

Recent theoretical developments on migration decision-making



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This paper presents recent theoretical and methodological developments relating to the trajectories, temporalities and dynamics of decision-making in migration, especially in the context of migration processes within and beyond the Global South. The conceptual framework lays the basis of empirical research on diverse migrations in selected African countries and their European diasporas.

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Introduction

Growing attention has been paid in recent years to South—South migrations in addition to the dominant focus on South—North migrations.¹ This is in response to the push for a decentring of knowledge production as well as the growing significance of such migration (McAuliffe and Triandfyllidou 2022), especially in relation to higher middle-income countries, which have become attractive to migrants from neighbouring countries and beyond. In part, the recognition of such flows has also been aided by an increasing availability of data in the past 20 years allowing comparisons of migration patterns, including bilateral flows along corridors (Abel and Sander 2014; Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

Data indicate that South—South migration is larger than South—North (Abel and Sander 2014; Nawyn 2016a, 2016b). In 2017, 38 per cent of international migration was from South to South countries, 35 per cent from South to North, 20 per cent from North to North and 6 per cent from North to South. In Africa and Asia, 80 per cent of international migrants headed for destinations in the two regions (Nawyn 2016b). Furthermore, migration to upper-middle-income countries, many of which are located in the Global South increased. Based on ILO statistics, there was a global decrease in migrant workers to high-income countries (from 74.7% in 2013 to 67.4% in 2019) while upper-middle-income countries saw an increase from 11.7%

¹ There is growing discussion about the language and terms used to characterise global inequalities, especially those distinguishing wealthy countries, many of which have been colonial powers, and poorer colonised countries (Khan et al. 2022; Oxfam 2023). Global South-Global North has increasingly replaced developing and developed but retains a problematic binary division. The use of the terms South and North in this paper does not imply homogeneity or an unchanging positioning within a global system (Gazzotti et al. 2023). We specify countries and regions in our analysis to avoid the binary and reflect the heterogeneity of economic inequalities, identities and regional systems (Kandilige and Yaro 2023).

to 19.5% in the same period (McAuliffe and Triandfyllidou 2022: 36). Indeed, even countries not in the upper middle income category host migrants within and beyond the African continent (Becker et al. 2022). For example, Morocco has received those in transit as well as an increasing number of African migrants, students and refugees. More long-term European residents, especially French nationals, have also come to live in the country (Berriane et al. 2015). Yet there remains an assumption that places in the South are much less rewarding economically and socially for migrants, except as short-term expatriates, a category that is often used for white and Western migrants and often contrasted with the 'typical migrant' (Kunz 2020).

Calls have also been made by academics and non-governmental organisations to decolonise and decentre the production of knowledge towards the South and shift the narrative to a more accurate understanding of developments in the South (Awumbila et al. 2022; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020; Khan 2022), in particular, to move the account of migration away from negative attitudes and misconceptions by states in the Global North, international organisations and the public. This is particularly the case in relation to African migrations, that render invisible the fact that the majority still migrate within the continent (Udelsmann Rodrigues and Bjarnesen 2020).

Media, political and public representations of African migration are often based on assumptions that migrations are mainly directed towards Europe, driven by poverty and violence and generating security problems associated with international crime, trafficking and terrorism (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

Though still beset with patchy data, we shall highlight the complexity and diversity of African migrations and also seek to move away from the notion of Africa as a consumer of rather than a producer of migratory and conceptual insights (Bakewell and Jónsson 2013). As Black et al. (2022: 15) comment, "West Africa is perhaps

unusual in the extent to which an emic ² culture of migration exists in the region, based on a long history of mobility, and the wide variety of national and regional destinations, and [while] this places some limits on the scope for generalisation, African destinations are often ignored in discourses of migration". Simple accounts of African migration that do not take account of migrant views and narratives contribute to the gap between the growing awareness of the complexity of migration motivations, capability and narratives, their contextual embedding and the expectation by many policymakers that migratory circulations can be directly influenced by policies (van Hear et al. 2018).

² Emic refers to the fact that the perspective is by the actor or from within a culture.

Objectives and Structure of the Paper

Objectives

The objectives of our report are the following:

- To enhance the conceptual framework of migration decision-making and processes, especially in the African context, as an underpinning for empirical research in selected countries in WP2 and to feed this understanding into other Work Packages (3,5);
- To present recent discussions and trends in African migrations within and beyond the continent;
- To review recent theoretical developments seeking to capture the decision-making of heterogeneous groups of aspiring migrants at different stages in their potential and actual journeys within and from selected African countries;
- To highlight the contribution and complementarity of different methodologies to conducting research in gaining a better understanding of migration decision-making and processes of African migrations.

Structure of the Paper

Part 2 outlines recent critical discussions on African migrations and how the availability of new data in the past few decades is enabling us to better appreciate the relationship between intra- and extra-African migrations in major regions of the continent – East, West, North and South- and the ways this may shift the narrative

away from the idea that its migrations are largely oriented to Europe and undertaken by those with irregular status ((Bjarnesen 2020). Such a clearer understanding may better capture the decision-making of diverse potential migrants, their intentions, and the infrastructures and institutions enabling or constraining their migrations. Udelsmann Rodrigues and Bjarnesen (2020: 42) argue that a

better understanding of the broader context and continual reconfigurations of migrant routes, settlement and aspirations is crucial in addressing the management of intra-African migration from the perspective of existing and potential links between migration and sustainable development.

Part 3 explores the theoretical attempts in the past two decades to more clearly understand the decision-making process and its temporalities, trajectories and dynamics. The intention of these theoretical initiatives is not to provide a general theory of drivers of migration nor to predict future migrations but to bring together the micro, meso and macro levels and institutions that facilitate or impede migrations of different categories of individuals and groups. The constellation of such connected approaches (journeys and trajectories, narratives and norms, infrastructures and intermediaries) acknowledging the heterogeneity of migrants helps us to generate a better understanding of processes at all stages of migration. It also lays the basis for the empirical research in selected African countries in WP2 as well as feeding into other WPs such as WP3 and WP5 that may draw upon the conceptual analysis in this review.

Part 4 takes up some of the methodological issues raised in conducting research on decision-making and processes in migration studies. The application of qualitative or quantitative methods has generally been associated with specific disciplines but

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there is a growing call in migration studies to embrace mixed methods and for proponents of specific methods to learn from each other.

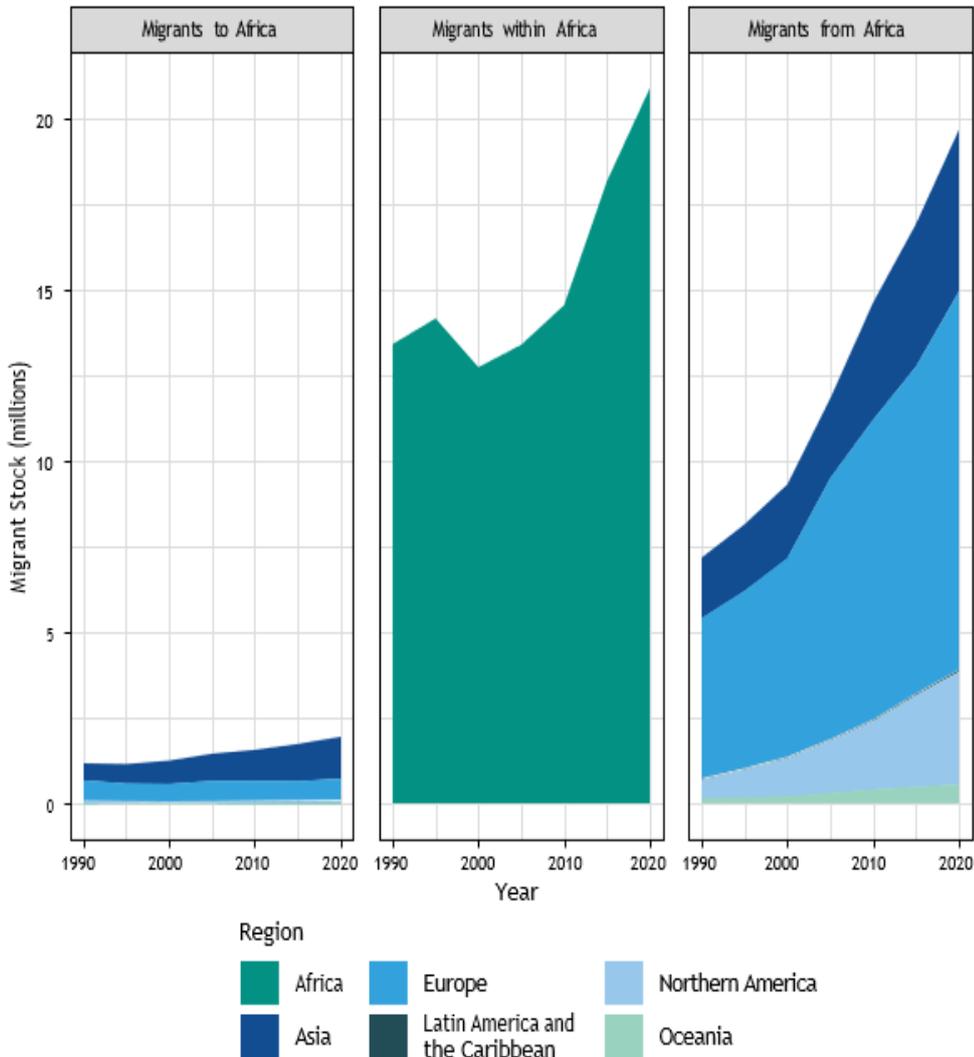
Recent African Migrations

While intra-African migration remains dominant and has grown sharply in numbers since the 1990s, African migrations have accelerated and diversified beyond colonial links to other countries in Europe but also increasingly to Australia and North America (Okeke 2023), Asia and GCC countries (see Fig.1).

As shown in Figure 1, around 21 million Africans in 2020 were living in another African country, a significant increase from 2015, when around 18 million Africans were estimated to be living within the continent. The number of Africans living in different African regions also grew during the same period, from around 17 million in 2015 to over 19.5 million in 2020. Since 1990, the number of African migrants living outside of the African continent has more than doubled, with the growth of African migrants living in Europe most pronounced. In 2020, most African-born migrants living outside the continent were residing in Europe (11 million), Asia (nearly 5 million) and Northern America (around 3 million). In part, the increased migration beyond Europe has been a response to increasingly restrictive visa and immigration conditions imposed by European states. So too have African states in the East and North imposed restrictions on movement through visas (Flahaux and de Haas 2016), with a major exception being West Africa through the implementation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), although in response to Covid-19³ and coups, some states such as Nigeria have also imposed partial and sometimes temporary restrictions on movement within ECOWAS.

³ Covid-19 led to widespread closure of borders and restrictions on mobility within states and hence reduced mobility and migrations in 2020 and 2021 (McAuliffe and Triandfyllidou 2022) but internal and international movements have since then revived although the long-term impacts are still not clear.

Figure 1: Migrants to, within and from Africa, 1990–2020



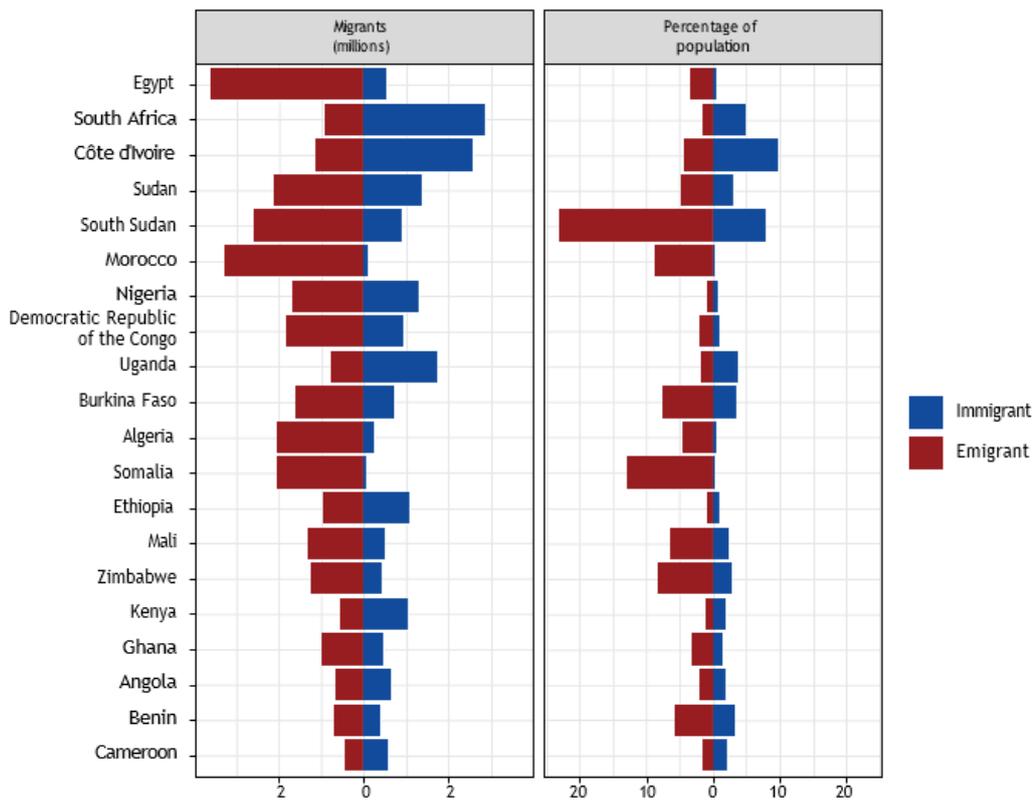
Source: World Migration Report 2022, based on UN DESA 2021 statistics.

Note: “Migrants to Africa” refers to migrants residing in the region (i.e. Africa) who were born in one of the other regions (e.g. Europe or Asia). “Migrants within Africa” refers to migrants born in the region (i.e. Africa) and residing outside their country of birth, but still within the African region. “Migrants from Africa” refers to people born in Africa who were residing outside the region (e.g. in Europe or Northern America).

In particular, there are considerable disparities in the percentage who are emigrating and immigrating in specific countries. Egypt, Morocco, South Sudan, Sudan and Ethiopia record the highest levels of emigrants, while South Africa, Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda and Sudan are the highest for immigrants. What the figures do not specify

are the legal and policy categories (labour, family, asylum and refugee, student) under which nationals leave and migrants enter a country. Family and student migrations tend to be poorly documented and relatively under-studied.

Figure 2 Top 20 African migrant countries, 2020



Source: World Migration Report 2022, based on UN DESA 2021 statistics.

Note 1: The population size used to calculate the percentage of immigrants and emigrants is based on the UN DESA total resident population of the country, which includes foreign-born populations.

Note 2: “Immigrant” refers to foreign-born migrants residing in the country. “Emigrant” refers to people born in the country who were residing outside their country of birth in 2021.

Schoumaker et al. (2013) have commented that lack of data has been consistently invoked. However since 2000, there has been an increase in survey- or interview-based studies on contemporary African migrations that have highlighted its diversity

and the significance of intra-African migrations. Increasing micro-evidence has indicated that most Africans migrate for family, work or study (Schoumaker et al., 2013), that is, the same situation as in other world regions. 86% migrate for reasons not related to conflict.

Yet despite the increasing availability of survey- and interview-based micro-level data on African migration, data availability continues to be focused on migration to Europe from a limited number of better-researched African countries, such as Morocco, Senegal, Ghana and South Africa. This emphasis often reflects funding for research from international programmes⁴, such as the EU FP7 projects MAFE (Migration between Africa and Europe, 2008-2012) which covered three African countries, namely DR Congo, Ghana and Senegal, and these three plus Morocco in EU FP7 TEMPER (2014-2018) on the relationship between temporary and permanent migration. Extensive data from the EU FP7 ERC DEMIG (Determinants of International Migration), using the C2C database covering bilateral migration flows for 34 reporting countries from and to a broad range of origin countries over the 1946–2011 period (Vezzoli, Villares-Varela, & De Haas 2014), has encompassed flows in addition to stocks. These projects have supplied macro-data for selective countries that allow for the mapping of the overall evolution of migration patterns from, to and within Africa over the past decades, which had hitherto been lacking (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

Furthermore, in the past decade, surveys have analysed aspirations and preparations for migration across a wide range of African countries. This included the Gallup World Poll for the periods 2007–2013 and 2010–2015, exploring aspirations as well as preparations for migration (Migali and Scipioni 2019). Other

⁴ It may in some instances reflect issues of safety.

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surveys, such as the EU FP7 EUIMAGINE project (2010–2013), based on four countries (Morocco, Senegal, Turkey, Ukraine), chose four different localities in each country, thereby encompassing diverse contexts within each country. Their data uncovered that differences in migration aspiration can be greater between regions within a country than between countries (Carling and Schewel 2018). We could add that the interest in migration tends to be restricted to the international and does not relate this to existing or previous mobility (see King and Skeldon 2010 on internal and international pathways and Schapendonk et al. 2021 on mobilities in African and European free movement zones). As Berriane et al. (2021) comment on Morocco it is necessary to look at all forms of mobility simultaneously instead of only focusing on one form of migration – typically, international out-migration or internal migration. Individual country studies, for example Nigeria (Ajaero and Madu 2014) and Senegal (Ndione nd), also demonstrate the continuing significance of internal migration, especially rural-urban. As we shall see, the omission of internal mobilities and migrations typifies surveys on aspirations globally or is excluded from consideration (Aslany et al. 2021).

Afrobarometer, in particular Round 7 (2016–2018) data covering 34 countries, has also been utilised to study subjective and structural dimensions of migration (Helbling and Morgenstern. 2023). So too have big data, such as social media and mapping of flows, been increasingly utilised to capture the aspirations, processes and trajectories of migration (Ambrosetti et al. 2021).

More detailed analyses of African migrations are usually divided into macro regions following the UN classification. Below we outline some key characteristics of relevant macro regions within which to chart the diversity of migrations and regional agreements.

North Africa: In the last few decades, the Maghreb has essentially become Africa's hub of emigration related to its geographical proximity to Europe, strong colonial and post-colonial links to France, and the labour recruitment agreements that countries of the Maghreb have reached with a range of European countries. The Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) were former French colonies and have gone through periods of conflictual relationships, for example between Algeria and Morocco (Natter 2014). There are also increasing numbers of migrants in transit. Though Libya lost many of its migrants following the conflict after the ousting of Gaddafi, it has still retained almost 680,000 migrants in mid-2022, primarily from Niger, Egypt, Sudan, Chad and Nigeria (IOM 2022), over half of whom are located in the West of the country. Countries differ a lot in their migration management and policies, their colonial histories, relationship to the European Union, and attitudes and policies towards migrants from other African countries (Boubakri et al. 2021).

East Africa: It is characterised by patterns of high mobility, and is a region of origin, transit and destination for migrants. The main causes of migration in East Africa are political instability and environment-related factors such as drought and natural disasters. Only the East African Common Market among regional agreements offers free movement where those within the region have similar social rights to citizens, are able to work and gain citizenship in Kenya. It is also the region producing and hosting the highest number of refugees. South Sudan was the origin of the fourth largest number of refugees globally (over 2 million) and Somalia was the origin of over 800,000 refugees. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes continue to be the origin of most African refugees, with more than 5 million from countries in the region in 2020. The region also hosted 4.5 million refugees in 2020.

West Africa: Most migration flows in West Africa are intraregional. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free movement protocols facilitate

this and have long enabled West African nationals to move freely within other ECOWAS Member States. It was adopted in 1979 to promote regional integration and free movement of labour and services. Although ECOWAS citizens currently enjoy the right of entry within the sub-region, implementation of the right of residence and right of establishment aspects of the free movement protocol have been negatively affected by anti-migrant sentiments in some ECOWAS countries.

Intraregional patterns of circular or seasonal labour migration are common, and approximately 86% (UNDESA 2018) of the international migrants from West Africa stay in another West African country. Mobility includes permanent migration (to leave without the intention to return), temporary/seasonal migration, cross-border movements, return migration and transit migration. Student numbers are increasing among both immigrants and emigrants within the region. Two important features of migration within the West African region are that it is still largely undertaken within the Anglophone and Francophone country groups, and primarily between neighbouring countries.

Extracontinental: Some countries, such as Angola and Ethiopia (and to some extent Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda) stand out as countries with strong extracontinental connections but weak regional migratory connections. This is possibly related to conflict and long-distance networks created as a consequence of refugee re-settlement and (in the case of Angola) colonial ties. South Africa has relatively low emigration intensity, but for those who emigrate it is overwhelmingly out-of-the-continent. The urban coastal zones of a number of relatively prosperous West African countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal) form an emergent zone of increasing extracontinental emigration (with the notable exception of Côte d'Ivoire). More generally, it seems that countries with a high proportion of extracontinental emigration intensity are those with comparatively higher levels of economic

development. The percentage of Western African migrants who went to Europe grew from 12% in mid-1990 to 19% in mid-2020, and the share who went to North America increased from 3% to 10% over the same period, with destinations driven in part by residual colonial ties and common languages.

A number of countries have substantial **diasporic communities** in Europe arising from labour migration (regular and irregular), family reunification, students, asylum seekers and refugees. Diasporas have grown significantly with increased migrations and displacement (Cohen 2023) and may play an important role in sending remittances⁵, investing in businesses and entrepreneurship (Elo and Minto-Coy 2019), supplying information and resources, transferring skills, providing health (Taslakian et al. 2020) and welfare services, facilitating continuing migration through family reunification and marriage, and helping their co-nationals settle into the country of destination. Diasporic members may also get involved in social and political mobilisations and institutions, for example as they have done recently in Nigeria (Akanle 2022).

France has the largest African population in Europe comprised of those from its former colonies. Countries in order of the stock of population by numbers born in the country, are Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Madagascar, Comoros and Côte d'Ivoire (OECD 2022). The population of Moroccan origin, the largest diaspora in Europe, was estimated at 5 million in 2020 (Berriane et al. 2021). Apart from France, Moroccans also have a significant presence in a number of other European countries such as Belgium, Italy, Netherlands and Spain as well as in Asia and North America (European Training Foundation 2021). The Senegalese are also well

⁵ Based on World Bank statistics, Egypt, Nigeria, Morocco, Ghana, Kenya and Senegal were the countries receiving the largest amount of remittances In 2019-2020 (McAuliffe and Triandfyllidou 2022: 65).

represented in Italy (OECD 2022). In the UK the main African population are Nigerians (270,768 born in Nigeria in the UK Census 2021), while Kenyans are found predominantly in the US and the UK.

The gender composition of these populations varies from 45-47% females for Moroccans in Spain and Italy, to 57% for Algerians and 60% Madagascans in France. Recent inflows by gender differ to a much greater extent, ranging from 18% for Mali in France and 27% for Senegal in Italy compared to Algerians in France, Moroccans in France and Italy who have a female majority (OECD 2022). These differences largely result from both the composition of the labour market and the extent of family reunification.

The broad regional characteristics outlined above are accompanied by considerable heterogeneity (see D3.1 Cross country differences) in terms of social characteristics of migrants, intensity and directions of migratory flows, diasporic links, social transformation and experience of conflict and political instability influencing the nature of intra- and extra-African migrations and mobilities. Below we outline some of the key economic, social and political differences.

- i. **Income level** differs substantially with the majority of countries in the least developed category of the OECD list of countries qualifying for Development Assistance (DAC countries) being in Africa, a number of lower middle-income countries – Algeria, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria- and a few upper middle-income countries largely in Southern Africa -Botswana, Gabon, Namibia and South Africa.
- ii. The **intensity of migration** is based on levels of emigration (IOM 2022) with Egypt having the highest score followed by Morocco (see Fig.2) and direction of emigration – extra African compared to intra. In general, large

coastal states have the highest level of extra-African migration though smaller states such as Gabon and Guinea have a high percentage of extracontinental migrants. Whilst Europe continues to attract the largest number in some states, other OECD destinations in North America and the GCC countries are significant.

- iii. **Colonial links**, especially with France and the UK, which, may shape development assistance and migration flows to Europe and beyond.
- iv. Some countries have over the past decades developed significant **diasporas** and social networks, especially with European countries (see above).
- v. **Heterogeneity of migration** by social characteristics between countries. Gender differences between men and women in aspirations and in actual international migration vary widely across Africa. In terms of actual migration, the percentage of females among migrants ranges from the lowest in the Seychelles (30%) to the highest in Chad (53.9%) (UNDESA 2017). Though we know that youth, which Belmonte and MacMahon (2019) define as between 15 and 29 years, have high aspirations to be mobile, we have little data on youth mobility. Socio-economic status or class is also highly significant, but we have less information on this from surveys (see Aslany et al. 2021).
- vi. **Transit countries**. There is a growing reliance on irregular overland and sea routes, given the increase in Europe's restrictive migration policies and controls. West African migrants going to North Africa and seeking to reach Europe generally move north via Mali and/or Niger. In other cases, transit migrants may settle, as in Morocco, whilst elsewhere, conflict may destabilise migrant populations who are forced to move on either to Europe or back to their country of origin (Crawley and Jones 2021).

- vii. **Conflict and political instability** are not just generating internal displacement and international refugee movements but also shaping the narratives of the future of the country, which reinforces the desire to leave as well as preparations to do so. Neighbouring countries and regional blocs, such as ECOWAS, may be affected and traditional circulations and routes impeded. In West Africa for example there have been nine coups since 2000, with Niger (a country through which irregular migrants move northwards) in July 2023 and Gabon in August 2023 being the latest. The Central Sahel area (Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mali) has experienced an increase in violence in recent years, driven by a combination of factors, including competition over natural resources, underdevelopment and poverty. Violence over access to natural resources has especially been exploited by non-state armed groups in rural areas, as state authorities have increasingly withdrawn into cities (McAuliffe and Triandylidou 2021: 70).
- viii. **Attitudes towards migrants.** Migrants have faced strongly xenophobic attitudes and attacks over time. Hostility may lead to deportations. Examples include South Africa and Tunisia, where the increasingly authoritarian regime has whipped up anti-immigrant feelings (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Recent Development of Theoretical Approaches to Migration Decision-making and Dynamics

In this part of the paper we explore a number of interconnected approaches that have sought to deepen our understanding of decision-making and the micro and meso processes involved in migration during the past two decades or so. Earlier theories, such as push-pull⁶ describing economic, social and political factors, that pushed individuals out of countries and pulled them to destination countries, on the one hand, and the historical structural, such as dependency and world systems, which focussed on the macro structures of states and global capitalism, on the other, were deemed to be too deterministic and did not recognise the agency deployed by migrants in making decisions (de Haas 2020, ch. 3).

The focus in recent decades has thus been on a more complex understanding of drivers, processes and dynamics of migration, on aspirations, experiences and decision-making, and the way the interplay of factors in space and time constrain or enable agency (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022)⁷. We first briefly outline some of the recent theoretical developments before discussing them in greater detail.

⁶ Some efforts have been made to engender more complexity into push-pull such as push-pull plus (van Hear et al. 2018). They do so by exploring in greater depth the conditions, circumstances and environments in relation to the drivers of migration placed within broader structures.

⁷ Based on a review of 463 studies, Czaika and Reinprecht have produced a migration driver taxonomy with empirical studies being largely quantitative with few using mixed methods.

In the 1990s, transnationalism, diasporas and social networks connecting migrants and places in space and time (Preiss 2022) emerged as key topics. In the following decade the focus on migration within the context of a broader notion of mobility as pertaining to societal processes and not just migration as a permanent move was questioned in what came to be known as the ‘mobility turn’ (Sheller and Urry 2006). It also drew attention to the significance of immobility. The focus on the relationship between mobility and immobility underpinned an influential body of research on aspirations and the ability and capacity to migrate, which argued that theories of transition in migratory patterns and development⁸ did not explain why individuals would be motivated to migrate. This work, associated with analyses by Carling and de Haas, derived from their insights from their research in Cap Verde and Morocco respectively, has become influential amongst academics, international organisations and policy makers (see subsequent discussion).

Another significant body of inter-connected approaches sought to engender greater clarity to the dynamics of migration processes. A major critique was the representation of migration as linear, which had been challenged by transnationalism in the 1990s, and for which detailed studies of journeys and trajectories, often from Africa and the Middle East, now provided evidence (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker 2019). The means by which these journeys were undertaken, and the circulation of labour globally have generated a body of research on infrastructures (material and digital) (Duvell and Preiss 2022, Xiang and Lindquist 2014). Other perspectives called for consideration of temporalities as part of the dynamic of migration processes and migrant responses to increasingly restrictive

⁸ Theories of transition (de Haas 2020) are based on the idea that migration changes over the course of development and modernization and that demographic shifts and economic development initially increase internal and international migration. Only when countries reach an upper-middle income status will migration decrease. There are however examples such as Morocco where this has not occurred and where migration remains at high levels despite development (Berriane et al. 2021).

measures and policies (Baas and Yeoh 2019) as well as narratives of futures in which migrants imagined themselves (Boccagni 2017).

At the same time, migrants were increasingly seen as having heterogeneous identities, such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, and religion, though the extent to which data apart from age and gender are collected is highly variable (see Aslany et al. 2021 for variables included in their review of surveys on aspirations). These social categories as axes of inequality have shaped the ability to and experiences of different forms of migration (labour, family, humanitarian, student, lifestyle) through access to economic and social resources as well as the norms, cultural practices and values ascribed to different categories (see discussion of norms and values). Intersectionality as a concept, though originally associated with feminist analyses of unequal power relations between social groups (see D7.2 Gender State of Art for a fuller discussion) has contributed to highlighting that social groups are not uniform but intersected by a variety of other social divisions, such as age, class, disability ethnicity/race, religion and sexuality. This perspective has been much more widely adopted in migration research (Bastia et al. 2023; Kofman and Raghuram 2022). Thus, intersectionality as an approach has highlighted the ways in which the intersection between social categories is important for capturing the complexity of migration decision-making and processes and unequal access to resources, the capacity to migrate and different experiences of migration⁹.

In the following subsection, we firstly outline the aspiration and abilities/capabilities framework which has sought to apply a general frame to migration decision-making and actual migration processes globally (Carling and Schewel 2018) or to provide an encompassing theory for global migrations (de Haas 2021) before proceeding to

⁹ Czaika and Reinprecht (2022) comment based on their review of drivers that this is an under-studied area.

discuss the constellation of approaches which been particularly relevant in furthering an understanding of the context, complexity and diversity of African migrations within and beyond the continent.

Aspirations and Abilities/Capabilities Approaches

As noted above, in the 2000s the focus on decision-making at the micro level gained pace, in particular through the aspiration-ability framework, a two-stage approach adopting the premise that migration aspirations may or may not result in actual mobility. A migration ‘aspiration’ is defined simply as a conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration. It followed from Carling’s perception that the prevalence of aspiration to migrate did not necessarily result in the act of migration, but the inability to do so led to what he called ‘involuntary immobility’ (Carling 2002). Among those who aspire to migrate, some have the ability to do so, while those who do not migrate fall into two categories: involuntary non-migrants, who have aspirations to migrate but lack the ability, and voluntary non-migrants, who stay because of a belief that non-migration is preferable to migration. The aspirations-ability framework has been widely adopted by academics, international organisations and policymakers, in particular its use in surveys (for example, EUMAGINE project; Gallup World Poll; Carling and Schewel 2018; Migali and Scipioni 2019 for a review of surveys using Gallup World Poll for 150 countries in the period 2010–2015). Hence, two decades later, several systematic reviews have been undertaken. The first we shall consider in greater detail is a systematic review of surveys complemented by ethnographic material providing the formation of aspirations (Aslany et al. 2021) and the second is a theoretical review of the literature (Carling and Schewel 2018).

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The QuantMig project (Aslany et al. 2021) synthesised the findings of 49 empirical survey-based on articles examining the determinants of aspirations across a variety of social science fields in various regions of the world over the past three decades. It focussed on individuals rather than broader contexts and was supplemented by publications using qualitative methods. Furthermore, most of the studies were concerned with the factors behind aspirations to migrate rather than the conversion of aspirations through preparations into the ability to actual migration, as Migali and Scipioni (2019) noted. The vast majority of studies were published after 2000, with considerable growth after 2014, especially those drawing on the Gallup World Poll. Only those including international migration were included, thus reinforcing the tendency to sideline internal migrations (see earlier discussion on the marginalisation of internal migration). Yet prior to 2000 a number of surveys analysed internal migration in terms of intentions (see de Jong 2000). The review also imposed restrictions on the remit of the project in order to simplify the comparative design -studies limited to pre-travel- hence leaving aside those in transit and post-migration, which has been a key critique of this approach (see discussion of journeys). We should also remember that the effect of localities on migration aspirations may remain large after controlling for socio-economic characteristics as the EUMAGINE project highlighted (Carling et al. 2012).

The papers reviewed by Aslany et al. tended to cover certain socio-demographic variables such as age (covered by 49 papers), gender (47), educational attainment (40), marital status (31), urban and rural residence (27), socio-economic status (27) and migration networks (26). Cultural and political contexts figured in only a small number of surveys – norms and values (5) and violence and insecurity (8). Yet, as Etling et al. (2020) note in their analysis of youth migration post the Arab Spring from the Arab Mediterranean (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon), there is a tendency to focus on the economic dimension for voluntary migration, ignoring the

political dimension. Political discontent, the perception of democracy and the ability to shape government policies, the perception of corruption and the experience of violence in everyday life are particularly important in young people's decision-making process.

Their results reveal that factors, such as violence and insecurity, the presence of ties to current or former migrants, and having a history (personally or within the family, links with former or current migrants, flows of remittances) of international migration or travelling, were equated with a rise in migration aspirations. A decline in aspirations was associated with individuals' level of subjective well-being and with increasing age – at least across adult age groups. Individuals are more likely to aspire to migrate if they are male, unmarried, live in urban areas, have low socio-economic status and high educational attainment. Although these indicate the clearest relationships, others have some influence but in more indirect ways (Aslany et al. 2021: 55). This accords with Migali and Scipioni's (2019) characterisation of the most significant traits globally of being male, foreign-born, highly educated, and having networks abroad which are associated with a higher probability of preparing for international migration.

The authors also lament that their systematic review has left out important research topics, which were excluded from the remit of their review. These included aspirations for onward and return migration among current migrants, and among specific groups, such as healthcare workers. Finally, they recommend the need to develop empirical approaches, which also allow us to assess relations between the individual and the structures in which their aspirations are formed: family, community, and the wider socio-economic-cultural milieu that are poorly captured in surveys. Indeed familial relationships and sense of obligations have been shown to

be highly significant (Trauner et al. 2023 in research on The Gambia) but generally poorly studied (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022: 71).

The need to take into account the context in which aspirations to migrate are formed, such as social norms and expectations, including migration as a rite of passage for young people (Belloni 2019; Mondain and Diagne 2013), and the general environment is a point made by Carling and Schewel (2018: 952). In relation to gender norms, Aslany et al. (2021) mention that opinions on gender roles can convey attitudes towards change that influence migration aspirations.

Carling and Schewel (2018:959) conclude their review with the view that migration ‘aspiration’ and ‘ability’, though varied, are universally meaningful concepts and that the differential constraints on migration ability have become even more important for actual migration dynamics. We know from interviews with Nigerians in Italy who had passed through Libya that their original intention was not to proceed to Italy (Kuschminder 2021). It is also not clear that they sought to migrate permanently. A range of outcomes, such as migration to a destination country, being stuck in transit or death en route or staying in a place are possible, all of which are produced by context-specific and multidimensional manifestations of migration ability.

They contend that the model and two-step approaches, more generally, hold the promise of striking a balance between unity and diversity in theoretical approaches to migration (Carling and Schewel: 960). However, the two-step approach has been critiqued for its simplification of the shift from one stage to another (Black et al 2022; Ruedin 2021), with the decision made to migrate treated as a single event rather than capturing the complexity of journeys and decision-making over space and time. Rather, for Black et al. (2022; 16) migration is an “ever-present imaginary of an implausible but also dazzling future that is waiting to emerge from the chaos of the

present”. We shall return to these issues in the discussion of journeys, trajectories and temporalities and the dynamics of migration.

Compared to Carling, De Haas puts greater emphasis on migration as an intrinsic part of broader processes of economic, political, cultural, technological and demographic change embodied in the concept of social transformation (Castles 2010), especially urbanisation, development and globalisation. He (2014) subsequently combined the aspiration/ability model with the work of Sen into an ‘expanded aspirations-capabilities framework’ encompassing two-way connections between migration and development. In *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) argues that the freedom to achieve well-being is a moral imperative, and this should be assessed in terms of people’s capabilities to do and be what they have reason to value. Drawing on Sen’s concept of capability, De Haas sees moving and staying as complementary manifestations of migratory agency in which human mobility is defined as people’s capability to choose where to live, including the option to stay, rather than as the act of moving or migrating itself. While capabilities and aspirations manifest themselves at an individual level, they are ultimately shaped by macro-structural changes such as the expansion of infrastructure, education and the media, upon which states have a considerable impact.

This view of mobility enables the analysis of different forms of migratory mobility within a single meta-conceptual framework, which for De Haas (2021) is an overriding objective. He decries the unwillingness of migration researchers to develop a single general framework and the growing gap between disciplines and methods. He contends that anthropologists, sociologists and geographers have focused on qualitative, micro-level studies of the lives, identities and experiences of migrants from an ‘emic’ perspective, for example in relation to transnational, multicultural, diasporic experiences compared to quantitative regression analysis

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examining the ‘causes’ and ‘impacts’ of migration pursued in economics, sociology and demography. The ways these methods have been deployed prevent them from understanding how macro-structural factors shape migration processes as well as explaining the diversity in migration experiences across different ethnic, gender, skill and class groups (De Haas, 2021, 2–3).

However, such a representation of current migration studies ignores the attempts made in the past two decades to apply mixed methods, the interpretation of empirical results in the how, when and why of the dynamics of migration within a broader field of the political economy of migration and policymaking, and the development of multiple and complementary theoretical analyses at meso levels. This latter constellation of approaches highlights the heterogeneity and inequalities confronted by migrants in their (im)mobilities, their trajectories in space and time, the impact of migration and related policies, and the strategies migrants deploy in relation to changing environments and policies. Furthermore, in the past two decades, gender and migration (see D7.2 State-of-the-art paper on gender in migration research; Kofman and Raghuram 2022) and race (Aquino et al. 2022) have become important topics in the field of migration studies. They take as central considerations the way inequalities in the ability to and outcomes of migration are forged within a dynamic global economy.

In the following section, we explore how the constellation of new and/or more fully elaborated perspectives related to the dynamics of migration, which as we briefly noted in the beginning of this section, have deepened our understanding of migratory decision-making, phases and processes. These encompass the spatio-temporal dimension of journeys, narratives and norms which shape individual, family and community attitudes to migration, and institutions, and intermediaries which facilitate migration. As Faist (2016:329) comments, theories of migration combining

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interactional and institutional patterns do not seek to explain the causes but its dynamics, which nonetheless have implications for the distribution of resources.

Complexity and Dynamics of Migration Decision-Making and Processes

A significant shift in our understanding of migration processes was to challenge the idea that migration entailed a permanent, linear and single movement, often associated with push-pull analyses. Emphasis on transit, circulations and movements and the temporalities pursued in crossing borders have all contributed to more complex insights into journeys and their spatial and temporal dynamics. The suggestion of solidity and permanence of movements between nation-states was critiqued in what has come to be termed the 'mobility turn' (Faist 2013; Sheller and Urry 2006) in which mobility draws together all forms of movement and circulation and theorises them holistically and relationally, rather than as separate, discrete forms of action associated with particular activities.

A **focus on mobility** helps to pay due attention to different forms of circulation and movement within states, regionally, including in free movement areas such as ECOWAS and the EU (IOM 2022; Schapendonk et al. 2022), and between states, and to trace how different internal and international pathways interconnect (King and Skeldon 2010). Disregarding the significance of migration within states exemplifies the tendency to apply globally a view of contemporary migration in the North in which internal migration has decreased. Yet in Africa, circulation in border regions and their cities and towns (Antwi Bosiakoh 2019) and rural-urban migrations (Ndione n.d.) are important. Seasonal or long-term migration from the poorest countries, for example, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea and Mali in West Africa, and Malawi and Mozambique in Southern Africa to more productive urban and rural areas in their

region (Udelsmann Rodrigues and Bjarnesen 2020) are also notable. For example, in the case of Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire corridor, flows mainly consist of movements from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire while the opposite direction largely involves return movements of Burkinabe (Bonayi and Soumahoro 2021). It has also become common for women to migrate from rural to urban areas and regionally, though not necessarily in the same sectors of employment or for the same period of time as men who are able to circulate continuously for longer periods (Schapendonk et al. 2021).

Furthermore, among migration scholars, especially those focusing on a single point of decision-making, there is often the assumption that migrants were previously immobile before their international departure (Schapendonk et al. 2021, Zhang 2018). Based on the mobility and migration of male migrants in West Africa and Europe, Schapendonk et al. (2021: 3246) propose replacing migratory journey with 'im/mobility trajectories' reflecting open spatio-temporal processes with a strong transformative logic. These may include multiple journeys across various places, such as onward, stepwise, serial and transit trajectories (Paul and Yeoh, 2021), representing the outcome of multiple intersections of individual aspirations, social networking, policy interventions and mobility regimes. In relation to the circulation of labour under temporary contracts, for example domestic workers to the Middle East and GCC, many migrate and return several times, both to the same and different locations which may be a result of their fixed-term contracts or to improve their pay and working conditions (Parreñas 2021).

Although studies of journeys and trajectories were undertaken before the large-scale flows from Africa and the Middle East across the Mediterranean from 2015, it was this event, deemed a crisis by media and policymakers, which generated a substantial literature (for example, Crawley and Hagen-Zanker 2019; Crawley and

Jones 2021; Kusschminder 2021) and a particular concern with irregular migrants (Spencer and Triandfyllidou 2022). Such studies have, however, demonstrated the agency refugees and migrants display in changing environments. A comparative study of Eritreans and Nigerians, the two largest groups arriving in Italy in 2015 and 2016 (Kuschminder 2021), highlighted their differences in terms of their countries of origin, drivers of migration, routes they took to reach Libya, experiences in the country, and the ways they socially navigated and adjusted their trajectories in response to changing environments. Interviews with those who had reached Italy, included 34 Eritreans, 16 of whom were females, and 35 Nigerians, of whom six were female. Eritreans left to escape conscription, imprisonment and abuse and general lack of freedom and had great difficulty in doing so since visas are required to leave. Their first destinations were Ethiopia and Sudan, neither of which offered them opportunities for work. Nigerians left for multiple different reasons - fleeing Boko Haram, a specific familial or individual circumstance, and others searching for a better life. The vast majority of migrants were from Benin City, Edo State (Sydney 2021). Most respondents travelled by bus to Kano and through northern Nigeria to Niger, where they often hired smugglers though some did so in Nigeria for their travel to Libya. For most Nigerian respondents. Libya was their intended original destination. Whether they stayed in the country depended on being able to find work through social networks. Subsequent conflict and turmoil in Libya propelled them to move onwards to Italy, although many migrants still remain (IOM 2022).

What these journeys/trajectories demonstrate is the uncertainty of the status of the destination at the outset. An intended final destination may turn out to be a transit location, in other cases, transiting was part of the planned journey but the actual parameters of the transiting may emerge in relation to a changing socio-economic, political and policy environment. The notion of transit migration originally emerged in the 1990s as a concept reflecting the increasing complexity and diversity of

migrations to the European Union and arriving at its Southern and Eastern borders (Bredeloup 2012; Collyer et al. 2012), but remains an under-studied area (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022: 71). Transit doesn't just refer to a halt in a single journey but may involve complex moves, accumulation of resources and skills and strategies. From the early 1990s, with the introduction of visas by Spain and Italy, and the institutionalisation of the Schengen area in 1997, Morocco became a country of settlement (Berriane et al. 2013). In the face of border violence, sub-Saharan Africans have decided to remain in the country, often settling in the major cities (Casablanca, Fez and Rabat), where they find jobs in the informal service sector, domestic households, petty trade, and construction (Berriane et al. 2013), rather than pursuing their journey to Spain (Ustubici, 2016). Students, especially from Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Gabon and Senegal, have grown in number (European Training Foundation 2021:17) with some settling despite originally intending to move on (Berriane 2015). Choosing to study in Northern Cyprus or an Arab country may represent an alternative to increasing restrictions and expenses in European countries (Piguet et al. 2020). In general, the prevalence of stepwise migration or circular migration (including return migration or return from Europe to another African country) is substantial, particularly for Ghanaians and Congolese, where 12.2 and 16.0 per cent had such trajectories, compared to 7.2 per cent for Senegalese (Caarls et al. 2021).

Another area of debate has been the knowledge that migrants have about the riskiness of their journey (Bakewell 2022; Tjaden 2023). While studies show that risk in migration decision-making is considered by them, it seems to be less relevant compared to alternative intervening factors, for example, community norms, peer pressure, masculinity norms or the absence of alternatives. Tjaden's survey undertaken in Dakar, Senegal, in 2018 suggested that perceptions of risk may depend on context and target population such that they may be less important for

communities with a high share of previous successful migrants, more contact abroad and better access to job opportunities abroad compared to communities with fewer international ties, possibly more returnees who have failed, or individuals early in the decision-making process. Comparative studies, for example on Guinea and Senegal (Tjaden 2023) also highlight substantial differences in the relative importance of risk perceptions in irregular migration intentions between dispersed rural communities in Guinea and concentrated urban population in Senegal.

Studies have examined the extent to which migrants were aware of or influenced by policies that sought to manage or control their journey to Europe. Crawley and Zanker-Hagen (2019) reported on a study of 250 Eritreans and Nigerians crossing the Mediterranean in 2015. The making of decisions reflected the combination of a wide range of factors, including access to protection and family reunification, the availability/accuracy of information, the overall economic environment and social networks rather than on the basis of migration policies whose implication may be unknown or misunderstood. Research (interviews and focus groups) conducted in The Gambia also revealed that potential migrants were well aware of the risks through information received from family and friends rather than through information campaigns aimed at dissuading them from migration. Women also confront different risks and are concerned about the risks of sexual violence, rape and pregnancy during the journey (Trauner et al. 2023).

The literature on journeys and trajectories has clearly embraced the growing interest in temporalities (Baas and Yeoh 2019), which in part is linked to the growth of studies of transnationalism from the 1990s. Temporalities encompass a number of dimensions, such as waiting to accumulate resources in a country of origin or transition, being able to cross borders, or for visas or for selection in a scheme as well as broader views of past, present and future. Diverse frames of temporalities

can enable us to connect institutional times of policy and governance with biographic times covering both everyday lived time and imaginaries of past, present and future Robertson (2014).

Black et al. (2021) in their critique of two-stage analyses of migration, emphasise the fact that decisions are not made at a single point in time, but that there is some level of future orientation, whilst decisions may be regularly returned to and adjusted through the life course. The future as a transformative dimension is instead deeply intertwined with the notion of uncertainty, highlighted in African studies. Ruedin (2021) suggests that narratives may play a strong role in shaping ambitions to migrate, help potential migrants to make sense of limited and contradictory information they may come across; they are linked to a sense of future possibilities or lack of. As Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2020) note studies should include questions on how people see the future of their country and whether they think their situation will remain the same or change, something that is particularly significant for youth.

Narratives as a theoretical and methodological dimension in the study of societies have become widely adopted across a number of social sciences (anthropology, cultural and media studies, psychology, sociology). Narratives have been defined as “a story with a temporal sequence of events unfolding in a plot that is populated by dramatic moments, symbols, and archetypal characters that culminates in a moral to the story.” (Jones and McBeth 2010, 329). In migration studies (Boswell et al. 2021), less attention has been accorded to migrant narratives than those of media, policy makers or politicians. Narratives of the personal experience can help understand and communicate the complex factors shaping migration decisions and the meanings they ascribe to their decisions (Sahin-Mencutek 2020:16). They have often been used to understand the experiences of those undertaking journeys. For

West African populations, the dominant narrative in favour of migration is positive (Trauner et al. 2023).

Norms and Values too shape aspirations, the possibility of migration and its actualisation, types of migration and how and with whom migrants move (Kofman 2019; Thorensen 2010). Such norms can apply at a community level where a culture of migration has become a central aspect and social norm of society as Mondain and Diagne (2013) note for Senegal, especially for men. Such cultures or norms of migration may be differentiated, especially according to age, gender and marital status. Gender norms that portray women's or girls' unaccompanied migration as indecent or less ideal do not necessarily limit girls' migration aspirations but rather shape the particular forms that aspirations take, for instance, how or with whom aspiring migrants hope to migrate (Thorsen, 2010). The application of stringent and constraining norms to women (Ferrant et al. 2014; Salomone and Ruysen 2018) may lead them to seek to migrate to avoid discrimination or cultural practices, such as early and forced marriages (Belloni, 2019) or the stigmatisation of separation and divorce. Others migrate to escape domestic and gender violence or lack of employment opportunities. Both men and women may seek to escape from norms limiting their sexual orientation (Cortés 2023). Mobility is equally important for male and female young people. While male mobility is part of households' economics and strengthens their family status, female mobility is rather seen as a personal project geared towards acquiring life skills in cities (Bolay 2021).

Facilitation of Migration

Another body of studies has focussed on the facilitation of migration. The **role of infrastructures and intermediaries**, such as recruitment agencies (Goss and Lindquist 1995), began to enrich the literature on migration processes in the 1990s. The interest in the institutions facilitating and impeding migration has continued

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since then as their role in the global circulation of labour has become more important. Xiang and Lindquist (2014: S124) define migration infrastructure as ‘the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility’. Duvell and Preiss (2022) comment that without them, migration journeys would hardly be possible for many due to limited information and assistance.

This approach is seen as answering how people migrate, who and what facilitates individuals to achieve their migration aspirations, what material and immaterial resources they use, on the one hand, and what facilitators do and how migrants interact with and experience migration infrastructures, on the other (Düvell and Preiss 2022). In such a way, this area of study introduces meso-level factors, bringing together the micro and the macro levels.

Infrastructure encompasses a variety of formal and informal actors, ranging from (a) regular and irregular actors and structure; (b) state, quasi-state and non-state actors; (c) commercial and non-commercial actors and structures; and (d) material, architectural, technical and digital infrastructures. The latter is a new and growing area, which examines its use by migrants and refugees during their journey and their influence on migration experiences and trajectories (Preiss 2022). The digital sphere covers actors, hardware and software and includes mobile phones, cyber cafés, shops that sell equipment and SIM cards, online services and social media. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) recommend that the multiple interlinkages of these different dimensions are considered together.

As Lin et al. (2017: 170) highlight, the organisation of infrastructures has implications for the ability of migrants to access mobility as a resource and therefore its unequal distribution and its ensuing rights and status. More than ever, migrants

have become dependent on intermediaries. In particular, there has been increasing recognition of the significance of agents and brokers in placing migrants and their contradictory roles in supporting hierarchies and inequalities whilst at the same time generating opportunities in the global labour market (Awumbila et al. 2019; Jones and Sha 2020). The use of infrastructures and intermediaries varies regionally (Kleist and Bjarnesen 2019). Although African migration towards Europe has resulted in the proliferation of migration brokers as a result of heightened regulations (Alpes 2017) as well as for the skilled in sectors such as health, within West African regional migration, brokers are relatively unimportant. Here the facilitation of regional labour migration tends to take place within extended kin and other social networks, and cultural institutions of fosterage and patronage rather than through commercialised and institutionalised brokerage in Asia (Kleist and Bjarnesen:2019: 8).

Brokers are particularly important in temporary migration schemes where citizens become the employer, as in kafala and quasi-kafala systems in the GCC and Middle East. Passing through intermediaries (some are unregistered), is necessary for domestic workers recruited by GCC countries, which is significant for East African workers (Fernandez 2013 on Ethiopians; Assumpta and Laiboni nd on Uganda) as well as those from Ghana (Awumbila 2019) and Nigeria. However, they may also play a crucial role in rural-urban mobilities, as in Ghana (Awumbila 2019) and regional from Zimbabwe to South Africa (Zack et al. 2019).

Intermediaries provide a wide range of different activities aimed at facilitating migration, such as helping broker visas, arranging birth certificates and passports, booking transportation, guiding, finding jobs and/or accommodation, connecting migrants to healthcare and medical tests and providing training and assisting aspiring migrants navigate complex immigration (Jones and Sha 2020; Sha 2021). At the same time, they may contribute to producing stratification between workers of

different nationalities; some of whom are paid higher salaries and employers charged higher prices. In the Middle East, African domestic workers for example are paid lower salaries than those from South East Asia, as is evidenced in the Kurdistan Region Iraq (Aghapouri et al. 2023). Employers often show preferences for certain worker characteristics -age, sex, nationality, religion, and ability to speak a language, especially English. Brokers too may direct the destination of migrants towards certain countries. Migrants may utilise dense networking, combining a range of social networks and personal contacts together with commercial agents as with Ethiopians to the Middle East (Fernandez 2013; Sha 2021) or Zimbabweans to South Africa, (Zack et al. 2019).

Social Networks are usually treated as a form of intermediary or meso structure facilitating the mobility process, but networks can change over time and involve both local and translocal support. The role of family members, peers, kinship groups, professional associates and those met in the course of journeys amongst others has been part of migration theories for some time, for example, the New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark and Bloom 1985). Recent years have seen substantial discussion on the nature of social networks in migration, in particular the critique of treating them as destination-origin links i.e. closely associated with the critique of linear journeys (see Sha 2021b for review of development and current debates about social networks and migration). As Wissinka et al. (2020) demonstrate for sub-Saharan migrants in Greece and Turkey, based on fieldwork undertaken prior to the major flows of 2015, networks may change in the course of the journey, over time and in relation to significant events, such as bodily accidents, accessing assistance from an NGO, being dissolved and recreated. Another critique has revolved around the failure to consider how changes in macro conditions impinge on the operation of migrant networks (De Haas 2010; Wissinka et al. 2020).

Social media may enable potential migrants to access diffuse networks beyond the diaspora; or to tap into weaker networks, for example of people or family members they may not have been in contact for some time (Drekker and Engbersen 2014).

Consolidating and expanding social networks can provide information on conditions on the journey or the labour market, legal conditions or other practical issues concerning migration to or life in the destination country.

There may be differential access to, deployment of and outcomes from networks in migration. For example, Sha (2021b) highlights the lack of attention paid to gender differences and the ways that social norms and gender roles, gendered divisions of labour, gender hierarchies and power relations, and gendered government policies, come together to shape the way that migrant networks operate for men and women. For example, Toma and Vause (2014) found that women tend to rely on close family ties, long-established and geographically concentrated networks, possibly due to different friendship and social circles which influence the information and help available to them (Muanamoha et al. 2010).

Methodologies

We have seen that there has been considerable discussion about the contribution and value of different methodological approaches and a more systematic attention paid to methodologies in migration studies (Vargas-Silva 2012). Recommendations have been made that methodologies could complement each other and users of one could learn from the other. It has been commented that cross-fertilisation in migration studies has been limited (Carling et al. 2022). Indeed, disciplines vary in the extent to which they use quantitative or qualitative methods. This ranges from an overwhelming use of qualitative methods in anthropology to a more common usage of mixed methods in geography and sociology, where qualitative methods have paid increasing attention to epistemological awareness and reflexivity and the position of the researcher (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2022). Qualitative methods have been particularly significant in the constellation of theoretical approaches we have discussed in the previous section, though they are also combined with quantitative methods, for example in the study of aspirations, social networks or the use of social media. Aslany et al. (2021) and Carling and Schewel (2018) both emphasise the need to include qualitative research, which has also been more attentive to factors such as indebtedness, interpersonal obligations, and social identities in studies of aspirations, and the use of multi-method approaches.

In quantitative social sciences, especially in economics, migration decisions may be modelled on utility maximization, in particular the Roy (1951) model. Individuals are assumed to make the decision between migrating and staying as well as the return decision based on what provides them with the greatest utility and subject to constraints. These constraints traditionally include financial aspects but can also include psychological costs. Typically, migrants are assumed to take a forward-

looking perspective that includes costs and returns to migration, which can be subject to biases or information deficits. Since utility and constraints are very abstract concepts, these models are highly flexible, allowing networks or aspects such as discrimination to play a key role in decision-making. The Roy model can be aggregated up to the macro level, then resulting in gravity-type models that can explain migration patterns between countries or regions (Beine et al. 2016).

Traditionally, economic models were centered solely on the individual. The New Economics of Labor Migration (Stark and Bloom, 1985) widened the approach to family- or household-based decisions, thus bringing in motives such as diversification of income sources and specialization in who becomes a migrant and what types of jobs and family roles individuals take. Models have been tweaked over time, allowing for aspects such as liquidity constraints and risk preferences to explain phenomena such as immobility in the face of potentially large financial returns to migration (Bryan et al. 2014).

Quantitative models have the advantage of being easily testable with data.

However, they can be criticised easily for oversimplifying. Often, a model aims to focus thinking on a specific mechanism, so simplification is intentional. However, when it comes to modeling migration decision-making, there is a widespread perception that the main models mentioned above require many tweaks and sometimes brave assumptions to come close to providing a good fit with the data overall. Economists, in particular, used to mistrust the use of survey-based questions about intentions and motivations. The worry was that social desirability bias, framing of questions and other such issues might make the results of more qualitative research unreliable. Instead, focusing on “revealed outcomes”, i.e. observed behavior instead of what people say they do, was the norm. This is easier to use in quantitative models and, for example, make predictions about actual

numbers, which can then be compared to the data and point to model failures, but the use of quantitative models also leads to a far less nuanced understanding of the actual behaviors.

Many researchers thus back up their assumptions and empirical estimations with qualitative evidence (Aslany et al. 2021), but the use of mixed methods in journal articles in economics is so far very low. Qualitative research is also often fundamental to the development of survey items and is able to move beyond fixed categories to capture social identities such as gender which can change through the different stages of migration and contexts (Bircan and Yilmaz 2023; Hennebry et al, 2021). Such methods may be useful in the framing of questions. Carling and Schewel (2018) raise a number of methodological issues about the challenges of using surveys often posing simple questions which may have difficulties in capturing complex situations and the transience of aspirations. They stress, for example, the importance of the phrasing of questions. For example in the Gallup World Poll, the question for Migration Wish was: 'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?' As they note, the inclusion of 'permanently' may be problematic, and, as we have argued, it is important to include multiple mobilities for an understanding of the dynamics of migration decision-making in space and times.

The use of mixed methods does not only help to overcome the shortcomings of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, but brings in an interdisciplinary approach which adds to the level of complexity and allows the uncovering of multiple facets of migration (Aslany et al. 2021, Carling and Schewel 2018, Salamonska 2022). This is particularly important for making theoretical contributions where providing evidence from qualitative and quantitative data is often sensible (Carling, 2023). In addition, big data for studying social media, the use of mobile phones or intensive mapping,

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have also increasingly been applied, as in a number of Horizon 2020 projects such as HumMingBird (2019–2023) including the mapping of migration flows; and ITFLOWS on migration, technology and human rights (2019–2023).

Conclusion

As we have highlighted, African migrations are diverse and complex, reflecting past traditions and contemporary realities in the global economy and the impact of restrictive migration regimes, on the one hand, and regional free movement and cross-border circulations, on the other. Selected countries, such as Morocco and South Africa, have also attracted migrants from further afield. Yet, discourses of African migrations still often focus on extra continental migration to Europe and the journeys undertaken in order to reach it. The diverse (im)mobilities within states, regionally, further afield within Africa and beyond are rarely taken into account together. However, as we have highlighted, different circulations may be undertaken by the same individual at different times. And how they combine mobilities and their durations will also differ by age, class and gender to name a few significant differences. Yet limited representations of African migrations in turn pose a problem for migration policymaking to enhance well-being and promote development.

At the same time, a number of theoretical approaches have sought to go beyond the transition model based on a simple set of demographic and economic variables which determine the shift in migration intensities and patterns in the context of economic and social change. One of the major critiques was that such theorisations do not provide an explanation of what motivates people to migrate. If their aspirations for a better and alternative life are not fulfilled, this may lead them to migrate. As outlined in section 3, aspirations-capability frameworks have been adopted by a large number of studies and surveys globally. However, some of the issues that have been raised in relation to this approach have been the simple questions posed in surveys, the strong focus on aspirations prior to migrate, and relatively little research on the conversion of aspirations, a desire held by many

compared to the few who convert their motivations into action. This focus on the initial period of aspirations and motivations in decision-making and processes of migration may translate into a failure to probe the multiple spatialities and temporalities underpinning actual journeys of migration and the modalities of how such journeys are facilitated and/or constrained.

In response to these lacunae, a constellation of theoretical approaches has sought to enhance the conceptual framework for understanding the complexity and context of decision-making and migratory processes of heterogeneous groups. In this paper, we have outlined some of the key theoretical and methodological approaches which have focussed in particular on the following:

- Journeys drawing out the multiple spatialities and temporalities and experiences of those undertaking journeys within and beyond Africa;
- Norms, values and narratives which explore how individuals, families and communities view migration and aid or dissuade the migration of different categories and how they narrate their aspirations and desired outcomes;
- The facilitation of migration through infrastructures such as formal and informal intermediaries in the homeland, en route, in countries of destination and from diasporic populations which provide both material and social resources.

As a whole, these inter-connected approaches contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of spatiotemporal dynamics of the different forms and stages of migration and the facilitation or constraints of migration for different categories of migrants within and beyond Africa. The interaction between the different parameters will inevitably vary according to the country and regional context. In exploring this dynamic interplay, we lay the basis for the empirical research in WP2 based on

interviews with migrants at different stages of migration (potential to return; internal, cross-border, transit and international) and organisations advising and facilitating them in Kenya, Morocco and Nigeria, countries which represent a diversity of migratory configurations within Africa, and with diasporic migrants and their organisations from these countries in Italy and the UK. The paper also provides a nuanced discussion of theoretical approaches and migrations in Africa for use by WP3 Heterogeneity and Perception on heterogeneous decision-making analysis within a utility-maximising framework. Finally, it will contribute to the comparison of migration decision-making and processes, on the one hand, and what policy makers understand of African migrations, on the other, in WP8 Joint Knowledge Creation.

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About DYNAMIG

DYNAMIG is a three-year project that aims to create a more thorough understanding of how people make decisions on whether and how to migrate. Focusing on Africa and Europe, we will analyse to what extent the diverse experiences of migrants are taken into consideration when migration policies – or policies that impact migration – are made. We will also look at how effective these policies are in shaping migrants' decisions and behaviour.

Website

dynamig.org



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