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Circular Migration in Zimbabwe & Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
CA	Communal Area
CBD	Central Business District
CHRA	Combined Harare Residents' Association
CSO	Central Statistical Office
DK (in tables)	Don't know
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Policy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
GPA	Global Political Agreement
HDA	High Density Area
HHH	Household Head
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDC	Less Developed Countries
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NESMUWA	Network of Surveys on Migration and Urbanization in West Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PASS	Poverty Assessment Study Survey
RLI	Rhodes-Livingstone Institute
SACN	South African City Network
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Policies
SPT	Solidarity Peace Trust
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
ZANU(PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZNVAC	Zimbabwe National Vulnerability Assessment Committee

Preface

In 1984 I sent a research proposal on migration to Harare to Professor Chris Mutambirwa, Head of the Geography Department of the University of Zimbabwe. He responded with interest. Thus began a research collaboration which has been central to the development of my ideas and understandings of migration and urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa. In the following year, when our first project was undertaken, and during subsequent rounds of surveys of migrants and their livelihoods, and on many other occasions when I was in Zimbabwe, the Geography Department hosted and supported me. The results of that research form the core of this book and the context from which I have developed my broader analysis of cities and circular migration in sub-Saharan Africa. I should like to thank everyone involved in the department. I am also grateful to all the research assistants and interviewees involved in our surveys over the years; special mention must go to Ruth Masaraure. Above all, I am indebted to Chris and his wife Jane for their support and affection for both me and my family over the decades since our first correspondence all those years ago. In the 1990s and 2000s, often with my young children in tow, I could not have conducted my work in Harare without the hospitality and friendship of Richard and Lynette Owen.

There are many other people who have contributed to my work on migrants and cities in Africa over the years, by providing intellectual stimulation and critique, and hospitality during research visits to other African cities. It is not possible to list them all here but in Johannesburg I would particularly like to thank Alan Mabin and Cynthia Kros who have welcomed me so many times. In Cape Town I must thank Sue Parnell and Owen Crankshaw. Liz Blunt kindly invited me to stay with her in Addis Ababa.

Colin Murray, Kathy Baker and Liz Gunner deserve special thanks for their encouragement of this book as well as their wonderful support and friendship over the years. I am also grateful to Colin, and to Deborah James, for their comments on various drafts of the book.

My research in Harare and in southern Africa more generally on the themes covered in this book has been funded by small grants from the School of Oriental and African Studies, King's College London and the Nuffield Foundation. I am also grateful to King's College London for a sabbatical, without which this book could not have been written.

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Introduction

Re-inventing the Wheel?

> Emerging new forms of resistance to the brutalities of global capitalism ... must coexist with older forms, scrounged – like circular migration ... – from the dustbin of history. Ferguson (1999: 257)

This book is about trends in migration to, and from, African towns and cities, and the changing characteristics of migrants and migrancy. To some extent, therefore, it is also about changing urban population dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa as an outcome of these shifts and the nature of urban livelihoods which is a key driver of migration. The core of the book is based on empirical evidence from longitudinal research in Harare, Zimbabwe. In the 1980s, ordinary residents of Harare were probably the most economically and socially secure urban people in sub-Saharan Africa. By the mid-2000s, they were among the least secure. Over the same period most ordinary urban people in sub-Saharan Africa had suffered significant falls in their living standards, leading to adaptations in their livelihoods and the nature of migration (Potts 1997; Beall et al. 1999). Harare's experience provides in microcosm an extreme example of these falls and adaptations which can be traced through the evidence from directly comparable surveys conducted in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

A key finding of this research in Zimbabwe has been the strengthening and revitalization of circular migration and the rural–urban linkages upon which this is predicated. Similar processes have also occurred in many other African towns across the continent. This is one reason why this introductory chapter is entitled, 'Re-inventing the wheel', referring to this reinforcement of circularity as one element in rural-urban migration patterns. There are two more abstract aspects to the title, however, which relate to theorizing about urbanization and migration processes in African countries. The experiences of the last three decades have entirely undermined the utility of conceptualizing such processes in relation to unilinear models, as embodied in modernization theory generally, and urban transition models more specifically, whereby permanent migration inexorably replaces circulation as urban economies develop. An important contribution to this view was Ferguson's book, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Copperbelt* (1999), which showed how the unilineal modernization model was meaningless in relation to what had really happened in urban Zambia since the 1970s. Further, it established how circular migration needed to be re-evaluated and incorporated into contemporary theoretical understandings of urbanization in southern Africa.

The rejection of *linear* theorizing and the appreciation of cyclical and more variable trends as influences on African urbanization and migration points to another part of the reasoning behind this chapter's title. Ferguson's arguments related particularly to theoretical approaches typical of southern African academic traditions. This chapter's title posits that these approaches have not taken sufficient cognizance of academic traditions and analyses of urban processes elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. These have much more comfortably accepted the many rationales for, and vitality of, circular migration over time. The eventual recognition in southern Africanist academic circles that circular migration is not simply fading away, despite the absence of any institutions enforcing it,[1] is also 'a reinvention of the wheel' in that this has been understood, without surprise, in much of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa for decades.

The questions of how circular migration has been evaluated in sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular, how different academic approaches and theoretical positions have influenced the tenor of these evaluations in different regions are considered in the next two chapters. This includes specific discussion of the experiences of, and academic debates within, South Africa where urbanization and migration exhibit some features in common with the rest of the continent but also some differences due to its particular political and economic history. The way in which circular migration has been defined and understood in broader migration theory is discussed in this first chapter. The general sub-Saharan African context within which migration trends and urban dynamics have developed is also examined, and related to how these compare with broader global (re)-evaluations of urbanization in developing countries. Particular emphasis is placed on the impact of African urban livelihood trends from the end of the 1970s. The key evidence for the two dynamics of more, and faster, circulation migration and of reductions in the rate of urban growth in many African urban areas is also presented and discussed.

African Internal Migration in Theory

Migration within African countries has been analysed with reference to most of the general types of theories about migration which have been developed, including straight neo-classical economic treatments such as Todaro (1971), radical Marxist perspectives (e.g., Amin 1974; Meillassoux 1981; Arrighi 1973) and post-modernist approaches. The following discussion makes no attempt to review the general theoretical literature, which has been done elsewhere (Baker and Akin Aina 1995; van Binsbergen and Meilink 1978; Murray 1994).[2] Instead, it outlines some key elements of theorizing which are of special relevance to this study. Theoretical approaches which have strongly influenced the different regional paradigms within which internal migration, including circular migration, have been analysed are highlighted. They are also cross-referenced in the subsequent two chapters in which these paradigms are

1 Discussed in Mabin (1990). Mabin's awareness that circular migration processes had dynamics outside of institutionalized migrant labour systems and that unilinear transition models had limited applicability was a key intervention in the South African literature but much subsequent policy analysis ignored its message.

2 Apart from some work in journals, the majority of literature on migration in Africa since the mid-1990s has focussed on international and/or forced migration flows rather than internal and 'voluntary' migration. Within this body of work, research output on cross-border migration to South Africa has been very significant.

discussed in detail. Research conducted in Zimbabwe which relates to migration and urban livelihoods is highlighted, in both its theoretical and methodological aspects.

At the end of the 1970s, as radical perspectives on migration were increasingly gaining sway, Gerold-Scheepers and van Binsbergen (1978) provided a typology of theoretical approaches for African migration which still has considerable utility. The methodological-individualist approach, which focuses on the individual motivations of the migrant, frequently emphasises the significance of economic motives but can also include various non-economic issues. This approach informed quantitative aspects of research surveys in Harare, which included simple inquiries into each migrant's own choice of factors that had caused their migration. Neo-classical migration theory essentially falls into this grouping, with its emphasis on individual decision-making by rational *homo economicus*. The driving forces in neo-classical migration theory are geographical inequalities in incomes and employment and the desire to maximize income. As is well known, rural-urban migration in Africa was explained in these terms by Todaro (1969, 1971). At one level, the rates of, and rationale for, in-migration to African urban areas after independence are quite well explained by his model, as long as a crucial, but rarely noticed, implication of part of his theorizing is recognized. Todaro argued that continued migration to urban centres in the 1970s, when formal employment creation was evidently not able to provide enough jobs, could be rationalized as individual migrants maximizing their life-time income streams rather than merely comparing rural versus urban incomes in the short-term. Each migrant would thus 'balance the probabilities and risks of being unemployed or underemployed *for a considerable period of time* against the positive urban-rural real income differential' (Todaro, 1997: 280, emphasis added). This meant that, paradoxically, 'more urban [formal] *employment* leads to higher levels of urban *unemployment*' (Todaro, 1997: 282, original emphasis) because of in-migration. However, this latter point also implies that, as formal employment levels fell dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s, the model would logically predict that open unemployment and in-migration would also fall. In the case of Harare, the migration surveys of the 1980s and 1990s suggested that this corollary of the Todaro thesis was operating. In 1994, when formal employment had suffered a sudden downturn compared to the 1980s, migrant household heads were *more likely* to be formally employed than in the 1980s and there was evidence of increasing out-migration (i.e., falling *net* in-migration) (ibid).[3] Yet Todaro (1997: 276) persisted in blaming migrants as the primary cause of increasing urban unemployment in Africa despite the logical implications of his model. He paid insufficient attention to the potential circularity of rural-urban migration there and how such circulation influences *net* in-migration and employment demand. In relation to income maximization rationality, this misses the fact that when 'the considerable period of time' has elapsed, many migrants leave town if they have *not* succeeded in beginning their long-term earning 'stream'. As will be shown, this is supported by evidence for falling net in-migration; furthermore, it is likely that open unemployment has not much increased in African towns (see Potts 2000).

Structural-functionalist approaches to migration assume the existence of

[3] The evidence for lower net in-migration by the time of the last survey round in 2001 was even greater (see Chapter 4). However, by this time the fundamentals of the national, as well as the urban economy, had become so unusual that the entire economy was informalizing. This was reflected in a somewhat higher rate of informal employment among migrants in Harare. Nonetheless, male household heads remained very largely formally employed (see Chapter 5).

differentiated sectors within society (e.g. traditional versus modern; rural versus urban) created by various structural forces. These lead to what might be termed socio-economic disequilibrium (Chapman and Prothero 1985a) and migration is one of the ways in which interactions between such sectors occur. The differences between the various sectors are largely taken as read, which often leads to studies of this type being ahistorical, as with methodological individualist approaches. Many of the works of the Manchester School of anthropology and sociology on African migrants in Central Africa conducted at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in the mid-twentieth century are ascribed as structural-functionalist (Gerold-Scheepers and van Binsbergen 1978; van Binsbergen and Meilink 1978). These include seminal works by scholars such as Gluckman (e.g., 1961), Mitchell (e.g., 1959, 1969) and Epstein (e.g., 1958, 1961), whose influence on southern African migration studies is considered in Chapter 3. The structural-functionalist approach was also central to Parkin's (1975) edited volume on African migration, urbanization and rural-urban linkages. These types of studies, and neo-classical economic approaches, are often wedded to a meta-narrative of modernization, economic progression and 'development'.

In contrast, radical or Marxist approaches to internal migration in Africa take as their key task the explanation of how and why differentiated sectors have emerged, along with identifying whose material and political interests are best served by particular migration patterns. Explanations are usually sought in historical processes of how African societies have been incorporated into capitalism and the subsequent articulation of different modes of production. Many migration studies in southern Africa fall into this group, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. It is only such approaches, rooted in a historical perspective, which allow real insights into the causes of migration and can identify the conflicts frequently inherent in migration. These are often skated over by structural functionalists, and not even noted by methodological individualists. A central example for circular migration is how migrants are sometimes argued to 'prefer' this pattern because they are poorly paid and cannot afford to have their family with them, when the real explanation lies in the structural causes of low pay. Migrants' preferences are self-evidently opposed to poor wages.

Such radical approaches tend to be wedded to their own meta-narratives and can therefore suffer from the same problem of unilinearity as those rooted in 'modernization' theories. In migration studies, the rise of post-modernism as a reaction to the overly deterministic theorizing of the meta-narratives of modernization or Marxism, led to something of a reversion to the sort of focus found in methodological individualist studies. Certainly, the importance of what was now often termed the 'agency' of individuals has been promoted again. The associated literature has often been rich in case study material promoting the 'voices', or individual decision-making and life histories of migrants. Qualitative, ethnographic methodologies are often preferred. Although the material generated is often absorbing to read, discerning trends and patterns generalizable to other situations is frequently difficult and indeed may be specifically resisted as unsound or undesirable: thus agency is preferred over structure. My research in Zimbabwe has certainly been influenced in some of its methodologies and interest in migrants' perceptions by some of these new directions in social science research, and these proved highly valuable. At the same time, it would have proved impossible to track the sorts of changes felt to be relevant without the base-line quantitative aspects of the surveys repeated in each round. Methodologically, therefore, like many other social scientists I would agree that a combination of approaches

yields the most satisfactory results. Theoretically, the difficulties of situating a mass of individual narratives within a broader framework, allowing for more general insights, can be as much of a drawback for postmodernist approaches as the supposed inflexibility of single meta-narratives.

The need to reconcile the contributions of structure and agency to the nature of migration was one of the main conclusions in Gerold-Scheepers and van Binsbergen's (1978) review of African migration studies thirty years ago, before the advent of postmodernism, and doubtless these debates will continue. My own position is generally for the prioritizing of structure over agency, but in terms of the reconciling approach as in Murray (1994/5: 25)[4] who argued that migration patterns in Africa have to be understood in terms of how different societies experience 'particular historical processes of differentiation and integration' as they are incorporated into capitalism. His approach falls generally within the more radical structuralist perspectives typical of southern African migration studies. However, the insistence on sensitivity to geographical and historical particularity helps to overcome the overly determinist analyses of migration associated with Marxist structural perspectives. My analysis of Zimbabwe's migration experience therefore identifies both patterns and trends which exemplify experiences generally in sub-Saharan Africa or sometimes only more locally in southern Africa, as well as features which can only be understood in terms of its specific national trajectory.

An alternative critique of African migration studies is that, far from the field being dominated by unilineal models, it has long been characterized by 'an abundance of case studies'. This was a view that pre-dated postmodernism and was also levelled at the structural functionalist school for its failure to provide an 'integrated theory of migration' (Gerold Scheepers and van Binsbergen 1978: 24, citing Gould 1974, Magubane and O'Brien 1972). Twenty years later Gould (1995: 129) was still complaining that the 'apparent anarchy in [African] migration studies remains, for there is no emerging or over-arching context into which these potentially insightful surveys can be set'. If anything, this critique is about too much, rather than too little, flexibility. The argument appeared in an edited volume on African internal non-metropolitan migration (Baker and Aina 1995) which contained three very different theoretical takes on how such migration should be theorized: by Amin (1995) who remained wedded to the Marxist structuralist views he had propounded since the 1970s; by Krokfors (1995) who argued for the prioritization of cultural determinants of migration; and by Evans and Pirzada (1995) whose theorizing fell into the neo-classical economics school. Taken in the round, this volume provided evidence both of the continued existence of theoretical fault lines in African migration studies and of a wealth of empirical material,[5] some of which is considered in the next two chapters.

[4] Murray's paper was originally presented at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in 1979, but not published at the time.

[5] An overview chapter by Adepoju in the volume edited by Evans and Pirzada reviews a study by Oucho and Gould (1993) in which over 1500 individual studies of migration in Africa are categorized.

Circular Migration: Theories, Models & Measurement

Circular migration, as a special type of migration, has been subjected to much the same modelling and theorizing as discussed for African internal migration in general. The phenomenon is often incorporated into works on rural-urban linkages more generally (e.g., Tacoli 2006; *Environment and Urbanization* 1998, 2003; Beall et al., 1999) but, not being the main focus, is usually treated in a fairly general way. The most comprehensive and focussed contribution to this specific field of study remains M. Chapman and R. M.Prothero's edited volume, *Circulation in Third World Countries*, which includes an excellent review, starting from the works of the nineteenth century French geographer, Vidal de la Blache, through Zelinsky's migration transition model, to the 1980s (Chapman and Prothero 1985b). It revealed the continuing salience of circular migration in a wide range of countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The editors also squarely addressed one of the key debates about circular migration which is whether it is a type of movement which will inevitably disappear as time goes on – that is, is it a transitional element first created by modern social change which gradually and irreversibly dwindles as further change occurs? This was the essential position of an earlier review of the field by Nelson (1976: 732) who maintained that, '[c]urrent African and South Asian patterns of temporary migration will almost surely give way to permanent patterns'. For structural functionalists wedded to modernization theories, and the dualistic modelling this frequently implies, this pattern would ebb away as economies modernized and progressed under capitalism and residual, 'traditional' sectors were transformed. For Marxist structuralists it could play a key and sometimes institutionalized part in early stages of capitalist incorporation by shifting most of the costs of the reproduction of labour onto rural households. Thus it was part of the active process of underdevelopment, but it would be undermined by any processes which strengthened full proletarianization and should become unnecessary in a socialist future. Chapman and Prothero opposed these standpoints, arguing strongly against any position holding that the phenomenon could usefully be analysed in relation to western experience which, in turn, meant rejecting unilineal modelling. This was a position broadly recognized at the time in work on circular migration in Tropical Africa, but much less so in studies emanating from southern Africa. Such regional differentiation in interpretation was noted by Chapman and Prothero (ibid.: 18), and is further demonstrated in the following chapters which analyse this in detail and incorporate the contributions of more recent literature. Chapman and Prothero also related their review to the sort of typology of migration theories outlined in the previous section, and agreed with both Murray, and Gerold-Scheepers and van Binsbergen, to whose work they specifically referred, about the need to reconcile the contributions of structure and agency to the nature of circular migration. For Chapman and Prothero (ibid: 24), the problem with structural models was that they 'emphasise discontinuities rather than continuities in the process of circulation over time, while the socioeconomic changes portrayed have the same remorseless and preordained character as do Zelinsky's "phases of mobility"'. They agreed with Bedford (1973, cited in Chapman and Prothero 1985a: 16) that:

> [t]here is no transitional sequence [for circular migration] applicable to all societies, even though there is dependence between mobility and socio-economic changes associated with modernization. The manner in which these relationships are manifested in movement behaviour ... is very much dependent on the society in which change occurs ...

There are evident parallels between this position and Murray's call for incorporating 'particular historical processes of differentiation and integration' (1994/5: 25) into any analysis of migration.

Chapman and Prothero's volume provided a fairly definitive debunking of the idea that circular migration could be theorized via any neat transitional model, ending with its demise. Nonetheless, the debate has continued, quite often without any recognition of the discussions and work that have gone before so that some theoretical and conceptual 'wheels' are reinvented. Various arguments are also rooted in different understandings of circular migration itself, with considerable differentiation in the definitions employed either implicitly or explicitly. For example, some studies focus on intra-rural circulation which may be strongly seasonal in character. Others are based on institutionalized circulation where labourers are contracted for a specific period to work on a mine (e.g., for one year in South Africa). Others look at rural–urban migrants who do not take their families with them, oscillating between their rural 'homes' where they are still regarded as part of the local household, and spending perhaps only a few years in town in total through their work careers. Yet others consider rural-urban migrants who have brought their immediate family to town and could not usefully be regarded as part of a rural household (even if they retain affective and economic links to their area of origin and are still linked by lineage), who have lived and worked in the town for many years, and intend nonetheless to return to a rural area in the future, possibly after a full working life in town. Geographical literature is more likely to recognize that there is a spatial and temporal spectrum of types of circular (and other) migration and therefore that interpretations of trends and shifts need to take this into account to avoid disagreements based on definitional misunderstandings. There are a number of descriptive typologies (e.g., Gould and Prothero 1975; Hance 1970: 162ff; Adepoju 1998) which provide guidance on such variations but usually acknowledge that they offer no explanatory power. All the migration types listed above (and others) can be understood as the outcome of structural forces acting on particular societies at particular times, and all of them are circular in terms of a fundamental characteristic of the migrant: that is, he or she does not remain permanently in their place of destination but returns to their place of origin. It is also quite possible that different trends can be simultaneously operating for these different types of circulation in any one society, and a failure to distinguish between types can then lead to confusion or contradiction. It is argued in Chapter 3 that this partly explains various contradictions in current South African literature on migration.

A useful discussion of the confusion that can emerge from attempts to analyse trends in migration which involve simultaneous changes in the scale, the length of time people stay, and the proportion choosing permanent migration, can be found in O'Connor (1983: 67). He noted that in any African city:

> some migrants have come for only a few months. ... some have come for a year or two ... and may do so for a second and third time, some have come intending to stay for most or all of their working lives but then to return to their rural homeland, and some regard the