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Africa's Contemporary Global Migrations: Patterns, Perils, and Possibilities

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The literature on international migration is dominated by economic and political perspectives. This paper begins with the culturalist readings to remind ourselves that there is more to international migration than the search for greener pastures or flight from political terror. It is about the movement of human beings, a story that is as old as humanity itself, going back to the great migrations within and out of Africa to populate the planet. But those who advance the culturalist perspectives also need to be reminded that in our contemporary world more often than not people migrate to sell their labor power and that the patterns of migration, labor procurement and utilization are conditioned by the dynamics of capitalist development, expansion, and accumulation. This is an argument for interdisciplinarity, the need for multiple perspectives on the exceedingly complex phenomenon of international migration.

In 1978, Ali Mazrui (1978) argued in his book, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* that Africa needed to domesticate, decolonize, and diversify the project of western modernity through what he called the strategy of counter-penetration, a multiple project of engagement and entry into the economic and cultural heartlands of the West. For Mazrui, then, migrant African elites including intellectuals were crusaders for African racial redemption and civilizational presence in the world concert of cultures. More extravagant claims for migrant elites were made by Edward Said (1993) in his book, *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he saw Third World elites exiled in the North as cosmopolitan combatants, upon whose hybrid shoulders rested the liberation of both the western and post-colonial worlds. For Arjun Appadurai (1996) in his book, *Modernity at
Large, mass migration is one of the twin forces that characterizes the current age of globalization, the other being electronic mediation. Migration, from his perspective, is a product of and produces globalization as a constellation of cultural flows that create a transnational world configured around postnational networks of diasporas.

My presentation is divided into five parts. First, I examine the scale of contemporary global migrations, and second, of Africans' global migrations. Third, I analyze the forces behind it, briefly probing the various theories that have been advanced to explain international migration. Fourth, I survey the question of the "brain drain" and its developmental implications for Africa. I conclude by making a few suggestions on ways of turning Africa's contemporary migrants into a productive and progressive diaspora for Africa's development and global presence.

**Dynamics and Directions of Global Mobility**

The late 20th century has been characterized as the age of globalization marked by the rapid movements of capital, commodities, and cultures across communities, countries, and continents. To what extent can it also be seen as "the age of migration," to quote the title of Castles and Miller's (1998) book? Going by the hysterical pronouncements of politicians and the media, and the inflated rhetoric by the academic seers of globalization one would think the world is undergoing massive and unprecedented waves of international migration. The reality is far more complex. The available evidence points to two broad conclusions. First, while the number of international migrants has grown significantly in absolute numbers since the 1960s, the percentage of people who have left and remained outside their countries of origin has remained remarkably steady and small. Second, there have been significant changes in the character and direction of international migration. The number of foreign-born persons, including migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, worldwide increased from 75.5 million in 1960 to 190.6 million in 2005, implying an annual growth rate of 3.4%, which was only slightly above the global population growth rate, but far below the rate of international tourist arrivals during the same period, let alone the phenomenal growth in world trade and capital flows. The change in the proportion of migrants in the world population changed only slightly, from 2.5% in 1960 to 3% in 2005 (United Nations Population Division, 2006).

In all world regions there was an absolute growth in the numbers of migrants between 1960 and 2005. Europe overtook Asia as the region with the largest number of migrants as its migrant population more than quadrupled to 64.1 million, compared to Asia's which rose from 28.5 to 53.3 million. Also experiencing fast growth was North America whose migrant population more than tripled,
while that of Oceania more than doubled but only from 2.1 million to 5 million. Latin America and the Caribbean's migrant population experienced the slowest growth, from six million to 6.6 million. Altogether, Asia, Latin American, and Oceania experienced declines in their percentage of the global stock of migrants, while it rose for Europe and Northern America. Also, less remarkable than often thought, has been the proportion of women among international immigrants; it rose from 46.6% in 1960 to 48.8% in 2000.

While the quantitative magnitude of international migration is not as extensive as it is often assumed, the changes in the composition and direction of international migration have been quite profound. We can isolate two critical developments. First, there has been growing diversification of sending and receiving countries. Second, skilled migration has assumed greater importance both in terms of the actual flows and in the formulation of migration policies at national, regional, and international levels. In terms of regional destinations, the share of the least and less developed countries declined from 65.7% in 1960 to 45% in 2005, while that of the developed countries rose from 42.8% to 60.5%. It is evident that the flows of international migration have shifted from the global South to the global North.

In many European Union countries the leading countries of origin of migrants are the EU countries themselves (Fassman and Munz, 1994), just as the bulk of migrants from the developing countries still go to other developing countries—47% compared to 40% who reside in the high income OECD countries (Ratha and Shaw, 2007). By 2004 there were still few countries from the global South that featured among the top five sources of immigrants for the EU. Although the numbers of migrants from the global South to the global North are smaller than is often postulated, their growth play an increasingly important role in the politics of state renewal, national memory and forgetting, and social mobility and control. The assimilationist promises of previous intra-Northern migration flows have been shattered as the racialization of Southern immigrants has taken a new intensity (Bolarias and Bolarias, 1997). In many of these countries immigrants have become an alibi for national failings; their presence serves both as threads that tie the nation together and threats that tear asunder the cherished but increasingly troubled marriage between nation and state.

There are considerable temporal, national, and regional variations in the migration patterns to the global North. The available data shows that until the mid-1990s international migration was more pronounced in the traditional countries of immigration, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, than in many parts of Europe. The scale of the immigration gap between the “settler” countries and the European countries can be gauged from the fact that between 2000 and 2004 the annual net number of migrants for the United States was 1.4
million compared to 1.1 million for Europe. The 2005 foreign born population in the United States estimated at 38.4 million was nearly one and a half times the combined foreign born population of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Spain. But the “non-settler” OECD countries in Europe have been catching up in the relative size of their immigrant and foreign born populations. In 2000, the percentage of foreign born in the United States and Sweden was about the same about 12% (OECD, 2006).

Migration to the global North over the last two decades has been characterized by several new trends amidst the persistence of old ones. Many governments are pursuing a two track policy: the recruitment of highly skilled immigrants who are provided with opportunities for permanent settlement and citizenship, and the resort to temporary immigrants for low-skilled work to meet labor market needs. As part of the drive for greater selectivity, there is fierce competition for international students as potential skilled immigrants, sometimes accompanied by acceleration of asylum requests and periodic regularization programs. In the meantime, the recourse to seasonal workers has been accompanied by more restrictive measures and tighter border controls to combat illegal entry and trafficking, and more aggressive repatriation policies (OECD, 2006, p. 76-110; Massey, 1999).

Not only has the foreign labor force grown in almost all the OECD countries, it has spread to more sectors, including the services and self-employment, although foreigners continue to be more vulnerable to unemployment than nationals particularly in Europe. For many OECD countries the need to import labor from the global South is likely to accelerate as domestic fertility rates continue to fall and ageing of the native population and dependency ratios rise. On the whole, while there has been an increase in the relative importance of highly-skilled and low-skilled temporary workers in the total flows, and a decrease in the number of asylum claims, immigration for family reunion continues to predominate in many OECD countries, ranging from more than 60% for the United States, Sweden, Norway, and France in 2004, to more than 40% for Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Patterns of Contemporary African Global Migrations

How do African patterns of contemporary global migrations compare to the other world regions? As elsewhere Africa’s migrant population increased, nearly doubling from 9.1 million to 17.1 million, but like the other regions in global South—Asia, Latin American, and the Caribbean and Oceania—Africa’s share of the world’s migrant stock declined from 12.1% in 1960 to 9% in 2005. There was also a decline in the share of migrants in the African population, from 3.2% to 1.9%. Also similar to other world regions has been the growing feminization of African migrants as more women migrate independently through legal and
occasionally irregular channels to seek better lives for themselves and their families. The growth in the share of female migrants in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 40.6% in 1960 to 47.2% in 2000, while for North Africa it declined from 49.5% in 1960 to 42.8% in 2000 to become the second lowest in the world after Southern Asia (Zlotnik, 2003).

Clearly, there are many similarities between migration trends in Africa and other world regions. But there are also differences of magnitude. Three notable features of Africa's international migration are worth noting. First, the vast majority of the continent's migrants go to other African countries. Second, an unusually large percentage of the migrants are made up of refugees. Third, the numbers of African migrants flocking to the global North remain relatively small, although they are growing rapidly, and Africa claims the dubious distinction of sending the largest share of its skilled workers compared to any other region.

Africa's international migrants within the continent are unevenly spread. According to the 2005 World Migration Report, “In 2000, 42 per cent were living in West Africa, 28 per cent in East Africa, 12 per cent in northern Africa, and 9 per cent in central and southern Africa” (IOM, 2006, p. 36). Many of these cross-border migrants include labor migrants seeking improved living standards in neighboring countries, communities in border regions that engage in perpetual cycles of traditional and livelihood migrations between countries, and refugees fleeing from political conflicts and environmental crises. In 2004 there were 2.4 million economically active migrants in other African countries.

Intra-regional migration flows within Africa have tended to be concentrated in a handful of countries, although the composition of these countries has shifted over time, such as Cote d'Ivoire in West Africa before the end of the economic miracle and onset of civil war, Libya in North Africa, Kenya in East Africa, and South Africa following the demise of apartheid, although South Africans are prone to exaggerate the immigrants waves allegedly swamping their country.

One unusual characteristic of African migrants is the relatively high percentage of refugees. While the world average of refugees among migrants in 2005 was 7.1%, for Africa it was 17.7%, although by then in absolute numbers Asia had the biggest refugee population—7.8 million compared to Africa's three million. The percentage of refugees in the African migrant population was even higher in 1980 (25.4%) and 1990 (32.7%). As might be expected the composition of refugee sending and refugee-receiving countries has changed over the last four and a half decades as the theatres of political conflict, human rights abuses, economic stagnation and environmental disasters, the principal causes of refugee generation, have shifted (Adelman and Sorenson, 1994; Kibreab, 1985, 1996; Barigab, 2006; Degu, 2007; Veney, 2007).
Notwithstanding the persistence and predominance of migrations within the continent, there is no doubt that Africa's international migrations have been growing rapidly. As is true of international migration in general accurate numbers are difficult to come by, but the available estimates point to an incontrovertible trend. Three observations can be made about Africa's migrations to other world regions in terms of their spatial concentration and social composition. First, Africa's transcontinental migrants largely flock to the global North rather than to regions in the global South. There are of course some notable exceptions: large numbers of migrants from parts of northeastern Africa have migrated to the Gulf States. Second, African migrants to the global North enjoy high levels of education. Finally, as restrictive immigration policies have been adopted and selectivity preferences increased in Europe and North America, irregular or illegal migrations have been on the rise for unskilled workers. Recent horrific stories of West Africans trying to get into Spain are a recent manifestation.

African migration flows to Europe and North America vary in their scale and composition. Europe claims the lion's share of Africa's international migrants. In 2005 eight out of the 12 leading OECD countries were European, which collectively accounted for 78.3% of the African immigrants led by France whose African migrant population was more than one and a half times the combined African immigrant populations of the United States, Canada, Israel, and Australia. In total volume, Saudi Arabia is second only to France in the numbers of African immigrants it hosted in 2005 (1.5 million), followed by the United States, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Italy. In regional terms, Northern Africa boasts the largest number of Africa's international migrants, followed by Eastern Africa, then Western Africa, Middle Africa, and finally Southern Africa. The three largest recipient countries for each of these regions are France, Saudi Arabia, and Spain for Northern Africa; the United Kingdom, the United States, and France for Eastern Africa; the United States, France, and the United Kingdom for Western Africa; Portugal, France, and Germany for Middle Africa; and the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States for Southern Africa (World Bank, 2005).

African immigration to Europe has generally tended to follow the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism, so that Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal were the preferred destinations of migrants from their former colonies. It was in the 1970s and 1980s that noticeable number of Africans began migrating to other European countries with which they had no colonial ties. Among the most popular were Germany and the Netherlands. The leading African source of immigrants to these two countries was Morocco. By 1995 Moroccans had become the leading immigrant group in Italy and Spain. Another African country to feature among the leading 15 sources of immigrants into the Netherlands in the early 1990s was Somalia, whose numbers rose from 3,600 in 1990 to 17,200 in 1995, the
fastest growing immigrant population during this period. Somalia also featured among the leading sources of immigrants for Denmark, and Finland. For its part, Sweden became an important destination for Ethiopians, Ireland for Nigerians, and Greece for Egyptians (OECD, 1998, 2006).

Clearly, African immigration to Europe was marked by increasing diversification both in the number of countries sending and receiving the immigrants. Particularly remarkable was the emergence of the southern European countries, principally Italy, Portugal, and Spain, themselves longstanding emigration countries, as immigration countries. This was as much a product of the improving economic fortunes in these countries and their integration into the prosperity and political sphere of Western Europe as it was of mounting immigration pressures on their borders to the east and the south. Enclosed in a new European transnational space, new identities of ethnicity and citizenship began to emerge that entailed creating both symbolic and material borders to keep away or distinguish the immigrants. The Europeanization of these countries and the rebordering of the Mediterranean that it implied required the separation and stigmatization of immigrants from the global South (Suárez-Navaz, 1997; Royo, 2005).

Equally rapid has been the growth of African migration to North America, especially the United States. Prior to the 20th century, African migrations to the Americas were dominated by slavery. After the staggered abolitions of the European and American slave trades and the end of African forced migration, only small numbers of Africans left the continent to settle in North America as compared to other immigrant groups. For example, Tibbett Speer (1995, p. 36) reports that "INS records show that in 1820 the first year a count was kept only one person migrated to the U.S. from Africa. Sixteen more came throughout the entire decade. The numbers climbed slowly until the 1960s." From 1820 to 1993, the United States only took in 418,000 African immigrants, while 345,425 Asians came in 1993 alone. A systematic analysis of American census data covering the period 1850 to 1990 shows that the number of African born migrants in the U.S. population rose from 551 in 1850 to 2,538 in 1900, climbing to 18,326 in 1930, 35,355 in 1960, 80,143 in 1970, 199,723 in 1980 and 363,819 in 1990, 881,300 in 2000, and 1.25 million in 2005. As rapid as this may seem, Africans accounted for a small proportion of immigrants to the United States—1.9% in 1990, up from 0.4% in 1960, and 2.8% in 2000 and 3.5% in 2005 (US Census Bureau 2001, 2005). In the meantime, there has been a precipitous fall in the proportion of European and Canadian immigrants, and a sharp rise for Asian and Latin American immigrants, which has provoked an anti-immigrant backlash (Huntington, 2004; Perea, 1997; Suro, 1996).

The relatively low rates and levels of voluntary immigration from Africa to the United States until the 1960s can be attributed both to restrictive U.S. policies
against non-European immigration and the reluctance and inability of colonized African populations to migrate in any significant numbers outside the continent. It is instructive to note that the largest numbers of African immigrants to the United States in 1960 came from Egypt and South Africa. Both countries had relatively advanced economies, had been sovereign for many years, and their migrants were, in the case of South Africa, largely white, or in the case of Egypt considered as white under U.S. immigration law. From the 1970s significant changes began taking place in the regional and national distribution of African immigrants to the United States as Western Africa overtook Northern Africa. As Ikubolaje Logan (1987, p. 603) has argued, the largest numbers of African migrants have tended to come from countries with “a large population; a pro-western, capitalist outlook; speakers of English, rather than any other European language; unstable economic conditions; a long history of well-established higher education; and a colonial legacy that had not been too culturally dominant.” It is important to note that many African immigrants to the United States are students who decide to stay.

Canada has also become an increasingly attractive destination for African immigrants. Africa’s immigrant population in Canada increased from 101,700 in 1981 to 166,200 in 1991. Between 1991 and 2001, 1.8 million new immigrants arrived, 8% from Africa as compared to 58% from Asia, 20% from Europe, 11% from the Caribbean, Central and South America, and from the United States. The growth of African immigration to Canada becomes clearer when we examine figures for annual inflows of permanent settlers. The inflows of permanent settlers from Africa increased 8.8% to 16% of total inflows.

African regional and international migrations are obviously part of a much older story, going back in modern times to the tragic days of the European slave trade when millions of shackled African men and women were shipped to the Americas, at once a painful moment and a poignant metaphor that established the subsequent tapestry of African-Euroamerican relations, and a cruel reminder that for the victims and combatants of western barbarity, globalization did not start yesterday with the Internet. Contemporary patterns of African overseas migration are woven in intricate and complex ways in the older processes, each successive wave creating new layers of memories and meanings, new braided histories of Africa and its diasporas.

**Causes, Courses, and Consequences of International Migration**

What accounts for the patterns of contemporary African global migrations, and what is the impact on the immigrants themselves and the receiving and sending countries? Clearly, changes in both Africa—the political conflicts,
economic hardships, and social disruptions—are obviously important, so are the transformations in the U.S. political economy and cultural ecology, primarily related to the civil rights struggles. Quite literary, many Africans who migrated from Africa to the United States from the mid-1960s owed their fortunes to the doors opened by African American struggles. The Congressional Black Caucus played a pivotal role in broadening immigration law to accommodate immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean (Eissa, 2005).

In the literature on the causes, courses, and consequences of international migration there are several theories, each employing radically different concepts, assumptions, and frames of reference that seek to explain the factors that first, initiate, and second, perpetuate international migration, and third, that attempt to assess the effects of international migration on both the sending and receiving countries. Some emphasize economic factors and motivations; others offer political or sociological perspectives and propositions.

The economic theories can be grouped into four. In the neoclassical economic model, international migration is seen, at a macro level, as the result of wage differentials and employment conditions between countries which, at a micro level, propels individuals as rational actors making cost-benefit calculations to migrate in pursuit of income maximization (Massey et al., 1993; Todaro, 1976). In contrast, the “new economics of migration” attributes migration decisions to households, not simply isolated individuals, seeking both to maximize income absolutely and relative to other households and to minimize risks associated with a variety of economic failures in addition to those in the labor market (Stark, 1991; Wallace et al., 1997). As is common in much neo-classical economics, these theories tend to reify migration, ignoring the historical, institutional, and structural contexts in which it occurs. Often neglected in the neo-classical economics literature is the role of the state in regulating migration flows through its control over borders.

Proponents of the dual labor market theory argue that international migration is caused not by push factors in the sending countries but by pull factors in the receiving countries, by the structural requirements of the modern industrial economies for low wage and low status jobs in labor markets that are segmented and where the traditional sources of entry-level workers—women and teenagers—have progressively shrunk (Salt, 1989). In contrast, the world system theorists see international immigration not as the result of recent processes of market segmentation in particular industrial economies, let alone wage rate or employment differentials between countries, but as the natural outcome of capitalist economic expansion that began in the 16th century. Besides internal capitalist transformations and thickening external ties of trade, financial transactions, transportation and communications, capitalist globalization
also generates ideological and cultural linkages, constantly reinforced by mass communication and advertising campaigns, which foster popular and seductive consumerist images of the global North that stoke the circuits of international migration (Sassen, 1988; Hamilton and Chinchilla, 1996).

These theories need not be mutually exclusive. International migration is such a complex process that it cannot but be the result of equally complex forces operating at various levels in space and time. There can be little doubt that international migration flows are determined by conditions in both the sending and receiving countries, including the state of the economy, political stability and freedoms, and immigration law, all of which are affected by broader forces in the global political economy. Whatever might initiate immigration, the factors and forces that perpetuate it can be quite different. Several theories have been developed to account for the rise of new conditions that emerge in the course of international migration that sustain it and function as independent causes for further migration.

The first is network theory, according to which the networks that arise in the course of migration and which link migrants, former migrants, and non-immigrants in sending and receiving countries through kinship, friendship, and community ties constitute an expanding pool of social and cultural capital that lower the costs and risks and raise the benefits of movement, and therefore increase the likelihood of international migration (Portes, 1989; Buechler and Buechler, 1987; Boyd, 1989; Heisler, 1992). The second is institutional theory, which argues that as migration expands profit-seeking and humanitarian institutions, organizations, and entrepreneurs develop to service both legal and illegal migrants, especially as restrictive immigration policies are adopted by the receiving countries, which serve to institutionalize and promote international migration irrespective of the causes that originally started it. The third theory, cumulative causation, maintains that migration brings about changed social, economic, and cultural contexts, which affect subsequent migrations. In other words, each migration decision is influenced by previous migrations, which alter the regional distribution of income, land, and human capital, the organization of productive activities, and the culture and social meanings of migration and work. In the sending countries migration can become an esteemed rite of passage, while in the receiving countries occupations dominated by immigrants can become culturally labeled “immigrant jobs,” and therefore shunned by native workers, thereby reinforcing the structural demand for immigrants (Massey, et al., 1998; Stark, et al., 1986; Taylor, 1999; Stark and Taylor, 1989).

Once again, there is little that is intrinsically incompatible among the three theories. Each explains an important dynamic and dimension of the migration process. It stands to reason that migration involves both social networks and enabling institutions and is a cumulative process. The interplay between these
factors obviously varies in specific contexts. Increasingly, international migration has come to be seen as an integral part of globalization, or the phenomenon known as “transnationalism,” a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Viewing international migration from the transnational perspective has serious implications on how immigrants should be viewed by both sending and receiving countries and how migration is analyzed (Glick Schiller, et al., 1992).

As might be expected, there is no agreement on the consequences of migration for the migrants themselves as well as for their countries of origin and their countries of immigration. How do African migrants fare and adapt in their new countries of settlement? What is the impact of their migration on their home and host countries? Much of the literature has focused on the economic dimensions of these questions. A variety of models seek to explain the performance of migrants. One is human capital theory, according to which education and training are important determinants of income and occupation. Some studies inspired by this theory make claims of immigrant superiority, that immigrants, even if they are not always composed of “the best and the brightest” of migration folklore, tend to be self-selective and highly motivated, qualities that are invaluable for adaptation and success. Others emphasize that immigrants arrive in the host country with many handicaps, including sometimes lack of language skills, knowledge of the job market, local customs, values, and the social structure, which impedes their assimilation or adaptation (Chiswick, et al., 1985; Borjas, 1989). Human capital theory tends to assume that economic discrimination is irrational and exogenous.

Other theories take labor market discrimination as a given and seek to explain it. One explanatory model sees it in terms of job segregation or closure by dominant groups who limit the eligibility of new members to high-rewarding occupations. The split labor market thesis postulates that the market is divided along racial, gender and other hierarchized lines along which rewards are unequally distributed. Immigrants are positioned accordingly. The succession model predicts that a group that arrives last occupies the bottom position in economic rankings as previous groups progressively move up the occupational hierarchy. A version of this model, the queue theory, suggests that employer preferences often determine rankings on the labor queue, which may result in some groups being selected for jobs, which may be high paying. The rankings are often determined by ethnic and racial characteristics (Waldinger, 1996). Many studies show that there is a cost to being a racial or ethnic minority in the Northern countries (Amissah, 1994, p. 31-42). From these perspectives, African migrants can be expected to suffer triple subordination: as immigrants, as people who arrived recently, and as people many of whom are black.
Similarly, there is little agreement on the impact of international migration on the receiving countries. Suffice it to say, there are those, especially from the neoclassical perspective, who see international migration as beneficial. It is widely believed, for example, that West European economic recovery and boom in the postwar period until the early 1970s was fueled by massive waves of immigration, up to 30 million, many of them from Africa (Castles and Miller, 1993, p. 65-76; Collinson, 1993, p. 47-50; Hollified, 1992, p. 45-73). It has been argued that migrants are not only valuable in terms of boosting production, but also for technological innovation. According to Gnanaraj Chellaraj, et al., (2006, p. 251), in the United States international students and skilled migration has "a strongly positive impact on future patent applications and grants." They calculate that a 10% increase in the share of international students raises patent applications by 4.7% and patents for universities by 6% and by commercial firms by 6.8%, while a ten percent rise in the ratio of skilled migrants tends to increase overall future patent applications by 0.8% and university patent grants by 1.3%.

But international migration can have its economic costs. There is considerable literature that shows international migration depresses wages because of the propensity of immigrants to accept lower wages than native workers and their weak bargaining position either because of their insecure or even illegal immigration status and lack of unionization. The phenomenon of "brain wastage" in which skilled immigrants take up unskilled jobs is quite widespread. In the United States, for example, "with some exceptions educated immigrants from Latin America and Eastern Europe perform poorly, especially when compared with immigrants from developing countries in Asia and developing countries" (Ozden, 2006, p. 243). This is attributed to the quality of their education and proficiency in English. Migrants are less likely to join unions, so that as their share in the labor force grows overall unionization levels tend to fall (Lee 2005).

As with the causes, the consequences of international migration cannot be confined to the economic dimensions. The profound political, social, and cultural impact of international migration in the global North is abundantly clear. National identities, political discourses, social structures, and cultural dynamics have all been reconfigured, to varying degrees, over the last half century of intensive migration especially from the global South who have brought new races, ethnicities, languages, religions, foods, values, customs, and practices. Immigration has challenged, but not eroded state sovereignty in these countries. It is also clear that international migration has diluted old certainties about the boundaries of national culture and citizenship, but this has not generally resulted in the emergence of a more liberal postnational citizenship, notwithstanding the fetish that is made of multiculturalism in many Northern countries. Rather, there has been the rise of new racisms as
the political and ideological temperature has arisen in the post-welfare state in which right-wing populist movements and political parties are fueled in part by irrational hatreds of and incendiary hostility towards immigrants (Messina and Lahav, 2006; Freeman, 1998; Farer, 1995; Adamson, 2006; Gibson, 2002; Messina, 1996; Betz, 1994; Soysal, 1994).

No less challenging is the question of the impact of international migration on the sending countries. Two main positions can be identified. First, there is a well established tradition of emphasizing the negative impact especially of skilled labor migration—the brain drain—on these countries. The brain drain represents not only the loss human capital, nurtured, and produced at great public cost; it also deprives the sending countries of the cultural and social capital for democratization and progress. This has led several scholars, led by Jagdish Bhagwati (1976; Hamadi and Bhagwati, 1976; Bhagwati and Wilson, 1989; Miyagawa, 1991), to devise strategies including taxation policies to reduce the negative effects of international migration.

The second approach can be found among the proponents of the new brain-gain literature, who argue that international migration confers “certain benefits, including increased trade, remittances, knowledge, foreign direct investment (FDI)—attributed in part to a diaspora effect—as well as the skills acquired by return migrants in the destination country” (Schiff, 2006, p. 201). It is also claimed that there the “brain drain” induces a “brain gain” in the sending countries in so far as it “raises the expected return on education,” which “induces additional investment in education” that, in turn, “may result in a beneficial brain drain or net brain gain, that is, a brain gain that is larger than the brain drain; and a net brain gain raises welfare and growth” (Schiff, 2006, p. 202). Much of this work has focused on effects of migration and remittances on income, poverty, and inequality, as well as on household capital and physical capital formation and other productive investment and entrepreneurship.

Those who contend that migration promotes development argue that remittances improve income distribution and quality of life by loosening production and investment constraints faced by households in the sending countries; after all, migration decisions are part of family strategies to raise income, obtain funds to invest in new activities, and insure against income and production risks (Keely, 1989; Arnold, 1992). Several empirical studies have demonstrated positive effects of remittances in many instances (Adams, 2006; Yang and Martinez, 2006). But there are also cautionary studies that indicate more ambiguous outcomes that show the effects on education and health of the families of immigrants can be negatively impacted. It has been shown in parts of Mexico that children of immigrants may not get adequate health care and attention and their children may reduce their investment in education as they
anticipate migrating northwards (McKenzie, 2006; Kandel and Massey, 2002). In short, the relationship between migration and development is multidimensional and complex. Migration and remittances can have both negative and positive impacts. They may reduce or reverse the lost-labor-and-capital effects of migration if their size exceed the value of production lost as a result of emigration, and if they enable economic agents in the sending areas to overcome capital and other constraints on production activities (Schiff, 2006; Taylor, 1999).

The exact magnitude of international migrant remittances is unknown since a large portion is not channeled through formal banking systems or made up of cash-transfers. Nevertheless, available estimates indicate that there has been rapid growth in the volume of global remittances in recent decades, from less than $2 billion in 1970 to $70 billion in 1995, and $226 billion in 2004, of which $147 billion went to the developing countries, representing 1.7% of their GDP and surpassing official development assistance. The top five countries in combined remittances between 1970 and 1995 were France, Mexico, Portugal, Egypt, and the Philippines. In terms of regional distribution, Asia claimed 38% and Europe 33.1% (United Nations, 2006).

Africa's Brain Drain and Its Developmental Implications

What is the scale of Africa's brain drain? Accurate data is hard to come by, although this has not stopped speculation. According to a new database created by a team at the World Bank, claimed to be the most comprehensive to date, covering 195 countries and 36 dependent territories, “the stock of educated immigrants has increased by about 800,000 a year between 1990 and 2000 (the total stock of immigrants has increased by about 1.7 million a year)” (Docquier and Marfouk, 2006, p. 155). The average world emigration rate has risen much faster for labor with tertiary education than for that with secondary education; it is lowest for labor with less than secondary. The result is that immigrants to the OECD are more skilled than the native born, 31.2% compared to 21.9% in 1990 had tertiary education, increasing to 35.4% and 27.6% in 2000, respectively.

Africa suffers from the highest rates of skilled labor migration. Africa's stock of people with tertiary education is a mere 4%, yet this group accounts for 30.9% of all immigrants from the continent. The mismatch for the other regions is limited to varying degrees but none equal the African pattern. The highest shares of skilled emigrants in Africa are from Southern Africa (62.1%), followed by Western Africa (42%), Eastern Africa (40.8%), Central Africa (30.9%), and Northern Africa (19.6%). While only one African country features among the top 30 skilled migration countries in absolute numbers—South Africa with 168,083 and in 29th place, nine are among those with the highest emigration
rates: Cape Verde (67.5%), The Gambia (63.3%), Mauritius (56.2%), Seychelles (55.9%), Sierra Leone (52.5%), Ghana (46.9%), Mozambique (45.1%), Liberia (45%), and Kenya (38.4%).

Let me give the example of the United States. The African born population currently claims the highest levels of education of any group in the country, foreign born or native born. According to the 2000 Census, among the African-born residents aged 25 and above, 49.3% had a bachelor’s degree or more as compared to 25.6% for the native born population and 25.8% for the foreign born population as a whole (U.S Census Bureau, 2001). The irony of people from the least educated continent in the world having the highest levels of education in the world’s lone, indeed, lonely superpower is quite striking. Some of the highly educated African born residents in the United States consist of students who don’t return to their home countries after graduation.

There is little agreement, however, on how well or poorly African migrants fare in the country or the global North more generally. Different samples, methods, and measures have yielded conflicting and confusing results. Disagreement has centered on the educational and income differentials between African immigrants and other immigrants and the host populations. One school argues that the African immigrants compare extremely well with those of the host American population and other immigrant populations. In a recent World Bank paper, it is noted that migrants from Africa together with those from Asia tend to perform better than those from Latin America and Eastern Europe because of the higher quality of their education and proficiency with English (Ozden 2006).

In 2000, more than a third of African born residents were in managerial and professional specialties, a fifth in technical, sales, and administrative support, another fifth in service occupations, 4% in precision production, craft, and repair, and the remaining 17% were laborers, fabricators, and operators. In contrast, the occupational distribution for residents from America’s historic backyard – Latin America, the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, and South America – are weighted to the less professional and managerial occupations and include sizeable groups in farming, forestry, and fishing. Yet, in terms of household income and poverty rates, African residents tend to do less well than their educational levels would seem to suggest.

This suggests there is considerable brain wastage among them. Indeed several studies of African migrant incomes using the census data of 1980, 1990, and 2000 show that mean earnings of African born residents were lower than their relatively high levels of education and less than those of African Americans and Caribbean immigrants (Amisah, 1994; Dodoo, 1997). This would seem to suggest that in addition to a racial tax, African immigrants pay a cultural tax, the devaluation of their human capital in a society where things African are routinely negatively stereotyped.
and despised. One more reason why the African immigrants cannot escape Africa and have to be concerned about its development: its shadows of underdevelopment cast a pall over how they are perceived and perform in the global North. Clearly, the odyssey of African immigrants is filled with both triumph and tragedy, fulfillment and frustration, impressive successes and ignominious failures.

Even more contentious is the question of the impact of the "brain drain" on Africa and what to do about it. Data from 2004 shows Africa's total remittance receipts had shot to $19.2 billion, accounting for 2.4% of GDP, compared to the world average of 0.6%, 1.7%, and 0.2% for the less and more developed countries as a whole, respectively. But Africa's remittances comprised a paltry 8.5% of world earnings. Except for Nigeria which got $2,751, thereby making it third in the continental rankings, the largest receipts went to countries in Northern Africa led by Morocco ($4.2 billion), Egypt ($3.3 billion), Algeria ($2.5 billion), Tunisia ($1.4 billion), and Sudan ($1.4 billion). But as a share of GDP, first place was claimed by Lesotho (25.9%), followed by Cape Verde (9.5%), Guinea-Bissau and Morocco (8.5% each), Togo (7.2%), Sudan (7%), and Senegal (6.7%) (United Nations, 2006).

These differentials reflect the divergent congruence of factors that determine the volume and quality of remittance flows. Among the key factors are the scale of migration, the educational quality of the migrants, and the development of the financial sector of the recipient countries, which affects the transaction costs of remittances. Whatever the private motivations of migrants, the sending of remittances is both socially induced and market driven so it is important to pay attention to the structural dynamics that affect flows. The North African countries claim the largest share of remittances because they have the largest volume of international migrants. This could also be because of they are located close to major remittance-sending regions, the EU and the Gulf States, which reduces the transaction costs of both migration and remittances (Niimi and Ozden, 2006; Adams, 2007; Adams and Page, 2003).

Unfortunately, studies on the effects of migrant remittances on African countries remain limited in scope and sometimes quality. Older studies focused on a handful of countries with long histories of emigration such as Egypt (McCormick and Wahba, 2001; Looney, 1990; Kandil, 1990; Aly and Shields, 1996) and Lesotho (Gustafsson and Maskonnen, 1993). More recent studies focus on a growing range of countries that have not been traditionally considered as emigration countries, such as Ghana whose rapidly growing diaspora in the global North reportedly remitted an estimated $3 billion in 2004 (through both formal and informal channels), or more than 40% of the country's GDP (Mazzucato, 2005, p. 5). Similarly positive assessments of the role of remittances have been made for the war-torn countries of the Great Lakes Region (de Bruyn and Wets, 2006) and the Horn of Africa (Maimbo, 2006).
The need for more extensive research that is both qualitative and quantitative, micro-level and macro-level on the flows and impact of migration and remittances (both formal and informal) in African countries cannot be overemphasized. There are tantalizing lines of inquiry that deserve closer scrutiny, including the role of migrants in direct foreign investment, the impact of international migration on fertility rates, and the transmission of cultural practices. It is now well established that migrant networks play an important role in promoting international trade in so far as they reduce informal barriers related to information about market conditions and opportunities, not to mention political and cultural conventions that affect economic transactions (Gould, 1994; Head and Reis, 1998; Rauch and Trindale, 2002), but their effects on direct foreign investment is a subject worth more investigations, certainly for Africa. Beata Javorcik, et al. (2006, p. 3) suggest that the presence of migrants, especially skilled migrants, “in the U.S. increases the volume of U.S. FDI in their country of origin” because they serve as a channel of information transfer that reduces transactions costs which tend to be higher for investment than trade. “The magnitude of the effect is economically meaningful, as a one percent increase in the migrant stock is associated with a 0.3 percent increase in FDI stock. A similar increase in the number of migrants with tertiary education increases FDI by 0.4 percent.”

Towards Diasporization and Brain Mobility

What can be done? It is easy to see African international migrations especially to the global North as an unmitigated economic, political, and cultural disaster for the continent. Remittances from them and other migrants, while important for the families and communities of the migrants and sometimes for some countries in their national balance of payments, do not seem to compensate for the net losses of their productivity and potential contributions to national development. It has also been argued that the skilled migrations deprive civil society of the organizational political skills of middle class professionals. That explains, according to the critics or cynics, why while African governments publicly decry the migration of their professional elites, they do little to create conditions that would stem it.

All this may be true, but it forecloses the possibility that the migrants can also be turned into assets for Africa. In so far as many of the migrants may not return, despite the proverbial wishes of migrants to return home “someday,” African countries and the migrants themselves need to devise creative strategies that exploit and enhance the potential benefits of African skilled migration. Demands on the Northern countries to compensate African countries for the emigration of their skilled personnel and lost human capital, which have been made, have not gone far and are unlikely to. Neither is the record of restrictive
policies and return programs encouraging. Bonding schemes that require those awarded publicly funded scholarship to return have not had much success either in stemming the tide of skilled labor migration. Also limited have been the effects of repatriation programs. For example, by the end of 1994 the program of the IOM’s Return of Qualified Africans program had assisted merely 1,200 African migrants to return to six target countries: Ghana, Kenya, Somalia (until 1991), Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, some of who, I am sure, eventually returned to the trails of international migration. Only time will tell whether recent efforts to negotiate temporary migration schemes between African countries and the major labor importing countries in the OECD, will bear fruit.

African countries and international migrations have three choices. First, they can continue bemoaning the “brain drain” and engage in mutual recriminations, occasionally pacified by remittances. The second is to pursue “brain gain” through the return option in which international migrants are encouraged and enticed to physically return to the continent. Reference is often made to the return of Indian and Chinese professionals from the global North who have contributed to rapid economic growth in their countries (Mahroum, et al., 2006). The third is the “diaspora” option that recognizes the migrants as new diasporas and seeks to build effective strategies of “brain mobility” or circulation between them and their countries of origin and the continent as a whole.

This option needs to be based on a sober understanding of the mutualities of interest, that neither Africa nor the diaspora can succeed in this ruthlessly competitive globalizing world without the other, that the diaspora will continue to be molested by racism and denigration as long as Africa remains underdeveloped, and Africa only stands to benefit and accelerate its prospects of development by maximizing the contributions of the diaspora, by recognizing that the diaspora constitutes a strategic asset possessing enormous social, financial, and intellectual capital, that in the case of the new diaspora it is already the continent’s biggest donor, whose remittances exceed foreign direct investment and official development assistance, and it is the only constituency in the global North that has a profound emotive and cognitive commitment and the capacity to play a progressive role in Africa’s social transformation, and in the case of the historic diasporas that it has the political potential and propensity, which it has demonstrated historically in struggles against colonial rule and apartheid, to mobilize in support of a new civilizational compact between Euroamerica and Africa that was so cruelly disrupted and distorted by the Atlantic slave trade that created that diaspora in the first place and the countervailing ideologies and movements of Pan-African through which the diaspora sought to reconnect itself to and help redeem Africa from European capitalist imperialism that its own unpaid labor of four centuries had helped build.
Africa and its diaspora have not always effectively mobilized to serve and advance each other’s interests as has been the case with other diasporas. The new African diaspora and their offspring who Mazrui calls in the case of the American Africans can help invigorate the re-awakened interest in Africa among the historic African American diaspora and serve as a trans-Atlantic bridge, as cultural mediators between Africa and Africa America, whose communication and knowledge of each other have largely been through the distorted lenses and prejudices of imperialist and racist media that they do not control.

Immigrant Africans, as workers and cultural agents, have an important and specific role to play in brokering relations between Africa and the global North, in blackening the Atlantic. They must resist the seductions of their new homelands to become native ventriloquists, complicit authentic others who validate narratives that seek to marginalize Africa. Nor should they let themselves be manipulated as a fifth column in Euroamerica’s eternal racial wars by disavowing the protracted struggles of historic African diaspora communities for the full citizenship of racial equality, economic empowerment, and political power. Sometimes immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean tend to forget that the roads they ride on to their jobs in industry or the academy were paved by all those brave men and women who fought and for civil rights. Solidarity requires respect for each other’s struggles and recognition of our splendid diversities anchored on a strategic collective self interest, in so far as it is the denial of our full humanity that has produced and continues to reproduce our collective exploitation and denigration whether in Africa or in the global North.

Migrant Africans should not be seen solely in the magisterial role of Edward Said’s cosmopolitan revolutionaries or the ministerial role of Ali Mazrui’s teachers subverting the global North through counter-penetration, or floating symbols of Appadurai’s various scapes. They belong to both worlds as economic workers, cultural producers, and political agents who should, in solidarity with historic African diaspora communities, construct practices, commitments, and knowledges of their multiple worlds that demystify the roots of Africa’s and diaspora Africa’s oppression and exploitation; that seek to empower their communities; that expose and confront the tyrannies of Northern imperial power and Africa’s dictators; that promote respectful conversation between Africa and the global North.

What does this mean in practice? I hesitate to offer a detailed list of prescriptions, not least because I am only too aware that Africa’s problem is often not the lack of advice, of which it gets too much from both friends and foes and foes pretending to be friends. Let me make a few suggestions that point to the possibilities of turning contemporary African migrants from liabilities into assets for African development based on the recognition that while many may not be able or want to return permanently to their native countries they, like most migrants,
often suffer from abandonment guilt which they seek to alleviate by continued participation in developments at home. In days gone by, global migration often entailed permanent relocation or long separation and infrequent encounters with one's native home through mail and the occasional visit. The contemporary revolution in telecommunications and travel has compressed the spatial and temporal distances between home and abroad, thus offering these new diasporas, unlike the historic diasporas, unprecedented opportunities to be transnational, to be people of two worlds, perpetually translocated, physically and culturally, between several countries or several continents. Thus, globalization is not simply facilitating the rapid flows of capital and commodities, but also revitalizing old cultural and community networks, thus strengthening transnational ethnic, racial, and national identities, interests, and interventions.

In this context it makes eminent sense to abandon restrictive and punitive policies that demonize even criminalize international migrants, which have not worked. It means providing dual citizenship to those among the new and historic diasporas who wish for such formal citizenship rights that are empowering. Indeed, taking up citizenship in their new countries of residence is critical if the new diasporas are to influence, in any significant way, relations between their host and home countries. It is not enough for African countries to court the diaspora economically but shun them politically. The same goes for the diaspora. It is self-indulgent to decry the alleged pathologies of Africa while reproducing the same perversions including the cancer of tribalism in the diaspora, or fueling them at home by supporting dictators and warlords and sponsoring conflicts and wars as has happened most tragically in the Horn of Africa. It entails improving the investment climate for the diaspora, beyond developing better instruments for remittance flows. It requires devising creative strategies for knowledge and skill circulation, the formation of national, regional, and continental knowledge networks that facilitate brain mobility, from academic exchanges to consultancies and temporary return migrations, to the transmission of information and vigorously defending Africa which is routinely defamed in Euroamerica with little social cost. In short, the diaspora constitutes Africa's eyes and ears in the world, and an important mediator for the world to Africa. It is indispensable to the globalization of Africa and Africa's globalization.

References


