The history of labour migration in twentieth-century Africa is inextricable from the process of articulation of the continent to the global economy and the development of capitalist relations of production and exchange. In comparison with other regions with a history of colonial occupation, African agrarian structures at the beginning of the twentieth century were distinctive, with the exception of settler colonies of East and southern Africa, for the absence of a proprietary class concentrating and monopolizing land. Over the following decades, this sustained access to land by direct producers would prove at times an obstacle and at times an advantage in capital’s attempt to mobilize a large labour force to develop large-scale mining, export-oriented agriculture and infrastructure projects. As a consequence, the massive mobilization of long-distance, periodic migrant labour had a lasting influence on the organization of production as well as on the character of labour relations across Africa, albeit in context-specific ways.

Labour migration had become one of the predominant forms of labour mobilization by the late nineteenth century. It has been argued that all African societies experienced the effects of labour migration in one way or another during the twentieth century. As will be discussed in this chapter, extra-economic coercion played no small part in ensuring that a workforce was eventually made available, frequently at low cost to employers. Chibalo in southern Africa, prestation in French West Africa, bonded labour and corvée were among the idioms of unfree labour. Poll taxes and raw violence, however central to these forms of labour mobilization, do not explain all forms of labour migration: millions of Africans migrated for work through

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channels – informal, clandestine or voluntary – that ran parallel to those that mobilized forced labour and that largely remained unrecorded. Over time, labour mobilization transformed the foundations of domestic agriculture and progressively locked households into commodity relations, which in turn cemented the emergence of forms of ‘free labour’ as well as of new forms of ‘unfree labour’.

This chapter is concerned with providing an overview of experiences of labour migration within the broader historical process of labour commodification. A neat distinction between free and unfree labour as well as between labour migration and other forms of migration is not always possible or analytically helpful. While some migrated for wages, others migrated as sharecroppers, and some forms of wage labour derived from earlier forms of forced and slave labour. To the extent that other contributions to this volume touch on such issues, this chapter focuses on migrant wage labour and to a lesser extent on specialized commodity production by migrants.

The drivers and outcomes of the mobilization of migrant labour are at the centre of debates in African labour history. In the literature on large-scale mining in southern Africa, the incorporation of migrant workers is widely seen as a historical attempt of employers to depress wages and lower labour costs by means of mobilizing migrants to constitute a segment of the workforce with lower reservation wages. Migrant labour recruitment in the development of export-oriented agriculture has been recognized as a mechanism for adjusting the labour supply to the markedly seasonal rhythms of production. Other accounts have stressed that the recruitment of labour migrants attempted to segment and fracture the workforce politically, to thwart the emergence of class consciousness and collective mobilization. In still other cases and regions, labour migration was found to be actively sought by migrants themselves as an opportunity for improved living standards, for accumulation or for evading local forms of oppression. The long-term effects of labour migration have also been assessed variously. In some cases, migrant remittances are credited as having triggered processes of ‘accumulation from below’, ultimately leading to social mobility and

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socio-economic differentiation. Other cases suggest that labour migration extended the direct producers’ access to land by way of providing the cash income necessary to sustain family-based agriculture in a period of rapid commodification, or emphasize the impact of migration on changing cultural identities and social norms.⁴

A survey of the literature suggests that, although labour migration was once considered merely a transitional form preceding generalized proletarianization, instead it remained numerically relevant in some regions and sectors, even as the labour migration systems broke down in the wake of independence and liberalization. Labour migration did not invariably result in the emergence of a fully proletarianized working class, but it certainly contributed to the monetization of rural areas and to the progressive commodification of livelihoods.

As the arc traced by these varied accounts of labour migration in African societies suggests, continent-wide generalizations are best avoided when accounting for labour migration. The combination of diverse and even contradictory tendencies has resulted in complex regional and local labour histories. Accordingly, experiences of migration translated into impoverishment for some households and accumulation for others. In certain cases, labour migration brought about a revolution of social structures, while in others it reinforced those that were pre-existing: ‘Migration … is perhaps best viewed as a structure in which various kinds of relationships with various outcomes can occur, depending on other social and economic contexts.’⁵ An exhaustive continent-wide survey of these drivers and outcomes could not be covered in a single chapter. Instead, this chapter outlines the challenges of accounting for labour migration and traces the history of the most salient dynamics around labour migration systems.⁶ The chapter concludes by discussing emerging themes in the study of African labour migration.

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⁴ For example, in drought-hit colonial Upper Volta, integration to labour markets was a form of protecting the autonomy of domestic agriculture (Cordell et al., *Hoe and Wage*), while in the case of the migrant homesteads of Pondoland, labour migration seems to have been triggered by the colonial squeeze of African livelihoods and the resulting need for labour-saving durable consumables and mass-produced tools – iron hoes, firearms, cloth, soap, blankets. See W. Beinart, ‘A Century of Migrancy from Mpondoland’, *African Studies*, 7.33 (2014), 387–409.


ACCOUNTING FOR LABOUR MIGRATION: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL DEBATES

Starting from the 1950s, scholars from a wide range of disciplinary and political traditions contributed to the study of migratory labour and its impact on the transformation of societies, markets and political systems in Africa. Early contributors – such as Monica and Godfrey Wilson, who worked on southern and Central Africa, Margaret Read on Nyasaland, scholars in the Rhodes-Livingston Institute working on the Copperbelt, and Polly Hill’s classical work on the migrant cocoa farmers of Ghana – examined the impact of migratory cycles on family life, on kin structures, on local authority and on identities and traditions, and engaged critically with the arguments around ‘detribalization’ and extra-economic pressures.7

From a very different perspective, insights from classical and neoclassical economics were also applied to the study of labour migration in developing economies in the post-war period. From a classical perspective, Arthur Lewis theorized the effect of the transfer of surplus labour from traditional to capitalist sectors; the impact of capital accumulation on wage levels over time and the likely effect of continued immigration of unskilled labour that would depress wages.8 For behaviouralist models, wage differentials and labour demand in urban areas were considered variables that informed the individual’s decision to migrate. Migration was understood as a mechanism to clear the labour market and allow for the optimal redistribution of the factors of production, assumed to be unevenly distributed between, on the one hand, developing countries and traditional sectors (which concentrated labour surpluses) and, on the other hand, developed economies and modern sectors (which concentrated capital). In the work of influential neoclassical development economists such as Todaro, migrants were assumed to be rational, self-interested maximizers, responsive to market signals, who would choose to go where the commodity they sold (labour) was best remunerated.9

Critics questioned these models early on for taking the uneven distribution of labour and capital as a given and thereby disregarding historical processes of dispossession and coercive mobilization of the migrant workforce. By portraying migration as resulting from individual choice, these models fail to account for the constellation of political and social relations that shaped and constrained individual motivations. Limited as these ahistorical and voluntarist models were when accounting for the functioning of African labour migration, they remain the conceptual foundation of policy and practice, as exemplified by the wide acceptance of the push and pull factor analysis and the human capital framework.

TOWARDS A HISTORICALLY GROUNDED POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN AFRICA

In the 1970s, Marxist, Third-Worldist and anti-imperialist scholars revisited debates about labour migration in Africa. In dependentista accounts, labour migration was a component of the articulation of the modes of production. For Marxists, it was to be understood as a form of super-exploitation characteristic of the African transition to capitalism. Labour mobilization among groups whose links to land were not completely severed was given careful consideration. It was proposed that, through coercively mobilized labour migration, peasant farmers and family-based agriculture were forced to subsidize capitalist accumulation by allowing for the periodic mobilization of their labour force at rates below the costs of labour reproduction. Farming households were made to shoulder the costs of reproducing the labour force for the benefit of capital.

Broadly speaking, this new framing of the question contributed to unveil the extent to which late twentieth-century labour migration in Africa remained rooted in longer histories of slave and forced labour. Capitalist penetration and the development of large-scale mining and agriculture in the late nineteenth century had triggered a spike in demand for labour in


the context of the recent abolition of chattel slavery. The labour regimes that emerged around the new centres of accumulation were profoundly dependent on political and extra-economic pressures for mobilizing labour. Hut and poll taxes went hand in hand with forms of forced labour and forced cultivation in compelling people into labour migration as a coping or avoidance strategy. In southern Africa and in other settler colonies, these measures were introduced against the background of land evictions and an overlapping array of measures to restrict the development of black commercial farmers while controlling the resettlement of communities and the movement of migrant workers. However, the drivers and methods of labour recruitment varied across regions and periods, with important differences in West Africa, where African farmers prospered through agricultural booms.\footnote{G. Arrighi, ‘Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia’, \textit{The Journal of Development Studies,} 6.3 (1970), 197–234; Wolpe, ‘Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa’; Amin, \textit{Modern Migrations in Western Africa}; T. Kanogo, \textit{Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau,} 1905–63 (Nairobi/London: East African Publishers/James Currey, 1987); G. Austin, \textit{Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante} 1807–1956 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005). From a different perspective, Cross drew on D. Harvey, \textit{The New Imperialism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), to propose that West African social formations would have gone through a period of accumulation by dispossession (ABD) that resulted in a landless peasantry obliged to sell their labour as a commodity. H. Cross, \textit{Migrants, Borders and Global Capitalism: West African Labour Mobility and EU Borders} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 12–17. A problem with the ABD thesis is that land dispossession was not prevalent in many of the regions where migrant labour originated and that access to land was powerfully mediated by other social hierarchies and relations (of kin, seniority and gender), with consequences for the formation of labour markets.} It followed from these accounts that African labour was mobile before it was ‘free’ in Marx’s terms, that is, either separated from the means of production or unable to reproduce itself based on its own production. In some cases, the use of long-distance migrant labour allowed employers to emulate functionally the labour-disciplining effects of proletarianization, such as the spatial separation that prevented workers from partaking in domestic agriculture and the growing dependence on wages for social reproduction. But similarly, new demands transformed patterns of consumption, and through labour migration, hinterlands became inextricably bound in the cash economy. The appeal for employers of recruiting migrant labour in different regions of Africa counteracted and complicated the pressures towards the
proletarianization of labour, where such existed, and cemented the process of expansion of commodity relations.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the categories that attempted to capture how surplus was extracted from migrant workers (categories such as ‘migrant-peasants’ and ‘semi-proletarians’) were also problematic. They presumed that periodic migration would eventually result in the full proletarianization of the workers. By calling instead for an approach that was open to considering the agency of workers themselves, the critique of the structuralist literature expanded the analytical horizons to encompass groups whose labour migration experiences had remained invisible. Case-based studies have incorporated a more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of migration as a driver of class formation, for example in the study of the accumulation from below based on migrant remittances; of overlapping ethnic, generational and gender relations around labour migration; and of the ‘political economy of affliction’ inflicted by the labour process.\textsuperscript{14}

From a period in which labour was at the centre of the study of African migrations, academic interest shifted to the study of more loosely defined migrant livelihoods.\textsuperscript{15} Some authors in this tradition reject the assumption that labour migration is inherently exploitative and propose that mobile lives are a norm rather than an aberration of African labour markets. In this approach, also popularized in the study of remittances as a link between migration and development, mobility creates the conditions for valued exchanges and potentially for poverty reduction.\textsuperscript{16} As the following section will show, these changing accents and inflections in the study of labour migration themselves reflect the transformation of the world of labour and employment taking place in Africa over the past decades.


SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON AFRICAN LABOUR MIGRATION

The complex nature of migration itself poses some methodological problems. Historical records on migratory flows are uneven and fragmentary, even for the most recent decades. Furthermore, available data is better at tracing the highly institutionalized colonial flows than accounting for clandestine labour migrations in the same period. More recently, labour informalization and casualization have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish labour from other types of migrations.

Existing aggregate statistics should be approached with caution, because labour relations have changed over time and there are no homogeneous units of analysis. Snapshot observations from demographic surveys can measure the stock of migrant workers in a given period but cannot capture change and movements over time (migrant flow). Cut-off points and categorization rules are highly arbitrary. Furthermore, distinguishing categorically between refugees, economic migrants and labour migrants is daunting, as are efforts to account for the labour experiences of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in humanitarian emergencies. In this respect, the study of labour migration has been greatly enhanced by the use of ethnographic methods, case studies and detailed small sample surveys, which to an extent compensate for missing cross-country and longitudinal data.

LABOUR AS A MOBILE COMMODITY: THE MAKING OF AFRICAN LABOUR MIGRATION SYSTEMS

The study of labour migration in Africa is the study of a mechanism with multiple moving parts. Casual, seasonal, periodic and permanent labour migration patterns coexisted and shaped one another. The palimpsest of labour migration circuits in the period of capitalist penetration and


18 Crush et al., *South Africa’s Labor Empire*.

development in Africa results from overlapping experiences with varying durations and distances travelled. Labour migration circuits could be domestic, regional or international but also institutionalized, spontaneous or clandestine.\textsuperscript{20} This constellation of movements had several epicentres during the twentieth century, the so-called labour migration systems. Around these epicentres, but not exclusively, millions of working lives were involved in one or different types of migration against the background of economic boom and crisis, as well as political coercion, struggle and resistance.

Labour migration systems constructed a socio-spatial division of labour between labour-sending areas and centres of capitalist accumulation.\textsuperscript{21} Due to its volume, labour outmigration was a central component of economic and political processes in the main sending areas in southern Africa as well as in the West African labour reserves. In Togo, approximately 20 per cent of the population was engaged in labour migration in the 1960s; 30 per cent of the workforce migrated from Mozambique in the 1970s, and, in the same period, Upper Volta provided 60 per cent of the migrant workforce in the West African system. In labour-sending countries such as Mali, Guinea and Niger, the rate of migration within the country was never as significant as the outward migration to other West African countries.\textsuperscript{22} However, trans-border labour recruitment similarly shaped the political processes of the main labour migration destinations. In the gold mines in Transvaal, foreign migrant workers accounted for 70 per cent of the workforce in the 1970s. In the coffee and cotton plantations of Buganda, labour migrants from Tanzania, Rwanda and other parts of Uganda accounted for one-third of the total population in the late 1940s. About a quarter of the population of Côte d’Ivoire consists of oscillatory and settled labour migrants. Similar dynamics took place in the other large epicentres of labour migration: the Libyan oil sector, the Central African Copperbelt, the groundnut basin in Senegal, etc. During the twentieth century, the recruitment of labour migration became a distinctive feature of most African economies, with consequences for the broader struggles between labour and capital.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} See the chapter by Fourchard in this volume.

\textsuperscript{21} However, cases of labour-sending areas that also recruited labour migrants have been documented across the continent. Cordell et al., \textit{Hoe and Wage}; Potts, \textit{Circular Migration in Zimbabwe}.

\textsuperscript{22} Amin, \textit{Modern Migrations in Western Africa}; Potts, \textit{Circular Migration in Zimbabwe}.

\textsuperscript{23} Crush et al., \textit{South Africa's Labor Empire}; Austin, \textit{Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana}. 
MINING AND THE 'LABOUR EMPIRE' IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The development of the mining industry and other ancillary sectors in the South African Transvaal and in Rhodesia brought about a spatial reorganization of production on a scale unforeseen in southern Africa. Of all the transformations introduced by capital accumulation based on mining, few were as socially significant as the effort to mobilize workers. This involved the largely coercive integration of African peasantries from within the Union of South Africa and Rhodesia as well as from neighbouring colonies. Mozambicans had been recruited to the sugar cane plantations of Natal and the diamond mines of Kimberley, but by the 1920s all recruitment of foreign workers in South Africa was redirected to the mining sector. South Africans who had lost land to massive evictions and many of those who remained as tenants on white-owned farms were further removed on to homelands that would function as labour reserves.  

The mobilization of migrant labour was complemented by the introduction of an array of measures that restricted the productive autonomy and mobility of the population, including the generalization of poll taxes to be paid in cash, restrictions on access to land, new evictions, forced resettlement and legislative measures to supersede labour tenancy and commercial agriculture by African farmers.  

In the following decades, and amid continuous tension between factions of farming and mining white capital, with conflicting interests regarding labour mobilization, the mining lobby and the state would lay down the conditions for the creation of the largest labour migration system in Africa on the basis of the native reserves and the neighbouring colonies. Extra-territorial migrants would be pitted against migrants from the homelands.

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26 Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa’s Mining Economy*, Crush et al., *South Africa’s Labor Empire*. The labour question also pitted industrial and commercial capital that favoured workers’ stabilization and would benefit from the expansion of domestic demand against uncompetitive Afrikaner farming capital that depended on subsidies and immobilized cheap labour to subsist. S. Trapido, ‘South Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialization’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 7 (1971), 309–20. Contradictions were also rife in labour-sending colonies. The consolidation
This required continuous adjustments of the volumes of labour recruited, to avoid becoming dependent on a single source of workers and to ensure that foreign migrant labour effectively counteracted domestic labour supply fluctuations. The resulting labour system was designed to exploit black labour, to protect white skilled and semi-skilled jobs in mining, and to assist the reproduction of white capital on the basis of cheap labour.\(^{27}\)

State-sponsored labour recruitment agencies (the Native Recruiting Corporation, NRC; the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, WNLA; and the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau, RNLB) recruited domestic and foreign migrant workers throughout southern Africa and as far as Angola and Tanzania. The agencies enacted international labour migration agreements that sought to optimize recruitment from the region. Although this did not prevent the development of clandestine labour migration channels, it helped regulate the migrant labour supply by making workers dependent on transport provided by the employers to reach their work destination. Throughout the period, the mining industry relied increasingly on the state to mediate labour relations and recruitment via repatriation clauses, which helped recruiters adjust supply, and regulations on deferred payments, which also created a stream of revenue and taxation for the states where migrant labour originated. The number of foreign migrant workers in South African mines increased from 100,000 in the 1920s to 265,000 in 1970.

The crisis of the 1930s illustrates how the employment and shedding of precarious foreign labour was used to compensate for volatility and risks. While, before the crisis, foreign workers constituted up to 50 per cent of the mining workforce (and up to 70 per cent in gold mining alone), by 1932 this had come down to 26 per cent. The sharp reduction in the demand for labour disproportionately hit the most flexible and vulnerable segments, the foreign workers.\(^{28}\)


\(^{28}\) Legassick and de Clercq, ‘Capitalism and Migrant Labour in Southern Africa’; Crush et al., *South Africa’s Labor Empire*. 

of Portuguese East Africa in the late nineteenth century was funded by the taxes and fees charged to Mozambican migrant workers, but the massive migration to the mines in the Transvaal for wages or to evade *chibalo* was resented by Portuguese plantations and other domestic sectors. M. Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1995).
Workers were divided along racial, ethnic and national lines by a range of official measures and employer practices. Internal and foreign migrant
workers were subjected to different contractual conditions and separate jurisdictions, which ultimately entrenched a segmentation of the mining workforce. By the 1970s, 97.3 per cent of the foreign migrant workers were categorized as non-skilled workers, and for decades their employment was restricted to non-skilled jobs.\(^{29}\)

Central to the mobilization of foreign and internal migrant workers was the time-bound nature of the migration, the prohibition on settling permanently in the mines and the periodic return of workers to their homesteads. The employers discharged most of the costs of the physical and social reproduction of the labour force on to the family economy. Whether this amounted to the articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production or whether it expressed the particular nature of capital accumulation in southern Africa has been at the centre of debate. However, reproduction based on the combination of wage-work and domestic agriculture became unsustainable by the 1940s. The squeeze was felt both by those relying on agriculture in the homelands and by the growing black urban population with no access to land for farming or means for autonomous production. The fall in real wages motivated the creation of the first African and multiracial trade unions.\(^{30}\)

In the post-war years, the employment of foreign migrants resumed and recovered its pre-war levels. Foreign workers would, for the most part, still have access to land and to families engaged in farming, so that their wages could be further depressed and their recruitment used in this period as a means to counteract the growing militancy of the trade unions.\(^{31}\) By the 1950s a rift between agriculture and other sectors had developed. The scaling up of commercial farming and land concentration allowed for mechanization and the shedding of agricultural jobs. Despite high levels of employment in mining, between 1960 and 1977 the unemployment rate went from 18.3 to 22.4 per cent, highlighting the profound crisis of social reproduction in the labour reserves. Chronic levels of unemployment and underemployment became a structural characteristic of the contemporary South African economy.

Price inflation and falling real wages set off a series of strikes in the Rand during the 1970s, a decade of sustained social unrest around labour conditions and against the apartheid regime, but also of fierce repression on the part of the apartheid state. The liberation struggles and independence of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola and the rise to power of socialist parties throughout

\(^{29}\) Crush et al., *South Africa’s Labor Empire*.


\(^{31}\) See the chapter by Freund in this volume.
Africa effectively threatened to upset capitalist accumulation in mining by breaking apart the labour system on which its profits rested. However, the hollowing out of the migrant labour system was neither sudden nor a linear process. Foreign labour migration to the South African mines, which never regained its previous magnitude, nevertheless remained central to sustaining the economies of southern Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.32 In the past decade, South Africa has become the epicentre of international migration from different African countries. As shown in Table 9.1, the immigration of Zimbabweans to South Africa is currently one of the largest cross-border population movements in the continent.33

Table 9.1. Flows of over 100,000 migrants over the 2005–10 period from countries in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Migrant flow in 2005–10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>495,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania*</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>294,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>265,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda*</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>187,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>172,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>169,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea*</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>164,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>153,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya*</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>153,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>140,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>130,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia*</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>125,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>119,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>103,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia*</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>100,646</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Cases involving humanitarian crises or refugee repatriation


32 Bakewell, ‘Keeping Them in Their Place’.

33 Table 9.1 allows us to discern between flows predominantly related to refugees and returnee flows (Burundi, South Sudan, Liberia and Somalia); countries with large outward migration to Europe and to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC (Morocco, Egypt); and established migratory flows within Africa (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Zimbabwe).
LABOUR MIGRATION TO THE CENTRAL AFRICAN COPPERBELT

Copper mining transformed the world of labour in the Belgian Congo and in Northern Rhodesia, starting from the late 1910s. On the back of sustained international demand for copper, by 1930 Northern Rhodesia had one of the world’s largest and most profitable copper sectors. Copper exports grew by 130 per cent between 1936 and 1941, and the number of workers increased from 7,459 in 1933 to 26,023 in 1940. In order to mobilize the labour force necessary, an array of economic and extra-economic measures was introduced, including the imposition of taxes and the promise to workers of access to consumer goods. African farmers were mobilized as migrant labour for the mines, and some white South Africans were hired as skilled workers.

Labour relations in the Copperbelt soon resembled those in the Transvaal mines, where methods of recruitment and opportunities were segmented along racial lines. Poll taxes, coupled with the growth of mining-related employment, resulted in the rapid monetization of the non-mining economy. The Northern Rhodesian state attempted to control the mobility, residence and domestic links of the migrant labour force. Restricting permanent settlement was not always necessary but was harder to enforce than in the highly institutionalized system of South Africa. Nevertheless, the continued mobilization of oscillatory migrant labour was the foundation of the profitability of the sector and was justified at the time by employers and the state on the grounds of preventing detribalization.

Ferguson rejected accounts from the 1970s that proposed a linear progression from circular migration towards a fully settled and proletarianized labour force. On the contrary, he argued that, from the very beginning, large-scale mining relied on a combination of different forms of labour mobilization: rural migrant workers, voluntary workers and contract labour recruited through agents. The majority of the workforce during the boom years of the late 1920s and early 1930s consisted of contract workers, but voluntary workers overtook those contracted after the crisis in the 1930s. In fact, during certain periods, employers had allowed the permanent settlement of workers and their families before the crisis, not least because

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36 Ferguson, ‘Mobile Workers, Modernist Narratives’.
they needed to secure experienced labour and faced competition for workers from the Transvaal mines, which paid comparatively higher wages.\(^{37}\)

The Great Depression and the profound crisis in the international price for copper translated in the early 1930s into rising unemployment in the Copperbelt: up to 79 per cent of the jobs for African miners disappeared between 1930 and 1932. Falling living standards and the attempt to raise taxes led to major strikes by African workers’ unions in 1935 and 1940. Demands focused on improvements in wages and working conditions and against job reservation. The vast number of workers that, at the time of the strike of 1935, could no longer conceive a return to rural livelihoods evidenced the irreversible effects of migrant stabilization. The realization that mobilization and resistance had been organized in compounds and settlements led employers in the aftermath of the strike to reintroduce pass laws along with other measures to restrict and reverse labour stabilization.\(^{38}\)

In the 1970s a new period of price instability eroded the viability of the mining sector. Copper mining would no longer be the undisputed engine of the Zambian economy, and the migrant labour system came to a standstill. Former labour-sending regions were forced to refashion their livelihoods in the absence of wages and remittances. Petty trade, smuggling and other commercial pursuits absorbed part of the former migrant labour: ‘Forced to find alternative means of participation in the money economy, the former low-cost industrial reserve has turned itself, at the height of a nationwide economic crisis, into a no-cost redistribution unit.’\(^{39}\)

\textbf{MIGRANT LABOUR AND AGRICULTURAL FRONTIERS IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL}

The history of labour migration in twentieth-century West Africa was similarly shaped by processes of economic articulation to export circuits, in this case predominantly of tropical agricultural commodities. But it was also shaped by the specific cultural, political and demographic characteristics of the region and by the different power balances in the struggles unleashed by producers’ demand for labour. Colonial penetration destroyed and reconfigured pre-colonial mercantile circuits and rested on resource accumulation in coastal areas as well as on slave and migrant labour mobilization from the West African hinterlands.

\(^{37}\) \textit{Ibid.}; Larmer, \textit{Mineworkers in Zambia}.

\(^{38}\) Larmer, \textit{Mineworkers in Zambia}.

Two different circuits of labour migration towards agricultural frontiers coexisted in the twentieth century, one from within the savannah and forested regions predominantly subjected to poll taxes by the British administration, and a second stemming from the French West African Sahel, where labour migration was driven by taxes and attempts to evade forced labour. Sahelian migrants, from regions with unreliable and limited agricultural production, provided seasonal and permanent agricultural labour to the emerging cocoa, coffee and cotton plantations of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria as well as for manufacturing and other non-agricultural employment. Access to land in the cocoa belt through an array of sharecropping arrangements attracted massive migration from within Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana but also, importantly, from Upper Volta. Similar sharecropping arrangements characterized migrations to Senegambia from the savannahs and the Sahel. The productive reinvestment of revenue from groundnut and cotton via Muslim fraternities in the Sudanese savannahs and northern Nigeria considerably increased the demand for agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour, as did major infrastructural works linked to all these agricultural booms.

With the exception of the Nigerian oil sector and, more recently, other extractive sectors in the Gulf of Guinea, the prominence of export agriculture shaped the formation of classes of migrant labour. The periods of mobilization and return followed the seasonality of agricultural production, but the less regulated mobility of the labour force – compared to southern Africa – meant that increases in demand for labour could effectively contribute to tightening the labour market and pressuring wages upwards, as was the case during the phase of agricultural expansion in northern Ghana. Therefore, employers continued to recruit migrant labourers to challenge the conditions of settled workers and sharecroppers. Both in cocoa and in groundnut production, daily and casual contracts became the norm in the period in which the expansion of the agricultural frontier reached its limit, and production was intensified via mechanization. This gave the employers greater flexibility to adjust the supply of labour. In response, migrant workers in Senegambia took to joining work gangs to improve their bargaining position.

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41. Cordell et al., *Hoe and Wage*; Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants*. See the chapter by Tischler in this volume.

Population resettlement through labour migration did, however, reverse the political economy of the hitherto powerful hinterland kingdoms and caliphates, which progressively gave way to coastal domination. Accordingly, the population, which until the 1920s was more or less evenly distributed between the coast, the forest and the Sahel, had become by the 1970s predominantly concentrated around the coastal centres of accumulation. Migrations in West Africa became more complex after independence, in the context of, first, commodity cycles, and then liberalization and political crisis. However, while in the 1960s rural-to-urban migration gave impetus to rapid urban growth, by the 1990s circular and urban-to-rural migration was the dominant pattern. Overall, the rate of urbanization was slower in West Africa than elsewhere in the continent, and periods of economic crisis triggered episodes of reverse migration into rural areas.

Sahelian Migrants and the Development of the Groundnut Basin

In the mid-nineteenth century, coastal plantations in Senegal and along the Gambia river started to supply a growing export market for groundnut – the main source of vegetable oil – and rice. The growing demand for agricultural labour coincided with the process of manumission, which had created groups of floating land-poor and landless populations that could not subsist on their own farming and engaged in periodic labour migration. Former slave traders from the hinterlands of Mali, Mauritania and Guinea became seasonal sharecroppers in Senegambia in order to raise capital to finance the trading activities that brought them to the ports. Former slaves became an available source of independent seasonal labour on groundnut estates, and some used their wages to buy their freedom or to establish themselves in patronage relations with former masters. Monetization, the introduction of colonial taxes and the expansion of the groundnut economy in the first decades of the century contributed to attracting new streams of labour migrants from Senegal’s hinterlands and the Sahel. Outmigration became generalized among Malinke, Bambara and Soninke.

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43 Amin, *Modern Migrations in Western Africa*. It has been argued that, before infrastructure and logistical developments, the transport costs of migrant labour would have been lower than the costs of exporting commodities produced in hinterlands. Cordell et al., *Hoe and Wage*, Amin, *Modern Migrations in Western Africa*.


Among the Soninke, migration involved both poor and former slaves as well as the maraboutic and non-clerical aristocracy. The latter used trading networks and Islamic schools to seek opportunities for employment as \textit{laptots}, commercial agents and colonial officers throughout the first half of the twentieth century. These varied forms of circular outmigration reaching all social groups among the Soninke transformed social relations by subverting the elders’ power and depriving local production of labour. The development of the Bamako–Dakar railway and of port infrastructure changed the spatial organization of the groundnut economy and created jobs in construction, transport and services.\footnote{Manchuelle, \textit{Willing Migrants}.} Soninke men, among others, were migrating for longer periods and were more likely to settle in their labour destinations. In the 1970s accumulation on the basis of groundnut slowed down, with land and seed becoming increasingly scarce. This eroded the foundation of the sharecropping arrangements with the Navétanes, resulting in a switch to wage-labour migrants. Manchuelle has proposed that the migration of unskilled West African workers to France came from among the ranks of these migrant and increasingly urbanized workers.\footnote{Ibid.}

Labour Migration to the West African Cocoa Belt

Migrant labourers were instrumental in the introduction of cocoa, coffee, rubber and cotton agriculture to internal agrarian frontiers in the Gold Coast, Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire. However, the development of wage-labour relations took place in the presence of forms of unfree labour, such as slave labour and \textit{corvée}, which were prevalent before the introduction of wage labour.\footnote{See the chapter by Eckert in this volume.} The continued coexistence of forms of free and unfree labour belies the assumption that pre-capitalist relations of production would be inexorably overcome by the logic of capital and resulted in processes of negotiation, struggle and resistance.\footnote{Freund, \textit{The Making of Contemporary Africa}, Swindell, ‘People on the Move in West Africa’; Austin, \textit{Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana}.}
During the early stages of the expansion of cocoa in Asante, for example, growers relied on slave labour, despite the administrative prohibition of forced and slave labour. Growers with access to land used household labour, but larger plantations relied on pawns and previously enslaved people from the Northern Territories, which reduced the supply price of labour and ultimately boosted the accumulation of a ‘forest rent’.\(^{50}\) Between the late 1910s and the mid-1930s, male slave labour was replaced by migrant wage workers from the same northern savannahs, although women and children often remained subjected to pawning. However, by the mid-1930s wage labour was being progressively replaced by sharecropping. The contractual arrangements for the sharecroppers were originally stringent but became more favourable over time, as the expansion of cocoa to other parts of Ghana and the growth of the non-cocoa economy multiplied sources of employment and strengthened the bargaining position of labour within the sector. That the pressure for a change from wage labour to sharecropping came from the workers themselves problematizes accounts of sharecropping as a merely transitional form on the path towards wage employment.\(^{51}\)

Requisitioned labour and the introduction of poll and hut taxes accelerated monetization and the commodification of labour across French West Africa. Mossiland, in the dry savannahs of Upper Volta, was not suitable for extensive cash cropping and provided most of the large contingent of migrant workers for cocoa farming in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. By crossing into the Gold Coast in the first half of the century, Mossi men were evading *corvée* labour (in place until 1946), forced cotton cultivation (introduced in the 1920s) and – at least temporarily – poll taxes. The international, circular and massive Mossi migration to the cocoa belt could still be accommodated in the calendar of sorghum and millet farming at home and became an avenue for the social empowerment of the youth. The French colonial authorities first encouraged this migration as a source of fiscal revenue, but soon felt the heightened difficulty of recruiting workers for the Ivorian plantations. In order to divert the ‘voltaic’ migrants into French colonies, Upper Volta was parcelled out to the neighbouring colonies between 1932 and 1947.\(^{52}\) Once forced labour was abolished and Ivorian cocoa farming offered better conditions, Mossi migratory streams were redirected to western Côte d’Ivoire where many remained as settled farmers and where thousands of Burkinabé still migrate every season (see Table 9.1).

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50 Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana*.
51 Ibid.
52 Cordell et al., *Hoe and Wage*. 
Along with wage-labour migrants, another stream of migrants was decisive in the development of the cocoa economy: those who gained access to land and set up cocoa farms in their own right. The social norms, institutions and political processes that granted access to forested frontiers to migrant farmers from northern Ghana, eastern Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and the Sahel had influential long-term effects on the politics of autochthony in the cocoa belt. The emblematic cases include the migrant cocoa farmers of Akwa Pim in Ghana, who crossed the Densu river at the turn of the century to negotiate access to plots and set up burgeoning independent cocoa operations; as did the Mossi and Baoulé (from central Côte d’Ivoire) who obtained land in the western Ivorian forest through the tutorat, a set of social norms that encouraged forest lineages to grant land to strangers. Côte d’Ivoire’s first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and the Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire, in power from the 1960s until 1999, represented the interests of Ivorian migrant farmers and articulated a development strategy that rested on the westward expansion of cocoa. By 1960 over a third of all the labour force in Côte d’Ivoire came from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Guinea, but other tenant farmers came from eastern and central Côte d’Ivoire. The ‘Houphouëtian compromise’ encapsulated the way in which state revenue was mobilized to compensate the original owners of the land through investment and employment opportunities; to mobilize cocoa farmers’ political support through guaranteed prices and subsidies; and to garner political strength by giving foreign migrants the right to vote. In the 1990s, however, structural adjustment and the crisis in the cocoa sector resulted in the shedding of thousands of jobs in the state and in parastatal agencies. Pressure from urban unemployment and agrarian crisis brought the end of the ‘Ivorian miracle’, and the old compromise could not be sustained. Mounting political instability resulted in violent struggles over land ownership, migration and conflicting ideas of autochthony and ivoirité.

The expansion of cocoa production in the early twentieth century contributed to making the Gold Coast the world’s largest producer. Accumulation based on cocoa exports created jobs in agriculture but also

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54 See the chapter by van den Bersselaar in this volume.

55 Chauveau, ‘How Does an Institution Evolve?'; Beauchemin and Bocquier, ‘Migration and Urbanisation in Francophone West Africa’.
in construction, manufacturing, services and mining.\textsuperscript{56} Furthermore, the construction of the Akosombo Dam and the development of the Port of Tema contributed to boosting other productive linkages as well as development in the manufacturing sector that employed workers from Niger, Nigeria, Togo, Benin and Upper Volta.\textsuperscript{57} Crises in the cocoa economy had different effects for foreign migrant workers in Ghana, where migrants were more readily scapegoated. In 1969, for example, between 55,000 and 213,000 workers in cocoa agriculture – for the most part Nigerians – were forcibly repatriated. However, these evictions did not solve the price crisis and may have aggravated it by constraining the labour supply and raising production costs.\textsuperscript{58}

In independent Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, the agricultural dynamism of the cocoa belt took part of the pressure off rural-to-urban migration. Efforts to diversify the Burkinabe economy and create local sources of employment had limited success. Periods of crisis in the cocoa belt led to relatively rapid growth of Ouagadougou from the 1970s via internal migration. But seasonal labour migration stemming mainly from Burkina Faso as well as from within Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire continued well into the 1980s (see Table 9.1).

The Nigerian Exception?

Labour migration in Nigeria followed a different trajectory. A considerable proportion of the migrant labour that was recruited in the expansion of cotton and cocoa in central Nigeria after the 1920s came from southern and northern Nigeria. Rather than the creation of separate labour reserves, there was significant resettlement in the middle belt, and groups of skilled workers and officials from the south settled in northern Nigeria. Outmigration was also significant: contract and clandestine Nigerian migrants worked in the cocoa plantations of Fernando Po, Spanish Guinea and Ghana until the 1969 evictions. However, unlike in other West African economies, by the 1950s over 70 per cent of migrant labour was internal, partly moving to the cotton belt, but also taking up jobs in Lagos, Ibadan and the Delta.\textsuperscript{59}

The discovery of oil deposits in the 1970s transformed the patterns of labour migration. In the period of development of the oil sector, between two and three million migrants entered Nigeria from Ghana, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin. Not all were labour migrants,

\textsuperscript{56} See the chapters by Brown, Neveling and Berry in this volume.
\textsuperscript{57} Arthur, ‘Labor Migration Patterns in West Africa’.
\textsuperscript{58} Swindell, ‘People on the Move in West Africa’; Bakewell, ‘Keeping Them in Their Place’.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}
but all sought to benefit from opportunities in and around the oil economy, including access to commodities, subsidized prices and higher wage levels. A number of ambitious infrastructure projects, such as the construction of Abuja and the Kainji Dam, required considerable labour mobilization and improved wages. Ghanaian teachers and professors staffed the new polytechnic universities. However, the oil sector was hit by the 1979 crisis, and the Nigerian economy suffered as a consequence. Nationalist narratives of retribution led to the expulsion of over two million unskilled foreign migrant labourers, half of them Ghanaian.  

The end of colonial rule brought a hardening of the national borders that made migration more onerous for workers. Both in Ghana and Nigeria, post-independence crises were dealt with by decreeing the expulsion of masses of labour migrants. In contrast, in Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone, post-independence was a period of rapid expansion of urban activity in which rural–urban migrants sought the jobs and opportunities that were concentrated in and around capital cities. However, structural adjustment in the 1980s hollowed out the state, reducing public-sector employment and indirect sources of livelihoods and jobs. This had the effect of slowing down the rate of urban expansion and contributing to instances of urban–rural migration in West African countries. Large migratory flows continue to characterize West Africa in the early twenty-first century. Nigerian outmigration and the circular flow of the Burkinabé into Côte d’Ivoire constitute some of the largest contemporary continental flows within Africa, and there is a large diaspora from Ghana, Nigeria and Liberia living in the United States (see Table 9.1). As in the case of East Africa, armed conflict and political instability in the region have been at the root of massive cross-border population flows. Furthermore, there is a more recent diversification of the migration destinations, with a growing number of West Africans migrating to the United Kingdom, the Gulf states but also to South Africa.

EAST AFRICAN LABOUR MIGRANTS AND SQUATTERS

Less systemic patterns of labour migration characterized the expansion of agricultural commodities in East Africa. Their different histories

60 Arthur, ‘Labor Migration Patterns in West Africa’.
notwithstanding, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda were important epicentres of internal and transnational labour migration during the twentieth century. One particularity that stands out in comparison with the labour migration systems reviewed so far was the shorter distance of displacements and the clear predominance of internal migration.

Evictions and land dispossession coupled with the institutionalized attempt to create labour reserves paved the way for the development of settler farming in Kenya. Here, the contrast of the coastal plantations and highland settler estates is telling. Unlike white settlers who benefited from the state’s active involvement in mobilizing and fixing the workforce after the abolition of slave labour in 1907, powerful large Arab and Swahili landholders – denied the assistance of the state – were unable to sustain high rates of surplus extraction and sustained accumulation. Former slaves and Mijikenda migrants became squatters and occasional workers in the production of food and cash crops. In contrast, circular labour migration was the main channel for mobilizing workers to the tea plantations of Kericho. Workers also migrated from Burundi and Rwanda, but mostly from densely populated areas of Nyanza and the Western Province, to the plantations and estates of the Rift Valley and the Central Province, and from the densely populated Kikuyu areas, for work in agriculture, transport, construction and the state. Migration contributed numerically to what was probably one of the largest contingents of wage labourers in the continent by the late 1920s. By the 1930s up to a quarter of the male adult population in parts of Nyanza was engaged in labour outmigration. Large-scale agricultural development and the growth of food markets opened options for labour migration and cash cropping, but migration stemmed predominantly from districts where land was relatively scarce and cash cropping less viable. Over time, profitable cash cropping would require bought inputs, and many households then opted for the comparatively higher returns of wage labour.

In contrast, settler farms in the ‘white highlands’ relied on Kikuyu migrant ‘squatter’ tenants. Instead of the dynamic white commercial farming that the administration envisioned, white absentee farmers in the highlands depended on labour extracted from squatters and their successful production. To overcome this, the state and the farmers agreed to increase the demands for labour from squatters and to preclude independent herding and farming.


64 Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya.
Their strategy pitted squatters against migrant contract labour on the farms. The ensuing resentment and grievances led to desertion but also to violent resistance by Kikuyu squatters during Mau Mau. In the post-independence period, there was some resettlement and the emergence of successful accumulation in agriculture by African farmers in the Central Province. For the most part, however, labour migration patterns remained in place, although more stringent border controls negatively affected the migration prospects of the foreign workforce.

In colonial Tanganyika, internal migrant workers as well as migrants from Rwanda and Burundi had been recruited in the production of coffee in estates around Kilimanjaro and cotton plantations south of Lake Victoria. In the coastal sisal plantations, labour migrants from Mozambique and the interior dominated over local workers. Migrant workers from Tanganyika instead engaged in long-distance migration to the mines of the Rand and to the Copperbelt. During the late 1940s, attempts to develop large-scale commercial agriculture, notably the groundnut scheme, stretched labour supplies to the limit. The administration response was to subdivide Tanganyika into areas of labour outmigration and areas of peasant agriculture, which did not prevent a ‘scramble for wages’ that pitted agricultural projects against other labour-intensive sectors. In periods of rising food prices during the 1950s, wage workers had every incentive to return to their land to become commodity producers instead.

However, after independence, ujamaa and villagization attempted to discourage long-distance labour migration and to stimulate the resettlement of former migrant labourers. This was reinforced by the nationalization of agricultural estates that further reduced the sources of employment for migrants. As the economic situation deteriorated in the 1970s, falling real incomes forced large groups of urban dwellers into self-employment and informal livelihoods. Petty trade, artisan production and informal service provision became the means of social reproduction. The socialist state’s governments tended to reject this development, because it was contrary to their ideology of virtuous and productive village life against unproductive

65 Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*.
68 See the chapter by Barchiesi in this volume.
urban self-employment. A concerted effort on the part of the state was made to ban, relocate and prosecute self-employed and informal workers. These conflicts reflected the irreversible effects of expanding commodity relations and the strategies that former labour migrants deployed when labour migration streams ceased to offer viable livelihoods.\(^\text{69}\) During the 1990s, armed conflict in the Great Lakes region produced the largest population movements of refugees and IDPs in the continent. Over 1.3 million refugees settled in western Tanzania, at times increasing the local population by up to 50 per cent. However difficult it was to discern seasonal and oscillatory labour migration from refugee and IDP flows, it is noteworthy that the routes of forced migrants mirrored the colonial routes of labour migration to western Tanganyika.\(^\text{70}\)

**NORTH AFRICA AND OUTWARD MIGRATION STREAMS**

The formation of a migrant labour force in North Africa during the twentieth century was founded on the displacement of nomadic herders out of the plains and the formation of estates headed by *colons* (colonial settlers). Colonial land concentration had different effects in Morocco and Tunisia and was perhaps more disruptive of the pre-existing production regimes and trading routes in Algeria. Displaced from the plains, Berbers retreated into mountainous regions, where the prospects for reproduction based on agriculture were precarious, and subsequently became a reserve army of labour for settler agriculture. People in the Rif and Kabylia started to combine household agriculture with long-distance seasonal migration to the plains and the cities. This pattern of labour migration involved for the most part unmarried men, but in areas of more acute dependence on off-farm income it would involve all men of working age.

The inability of the settlers to raise agricultural productivity on the estates led to the adoption in the 1920s of sharecropping arrangements and to replacing cereals by more profitable but labour-intensive citrus, vine and olive orchards in both Tunisia and Morocco. The system was upset by different crises. In the 1930s generalized unemployment among seasonal migrants


destabilized the financial foundations of family agriculture and caused the relocation of villagers to urban slums and urban-based livelihoods, including employment in the emerging manufacturing and construction sectors. The operation of the ports, transport logistics and the array of infrastructural projects under construction in the first half of the century created a demand for labour outside agriculture.71

From the 1920s onwards, Algerians from Kabylia also started to migrate for work to France. To compensate for the reduced labour supply, the estates of Oran and Algiers began to recruit Moroccan migrants as seasonal wage workers. Later on, labour shortages in France, Germany and Belgium triggered labour recruitment from Tunisia and Morocco, and the 1950s was a period of rapid expansion of North African emigration. As North African migrants stabilized in France and became skilled workers, new frontiers of recruitment for unskilled labour were developed, notably in Senegal.72 European demand for labour slowed down with the oil crisis. Whether this reflected highly restrictive immigration policies in Europe after the 1970s or alternative patterns of migration within Africa is open to debate. Active recruitment gave way to more restrictive migratory regulations, but the Moroccan population in Europe continued to grow through spontaneous migration from 400,000 in 1975 to three million by 2004, which corresponded to 10 per cent of the total population. Similarly, migrants living outside Tunisia amounted to 9 per cent of the population by 2003. In contrast, emigrants account for less than 3 per cent of the Algerian population, while Libya’s large oil economy made it into a labour migration destination for workers from Egypt, Sudan and from across the Maghreb.73 At present, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco all have large migrant populations living in Europe and account for the largest share of African outward migration (see Table 9.1).

72 Manchuelle, Willing Migrants.
THEMES IN AFRICAN LABOUR MIGRATION

URBANIZATION AND THE LINKAGES BETWEEN LABOUR MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

While different labour migration experiences contributed to the consolidation of urban centres in Africa, migrant stabilization was actively discouraged when not banned outright in different periods and sectors by employers and states, for example in the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt and the mines of the Transvaal. Similarly, migration to booming agricultural districts (sugar plantations in Natal, tea and coffee estates in Kenya, tobacco farms in central Malawi, to cite some examples) did not directly result in pressures towards urbanization. If agricultural exports contributed to urbanization, it was indirectly, by triggering employment in construction, transport, agro-processing and in the state apparatus.

The growth of peri-urban settlements in the late twentieth century owed more to the loss of jobs and the overall squeeze of subsistence in the countryside than to surges in demand for labour in urban areas. During agricultural crises, migration to peri-urban settlements allowed distressed migrants to engage in new livelihoods by straddling urban and rural economies. Finally, urbanization was not a linear process in twentieth-century Africa, and economic crises resulted also in some instances of falling urban growth rates and urban-to-rural migration.

Since the 1990s the literature on labour migration has reinterpreted spatial mobility as a driver of societal change rather than as an economic malfunction. This work has produced a different, frequently positive, understanding of the linkages between migration and development – for example, as experiences and remittances that are accrued via migration enhance the human capital of the migrants and unlock sources of finance for domestic economies with potential poverty-reduction effects. However, there is also a new recognition that migration is not an avenue open to all, and that the uneven distribution of the streams of revenue generated by migrants can reinforce inequality and social differentiation at the local level. Examples of remittance-fuelled processes of reinvestment resulting in agricultural dynamism coexist side-by-side with instances of stagnation and distress migration.

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74 Potts, *Circular Migration in Zimbabwe*.
INFORMAL WORK AND LABOUR CASUALIZATION

The informalization and casualization of formal labour in Africa has had a double effect on labour migration. In relative terms, it has resulted in a deterioration of the conditions of settled labour, thereby reducing the comparative appeal of recruiting migrant workers in the eyes of employers. In absolute terms, it has also contributed to a greater precarity for the remaining migrant workers. Labour flexibilization, deregulation, outsourcing and subcontracting have translated into greater employment instability, losses in terms of real wages and statutory benefits and lack of legal and social protection for migrant workers.

The use of migrant labour in formal employment seems to have experienced a steep reduction in the period of liberalization. Structural adjustment reduced the employing capacity of the public sector, with dire consequences for countries such as Tanzania, Kenya and Angola, in which labour demand in the private sector was already sluggish during the 1990s. Foreign migrant labour in the South African mining sector, which represented 60 per cent of the total workforce in the 1970s, accounts nowadays for less than 30 per cent. Part of this shift reflects the removal of settlement restrictions after the end of apartheid, but the downward trend continued thereafter. In the platinum mines alone, the number of migrant Mozambican workers (the largest contingent among foreign migrants) halved between 2003 and 2012, and there are fewer than 10,000 migrant workers from Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. This happened at the same time as there was an overall rise in the hiring of contract labour, which now represents almost 40 per cent of the workforce. The rise of contract labour, disparities between formal and informal employment and conflicts between different types of workers present their own challenges for workers’ collective action. In some cases, the fight for decent jobs has been couched implicitly as a fight against jobs for migrants.

Horticultural sectors in East and southern Africa are experiencing similar tendencies towards labour informalization and casualization. Trade liberalization, increased competition and vertical integration in production have reduced the role of the state in the regulation of the labour market.

77 See the chapter by Barchiesi in this volume.
and work conditions. In its place, corporate responsibility and self-regulation have become the guiding mechanisms in expanded global value chains. On the other hand, stringent competition linked to transnational outsourcing and subcontracting has introduced renewed pressures for cost reduction via the flexibilization of labour. This has resulted in a greater scope for temporary, casual and contractual labour, contract farming, the proliferation of labour brokers as well as the growing participation of women in the workforce, including as migrant workers.  

The informalization of the more permanent and secure types of employment has coincided with the expansion of informal work. According to the ILO, unemployment increased by 0.3 per cent between 1999 and 2004 in sub-Saharan Africa, despite an average annual GDP growth rate of 3.3 per cent and a 2.7 per cent annual growth rate of the workforce in the same period. By 2004 the unemployment rate stood at 10.1 per cent, but the rate in southern African countries can be three times as high.  

It was estimated that about 93 per cent of the new jobs created in Africa during the 1990s were in the informal sector and its contribution to GDP seems on the rise across the continent. ILO data from the 1990s indicated that up to 63 per cent of the urban workforce was employed in the informal sector. However, the majority of these jobs were in very small family or individual enterprises, with minimum protection and in informal activities, including hawking, scavenging, petty trade, as well as in low-cost services such as transport.  

The feminization of informal work led to the initial praising of the informal sector as being more receptive of women, but as Meagher warned, high levels of female entry into informal activity should not be confused with high levels of opportunity. Many of the same factors that disadvantage women in the formal sector operate as obstacles to success.

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82 Rogerson, ‘Globalization or Informalization?’.
in the informal sector, particularly limited access to capital and low levels of education and skills.\textsuperscript{83}

The combined effect of the informalization of employment and the growth of the informal sector have resulted in a blurring of the distinction between formal and informal employment, with implications for migrant workers. There are also problems with criteria for categorization in labour surveys: many of those classified as self-employed tend to be dependent workers who are working on commission or on outsourced jobs.\textsuperscript{84}

\textbf{OUTWARD LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE ‘BRAIN DRAIN’}

Between 2005 and 2010 over 3.6 million people engaged in trans-border migration within Africa. No other region in the world has such large, dynamic and concentrated internal migration. Although this figure also includes the movement of refugees and returnees, the distinctive internal nature of migratory flows owes much to a long and consequential history of labour migration in Africa. Contrary to the impression created by current media narratives, Africa is not a large contributor to trans-regional migration, and migration within Africa surpasses outward migration in volume.\textsuperscript{85} What is distinctive about African migratory patterns in global perspective is that Africa has the largest internal migration flow of all regions and the highest concentration of overall migration within the same region.\textsuperscript{86} Unlike in most other regions, the volume of internal migration is slightly larger than that of outward migration. Figure 9.1 compares migratory movements in Africa and other continents and Table 9.1 includes the largest migratory movements between 2005 and 2010.

The best existing estimates indicate that migration originating in Africa accounted in 2005 for only 14 per cent of all migrants in the EU and only 3 per cent in the US, and there is no solid evidence for arguing that upward trends in outward migration will be sustained. ‘Absolute numbers of African


\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{85} In fact, if North African countries – the largest continental contributors to outward migration – were omitted, migration within Africa would surpass outward migration by a large ratio.

\textsuperscript{86} Even in West Africa, the only sub-region in which the rates of migration surpass the rate of population growth, the migration flow within Africa is seven times larger than the outward flow. Bakewell and de Haas, ‘African Migrations’.
migrants to Europe might be increasing but falling as a percentage of overall immigration level.\textsuperscript{87} Furthermore, outward migration stemming from Africa is highly concentrated among North African countries.

Another frequent misrepresentation relates to the characteristics of African migrants. Highly skilled immigrants are a large share of all migrants of African origin. In Europe, 13.5 per cent of all highly skilled foreigners are Africans. In the United States, African migrants have among the highest rates of high school completion of all immigrant groups.\textsuperscript{88} While the emigration of Africans out of the continent is less numerically significant than other global and intra-African flows, the concentration of highly skilled migrants among those who relocate poses serious problems in terms of ‘brain drain’, the disproportionately high rate of emigration of people with tertiary level education as a share of all migrants.\textsuperscript{89}

An important share of professionals from countries with well-regarded higher education, particularly in health sciences, have emigrated within Africa and overseas. African migrants account for 7.8 per cent of doctors

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 112.
and 8.4 per cent of nursing personnel working in OECD countries. It has been estimated that the number of African doctors, nurses, lab technicians and pharmacists practising abroad far surpasses the total national health personnel in countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi and Zambia. Periods of political instability have contributed to the accelerated emigration of skilled workers. For example, under Idi Amin, an important share of the practitioners in the Ugandan health sector fled the country, and it is estimated that up to 50 per cent of Zimbabwean health workers have relocated since 2001. With up to 60 per cent of its medical doctors abroad, Ghana has experienced a veritable exodus of health professionals. Many skilled Ghanaians migrated within Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, but Europe and North America have become preferred destinations thereafter. In countries with long histories of migration, such as Senegal and South Africa, the exodus of highly skilled migrants has coincided with the arrival of skilled foreign workers. The overall impact of the outmigration of highly skilled populations is, however, still poorly understood. Analysts debate whether the macroeconomic impact of the disproportionate outmigration of skilled personnel could be offset by the potential positive effect of revenues remitted. Liberia, Morocco and Tunisia are the countries with the highest rate of remittances as a share of GDP.

CONCLUSION

Labour migration is hardly a peculiarity of capitalism in Africa. Circuits of labour migration have been important in other periods and in other regions. However, examined in the historical context of the different African trajectories of development of productive forces, expansion of commodity relations and articulation to international circuits of trade and finance, the movement of workers and the spatial stretch of labour relations appears under a different light. In a vast continent in which, for the most part, the colonial encounter did not succeed in dissolving the very strong relationship between people and the land, changes in production involved massive movements of oscillatory labour migration.

90 A. Adepoju, Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008).
92 Baldwin-Edwards, ‘Between a Rock and a Hard Place’.
Labour relations in twentieth-century Africa took a range of forms, remarkable in their extreme heterogeneity and impossible to chart using the instruments provided by standardized categories in labour studies. Many of these contractual forms – formal and informal, coerced and ‘free’, institutionalized or clandestine – involved relocation and separation from the homestead, at times over very long distances. These dynamics introduced durable change in social relations, balances of power and identities within households, kin groups and communities and shaped agrarian class structures, processes of urbanization and labour struggles throughout the continent. Labour migration trajectories, their drivers and their effects encapsulate the contradiction of processes that were exploitative in nature, that were put into motion through coercion, and yet – by virtue of being contested, avoided or reshaped by those who confronted them – resulted in an array of contingent outcomes.