

Migration in movies. An innovative database

Laura Terzera, Giulia Rivellini | July 14, 2015



1. EMFD: European Migratory Film Database. Construction, Description and Reliability

The aim of our work is to produce a database and to investigate in what way the phenomenon of migration has been represented in movies. We are interested in studying what messages (migratory themes, places, subjects involved) and what form of cinematographic language (genre) are mainly used and what aspects of migration are most represented in film production.

The European Migratory Films Database (EMFD) contains films, with the exception of certain genres (fantasy, cartoons, horror, science fiction, documentaries) produced between 1991 and 2010, in at least one European country, on migratory themes.

We drew information from several sources: the IMDB database; the filmography produced by the Fondazione ISMU, the filmography published by Berghahn and Sternberg (2010) and two important cinema guides (Mereghetti 2010; Morandini et al. 2010).

We selected the movies into our database by querying our main source ([the IMDB - International Movie Database](#)) with a few keywords, notably: immigrant, immigration, emigrant, emigration, migrant, migration, prejudice, racial prejudice, cultural clash, refugee,

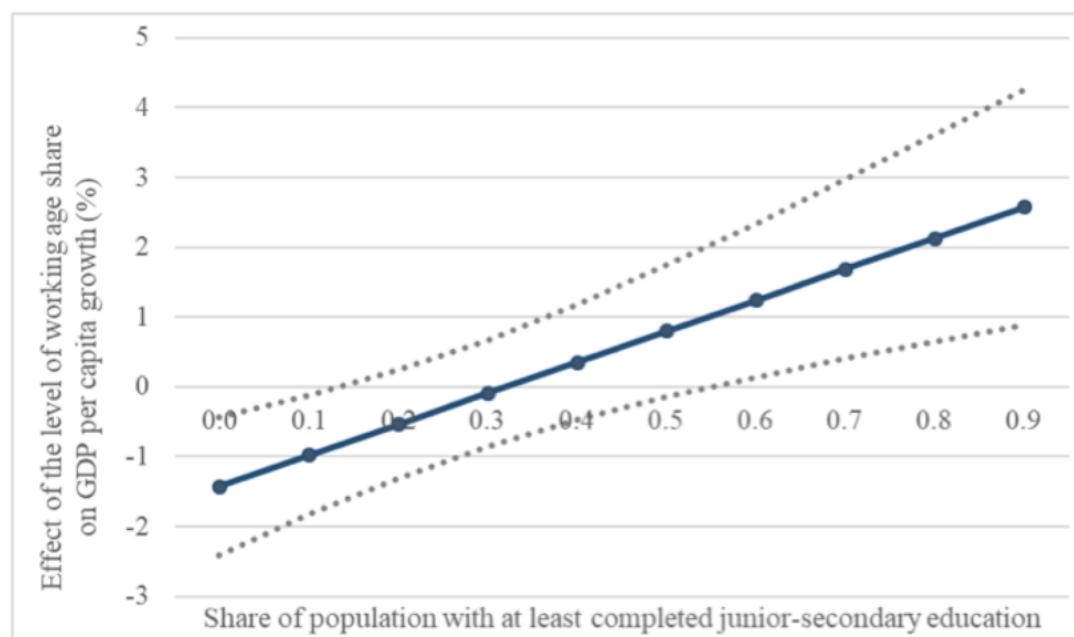
interracial, multicultural, racism. We had actually started with a shorter list, but it kept growing, since we included new terms as we found them in the IMDB review of each of the movies, which can be assimilated to a snowball sampling procedure.

For each film, from the plot and the information provided in the IMDB database, we identified both qualitative and/or quantitative variables: the year and the countries of production, the original language, the length, the genre, and whether the film was taken from a book or based on a true story. We then added information about the gender and nationality of the filmmaker and any participation in a festival or cinema competition. From the plot the following main variables were then identified: country in which the film was set; direction of the migratory flow (countries of origin and destination); period of reference of the story (starting and ending decade); typology of the main character(s) of the movie (single, family, relatives, friends, couple, community, acquaintances); gender and age of the protagonist (child, adolescent, young, adult, elderly); cause of migration.

The EMFD consists of 256 films: it is in Excel format and is available for research (on request to the authors).

2. Main Results

Figure 1. Effect of the share of population in working ages (20-64) on per capita GDP growth by educational level.



How to read the graph: Our empirical assessment for 165 countries over the period 1980-2015 shows that if less than 30 percent of the adult population have completed junior secondary education the effect of a relatively larger share of working-age population on economic growth is negative and only turns positive at higher levels of education.

Source: Lutz et al. (2019)

Since the first 5-years of our time window (1991-95), the total film production has been growing, with a slowdown in the final period (Figure 1). This trend has been determined largely by the production in Western and, less so, in Northern Europe, which are areas with a “mature” migratory history (Bonifazi et al. 2008).

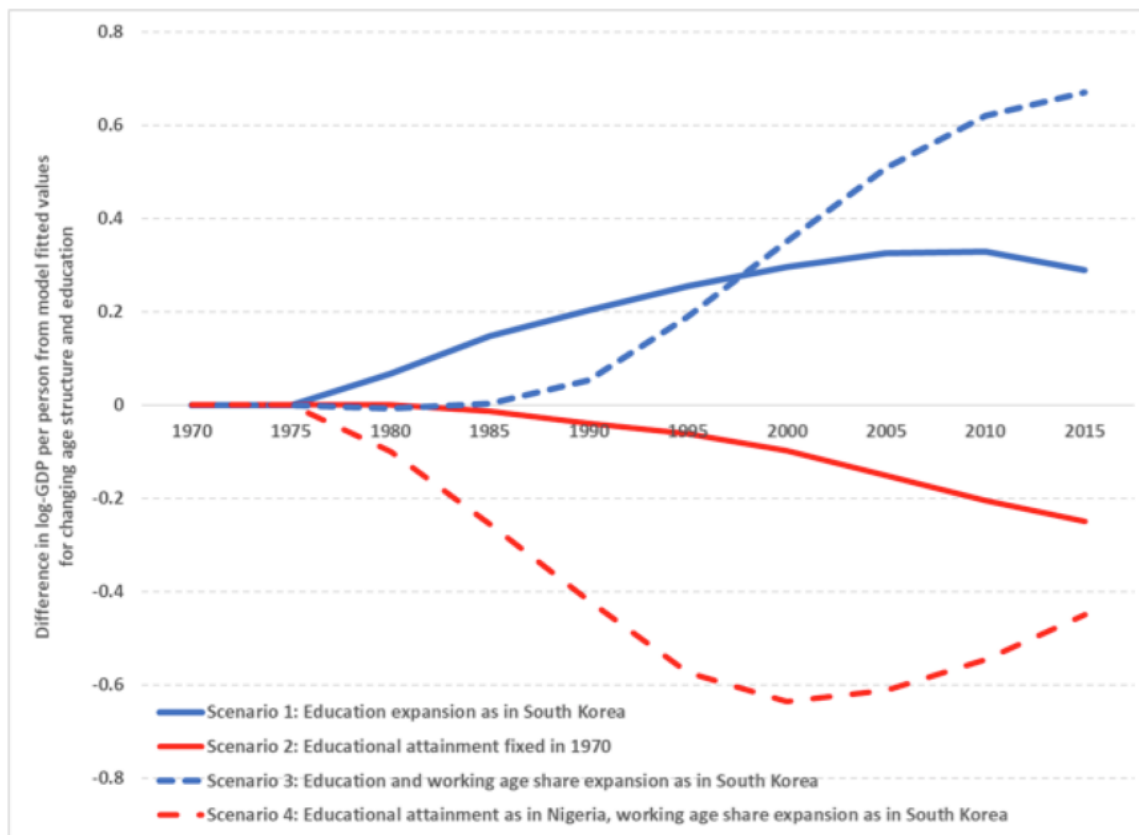
Table 1. Selected indicators in Nigeria and the Republic of Korea, 1970 and 2015

	Share of population of working age		Share with at least junior secondary education		Real per capita GDP (2011 USD)	
	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Rep. Korea</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Rep. Korea</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Rep. Korea</i>
1970	55%	55%	4%	18%	2,393	2,544
2015	53%	73%	28%	76%	5,568	34,082

Notes. In 1970, South Korea and Nigeria had exactly the same proportion of the population in working age. By 2015, that of Korea had increased to 73%, and its GDP had increased by a factor of over 13. GDP only doubled in Nigeria over the same period. As the analysis shows, education gains were the main driver of Korea's rapid income growth.

Focusing on the characteristics of the movies (Table 1) the most used genre is drama, followed by comedy. Only in a minority of cases (15%) is the film taken from books, narratives or true stories. A strong and obvious connection between the country of location and the country of production appears (84%), but the films for which we observed a coincidence between the country of origin of the filmmaker (or country of origin of the migration) and the country of production are much less frequent (30% in the first case and 34% in the second).

Figure 2. Real per capita GDP: simulations for Nigeria 1970-2015 (deviation from actual path in four scenarios)



The zero line represents the observed trajectory of per capita GDP in Nigeria; the other lines show possible the log-deviations from this in four scenarios, where elements of the South Korean experience are inserted into the Nigerian reality.

Source: Lutz et al. (2019)

Table 2 shows the distribution of some noteworthy variables related to the plot. Single and young people are more often described; the lead role is generally performed by a man and the countries of origin are indeed the countries from where most immigrants in Europe come. Indeed, the films represent both migrations within and from outside Europe, and some may appear as countries of both as origin and destination (e.g. Italy). The stories take place mainly taken in periods that coincide, or at least partly overlap, with the twenty years considered in the EMFD.

References

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