

## **Introduction**

The topic of mobility in Africa has drawn the attention of social scientists and academics worldwide. Initially, most of this attention focused on the ability of rural Africans to integrate into urban settings. This particular issue was dealt with quite comprehensively in some anthropological traditions, especially in the work of the Rhodes Livingstone's Institute in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) up to the 1960s (Gluckman 1945; Shapera 1967). Additionally, special emphasis had been placed on the mobility of Africans and their migratory trajectories outside of the continent in the 1970s and 1980s. Some themes long favored by economic and geographical approaches have also loosened their grip on the theoretical imagination of migration scholars, who, following Hahn and Klute (2007), had focused too much on the search for the causes of migration. In this analysis, notions such as "push and pull factors," "urban bias," and "rural–urban inequalities" were emphasized. Perennial Marxist concerns with the role of capital interests in encouraging or discouraging migration have given way to descriptions and studies that go beyond the conceptual confines of the nation-state and the development challenges it faces. To a large extent, this concern also reflected the needs of colonial policy, which were aptly described by Frederick Cooper (1996) when noting the particular difficulties faced by British and French colonial authorities in taming native labor. The trend away from such perspectives is in line with recent literature on migration, which, on the account of Paul Boyle et al. (1998) goes beyond the determinist, humanist, and integrated approaches to consider how migration in itself can be usefully studied as a way of life (see also Castles and Miller 1998).

Indeed, migration in Africa has gained a new impetus in recent years through the expansion of destinations away from local urban centers and regional economic hubs into far-off places beyond the African continent. In the same vein, mobility within Africa itself, in its various forms, has also started to receive more attention. Consequently, there is a pressing need to develop new ways of looking at this phenomenon.

While it is true that globalization, for example, has provided social scientists a conceptual and theoretical apparatus with which they can seek to account for the new form of migration (Cohen 2006), the task is still daunting and cannot be easily discharged simply with reference to globalization. Ease of communication and the attendant exchange of information, a purported stronger integration of economies, and growing inequalities that encourage the younger and more energetic segments of certain African societies, notably in West and Central Africa as well as North Africa, to be more daring, are important in the description of the present nature of migration.

Stowaways freezing to death in the bellies of airplanes or merchant ships; young Africans drowning in the Mediterranean or getting stranded in

North African cities; heated discussions about the danger posed by so-called economic migrants to the better-off countries of the world; the invasion of African markets with Chinese goods; the growing recognition of minorities in African economies (Lebanese, Indian, and Chinese, for instance); the increasing relevance of remittances to African economies; and the articulation of migration dynamics with international terrorism and drug trafficking, among other phenomena, are important aspects of these entanglements. They are also critical commentaries on the uses of globalization.

After all, ease of travel owing to cheaper airfares has gone hand in hand with increased, and often humiliating, controls at the gates leading into Europe. In this context, migration has become not only more difficult, but also dangerous. Host countries in the richer North have also become less welcoming, which is another way of saying that while globalization may theoretically have made travel easier, it has come with a heightened sense of insecurity in the North that has translated into draconian forms of control. Therefore, these previous aspects do not sufficiently establish the analytical links, which could explicate, clarify and make migration more relevant for the formulation of empirically grounded propositions on Africa.

As suggested above, while African mobility outside of the continent has been a central concern in academic studies, our focus in this book is on opportunities, challenges posed by internal migration and the workings of migration in general in African settings today. With this contribution, we strive to fill some of the gaps about the question of mobility within the African context. Addressing issues specific to people's mobility and their influence on religion, economy, politics, traditions, societies on shifting grounds, gender relations, and cultural interactions, this edited volume is an attempt to cover a range of pressing questions on modern migration by Africans within Africa.

The articles in this book were presented and debated during a seminar held under the same title: "*Spaces in Movement: New Perspectives on Migration in African Settings.*" It took place in Bamako, Mali in January 2011 with the generous financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, the German Research Foundation), and the institutional support of the Bamako-based research NGO, "Point Sud: Center for Research on Local Knowledge." The papers presented at the seminar covered a wide range of research activities focusing on human mobility in African configurations and brought together a large number of participants with diverse disciplinary and geographical backgrounds, engaged in research in different parts of the African continent.

The initial notion of 'moving spaces' was discussed and developed at a meeting that took place in 2008 in São Paulo, Brazil among members of the research network called Southern Spaces in Movement (SSIM). Organized by

Denise Dias Barros and supported by the São Paulo-based Institute for African Studies (Casa das Áfricas), it demonstrated that there is a dire need to explore current debates and contemporary experiences of migration among minority and non-hegemonic groups. Significant reflections were produced at that time, which needed to be explored further. For instance, the meeting revealed that the main actors of migration are still perceived and analyzed as victims of a drama unraveling in northward migration contexts, specifically in Europe. The trend has been to analyze the migrant as a threat to his (or her) local community (the one to which she or he belongs), to the transit community, and also to the final host, or the receiving society. Other research tendencies, however, have clearly demonstrated that the analysis should avoid such assumptions and consider migrants as subjects responsible for their own lives (Dasseto 1989; Tily 1990).

The SSIM meeting intended not only to rethink migration with reference to the idea of mobility as the movement of people from one place to another, but also, and more significantly, the ways in which the movement of people entails the moving of space itself. While not based directly on Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Production of Space* (2007), the idea of "*spaces in movement*" draws on two crucial notions developed by the French theorist. The first one concerns the idea of movements understood as a theory of presence and the basis upon which emancipation can be sought. The notion of "*spaces in movement*" is in some sense a critical commentary on how individuals engage their selves, guided by a longing for the freedom to be the masters of their own lives, a longing rarely taken into account in many approaches to migration. The second notion from Lefebvre bears on his three-pronged conceptualization of the production of space – the perceived space, the conceived space, and the lived space – which, when articulated with the notion of spaces in movement, yields a representation of mobility that portrays migration as a totalizing experience.

Therefore, the aims of this encounter and of this publication stemmed from the need to revisit existing discourses on mobility in Africa, to explore new and innovative approaches that deal with migration in African configurations in the present day, and to consider new directions for theorizing this phenomenon. The argument is that the dominant perspectives have failed to provide accounts of migration that help us to understand social change and social relations on this continent. Thus, our objective is to encourage ways of understanding and thinking about migration that place it firmly in the social contexts which make it possible, constrain it, or are transformed by it. For this reason, we concentrate our analysis on voluntary migration, though, of course, the distinction between forced and voluntary can become fluid and blurred for

practical reasons. In the following section, we consider the notion of “spaces in movement” to clarify the kinds of insights it seeks to achieve.

### **Spaces in Movement**

While the traditional emphasis on movement across spaces remains central to thinking about migration as a social phenomenon, there is another dimension that deserves equal, if not even greater, attention. This dimension concerns the social transformation that migration causes to the local configurations from which migrants come, as well as its impact on the so-called receiving side. In other words, migration as movement across space is strongly embedded in a larger movement of space itself, conceived of as the life-world of villages or other places, local economies, neighborhoods, gender relations, and the public spheres to which migrants claim affective allegiance. Put simply, there is more to migration than merely movement across space. There are social transformations of a deeper nature than older debates could ever have adequately taken account of. Migration is not simply a response to economic hardships, political instability, and cultural or religious expectations. It is also a manifestation of vibrant life-worlds in transformation, expanding their territorial and normative boundaries (see Hahn and Klute 2007 and Knörr 2005 for similar arguments). Our view is that spaces in movement emerge as a complex social activity that involves transcending borders and geographical boundaries. Migration should thus be understood as the movement of people across spaces, and as the movement of *spaces* themselves. Moreover, it does not only involve human agents; encompasses a wide range of other factors such as processes of transformation and adaptation, or the dynamics affecting social relations, ideas, knowledge, economic exchanges, technologies, and vocabularies in local and trans-local settings worldwide. It is in this sense that we speak of “*spaces in movement*,” to draw attention to the relocation of social relationships, life-worlds, and worldviews that take place when people move across space.

Still, the contemporary phenomena are to be considered in a diachronic way through individual and collective trajectories and channels. They form very often fragmented, differentiated, and unexpected forms of belonging (Magnani 2002). The analysis needs to include the dimensions of dream, wishes, and expectation (projection onto the future). As Carvalho (2008: 105) says: “in the liminal spaces, there is prevalence of connections and yet, social syntaxes,” where all experiences merge into one another and can be blended.

In the wake of the Bamako seminar in 2011, the members of the SSIM network reflected thoroughly on the implications of the idea of “*spaces in movement*” to stimulate further analysis of people’s mobility within the African continent and its wider connections. Accordingly, we seek common trans-

local phenomena, based on the perspective of double meaning: people with respect to their localities and to their experiences of sharing borders with the world at large. In thinking about the notion of “*spaces in movement*” as the thick entanglement of *space* and *time* in individuals’ lives, we seek to understand how people carve out space for themselves in their life course. Our framework is based on the articulation of both space and time as they bear on identity, that is, “who we are and who is with us.” Thus ‘*spaces in movement*’ are narratives of life against the background of which individuals become aware of themselves, while at the same time revealing their identities in rituals and tales as they appear in accounts and playful representations of life and creativity. This is achieved through the meaningful construction of webs of relationships that draw from space as a lived category. In this regard, we want to explore how a local knowledge constructs its space and produces places of relevance and exchange, by which we mean the values by which communities, kinship systems, religious affiliations, and networks of friends seek to bind individuals and commit them to approved social practices. Similarly, movement becomes entangled with all kinds of other issues, which become part and parcel of the whole experience. For instance, mobility for the purpose of pilgrimage, as studied in one essay in this volume (see Dias Barros and Abdalla), intersects and combines with different sorts of concerns – disease and anxiety, for example, or the quest for the satisfaction of inner desires such as seeking knowledge, travel, and adventure. In the middle of all of these issues, persons manipulate space by their actions. Further questions arise bearing on how different individuals succeed in negotiating and resolving problems related to conflict and security. These individuals are often part of marginal discourses in relation to universal perspectives. The different papers in this book, however, try to understand the actions of individuals, groups, and societies by asking how they negotiate and (re)organize themselves in relation to daily challenges, in order to renew social dynamics on the local (village) scale and to connect to wider and larger scales. This concern is one of the pillars of the research and the theoretical debates that we wish to construct. These are just a few of the many daunting questions that need to be answered in order to understand the dynamics of African mobility.

This book is an attempt to bring together some of these research concerns to reflect upon the theoretical and conceptual challenges posed by the idea of *spaces in movement*. Of particular interest is a discussion of the relationship between different African cities and villages and the world spawned by migration. This relationship is looked at from a southern perspective, one that draws on a theoretically reflected mistrust of traditional migration theories. This mistrust is grounded on the assumption that such theories ensue from discursive contexts predisposed to see migration as a problem, whereas our

approach seeks to move away from this assumption by suggesting that the phenomenon of migration needs to be integrated into wider societal processes and transformations.

### **Structure of the Book**

The chapters in this book are organized to reflect on some of the issues we raised; however, space does not permit us to cover every question we have posed here. Nevertheless, the articles present various dimensions of the larger context within which spaces in movement are configured. In the first chapter, Augustin Emame focuses on laws created to organize and shape migrant labor work within some of the African states. He analyzes some of these laws in order to understand how African nation-states negotiate the situation of African migrant workers. The author stresses that the integration of policies and legislation is not effective. African states seem to claim equal rights for all employees regardless of their origins, but a close scrutiny of actual practices on the ground and the laws being enforced reveals the contradiction between policy and practice.

Instances of xenophobia in African countries (South Africa being a recent example) are observed in chapter two by Pierre Cissé and Bréhima Kassibo, who explore the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) and its migration policies. They observe the existence of migration networks in West African societies and, more specifically, evaluate the case of Malian migrant traders and how they construct their relationships in other African countries (Cameroon for instance) by innovatively adapting to the socioeconomic fabrics of their host communities, building alliances, religious exchanges, and the sharing of knowledge. Cissé and Kassibo perceive sub-regional migration as a serious challenge for most African countries, and migrants can sometimes be regarded as a risk to national economies and local interests.

In chapter three, Denise Dias Barros and Mustafa Abdalla offer an examination of a kind of mobility linked to West Africa which is supported by strong identification with religion and the desire to carry out a religious duty, namely the pilgrimage to Mecca. Among the Muslim Dogon community in Songho during the pilgrimage trip, religious issues may intersect with other sorts of concerns (disease for instance) or a quest for knowledge and adventure. These are similar to the issues addressed by Sophie Bava in chapter four where she analyzes the dialectical relationship between migration and religion. More precisely she examines the role and meaning of mobility in religious routes and how mobility leads to the emergence of different religious figures or religious migrants. In the same vein, Abdoul Hadi Savadogo in chapter five focuses on the return of burkinabè students who return to Burkina Faso

from universities in Arabic-speaking countries and search for work in their own communities. He sheds light on the dynamics of reintegration of these returnees into their own society, as they are challenged by language, traditions, and different ways of life that they acquired during their temporary stays in Arab countries.

In chapter six, Christian Ungruhe explores women's spatial mobility from northern Ghana to Accra or to other West African cities. He observes particularly young females' independent travels to urban centers and how they negotiate their movements. He argues that labor migration for these women guarantees economic autonomy and a higher social standing, while maintaining intergenerational relationships and keeping dynamic local social structures intact. Similar issues in the context of Egypt, however, as shown by Senni Jyrkiäinen in chapter seven, have to be negotiated and renegotiated daily in order for women to retain a respected social standing. She argues that women in Upper Egypt (wives and mothers of migrant men) have been confronted with new challenges, social roles, and opportunities triggered by male migration. The central argument of this chapter is that male migration affects the notion of family and alters power relations within the household. In this context, just as mobility brought a certain level of economic leverage, it produced challenges and pressures that women have to deal with in daily life.

In the middle of intense debates on people's mobility, we tend to forget that the absence of migration also exists and at times heavily impacts the lives of some people. Gunvor Jónsson and Marina Berthet, in chapters eight and nine respectively, tackle this issue by stressing the relation between migrant and non-migrant groups, those who are in transit and those remaining – or, as usually referred to, the “left behind.” Jónsson reflects on the absence of migration in African settings and different frameworks of analyzing it by moving beyond the sedentary perspective and by addressing the role of power and hegemony in determining who does and should move. Berthet, however, explores the question of circularity, temporary and usually repetitive movements of people between their villages and cities, and the strategies adopted by the migrants in order to circumvent challenges and to remain together as a group away from home. Furthermore, the imaginary about travel and travelers, among those who travel and among the stayers, is explored in these articles.

In chapter ten, Magnus Treiber sheds light on Eritrean migrants' movement trajectories between Khartoum and Addis Ababa in their attempts to escape the military dictatorship and their aspirations to reach to the outer world. In these foreign spaces and settings, he highlights migrant hopes, sorrows, future plans, and learning processes. In such circumstances, the migrants' dreams and the interconnections between individual projects and local, national, and global dimensions emerge as important aspects in people's movements.

The authors in this volume include in their analyses the multiple interactions between southern societies and regional exchanges, between space and time. But the project is still unfinished and needs further research and exploration. There is simply more material than one volume can encompass. In African settings, there are varying and growing interrelational phenomena connected to exchanges and different types of movement of people and spaces (migration, journeys, pilgrimages, traveling ideas and traditions, and tourism, to mention just a few) that need to be attended to in the future. Nonetheless, with this humble publication, we hope that we have made a contribution to ongoing debates on migration and have shed some light on issues that have been ignored in previous research.

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