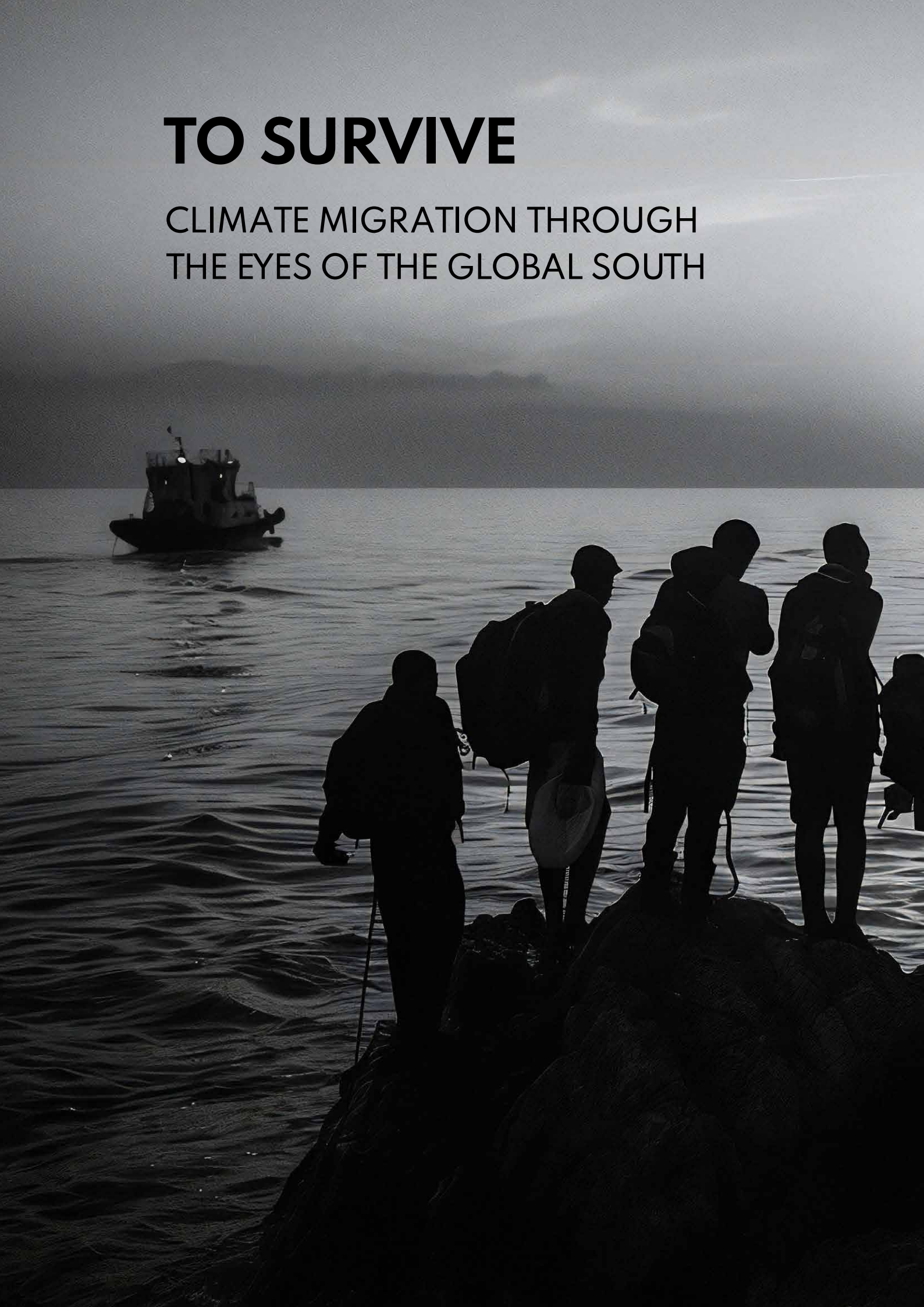


TO SURVIVE


CLIMATE MIGRATION THROUGH
THE EYES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH



Wanderlust is part of human history. *Homo sapiens* owe it their greatest triumph. After leaving the cradle of humankind in Africa, we have reached every other continent and even set foot on the Moon. In the 21st century, however, we are still preoccupied with matters here on Earth, where increasing climate change is forcing many people to leave their homes. How we approach the issue of climate migration today will determine what kind of world we will live in tomorrow.



Anthropogenic climate change, caused primarily by the countries of the so-called Global North, hits the Global South the hardest. Still, we don't really notice the voice of the latter group as much, even though it is important for us to lend them an ear as they can offer us a completely different, yet valuable perspective on many issues. In their research, Ewa Macura-Nnamdi, PhD, Associate Professor – an English studies expert – and Magdalena Malinowska, PhD – a Romance studies expert – from the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Silesia in Katowice, examine the perspectives of this often overlooked part of the world's population. The researchers are combing through English and French-language works to find out how authors living primarily in Africa and the French Antilles deal with the consequences of climate change and environmental pollution. It is mainly a study of literature but also includes film and other art forms.

 Weronika Cygan-Adamczyk

Will Europe have to build a wall around itself to face the incoming flood of immigrants? | Photo: AI



DISPLACEMENT RATHER THAN MIGRATION

Ewa Macura-Nnamdi notes that when talking about population movements caused by climate change, instead of migration, it is better to refer to the much more appropriate and significantly broader concept of displacement. The former also carries a certain baggage, often negative, especially when it comes to climate or economic migration. Western (American and European) cultural works play a significant role in perpetuating this impression.

'They often depict climate refugees as wild hordes of people, mostly flooding into Europe, attempting to escape from endangered parts of the world that are usually neither geographically defined nor defined in any other way. These are often sheer masses of people about whom we know absolutely nothing. They are supposed to represent danger and threat. Europe is, therefore, something of a citadel that needs to be walled off and protected against the advancing masses', says the English studies expert, and points to the British writer John Lancaster's book *The*

Wall (2019) whose titular wall protects England from foreigners and Alfonso Cuarón's film *Children of Men* (2006) based on the book by the same name by P.D. James (1992), where the English also have to protect themselves from a deluge of refugees attempting to enter their country.

In the context of climate change, the term displacement can refer not only to horizontal migration to distant or near places but also to vertical migration to higher terrain or below ground. More often, it also takes into account smaller-scale relocation, which can involve moving to a different place within the same country or region.

One of the more imaginative visions of such climate-change-driven relocations is presented in the short film *Pumzi* (2009) by Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu. The plot takes place in the distant future when the world is struggling for water after the third world war, and the inhabitants of the eastern regions of the continent decide to move underground.

Researchers from the University of Silesia also point out that the theme of adaptation and determination to survive in new circumstances is prevalent in the works of artists from the Global South.

'It is more about adaptation than escape, and if anyone does escape, it is not to a place thousands of kilometres away but to neighbouring areas', explains Ewa Macura-Nnamdi.

In fact, there are already some significant global displacements taking place right now. In the next few years, Indonesia intends to move its capital from Jakarta, which is at risk of flooding, to Nusantara. Sinking land – a result of rising sea levels due to global warming – is an increasingly urgent threat to many island nations, especially in the Pacific. Their citizens will have to move somewhere – will they have to rely on being granted asylum by other countries?

AFRICANFUTURISM AS AN ANSWER TO AFROFUTURISM



Our perspective on the global South, a region less resilient to climate change, is gradually shifting, but it's still a slow process. Even if we are introduced to these countries through popular films or books, we still risk adopting an American- or European-centric view. Let's take a look at the Marvel film *Black Panther* (2018), which takes place in Africa, but the highly developed country of Wakanda that we visit does not actually exist. Also, the story does not particularly focus on the continent itself or the connections between the nations there. The fact that the film was made in the US means that even though it features African citizens, it is not a truly African perspective.

Magdalena Malinowska emphasises that it is easy to distinguish between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism on this basis. In the case of Afrofuturism, we are talking about a trend that grew

out of American soil and has close ties to African-American culture. However, the name can create the misleading notion that it refers to the experiences of Africans, hence why Nnedi Okorafor (one of the most renowned authors of this genre) created the term Africanfuturism, deliberately written as a compound word. Contributors to this genre finally take into account the African context and the relations between the countries in the African continent. However, it is still possible to find common elements linking both perspectives.

While the future in Western science fiction often reproduces existing power relations, the authors of the Global South aim to shift the focus in the world of future global geopolitics. There is a palpable sense of optimism, a certain amount of hope that a better future, free from inequality, is possible and that a way out of the ecological crisis can be found', explains Magdalena Malinowska.

This perseverance, as expressed by the communities portrayed by said artists, does not always have to concern humans as such. In the novel *Semences*, the last volume in the climate trilogy by French writer Jean-Marc Ligny, after a period of human domination, with humans having been reduced to micro-societies, the planet is ruled by ants, which have evolved to become intelligent and have gained a significant advantage over the last representatives of *Homo sapiens*.

'If humanity were to become extinct, it would not necessarily spell the end of the natural environment. By adapting to these changes, the Earth could create space for something completely new to emerge', adds the Romance studies expert.

Although the media tend to focus on animal and plant species that are dying out, environmentalists and biologists also report on organisms that are still winning the race to adapt to climate change and are even expanding their habitats (e.g. the invasive jellyfish *Periphylla periphylla* off the coast of Norway).

Migrations can therefore involve not only a physical change of location but also the passage of time – transformations that occur not only over a number of years but over entire eras. Connections between them are sometimes shown in a surprising way, such as in the form of an unusual union of a pro-ecological message with the use of long-abandoned rubbish. This is how photographer Fabrice Monteiro (born in Belgium as a descendant of Brazilian slaves, currently living and working in the capital of Senegal, Dakar) decided to show the scale of harm done by environmental pollution. He did so by presenting waste in an aesthetic and almost hypnotising way. His photo series with the suggestive title *The Prophecy* shows otherworldly, sometimes monumental and sometimes terrifying figures made from a combination of waste and elements of the natural environment.

We do not know what our planet will look like in a few years, let alone a few centuries. However, we should make an effort to leave it better off than it is now. It can only be done if we also try to better understand the circumstances of other communities. Let's begin by looking at the world through their eyes, reading their literature, and experiencing their art.

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