Africa <> Europe: A Double Engagement

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This introduction to the special issue entitled ‘Africa <> Europe: Transnational Linkages, Multi-Sited Lives’ outlines the history of the African migrant presence in Europe, gives an account of the contexts which shape contemporary migration, and surveys the approaches to international migration from Africa which have influenced researchers since the 1960s. Linking the contributions to the special issue is the theme of migrants’ transnational ‘double engagement’ with both Africa and Europe. The paper examines this theme across three domains of the lived experience of African migrants and refugees in Europe: ‘Livelihoods’, ‘Families’, and ‘Identities’. We conclude with an assessment of what can be learned (theoretically and methodologically) from the study of African transmigration, and suggest future lines of research.

Keywords: Transnational Migration; Africa; Europe; Livelihoods; Families; Identities

Introduction

This issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies concerns people from sub-Saharan Africa, in Europe as migrants or refugees, who, in the contemporary globalised ‘multi-sited’ world, live ‘transnationally’, maintaining a wide range of relationships linking them to places of origin.

Movement of peoples of African descent from Africa to Europe has a long history, in the past encompassing diplomats and missionaries, merchants and students, slaves and servants, soldiers and seamen. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, difficult economic, political and environmental conditions in sub-Saharan Africa, and demands for labour in the ‘North’, led to increasing numbers of migrants...
and refugees seeking entry to European countries, including those with few if any previous colonial/post-colonial ties with the continent. Africans are now a significant presence throughout Europe, especially in capital cities, where they form a major element in what has been called Europe’s ‘new’ immigrant population. At the same time, the revolution in information and communication technologies, and cheap international air travel, have meant that many are able to live ‘transnationally’, maintaining significant social, economic and cultural ties with countries of origin, and with fellow migrants elsewhere. This ‘double engagement’ (Mazzucato, infra) is manifested in manifold transnational linkages which result in flows of people, goods, money and ideas, and the creation of new institutions that cross national boundaries. The lives of many African migrants and refugees living and working in Europe are thus ‘multi-sited’, obliging them to deal with a multiplicity of contexts and social and cultural realities.

There is now a huge literature on transnational migration, with numerous overviews (among many others see Vertovec 1999, 2001). We cannot and do not undertake our own review here (but see Grillo 2001; Mazzucato 2008). Instead we draw upon certain themes which we believe offer a valuable comparative analytical perspective for the study of African migrants in Europe. Increasing numbers of migrants, and the xenophobic reaction in many receiving countries, have led to a great deal of heart-searching about ‘integration’ (however defined). This issue, reflecting a long-standing pre-occupation of the literature on immigrants, has since the turn of the millennium been revisited with renewed concern. At the same time, governments of developing countries and development organisations have become increasingly conscious of the contribution that migrant remittances make to home-country economies. The strength of the transnational approach is that it tries to bring these and other related phenomena together and study them simultaneously. A focus on transnational linkages, and the simultaneity of these linkages, avoids splitting migrants’ lives into two or more disconnected arenas. From the point of view of transnational migrants, the concept of ‘double engagement’ summarises in a striking way the range of social situations and relationships that they have to confront and reconcile, and forces our attention on how ‘here’ and ‘there’ constitute a single social field.

We accept the challenge of this approach by focusing in the first instance on Africans living and working in Europe, the linkages, material and imaginary, that they maintain with Africa, and the consequence for their lives both ‘here’ and ‘there’. In doing so we build on pioneering collections edited by Koser (2003) and Bilger and Kraler (2005). Both those collections, and Riccio (2005), are concerned more generally with migration or with migrant populations in situ, and, although some of their contributors deal with the transnational dimension, the collections do not attempt a comprehensive overview of the nature of transnational migration to/from Africa. This special issue instead examines the diverse forms that double engagement takes and how its many facets (social, economic, political, religious etc.) inter-relate. Contributions deal with African migrants and refugees in Britain, Denmark, France,
Italy and the Netherlands, and *inter alia* demonstrate the significance of the changing circumstances in both sending and receiving contexts within which transnational relationships are shaped. Africans are confronted with a ‘cascade of life choices’, as one Eritrean informant put it (Arnone, *infra*). The papers illustrate the different trajectories their paths follow as men and women attempt to devise individual and collective strategies and projects (including projects to bring ‘development’ to towns and villages ‘back home’) which take advantage of the benefits of living transnationally, and at the same time counter the difficulties (e.g. economic marginalisation) that such multi-sited lives face. Not the least of these is rejection by Northern populations increasingly hostile to migrants and refugees.

This issue is organised as follows. There are eight papers following this introductory overview. These have been selected from those presented to a panel convened by the present writers at the 2005 AEGIS (Africa–Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies) conference in London. Valentina Mazzucato introduces the concept of double engagement with special reference to Ghanaian migrants, but places that material in a broad theoretical and analytical framework. Bruno Riccio looks comparatively at two groups, Senegalese and Ghanaians, both living and working in Italy, whose double engagement has some similarities, but also some important differences, notably in the way in which extended families are involved ‘here’ and ‘there’. Kristine Krause opens up another area (transnational therapy networks) in which migrants engage in a multiplicity of relationships in seeking to care for their own health and that of family members and others in both Europe and Africa. She argues that medical anthropological studies need to adopt a transnational perspective. Healing is also central to Clara Saraiva’s paper, which explains how religious and ritual practices in Guinea-Bissau and Lisbon create a transnational realm in which the worlds of the living and of the ancestors coexist. Mayke Kaag shows how the lives of Senegalese in Italy are influenced by the transnational linkages (including religious ties) they maintain with their homeland and the politics of the locality in Italy where they reside and work. Alice Bloch takes up the theme of remittances, also discussed by Mazzucato and Riccio, and provides detailed evidence of remittance practices among recent Zimbabwean refugees. Nauja Kleist analyses the home-country engagements of Somali exiles in Denmark through a detailed case study of a conference seeking to mobilise the ‘diaspora’. Finally, Anna Arnone shows how Eritrean exiles in Milan constitute their identity through narratives of dislocation.

The following section in this paper outlines the history of the African migrant presence in Europe, gives an account of the contexts which shape contemporary migration, and surveys the approaches to international migration from Africa to Europe which have influenced researchers since the 1960s. We then pursue the theme of double engagement across three domains of the transnational lived experience of African migrants and refugees: ‘Livelihoods’, ‘Families’, and ‘Identities’. We conclude with an assessment of what can be learned, theoretically and methodologically, from the study of African transnationalism, and suggest future lines of research.
The Study of Africans in Europe

The Colonial Period and Earlier

‘There were Africans in Britain before the English came’ (Fryer 1984: 1). This much-quoted opening sentence of Peter Fryer’s monumental history of black people in Britain underlines the need for an historical perspective in any account of Africans in Europe. Fryer’s book followed the pioneering work of Debrunner (1979) and others who subsequently had an important influence on research on contemporary African migration to Europe and the Americas. Often by Afro-Caribbean or African American scholars (e.g. van Sertima 1987), their accounts were characterised by the desire to reassess the role of Africa in world history, counter ‘Western-centric’ views, and rescue black people from historical obscurity; they are in some respects the ethnic counterpart of feminist histories. Fryer’s book was one of a number of influential studies (others include Killingray 1994; Shyllon 1977; Walvin 1971) which established the long-term trajectory of Africans and others in Britain, their contribution to British society and, crucial for those writing in the 1970s and 1980s, the legitimacy of their presence in situations in which black people (principally of Afro-Caribbean origin) felt themselves increasingly marginalised and subjected to racism and xenophobia. Such studies also sought to endow African migrants with agency: far from always being victims, Northrup argues, Africans showed ‘immense curiosity and capacity for change in many and varied directions’ (2002: 186). They were as much a necessary contribution to public culture as contributions to academic scholarship.

There is now a considerable body of knowledge about Africans coming to Europe before and during the colonial period, and the details of that previously hidden history are quite astonishing. Nonetheless, with certain exceptions, we know little if anything about the significance of transnational relations (Africa <> Europe) during the earlier period. Yet within the limits imposed by transportation in the age of sail, and the social and economic condition in which Africans often found themselves, there was at times extensive movement to and from Africa, Europe, and indeed the Americas (within the ‘Black Atlantic’; Gilroy 1993), inside and outside the context of the slave trade. African rulers and representatives were involved in trade and diplomatic delegations; their children were sent to Europe for education; some of these were trained as missionaries and returned to Africa in that capacity; others acted as interpreters and go-betweens. There were also non-elite servants, musicians, court pets and so on. However, there is little trace of what they said and did when they went home (and perhaps returned to Europe again), and we know little about how such movement was experienced, and its long-term significance for social, economic, cultural and political change in Africa.

The principal partial exception concerns the intercontinental connections of the Afro-Caribbean and African students and political activists of the 1930s. Europe was the meeting-place for many students from the African colonies who, in conjunction with African American and (white) European sympathisers, created Pan-Africanism
and the movement for African freedom. London and Paris were important nodes in transnational (inter-colonial) political networks, in what (optimistically) might have been thought of as an ummah of black (colonised) peoples. Nonetheless, while detailed studies such as Adi’s (1998) provide much information on emergent nationalist movements and the connections established through student links, they tell us little about transnationalism as such. Trawling through the published research (including missionary literature) would uncover many clues, but absent that trawl, little can be said.

Nor do the mid-twentieth-century sociological studies of Africans in Europe provide any detailed accounts of transnational linkages. Probably the earliest academic study of the contemporary situation of Africans in Britain (indeed in Europe) was the anthropologist Kenneth Little’s research in Cardiff in 1940–41 (1947). The Tiger Bay area of Cardiff, like that of other British port cities, had a significant non-white population principally from Sierra Leone and Somalia, many of whom arrived as merchant seamen. Little describes these African-origin communities and their at times difficult relations with the indigenous population (there were serious anti-black riots immediately after the First World War), but although many were transient residents, he has nothing to say about their ongoing relations with Africa. Likewise a subsequent study by Little’s pupil, Michael Banton, of the black population of Stepney in East London (1955), though recording that many looked to return to Africa, provides little evidence of ongoing linkages. Recent historical research has, however, begun to fill the gap. Diane Frost’s account of the Kru (Sierra Leonean) merchant seamen of Liverpool found that Kru men often contracted common-law relationships in both Liverpool and in Freetown, but even marriage with British women did not mean abandoning Kru identity, and links between the Kru communities were maintained through the ‘comings and goings’ of seamen between the two cities (Frost 1994: 96).

**Independence to Oil Crisis**

Between the 1960s—by which time most African countries had gained independence—and the 1990s, limited scholarly attention was given to African migration to Europe. This can partially be explained by the limited numbers of Africans in Europe until the early 1980s. However, even when Africans began to migrate in larger numbers to Europe after the mid-1980s, scholarly attention remained scant. Between 1966 and 1999, only five per cent of articles published by the *International Migration Review* concerned Africa, and less than one per cent African migration to Europe. Another, related explanation is that there was little political interest in African migrants. Western European migration studies were initially concerned with inter-European population movement (e.g. internal migration in Spain and Italy—Pascual de Sans 1984; Rella and Vadala 1984), with Southern European emigration (Schechtman 1962), and with declining population growth and labour market shortages (Moller 1964). Africa was often still seen as a receiving
continent for Europeans who migrated during the colonial period, for Eastern European refugees fleeing Communism, and for Chinese and Indian migrants seeking business opportunities. African migration to Europe meant the temporary sojourn of students or the return of colonists to metropolitan countries (Bouscaren 1963). When African specialists studied migration it was as movement within Africa. Uyangá’s exhaustive review (1981) of work conducted during this period lists no studies of Africans in the North. The principal focus was rural–urban (circular) migration in Africa, long a preoccupation of anthropologists and other social scientists who were concerned to understand the causes of migration and its implications for social change, for agricultural and industrial development, and for urbanisation (Gluckman 1961). A sign of the low priority accorded to migration to Europe is that, at the time of the first Lomé Convention (1975), while the flow of goods and financial assistance was widely discussed, the flow of people was hardly mentioned (London Chamber of Commerce 1977). Migration between Africa and Europe was not on the agenda.

The picture changed only gradually. In the UK, where the principal concern was with ‘new Commonwealth’ immigrants from South Asia and the Caribbean, the latter sometimes incorporated migrants from ‘black Africa’ (Phizacklea 1984), with ‘race’ and class providing the dominant analytical frameworks (Katznelson 1973). In France, where the focus was on migrants from North Africa (Anon. 1965), studies specifically concerned with sub-Saharan migration (principally from the Senegal River valley) were slow to appear. Early publications were mainly descriptive, biographical accounts of migrant experiences (témoignages), documenting the difficulties encountered in France and presenting migrants as torn from their African roots (Dadier 1959; Dariel 1975; Lauran 1968; Ndongo 1974; Pinot 1973; Rosier and Leriche 1961). There were few, if any, cross-country comparisons.

Following the oil crises of the 1970s, however, when it became apparent that many migrants were in Europe to stay and countries began imposing increasing restrictions on entry, migration literature became more abundant and within it some attention was paid to migrants from Africa. The little scholarship on African migrants was predominantly conducted in the ex-colonial metropole countries on groups they had colonised, reflecting migration flows (discussed in the next sub-section). French publications, frequently anthropological in focus, concerned specific groups of African migrants, especially Senegalese, and were often based on migrants’ own accounts of their lives (Colin-Nogues and Dia 1982; Ouossou-Essu 1979). The main focus, though, was principally on aggregate groups and their adaptation into the labour market (Adams 1977; Barou 1978), or their conditions in terms of class and ‘race’ relations (Meillassoux 1976; N’Diaye 1970; Pinot 1973; Rey 1976; Samuel 1978). In Italy, a small number of studies documented the living conditions of African migrants, including Eritreans (Capalbo 1982; see also Censis 1979; ECAP CGIL 1979; Sala 1980). Some were journalistic, bringing the situation of clandestine workers to public attention (Guarna 1974). In Germany, no attention was paid to African migrants during this period.
In the UK there was in the mid-1970s a marked break with the previous approach of lumping migrants into all-encompassing categories, and more attention was paid to heterogeneity. Watson’s edited collection (1977), although not focused on sub-Saharan Africa, argued that culture mattered in migrants’ adaptation and that migration was not permanent, but rather a back-and-forth process. With respect to Africans, however, most studies still focused on issues of ‘race’ and ethnic relations in very general terms. Exceptions included two studies of Nigerians and Ghanaians in London in the early 1970s, both of which anticipated later research. Jerrome (1978) was concerned with Ibo from South Eastern Nigeria, of whom she estimated there were 3,000 in London. Most had come to gain qualifications to stand them in good stead when they returned home. Their lives were, however, disrupted by the Nigerian civil war, which originated with the attempt by their home region (‘Biafra’) to secede. One consequence was the proliferation of voluntary associations mobilising support for the struggle. If in this and other ways (e.g. the importance of maintaining good ‘hometown’ relationships) Ibo illustrated their continuing commitment to the world of Nigeria, their gradual transition from studying to working in Britain, and their use of savings to invest in property in London, also illustrated the extent to which they were living in both worlds.

Goody and Groothues (1977) provided further evidence of this ‘double engagement’. Ghanaians, too, had come to Britain principally as students, even if financial constraints meant their studies lasted several years, and many had to work to support themselves. Their extended stay led the (principally male) students, now married, perhaps with children in Ghana, to seek to unite their families in London. However, husbands-as-students also required support, and this meant that wives had to work, though they too had ambitions to study. As a consequence many couples followed the common Ghanaian practice of fostering their children, sometimes with other families in Britain, but also (in up to half the households) with families in Ghana. If Jerrome’s study anticipated subsequent research on transnational ties sustained through the mobilisation of emigrant populations, that by Goody and Groothues drew attention to the importance of transnational households and practices of transnational caring, both of which figure prominently in more recent research (Baldassar et al. 2007; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Gardner and Grilo 2002).

Into Fortress Europe

In the 1990s migration scholars and African specialists increasingly turned their attention towards migration from Africa to Europe. Studies became more diversified, focusing on groups other than those with a relationship with a former colonial power. After the optimism of independence, African states found themselves grappling with economic difficulties and accompanying social upheaval. All the countries represented in this special issue (Eritrea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Somalia, Zimbabwe) have gone through and are going through immense economic, political and social upheaval due to failing economies, unemployment (especially of young
educated people), social strife, war, corruption, environmental and/or health problems (e.g. HIV/AIDS). All are categorised as ‘Low-Income Developing Members of the IMF Eligible for Assistance under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility’\textsuperscript{2} and subjected to policies which have undermined welfare and educational systems. In international terms some would (fairly or not) be characterised as ‘failed states’: 11 of the top 20 states listed in Foreign Policy’s ‘failed states index’ are African.\textsuperscript{3} The situation of Somalia (ranked fifth), a country torn by internal warfare, is well-known, that of Guinea-Bissau less so, though it too has experienced considerable civil strife and economic disaster, if not on the same scale as has, most recently and with greater publicity, Zimbabwe. Both Somalia and Zimbabwe figure prominently in recent refugee statistics, as previously did Eritrea which underwent a prolonged war for independence (achieved in 1991) with further conflict in 1998.

Less dramatic, but with no less consequence, has been the socio-economic decline of Ghana and Senegal, both with high hopes at independence (1957 and 1960), since turned to disappointment. Akyeampong (2000) describes in some detail the changing fortunes of Ghana (declining price of cocoa, ‘bungling and inept’ regimes, structural adjustment programme etc.) which make it difficult for the country to retain its workforce. In the 1970s many found employment in neighbouring countries, notably Nigeria, but the latter’s expulsion of migrants in 1983 led to a search for work further afield, in Europe and North America (Peil 1995). In the same period, Senegalese began to move to a much wider range of countries than previously, including Italy (Carter 1997; Riccio 2003). From the late 1980s onwards, therefore, economic decline and political instability generated wave after wave of migrants and refugees from Africa seeking to enter Europe. Coupled with the above trends are stringent immigration policies in what came to be known as ‘Fortress Europe’, raising the requirements for obtaining residency and working permits. Large populations of ‘illegals’ began entering Europe along circuitous and dangerous routes, often living precariously in the interstices of European societies.

Only a very general picture of the origins, distribution, demography, and changes in the contemporary African migrant population across Europe is possible. One of the most detailed surveys of migratory flows from Africa to Europe, principally derived from EUROSTAT statistics, was conducted by Nelly Robin (1996) at ORSTOM (Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d’Outre-Mer).\textsuperscript{4} In 1993 around 1 million sub-Saharan Africans were officially registered in the European Union. An area of Northern Europe encompassing the UK, the Netherlands and Germany attracted mainly Anglophone Africans, a central area (France) hosted mainly French speakers, while Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal) received diverse populations: common language and colonial past obviously remained influential, but not exclusively so. West Africans predominated with some 128,000 in France, 82,000 in the UK, 74,000 in Germany, and 63,000 in Italy. Ghanaian migrants were the most numerous, followed by Nigerians and Senegalese, though Ghana also attracted migrants from within Africa, an example of how migration flows intertwine and create complex migratory networks in both North
and South. Robin warns that the statistics which form the basis of the ORSTOM
publication may be highly inaccurate. Each European country maintains its own
definition of migrant (foreign-born, non-national, ethnic groups, etc.), and uses
different collection systems (surveys, censuses), making cross-country comparisons
difficult. Moreover, the increasing numbers of undocumented migrants make
migratory flows increasingly difficult to measure accurately.5

Although precision is impossible, some general trends in intercontinental African
migration may be noted.

- The volume of movement out of Africa has grown dramatically since the 1970s.
The African population (documented and undocumented) in Europe has
increased, is increasing and is unlikely to diminish, with ever-greater numbers
of family re-unions, despite increasingly stringent controls on entry.

- The range of countries from which Africans migrate and of migrant destinations
within Europe and beyond is greater than ever. Although recent migrations
underline the enduring significance of the colony–metropole axis (e.g. Senegalese
in France, Ghanaians in Britain, Eritreans in Italy), Italy now hosts Senegalese,
there are Ghanaians in the Netherlands, and Somalis in Denmark.

- African migrants tend to congregate in large European cities and in specific
neighbourhoods of these cities: Congolese in the Château Rouge neighborhood of
Paris (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000), Ghanaians in the Bijlmer
neighbourhood of Amsterdam (Nimako 2000; ter Haar 1998), and Somalis in
East London (McGown 1999).

- Emigration involves educated, skilled, often highly skilled, workers, as much as it
does manual labourers and the illiterate, with a consequent brain drain from the
home countries. In Ghana, 70 per cent of doctors, 45 per cent of pharmacists and
20 per cent of nurses trained between 1995 and 2002 left the country, mainly for
the UK and the USA (ISSER 2003).

- The jobs obtained by migrants are often incommensurate with their skills. Some
Africa-trained doctors obtain employment in Britain’s National Health Service,
earning many times what they can in their home countries, and enjoying vastly
better facilities, but many other migrants must be satisfied with menial employ-
ment. It is in this context that we find what Nieswand (2006: 2) calls the ‘status
paradox of migration’, wherein the status back home gained (by Ghanaians)
through migration is accompanied by a ‘simultaneous loss of status in the
receiving country’.

- There has been a feminisation of migration with consequent changes in male/
female relations and family organisation (IOM 2005: 11). Women are increasingly
migrating independently of partners, seeking work on their own account. The sex
industry and trafficking are but part of this, as changes in the demographic
structure in Europe and in job expectations have created multiple opportunities in
the health and caring sectors. Women, especially from West Africa, are also
building on their traditional experience of trade to make successful forays into the European commercial sector (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000).

- Above all, ‘what is most significant about [African] twentieth-century dispersion is the ties Africans outside retain with their home countries—politically, economically, socially and culturally . . . Africa and its diaspora exist in a closer physical union than in any previous period’ (Akyeampong 2000: 188).

The Transnational Turn

Two dominant policy discourses influenced research on African migration to Europe in the 1990s. First, there was growing disquiet in receiving countries about the numbers of new migrants and about their ‘integration’. Sub-Saharan African migrants, heretofore ignored or seen as unproblematic, were caught up in these concerns which guided research on migratory routes and settlement patterns (Courade 1997a,b; Pérouse de Montclos 2003; Timera 1997), and on migrant participation in the labour market, in health and social services, and in education (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004; Calvo 1997; Coleman 1992; Egharevba 2004; Kuami Kuagbenou 1997; Mendoza 2000). Research thus focused on the quantification and distribution of migrants over sectors of the economy, and their gross impact on the host-country economy. Studies rarely disaggregated the data by national or ethnic origin (Styan 2003) because receiving countries had only recently begun to gather data on African migrants and moreover many escaped data collection because of their illegal status. Thus while there was felt to be an increasing need to quantify numbers entering and exiting national borders, the more difficult reliable quantitative estimation became.

Secondly, development organisations such as the World Bank drew attention to the amounts of money that migrants sent home and the consequences for home-country economies (Ratha 2003). Remittances (cash or goods which those based ‘here’ send or take back ‘there’) have thus become a focal point of studies on Africans in Europe (Orozco et al. 2005; Sander and Munzele Maimbo 2003). International organisations, academia and home-country governments have conducted numerous surveys to try to quantify remittances and their development impact. Remittances have always been an important part of migrants’ contributions to their local economies and the welfare of their individual families, as studies of migration in Africa demonstrated long ago. Although remittances frequently crossed international borders (e.g. Nigeria to Ghana), they tended to be interpreted as re-distributing resources from relatively affluent urban workers to families in the countryside. In principle, little has changed, though the volume is now huge and for many countries equals or surpasses the value of trade or aid. Such remittances may constitute a substantial proportion of the migrant or refugee’s wages or benefits (see Bloch, Riccio infra), may supplement daily income, provide for household goods or luxuries, build a house, start a business or contribute to a migrant and her or his family’s prestige back home (Mazzucato infra).
Concern with remittances reflected an important turn in migration studies in the 1990s in which attention was increasingly given to the ties migrants maintain with their home country while living and working elsewhere, i.e. with what has come to be called ‘transnational migration’, or ‘transmigration’. Transmigration points to a world where lives are multi-sited, and in which there is a multiplicity of linkages between people and places. Those places may be physically widely separated but co-exist within a single social field. Theorists of transnationalism, from Glick Schiller et al. (1992) onwards, have argued that modern production methods and the revolution in information and communication technologies have created the conditions that have heightened aspirations to migrate. At the same time they have made it possible for migrants to communicate frequently and regularly through telephone calls, air travel and Internet with people back home and other migrants around the world, with consequent changes in the institutions and norms that guide people’s behaviour both at home and abroad (Foner 1997). Whether or not migrants and refugees are actually moving between sites, dual orientation and double engagement are part of their daily lived experience, and the significance of transnationalism may be observed from one site or many within the field.

The 1990s and 2000s thus saw a proliferation of detailed case studies of African transnational migrants. Most such studies have been qualitative, anthropological accounts based on people’s narratives and practices. They encompass different aspects of migrants’ lives and their relationships to their home country, ranging from economic activities (Marques et al. 2001), culture (Kazadi Wa Kabwe and Segatti 2003), religion (Soares 2004; ter Haar 1998; van Dijk 2002), identities (Ifekwunigwe 2003), and second-generation youth (Andall 2002). Building on such studies and exploring how and why this double engagement (‘here’ and ‘there’) affects migrants’ lives while in Europe, we next examine social institutions and practices within three closely interwoven domains: ‘Livelihoods’, ‘Families’ and ‘Identities’. All three are vast in scope, and we can only point to some emergent issues, often requiring further research.

Double Engagement

Livelihoods

There are various ways in which discussion of livelihoods illuminates migrants’ double engagement and the changes in institutions and practices that arise from it. First, flexibility. In Ghana, says Akyeampong (2000: 207), ‘going abroad to “hustle” [is] the stuff of popular culture’. The exigencies of economic, social and political life have obliged Africans to learn the art of ‘making do’ in whatever situation they find themselves, and this is a skill they take with them wherever they go (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). These skills were amply demonstrated in Keith Hart’s work on the ‘informal sector’ in urban Ghana over thirty years ago (1973), a study with considerable relevance to African migrants in contemporary European cities. There is,
for example, the willingness, within limits, to do what is necessary to earn a livelihood, accept work which is hard, poorly paid, in difficult conditions, often undocumented, and below the expectations that migrants have brought with them. Hence they do domestic work, cleaning, construction and work in meat-packing plants, often working two or three jobs at a time. There are also entrepreneurial skills: migrants from Congo and Zaire in Paris engage in a range of income-generating activities (using a morally neutral term): legitimate businesses selling exotic ethnic products, street-trading, illegal bar–restaurants, unlicensed taxis, smuggling, the sale of stolen goods, trading in illicit substances, and so on (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). Flexibility is also manifest in the willingness to carry a portfolio of multiple, transnationally distributed careers, serially or simultaneously being a night porter and street peddler in Europe, running a taxi business and a farm in Africa. Gender comes into it as the feminisation of emigration, noted above, has meant that increasingly African women, too, are arriving independently in Europe, in cities like Paris, and developing their own economic niche. From providing food to African migrant workers in all-male hostels and running illegal bars, they have entered the world of legitimate businesses, including international trading, on an ever-increasing scale.

Secondly, transnationalism affects both earning and spending. Remittances, discussed above, are one aspect of this. Less well documented are the resources moving from ‘here’ to ‘there’ via prestations (gifts and offerings etc.) at the time of life-cycle events: births, marriages and deaths (see Mazzucato, Saraiva infra, and Mazzucato et al. 2006). Less attention has also been given to migrants’ spending patterns in the receiving country. Mazzucato (infra) analyses migrants’ spending patterns both ‘here’ and ‘there’ and shows that migrants remit home but at the same time, and to a greater extent, they spend on services, businesses, taxes and goods in the country where they live, attesting to their double engagement.

Thirdly, in the 1990s, as the significance of transnational migration began to be understood, the relationship between migration and development received renewed attention, especially from NGOs looking for routes outside of bilateral aid channels. In France, there was a particular concern with initiatives by African migrants from the Senegal River area working through migrant associations to channel resources for development directly to their own villages and regions (Grillo and Riccio 2004 survey the literature; see also Hamilton 1997). Similarly, Van Hear et al. (2004) have examined the contribution to development made by African migrant associations in the UK. Such initiatives have, however, rarely been subjected to detailed scrutiny, assessment of their potential often being based on optimistic reports by the NGOs and/or village/ethnic associations involved. Nauja Kleist’s analysis (infra) of a conference in Denmark where the ‘Somali diaspora’ mobilised on behalf of development and reconstruction makes an important contribution to a literature which has yet to address the complexities of such transnational activities.

Finally, flows from ‘there’ to ‘here’ are also important for understanding transnational relationships. These have received little attention as they are less
visible, because in smaller quantities, and because they often come in the form of services that are not easily quantifiable. Such services, provided by those at home, might include managing migrant businesses and looking after their families, arranging the provision of visas and identity documents, or attending prayer camps for days on end, seeking help to get migrants out of prison. They are increasingly significant as a means of supporting the migrants’ livelihoods in Europe, in particular when exclusionary policies make their lives increasingly precarious (Mazzucato 2006).

Families

Intersecting livelihoods is the domain of kinship and family relations, surprisingly under-researched in the context of African transmigration. It would currently be impossible to assess the implications of transnational migration for ‘African Systems of Kinship and Marriage’ (to cite a path-breaking anthropological work by Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950), even if one were able to disentangle its precise contribution after a century of profound (colonial and post-colonial) change in African family relations in which rural–urban migration has also played a part. We can nonetheless point to three areas where kinship and family relations have been directly affected.

The first stems from the way in which migratory regimes, for instance controlling the admission of partners or dependants, or regulating certain kinship or ritual practices (polygyny, circumcision) may lead to families being split between continents, obliging them to live their lives across multiple sites. This splitting may, however, also represent a choice through which families maximise their income and/or reduce economic or social costs by spreading themselves across different locations (Stark and Lucas 1988). Single male migration, for example, continues to be important in many cases, and is especially well documented for Wolof-speaking Senegalese in Italy (Kaag, Riccio infra), and Soninké in France (Timera 1996, 1997, 2002). Such migrants, whose lives are ultimately oriented towards West Africa, live a frugal, ‘bachelor’ existence in hostels or multi-tenanted accommodation (e.g. the Residence Prealpino in Brescia, Kaag infra), making annual (sometimes more frequent) visits to family back home. Even when spouses accompany them to Europe, as is increasingly happening, it does not mean that partners and children are united. As Goody and Groothues (1977) reported, children may be left in the care of grandmothers or other female relatives in Africa, or sent there to be raised away from the temptations of European society. Thus the increasing numbers of couples who come to Europe are obliged to split their families over different sites and depend on transnational networks of caring and responsibility structured through the kinship system. This in turn needs to be ‘oiled’ through remittances: the onerous demands for gifts on the part of relatives are a constant source of complaint by those returning to Africa for a visit (Riccio infra). Such transnational networks of child care (or care of elderly parents—see Mazzucato 2007), are also important for the ‘single’ female migrant with children back home (e.g. Cape Verdean domestic servants in Rome;
Andall 2000), and also serve as important sources of support, information, and indeed medication at times of life crisis and sickness (Krause infra).

Secondly, transnational migration transforms gender relations. Men and women are differently affected by transnational migration and this may be reflected in different transnational practices (in respect of earning a living, what is done with remittances, involvement with religious or secular associations, or the extent to which men/women move jointly with, or independently of, partners). It is also reflected in changes in expectations about gender relations and the performance of gender. Kleist (infra) provides an illustration of what may happen to gender under conditions of migration, arguing that participation in refugee associations by Somali men in Denmark is a ‘way of regaining status, of achieving recognition as a man of competences and resources’ It is a means of ‘repairing’ masculinity, the proper performance of which the breakdown of Somali society and the exodus of refugees has undermined. There are other ways, too, in which expectations of masculinity, and the possibilities for performing expected masculine roles, change and/or are shaped through the experience of transnational migration, as was apparent in an older literature (from France) on North African men presenting symptoms of impotence. Rassiguier’s observation concerning the ‘quintessential African woman who gets conjured up when the African presence in France is in need of a representational trope’ (2003: 9) illustrates another point, that gender identities are re-articulated through the vector of transnationalism. A view of the ‘unintegrable’ African family is built around images of alien customary practices (polygamy, circumcision, many children, patriarchy) through which the African woman is constituted. The transformation of gender relations also affects intergenerational relations within families. Long a major focus for research on Afro-Caribbean and South Asian families in Britain, and those of North African origin in France (les Beurs), it has featured less in research on sub-Saharan Africans in Europe, partly because, with exceptions, family migration has, until recently, not been significant, though that is changing (see Salzbrunn 2002; Timera 2002 on intergenerational conflict over marriage and circumcision).

Thirdly, along with shifting allegiances, and changes in family structure (possibly indicating that the long-anticipated trend towards the nuclearisation of African families is finally occurring, with or without the impact of transnational migration), there also appears to be a shift in the role of non-kin relationships. In Mazzucato’s (2003) research on Ghanaian transnationalism it was found that non-kin occupy key roles in certain networks. They are often the ones who are given the responsibility to distribute remittances to the different kin members of the network, asked to manage housing construction or business ventures, and check on family members. These friends who have often themselves been migrants are presumed not to be needy, to know how difficult life is overseas, and thus less likely to make unrealistic requests or take money for themselves.
Identities

‘Transnationalism and identity’, says Vertovec (2001: 573), ‘are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition’. We noted above that transnationalism frequently involves the reformulation of gender roles and relationships. But it also obliges both those who move and those who stay to articulate, code and re-code a whole range of identities. How do Africans living and working in Europe define/redefine themselves, and how are they defined/redefined by the society to which they have come?

One vector, discussed in Arnone’s account of Eritrean refugees, is the passage from Africa to Europe. Their journey, as for many refugees, is frequently a scarifying experience, a ‘frightening and painful ritual, through which one becomes part of the Eritrean diaspora’ (Arnone infra). For many economic migrants, too, especially those entering Europe clandestinely, their journey may be terrifying, sometimes deadly. Others simply step off a plane. Either way, the migrant must negotiate (and learn to negotiate if they do not already have such skills, perhaps acquired through rural–urban migration in Africa) a multiplicity of potential (new) identifications and definitions of self and other, often in a hostile environment.

Perceptions of the ‘otherness’ of black Africans have deep and persistent historical roots, including the legacy of the slave trade and of colonialism. These have continuing resonance even in countries which were not themselves colonial powers, and are constantly reinforced through media images of devastation and dependency. For many people the overwhelming vision of black Africa remains one in which the dominant motif is savagery and this is reinforced by the content of stories about contemporary migrants that permeate the European press and TV: female circumcision, prostitution, polygyny, AIDS, witchcraft, ‘ritual murders’, ‘bush meat’, cruelty to children, drug smuggling, fraud (van Dijk 2001).

‘Race’ is, however, only one element. ‘The movement of black peoples’, says Gilroy (1993: 30), entails ‘inescapable pluralities’. ‘There’ or ‘here’, Africans engage in a multiplicity of ethnically-based identifications, their situation more complex than that which Gilroy, drawing on Du Bois, describes through the language of ‘doubleness’. It is not just a matter of being ‘Black’ and ‘British’ or indeed being caught ‘between the claims of racial particularity … and … the modern universals that appear to transcend race’ (Gilroy 1993: 147). Mundanely, they are nationals of a particular country (though they may have acquired or lost more than one nationality in their travels), and obliged to adopt a ‘national’ system of identification because it is a significant bureaucratic tool (structuring legal relationships, for example), and one that may well be reinforced, even created by, the experience of migration and exile (Arnone infra). Other kinds of identification may also be situationally relevant, for example region of origin, and what was, and often still is, called ‘tribe’. ‘Tribe’ (or ethnic group) was always a difficult category to operationalise in the African colonial context, and much further work needs to be done on what it means to be ‘Ibo’ or ‘Ashanti’ in contemporary Europe. There may also be ‘super-tribal’ identities,
involving clusters of related ethnic groups perhaps extending across the national boundaries which colonialism created and independence reinforced.

The extent to which cross-national, tranethnic relationships are emerging in the migrant and refugee population of contemporary European cities around an ‘African’ identity, perhaps re-articulating old ideals of pan-Africanism and négritude, is poorly documented; likewise any solidarities stemming from common colonial and postcolonial experience, or common colonial language (Styan 2003, for instance, finds little evidence for these phenomena among Francophone migrants in London). Ter Haar (1998) rightly draws attention to the way in which such collective categorisations may be generated by the receiving society itself, and depend on context. Thus the ascribed identity of African Christians in the Netherlands is ‘African’, rather than the ‘Christian’ they would prefer, while in the UK African and Afro-Caribbean church leaders emphasise their African-ness. Somalis in London and Toronto, on the other hand, define themselves principally as Muslims, rather than as Africans (McGown 1999).

Since the 1990s there has been much discussion of religion among Africans in Europe, about Islam, as in the case of the Somalis, and West African followers of the Sufi brotherhoods, and about Christianity, especially Pentecostalism and other African-oriented Christian sects (e.g. Adogame 2004, ter Haar 1998, van Dijk 1997, 2002). Less has been written about religious beliefs and practices that do not draw on world religions. Saraiva’s account (infra) of the religious practices of migrants from Guinea-Bissau in Lisbon describes a community which, in spiritual terms, is a world apart. But the religious system is one which is ‘truly transnational’:

[S]pirits, people and goods circulate on two parallel sets of worlds: the physical, real worlds of the two contexts, the home country and the host country, and the two conceptualised universes of the living and of the ancestors.

Much of the literature on religious institutions could be interpreted through a dialectic of enclosure and opening out, and touches on the extent to which African-origin transnational populations are included with, or excluded from, mainstream societies in Europe. The situation is complex, with considerable variation. Certainly many African migrants who live transnationally, also exist ‘here’ within relatively self-enclosed worlds. There is a repli sur soi (Timera 1997), an enclavement within an environment in which ties based on kinship and village of origin, and/or religious affiliation predominate: a ‘place to feel at home’, to quote the resonant title of an early book on African Christianity (Welbourn and Ogot 1966). To an extent this enclavement may be a response to an increasingly hostile environment. The Residence Prealpino in Brescia (Kaag infra) is what Sinatti (2006) calls a ‘translocality’, and appears to be a safe haven wherein the inhabitants can continue to be Senegalese (specifically adherents of the Mouride Sufi brotherhood) and maintain their own social, cultural and religious practices and identity. This is an illusion as the Residence is very much part of the Italian world, and the focus of dispute between parties of the centre-right (especially the Lega Lombarda) and centre-left as well as different strands
of opinion among the Senegalese themselves around issues such as greater separation from, or integration with, Italian society, or more simply the construction of a mosque.

If enclavement is one option, then the search for, or practice of, inclusion is another. Thus, in response to the current adverse political climate in Italy, the transnational Senegalese Mouride leadership has advocated a rapprochement between their followers and other Muslims on the one hand, and Italian society on the other. There seems to be a movement away from the Saints and Marabouts characteristic of Sufism towards a more universalistic Islam, and greater identification with the ummah. Enclavement is thus not a necessary accompaniment of transnationalism, and its significance should not be overestimated. In Sinatti’s terms (2006), drawing on Hannerz (1990), some African transnational migrants are ‘locals’, others ‘cosmopolitans’, engaged in a multiplicity of linkages ‘there’, while maintaining an equally wide-ranging set of relationships ‘here’. In an increasingly globalised world it is not untypical to see a man bringing his child to elementary school in Amsterdam while talking to his mother in a Ghanaian village on his mobile phone. This is what ‘double engagement’ means.

Conclusion

It is now well established that a transnational perspective is essential for studies of contemporary migration, and this special issue underscores that point. Beyond that, we would emphasise the importance of grounding such studies in specific histories and contexts. The value of research located (physically) both ‘here’ and ‘there’ may also be apparent, though transnationalism may be observed from one site or many within a single social field.

Is there anything unique about, or specific to, Africa <> Europe transnational migration? Our tentative conclusion is that there is in principle no fundamental difference between that and other transnational migrations, e.g. South Asia <> Europe or Hispanic America <> USA; indeed, there are many similarities. Nonetheless, even if there are no fundamental differences, Africa <> Europe transmigration is shaped in distinctive ways which taken together constitute a migrancy configuration specific to African migrants and their transnational linkages. Five inter-related aspects of that configuration may be noted briefly: the list is not exhaustive.

- Migration takes place against the background of a specific history of colonialism (and in the case of Western Africa the slave trade), which in important ways formed African society and economy, and Africa’s relationship with the wider world, over several centuries.
- Colonialism and after gave a distinctive profile to the image of Africa and Africans in Europe, and in complex ways also shaped how localistic (tribal, village) identities interplay with national identities on the one hand and global forms of
identification on the other. These global forms of identification include both positive and negative aspects of ‘black’ identity in an historic and contemporary context.

- There has been a shared experience of an optimistic emergence from colonial rule, with hopes and expectations dashed by subsequent economic and political failure.
- Religion, in the form of variations on two major world religions, is very significant in the lives of many African migrants. Theirs is Islam and Christianity through an African lens, modulated on the one hand by indigenous African thought and practice (which is not to say ‘traditional’ in any simple sense), and on the other by ‘modernity’.
- Influenced, indeed transformed, by all of these, there is the specific form that African kinship, affinity, and gender relations, take and have taken, both ‘here’ and ‘there’.

Although research on Africa <> Europe has advanced considerably, much work remains. Concerning livelihoods, for example, there is a need to ‘follow the prestations’, tracing the transmission of resources passing through kinship and other channels at life crises, both from the point of view of their contribution to African local economies and what they tell us about contemporary systems of kinship and affinity (and religion) under conditions of transnational migration. Indeed, much more consideration should be to given to ‘African’ kinship and marriage in a European context. Further detailed empirical work on development initiatives emanating from African (village or other) associations based in Europe is also desirable: do they really work, if so for whom? On identities, we still know little about the meaning of ‘tribe’ and ‘nation’ in the context of transnational migration to Europe, or about relationships between African migrants from different parts of the continent, or between Africans and those of African descent from the Caribbean or South America. Are there, for example, emergent ‘Black Atlantic’ solidarities, other than among intellectuals (novelists, playwrights, filmmakers, musicians etc., and of course academics) operating transnationally in a cosmopolitan milieu? And what of the ‘cultural intermixture’ that, along with ‘doubleness’, characterises the Black experience in a country such as Britain (Gilroy 1993: 4). To what extent are the experiences of young people of African background, born and brought up in London, Paris, Amsterdam or Lisbon, converging with those of Afro-Caribbean/African-American, North African, South Asian or indeed any other origin?

Finally, a crucial problem for transnational migrants is balancing ‘here’ and ‘there’. An irony of transmigration is that it draws people back (‘there’) while placing them in situations (‘here’) in which transethnic, intercultural dialogue is not only possible but may be essential. Sustaining linkages with ‘home’ may seem the counterpart of the repli sur soi widely reported among many, African and other, transnational migrants in Europe. Yet the very fact of migration inevitably exposes such migrants to some form of ‘integration’, whether practically needed or demanded for ideological reasons
by the receiving society. They are therefore obliged, albeit sometimes in minimal fashion, to open out and address other cultures and societies. For such migrants this is the fundamental challenge of the double engagement which constitutes transnational migration, and how they address that challenge is crucial to their future trajectory in Europe. For others, double engagement may mean lives which are more closely interwoven with both receiving and sending societies, and this is especially true of the second generation. In profound ways they are both ‘here’ and ‘there’, and in their case it is how the receiving society itself addresses that challenge which will determine their future in Europe.

Notes

[1] The AEGIS conference was held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 29 June–2 July 2005 (http://www.nomadit.co.uk/~aegis/ has full details). Besides the papers in this issue, the panel on ‘Africa <- Europe: Transnational Linkages’ included contributions from Naluwembe Binaisa (Ugandan migrants and refugees), Lyubov Ivanova (African diaspora in Russia), Barbara Jettinger (Senegalese women in Paris), Hannah Lewis (asylum-seekers in the UK), Ibra Sene (West African immigrants in France), and Ellie Vasta and Leander Kandilige (Ghanaian workers in Britain). Richard Black, John Campbell, Khalid Koser and Ben Soares chaired sessions and acted as discussants. The convenors thank the University of Sussex Centre for Migration Research, and the Ghana TransNet Program at the University of Amsterdam for providing financial assistance with the organisation of the panel. Valentina Mazucato would like to thank Magali Chelpi for excellent research assistance.

[4] Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d’Outre-Mer
[5] Uniquely in Europe, the 2001 UK census asked people to identify themselves by their ethnicity, e.g. as ‘black African’. Adjusting for those who declared themselves ‘mixed African’, Rees and Butt (2004) have estimated the ‘African’ population in the UK for 2001 as 514,000, compared with 214,000 in 1991 (Daley 1998), and 140,000 in 1981. On this basis, the African population, heavily concentrated in certain boroughs in North and South inner London, increased almost fourfold between 1981 and 2001, and in 2001 approached the ‘black Caribbean’ population (677,000). Comparable statistics for other European countries are not available. Figures for those discussed by our contributors include:

- **Denmark.** The Danish Immigration Service (2005): 43,000 African immigrants and descendants, including those from North Africa: Somalia 17,000, Ghana 1,000–2,000.
- **Italy.** Official statistics for 2004 (http://demo.istat.it/): 195,000 residents from sub-Saharan Africa in foreign population of 2.4m: Senegal (54,000), Ghana (33,000), Nigeria (32,000), Eritrea and Somalia 5,000–6,000 each.
- **The Netherlands.** Stock of first- and second-generation, non-Western population (2005): 1.7m, of which Somalia (21,733), Ghana (19,108), Cape Verde (19,966), Nigeria (7,615), Senegal (1,330), Eritrea (794) (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, http://statline.cbs.nl/).
- **Portugal.** In 2005 there were 265,000 foreigners with legal residence permits, about 46 per cent from Africa.
References


