Population mobility in Africa:
An overview

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Although there is an abundant literature on migration in Sub-Saharan Africa and mobility in the continent seems to be increasing, it is remarkably difficult to understand fully the processes underlying the phenomenon. This is partly related to problems with definitions and concepts and partly to a lack of reliable data. This chapter is an attempt to summarise the recent literature and patterns of geographical mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa, dealing with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. By emphasising the complex nature of the phenomenon, it is concluded that systematic quantitative data as well as detailed case studies are needed in order to obtain a clear picture of mobility on the continent.

Introduction

As outlined in the introduction to this volume, the term 'mobility' is preferred to that of 'migration' for two reasons. First, the concept of migration does not cover all types of geographical mobility as is made clear in the section below dealing with mobility as a way of life. Second, mobility is more than the movement of people alone: also non-human and non-material things such as ideas and values can move or adopt specific forms as a result of the movement of people. It should be noted, however, that the overview presented in this chapter is largely based on the recent 'migration' literature concerning Sub-Saharan Africa.

Africans have always been on the move (Amin 1995; Akokpari 1999) but there are indications that mobility is increasing (Akokpari 1999). Moreover, patterns of mobility are changing in the sense that new forms are emerging and old ones are decreasing (Tacoli 1997, this volume). Rural-urban migration seems to be slowing down and in some countries urban-rural migration (return migration) is increasing. Intercontinental migration, particularly to North-West Europe, has started to grow in importance. The number of cross-border labour migrants in Southern Africa has declined substantially (Sachikonye 1998) and finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the number of people in

Africa who can be labelled as 'refugees' or 'internally displaced persons' has grown dramatically.

Some authors use a rough chronology to describe the history of spatial mobility in Africa (e.g. Adepoju 1995; Amin 1995). In pre-colonial times, "population movement aimed at restoring ecological balance and (...) of individuals in search of subsistence food, better shelter and greater security" (Adepoju 1995: 89). The establishment of colonial rule brought an end to this type of movement and migration became largely determined by the labour requirements for plantations, mines, industries and the administrative apparatus. As Amin (1995) said, the movement of peoples during the pre-colonial period gave way to labour migrations in the colonial period. Colonial migration was usually short term and male dominated. Post-colonial mobility has been essentially a continuation of colonial mobility, i.e. directed towards resource-rich areas and urban centres. Female mobility has increased markedly since independence. The present changes in forms of mobility mentioned above do not introduce a new period but should be seen as responses to changing – and usually deteriorating – economic, political and ecological situations.

The chronology seems to suggest that one type of mobility has been replaced by another. However, this is not completely true. Older forms of mobility 'to restore the ecological balance' are now being labelled as rural-rural migration. There are indications that this type of migration is even on the increase under the impact of population growth and periodic drought (see De Bruijn *et al.*, Chapter 5 this volume).

This chapter discusses firstly some definitional problems. The following section deals with the many types of migration that can be distinguished based on a variety of criteria and then, two specific types of migrants are briefly highlighted: those for whom mobility is a way of life, and refugees. An overview of the recent quantitative data on migration in Sub-Saharan Africa is presented and then finally, four important aspects of the study of population mobility are discussed: gender aspects; adaptation and integration of migrants and strangers in the receiving area; the hinterland as an object of study; and relations between migrants and their home areas.

Problems with definitions

Mobility has both a spatial and temporal dimension. Defining mobility (or migration) is not easy because of the many different types. The simplest definition of migration is 'a change of residence' (Bilsborrow & United Nations Secretariat 1993: 1). However, this definition poses two problems. First, 'residence' implies a certain minimum length of stay. How long does a person have to stay in a certain place to be classified as a migrant, a sojourner or a non-migrant? Second, people who move regularly between two or more places may not even have a clearly identifiable 'place of residence'. This refers particularly to those for whom mobility can be considered as a way of life.

Usually, 'migration' is also defined in terms of crossing a political or administrative boundary (Bilsborrow & United Nations Secretariat 1993) but questions arise about the nature of such boundaries. In the case of state boundaries the situation may seem clear,

although lack of uniformity among countries in determining who is an international migrant has long been a source of inconsistency in international migration statistics. Nowadays, an 'international migrant' is "a person who changes his or her country of usual residence" (United Nations 1998: 9), i.e. someone who crosses one or more state boundaries to stay in another country for a certain period of time. However, state boundaries and related political jurisdictions are not always static. They change over time and thus introduce confounding effects into the measurement of migration.

At the sub-national level, the situation is even more complex. What is meant by an administrative boundary? Moving from one district to another implies crossing a well-defined administrative boundary. A rural-urban migrant crosses the municipal boundary but what about a person who comes from a rural area and settles just outside the urban boundary or a person who moves from one village to another? Is moving from one province in southern Sudan to another in the north *not* migration whereas crossing the border between Burkina Faso and Ghana means that one does not leave the area inhabited by one's own ethnic group but nevertheless becomes an international migrant? Defining mobility or migration in terms of crossing some kind of administrative boundary is less useful because it excludes certain categories of mobile people. Such an approach to migration neglects other boundaries that, for the migrant, may be more relevant.

Types of migration

The word 'migration' covers a wide range of different types of mobility. When writing on migration, authors usually distinguish various types but these distinctions are seldom based on clearly defined criteria. An attempt is thus made here to identify the large variety of migration forms by using six different criteria: geo-administrative level, area of destination, duration, choice, legality, and migrant's characteristics in relation to motivation.

(1) Based on a *geo-administrative level*, the usual distinction is between international (or inter-state) and intra-national migration. Indeed, for a long time migration was compared with *inter*national migration (emigration), despite the fact that *intra*-national migration is much more common. This is reflected in the fact that statistics on the latter type of migration are still scarce, certainly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Statistics on international migration are much easier to collect, as international migration is subject to state regulation. Foreigners are checked upon entry and are granted permission to stay in a country other than their own only on an exceptional basis (United Nations 1998). *Inter*national migration can be further subdivided into intra-continental and intercontinental. There is quite a difference for a Ghanaian migrant between going to Nigeria and heading for North-West Europe in terms of 'pull' factors as well as the types of problems this migrant will encounter on the way (see de Bruijn *et al.*, Chapter 5 this volume).

(2) Although a wide range of *destination areas* can be distinguished, this criterion is usually, if not always, simplified to the rural-urban dichotomy, resulting in four types of

migration: rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural and urban-urban. Of these, rural-urban migration is the one that has received most attention from researchers. African governments tend to concentrate investments in urban centres, thereby attracting people from rural areas who come looking for employment possibilities or educational facilities (pull factors). Rural-urban migration is further influenced by, amongst others, deteriorating economic conditions in the rural (home) area and such social factors as the migrants' perceptions of living conditions in urban areas, the presence of friends and/or relatives in the urban areas, and the expectation of a rise in social prestige associated with migration (Obudho 1998).

Despite the predominant attention that rural-urban migration has received in the literature, in terms of size of flows, rural-rural migration is historically as well as currently probably much more widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa. For centuries, people have moved to areas where there was work in agriculture, a process that became even more important with the widespread introduction of small- and large-scale commercial farming during the colonial period (see Diallo, this volume; Cordell *et al.* 1996). The two other types of migration, urban-urban and urban-rural, have received even less attention. Urban-urban migration is usually considered in terms of gradual migration: migrants from the rural areas move to a small urban centre first, before continuing on to a larger urban area. Urban-rural migration is often equated with return migration, certainly in Sub-Saharan Africa, involving people living in town who go back to their rural home after retirement. 'Retirement migration' usually has an economic base: people can retain or regain land rights and support themselves by farming at home (Peil 1995; Foeken & Owuor, this volume). However, recently, there have been indications that younger urbanites, too, are moving to the rural areas because of the lack of job and income opportunities in town (e.g. Potts 1997; Tacoli, this volume).

(3) As with the previous criterion, a classification based on *duration* of migration can be put into a simple dichotomy: permanent versus temporary. Duration is an essential criterion in establishing whether a person should be classified as a migrant or not. Very few people migrate with the intention of leaving for good but in practice, however, many will never return. Temporary migration is common in Sub-Saharan Africa, mostly in the form of seasonal or circular migration. Seasonal migration is usually connected with the rural-rural type, while circular migration has a rural-urban-rural character. However, the distinction between the two is not always clear, as circular migration can also be seasonal in nature. For instance, the circular movements of an urban woman who spends six or more months a year in the rural 'home' in order to farm there are dictated by the agricultural calendar, particularly in areas like the Sahel (Hampshire & Randall 1999; Cordell *et al.* 1996).

(4) The criterion of *choice* denotes whether migration is forced or voluntary. A voluntary migrant is a person who migrates out of his/her own free will and has the choice to migrate or not. Forced migration, thus, refers to people who have no other option than to migrate. However, the meaning of the word 'forced' can be subjective because while many people consider themselves as forced migrants, often some will stay behind, for whatever reason. Today, millions of Africans can be labelled as forced migrants, either being refugees (international forced migrants) or internally displaced

persons (intra-national forced migrants). The latter group is growing faster than the refugee group (Bascom 1998). Moreover, there are important new dimensions to the present refugee crisis. First, voluntary repatriation (return migration of refugees) has become less common and more difficult. Second, conflicts between incoming refugees and local communities are increasing. And third, environmental resources are being seriously threatened in areas with large concentrations of refugees (Bascom 1998; see also Daley, this volume).

(5) Based on the criterion of *legality*, Ricca (1989) distinguished both 'legal migration' and 'clandestine migration' as forms of labour migration (see below). Each year, hundreds of thousands of individuals cross state borders without going through any formalities. These clandestine migrants usually end up as illegal workers in the informal sector. Legal migration can be further subdivided into 'organised migration' and the 'free movement of persons'. Organised migration refers to "movements of groups of workers, generally low-skilled, who move from one country to another to offset a temporary or long-term labour shortage" (Ricca 1989: 53). Organised migration and the free movement of people are usually sanctioned by a bilateral agreement between the country of departure and the country of destination. There are a few examples of such agreements between African states but their duration was generally short and they covered only a small number of the migration flows.

(6) The final classification criterion concerns the *migrant's characteristics* in relation to motivation: the reasons for migration differ as people differ, in particular in terms of gender, age and education. The literature on labour migration is overwhelming for southern African countries, where large numbers of men from neighbouring countries have migrated to work in mines and plantations in South Africa for contract periods (usually two years at a time) only to return home periodically between contracts, leaving their families in the rural areas (De Vletter 1985). Although men have always migrated to find work, it is only in the last two decades that women have been migrating for work as well, albeit mostly within their country of residence (Vaa *et al.* 1989). The more traditional motive for women migrating was to follow their husband (Cordell *et al.* 1996),[1] often taking their children with them. Children also migrate to go to school (for instance boarding schools in former British colonies but also African students at western universities). As mentioned above, old people may decide to return home after retirement. The third characteristic, education, is highly decisive in relation to migration. For well-educated rural people, there are frequently few jobs in the area of origin. This is also the group for whom international (legal) migration is an option. Low salaries and massive retrenchments have induced many highly skilled people from countries like Ghana, Uganda and Kenya to move to countries in southern Africa and the western world (Adepoju 1991). This 'brain drain' is seen as a substantial loss for the countries of departure.

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[1] Women migrate in the many patrilineal societies in Africa, as they always move to join their husband's family, mostly in another village, town or even region

Mobile populations and conceptual problems

Mobility as a way of life
'Migration', as a term, does not cover the whole phenomenon of geographical mobility. Africa is a continent where a considerable part of the population leads a mobile way of life. Nomadic pastoralists, (hunter) gatherers but also healers, Islamic clergymen, students of the Koran, traders, singers, craftsmen and tramps can be found everywhere. In addition, large numbers of people have been uprooted from their place of origin and have become part of a peripatetic category of wandering persons. These people are difficult to classify because they do not fit into perceived notions of what is deemed 'normal' in the administrative and legal logic of the sedentary world.

Historically, mobility has been deeply engrained in African societies. Kopytoff (1987), for example, uses the term 'internal African frontier' to denote the process of expansion of African agricultural societies. Nineteenth-century travel literature abounds with examples of people moving around (Klute 1996). Poor people moved from city to city in search for charity in the West-African savannah states (Iliffe 1987) and pilgrims on their way from West Africa to Mecca were the nuclei of numerous population groups in the British Sudan and Ethiopia (Abu-Manga 1999; Delmet 2000). Oral histories in most African villages start with the dangers encountered by the founders of the village while *en route* to its present location.

For a number of reasons these wandering people cannot be classified as migrants and are conceptually difficult to categorise. In the first place, pastoralists, nomads and peripatetics often move in cycles. Most have some place of attachment, and therefore cannot be classified as migrants as such. Secondly, movement, i.e. being mobile, is not a break with their past or a breakdown of their normal social environment. Instead, these movements are part and parcel of their daily lives. Thirdly, societies of mobile people seem to have a number of distinct characteristics in terms of social organisation and cultural traits.

Though there is an abundant literature on pastoralists in Africa, much less is known about other categories of mobile people, and the organisational and cultural aspects of mobility. The contribution of De Bruijn *et al.* in this volume (Chapter 5) provides some food for thought on this issue.

Refugees and internally displaced persons
A similar conceptual problem is posed by the existence of refugees. Like mobile populations, they cannot simply be classified as migrants. An often-used criterion to distinguish between refugees on the one hand, and migrants and mobile populations on the other, is the question of whether people move voluntarily or not. The most commonly used definition of a refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR 2001). People have to move involuntarily and cross international borders in order to obtain the official status of refugee.

Sub-Saharan Africa has a dismal history of forced (intercontinental) migration. Between 1500 and 1800, some six million Africans were shipped to the New World as slaves, followed by another three million during the nineteenth century (Emmer 1992). Unknown numbers – but there must have been many – have been forced to migrate due to warfare and natural disasters. During the post-colonial period, forced migration has increased again (Bascom 1998). Until the mid-1970s, forced migration increased slowly and was related to the wars of liberation. After that, the number of forced migrants escalated, reaching almost six million during the mid-1990s. The main causes are political and military strife, abuse of human rights by totalitarian regimes, and ecological disasters (Adepoju 1993).

The definition of 'refugee' excludes all those who are or feel forced to leave their homes but remain within national borders. These people are alternatively labelled as 'internally displaced people'. Likewise, people who leave their homes for reasons other than political or military conflict are not able to obtain refugee status. One could, however, question the degree of volition of people leaving their home because of drought, ecological degradation and unremitting deprivation. Some have coined the term 'ecological refugees' for these people (Suhrke 1994; Westing 1994).

An important obstacle preventing accuracy in stating precisely how many refugees there are is that areas where large numbers of refugees are to be found are often chaotic. The acuteness of the problem hampers systematic study in many instances. Furthermore, most people involved with refugees are practitioners rather than academic researchers (Kuhlman 1994; Allen & Morsink 1994; Allen 1996).[2]

A quantitative assessment of migration and population mobility

Most countries in the world – and African countries in particular – lack adequate statistics on migration. Therefore, estimates are calculated, often for five-year periods, based on partial information and projected figures (United Nations 2000: 128). Data on various migratory flows can be obtained from three types of sources: *administrative sources* such as population registers, registers of foreigners, information from applications for visas, residence permits, work permits, etc.; *border statistics* including all data gathered at border controls; and *household-based inquiries* involving censuses and various types of household surveys (United Nations 1997: 5). For international migration, the administrative sources and border statistics are predominantly used, while for intra-national (often called 'internal') migration, household studies are the main sources. Censuses are generally not able to capture temporary migration and tend to miss most return migration. Although surveys are more flexible instruments, they frequently only provide a partial view of the phenomenon, resulting in possible misrepresentations and incomplete data (Bilsborrow & United Nations Secretariat 1993: 2).

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[2] Nevertheless, a lot of information is available in published and unpublished form. For example an international conference was held in the Netherlands from April 24-27 1999 entitled 'Refugees and the Transformation of Society Loss and Recovery' At the University of Oxford the Refugees Studies Centre, http //www qeh ox ac uk/rsc/, has a documentation centre with over 34,000 bibliographic records

International migratory flows in Sub-Saharan Africa

Table 2.1 shows the Sub-Saharan African countries with the highest out- and in-migration flows during the 1990s. During the first half of the 1990s, the major 'sending' countries were Malawi, Liberia and Somalia. The major 'receiving' countries were the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Tanzania. The picture during the second half of the 1990s was quite different, with Mali and Kenya being the main sending countries and Liberia and Somalia the main receiving countries. The Democratic Republic of Congo had developed from being a receiving country during the first half of the decade to a sending country during the late 1990s.

Table 2.1 Net in- and out-migration, selected countries, 1990-95 and 1995-2000

	absolute per year (x 1,000)	net out-migration rate (%)		absolute per year (x 1,000)	net in-migration rate (%)
Net out-migration 1990-95			**Net in-migration 1990-95**		
Malawi	200	2 10	Dem Rep. of Congo	227	0.55
Liberia	140	6 00	Mozambique	200	1.16*
Somalia	130	1 63	Tanzania	110	0.37*
Mali	80	0 85	Gambia	n d	1.34
Rwanda	350*	5 72	Gabon	8*	0.80
Sierra Leone	41*	0 98			
Eritrea	25*	0 80			
Net out-migration 1995-2000			**Net in-migration 1995-2000**		
Mali	70	0 66	Liberia	140	5.34
Kenya	60	1 99*	Somalia	70	0.77
Dem Rep of Congo	284*	0 55	Rwanda	415*	5.39
Burundi	38*	0.56	Eritrea	44*	1.14
			Gambia	n d.	0.91
			Sierra Leone	43*	0 88

* Calculated with the help of population figures from UNFPA (2000)
Source United Nations 2000

These figures are all net migration rates. Some countries that were both receiving and sending large numbers of migrants are therefore not included. Burkina Faso and other West-African countries have been and still are major exporters of labour to Côte d'Ivoire (see Cordell *et al.* 1996; World Bank 1990). As a result, almost a quarter of the population of Côte d'Ivoire were born in another country. A large number of Chadians risk being expelled from Libya at present and there is a lively circulation of people across the Niger-Nigeria border, which also does not appear in migration statistics (see World Bank 1990; cf. Rain 1999). And the statistics on refugees in the year 2000, for example, reveal a different picture once again (see Table 2.2).

Moreover, the figures in Table 2 1 only provide information about recent population flows. The World Bank (1990) estimated that, in 1990, 21 million of the 35 million migrants in Africa lived in West Africa However, none of these countries – except Mali and strife-torn countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone – figures in Table 2.1. Club du Sahel (1994) estimated that 11% of the population of West Africa lived outside their

country of origin. These past population flows also fundamentally altered the population distribution between the coast and the interior: in 1920 half the population were living on the coast but by 1970 the figure had risen to 67%.

Refugee movements

Over the last decade of the twentieth century the largest number of refugees worldwide could be found in Africa, where by the end of 1992 there were about six million refugees (USCR 1991). Whereas in the (recent) past the main causes were struggles for independence and autonomy, nowadays wars, the abuse of human rights and ecological disaster are among the key factors compounding the refugee situation. It should be noted that refugees drawn from the poorest countries in the world seek refuge in equally poor countries (Adepoju 1995: 101).

Table 2.2 presents the numbers of refugees as estimated by the U.S. Committee for Refugees in 1991 The largest group, almost 1.5 million, came from Mozambique as a result of its long civil war. Many of these people found shelter in Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world but have now been repatriated. Some countries were at the same time a source as well as an asylum country. This applied in particular to the Horn of Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia). Parts of West Africa have also become war zones from time to time. For example in 1989, ethnic tensions along the border of Senegal and Mauritania led to the displacement of 70,000 people in both countries and in 1990, the war in Liberia uprooted thousands of people resulting in 125,000 flocking to Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire and 50,000 to Guinée.

According to PIOOM (1998), in the late-1990s there were almost three million refugees and asylum seekers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 15 countries in the world with 100,000 to 500,000 refugees (i.e. the source countries), seven were located in Africa.[4] UNHCR (2001) gives a figure of more than 3.4 million refugees in 2000 with nine source countries with more than 100,000 refugees. What is hidden in these figures is the rapid rate of change in refugee movements. Though the total number of refugees remained fairly constant at the end of the 1990s, UNHCR (2001) recorded more than one-million border crossings by refugees in 2000 (new cases and people who were returning), the net result being an increase of 90,000 more refugees in Africa.

The figures in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 reflect the number of official migrants and recognised refugees. Clandestine migration and unrecorded refugees are not included in these statistics. Refugee movements are in some cases counted as migration. Malawi is a clear example of this as its emigrants were mainly Mozambican refugees (950,000 in 1991) who were repatriated after the end of the civil war in Mozambique. Consequently, by 2000 there were fewer than 100,000 refugees in Malawi. Rwanda experienced a similar pattern. In the 1990-1995 period an enormous emigration flow of 350,000 people per annum was recorded and between 1995 and 2000, 415,000 immigrants per annum were registered as a result of the civil war (Table 2 1). This is not reflected in the number

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[3] At present with the crisis in Afghanistan, Central Asia may well have become the region with the largest number of refugees worldwide
[4] Liberia (475,000), Sudan (353,000), Eritrea (323,000), Sierra Leone (297,000), Burundi (248,000), Angola (223,000) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (132,000) (Jongmans & Schmid 1998)

Table 2.2: Major refugee numbers in Sub-Saharan Africa, selected countries, 1991 and 2000 (x 1,000)*

Country of source	number	Country of asylum	number
		1991	
Mozambique	1,483.5	Malawi	950 0
Ethiopia	752 4	Sudan	717.2
Angola	717 6	Guinée	566.0
Liberia	661.7	Ethiopia	534.0
Sudan	443 2	Dem. Rep. of Congo	482.3
Rwanda	208.5	Somalia	350.0
Burundi	203.9	Tanzania	251 1
Somalia	202.5	Côte d'Ivoire	240.4
		Zimbabwe	198.5
		Djibouti	120.0
		Kenya	107.2
		Burundi	107.0
		2000	
Burundi	567.0	Tanzania	680.9
Sudan	485.5	Guinée	433.1
Somalia	441.6	Sudan	401.0
Angola	421.1	Dem Rep of Congo	365.0
Sierra Leone	401.8	Zambia	250.9
Eritrea	366.8	Uganda	236.6
Dem. Rep. of Congo	332.4	Kenya	206.1
Liberia	273.2	Ethiopia	198.0
Rwanda	114 1	Congo Brazzaville	123.2
		Côte d'Ivoire	120.7

* Only countries with at least 100,000 refugees
Sources USCR (1991) & UNHCR (2001)

of refugees present in the neighbouring countries of Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Table 2.2), since these movements took place between1991 and 2000. Surprisingly, conflict-ridden countries like Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola are absent as migration countries in Table 2.1, and do not figure prominently as source countries for refugees. Apparently, refugee flows have come to a standstill but perhaps this is because large numbers of refugees are hosted within the border areas of the countries themselves.

International seasonal migration

Statistics on international seasonal migration are non-existent. Yet, in West Africa this type of migration, popularly called *exode*, is common. It is a temporary, male-dominated form of migration whereby people move out of the Sahel region for a certain period[5] to earn money elsewhere. Men leave after the harvest to come back before the next rainy season begins for cultivation. Wealthy households tend to participate more in this form of migration and gain much from it (Hampshire & Randall 1999).

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[5] Hampshire & Randall (1999) defined the duration of seasonal economic migration as lasting between one month and two years for their quantitative research, though the time span can be longer.

From the research by Hampshire and Randall, some figures on movements of Fulani in Burkina Faso can be deduced. Of the total sample, 11% had undertaken seasonal labour migration at least once in their lives, while 4.2% had been away the year before. Of the male population between the ages of 18 and 64, 36.6% had been away on seasonal labour migration at least once. The vast majority went to Côte d'Ivoire (mainly to Abidjan) and only a small minority had gone to the two major towns in Burkina Faso.

For some people, their country of usual residence cannot easily be established because by the very nature of their way of life nomads do not have a fixed place of residence. Thus, even if they cross international boundaries, they are often not regarded as moving from their normal country of residence. As a result, this group is excluded from international migration statistics (United Nations 1998).

Intra-national migration

Since statistical evidence on intra-national or internal migration is not readily available, the information presented here is incomplete. Many forms of internal movements exist and some populations are highly mobile. The two best-known forms of intra-national or internal migration are rural-urban migration and forced displacement.

For most African countries, figures on rural-urban migration can only be obtained indirectly from changes in the urbanisation rate, i.e. the growth (or decline) of the percentage of a nation's population living in urban centres. For Africa as a whole, this percentage increased from 18% in 1960 to 34% in 1990 (United Nations 1995). Its urban population increased during that period from 51 to 217 million, a growth of 325% and during the same period, the world urban population increased by 132%. By the year 2000, 37% of the African population was expected to be living in urban areas and in 2025 it is estimated that it will be 54% (UNCHS/Habitat 1996).

Urbanisation rates differ considerably between the various Sub-Saharan African countries. In 1990, the highest levels, i.e. with a rate of 40% or more, were found in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Mauritania, Gabon, Zambia, Liberia, Mauritius, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon. The least-urbanised countries, with a rate below 20%, were Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, Eritrea, Burkina Faso and Lesotho (United Nations 1995).

Kenya is one of the very few countries for which some statistical data on internal migration, based on the 1989 population census, are available. At a provincial level, the numbers of in- and out-migrants have been calculated from the census data. Since the city of Nairobi was a province at the same time, data on in- and out-migration for this city are available. It appears that in 1989, 930,000 Nairobians could be classified as in-migrants, while 157,450 had left the city (Kenya 1996). In general, the Kenyan data show that important movements were from densely populated areas experiencing considerable land shortages to the urban areas of Nairobi and Mombasa for employment reasons and to the Rift Valley in search of arable land. Another type of internal movement concerns 'rotation' within peoples' provinces, indicating that rural-rural migration is important as well.

Conspicuously, rural-urban migration in Ghana is reported to be of minor importance compared to other internal migration flows. According to Sowa & White (1997), less

than 10% of all migration in Ghana in 1995 was rural-urban, 25% was urban-urban, 31% urban-rural and 34% rural-rural. In other words, the destinations of more than half of all migrants were rural. This might suggest that perceived opportunities in agriculture were an important driving force behind migration patterns (Sowa & White 1997). However, the authors do not specify 'rural areas'. These could also be small rural towns that were rapidly emerging during the 1990s and attracting many people from the rural hinterlands. Agriculture and also expanding commercial sectors in small rural towns were the driving forces in that case (see, for example, Zondag 2001). Information on other countries also indicates that rural-rural migration makes up a substantial part of total migration in West Africa as a whole (see Mazur 1984; Adepoju 1995; Findley 1997).

Research on 'retirement migration' was done by Peil (1995) who suggested that, in general, Africans prefer to return to their place of origin on or before retirement, rather than settling permanently in the host location. Peil studied senior citizens in five small towns in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe and concluded that small towns are preferred as a place of retirement because they provide services like health clinics, hospitals and sources of water that are less easily available in villages, and facilitate visits from their children. The retirees can make enough cash for their daily needs from petty trading.

A migration flow of increasing importance is that of elderly women and widows who move to towns and cities to live with a son or daughter. Because nowadays parents increasingly prefer to educate their children in town, it seems more sensible for 'granny' to join the family there, while formerly she would probably have stayed at home and asked for a grandchild to live with her to run errands and keep her company. Older men usually have larger economic, political and social resources at home, control the land and help to run the village so their willingness to move to town is negligible. Instead, a son will move home to run the farm (Masamba ma Mpolo 1984).

Forced displacement is widespread in contemporary Africa. Internally displaced persons include not only those fleeing civil strife but also people displaced because of "oppressive economic conditions" and "sudden natural disasters" (Bascom 1995: 200-201; 1998). Defined that way, the number of involuntary migrants who remained in their own country totalled 16.8 million Africans in the mid-1990s (Hamilton, quoted by Bascom 1995; see Table 2.3). Countries with large numbers of internally displaced people are Sudan, South Africa, Mozambique, Angola and Liberia.[6]

According to Bascom (1995: 200-201), some 600,000 of the almost 17 million internally displaced people could be classified as having fled because of "refugee-like conditions", most of them being environmental migrants. The status of these people and the way in which they are counted (or estimated) remains totally unclear, however. There is little doubt that such a category of people exists but any further information does not go beyond rough guesstimates.

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[6] Remarkably, UNHCR (2001) gives a figure of approximately 11 million internally displaced people in 2000 (e g 3,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo instead of 500,000, Sudan 94,783 instead of 4 million, Angola 257,508 instead of 2 million) The reason for these enormous discrepancies is not known

Table 2.3. Internally displaced civilians within African countries, 1994

Sudan	4,000,000	Kenya	300,000
South Africa	4,000,000	Rwanda	300,000
Mozambique	2,000,000	Eritrea	200,000
Angola	2,000,000	Togo	150,000
Liberia	1,000,000	Djibouti	140,000
Somalia	700,000	Guinée	80,000
Dem. Rep. of Congo	500,000	Chad	50,000
Burundi	500,000	Mali	40,000
Ethiopia	500,000	Senegal	28,000
Sierra Leone	400,000	Total	16,880,000

Source Hamilton 1994, in Bascom 1995

Some aspects of population mobility

A number of subjects have been under-researched in comparison to normal studies of migration. Gradually, research is concentrating more on the processes associated with population mobility and is less preoccupied with a purely statistical approach. Here four of these issues are touched upon.

Gender aspects

Though no less important than male migration, there are several reasons why female migration in Africa has up to now received scant attention. First, women tend to migrate over shorter distances and hence are not always included in migration statistics. Second, women are over-represented in short-term movements such as circular migration. For a long time there has been no consensus on how to define the concept of circular migration, which has made it even more difficult to measure women's participation in this process (Hugo 1998). Third, researchers have tended to focus on economically motivated migration. Women migrating with their husbands or for marriage are often stereotyped as associational migrants (Adepoju 1995; Bilsborrow & United Nations Secretariat 1993).

Despite this, various studies have shown that autonomous female migration is widespread and on the increase. Many women undertake rural-urban movements on their own to attain economic independence through self-employment or wage income (see, for example, Vaa et al. 1989; Adepoju 1984, Findley 1987). They take up jobs as varied as public-sector workers, homemakers, prostitutes, and domestic servants.

Adaptation and integration of migrants and strangers

There is a substantial literature on the adaptation and integration of migrants. Population mobility entails also a movement of cultural forms. People not only bring their physical presence but also their food habits, social relations, rituals, religious convictions and ideologies. Given the enormous diversity of cultural forms in Africa and the important role of mobility in social life, it is surprising that the cohabitation of all these people with all its variety has been so peaceful for so much of the time. Apparently there are

many ways of regulating relations between groups of people and to manage cultural and social diversity.

The integration and adaptation of people into a host society is a common problem for all moving people, regardless of the reasons why they have moved there. The concept of integration itself is also fraught with difficulties because no good measure can be defined for socio-cultural integration (Kuhlman 1994). It has to be set against the background of the inter-ethnic and social and political relations in the host area as well. Ethnic and socio-economic differences within the host population might be more accentuated than the differences between the host and refugee population.

Another issue to take into account concerns the reasons for moving. So-called ecological refugees drifting slowly southwards from the semi-arid Sahel to more humid areas with what remains of their belongings are obviously in a different position when it comes to integration than the millions of Rwandan refugees who flooded into the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1994. The majority of people labelled as refugees are likely to find themselves in a situation in-between these two examples.

In the literature some attention has been given to the psychological aspects of these processes (Tieleman 1990: 1). This existential aspect of movement may influence the ways in which people experience their lives and consequently act upon in their futures (De Bruijn 1999). This does not only apply to refugees but also to other types of migrants and even to people for whom mobility is a way of life.

The area of origin as an object of study
The mobility of some obviously has important consequences for those who remain where they are. Those who stay behind not only suffer the loss of a member of the family but there are also economic costs incurred. Those who migrate are often the young able-bodied men, and increasingly also women, who would have played a crucial role in the local, mostly rural economy. At the village level, the loss of a substantial number of young people may endanger the viability of a village economy, as the maintenance of all kinds of crucial physical and social infrastructural facilities can no longer be guaranteed. When young families migrate, the care of the weak, infirm and old may be put at risk. Another form of expense incurred by those who stay behind is providing the means for the migrants to make their enterprise successful.

Circular labour migration, for example, is one of the ways of tackling this problem. Young men only migrate during the unproductive season and return before the onset of the rains so that the continuity of the agricultural cycle in their village of origin is ensured. A direct benefit is that there is one less mouth to feed during the more difficult part of the year.

The most immediate problem for people who stay behind is to survive socially and economically until the migrant returns or starts to send home remittances. The migration of males may also have an impact on the position of women at home. Within the nuclear family, they become responsible for all productive activities, which may not just entail difficulties It may also mean an improvement in their social and economic position since they can liberate themselves from male dominance (Ruthven & David 1995).

Relations between migrants and their home areas
Until recently, relations between migrants and their home areas were almost solely viewed in terms of remittances, i.e. a one-way flow of money and goods from the migrant to the family back home. Indeed, it cannot be denied that the "sending of remittances by migrants is one of the strongest and most pervasive phenomena in Africa's migration systems" (Adepoju 1995: 100). It is characteristic of the fact that migration in Africa is fundamentally a family affair and not an individual activity. In the literature of the 1980s, migration was viewed as part of the livelihood – if not survival – strategy of the rural family.

Meanwhile, structural adjustment and the concomitant increase of prices and reduction in wages and employment in the urban areas have taken their toll in the sense that for many urban dwellers, the social obligation of sending remittances has become compelling as rural links have become "vital safety-valves and welfare options for urban people who are very vulnerable to economic fluctuations" (Potts 1997: 461). Increasingly, urban dwellers have become at least partly dependent on rural sources of food and/or income, causing a reverse flow of goods and perhaps even money from rural to urban areas. Such concepts as 'income diversification' and 'multi-spatial households' should not only be viewed from the rural perspective but also from the urban perspective. The literature on this topic is still sparse (for an overview, see Foeken & Owuor, this volume).

Increased poverty in African countries makes intercontinental migration, in particular to Western Europe, all the more attractive. In a recent study, Arhinful (2001) shows how important assistance from Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam is for relatives back home in Ghana. It comes in the form of transfers of money and goods (such as clothes, electrical equipment, medicines and even vehicles) to provide material support in times of sickness and old age, and for education and funerals (see Van Dijk 1999). In short, it provides a degree of social security.

Conclusions

This overview of definitions and issues in the study of population mobility in Africa shows that a general theory or approach to population mobility is still a long way off. The complexity of the phenomena observed and the arbitrariness of administrative and conceptual boundaries bedevil any attempt at a systematisation of research or mapping of general trends.

The emphasis in official statistics on national boundaries as the basis for migration figures turns the phenomenon into an administrative problem. Such statistics force an examination of population mobility from the perspective of the state. They do not take into account that many national boundaries have little relevance for the population and are used as opportunities for smuggling or other illicit activities. The fact that very little systematic knowledge is available about *intra*-national movements is telling in this respect. Nevertheless, these movements can be as long and as important in their economic, ecological and political consequences as *inter*national migration and can just as

well imply a break with the past because it takes people into unknown territory, socially, ethnically, ecologically and culturally.

For many migrants other variables are much more relevant to their decision to move than the existence of national or administrative boundaries. The presence of economic opportunities in the form of access to natural resources or employment, affiliated ethnic groups and/or kinsmen, people from the same religious denomination, relative safety from prosecution, aid organisations, and the urban character of regions can all be important variables in the decision to move or not to move. In a number of cases adventurism is definitely part of the motivation.

Nevertheless, a number of observations stand out as being of general significance. The first is that refugee movements have and will continue to have an impact on the distribution of the population on the continent. It is unlikely that all refugees will ever return to their home areas. In fact, it seems that large numbers of them integrate in the asylum countries – thus leaving official aid channels – and cease to be refugees. Likewise, large-scale migration from the semi-arid zones towards urban areas and coastal countries will continue unabated. However, current statistical material provides very little insight into the nature and the direction of these movements.

The most valuable information on the processes and factors behind population mobility can be derived from an increasing number of comprehensive case studies trying to grasp the complexity of the process. These studies provide deeper insight into the motivations, desires and ambitions of people's movements than can be achieved from statistical analyses. However, this does not lessen the necessity to have more and better quantitative information. Quantitative data are essential to position the rich variety of case studies and to anticipate the consequences of enormous population movements for the development of infrastructure in cities or the chances for social and political unrest, as seen in Côte d'Ivoire recently. Likewise, insights into the background of population movements are urgently needed. Climate change, the AIDS epidemic and large-scale conflicts as in the Great Lakes Region may fundamentally alter the economies of a number of countries over the coming decades and may incite new population movements. The impact of these events on the economies of African countries and on the lives of mobile and sedentary people may be serious.

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