

Book review: *African Migration to Thailand: Race, Mobility, and Integration*

by *Elżbieta M. Goździak and Supang Chantavanich*
Routledge, London
2023
144 Pages
ISBN 9781032261102
Review DOI [10.1108/SEAMJ-05-2025-091](https://doi.org/10.1108/SEAMJ-05-2025-091)

Introduction

Elżbieta M. Goździak and Supang Chantavanich's *African Migration to Thailand: Race, Mobility, and Integration* (Routledge, 2023) provides a critical and timely examination of the migration experiences of African communities in Thailand. The book situates itself at the intersection of migration, race and policy studies, filling a significant gap in the literature on South–South migration. Through a collection of empirical studies, the editors and contributors explore African migrants' legal, economic and social integration challenges in Thailand, while situating their findings within broader theoretical frameworks of precarity, visibility/invisibility and othering. The book also contributes to policy discussions on migration governance and social inclusion in Southeast Asia.

Overview of the book

The volume is divided into nine chapters, beginning with an introduction to African migration to Thailand and ending with a forward-looking discussion on policy implications and areas for future research. The book's interdisciplinary approach combines ethnographic fieldwork, policy analysis and theoretical insights, making it a comprehensive resource for migration scholars, policymakers and students.

The first two chapters, written by the editors, set the conceptual framework and introduced the themes of race, mobility and integration. They outline how Thailand, a regional migration hub, has become an increasingly important yet under-researched destination for African migrants. The authors emphasize that while the Thai government seeks to attract long-term skilled migrants and high-net-worth individuals, African migrants, often working in small-scale entrepreneurship, sports and education, face significant barriers to legal residency and social inclusion.

Subsequent chapters focus on specific migrant groups, such as Somali asylum seekers in Bangkok (Fatma Issa and George Kiarie), Nigerian traders (Anthony Unor and Naruemon Thabchumpon), African gemstone merchants in Chanthaburi (Premjai Vungsiriphisal) and African footballers seeking opportunities in Thailand (Gabriela Romero and Nithis Thammasaengadipha). These chapters provide rich ethnographic accounts of migrants'



experiences, highlighting themes of legal precarity, economic survival and racialized discrimination.

Theoretical contributions

One of the key contributions is its engagement with theoretical debates on race and migration in non-Western contexts. The authors draw on the concept of *in/visibility* to describe the paradoxical position of African migrants in Thailand: they are hyper-visible in public spaces due to racial difference yet politically and socially invisible in Thai migration governance frameworks. The book also employs the concept of *othering* to explain how negative media portrayals and public perceptions shape discrimination against African migrants.

Another important theoretical intervention is the discussion of *precarity*. Several chapters illustrate how African migrants experience multiple layers of insecurity—not only economic instability but also legal and social vulnerabilities. The chapters on Somali asylum seekers, for example, highlight the lack of formal refugee protection in Thailand, leaving many in a state of legal limbo.

Empirical insights and methodology

The book is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2018 and 2020, supplemented by policy analysis and interviews with African migrants and Thai policymakers. The authors' methodological approach—combining participant observation, interviews, and secondary data analysis—ensures a nuanced and contextually rich discussion of migration dynamics.

A notable strength of the book is its inclusion of African researchers as contributors. This perspective enhances the authenticity of the narratives and provides insider insights into the African migrant experience. The methodological rigor and empirical depth make the book a valuable resource for those interested in migration studies, race relations and Southeast Asian society.

Policy implications

The findings have significant implications for migration governance in Thailand and beyond. The authors argue that Thailand's migration policies remain largely exclusionary toward African migrants, often driven by racialized stereotypes and security concerns. They call for more inclusive policies that recognize the economic and cultural contributions of African migrants and provide legal pathways for integration.

The book also raises broader questions about migration governance in the Global South. While much migration research focuses on movements from the Global South to the Global North, this volume underscores the need for more scholarship on South-South migration and the unique challenges it presents.

Critique and areas for further research

While *African Migration to Thailand* is a groundbreaking contribution, there are areas that could be expanded in future research. First, the book primarily focuses on African men's migration experiences, with limited discussion of African women's roles and challenges in Thailand. A gendered analysis of African migration, including experiences of African women in domestic work, entrepreneurship or intermarriage, would provide a more holistic understanding of integration challenges.

Second, while the book discusses the concept of *precarity*, a more in-depth engagement with comparative cases of African migration to other Asian countries, such as China or Malaysia, could enrich the analysis. Future research could explore how different Asian states construct African migrants in legal and social frameworks.

Finally, given the evolving nature of migration policies, an updated analysis of post-pandemic migration governance in Thailand and its impact on African migrants would be a valuable addition to the field.

Overall, *African Migration to Thailand: Race, Mobility, and Integration* is an essential contribution to the study of migration in Southeast Asia. Its empirical richness, theoretical depth and policy relevance make it a must-read for scholars of migration, race studies and Asian studies. The book not only sheds light on an under-explored migration corridor but also challenges dominant narratives about African migration, urging policymakers and scholars to rethink migration governance in the Global South.

For researchers and students interested in migration, racialization and policy studies, this volume serves as a crucial resource that bridges African and Asian migration studies. Its interdisciplinary and intersectional approach makes it a significant addition to the growing literature on migration and mobility in non-Western contexts.

AKM Ahsan Ullah
FASS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei Darussalam