiences of individuals and communities, and to counter-balance the media concentration on massive border-crossing, security issues, and populist agendas related to these.

An abundant literature illustrates the renewal of interest in migration issues. Scholarship abounds on immigration policies, integration, transnationalism, return migration as well as the transformations that migration produces in the countries of departure and arrival. Underpinning diverse studies are the interactions between push and pull factors, migration profiles, trajectories, and settlement. In addition, the increasing visibility of second and third generations, and the emergence of ethnic minorities brought issues of multiculturalism to the debate, and inscribed them on the social and political agendas in many a migration space. Such complexities are redefining the processes, and even the models of integration. But one thing needs to be constantly kept in mind, and that is that the developments that modern migration has registered are firmly rooted in inherited histories and realities resulting from the dislocation of imperial/colonial states, and decolonization. Further, these situations of internal diversity occur as the parameters of the Nation-State enter a cycle of redefinition, where the signs of the dilution and the weathering of the ancient model built on homogeneity (race, language, religion, cultural identity) give rise to extremisms and xenophobia.

In this general context of shiftiness, an intense debate is taking place wherein the multiculturalist approach is being both criticized and upheld as a model for the post nation state model of political organization, while the persistence of social, gender and racial inequalities question "equality policies." In addition, the theories of assimilation and integration devised in Europe and in North America have since long been challenged and proven to be oppressive. Consequently, new attempts at intelligibility of the complex phenomenon, and new dynamics of state and societal transformation are underway.

In the academic sphere, the insistence is on the multidimensional character of migration spaces. Notions and concepts such as "migratory spaces," "migratory fields," "migratory territories," "territories of mobility," "transnational spaces" ...etc. attempt to make sense of a diversity of polycentric and hierarchical spaces of plurality and ethnicization of contemporary economies and societies.² This means that current forms

¹ Simon, Gildas, *La planète migratoire dans la mondialisation*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2008.

² Laurence Roulleau-Berger, « Repenser la question migratoire : migrations, inégalités multisituées et individualisation », *SociologieS* [En ligne], Dossiers, Migrations, pluralisation, ethnicisation des sociétés contemporaines, published online 18 October 2011, retrieved 02 May 2021. URL :<http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/3701>

of massive or individual cross border mobility, whether regulated or not, are too complex to be dealt with strictly in terms of security, as is currently the case almost everywhere. In fact, migration transforms socioeconomic spaces into stratified and hierarchical spatialities which are themselves regularly upset. Transnational and reticular networks are formed above Nation-states, thus creating processes of cultural, economic and symbolic conjunction and disjunction. Where individuals are experiencing unavoidable forms of multiple belongings, migrants develop narratives that are increasingly punctuated with bifurcation points and individualized pathways of mobility and settlement. These narratives of resilience and resistance testify to the fact that social and cultural identities are in constant re-composition. They also reflect a process of building a globalized social stratification in which a new upper class and an international underclass appear.³

In taking up the situations in these different spaces, the articles that compose this dual issue of *Ikhtilaf* seek to address the questions related to migration with a focus on individual spaces and on individual accounts of what it means to live in circumstances determined by shiftiness both in terms of socio-political and physical spaces that migration spatialities seem to be today. Focusing on the African experience, the contributions describe in an analytical and critical spirit diverse situations where the effects of migration circumscribe the horizon of possibilities for individuals and groups from North-East Cameroun to West and Northern Africa.

³ Laurence Roulleau-Berger, *Migrer au Féminin*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010.