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AFRICAN MIGRATIONS: CONTINUITIES, DISCONTINUITIES
AND RECENT TRANSFORMATIONS

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Introduction

Africa is often portrayed in both contemporary and historical accounts as a continent of people on the move (de Bruijn et al. 2001, IOM 2005). Great migrations figure in the myths of origins for many ethnic groups: for example, the Bantu expansion from central Africa, the 'Hamitic myth' of migration from north to south, and even the Voortrekkers 'Great Trek' in South Africa. While some of these migrations may be little more than hypotheses and lack any historical basis, they all serve an important function in the (mythic) construction of Africa and its people in the modern world (Bilger and Kraler 2005). Today, new 'myths' about African migration are serving to shape contemporary perceptions of Africa. For example, such modern myths suggest that all Africans crossing the Sahara are in transit to Europe or that the trafficking of women and children is the most common form of migration within and from Nigeria.

The chronic lack of data about African migration has helped to perpetuate such myths. The UN Population Division uses census data to estimate the number of international migrants, but across Africa such census data is often of poor quality or lacks any migration questions. As a result, 19 of the 56 countries in Africa have either no data or just one census providing any information on migrant stock from the 1950s (Zlotnik 2003: 3). Moreover, most of the border crossings are over land frontiers that are passed with minimal if any formalities. As a result there is only limited knowledge about the forms and patterns of migration across large parts of Africa.

It is these movements *within* the continent that forms the vast majority of African migration (Sander and Maimbo 2003). Although there is some evidence that migration from Africa to industrialized states is growing, it is important to recall that only a small fraction of international migration originating in Africa results in journeys to Europe, the Gulf, the US and beyond. As we will see, the conventional



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focus on migration *out of* Africa conceals the existence of several migration sub-systems centred on continental migration poles such as Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Gabon and South Africa. Such a poor understanding of the nature and magnitude of intra-African migrations has skewed perceptions of migration within, from and towards the continent and allowed the development of these pervasive migration myths.

The aim of this chapter is to give a more balanced overview of migrations within and beyond the African continent. This is a risky and perhaps pretentious endeavour, given the huge size of the continent and the complexity and diversity of migrations found there. In the space available, we can only highlight some general migration trends and do not claim to offer a complete picture of African migrations. The following sections briefly summarize the evolution of migration patterns in different regions of Africa. Of course, these crude divisions between North, South, East and West are problematic, especially with reference to migration that cuts across such borders. Nevertheless, they will have to serve for the purpose of this broad overview. We conclude by outlining some of the recurring themes that are echoed across the continent and analyse the main research gaps.

North Africa and the Sahara

The pre-colonial population history of North Africa has been characterized by continually shifting patterns of human settlement. Nomadic or semi-nomadic (*transhumance*) groups traveled large distances with their herds between summer and winter pastures. Besides age-old patterns of circular migration, conquest and conflicts between tribal groups over natural resources and the control over trade routes were associated with the regular movement and resettlement of people. Throughout known history, there has been intensive population mobility between both sides of the Sahara through the trans-Saharan (caravan) trade, conquest, pilgrimage, and religious education. The Sahara itself is a huge transition zone, and the diverse ethnic composition of Saharan oases testifies to this long history of population mobility.

In all north-African countries, colonial intrusion occurring as of the mid nineteenth century has triggered processes of urbanization, settlement by *colons* (colonialists) and substantial rural-to-urban migration. However, colonialism was only associated with substantial



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international movement in the 'French' Maghreb. From the second half of the nineteenth century, Tunisian and Moroccan workers moved to 'French' Algeria to work. During the First and Second World Wars, a lack of labor power in France led to the recruitment of Maghrebi factory and mine workers as well as soldiers. After Morocco and Tunisia became independent in 1956 this 'colonial' migration to France largely persisted (de Haas 2007). After independence in 1962, over one million *colons* and *harkis* (Algerians who served with the French army in the war of independence) left Algeria.

Post-colonial labor migration to France was modest compared with the 1963–1972 migration boom. Rapid post-war economic growth in northwest Europe and increasing unskilled labor shortages and labor recruitment by France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands triggered large-scale emigration of "guest workers" from Morocco and Tunisia. While Tunisia and Morocco pursued pro-emigration policies, and Algeria's stance towards emigration to France was more ambivalent, the Egyptian state actively discouraged labor emigration in the 1960s (Choucri 1977, Sell 1988).

The shock of the 1973 Oil Crisis and the ensuing economic recession in Western Europe would dramatically reshape the North African migration landscape. For Maghrebi-European migration, it heralded the end of the 'recruitment phase' and the onset of increasingly restrictive immigration policies pursued by European states. For the Arab oil countries the events of 1973 marked the *beginning* of massive labor recruitment. Coinciding with the implementation of Sadat's *infitah* ('open door') policies, this facilitated large-scale migration of unskilled and skilled laborers from Egypt. Smaller but substantial numbers of migrants came from Sudan, the Maghreb countries and the Horn of Africa. The oil crisis also created the condition for the emergence of a new migration pole *within* North Africa. Rapidly increasing oil revenues and economic growth in oil-rich Libya triggered substantial movement of mostly temporary migrants, mainly from Egypt, but also from Sudan and other Maghreb countries (Hamood 2006).

Economic downturn and mass unemployment in Europe provided the mirror image of the boom of the Arab oil economies. Nevertheless, large number of Maghrebi migrants ended up staying permanently, while subsequent family and irregular migration explain the continuous increase of Maghrebi emigrant populations throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Entzinger 1985, Fargues 2004). Furthermore, after 1990 there has been a striking resumption of labor migration of Maghrebis



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but now also Egyptians to southern Europe. Particularly in Italy and Spain, economic growth has generated increasing demand for flexible and low-skilled labor (Fargues 2004: 1357). An increasing proportion of such independent labor migrants in Europe are women (cf. Salih 2001). In Algeria, the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 led to an increase of refugee and economic migration to an increasingly diverse array of European countries (Collyer 2003). Although many immigrants are irregular, southern European governments have been compelled to grant legal status to large numbers of migrants on several occasions since the late 1980s. Another development has been the increasing migration of higher educated Maghrebis to Canada (Québec) and the US (Fargues 2005).

Meanwhile, in the Gulf, economic stagnation due to falling oil prices from 1983 and increasing reliance on Asian immigrant labor caused a decline in demand for Arab workers (Zohry and Harrell-Bond 2003: 27–31). The 1991 Gulf War led to massive expulsions (Baldwin-Edwards 2005: 28). Nevertheless, African migration to the Gulf has often been more persistent and permanent than the *temporary* migration policies intended. In fact, after the Gulf war, migration rates quickly resumed to pre-War levels (Zohry and Harrell-Bond 2003: 30, 35). Semi-legal migrants enter through intricate systems of visa-trading (IOM 2005: 60), and undocumented labor migrants enter the Gulf through making the *hadj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

Although the advent of colonialism had caused a decline in traditional trans-Saharan mobility, soon after independence the foundations were laid for contemporary trans-Saharan migration. In the 1970s and 1980s, forced and voluntary settlement of nomads and wars in the Sahel zone provoked two types of Saharan mobility. First, (former) nomads and traders, such as the Touareg, started migrating to work at construction sites and the oil fields of southern Algeria and Libya. Second, with recurrent warfare in the entire Sahel zone, thousands of refugees settled in towns and cities in Libya, Algeria, Mauritania, and Egypt (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005).

Libya's pan-African policies of the 1990s would cause a major increase in trans-Saharan migration. Disappointed by the perceived lack of support from fellow Arab countries during the air and arms embargo imposed on Libya by the UN Security Council between 1992 and 2000, Colonel Al-Qadhafi positioned himself as an African leader and started to encourage sub-Saharan Africans to work in Libya in the spirit of pan-African solidarity (Hamood 2006). In the early 1990s,



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most migrants came from Libya's neighbours Sudan, Chad and Niger, which subsequently developed into transit countries for migrants from a much wider array of sub-Saharan countries (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005: 6). In the same period, violence, civil wars and economic decline affecting in several parts of West Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria), Central Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo), East Africa (Sudan) and the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Eritrea) also contributed to increasing trans-Saharan migration (de Haas 2006a).

Since 1995, this mixed group of sub-Saharan asylum seekers and labor migrants have gradually joined Maghrebis who illegally cross the Strait of Gibraltar to Spain or from Tunisia to Italy (Barros et al. 2002, Boubakri 2004: 3). This has been further incited by increasing xenophobia and expulsions in Libya after violent anti-immigrant riots occurred in 2000 (Hamood 2006). Increased border controls have led to a general diversification in attempted crossing points (Boubakri 2004: 5, de Haas 2006a) from the eastern Moroccan coast to Algeria, from Tunisia's coast to Libya, and from the Western Sahara and most recently Mauritania and other West-African countries to the Canary Islands. A substantial proportion of migrants consider North Africa (in particular Libya) as their primary destination, whereas others failing or not venturing to enter Europe prefer to stay in north-Africa as a "second best option" rather than return to their more unstable and substantially poorer origin countries (Barros et al. 2002, Bredeloup and Pliez 2005).

Approximately 4.7 and 2.4 million north African migrants and their descendants were believed to live in Europe and Arab countries, respectively, around 2004 (Fargues 2005). Morocco has the largest officially registered emigrant population of all countries involved with 3.1 million expatriates including second generation descendants, followed by Egypt (2.7 million), Algeria (1.4 million) and Tunisia (840,000). According to various estimates, at least 100,000 sub-Saharan migrants now live in both Mauritania and Algeria, 1 to 1.5 million in Libya, and anywhere between 2.2 and 4 million mainly Sudanese in Egypt. Tunisia and Morocco house smaller but growing sub-Saharan immigrant communities of several tens of thousands (de Haas 2006a).

East Africa and the Horn of Africa

The migration patterns of this region have been dominated by circular movement of various forms for many generations, especially among



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the large numbers of pastoralists. Moving with their livestock to grazing land and forage has involved both seasonal migration within stable patterns, and population drift as the orbit of people's migrations shifts with the changing ecological, political and economic environment. Such free ranging movement across the region has come under steady pressure for over a century as the imposition of colonial rule, the creation of borders, sedentary development initiatives and violent conflict have all contributed to constrain the range of pastoralism.

Like the rest of the continent, migration patterns across East Africa and the Horn were profoundly altered by the arrival of European colonialists and their attempts to marshal the labor of Africans to serve their interests. The arrival of European settlers forced Africans off their land, especially in the Kenyan highlands, which were the focus of European settlement in the region. Colonial policies coerced people to engage in the cash economy by undertaking wage labor on settler farms and estates; working on coffee and cocoa plantations in Uganda and providing labor for the mines of the Belgian Congo. Although this represented a major expansion of labor migration, the practice was already established. For example, areas which had been supplying porters for the caravans crossing the region through the nineteenth century, provided the majority of the laborers in the German plantations of East Africa (Ilfie 1995: 207). There has also been a high level of migration from rural areas to the emerging urban centres, such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, but the extent of urbanization in this region has remained lower than other parts of the continent.

During the colonial period, the British allowed labor migrants to move freely between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and this was continued with independence with the establishment of the East African Community (EAC). This freedom of movement ended in 1977 when the EAC collapsed (IOM 2000). The EAC was revived in 1999 with a treaty which committed member states to facilitate the freedom of movement for their citizens within the community. The creation of the East African Passport was one of its first concrete steps.

The region has the dubious distinction of both generating and hosting over 50% of the refugees on the continent. In the last forty years, since the end of colonialism large swathes of East Africa and the Horn has been scarred by long and pervasive conflicts; only Kenya and Tanzania have been spared war or civil conflict. As a result, there have been massive movements of refugees exchanged between the countries of the region—for example, Ethiopians in Sudan, Sudanese



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Table 1. Refugees in East Africa and the Horn 1995–2005

	1995	2000	2005
Burundi	142,700	27,136	20,681
Djibouti	25,700	23,243	10,456
Eritrea	1,100	1,984	4,418
Ethiopia	393,500	197,959	100,817
Kenya	239,500	206,106	251,271
Rwanda	7,800	28,398	45,206
Somalia	600	558	493
Sudan	558,200	414,928	147,256
Tanzania	829,700	680,862	548,824
Uganda	229,300	236,622	257,256
Total	2,428,100	1,817,796	1,386,678

Source: UNHCR (<http://www.unhcr.org/statistics.html>).

in Ethiopia—and beyond, especially to Egypt and DR Congo. Many refugees in the region have been pushed back and forth across borders in ‘search of cool ground’ as violence has waxed and waned (Allen and Turton 1996) or forced to flee to a third country as their country of first asylum has been overtaken by conflict.

Until 1996, the policy of East African state towards refugees was generally accommodating, despite the ongoing complaints about the lack of resources and the failure of ‘burden sharing’ with industrialized states (Stein 1987). The expulsion of Rwandan refugees by Tanzania in 1996 signalled the end of the international community’s easy reliance on notions of ‘African hospitality’ as a rationale for African states to accept refugees. Since then climate for refugees has worsened; states are becoming more reluctant to grant asylum and more enthusiastic to hasten repatriation (Betts and Milner 2006: 24). Consequently, there has been a very significant decrease in the number of refugees in the region (see table 1).

However, there has been no commensurate decline in violent conflict and more people than ever are being forced from their homes. Today, the vast majority of these forced migrants are unable to cross international borders. At the end of 2005, there were estimated to be over 5 million ‘internally displaced persons’ in Sudan alone, with a further 1.7 million in Uganda (USCRI 2006).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the overwhelming focus of migration research and policy in East Africa and the Horn has been on forced migration. Little is known about the scale of other forms of international



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migration in the region but the available estimates suggest that they represent the majority of cross-border movements. According to the UN Population Division, the number of international migrants living in the region has declined from a peak of nearly 5 million in 1990 to 3.4 million by 2005 (UN 2006). Much of this decline is related to the reduction in the number of refugees. Given the porous nature of the borders, the lack of controls, the very limited census data and problems of access in conflict zones, these estimates almost certainly understate the movement of people. In countries such as Somalia and Sudan that are caught up in conflict where migrants are often granted *prima facie*¹ refugee status, attempting to distinguish 'forced' from 'voluntary' migration is unlikely to be possible or useful. It is likely that much of the seasonal and labor migration in the region is now caught up in the broad category of forced migration.

There are significant levels of migration out of the region, most notably to the Gulf, South Africa, Europe and the United States. The effect of the 'brain drain' has been a major concern in the region for many years. Uganda experienced a massive loss of its educated and skilled people during the 1970s during the rule of Amin, in particular with the expulsion of Ugandan Asians. This benefited both countries that received them including Uganda's neighbours, Kenya and Tanzania (Black et al. 2004a), and Britain. Ethiopia has lost large numbers of graduates who have not returned after study abroad. In 2003 Ethiopians were the second largest group of immigrants to the US and they have been in the top four countries since at least 1990. Refugees from Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia are among the largest groups accepted for resettlement in the US (a combined total of 6,000 in 2003) (US DHS 2004). There are also irregular movements of migrants to Europe from East Africa and the Horn to Europe, especially Somalis, Eritreans and Sudanese. The levels of migration from the region to South Africa and Libya as well as labor migration from the Horn to the Gulf are thought to be significant but there are few reliable data available on these movements (Black et al. 2004a).

¹ I.e. a person is granted refugee status by virtue of having come from a country rather than by going through an individual refugee status determination procedure (Hyndman and Nylund 1998).



West Africa

Contemporary West Africa has recently often been described as the most “mobile” part of Africa. According to census data, West Africa houses the largest international migrant population, amounting to 6.8 million in 2000, or 2.7 percent of its total population (Zlotnik 2004). However, this figure fails to capture migration to other parts of Africa, Europe, North America and the Gulf, which is also higher than elsewhere, with the exception of North Africa.

As in other parts of Africa, there is evidence of a considerable degree of pre-colonial mobility, which is for instance testified by the dispersion of Fulani speaking people through large parts of the Sahel zone and the seasonal wanderings of transhumant herders (cf. Arthur 1991). Furthermore, trans-Saharan trade, religious education and the *hadj* to Mecca was associated with major mobility and sometimes settlement of West Africans all across West, North and East Africa.

Colonization would affect most of these patterns. When the first Europeans arrived in the 15th century, they disrupted traditional patterns of (trans-Saharan) trade and seasonal movement while the growing slave trade led to the transportation of an approximate 12 million Africans across the Atlantic (Anarfi and Kwankye 2003, Bump 2006). Since the late nineteenth century, colonization and the establishment of cocoa, coffee and groundnut plantations, infrastructure works and the growth of cities such as Accra, Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Abidjan, Lomé, Dakar and Cotonou triggered major rural-rural and rural-urban migration (Arthur 1991). Other factors that are believed to have stimulated such migration were infrastructure improvements, the introduction of colonial taxes (Arthur 1991), organized labor recruitment (Bump 2006), and the expropriation of agricultural land for plantations (Amin 1974).

Intra-regional mobility in West Africa is generally characterized by a predominantly North-South, inland-coast movement from Sahel West Africa (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad) to the plantations, mines and cities of coastal West Africa (predominantly Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, and in the West to Senegal and The Gambia) (Findley 2004, Arthur 1991, Kress 2006). Most intra-regional migration is seasonal or circular, reflecting pre-colonial patterns, although many migrants have eventually settled. After independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, the relatively prosperous economies of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire attracted large numbers of internal and international



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migrants from countries such as Togo and Nigeria (mainly to Ghana), Burkina Faso and Guinea (mainly to Côte d'Ivoire) and Niger and Mali (to both). In a strong anti-colonial spirit of pan-Africanism, the governments of Ghana and particularly Côte d'Ivoire welcomed immigrants to work and stay (cf. Anarfi and Kwankye 2003).

Increasing repression in Ghana following the 1966 coup, a declining economy and rising unemployment marked the country's transition to an emigration country. The immigrant community in Ghana became a scapegoat for the deteriorating situation and in 1969 the Ghanaian government enacted the Aliens Compliance Order, leading to a mass expulsion of an estimated 155,000 to 213,000 migrants, predominantly from Nigeria, working informally in the cocoa industry. Ghanaians also started emigrating in large numbers. An estimated two million Ghanaian workers left Ghana between 1974 and 1981; their primary destinations being Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. Also skilled Ghanaians such as teachers, doctors and administrators moved to Nigeria, Uganda, Botswana, and Zambia. As of the mid 1980s, Ghanaians have increasingly migrated to a range of destinations in Europe and North America (Anarfi and Kwankye 2003, Bump 2006).

While migration to Côte d'Ivoire continued, Nigeria took over Ghana's place as West Africa's second migration pole after the 1973 Oil Crisis. Similar to Libya and the Gulf countries, the surge in oil prices made oil-rich Nigeria into a major African migration destination. However, misguided economic policies and a major decline in oil production and prices heralded a long period of economic downturn accompanied by sustained political repression. In 1983 and 1985, Nigeria followed the Ghanaian example and expelled an estimated two million low skilled west-African migrants, including over one million Ghanaians (Bump 2006, Arthur 1991: 74). As Ghana had before, Nigeria transformed itself from a net immigration to a net emigration country (Black et al. 2004b: 11), although many immigrants (in particular Beninois and Ghanaians) have remained.

Meanwhile, the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 expanded migration opportunities for West Africans. The freedom of mobility is enshrined in the ECOWAS protocol of 29 May 1979 on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment. However, the implementation of the protocol leaves much to be desired (Adepoju 2001), as is testified by past expulsions and by police and border officials taking bribes as forms of unofficial toll (de Haas 2006b).



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The general worsening of the political and economic situation in West Africa over the 1980s set the stage for a change in the West African migration landscape. This trend was reinforced by civil wars in Sierra Leone (1991–2001), Liberia (1989–1996 and 1999–2003), Guinea (1999–2000) and Côte d'Ivoire since 2002, leading to the loss of up to a quarter-million lives and at least 1.1 million people living as refugees or internally displaced persons (Drumtra 2003). After 1993, political turmoil, economic decline and rising nationalism in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa's only remaining labor migration pole with an approximate quarter of its population consisting of immigrants, prompted hundreds of thousands of migrants, predominantly Burkinabè but also Malians, to flee the country (Black et al. 2004b, Drumtra 2003, Findley 2004, Kress 2006).

Although many settled migrants would stay (cf. Adepoju 2000) and other returned, the civil wars and particularly the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire fundamentally affected West African migration patterns. Confronted with the lack of alternative migration destinations in the region, skilled and low skilled West Africans expanded their geographical view culminating into a diversification of destinations (Bump 2006). This coincided with the emergence of two new migration poles at the northern and southern extremes of the continent over the 1990s, that is, 'pan-African' Libya and post-apartheid South Africa (Adepoju 2004, Bredeloup and Pliez 2005). Also Gabon and Botswana have emerged as new destinations (Adepoju 2000). Due to increasing trans-Saharan migration to Libya, other Maghreb countries and the EU, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, Niger and Chad have developed into transit countries (de Haas 2006a).

Until 1980, only limited numbers of West African students and workers migrated to industrialized countries, mainly following the French-English colonial divide. In comparison to North Africa, extra-continental migration remained very limited. Only workers from Cape Verde (to Portugal and the Netherlands) and parts of the Senegal river basin in northern Senegal and western Mali (to France) joined the northbound, large-scale movement of north-African labor migrants of the 1960s and 1970s (Carling 2001, Findley 2004).

Since the late 1980s, however, there has been a remarkable increase and diversification of migration to Europe and North America, principally from Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal. This has comprised both highly skilled migration, for instance of health workers to the UK, the US and the Gulf, and relatively low skilled, often irregular, migration,



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in particular to the informal economies of Libya and (mainly southern) Europe. Irregular emigrants tend to work in informal services, construction and agriculture, while more and more emigrants are self-employed entrepreneurs (Adepoju 2000). Increasing immigration restrictions in Europe have not led to a decrease in emigration but rather its increasingly irregular character and growing costs. This has made migrants more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. In particular trafficking of young women who work in prostitution in Europe is a subject of major policy concern (Carling 2006).

According to official figures, 351,000 West Africans are living in the US, 41,000 in Canada, 288,000 in France, 176,000 in the UK, 82,000 in Italy, and 68,000 in Portugal (OECD 2006). In the US, the dominant origin countries of West Africans are Nigeria (135,000), Ghana (66,000) and Liberia (39,000) (Dixon 2006). In the EU, Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Cape Verde, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire provide the largest numbers of migrants from the region. In recent years, migration to Italy, Spain and Portugal and the US has particularly increased (Black et al. 2004b).

Southern Africa

For many of the peoples of southern Africa, the story of their origins is one of migrations: in response to conquest; in search of new land; or to resolve power struggles. For example, many of the peoples of Zambia and eastern Angola see their origins in the upper Kasai, DR Congo, and recount the journeys which brought their ancestors into new lands (von Oppen 1995, White 1960). Moreover, individuals, households and whole villages continued to move within rural areas, causing dismay to colonial officials (Ferguson 1999: 39). In such contexts,

migration—rather than being a disruption to normal household life and composition—constitutes the very form of households. Movement of people between households (residential units) is the norm rather than the exception (de Haan 2000: 20–21).

As European influence spread in from the coasts, it stimulated new forms of mobility. The Portuguese first came to Angola in the 15th century but it was only in the 18th century that they started to move inland in search of slaves (Miller 1988). Some chiefs cooperated with the trade and moved to the east in search of captives, forcing others to flee. In the nineteenth century, with the end of the Atlantic slave trade,



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the search turned to rubber, ivory and later beeswax, which encouraged more Africans to move deeper into the forests of the interior.

With the arrival of European settlers and the establishment of the mines of South Africa and the Zambian Copperbelt, especially after the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand, more sophisticated systems to control African labor were devised. Initially migrants came independently but were subject to increasing regulation in an attempt to prevent them settling permanently and maintain the circular flow of people. While the migrant labor system stretched over the region to serve the mines and farms of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Swaziland and Botswana, its core has always been in South Africa. By 1920 there were 100,000 foreign contract laborers working in South African mines from all over the region. At its peak in 1970, this had risen to 265,000 and declined to 192,000 in 1990 (Crush 2005).

The formal system of labor migration for the mines was supplemented by a parallel system of irregular migration that provided labor for other sectors, including farms and plantations, domestic services, transport and construction. In 1951, South African census data recorded over 600,000 foreign born Africans in South Africa. This declined steadily with the increasing grip of apartheid, but even in 1985 there were over 300,000 (*ibid.*). The contract labor system was heavily biased towards men and the movement of women was mostly restricted to irregular channels. As a result the extent of women's migration has remained largely unrecorded.

Despite the attempts to avoid permanent settlement around the mines, the industrial development stimulated the growth of urban areas, driven by both internal rural-urban migration and international migration. With the growth of the Copperbelt, Zambia became one of the most urbanized countries in Africa with 40% of the population living in urban areas (according to the 1990 census). With the end of apartheid, South Africa has experienced a rapid rise in internal migration as people who were previously forced to stay in rural areas have been free to move to the cities (*ibid.*: 16).

Many commentators have described the southern African migration system (both formal and informal) as a means to exploit the African labor to serve the interests of capitalism, especially as developed under apartheid (Burawoy 1976, Meillassoux 1983, Wolpe 1972). While there is little doubt that this is the case, the analysis often leads to the portrayal of the African migrants as passive pawns of wider forces and



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the system as destroying a largely sedentary 'traditional' life. However, where these coercive systems have broken down or never even existed, migration from rural areas to the cities continues unabated (Peil and Sada 1984). The single explanatory factor in determining migration, the logic of capitalism, does not cast much light on the reasons for some people staying at home and others going; nor do they explain the different responses to migration pressures in different villages. The assumption of coercion does not account for the widespread practice of migration before colonialization nor the willing co-operation of black Africans in providing labor for capitalist enterprises (Peil and Sada 1984, Wright 1995).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the region was embroiled in some of the most entrenched conflicts on the continent. The liberation wars in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia and the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa displaced thousands of people within the region. The front line states of Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe (after independence in 1980) hosted the majority of refugees. By the late 1980s, the one million Mozambican refugees in Malawi represented nearly one in ten of the population (Russell et al. 1990). With the repatriation of Mozambican refugees, Zambia became the leading country of asylum in the region, with over 200,000 Angolan refugees and 60,000 Congolese in 2001. Since the end of the war in 2002, many Angolan refugees have repatriated from Zambia. However, there are estimated to be over a one million people internally displaced within Angola and movement within the country is heavily constrained by the lack of infrastructure and the prevalence of landmines.² In the last five years, the collapse of Zimbabwe has generated new internal displacement and refugees in the region.

Since 1990, the context for migration in southern Africa has been transformed. The end of the wars in Namibia, Mozambique and eventually Angola, and the defeat of apartheid in South Africa have heralded a new set of migration motivations and opportunities in the region. Refugees and exiles have been returning to their countries and thousands of others have seized the chance to move. The attitudes to migration among the countries of the region have become increas-

² Figures according to UNHCR (<http://www.unhcr.org>).



ingly negative with more controls on immigration and restrictions on migrants' rights. Rather than reducing migration, the result has been to drive it underground and there has been a significant growth in the numbers of undocumented migrants. In particular, South Africa has become a focus for migration both from within the region and the rest of Africa. Estimates of the numbers of migrants in South Africa vary wildly ranging down from the wildly exaggerated figure of eight to ten million to the more plausible total of half to one million (Crush 2005: 12, Kihato and Landau 2006, Landau 2004).

Emigration from the region has also become a topic of increasing concern, especially with the departure of large numbers of people with high levels of education and skills. Since independence, the poorer countries of the region such as Malawi and Zambia have struggled to retain professional staff in public services, most notably in the face of recruitment drives to attract nurses and doctors into the UK health service. Since the end of apartheid and South Africa's re-engagement with the rest of the world, the so-called brain drain has grown as more skilled South Africans have emigrated to industrialized states. At the same time, South Africa has also generated a regional brain drain as it has attracted skilled migrants from its neighbouring countries. Despite the level of concern, there are very limited data available to assess the scale of the brain drain in the region (see Crush 2005, McDonald and Crush 2002).

There have been various attempts to harmonize migration policies across the region but these have been unsuccessful to date. The Southern African Development Community attempted to introduce a protocol on the freedom of movement but this was opposed most vigorously by South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. A weaker protocol on the facilitation of movement has now been adopted in 2005 but has yet to be signed by sufficient member states to come into effect (Williams and Carr 2006).

Conclusion

This brief overview illustrates the diversity of migration patterns across the African continent. However, there are certain recurrent themes that are echoed across the different regions reflecting their linkages and shared experiences.



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First, in all regions, it is clear that colonialism has had a profound impact on migration in Africa. The direct intervention of European powers to control African labor through slavery, expropriation of land and contract labor systems both forced and encouraged new movements. The establishment of new industrial centres and urban areas set in train the rural-urban migration, which became a major pre-occupation for colonial and independent African governments. President Nyerere's policy of villagization in Tanzania in the late 1960s set a pattern of development interventions in rural areas all across the continent to reduce the levels of out-migration to the urban areas that continues to this day. For example, in 2003 the African Development Bank gave loans and grants to the value of \$86 million to Ethiopia to support rural infrastructure and financial services to 'tackle migration' to urban areas from rural communities (Black et al. 2004, IRIN 2003). Despite such efforts, the levels of urbanization have increased across Africa.

The other critical legacy of colonial powers on African migration was the imposition of borders, which laid the foundations for the modern nation states. While the borders represented an attempt by colonial authorities to control the movement of people and extract their labor or taxes, at the same time they defined the extent of their authority. For those near the borders, rather than fleeing long distances to escape taxation, forced labor or other such impositions, it was merely necessary for them to cross a line. By judicious crossing of frontiers, it was (and to a certain extent still is) possible to get the best, or at least avoid the worst, of both worlds (Nugent 1996). Hence, while the borders did control some migration, they created new forms of migration by reshaping 'political and economic opportunity structures' (Tornimbeni 2005). This is seen most clearly in the case of refugees, who can only gain international recognition and protection if they leave their country of origin.

The arbitrary nature of the borders means that distinction between international and internal migration is somewhat muddled in the African setting. In many cases, a move to a neighbouring country may involve less social and political upheaval for the migrant than a move to the capital (Adepoju 1995). The weak control of the state in many countries, especially on their remote borders, may also mean the change in jurisdiction does not influence migrant behaviour as it might in other contexts.



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Second, there are many threads of continuity linking pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial migration patterns. While colonization, war and major political-economic shocks such as the 1973 Oil Crisis clearly created major shifts in migration patterns, they were overlaid on existing migration practices and patterns rather working on a *tabula rasa*. As the context changes, the old patterns can show through more strongly again: for example, an increasing number of contemporary migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are using ancient Saharan caravan trading and migration routes on their journey to North Africa. Indeed in the case of the southern African labor migration system, its success depended on the widespread practice of migration prior to colonization that encouraged the movement of Africans. It is particularly important to recognize the *continuity* between current migration paths and those of the past, because this is the only way to identify areas of *discontinuity* and their structural causes.

Across the continent, the 'brain drain' is a recurrent concern among African governments. It is true that African migrants to Europe and the US have the highest levels of education among all migrants, although the US attracts more highly skilled migrants than Europe (Katseli et al. 2006, Schmidley 2001). Emigration of skilled workers is said to have created labor shortages in specific sectors, such as among health care workers in Ghana and South Africa. On the other hand, the prevalence of mass unemployment among highly educated people in Africa casts some doubt on the assumption that emigration would automatically represent a loss. In fact, there is very limited data available to assess the true scale and effects of the brain drain.

In contrast to popular belief, there has not been a recent 'major increase' in intra-African migrations. West Africa is the only part of Africa where migration populations relative to the total population have been increasing over the past decades, while other parts of Africa have shown a relative and sometimes even *absolute* decline (Zlotnik 2004). Only North Africa has relatively high levels of extra-continental migration. Even in West Africa, where migration to the industrialized countries is higher than elsewhere south of the Sahara, regional migration still is at least seven times higher than migration from West Africa to the rest of the world (OECD 2006).

Recent changes in African migration patterns have been affected by the rise (e.g., South Africa, Libya, Gabon, Botswana) and fall (e.g., Ghana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire) of migration poles on the continent, as



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well as civil wars affecting several parts of West Africa, Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. There seems to be increasing inter-linkages between the migration sub-systems centred around these continental migration poles as well as migration systems that link Africa to Europe, the Gulf and North America. This has coincided with a recent *diversification* of intra-continental migration patterns and a significant, albeit modest, increase in migration *out of* Africa. While the absolute numbers of African migrants to Europe might be increasing, they are falling as a percentage of overall immigration level (Katseli et al. 2006). The picture in the US is very different. In 2005, only 3% of the foreign born population had been born in Africa. However, this represents an increase from 1% in 1995 and a four fold increase in absolute numbers up from 270,000 in 1995 to 1.1 million in 2005.³

Finally, across all the regions and over many decades, there have been laments about the lack of data and the limited research into migration in Africa. In some ways, this must echo the problems found in other fields in a continent where resources are extremely limited. There seemed to be more consistent and reliable migration research in the 1970s. However as African economies declined, many countries suffered the ravages of war and migration dropped off the policy agenda, the interest in migration waned. Today, the trends in research seem to clearly follow the concerns of policy rather than any academic agenda. Unfortunately, migration research, which requires consistent effort over a sustained period, has been subject to the vagaries of short term funding focused on 'hot topics'. Hence, in East Africa, we no longer hear about labor migration but most current research and literature is focused on forced migration. Likewise, in West Africa we hear more about trafficking; and in North Africa about migration to Europe. While all these aspects of migration are of great importance, by focusing on these areas under the policy spotlight, we fail to see the underlying trends in mobility across the continent, which affect the lives of millions more people.

What is distinctive about much of the current literature on African migration is its portrayal of African migrants as subject to external

³ Figures according to the Migration Information Source Global Data Center (<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Global/Data/>).



forces that drive their movements. This is seen most clearly in the structuralist literature, which shows how Africa migration patterns have been shaped by the interests of capital and states. For example, Amin suggests that the endeavour to understand migration through the analysis of individual's motivations is futile since the migrant 'rationalizes the objective needs of his situation' (Amin 1974). Modern discourses of migration in Africa tend to present it as either: a desperate move to escape poverty; forced migration by those subject to violence or the threat of violence; trafficking and smuggling; or, migration in response to global forces and environmental misfortune.

This completely ignores the insights from the contemporary migration literature that highlight the ambivalent and complex relationships between poverty and migration. What is desperately missing is any understanding of the agency of African migrants in the process of movement, even in the face of enormous constraints. There is little recognition of 'the importance of social practices emerging from below in shaping migration practices' (Andersson 2006: 377). This portrayal of African migrants as subject to forces completely beyond their control appears to be a reflection of the common 'image of Africa as a continent in the grip of powerful external forces, with most of what happens in countries being fairly directly attributable to external factors' (Booth 2003: 868), rather than a conclusion drawn from empirical evidence.

It is important to stress that by highlighting such themes we are not trying to suggest that there is an essentially 'African' form of migration, which can be analytically distinguished from that found in the rest of the world. Too much of the literature of Africa suggests it is an 'exception', thereby cutting it off from the mainstream of theory and debate (Bilger and Kraler 2005: 6, Roe 1995). Instead, we would argue that understanding the dynamics of migration in the context of Africa is necessary in order to understand the human experience of mobility.

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