

## Temporary Migration in Africa: Views from the Global South

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### 1. Introduction

Politicians in the Global North frequently warn their populations of threats of possible migration flows from Africa. The general argument goes like this: if border security measures were relaxed, migrants from Global Southern countries would flood Northern countries, would stay there permanently, and would cause social and economic problems for the rest of the society. This view has been pervasive since the 1950s and 60s and led the Northern countries to sign bilateral 'guest worker' agreements with various countries in the Global South. To prevent these temporary migrants from becoming permanent residents, the receiving countries have typically instituted top-down measures enforced strictly, if not ruthlessly. Even then, these measures have not always worked and some 'temporary' migrants ultimately became 'permanent residents' (see Castles, 2004 for an analysis of why migration policies fail).

With the failure of temporary migration programmes, Northern countries started developing new concepts. Today, 'temporary migration' refers to a much wider issue than in past bilateral agreements. It includes both project-tied skilled and unskilled workers' migration. Such migrants can be one or multiple times entrants in destination countries. The latter is called 'circular migration' in which usually migrants move back and forth between countries of origin and destination according to market demands in both places (see Wickramasekara, 2011 for an extensive overview of such programmes). Alongside the temporary migration phenomenon, emerged 'transit' and 'irregular' migration. Whether in the academic literature or in policy circles, these constructs remain unclear, leading to questions such as how exactly is circular migration different from temporary migration; is it any better or is it just a nicer name for old temporary 'guest worker' programmes (Castles and Ozkul, 2013)?

The aim of this overview is not to delineate these fluid concepts, but to take on board practical and urgent issues that currently agitate the minds of migration scholars and practitioners. From Europe, North America and Asia, many countries today are discussing how to manage their need for temporal labour. Even countries that are commonly known as immigration countries are increasingly turning towards temporary modes to attract their immigrants. In Australia, for instance, migration policy-makers deliberately turn to temporary migration over the old-favoured permanent family migration system (Castles *et al.*, 2014). Generally, the options to immigrate are far larger for high-skilled workers; low-skilled workers suffer from the increasing regimentation in the Global Northern borders. However, what the Northern countries need are workers of diverse skills, in other words, not only of low- and high-skilled workers, but also workers for different positions in various sectors (Schierup *et al.*, 2006).

Although today the new technologies and the intensification of the activities of multi-national companies allow for international outsourcing, there remain some industries that need their workforce 'on the ground' (Castles, 2006). For instance, today some of the officers paging at the Frankfurt Airport work in India. Or, the products of the textile industry and many other manufacturing industries are made in and exported from China. China is also outsourcing to Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Cambodia (Cissé, 2013). However, sectors such as construction, security, cleaning, domestic service, childcare, elderly care, entertainment, and such sectors related to health services need face-to-face contact, so in this case, migrant workers have to be 'on the ground', both literally and figuratively. Moreover, the receiving countries need workers with different skills more than ever, due to increasing complexity in lifestyles and related emerging needs. Nevertheless, it is difficult for politicians to acknowledge in public that they need migrants because their populations might fear that their earnings would be affected negatively. In turn, official discourses about 'irregular migration' (Castles *et al.*, 2012), regimentation, and the threats of a flood from Africa are constructed (Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar, 2013).

It is important to remember, though, that not all migrants from Africa depart to Northern countries. Many choose to migrate to neighbouring or other more distant countries within Africa (Ratha and Shaw, 2007; Antwi Bosiakoh, 2009). One obvious reason might be that they cannot afford to travel overseas. However, the second and more important reason is that migrants may find it more beneficial to live in close proximity to their families in the countries of origin and take advantage of their comparative skills in the countries of destination, while being able to come-and-go more freely.

We planned this collection of research articles exactly for these reasons: to show that despite the preponderance of North-centred literature, a large extent of migration flows are already happening in Africa and migrants from Africa are already experiencing these processes, contrary to the common belief in the Global North that if migrants arrive, they will never leave and they will not be able to adapt to their new places. In fact, many migrants do move temporarily and do find ways to adjust to their new conditions. Besides, they contribute enormously to economic and social development in the countries of destination.

Having said that, we cannot ignore why and how temporary migration is gaining more importance across the world. Neither can we overlook the changing character of migration (Urry, 2000). First of all, there is a clear transformation in economic and social spheres of peoples' lives. In the economic realm, capital is rendered more and more decentralised and flexible, requiring labour to match its degree of velocity. In this sense, mobility of labour becomes imperative, in parallel with that of capital. In turn, a constant readiness to move is necessary for and imposed on labour as it is for capital, thanks to the ruling ideology of neoliberalism on a

world scale. These changes are illustrated within 'disorganised capitalism' (Lash and Urry, 1987) or the 'new world capitalist order' (Harvey, 1989) pointing out that current business is more flexible, decentralised, and more diverse. In this context, temporary migration emerges simultaneously as a need, a solution, and a peril for increasingly many more countries. What is also different today is that the modes and means for such mobility do exist, at least to a certain degree, with cheaper transport facilities bringing to mind the famous Marxian phrase, 'annihilation of space through time'. Migrants can also respond to these demands (with great difficulty for low-skilled workers), although at the cost of their family members being left in between two countries.

Advocates generally claim that strictly applied temporary migration programmes would bring development to origin and destination countries, as well as migrants themselves, commonly known as a 'triple win' phenomenon (see, for instance, the European Commission's Communication Notes on Mobility Partnerships). Critics, on the other hand, suggest that there is not enough evidence to reach such bold conclusions. In both cases, however, the existing data in the migration and development literature are not sufficient to theorise temporality with all of its integrity. In temporary migration, the duration may be planned according to migrants' own preferences or subject to legal conditions and restrictions. Major questions remain; such as how do migrants themselves perceive these changing movements? How do migrants co-opt with temporariness in their geographies? It is the consideration of these issues (and more) that the articles in this special issue address.

## 2. Views from the Global South

The articles in this issue engage with and transcend polarised and insular debates about whether migration is 'good' or 'bad', whether it starts from rural to urban and then to the global, or whether it is merely a push-pull dynamic that sustains it. Their frameworks are heterodox and plural, as are their methods for collecting and interpreting data. The authors are differently trained: some from demography, others from African studies, history, geography, and some from international studies. This diversity of backgrounds reflects the multifaceted nature of migration studies. The authors are also at different stages in their careers and hence bring diverse energy and perspectives to the issue of temporary migration. There are five articles and two book reviews. The content covers case studies in Madagascar, Senegal, Tanzania, Ghana, and Libya.

The first article is by Cornelia Tremann, formerly of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Tremann's article looks at how Chinese migrants in Madagascar experience their locality, how they are perceived by the locals in Madagascar, and how this interaction shapes economic development in Antananarivo in Madagascar. Her focus is very important because Madagascar is one of Africa's largest hosts of locally born Chinese, or Chinese born in Africa. This article draws on a rich ethnographic study including interviews with both Chinese migrants and local Africans. It is complemented with careful historical analysis, which challenges existing representations about the presence of Chinese migrants in Africa (Mohan, 2013). Here, the locals speak through Tremann's accounts, as do the Chinese temporary migrants. Tremann argues that the celebratory accounts of Chinese engagement with Africa must be tempered. Poor quality commodities are recurrently being imported to flood the Malagasy markets, succeeding on account of their relative low prices, and sometimes undermine the viability of indigenous businesses. These 'Africa-grade' imports, as they are called, compound existing problems around local policy failures and, in particular, lack of support for local industries.

Tremann's study does not suggest that all Chinese migration in Madagascar is devastating for the locals. Chinese migrant activities have encouraged the growth of a few local industries. However, these industries exist mainly to support the accumulation of Chinese enterprises leading to even a more disturbing concern about whether temporary Chinese migrants are developing a sustainable local economy or merely a fly-in-fly-out effect. These findings expand the state of the critical political economy literature on international trade, which argues that African countries play the financially unrewarding role of provider of primary products. That itself creates dynamics that keep Africa underdeveloped either because the international terms of trade for primary products usually worsen, the prices of such products are unstable, or that a few global transnational corporations control the trade in primary products (Frank, 1966; Robinson, [1979] 2009). Tremann's study shows that even when African migrants are involved in the production of non-primary products, some of the forces of dependency continue to be at play both locally and internationally.

Interestingly, while the Africans feel that they have lost business due to Chinese 'invasion', their perception of Chinese activities is not xenophobic, although tensions around the activities of temporary Chinese migrants in Madagascar continue to build. These findings, therefore, show the need for policy intervention from both receiving and sending countries to mitigate or even to remove the economic pressures on local industries and to support them to flourish. This orientation contrasts with seeking the extinction of 'external markets'. Also, it contrasts with the 'planning for competition' model proposed by the Austrian economist, Frederick Hayek (1945, p. 46) and currently being implemented by the Malagasy state. Rather, it implies the tight embeddedness of markets within society and environment, as argued by the economic anthropologist, Karl Polanyi (1944 [2001]). So, we are not calling for the expulsion of temporary migrants, a strategy which was adopted by the Ghanaian state under the Aliens Compliance Order of 1969. Then, migrant scapegoating was the order of the day: while the state believed it could survive challenging economic times that way, the policy led to beggar-thy-neighbour programmes whose consequences were devastating (Antwi Bosiakoh, 2009). Instead, we argue that both receiving and sending states need to contemplate and confer on the effects of temporary migration on local populations.

The next article is by Daouda Cissé, a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University. Cissé looks at African migrants in China and compares their experiences with Chinese migrants in Senegal. This focus too is novel because in the existing Africa-China literature, China is generally constructed as the actor and Africans as actants. Cissé's study shows that the activities of migrants from both origin and destination countries are mutually beneficial and hence suggests that, through migration, countries should become equally important actors. This perspective helps to understand the need to fashion out effective policy that can help both countries. What the African countries will need to remember, though, is that China's so-called 'open door' policy was opened gradually and even then not widely. It is a door from which they walk and into which others walk. Therefore, Chinese migration should not be seen as China's attempt to 'help' Africa. Indeed, in China, African migrants are

conspicuous, forming what some Chinese locals call 'Chocolate City' and contributing substantially to the Chinese economy so, for Cissé, the relationship between countries in Africa and China should be one of 'mutual discovery'.

Cissé's study provides rich data on the demographic and other characteristics of migrants from both China and Africa. His article will help future scholars to systematise the evidence and policy makers in Africa to see how they can support emigrants. The stock of information collected through interviews is revealing. For instance, it shows that competition from Chinese firms is not only against African firms, but also against other Chinese firms. Further, not all Chinese entrepreneurs are wealthy: some are relatively poor, harbouring fears about losing out as migrants. Contrary to the view that the Chinese state is interventionist, the data collected by Cissé reveal that the Chinese state does not always support its nationals in Africa.

In terms of policy too, Cissé's article has much to offer. For instance, it shows that some Africans who studied in China have returned to Africa and do form some alliances with Chinese businesses. It is, therefore, necessary for policy makers to engage these returnees for collective policy making. This collaboration will be particularly important, because some of the relationships between the returnees and their Chinese employees are exploitative and involving the state as a third party can streamline such engagements, while providing the state with quality information for intervention. Further, streamlining African-Chinese relationships can extend the current professional relationship between the returnees and the migrants to cultural and social exchanges. Otherwise, pure economic relationships may create social problems. For instance, in China, African migrants face racism. The Chinese state ought to be pressured by the African states to implement effective strategies against this unfortunate experience. Ultimately, carefully planned and informed steps need to be taken to better understand the two societies for harmonious interactions.

This special issue also considers these matters from a gender perspective. Esther Dungumaro, a senior lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam, revisits the urbanisation-economic development nexus through a gendered lens. She examines migrant women's experiences in Tanzania. She finds that, while remittances sent to the countryside sometimes helps to improve rural conditions, the money is sent at a price: the remitters often make life threatening sacrifices. Thus, the epiphanic moment that is created when money reaches the countryside is organically linked with moments of social pressure when money leaves the city. In this sense, celebratory accounts of the goodness of urbanisation must be challenged, especially if migrants live in threatening conditions. Dungumaro's rich account shows a systemic problem in capitalist urbanisation: migrants from the countryside are sapped into the 'engine of growth', as capitalist cities are called these days, used and spat back into the countryside either sick or diseased, socially traumatised, or abused in the harsh urban environments.

It would, however, be hasty to interpret this evidence as total proof that urbanisation in Africa is not benign. Adaawen and Boabang, postgraduate researchers based in Germany, provide the other side of the story: migration has substantially contributed to improving the conditions at the point of origin, enhanced the economic situation of migrants and improved urban economic development at the host point. Having said that, the authors acknowledge that migrants typically work in very stressful and low-paid jobs. Adaawen and Boabang look beyond whether migrants remit. They examine which factors trigger or inhibit the sending of remittances. They find that the size, frequency, and likelihood of sending remittances depend on factors such as sex, mode of saving, length of stay, and level of income. It seems that migrants from the three Northern regions can become successful in Southern Ghana, often defying the heavy socio-economic cost and challenging work conditions to save some money. While not many will become economically comfortable, the remittances they send back to their places of origin improve familial and individual socio economic conditions. The migrants themselves do not stay permanently in Southern Ghana: they tend to move around. It seems that the reason for moving may not be individual at all. Indeed, motives are often related to their social class, or to their groups' interests in sharp contrast to orthodox migration theories recently reviewed by Ian Molho (2013) in *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*. In turn, the consequences of migration are class-based. Adaawen and Boabang's article shows us that there are no natural beneficial advantages guaranteed under capitalist migration. Analysts should look critically and carefully at any reported gains of migration flows.

Internationally too, this special issue has important implications. The article by George Bob-Milliar and Gloria Bob-Milliar, lecturers respectively at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and University for Development Studies, provides us a novel account of the Arab Spring. The existing knowledge on Libya centres on the causes of the uprising, and the use of Blacks as snippers and their subsequent victimisation in Libya (Etzioni, 2012). Questions about why migrants go to Libya in the first place and what happened to the ones who were whisked away from the conflict site in Libya remain unanswered. The Bob-Milliars answer these questions by drawing on the experiences of the Ghanaians who migrated to Libya.

Their account provides lucid insights into the psychology of migrants that challenges the view that Tripoli, for instance, was a step to migration into Europe. They argue that, to most migrants in their sample, Libya was a destination and not a springboard or a 'gateway'. The article shows that the drivers of temporary migration vary according to the class position of migrants. Overall, the evidence shows that Libya is mostly a destination, as well as a stepping stone. As to why the reverse narrative dominates the literature, the Bob-Milliars point to the paranoia of Western countries in stereotyping all migrants from Africa and elsewhere as heading to the West. The Bob-Milliars boldly show how the West pressured Libya and why the Libyan state acquiesced to brand African migrants, 'illegal', 'in transit to Europe', and hence undertake arbitrary and illegal arrests of migrants, while ignoring the contribution of these migrants and the often difficult conditions under which they have been working.

The double standard of this Western propaganda is not difficult to see: on the one hand, globalisation is preached when it suits and soothes but, on the other hand, migration on the international scale is delegitimised, especially if Western bureaucrats perceive migrants as heading to their countries even if the empirical evidence suggests the contrary. More generally, the article by the Bob-Milliars highlights an important point about the mobility of the human spirit and how political economic developments such as uprisings and internal political problems can transform permanent migrants into temporary migrants. It seems, therefore, that all migration can be temporary and hence people will move for various reasons, not only economic, but also for social, political, legal, and religious reasons, among others. The reasons may also evolve with time and are linked with regional or global policy shifts.



From this perspective, it is crucial to view temporary migration as a multi-faceted phenomenon, as recently noted in *International Migration and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Viewpoints and Policy Initiatives in the Countries of Origin*, as reviewed in this issue by Thomas Antwi Boasiakoh. We need to eschew simplistic, celebratory accounts of migration as set out in *Arrival City*, also reviewed in this issue by Franklin Obeng-Odoom. These reviews do not only summarise these major books but also situate them in the broader conversation on migration from both international and national perspectives. The reviews also demonstrate in what ways the books enhance and/or hinder our understanding of migration and how we can work on their implications for a better world. Overall, this special issue does not pretend to be comprehensive. Pressing matters such as temporary migration to and from oil cities in Africa are not covered. The issue does not consider in what ways sex workers migrate to oil cities in order to look for work. It does not go into the crucial questions of sex and crime, and temporary sex workers and housing prices. Neither does it investigate in what ways the extractive industry acts as magnet to attract temporary migrants, the construction of their expectations, and the congruence between expectations and actual experiences. For readers interested in these issues, Obeng-Odoom's book, *Oiling the Urban Economy: Land, Labour, Capital, and the State in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana* (Obeng-Odoom, 2014), provides some answers.

Also, issues related to migrants' agency, and their social movements are not covered. Adaawen and Boabang give a reference to migrant organisations established by Nigerian migrants in Ghana, but the articles in general do not focus on this aspect. We need to stress that this angle of migrants' agency is very important. After all, if human and capital flows are increasing, as the articles in this special issue show, how migrants are networked matter to a great extent. Some important ideas are offered by Antwi Boasiakoh's article on Nigerian migrant organisations (Boasiakoh, 2012). Cissé's article suggests that the Chinese do not form such associations except the ones they found with their families. It is imperative to examine, then, why some migrant groups do form such groups, while others do not. There is some work that provides tentative answers to these questions in the Sydney case where an 'African' project is seen as a 'Ghana-man project' and hence shunned by other Africans (Obeng-Odoom, 2011, p.41), but more systematic work is needed on this topic.

What all these articles show urban and migration scholars is that their professional divide impedes nuanced analyses of these issues. With temporary migrants living in cities and involved in various urban flows, it is, frankly, insular to divide the field into urban and migration studies. We, as the two editors, noted this faux division and thought it would be good to 'combine our forces'. Ozkul principally works in the migration field, while Obeng-Odoom is an urbanist. The combination of our frameworks has fundamentally helped in the production of a more coherent and a more comprehensive view on these multifaceted processes. Clearly, there are no single set of temporary migrants: some are students, others are traders, and many more are workers either for governments, private companies or civil society organisations. Even among traders, there are great variations. Their modes of engagement and operation, experiences, and encounters differ markedly. So, accounts and policies on temporary migration must necessarily avoid the simplistic binaries such as 'good' or 'bad' consequences.

Other matters related to temporary migration will have to be probed by future issues of this journal. As we prepare this issue for the printers, the political economy of land grabbing in Africa and its related dispossession of peasants have become major issue in African and global discussions. Studies on this social problem have proliferated as one of us noted in a recent contribution to *Revista de Economia Política* (Obeng-Odoom, 2013) but, to date, matters related to temporary migration for these peasants have not been examined. We are hoping that the forthcoming special issue of this journal on resilient rural economies can interrogate some of these tensions and contradictions and speak truth to power.

### 3. Conclusion

The common implications of these articles are as follows: if people will increasingly move back-and-forth between countries, how will this affect their connexion to their local and national origins? If temporary migration increases in scope, will migrants be able to establish any attachment to the destination country? If people increasingly have diverse attachments to different localities in different countries, how will these processes affect our understanding of citizenship? Traditionally, citizenship is based on peoples' attachment and feeling of duty and sense of entitlement to one country. Research shows that the number of dual citizens is increasing globally (Faist *et al.*, 2004). If the extent of legal and individual attachments increases to several countries, how will the borders between them be legitimised?

At the urban level too, the dichotomy between rural and urban becomes highly questionable given that these are interconnected by the flows of migrants and their financial remittances. The articles in this special issue raise questions about 'national urban policies' that say little or nothing about the countryside. Further, they show that cities must be thought of both locally and regionally. Such questions do not lend themselves to easy correlations and causations built from sophisticated but increasingly schizophrenic software - the stock-in-trade of positivist economic methodology and epistemology. Rather, rigorous transdisciplinarity promoted in this journal, which includes formulating and answering questions not for subjects but with participants, visual methodologies, historical materialism and dialectics, Georgist re-interpretations and approaches will help as will other plural anthropological, geographical, and sociological perspectives. This way, not only will nuanced insights be revealed, but also the tyranny and imperialism of the conventional economic approaches can be challenged.

Beyond academic research, the articles also have implications for contemporary and future policy making about human mobility, locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. The states in Africa ought to be wary of the 'engine of growth' metaphor that basically turns cities to little more than production machines and take steps towards an inclusive urban society with better municipal services and labour protection for migrants. From an international perspective, local labour also requires protection and support in ways that will not leave migrants to racist scapegoating, but will deepen their contributions (for example through better social support programmes specifically designed for migrants) to both host and origin countries.

It seems that temporary migration will happen regardless of any attempts to stifle it. Given the preponderance of the evidence, we suggest that it can enhance economic development at the point of origin and destination but can also generate difficult conditions for migrants that might alter the positive processes. Clearly, temporary migration is imbued with both dangers and possibilities and rigorous research such as what is presented in this special issue can help policy makers to devise wise and effective strategies.

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### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Prof. Paul Alagidele for his support. Of course, the original ideas and data come from the authors who shared their research findings with us, so we thank each of them for their timely responses and for bearing with us in the process. We are also grateful to the referees not only for this paper but also for all the other articles in the issue. We take joint responsibility for all views expressed in this paper.

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