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MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Lessons from Africa's Long-Run Experience

Michiel de Haas and Ewout Frankema

1 Introduction

Our study of two centuries of shifting patterns of African migration generates four pertinent lessons on how development affects patterns of migration. Although this book has looked into a broader spectrum of migration forms, we focus our discussion here on long-term shifts in voluntary *international* migration. We broadly define the term "development" as a long-term, non-linear, and layered process of welfare growth, involving rising per capita income levels, the spread of mass education, increasing longevity, and demographic growth. The insights of our study speak to two influential theoretical notions on the migration-development nexus, which we will introduce in Section 2. In Section 3 we discuss the four lessons, while also addressing the question of what drove the post-1960 shift in African migration to extra-continental destinations, a shift that marked the end of the "Age of Intra-African Migration" (c. 1850–1960) (see De Haas and Frankema, Chapter 1, this volume).

2 Theories of migration and development

Theories on the impact of development on migration (or mobility, more broadly defined) are grounded in the observation that many societies, at different points in time, have undergone a so-called "migration transition," also dubbed a "mobility transition" or an "emigration life cycle." The main idea is that, with welfare development, emigration rates tend to rise up to a particular threshold level, after which they begin to decline (Zelinsky 1971; Clemens 2014; Williamson 2015). This threshold level is difficult to define in absolute terms, as migration transitions unfold in wider international and historical contexts that shape the uneven opportunity structures that provoke migratory responses, as well as the spatial and legal barriers that limit the international mobility of people in varying ways. The key point is that, *all other things being equal,* development induces increasing emigration rates first, and declining emigration rates at a later stage.[1]

DOI: 10.4324/9781003225027-25

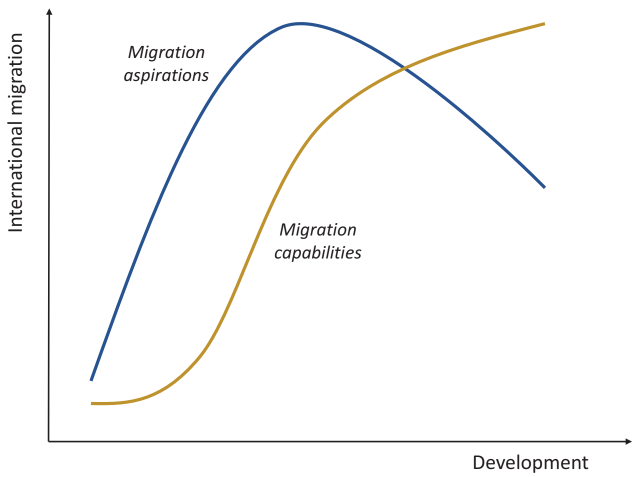

FIGURE 17.1 The relationship between development and migration aspirations and capabilities.
Source: De Haas (2010, 2014).

The most common explanation among migration scholars for the upward part of the migration curve is that rising income levels lead to growing aspirations to seek opportunities that cannot (yet) be realized at home elsewhere. Meanwhile, with development the capabilities to turn such migration aspirations into practice also increase. As shown in Figure 17.1, only at later stages of development, presumably yet to be reached by almost all African countries, migration aspirations decline as opportunities in home societies improve (Carling and Schewel 2018; Hein de Haas 2019). The idea that migration rates increase from low initial levels with development resonates with older, highly influential strands of literature in African history which argued that large-scale African migration emerged from the *disruptions* caused by colonization and economic modernization (see for a summary and critique Manchuelle 1997, 4–8; see also De Haas and Frankema, Chapter 1, this volume). Whereas Figure 17.1 is primarily used in migration studies to explain migratory change in settings without colonialism, the underlying assumption is strikingly similar: powerful forces of change disrupt a stable "traditional" and "undeveloped" social order in which mobility had been constrained.

A second explanation of the inverted migration U-curve, proposed by economists, sees rising migration as the outcome of a race between a growing and increasingly educated workforce versus economic opportunities in sending regions. When the former gets ahead of the latter, as was the case in Europe during the "Age of Mass Migration" (c. 1850–1940) and, arguably, in sub-Saharan Africa today, emigration rates increase (Hatton and Williamson 2003; Clemens 2014, 2020; Dao et al. 2018). Processes of development have coincided with a demographic transition in every society across the globe, albeit at a varying pace and level of intensity. Rapid population growth raises the demand for jobs and puts pressure on limited natural resources (e.g., land, water, forests). Whenever increasing labor supplies cannot be locally absorbed, young generations are stimulated to move to areas with open land frontiers or tighter labor markets. Rising educational attainment compounds this effect, as it stimulates educated workers to capitalize on their knowledge and skills elsewhere. This informs the prediction that African population growth (Hatton and Williamson 2003) and "overeducation" – i.e., high skill accumulation relative to local employment opportunities (Frankema and van Waijenburg 2019) – increase African emigration rates.

3 Lessons from Africa's long-run experience

Based on the historical analysis of shifting patterns of African mobility presented in this volume, we put the two theoretical mechanisms driving a presumed "migration transition" to the test, and propose four lessons to enrich theories on migration and development.

3.1 Poverty and mobility in (pre-)colonial Africa

The first notion we call into question is the idea that a certain level of development is required for people to overcome mobility constraints and that migration aspirations take time to gestate. An assessment of this notion requires a long-term perspective to reveal migratory patterns before (or in the early phases of) sustained expansion of mass education and population. While long-run migration transitions have been studied for other world regions (Hatton and Williamson 1998; Clemens 2020), work on migration and development in Africa has typically taken the 1960s or 1970s as a starting point (Hatton and Williamson 2003; 2005, 247–64; Lucas 2015; European Commission, Joint Research Centre 2018). This is too short. While a lack of accessible, reliable, and consistent serial data has hitherto complicated analyses with longer timeframes, there is no evidence for claims that before 1960 African migration aspirations were limited, that historical opportunity gaps in Africa were simply too small to warrant large-scale mobility (Hatton and Williamson 2005, 252), or that historical (i.e., colonial-era) migration was more of a political (force and flight) rather than economic nature (Herbst 1990, 186).

This book has provided ample evidence that African migration rates in the 19th and 20th centuries were substantial, and that even in the poorest parts of Africa, migration occurred on a substantial scale.[2] Large flows of emigrants in colonial Africa originated from the least developed regions such as present-day Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, and Rwanda.[3] Can these migration flows be simply ascribed to brutal colonial force? To be sure, such flows were partially enforced by colonial policies (Okia; Ribeiro da Silva and Alexopoulou, Chapters 8 and 9, this volume). However, direct colonial efforts to push people onto the migratory labor market were often ineffective, as African migrants proved to have substantial agency to choose their destinations and employers and used mobility to move beyond colonial control (Michiel de Haas 2019; De Haas and Travieso, Chapter 11, this volume). Moreover, the role of state intervention as a driver of mobility in the colonial era appears less decisive when we place it in the context of much larger forced mobility triggered by intense slavery and state formation in the 19th century, as well as the mass expulsions and refugee flows engendered by post-colonial conflict (Austin; Keeton and Schirmer; Frankema, Chapters 2, 6, and 15, this volume).

It is highly problematic to simply set aside colonial-era mobility as an outcome of coercive colonial structures (for such a tendency, see, for example, De Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020). We need to view migrants in the (pre-)colonial era as agents responding to economic incentives, as much as their counterparts today. Indeed, voluntary forms of labor migration from rural areas emerged long before the colonial era (Manchuelle 1997). Already in the 19th century, preceding colonial rule, labor demand on African-owned farms and plantations producing commercial crops such as groundnuts, palm oil, and cocoa resulted in a *widening* of *opportunity gaps* between rural areas. Africans responded with alacrity to such gaps, which resulted in expanding migrant flows. De Haas and Travieso (Chapter 11, Figure 3, this volume) estimate that in the interwar period, migrants were able to augment their incomes by a factor of 2 to 4 by moving over large distances to zones of cash-crop production. For the same period, Frederick and Van Nederveen Meerkerk (Chapter 12, Figure 2, this volume) estimate that unskilled day laborers in the major cities of the Belgian Congo earned triple the wages of their rural counterparts. Ribeiro da Silva and Alexopoulou (Chapter 9, this volume) estimate income gaps between Mozambique and the South African Witwatersrand to have been in the order of 4 to 6.

Summing up, new opportunity gaps that emerged in pre-colonial and grew rapidly during colonial times triggered rising voluntary migration within Africa. Even in poor regions, migrants responded to such opportunities in large numbers, apparently not hindered by a lack of capabilities and aspirations. In fact, many migrants needed very little but their feet to cover impressive distances, year in year out.

3.2 Migration and development in post-colonial Africa

Has migration risen with development since 1960? Figure 17.2 shows continental decadal migration rates and annual GDP per capita. Despite long-term income growth which

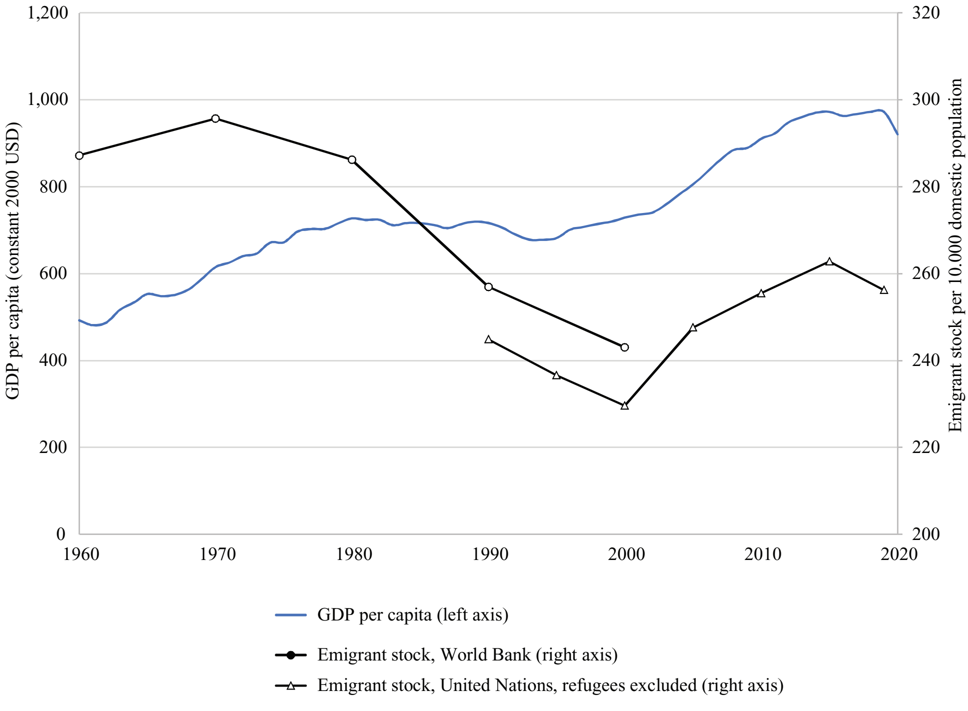

FIGURE 17.2 African GDP per capita and emigrant stock, 1960–2020.

Sources: GDP and population data from the World Bank (https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators). Emigrant stock from the World Bank (https://databank.worldbank.org/source/global-bilateral-migration) and the UN (https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/ estimates2/estimates19.asp). Refugee stock from the UNHCR (https://www.unhcr.org/data.html). Accessed 15-09-2021.

Notes: Emigrant stock includes all Africans residing outside their country of birth, either within or outside of the continent.

coincided with booming population (from 283 million in 1960 to 1.34 billion in 2020) and massive expansion of school attainment (from 1.3 to 6.7 years of education on average for Africa's full working-age population between 1950 and 2015), the recorded African emigrant stock (including both intra- and extra-continental destinations) as a share of Africa's total population *declined* between 1960 and 2019 (also see Table 1, De Haas and Frankema Chapter 1, this volume).[4] This goes against the notion that migration rates increase with development. In the shorter run, we do observe some correlation between migration and development. As average per capita incomes rose between 1960 and 1980, the total migrant stock also expanded to reach its highest recorded level (in 1970). As GDP per capita plateaued between 1980 and 2000, the estimated stock of African migrants declined, suggesting a "reverse migration transition." As African growth bounced back during the 2000s and early 2010s, the migrant stock began to expand again as well.

Of course, a continental approach is coarse and hides substantial underlying variation (see Manning, Chapter 16, this volume, also Adepoju 2022). Examination of the drivers of bilateral (country-to-country) migration stocks between 1960 and 2000 (Lucas 2015, 1490–500) and 1960 and 2015 (European Commission, Joint Research Centre 2018, 21–2), using a multi-variate "gravity model" approach, reveals that large income differentials between sending and receiving regions as well as low GDP per capita in sending regions are positively correlated with African migration. Thus, more fine-grained country-level evidence further calls into question the idea that rising incomes spur migration and suggests instead, as we have argued above for earlier times, that the size of opportunity gaps matters most. Some sub-national and individual-level evidence does point to higher emigration rates in more developed regions *within* African countries, and among individuals with higher-than-average socio-economic status, but these findings are correlational, and await more rigorous causal analysis (European Commission, Joint Research Centre 2018, 21; UNDP 2019).

Why did migration not unequivocally expand with development in post-colonial Africa? Our main explanation is that many of the opportunity gaps that had emerged in Africa in the early 20th century began to narrow during the second half of the century. We propose that this narrowing reflected a progressing spatial integration of labor markets; the diffusion of public goods (roads, medical services, and fresh water); an expanding supply of skilled as well as unskilled workers due to better education and population growth; and worsening terms of trade for export commodities. Substantial rural-urban income gaps tended to persist somewhat longer, typically as a result of government intervention which sought to suppress earnings in rural areas to sustain labor circularity (as in Southern Rhodesia, see Frederick and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, Chapter 12, Figure 4, this volume) or due to wage increases of a privileged minority of formal wage workers (as in Uganda, see De Haas 2017). Yet, real urban incomes began to decline in many parts of Africa during the 1970s and 1980s as well, after colonial restrictions to urban settlement had been removed and urban growth accelerated (Meier zu Selhausen, Chapter 13, this volume). In the meantime, international immigrants became increasingly less welcome, as reflected by mass expulsions of "illegal" workers in numerous African countries (Frankema, Chapter 15, Table 2, this volume).

In sum, welfare development across the long 20th century did not coincide with a long-term rise, but rather with a long-term decline in *overall migration rates*, which we should understand in the context of narrowing opportunity gaps. Such gaps are always a vector of conditions in sending *as well as receiving* regions. Hence, the first-order question for Africa is not how development has spurred the magnitude of migration, but rather how it has affected shifts in *origins and destinations* over the course of time, and more in particular the resurgence of extra-continental migration since the 1960s.

3.3 Resurging migration out of Africa

Rates of slave-related migration within Africa probably peaked between 1850 and 1910, of cash-crop migration between 1920 and 1960, of urban migration between 1950 and 1990, and of forced migration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) between 1970 and 2000. In this long-term landscape of shifting patterns of migration, the shift toward destinations outside Africa has most profoundly shaped public perceptions of African migration. Extra-continental migration has been picking up since the 1960s and was initially dominated by North Africans, but African emigration originating from south of the Sahara has undergone a significant and sustained rise as well. Western Europe became the most important destination by far, followed by the Gulf countries and North America (Lucas 2015, 1448–52). Overall, the share of African (sub-Saharan African) migrants residing out of the continent has grown from 28% (5%) to 47% (31%) between 1960 and 2019 (De Haas and Frankema, Chapter 1, Figure 2, this volume). What caused this broad, albeit partial, shift in migration destinations?

Although it would be unfair to suggest that this question has been entirely overlooked in the migration literature (e.g., Lucas 2015, 1493), the long-run perspective of this book allows us to see more clearly how the shift to extra-continental destinations is connected to historical migration shifts *within* Africa. Understanding this connection is important to correct some widespread misperceptions. For example, in their seminal work on two centuries of global migration, Hatton and Williamson (2005, 247–64) rhetorically ask "where are all the Africans?", to argue that poverty in sending societies and restrictive migration policies and the lack of migrant networks in receiving societies have long hampered extra-continental migration of Africans. Concerning intra-African migration they posit that "many African countries have neighbors who are at similar levels of development. Thus, the incentives for cross-border migration have not been large enough in most of Africa to induce any secular migrant floods" (Hatton and Williamson 2005, 252). This conclusion, based on data starting in 1977, might be broadly correct since then (as we argue above), but it is certainly at odds with the migration patterns we have observed in the 19th and earlier 20th century. Indeed, even though their moves were largely restricted to the continent itself, Africans were never absent from the international migration scene.

Without attempting to be exhaustive, we highlight three explanations for the partial shift from intra- to extra-continental destinations. Development in the sending regions has only limited bearing on these explanations, which rather find their origin in the macro-historical drivers that we have discussed in the introduction of this volume (De Haas and Frankema, Chapter 1, this volume).

First, as already indicated, the gains of intra-African migration have declined substantially since the majority of African countries became independent in the 1960s. While most African countries are richer today than they were in 1960, spatial opportunity structures *within* and *between* countries have converged. The gains that migrants were able to reap from rural-rural migration or urban migration in the first half of the 20th century were similar to those of Europeans moving to the New World, or Indians and Chinese converging upon

Southeast Asia during the "Age of Mass Migration" (Hatton and Williamson 1998; 2005, 136–37). With some major exceptions (migrant destinations Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa being the most important), opportunity gaps of such a magnitude had largely disappeared by the third quarter of the 20th century, and have not reappeared since.

In cases where spatial opportunity gaps continued to exist, receiving communities increasingly saw immigrants as competitors for land and jobs, in numerous cases even expelling them in large numbers (Frankema, Chapter 15, this volume). The most telling example is South Africa which, with an income level far exceeding that of neighboring countries such as Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, continues to attract scores of migrants from the wider region (over 1.5 million individuals born in these five countries were estimated to reside in South Africa in 2019, according to United Nations (UN) migration data). However, international migrants in South Africa have met with rising intolerance, especially after 1994 (Crush 2000). Contrary to older generations, the young aspiring labor migrants have met expanding restrictions and their status has become increasingly precarious, with violence, detention and deportation as ever-present threats. Thus, those with aspirations to improve their lot and that of their families are more often inclined to attempt a move out of the continent.

Second, after recovery from the Second World War, Western European countries embarked upon a "golden age" of industrial catch-up growth (Eichengreen 2007). Shortages of unskilled labor emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. "Guest workers" from Southern Europe were the first to fill these gaps, but international agreements on temporary labor migration were also signed with countries in North Africa. This period of moderate openness was smothered by the economic recession of the 1980s, but by that time chain migration and family reunion sustained these flows. More recently, new forms of African migration to Europe have emerged, again in a context of tightening labor markets. Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain developed new demand for temporary workers engaged in (informal) occupations with inferior status, harsh labor conditions, and low pay. For example, an increasing number of labor migrants originating from rural areas in West Africa (e.g., Senegal, Mali, Niger) are employed as seasonal workers in agriculture, with or without legal work permits (Hoggart and Mendoza 1999). Europe's demographic decline, aging, and widespread reluctance to engage in certain occupations among its native populations gave the demand for cheap foreign labor a more structural character (De Haas 2008). Meanwhile, in the resource-rich but sparsely populated economies of the Gulf region, demand for migrant workers from Asia as well as Africa, operating under strictly temporary and highly controlled conditions, has also expanded substantially.

Third, access to destinations outside the continent has increased enormously. Initially, linguistic, political, and economic ties with former colonizers were decisive, especially in the case of former French and Portuguese colonies. Migrants from former colonies formed "bridgehead communities" in Europe. In France, for example, there were only 2,000 registered black African workers in the early 1950s (a large majority of whom originated from Senegal and Mali), a number that grew to 660,000 by the mid-1990s, still predominantly from the same regions (Manchuelle 1997, 2). Even in 2019, France still accounted for over half of all African migrants from former French colonies residing in non-African states (3.4 out of 6.8 million, according to UN data). In recent decades, however, increasing shares of African migrants have moved to destinations other than the former colonizers. This is driven by falling transportation and transaction costs due to the diffusion of cheap motorized travel over land and sea and the growth of professional albeit often criminalized networks of migrant recruiters in sending regions, smugglers and other facilitators along the routes, and connectors on the receiving end. On the migrants' end, the rapid surge in mobile and digital information and communication technology from the 1990s onward has made it much easier to gather information, to remain in touch with "home," and to organize multiple attempts to cross fortified borders in the hope that one time will be successful.

Intercontinental African migration has distinctively different faces. For those migrating through *regular* (i.e., legally recognized) channels, the journey itself became shorter and easier to plan with airlines maintaining regular connections. At the same time, formal international cash transfers have become much easier for labor migrants seeking to support their families back home with regular remittances. Education levels have risen massively across Africa since independence, which means that an increasing share of Africa's young generations is both motivated and qualified to migrate to rich countries to study or take up jobs. Indeed, on the country level, more advanced education has been found to correlate with "intercontinental migration [of Africans] but not shorter movements within Africa" (Lucas 2015, 1496). Meanwhile, the appalling conditions under which many *irregular* migrants cross the Sahara and Mediterranean are well known. Notably, this type of migration experience is hardly novel: in the early 20th century it was not uncommon for migrants to walk for weeks to arrive at their destination within Africa, often under pitiful circumstances (Okia; Juif; De Haas and Travieso, Chapters, 9, 10, and 11, this volume). What has changed is primarily that migrants today are able to reach even harder-to-reach destinations, and to bridge even larger cross-community barriers with a comparable level of risk and distress.

In sum, the resurgence of migration out of Africa should be viewed in connection to the narrowing of historically sizable opportunity gaps *within* Africa. In addition, macro-historical drivers in the form of demographic growth, technological change, and processes of decolonization have created conditions for chain migration. But there has also been a countervailing force: changing beliefs regarding the contribution of African immigrants to "development" in Western European societies, which have resulted in severely tightened entry conditions.

3.4 Shifting reception of labor immigrants

Despite the presence of strong forces that make migration out of the African continent more feasible and attractive, contemporary patterns of migration have emerged in a context of newly erected barriers, in particular more restrictive migration regimes and border controls, within as well as outside Africa.[5] The large share of Africans with aspirations to migrate (Carling and Schewel 2018) suggests that without these barriers extra-continental migration would certainly have involved far greater numbers – a key reason why such barriers are erected in the first place. But there is also a different logic to migrant barriers, which applies to both African destinations in the past and non-African destinations today: a strong demand for cheap labor, which benefits from migrants' precarity and marginalization. This results in situations, past and present, where migrants' ability to own property is limited and their legal status is either poorly defined or highly restricted. Moreover, host societies within and beyond Africa have used repatriation as an instrument to limit migrant numbers and to diminish their status.

The mounting barriers to African mobility are important to consider in a global historical perspective. Since the mid-20th century, African population growth began to accelerate, resulting in unprecedented population levels and densities that are expected to peak in the late 21st century. From a comparative perspective, Africa's demographic transition is not just late, but also sharper than in all other world regions and it is turning a long historical equilibrium of low population densities and scarce labor supplies upside down (Austin 2008). Africans' opportunities to migrate and settle in overseas areas are nowhere near substantial enough to absorb a meaningful share of this growing working-age population (Frankema and van Waijenburg 2019). This stands in sharp contrast to the surge in trans-Atlantic migration of Europeans who (typically unlike their non-white counterparts) were welcomed to settle the "open" land frontiers of the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and to a lesser extent the southern cones of Africa and Latin America since 1850. Such migration, made possible by the dramatic fall in the cost of trans-oceanic transport served as a "population valve," offering an escape to millions of socially, religiously, or economically marginalized groups in Europe (Hatton and Williamson 1998). The millions of Chinese and Indians who moved into thinly populated and labor-scarce parts of Southeast Asia (c. 1850–1940) equally sought to escape dismal living conditions in sending regions (McKeown 2010). However, unlike the millions of Europeans, Indians, and Chinese who engaged in overseas migration during the Age of Mass Migration, and who in their respective contexts were often supported and facilitated instead of restricted, there are no present-day equivalent "population valves" that can cushion the effects of rising pressure on environmental resources, public services, and overwhelmed urban job markets in Africa. Neither are there large open land frontiers waiting for Africans to be settled. Indeed, the historical timing of development matters greatly for how migration transitions can play out.

As old windows close, new ones may be opened. The aging of European and Chinese populations will inevitably lead to greater labor shortages in both regions in the decades ahead. Whether shifting ratios of economically active to non-active populations will lead to a willingness to accommodate very large numbers of African migrant workers remains to be seen. A future scenario in which African labor migrants will be invited to come over cannot be written off and present-day anti-immigrant sentiments should not be taken as a given. As a historical perspective demonstrates, gradual, yet deeply transformative, long-run processes of economic, demographic, and political change tend to reconfigure opportunity structures, and how "development" in destination societies can lead to resisting as well as inviting attitudes to newcomers.

Acknowledgment

Ewout Frankema gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research for the project "South-South Divergence: Comparative Histories of Regional Integration in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa since 1850" (NWO VICI Grant no. VI.C.201.062).

Notes

1 For a recent application to mobility transition theory to Ethiopia, see Schewel and Asmamaw 2021)
2 Also, in Asia large numbers of extremely poor Chinese and Indians migrated into underpopulated parts of Southeast Asia to work on colonial plantations, in mines, or in port cities. See McKeown (2004) and (2010).
3 Although no historical national income estimates exist yet for these countries, their poverty is clearly indicated by extremely low unskilled wage rates. For studies on African real wages see

Frankema and van Waijenburg (2012); on Rwanda see Michiel de Haas (2019). See also De Haas and Travieso (Chapter 11, this volume).

4 Population from the UN (https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/). Education from the educational attainment dataset of Barro and Lee (2013) (http://www.barrolee.com/). Accessed 04/01/2022.

5 Herbst (1990). Also see Frankema (Chapter 14, this volume).

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