

## Internal migration in Africa

With the obvious exception of the slave trade (the Atlantic and the Islamic ones), all African migrations, across time and space, have reflected internal tendencies irrespective of external stimulators.

Pre-colonial mobilities of Africans, often enabled by rife intra-tribal conflicts and the urge for establishment and/or expansion of kingdoms via land grabbing, were limited to the confines of Africa. Even long after slavery, trade remained the guiding principle and the main lever that, in one way or another, explained the displacement of populations. One might think that colonisation, due to the construction of borders, would have slowed down the internal movement of populations. Still, in spite of various control mechanisms, colonisation also favoured the establishment of many internal diasporas, and their swarming through the importation of labour, soldiers and clerks. Recently, in addition to the slow migrations that have been established over several centuries and whose main fuel was trade, there are forms of violent migration born of wars, crises and political instability (in the CAR, Rwanda, etc.). To these layers are now added displacements linked to the vagaries of nature (climate refugees), to the exploitation of mines or just to seasonal migrations, etc. Within different communities, another important entity also emerges. It is a form of 'diaspora of the diaspora'. In other words, people who leave their country of origin and settle elsewhere for 10 or 20 years.

As reported in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report (2024), 70 % of migration expeditions of Africans do take place across internal borders of Africa. This affirmation further buttresses the earlier declaration of the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009) on preference of Africans for migrating within Africa relative to transcontinental migrations. Apparently, the internal nature of most of African migrations has continued to be sustained due to inherent desires of Africans to simultaneously connect with their initial points of departure despite making the move. It clearly aligns with the notion of "transnational simultaneity". Such extent of 'dualistic' subsistence has often a regional outlook. In this regard, the great majority of migrants from all parts of Africa conceive and implement their migratory intents within the confines of their respective sub-regional configurations. As case references, a significant proportion of illegal miners in South Africa are shuttle migrants from Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe; most of cross-border shuttle and long-term traders in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana are of Nigerian origin; so also, the situation with Somalian and Ugandan seasonal/shuttle migrants in Kenya. Conversely in the North African case regional cross-border mobilities have been largely unpopular when compared with their routine preference for cross-Mediterranean movements towards Europe and the Middle East.

While relative activeness of the free movement protocol of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been central to seeming popularity of cross-border engagements, non-recognition of most of modern-day borderlines by citizens across the borders, and sustenance of pre-modern migratory routes have been implied for acceptability of regional migratory tendencies by Africans across all sub-regional configurations, such as within the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC), the East African Community (EAC) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). Undue categorization of most cross-border engagements by Africans has now led internal migrations in Africa to assume irregular tendencies in most cases. For instance, smuggling-of-migrants, trafficking-in-persons and cross-border labour exploitation are now widespread. Therefore, regional diasporas and constant movement within the continent, unfortunately, do not always work harmoniously. For several decades we have seen a form of xenophobia developing in African countries (South Africa, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Tunisia, etc.) against migrant communities.

African women are now actively involved in different cross-border trading activities, which usually reflect shuttle tendencies. Ostensibly, such budding migratory capabilities of the womenfolk in Africa could be adduced to the impacts of modernity and acceptance of vagaries of information and communication technology (ICT) in Africa. There is no doubt that these factors have had profound multiplier effects on the economic empowerment of African woman, impossible to achieve in the pre-colonial African societies when all strands of mobility were characteristically dominated by the male gender.

Despite the importance and complexity of this phenomenon, academic studies - not to mention political rhetoric mainly in Europe - have neglected Africa's internal migrations in relation to the flows leaving the continent to settle in Europe, America or Asia. The articles of this *Africana Studia* file, which focus on African inner migrations, result from two international conferences: one organised in September 2023 at the Las Palmas (Casa de Africa) and especially the one of May 2025 in charge of the Centre de Recherche Afrique Contemporaine (GRUMAC). This larger conference took place in Douala, Cameroon, and it was the third of a series organised by the Research Group Internal Change and Foreign Policies of African States, a network which, in addition to GRUMAC, includes the Institute of African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IAS) and the Centre for African Studies of the University of Porto (CEAUP). In the final phase of this publication, we were pleased to be able to count on the collaboration of the Obafemi Awolowo University of Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

With special thanks to all the institutions involved but especially to the team of Douala who organised the meeting on which this editorial project builds upon, we hope that this publication will provide a better understanding of African migrations. A process that, for the foreseeable future, will continue to take an internal outlook for obvious cultural interconnectedness.

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**René Pélissier** (1935-2024) - Durante a preparação deste número a equipa redatorial recebeu a triste notícia do falecimento do Prof. René Pélissier, nosso colaborador regular desde a *Africana Studia* nº 11 (2008). A importância da sua obra é conhecida de todos. Aqui, apenas uma nota de reconhecimento pelo contributo que deu à atualidade da *Africana Studia*, recenseando sistematicamente todas as publicações entretanto surgidas sobre a África de expressão oficial ibérica.