

extremely confining conditions. While the book provides a very sound and interesting account, it is thus difficult to see to what extent it moves beyond this existing literature. In particular, there would have been potential for the author to take her empirical findings further theoretically, for example by elaborating more on the idea of refugees being ‘in perpetual passage’. There have been many attempts to theorize this conception, both in relation to belonging and in terms of rights and duties. The literature on liminality, uncertainty and resilience, but also the citizenship literature that Abdi touches on, provides interesting debates that Abdi could have used to position herself and her empirical findings more strongly. Even so, *Evasive Jannah* remains a powerful ethnography that sheds great light on the challenges, perspectives and strategies of Somalis in different national contexts.

Cindy Horst

Peace Research Institute Oslo

[cindy@prio.org](mailto:cindy@prio.org)

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Maybritt Jill Alpes, *Brokering High-risk Migration and Illegality in West Africa: abroad at any cost*. Abingdon and New York NY: Routledge (hb £110 – 978 1 4724 4111 9). 2017, 234 pp.

Studies on African overseas migration usually come in two flavours: they construe migrants either as opportunity-seeking adventurers or as victims of globalization. Jill Alpes’ book on Cameroonian overseas migrants stands out as a welcome alternative as it focuses on the power of the social. She does so by adopting an extended case-study approach: the book revolves around insightful portrayals of biographic narratives and detailed descriptions of the social practices of only a handful of individuals – the migration brokers James and Walther; aspiring migrants Claire, Josephine, Pamela and Victorine; and the author’s research assistant, Delphine. Thus, the book is at odds with the academic practice that is increasingly becoming fashionable (no doubt following from shrinking research funding): to make generalizing statements based on apt illustrations. The book instead delves deeply into the layered, often contradictory, motivations as well as the social forces driving ordinary Cameroonians to venture into overseas travel, subtly linking individual issues of *bushfalling* (the local vernacular for overseas migration) to collective problems of involuntary immobility.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1 and 2) deals with the fascinating world of migration brokers. Far from being the rogue, ruthless dealers in human flesh prevalent in the trafficking discourse of (Western) migration policymakers, Alpes situates these key actors in the social practice of everyday life. Migration brokers cultivate relations with aspiring migrants, and they are usually valued by them. Alpes thus sheds light on a challenging riddle: migration brokers are not particularly successful (the book is replete with stories of unsuccessful migrants) yet their position remains surprisingly unchallenged. Aspiring migrants distinguish sharply between different social categories: *feymen* (fraudsters), *dokimen* (hustlers of administrative documents) and *big men* (migration brokers proper). So long as an intermediary succeeds in portraying a genuine sense of sincerity, he (few are women) generally does not risk loss of social prestige. Impression management appears key: esteemed brokers emanate a sense of being connected to state structures, and they are able to suggest a vast network of overseas contacts – even though few of them are actual globetrotters.

In the second part (Chapters 3–5), the book looks more closely at visa practices, thus bringing state structures sharply into focus – foreign embassies and the Cameroonian Ministry of Interior in particular. Alpes does this by unpacking two arrangements closely related to *bushfalling*: marriage and deportation. In regard to marriage, to avoid challenging visa procedures, aspiring Cameroonian women are inclined to marry overseas husbands, of African origin but also Westerners. This trend is analysed in the context of the recent spike in bridewealth prices, a consequence of Cameroon's protracted and deep economic crisis, upsetting earlier expectations of marital conviviality. It fosters in particular a utilitarian orientation towards marriage that defies romantic relationship ideals underpinning European (immigration) visa laws. A self-denying prophecy results: European visa officials expect Cameroonian women to engage in contract marriages, and they scrutinize their dossier with redoubled energy to find evidence that can compromise their application.

*Bushfalling* migrants who have failed to secure residence permits risk deportation, and forced returns are therefore common. Significantly, Alpes found that, for women who return involuntarily, deportation is not explained locally as the logical consequence of an infraction of strict visa laws but as a failure to secure an overseas marriage. Thus, deported migrants, once they have returned, lose face not because they have violated some legal principle, but because their relatives and friends view them as incomplete persons: marriageable yet single. It is precisely this stifling social pressure that aspiring *bushfalling* women seek to escape, and it motivates them, against many odds and often at great financial cost, to contact a migration broker and try their luck once again. Hence, the aspiration to out-migrate is essentially construed as the outcome of social processes. With this insightful observation, Alpes slashes popular yet intellectually impotent interpretations that view overseas migration from Africa as the outcome of individual calculation and utility maximization (discussed in Chapter 5).

Let me add a critical note. The book repeatedly highlights the limitations of conventional, state-centred binaries that view migration in legalistic terms such as 'formal'/'informal', 'legal'/'illegal', and 'forced'/'voluntary'. Although this critique follows logically from the emic perspective that the book advocates with much gusto – for it views the state as an equal agent among others in structuring migration practices, kinship expectations in particular – eventually this message becomes repetitive, verging on the partisan, thus attenuating the punch offered by the insightful portrayal of the various Cameroonian aspiring migrants peopling its pages. Readers versed in anthropological discourse may not be entirely surprised that Eurozone migration cannot be controlled with a stroke of the pen. Yet the situation may be different for policymakers, for whom the book offers a powerful message: look beyond the rational choice and/or victimization models of migration that underpin migration policies. I therefore end this review by expressing hope that this excellent book, in addition to stimulating academic reflection, finds its way onto policymakers' bedside tables.

Joost Beuving

Radboud University Nijmegen

[joostbeuving@gmail.com](mailto:joostbeuving@gmail.com)

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