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CASH-CROP MIGRATION SYSTEMS IN EAST AND WEST AFRICA

Rise, Endurance, Decline

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1 Introduction

For much of the 20th century, African economies relied heavily on the export of cash crops that were grown, harvested, and sometimes processed by self-employed and often small-scale African producers. Exports of groundnuts in the Senegambia and palm oil along the West African coast took off in the first half of the 19th century. Cocoa rapidly diffused in the West African forest from the 1890s onward. Cotton and coffee expanded across East Africa in the early 20th century. In most cases agricultural exports peaked in the mid-20th century, after which volumes per capita declined sharply. The cash-crop economy crucially sustained the budgets of colonial states, stimulated African demand for European manufactures, and supplied strategic raw materials for European colonizers. Still, the most successful cases of commercial agriculture did not result from colonial planning and policy, but hinged on African initiative, as indigenous farmers chose to adopt new crops and outcompeted the European settlers who tried. Yet members of households and communities in well-endowed and accessible farming regions were not the only Africans who sought new economic opportunities. Annually, hundreds of thousands of rural migrants cultivated and harvested cash crops as seasonal laborers, sharecroppers, or aspiring settlers. They are the protagonists of this chapter, which seeks to explain not only how these cash-crop migrations emerged, but also why they endured over decades, and what finally caused their undoing.

At the apex of the "cash-crop revolution" during the first half of the 20th century, tropical Africa's areas of export agriculture attracted more immigrants than urban centers and mining areas together, and the vast majority of these rural migrants were absorbed by the indigenous economy rather than the "formal," European-controlled wage economy. Migrants made long and perilous journeys, often covering hundreds of kilometers by foot over weeks or even months. In the 1970s, "underdevelopment" theorists argued that migrant-sending areas were deliberately and successfully reduced to impoverished "reserve regions" to serve "capitalist development" in the cash-crop zones (Amin 1974). More recent work, however, has emphasized how this perspective places undue strategic insight and administrative control in the hands of European colonizers, and underplays the choices of

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migrants themselves. African migrants proved highly receptive to rapidly emerging spatial disparities of opportunity, often defying their designated roles in colonial economic blueprints, or moving beyond colonial control altogether by crossing borders (Asiwaju 1976; Manchuelle 1997; De Haas 2019). On the receiving end, as long as labor demand outweighed supply, rural communities exhibited a remarkable ability and willingness to attract and absorb newcomers, especially in temporary and subordinated roles.

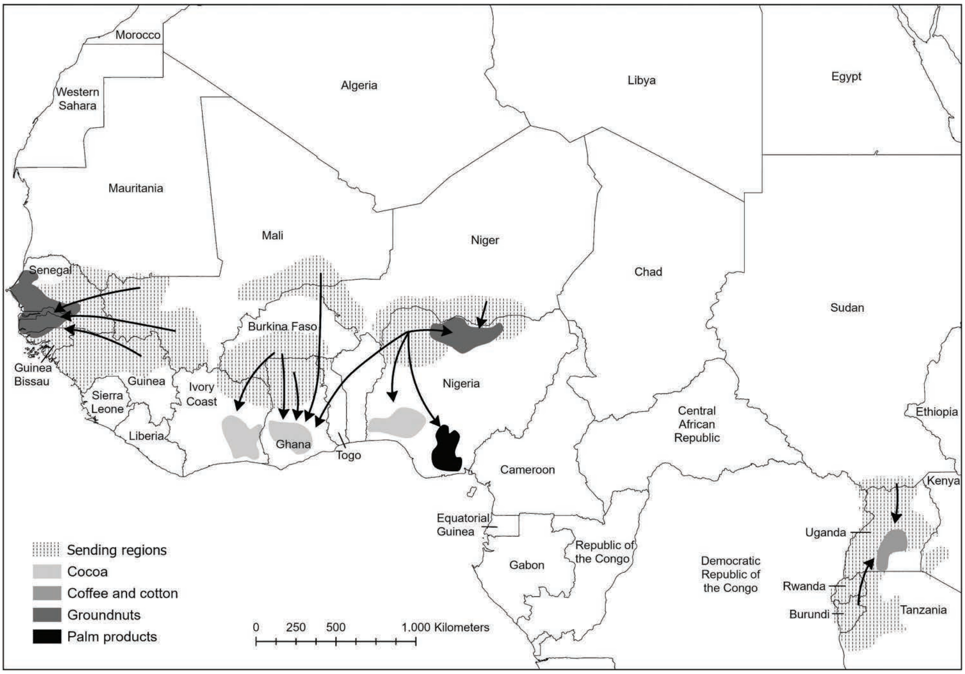
Despite the scale and importance of "uncontrolled" or "nondirected" migration toward cash-crop regions in colonial and post-colonial Africa, research on this topic is notably fragmented, and our understanding remains limited as a consequence. In the pages that follow, we attempt to overcome that fragmentation by bringing together the four largest cash-crop migration systems in the continent. Section 2 describes their contours, while Section 3 explains their shared origins in the emergence of a migratory labor market brought about by emancipation from slavery. Section 4 presents quantitative estimates of evolving wage gaps between sending and receiving regions that motivated rural-rural migration flows. Sections 5 and 6 examine competing explanations for the endurance of these flows, respectively considering pressures in sending regions and opportunities in receiving areas. Before the conclusion, Section 7 identifies the causes behind the transformation of cash-crop migrations, as (semi-)settled immigrant populations grew and flows abated, and their ultimate decline.

2 The contours of cash-crop migration systems

Our four migration systems encompass the most important zones of export agriculture in 20th-century Africa in terms of total output, all of which experienced substantial and sustained immigration, with flows peaking near or well above 100,000 people per year. Map 11.1 provides the locations of sending and receiving regions; Figure 11.1 shows the population-adjusted volumes of the most important crops exported from the latter relative to their peak year.

First, from west to east, the ***Senegambia estuary***, which encompassed British colonial Gambia and coastal French colonial Senegal, had long attracted migrants from a wide hinterland, harboring a major Atlantic port. During the 19th century, the region emerged as Africa's leading exporter of groundnuts (peanuts), the demand for which had risen substantially due to the oil's use in industrial processes. Commercial groundnut farming was inextricably linked to migration from its very onset. From the 1840s onward, migrants converged upon the riverine systems of the groundnut-producing zones, where they were known as "strange farmers" or "navétanes" (Jarrett 1949; David 1980). In the first half of the 20th century, Gambian officials repeatedly estimated that migrants produced about half of the colony's groundnut output (Jarrett 1949, 650; Sallah 2019, 127). Over a period spanning from the mid-19th into the late 20th century, the groundnut sector attracted tens of thousands of seasonal migrants annually from vast swathes of the western Sahel. Recorded migration peaked in the interwar era, with up to some 90,000 recorded immigrants arriving annually (David 1980, 470).

The ***Ghanaian forest zone*** had also long been a center for regional mobility, notably through the forced migration of enslaved people from the northern savanna over the 19th century. Following the adoption of cocoa in the 1890s, it attracted voluntary seasonal migrants as well as settlers from northern Ghana (the British Gold Coast's Northern Territories), but also from neighboring French colonial territories, notably Burkina Faso (Haute Volta) (Austin 2005, 412–24).[1] From the 1920s onward, these flows widened to include migrants


Morocco
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Liberia
Ivory Coast
Ghana
Togo
Nigeria
Central African Republic
Ethiopia
Cameroon
Kenya
Equatorial Guinea
Gabon
Republic of the Congo
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Uganda
Rwanda
Burundi
Tanzania
Sending regions
Cocoa
Coffee and cotton
Groundnuts
Palm products
0 250 500 1.000 Kilometers

MAP 11.1 Location of four cash-crop migration systems.

Sources: Drawn by the authors on the basis of Gold Coast Government (1955) and previous maps in Hance, Kotschar, and Peterec (1961), Hopkins (2020[1973]), Richards (1973[1954]), Swindell (1982), and Austin (2009a).

Notes: Approximate locations only. Present-day borders shown for orientation purposes.

from northern Côte d'Ivoire to northwestern Nigeria. Annual flows reached 100,000 migrants in the 1930s (Dickinson 1938). By the early 1950s, flows had again increased, to well over 200,000 (Gold Coast Government, 1955, 14; Hopkins, 2020[1973], 275). During the 1960s, the center of cocoa production and labor migration shifted from Ghana to southern Côte d'Ivoire, where it was sustained into the late 20th century, by when the other major cash-crop migration systems had long collapsed (Cordell, Gregory and Piché 1996). This longevity explains why Côte d'Ivoire had the highest intra-African immigration intensity of all large African countries between 1960 and 2000, and the largest immigrant population after South Africa (Flahaux and De Haas 2016, 11).

Third, ***colonial Nigeria*** saw the development of various cash-cropping systems during the late 19th and early 20th century, which were associated with large labor mobility within and out of the interior savanna (Swindell 1984; Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993, 200–22). Here, population movements had a long pre-colonial history associated with slave raids as well as free circular migration, but the "cash-crop revolution" brought about new spatial inequalities and expanded old ones, resulting in greater migration flows than ever before. While many migrants traveled to Ghana, most of them worked as rural laborers within colonial Nigeria, which saw rising exports of cocoa beans form the southwest, palm oil from the southeast, and groundnuts in parts of the center-north. About 190,000 migrants were counted traveling southward from northwestern Nigeria in the dry season of 1952–53 (Prothero 1959).

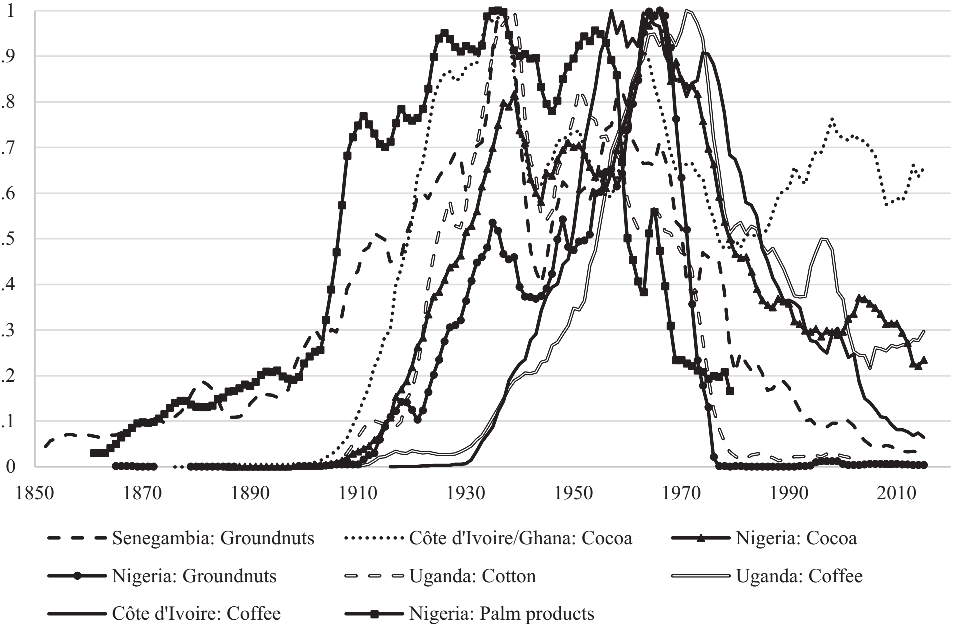

FIGURE 11.1 Per capita volumes of cash-crop exports, 1850–2017 (centered five-year moving averages, peak year=1).

Sources: 1850 to 1940/45: Frankema, Williamson, and Woltjer (2018). 1941/48–1960: De Haas (2017a) for Uganda; David (1980, 460–1) for Senegal; Mitchell (1995) for Côte d'Ivoire; unpublished extensions of the African Commodity Trade Database (ACTD), for the remaining missing points, Mitchell (1995) for other countries. From 1961 onward: ACTD extensions for Nigeria; FAOSTAT for other countries.

Lastly, the British-controlled areas of bimodal rainfall around Lake Victoria, and ***Buganda*** in particular, became a center of cotton and coffee export under colonial rule. Buganda was the economic and administrative center of the Uganda Protectorate, and was situated in a wider region with a longstanding history of population mobility (Reid 2017). Export-oriented agriculture only became feasible when the Uganda railway reached Lake Victoria in the early 1900s. Within 20 years, cotton had spread throughout the Protectorate, encompassing an area with a wide variety of agro-ecological characteristics and socio-political structures (De Haas 2017a, 2017b, 132–3). It took until the early 1920s for labor migration to take off on a substantial scale, considerably later than in the other cases discussed here. Migrants arrived in Buganda from all directions, but especially from Belgian-controlled Ruanda-Urundi. By the late 1930s, when migrant flows peaked, annual arrivals from Belgian territory had likely swelled to over 100,000 (De Haas 2019).

Alongside these four major cases, there were numerous other cash-crop zones across tropical Africa that did not attract large-scale migrant labor. In some cases, the reasons were obvious. For example, African cotton production in French Equatorial Africa, the Belgian Congo, and Portuguese Mozambique was directed by state-sanctioned concessionary companies, took place under harsh conditions, and was poorly remunerated. In such contexts, cash cropping triggered flight rather than immigration (Isaacman 1996, 209–12; Stürzinger, 1983, 225; Likaka 1997, 110–5). There were also cases of cash-crop cultivation that relied on African initiative, but did not attract sustained flows of voluntary migrants, such as cocoa production in southwestern Cameroon (Eckert 1996) and in the island of Bioko off Equatorial Guinea (Sundiata 1996), or cotton cultivation in the Shire Valley in Malawi (Frederick 2020). That these cash-crop economies remained small is explained by their particular island or riverine ecologies, but is also a consequence of not attracting migrants. Finally, in some places, such as Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, cash crops were grown on European settler farms, which relied on African migrant labor, but did not attract voluntary migrants on the same scale as the migration systems we discuss here (Mosley 1980; Frederick and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, Chapter 12, this volume).

In the major zones of export agriculture, migration and cash-crop production came to reinforce and ultimately depend upon each other. Migrants would not have left their homes for extended periods and in large numbers had cash-crop economies not provided them with distinctly better economic prospects. At the same time, continued expansion of cash-crop output in land-abundant and labor-scarce contexts such as the West African forest belt or Buganda relied crucially on the mass attraction of strangers to contribute to cultivation, harvesting, and processing. Yet, the emergence of cash-crop production cannot sufficiently explain the rise of rural migration, or vice versa. Suitable environmental endowments and access to export markets allowed some regions to take up the production of cash crops, often experiencing a take-off well before large-scale immigration began. Protracted emigration, all the while, was at least partly sustained by dynamics in sending regions that had no direct link to the cash-crop economy, as Section 4 will show. As for the initial rise of cash-crop migrations, its explanations are found in longer trajectories of socio-economic change that preceded the colonial period, and to which we now turn.

3 Emergence of cash-crop migration

Each of the four major cash-crop migration systems emerged in a context of agricultural commercialization, the protracted abolition of slavery, and the formation of free labor markets. Into the 19th century, human captives had been the main export product from mainland tropical Africa. Most African slaves were transported across the Atlantic to produce cash crops on New World plantations, most infamously sugar and cotton (Curtin 1990). Africa's own export agriculture, in the meanwhile, was mostly limited to provisioning of slave caravans and ships (Dalrymple-Smith and Frankema 2017).

Between the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the colonial "scramble" in the 1880s, the barter terms of trade of tropical commodities underwent a sustained rise, incentivizing production on the continent (Frankema, Williamson, and Woltjer 2018). Already by the 1830s, the value of agricultural commodities exported from West Africa exceeded the value of slaves, and continued to grow rapidly afterward. Europeans experimented with export-oriented plantation agriculture along the West African coast using free African labor, but without much success (Law, Schwartz, and Stickrodt 2013). Most successful moves toward what was at the time known as "legitimate commerce" in contrast with "illegitimate" slave trades shared at least one of the following two characteristics: they were initiated by Africans and they (ironically) relied on slavery (Law 1995; Pallaver, Chapter 4, this volume). To understand the emergence of cash-crop migration systems, we must look closely at the connections between indigenous agricultural commercialization, slave emancipation, and labor mobility.

Agricultural commercialization in 19th-century Africa was a response to the decline of the oceanic *slave trades*, not the institution of *slavery* as such. Indeed, the transition to "legitimate commerce" did not immediately produce freedom but provided new ways for African slave traders and owners to profit from their captives, who were redirected from the Atlantic export market toward commodity production. Slaves played an important role in the emergence of export-oriented groundnut cultivation in the Senegambia and palm oil production across West Africa in the first half of the 19th century (Swindell 1980; Miott 1989; Lynn 1997). Slavery (and human pawning) also provided crucial sources of labor for the production of gold, rubber, and kola, and subsequently cocoa among the Asante in the Ghanaian forest zone, and groundnuts around early-colonial Kano in Northern Nigeria (Austin 2009a; Salau 2010). In fact, cash-crop systems came to rely to such an extent on slave labor that colonial states were hesitant to enforce their abolitionist policies in the early 20th century, worried about undermining agricultural export economies (Austin 2009a). Even in Buganda, where cotton was introduced after formal slavery had been suppressed, the initial uptake by chiefs relied on reconfigured forms of labor coercion, enabled by the colonial government (De Haas 2017b: 133–6).

The widespread use of slave labor in pre-colonial West Africa was predicated on a strong economic logic. In a context of land abundance, free workers commanded high wages as the returns to dependent employment had to outweigh those of independent family cultivation (self-employment) (Hopkins 2020[1973], 68–71). Thus, before the "cash-crop revolution," for most of the year and in most places "there was no wage rate which would have been mutually profitable for an employer to offer and for a worker to accept" (Austin 2009b, 42). Despite their initial reliance on slave labor, cash crops came to play an essential role in the development of free labor markets in tropical Africa. The surplus generated by increasingly lucrative commercial crops gave employers and employees more room to negotiate. Free labor markets emerged in places where independent cash-crop farming was not equally accessible to everyone (Austin 2009a). In some host communities, property or use rights to land suitable for export-oriented agriculture were strongly differentiated by geographical and ethnic origin, effectively excluding foreigners. Local authorities in the Asante and Yorubaland forest zones, for example, prevented strangers from clearing land to grow their own cocoa trees, so they could only participate in the agricultural export economy as laborers or sharecroppers (Agiri 1984, 102; Austin 2006). Access to capital (bearing trees in these cases) or credit was also difficult for "strangers" who could not rely on local networks, or borrow against the next cash-crop harvest.

The abolition of slavery and subsequent emancipation of slaves was a prolonged process, which took hold in the 1880s and in many places lasted into the 1930s. Ex-slaves were certainly not the only, nor the first, to engage in free cash-crop migration. In the Senegambia, from the 1840s onward, enslaved people cultivated groundnuts alongside free migrants who themselves built on their commercial experience in the slave trade, for example, as provisioners of grain to slave caravans (Manchuelle 1997, 53–9; Swindell and Jeng 2006). Emancipation, however, generated large new labor supplies within cash-crop migration systems, which was crucial for a major expansion of output (Figure 11.2), which occurred despite the fact that terms of trade for tropical commodities had turned for the worse after c. 1890 (Frankema, Williamson, and Woltjer 2018). Emancipated slaves were highly motivated to migrate, not only because participation in the cash-crop economy provided new avenues to greater economic freedom, but also because mobility allowed them to shed the social stigma of slavery and start anew elsewhere (Rossi 2014). Even when they moved within their broad region of origin, emancipated people played crucial roles in cash-crop production. In Northern Nigeria, for example, they often entered tenancy agreements with former masters that allowed them to grow groundnuts, especially in the populous Kano emirate, where most of the region's export agriculture was based (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993, 211–3).

On the migrant-receiving end, abolition cut off the supply of outside labor to African producers and compounded labor scarcity, exactly at a time when infrastructural development increased the potential to put such labor to profitable use. Moreover, and perhaps counter-intuitively, the legacy of slavery generated favorable conditions for free immigration in host communities. One striking similarity of our cash-crop migration systems is that the receiving societies had a history of incorporating foreign slaves into their rural economy. Post-abolition, this legacy contributed to their ability to absorb large numbers of strangers, even if these were now free migrants rather than slaves. In the Gambia, arrangements between local hosts and migrant farmers indeed drew from earlier slave work regimes (Swindell and Jeng 2006, 125). Buganda also showed a remarkable ability to absorb strangers, relative to neighboring polities which had not previously relied on slaves to a similar extent.[2] Even though Buhaya (coffee) and Busoga (cotton) were equally involved in cash-crop cultivation, they were mostly bypassed by migrants who instead walked an extra 100 miles to seek employment in Buganda (Richards 1973[1954], 218). In the Ghanaian forest zone, most free migrant laborers arrived from savanna regions where slaves had been captured before, but their bargaining power was substantially larger and they used it to change labor arrangements with the introduction of sharecropping (Austin 2005, 424–7, 545).

To understand why the formation of free labor markets in post-abolition tropical Africa came to involve such a large degree of mobility, we must also consider the fact that the potential for export agriculture was immensely varied, and that cash-crop production was largely confined to small spatial "enclaves" (Map 11.1; also see Roessler et al. 2020). Access to external markets was vital for profitable export agriculture, but transportation infrastructure was extremely limited in much of Africa's vast interior. Tellingly, groundnut production in Northern Nigeria and cotton production in Buganda, both over 800 kilometers removed from a coast, took off only (and very soon) after a railroad arrived. Uneven agro-ecological conditions also mattered greatly. Soils and rainfall patterns in Africa's savannas did not allow for the cultivation of cocoa, coffee, or oil palm, and their short unimodal rainfall regimes created seasonal bottlenecks that limited farmers' ability to combine food crop cultivation and labor-intensive cash crops suitable for the savanna, such as cotton and groundnuts (Tosh 1980; Austin 2014; De Haas 2021). Most cash crops took off in regions with abundant fertile land. Thus, the "cash-crop revolution" generated growing spatial disequilibria in labor demand and supply, increasing the scope for large-scale mobility.

4 Measuring opportunity gaps

Why was voluntary long-distance migration toward cash-crop zones sustained on such a large scale, and over a period of many decades? A first step toward answering this question is to evaluate the magnitude and evolution of opportunity gaps. Figure 11.2 shows the ratio of unskilled wages between sending and receiving regions, which is the closest we can get to systematically quantifying and comparing such gaps. Since urban and rural employers competed for the same pool of unskilled migrant labor, these ratios are roughly indicative of returns to agricultural wage labor (or sharecropping) in the indigenous cash-crop sector. The comparison becomes more problematic in the 1950s, when public sector minimum wage policies began to distort this market mechanism (De Haas 2017a), although the rising cost of urban housing may at least have partially attenuated a growing rural-urban gap (Westland 2021). For this analysis, we assume that potential wage distortions were of the same magnitude in sending and receiving regions and thus had limited impact on the ratios presented here. Because we compare nominal wages, these ratios directly translate into differences in purchasing power of imported goods (after taking into account the cost of migration itself, and assuming that trade costs and import duties were similar in sending and receiving regions).[3]

Figure 11.2 shows that wage ratios between receiving and sending regions were sizable but varied. In southern Ghana nominal wages were, on average, over twice as high as in Burkina Faso in the period from 1920 to 1970 (a ratio of 2.3). In neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, the ratio was much smaller, but increased and overtook Ghana's in the 1950s. The ratio between coastal Senegal and the Gambia, both migrant-receiving, and migrant-sending Mali averaged out at 2. The wage differential between the Nigerian cash-crop regions and their major sending areas (northwestern Nigeria and Niger) was even larger. Buganda offered a much less impressive wage ratio of 1.5 overall, which nevertheless still corresponded with a wage premium of 50%.[4]

Overall, these figures suggest that cash-crop migration was profitable for a sustained period, but they in turn must be explained. Were these gaps driven by low wages in the sending regions, or by high ones in host communities? The next two sections systematically evaluate both possibilities and their possible causes. Moreover, how and why did opportunity gaps close over time? Section 6 will pick up this question.

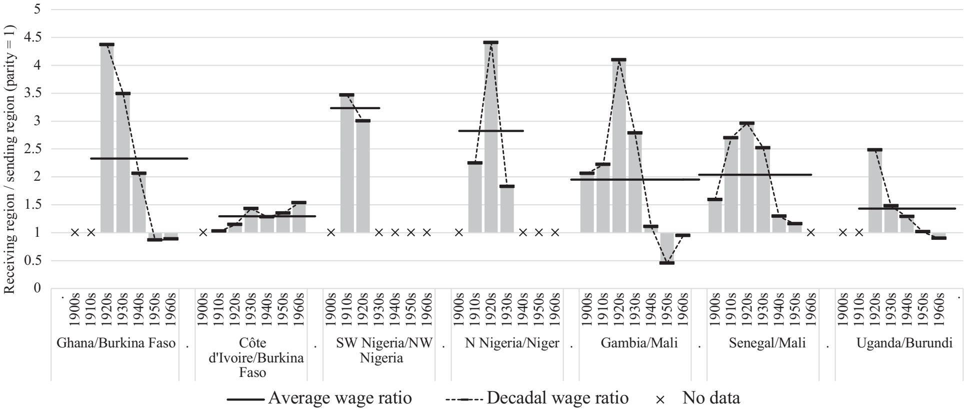

FIGURE 11.2 Unskilled nominal wage ratio between sending and receiving regions, 1900–69.

Sources: Unskilled nominal wages (averages of rural and urban wages if observed separately) for Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Southwestern Nigeria from Frankema and Van Waijenburg (2019), for Uganda and Burundi from De Haas (2019), and for central Northern Nigeria from Travieso and Westland (2021). The franc-sterling exchange rate used to convert wages into pound sterling from MeasuringWorth.org and unpublished extensions of the ACTD (Frankema, Williamson, and Woltjer 2018). From 1945 onward, wages are converted from CFA to franc (1 CFA = 1.7 franc in 1946–48; 2 francs in 1949–60).

5 Pressures in the sending regions

The endurance of labor migration systems in the process of capitalist development is often associated with declining access to land and livelihoods in sending regions. In Arthur Lewis' (1954) foundational "dual-sector model," cheap labor for developing capitalist sectors comes forth when the marginal productivity in an economy's subsistence sector approaches zero. This happens in situations where land is so densely and intensively used that it cannot accommodate any more productive labor, resulting in incomes close to survival level, widespread underemployment, and landlessness. However, these conditions were not in place in most of tropical Africa during the era of cash-crop migration. As was first systematically pointed out by Hla Myint (1958), African rural economies were generally not land-constrained, and did not operate at their productive limits. Widespread access to land meant that rural self-employment should have been sufficiently remunerating and livelihoods secure enough to prevent a rural exodus of low-wage workers.

However, the generalized premise of "Myintian" land abundance in African agriculture needs qualification. This premise certainly does not apply to Ruanda-Urundi, the major sending region for Buganda's cash-crop migration system, which was by far the most densely settled territorial unit in colonial Africa, and experienced rural poverty and recurrent subsistence crises before Europeans arrived (De Haas 2019, 388–90). Consistent with the high incidence of rural poverty, up until the 1940s wages in Ruanda-Urundi rank at the very bottom of all sending and receiving areas. That Ruanda-Urundi migrants offered their labor in Buganda despite comparatively modest wage gaps (Figure 11.2) is a testament to rural poverty in the sending area.

Nigeria's migration system was also influenced by land scarcity. The northwestern Sokoto Province, which supplied most of Nigeria's labor migrants, was densely populated despite the low carrying capacity of its savanna soils. In such conditions, high densities could only be sustained through short fallow periods, heavy manuring, and the intensive farming of riverine floodplains (Swindell 1986). As population grew in the early 20th century, increasingly marginal soils were brought under cultivation. When traditional methods of rising yields or expanding acreage were exhausted, the scarcity of floodable land put livelihoods at risk and motivated large-scale outmigration (Goddard 1974; Watts 1983). The wage observations we have for northwestern Nigeria and Niger rank at the low end of the wage distribution, confirming that rural livelihoods were close to survival level.

In the other major sending regions of the four cash-crop migration systems, the presumption largely holds that land was sufficiently abundant to sustain growing rural populations. Facing limited voluntary labor supplies, colonial states could draw from a register of strategies to push down reservation wages and force people to offer themselves for employment, either by exerting direct force or by deliberately disrupting rural livelihoods (Okia; Ribeiro da Silva and Alexopoulou, Frederick and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, Chapters 8, 9, and 12, this volume). Indeed, both Lewis (1954, 149–50) and Myint (1958, 326–7) suggest that such strategies were widely adopted by colonial governments in Africa to generate a cheap labor supply for capitalist development, for example, through large-scale land alienation in Kenya, Rhodesia, and South Africa. But can colonial interventions to overcome labor scarcity in a context of land abundance explain cash-crop migration?

There can be little doubt that colonial governments envisioned controlling a pool of cheap labor, and committed scant investment into infrastructure, education, or livelihood diversification in what would become the primary sending regions of cash-crop migrants.[5] Moreover, colonial administrations could use the introduction of monetary and labor taxes as a powerful instrument to push people onto the labor market (Okia, Chapter 8, this volume). A monetary tax generates a migratory labor supply when the required cash can only be obtained through wages, as was often the case in non-cash-crop regions. Additionally, a tax pushes up local labor supply, suppressing wages and thus incentivizing people to look for income elsewhere. Colonial labor and monetary taxes were introduced in most of the sending regions. In Ruanda-Urundi, the onset of large-scale migration coincided with the institution of a colonial poll tax (De Haas 2019, 392). In Northern Nigeria direct colonial taxation preceded cash-crop migration, but during times of hardship in the 1930s tax pressure was more harshly felt and may have encouraged mobility (Ochonu 2009, 90–3). In other sending regions, like the Senegalese interior, Mali, and northern Ghana, migration preceded the legal imposition of monetary and labor taxes, but expanded as the tax burden increased and enforcement was strengthened (Asiwaju 1976; Manchuelle 1997; Van Waijenburg, 2018).

Nevertheless, viewing taxation as the prime trigger of migration is problematic in several ways. First, the personal taxes that were instituted in sending regions were often not high enough to fuel mass migration. For example, at prevailing unskilled wage rates, a laborer in northern Côte d'Ivoire in 1925 could fulfill his yearly tax obligation in less than five days, while his counterpart in Ruanda-Urundi required less than four days in 1929.[6] Second, while the unevenness of taxation across space certainly played a part in some of our cases, it was far from a necessary condition for migration, as a comparison between two sending regions in the Ghanaian migration system shows. The increasing head taxes imposed by the French colonial administration in Burkina since 1906 contributed, as did the threat of forced labor and military conscription, to Burkinabè migration to the Ghanaian forest zone, where direct taxation was introduced much later (Coulibaly 1986). But a substantial share of migrant laborers in the cocoa farms came from northern Ghana even before direct taxation was imposed in 1936 (Thomas 1973).

Third, even if generating a labor supply was part of the reason why taxes were instituted, the direction of migration as it subsequently emerged largely defeated such purpose, even resulting in a loss of labor to colony and empire. Migrants from Burkina Faso, which the French designated as their prime "labor reservoir," did not offer their labor cheaply to the European plantations in Côte d'Ivoire but preferred to work on the native cocoa farms in neighboring Ghana, a British colony. The key migration destination began to gravitate toward Côte d'Ivoire only when forced labor was abolished in French West Africa in the late 1940s. Still, French colonial subjects continued to account for over 40% of people crossing the river Volta into Ghana up to the 1950s, as well as of immigrants present in Ghanaian cocoa-producing regions in the 1960 census (Gold Coast Government 1955, 14; Ghana 1962).

Moreover, forced labor policies and the imposition of cash crops in the sending regions, such as cotton in Mali, northern Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, or coffee in Ruanda-Urundi, tended only to contribute to people's decisions to work or even live elsewhere (Asiwaju 1976, 590; De Haas 2019, 398–400). While many migrants from the French-controlled Upper Senegal Valley went to coastal Senegal, others chose to go to the Gambia, again a British colony. Most migrants from Ruanda-Urundi did not move to the European plantations and mines in the Congo, but to native cotton and coffee farms in Uganda, yet again under British control. Part of the cash that migrants earned was used to pay taxes on return, and colonial authorities ratcheted up tax rates in response to migration. As such, colonial states certainly reaped some benefits from cash-crop migration. Yet, rural-rural mobility hardly took on the shape that colonial governments had envisioned and hoped for, and French authorities in West Africa and Belgian authorities in Ruanda-Urundi only reluctantly accepted a massive labor flow toward British territories outside their control (Roberts 1996, 173; De Haas 2019, 397).

In conclusion, pressures in the sending regions partially explain the supply of cash-crop migrants, serving as a contextual driver of migration in densely populated rural areas in Ruanda-Urundi and northwestern Nigeria. Still, the logic of colonial taxation as a prime driver of migration holds up at most only partially when confronted with the historical evidence, and gives at least some credence to Manchuelle's (1997, 90) stark claim, formulated in the context of the Senegambian migration system, that

> Taxation did not create labor migration in the Soninke homeland nor was it intended for that purpose by the French administration. Far more significant in this period than the taxation or other nonexistent coercion and economic disruption was the attraction of high wages and incomes in an expanding coastal Senegambian economy.

In the next section, we will scrutinize the latter component of this claim, by evaluating the role of opportunities in the four cash-crop migration systems.

6 Opportunities in receiving regions

Seasonality was at the core of rain-fed agriculture across tropical Africa, and thus became an important ingredient in migratory decisions. Even where land was abundantly available, it could not be profitably cultivated during the dry season, resulting in agricultural un(der) employment during that part of the year (Tosh 1980; Austin 2008). Food availability was also seasonal, with surpluses after the harvest but shortages toward the end of the dry season. In such conditions, sending off household members to work elsewhere during the agricultural off-season was a rational strategy, as long as "elsewhere" offered better opportunities to use labor productively during this time of the year. To evaluate the extent of potential complementarities, Figure 11.3 shows the intra-annual distribution of rainfall for the sending and receiving regions of the four migration systems.

Seasonal complementarities were most pronounced in the Ghanaian and Nigerian migration systems, where migrants moved latitudinally, cutting through ecological zones. By outmigrating during the long dry season, also known as the "hungry season," and returning to sow crops before the first rains, villagers from the Sahel fringes in the Sokoto Province in Nigeria temporarily relieved their families of seasonal nutritional stress (Swindell 1984; Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993, 199–200). A similar complementarity was found in Ghana, where migrants entered seasonal contracts and received their wages once the cocoa harvest was sold, approximately six months after they had started work (Cordell, Gregory and Piché 1996, 109; Austin 2005, 360).

In the Senegambia, on the other hand, migrants moved longitudinally between savanna systems with synchronized rainfall distributions. Even though absent migrant farmers could not contribute to cultivation in the sending region, their mobility could still benefit households' subsistence position. Food tended to be most scarce at the start of the wet season, before the first food crops were harvested. This meant that migrant-sending families had fewer mouths to feed at this critical time, while migrants were able to consume imported rice in the receiving regions (Van Beusekom 2002, 21–5; Swindell and Jeng 2006).

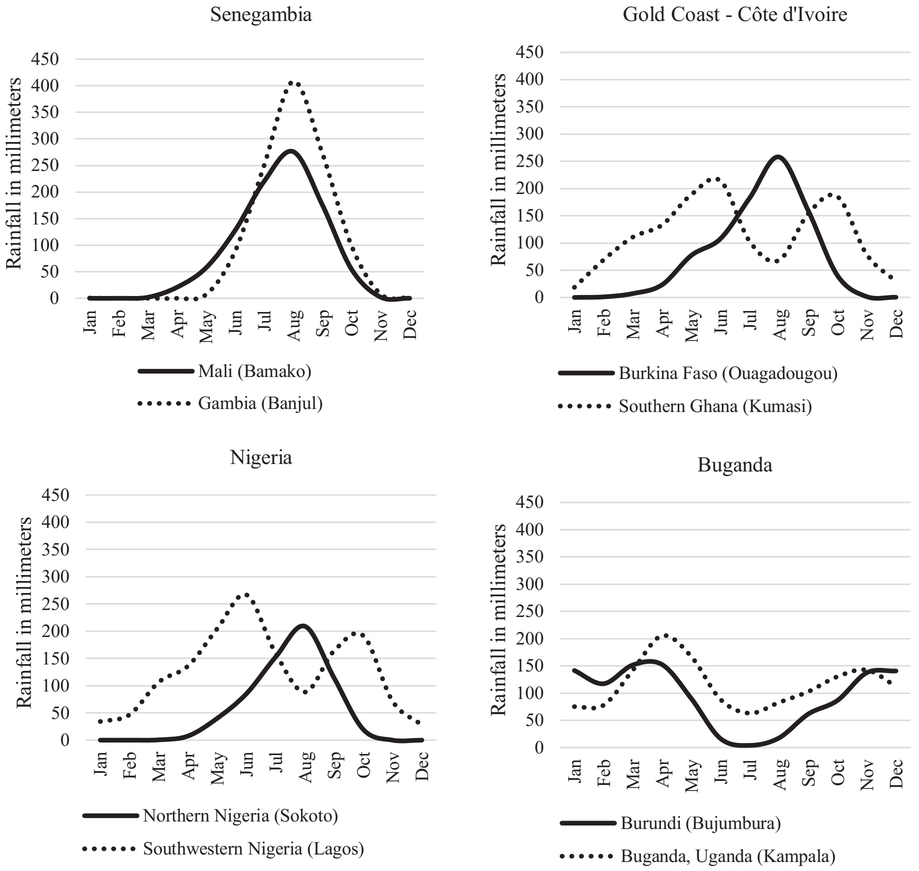

FIGURE 11.3 Rainfall seasonality in sending regions (solid lines) and receiving regions (dotted lines).

Sources: Average monthly rainfall estimates for the period 1931–60 from the World Bank Climate Knowledge Portal (https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org).

Seasonal cash-crop migration arose as a new and effective strategy of savanna households to mitigate recurrent episodes of dry-season hunger. It is telling that between the two world wars, male heights increased even more in Ghana's northern savanna than in the forest zone, indicating an improvement in the biological standard of living in the migrant-sending regions (Moradi 2008, 1115–6). In Northern Nigeria, growing population densities and reduced fallow periods in migrant-sending savanna areas also testify to the benefits of circular migration (Goddard, Mortimore and Norman 1975). That migrants exploited agricultural seasonality to their benefit, a strategy that moreover predated the onset of colonial rule, also undermines the idea that pressures in the sending regions due to colonial policies were the prime, let alone single, driver of cash-crop migration.

But was there perhaps a marked decline in income-earning opportunities during the dry season in the colonial era that triggered people to opt for circular mobility in such large numbers? Across the West African savanna, encompassing the sending regions of three of the migration systems discussed here, pre-colonial dry-season labor was employed in a range of non-agricultural economic activities, notably producing cotton fabrics which were traded in extensive regional markets. The traditional argument that cheap imported European manufactures successfully destroyed local circuits of production and exchange has been widely contested, and most scholars now stress the remarkable resilience of local handicraft industries (Frederick 2020). Soninke migrants even took local cloth with them to the coast to arbitrage price differences (Manchuelle 1997, 101, 188).

If the wage disparities observed in Figure 11.2 were not driven primarily by declining (seasonal) incomes in the sending regions, we should turn to the opportunities that attracted migrants to cash-crop zones beyond seasonal complementarity. Key was the accumulation of textile fabrics and other imported consumer goods, which returning migrants used to improve their social status, marry, or set up a home (Swindell 1984; Manchuelle 1997, 172; Austin 2005, 51–2; De Haas 2019, 394–5). In the receiving areas, imported products were easier to obtain, and especially could be earned faster, because nominal wages were so much higher – and in most cases substantially above barebones subsistence level (Frankema and Van Waijenburg 2012). Migrants engaged in price arbitrage, exploiting price and wage gaps between the sending and receiving regions, which opened up as a result of currency fluctuations and regional price imbalances, especially of locally produced goods with low tradability, such as liquors, handicrafts, livestock, and local building materials.

To exploit such opportunities, migrants often lived frugal lives in the receiving areas to maximize their savings, and brought back consumer goods for resale in their home communities (Manchuelle 1997, 120; Swindell and Jeng 2006, 60–1; De Haas 2019). As Swindell points out for the case of migrants from Sokoto Province, toward the end of the dry season people went from being migrant laborers elsewhere to traders in their own communities, selling the consumer goods they had brought with them in the return journey, and finally went back to being farmers (Swindell 1984). Colonial officials in Ruanda-Urundi saw migrants returning home loaded with textiles, which were used for bride price and to accumulate livestock. Migrants here also engaged in a lively currency trade (De Haas, 2019, 394).

At the same time, it is important to not overstate the opportunities available to cash-crop migrants. The returns to migrant labor gradually deteriorated between the late 19th and mid-20th century, as the price of agricultural commodities (and African real wages) declined precipitously relative to imported manufactured goods (Martin 1989). During the 1920s and 1930s, producers in East and West Africa had to work about twice as long to obtain the same amount of imported textiles as during the first two decades of the 20th century.[7] In French and Belgian territories, the loss of purchasing power was further compounded by substantial depreciation of their respective currencies to the pound sterling in the 1920s. In most cases, the Belgian and French francs made up lost ground during the 1930s, which reduced (but not erased) wage gaps with receiving regions in British territories (Figure 11.2).

That cash-crop migration systems, nevertheless, continued to be shaped by migrants' own aspirations is illustrated by savanna migrants changing their destination from southern Ghana to Côte d'Ivoire from the 1950s onward in response to changing wage premiums (Figure 11.4). This spatial shift was linked to currency alignments as well as the fortunes of the two countries' cocoa sectors. Ghana's cocoa farming began a decisive decline from the mid-1960s onward, as reserves of fertile land depleted and the Nkrumah government used the cocoa sector as a cash cow for the state coffers. In Côte d'Ivoire, virgin forest was still available and the opportunities for indigenous entrepreneurship expanded with the Houphouet-Boigny Law of 1946, which abolished forced labor. To boost the country's

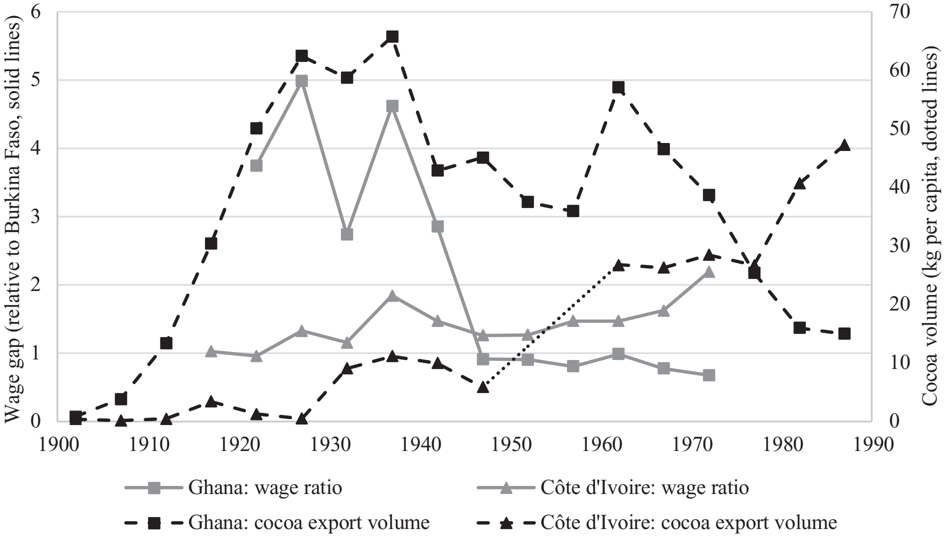

FIGURE 11.4 Wage ratios and cocoa exports in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (five-year-centered averages).

Sources: see Figure 11.1 and 11.2.

emerging cocoa sector, Côte d'Ivoire's post-colonial Houphouet-Boigny government welcomed rural migrants and facilitated their access to resources. The response of migrants, the majority of whom came from the country's northern regions, Mali, and Burkina Faso, was impressive. Between 1950 and 1965 the number of African international immigrants working in Côte d'Ivoire rose from 100,000 to 950,000, two-thirds of whom settled in the forest region (Bassett, 2001, 95). As one migrant from northern Côte d'Ivoire recalled in 1992: "we would be gone for 6 months, sometimes a year, and come back with a bicycle. Everyone saw that you could earn some money if you left the village, so people left to work for a bike." He also noted that "it wasn't like that during [the preceding regime of] forced labor; if the workers returned, they were in poor health" (quoted in Bassett 2001, 98).

Finally, cash-crop migrants also exerted their agency when choosing, if such options were available, whether to work for African smallholders, large African farmers, or expatriate employers in the same regions. While independent, small-scale family farmers widely took up cash crops, the development of export agriculture in receiving regions also underpinned economic differentiation among rural producers, allowing some to achieve substantial scale (Austin 2009, 34; Hopkins 2020[1973], 292). As Austin has observed for the case of Ghana, migrant workers could play different roles in small and large farms. Cocoa smallholders did not see migrant workers as an alternative to family labor, but as a way to supplement it in times of peak demand; very large cocoa farmers, on the other hand, required so much labor to look after many thousands of trees that they had to rely on migrants to a much larger extent (Austin 2005, 406–8). In some districts of southern Yorubaland, in southwestern Nigeria, inflows of migrant laborers concentrated on larger cocoa-bearing farms and made their expansion possible (Agiri 1984, 99–100). In Buganda, native farmers, operating at various sizes, proved more attractive employers than expatriate (Asian and European) planters, as the former offered, according to one colonial official, "conditions and inducements with which the private [sic] employers cannot compete" (Richards 1973[1954], 29).

In conclusion, opportunities in receiving regions were a key driver of voluntary cash-crop migration. Such opportunities arose from seasonal complementarities, which predated colonial rule but were compounded by the colonial-era "cash-crop revolution" in the receiving regions, while sending regions lacked similar dynamism. Migrants proved highly responsive to opportunities in receiving regions. They lived frugal lives in order to accumulate savings and consumer goods and engaged in price arbitrage, even though the returns to their efforts deteriorated over time. When opportunities in receiving regions changed, for example, as the center of gravity of cocoa production shifted from Ghana to Côte d'Ivoire, migrants responded with alacrity and en masse. In the final substantive section of the chapter, we will evaluate how cash-crop migration systems became less circular and eventually declined, while nevertheless leaving profound legacies.

7 Transformation and decline of cash-crop migration

Initially, cash-crop migration was characterized by the temporary and often circular mobility of adult men. Migrants typically moved for a few months and sometimes up to a few years, before going home to establish or return to a family holding. Over time, many extended their trips, and expanded their involvement in a wider range of economic activities in receiving regions. In the early 1970s, close to half of the migrants who were surveyed in the Gambia had already been present during the previous agricultural season, spending the dry season working in the docks, groundnut processing facilities, or setting up small businesses. For many, groundnut cultivation had become a means to accumulate capital, with the ultimate aim of setting up an urban business (Swindell 1977). In Buganda, the average length of migrant trips increased substantially in the 1940s, and women and children began to migrate alongside (and sometimes without) spouses, typically with the aim to move permanently. As migrants stayed longer, they also adopted new ethnic identities and married into receiving societies. The proportion of migrants who settled at their destination increased (De Haas 2019, 401–5).

Migrant settlement had profound demographic consequences, contributing to a major population shift even before migrants increasingly sought out booming cities after 1950 (Meier zu Selhausen, Chapter 13, this volume). As shown in Table 11.1, Buganda's population share with migrant origins rose spectacularly, from 12.8% in 1931 to 42.2% in 1959, about half of which was of non-Ugandan origin (predominantly Ruanda-Urundi). That the majority of migrants ended up in the countryside, and that this is not (yet) a story of urbanization, is illustrated by the fact that in the latter year only 6.8% of Buganda's African population lived in an urban or peri-urban context (Uganda Protectorate 1960). In rural Ghana, communities of settled immigrants also grew, as they successfully negotiated for longer-term arrangements as permanent laborers or, increasingly, as sharecroppers (Hill 1997[1963]; Robertson 1982). Most of these migrants were directly involved in cash-crop cultivation: foreign migrants came to represent 47% of permanent workers in cocoa farms in the 1960s (Addo 1974, 73). However, as Table 11.2 shows, the recorded growth of immigrant communities in southern Ghana was not as spectacular as in Buganda. This contrasts to a massive inflow of migrants in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, where foreigners comprised 22% of the forest regions' rural population (and 35% of the male rural population) by 1965,

TABLE 11.1 Enumerated migrant population of Uganda's cash-crop zone

		Total African population	*Total African migrants*	*African migrants, by origin*		
				Internal, other regions	*International, within Empire*	*International, outside Empire*
1931	Total counted	682,893	87,611	56,522	13,039	18,050
(May)	% of population		12.8%	8.3%	1.9%	2.6%
1948	Total counted	1,302,162	455,009	162,024[a]	40,506[a]	252,479[a]
(August)	% of population		34.9%	12.4%	3.1%	19.4%
1959	Total counted	1,834,128	773,645	355,570	51,044	367,031
(August)	% of population		42.2%	19.4%	2.8%	20.0%
1969	Total counted	2,617,609	723,508	319,308	108,444	295,756
(August)	% of population		27.6%	12.2%	4.1%	11.3%

Sources: Uganda Protectorate (1933); East African Statistical Department (1950); Uganda (1960); Uganda (1974).

Notes: The cash-crop zone comprises Buganda Province's constituent districts. Data for 1931, 1948, and 1959 pertain to individuals' ethnicity. Non-Ganda have been labeled as migrants, except for Banyoro in Mubende district. Data for 1969 pertain to individuals' birthplace and are therefore not strictly comparable to the other years (De Haas 2019, corrigendum 2021, 179–80).

a The sub-division by origin in 1948 is the authors' approximation.

TABLE 11.2 Enumerated migrant population of Ghana's cash-crop zone

		Total African population	*Total African migrants*	*African migrants, by origin*[a]		
				Internal, other regions	*International, within Empire*	*International, outside Empire*
1931	Total counted	2,152,472	248,650	54,806	60,190	133,654
(April)	% of population		11.6%	2.5%	2.8%	6.2%
1948	Total counted	2,862,668	297,429	196,890	45,600	54,939
(Jan/Feb)	% of population		10.4%	6.9%	1.6%	1.9%
1960	Total counted	4,369,904	689,803	301,283	94,380	289,640
(March)	% of population		15.8%	6.9%	2.2%	6.6%
1970	Total counted	6,021,704	596,783	462,691	26,971	104,358
(March)	% of population		9.9%	7.7%	0.4%	1.7%

Sources: Gold Coast (1932); Gold Coast (1950); Ghana (1962); Ghana (1975).

Notes: The cash-crop zone includes all administrative areas except for Volta, Togo mandated territory, Northern and Upper. Data pertain to individuals' birthplace. Data for 1960 suggests that the number of individuals with non-Ghanaian "origins" is about 50% higher than individuals with non-Ghanaian "birthplace," so these figures give a conservative estimate of the "migrant" population.

a Since the origin of a small portion of migrants is unknown, the sub-division by origin may not add up to the total migrants.

compared to only 2.5% in 1950 (Bassett 2001, 95). In the Gambia, settlement also increased, and some villages were even made up entirely of immigrants. However, over three in four immigrants enumerated in the Gambia in the early 1970s indicated they wished to return to their sending regions, which suggests that the Senegambian migration system remained comparatively circular (Swindell 1982).

It should not come as a surprise that an increasing share of migrants aspired to settle as they gradually adapted to the culture and institutions of receiving societies and expanded their networks. One major benefit of settlement is its compatibility with a stable family life, but the economic pay-offs to rural settlement could also be substantial. As migrants were increasingly able to obtain (often informal) land rights, they were able to secure their own food supply, and no longer had to share their agricultural output with hosts or employers. In the Yorubaland forest belt, in southwestern Nigeria, migrants' decision to settle permanently depended crucially on whether they could obtain land rights as tenants or freeholders. Where they could, migrants readily settled as independent cultivators, as in the case of farmers from communities in the Nigerian Middle Belt who moved to the eastern districts of the Yorubaland forest belt to plant cocoa in the 1940s and 1950s (Berry 1985, 56). Where they could not, circular migration remained dominant (Agiri 1983, 102). Pay-offs to settlement also varied substantially from case to case. In Asante, southwestern Nigeria, and Buganda, settlement enabled migrants to invest in their own tree crops (cocoa or coffee). In the Senegambia and in north-central Nigeria, peanut cultivation did not benefit to a similar extent from a multi-annual investment, which may be one factor contributing to limited settlement.

While (semi-)settled migrant populations increased, flows eventually began to dry up. As shown in Figure 11.5, the flows of migrants to Buganda and the Senegambia (expressed as a share of the host population) gradually abated. In the Buganda-centered migration system, male circularity became less attractive as opportunities for price arbitrage declined with the equalization of wages and prices in sending and receiving areas. In response, migrants

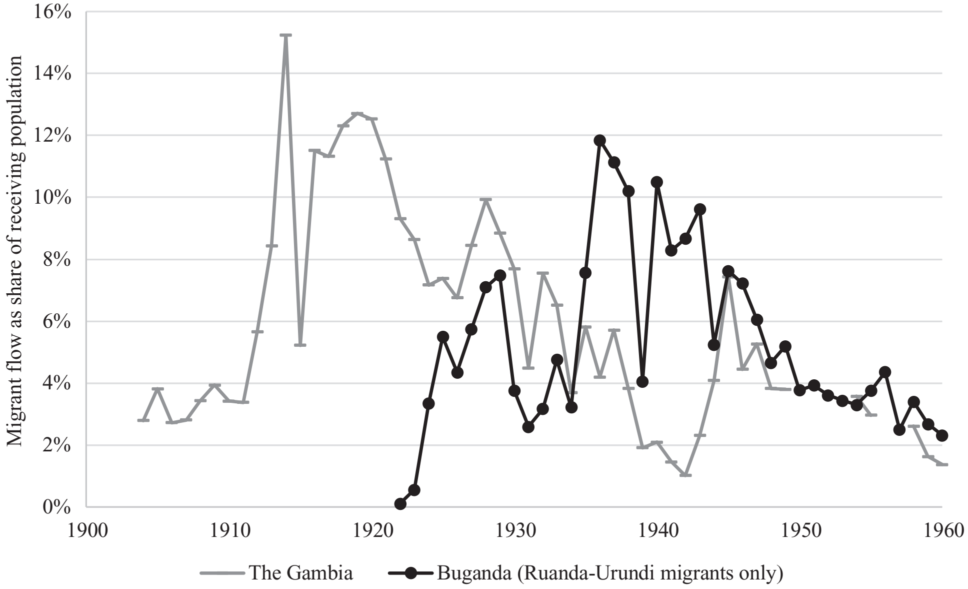

FIGURE 11.5 Migrants coming annually to the Gambia and Buganda relative to total receiving population, 1904–60.

Sources: Migration into the Gambia from David (1980, 467–8), Ruanda-Urundi migration into Buganda from De Haas (2019). Population estimate from the Gambia from Frankema and Jerven (2014) and Buganda interpolated from census data (see Table 11.2), assuming constant annual growth rates between census years.

either stopped making trips to Buganda or moved there once (more) to resettle on a more permanent basis (De Haas 2019, 401–5). In the early 1950s, a survey in three Buganda villages found that only one in seven migrants had plans to return to the sending region, and these were usually migrants from poorer sending regions, such as eastern Rwanda (Richards 1973[1954], 274; De Haas 2019, 404). In the Senegambia, the arrival of circular migrants also diminished, except from independent Guinea, which suffered badly from French economic retaliation, despite attempts by the Sékou Touré government to stave off an exodus (Swindell 1977). In the forest zones of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria, large opportunity gaps between sending and receiving regions, partly driven by nominal wage gaps and partly by the seasonal dynamics of these migration systems, continued to attract temporary migrants, as long as their cocoa economies thrived (Walker 2000).

To understand why the circulation that characterized cash-crop migration systems ultimately came to a halt we should evaluate the role of both increasing opportunities in sending regions and declining opportunities in the receiving areas. Many of the migrant-sending regions were gradually incorporated into the orbit of cash-crop cultivation themselves, as transportation and marketing infrastructure improved, and new agricultural technologies helped break labor bottlenecks in the savanna areas. In Ruanda-Urundi, the Belgian forced coffee campaign of the 1930s began to yield returns after the Second World War, and especially during the early 1950s, when commodity prices boomed. Cash crops not only brought in money to cultivators, but the increased export earnings also generated government revenues and enabled wages to rise and converge toward Ugandan levels (De Haas 2019, 401–2). As a result of coordinated efforts to provide inputs, including new seed varieties and improved marketing infrastructure, from the 1950s onward, cotton production expanded markedly in the sending regions of both the Senegambian and the Ghanaian/Ivoirian migration systems (Bassett 2001; De Haas 2021) The ability to grow and market cash crops locally raised the bar for people to choose migration over local employment, but since Côte d'Ivoire came to offer increasingly attractive conditions for migrants, the trip continued to be worthwhile for many.

During the second half of the 1940s, various coercive colonial institutions were dismantled in French and Belgian Africa, which also changed the dynamics of migration. In Ruanda-Urundi, corvée labor and chiefs' extractive powers were significantly scaled back in 1949, which reduced people's incentives to engage in labor migration. This effect was counteracted, to some extent, by the introduction of affordable buses and recruiters' lorries, which migrants could use to travel to Buganda (Richards 1973[1954], 56–63; De Haas 2019, 404). In the French West African colonies, the abolition of forced labor in 1946 had a rather different effect. Despite formal abolition of slavery half a century earlier, many captives' descendants had been retained in subordinate positions as domestic servants. This lack of emancipation was condoned by the colonial state, as "house captives" provided much of the forced labor requisitioned by the authorities for local public works and the settler plantations in southern Côte d'Ivoire. With the threat of forced labor gone, this system broke down, and former slaves in the sending regions began to engage in profitable migrant labor, alongside other young men, echoing similar developments just half a century earlier (Bassett, 2001, 96). The initial effect of the abolition of forced labor, therefore, was to extend people's capabilities to migrate, resulting in an uptick of the flow, which perhaps also contributed to the post-war increase of the migration flow into the Senegambia (Figure 11.5).

While opportunity structures in migrant-sending regions improved, they tended to worsen in the receiving regions. This was partly a cumulative feedback effect of migrant settlement. Settlers took up land, which had long been amply available in the Senegambia, Buganda, and the Ghanaian and Nigerian forest zones but became increasingly scarce, especially in the most commercially attractive parts of each of these regions. Moreover, as migrants began to settle in larger numbers while circular migration abated, local farmers lost their access to a cheap migrant labor force. These developments contributed to growing hostility toward migrants, whose rights to be present and access land had been poorly codified by colonial governments and were contingent on the support of local hosts. In the early 1950s, smallholders in Buganda began to express their grievances about the fact that migrants were increasingly taking up tenancies and were no longer willing to work for them, a trend that was enabled by large landowners who encouraged migrants to settle and open up their uncultivated land (Richards 1973[1954], 194–200).

As Ghana's agricultural export economy declined in the mid-1960s, the economic position of undocumented foreign migrants was increasingly compromised: years of voluntary immigration ended, for many, with the shock of forced displacement under the Aliens Compliance Order of 1969 (Addo 1974; Frankema, Chapter 15, this volume). In neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, instead, immigrants were drawn to the cocoa and coffee economy by the independent government's promise that "land belongs to those who make it bear" (Chauveau and Léonard 1996). However, in the 1980s, as the Ivoirian cash-crop frontier closed, strangers' land rights also became increasingly questioned by locals, leading to intense conflict (Chauveau 2006; Lentz 2006). The increasing pace of population growth in the second half of the 20th century intensified these struggles over resources, even if such competition preceded the height of the demographic transition in most cash-crop areas. Meanwhile, the expanding scale of African cities encouraged rural migrants to choose urban destinations (Meier zu Selhausen, Chapter 13, this volume).

Some of the cash-crop migration systems began to decline while the cash-crop economies themselves were still flourishing. In all cases, however, the sharp reduction of agricultural exports from the receiving regions from the 1960s onward marked their definitive undoing. The colonial-era "cash-crop revolution" had been predicated on extensive growth, converting increasing amounts of land and labor inputs into exports, with very limited technological change beyond the adoption of new cultigens and varieties. As land frontiers were closing, this type of growth was increasingly untenable. The cocoa take-off in southern Ghana and southwestern Nigeria was particularly dependent on fresh supplies of virgin land which sustained a "forest rent": the surplus derived from cultivating cocoa in cleared primary forest in comparison with planting it in land previously used for other crops (Ruf 1995).

Agricultural exports also became the cash cow of colonial states, and increasingly elaborate systems were put in place to tax rural production and export. From the 1930s onward, colonial states devised marketing boards which had the mandate to stabilize prices. However, marketing boards often accumulated large reserves, especially during the price boom of the early 1950s, which were used for development projects outside the agricultural sector. In Uganda, cotton and coffee prices were kept at an artificially low level during the late 1940s, which suppressed rural incomes. As world market prices worsened during the 1960s, Ugandan cash-crop farmers increasingly began to fall behind their wage-earning counterparts (De Haas 2017a). In the Senegambia, marketing boards had a similar effect on farmers' earnings (Swindell 1977). In Ghana, the marketing board monopoly of cocoa exports since 1939 imposed low real producer prices for cash-crop farmers during the late colonial period, and would do so again after independence in the 1970s and early 1980s (Alence 2001). In

Nigeria, the overvaluation of the naira following the oil boom since 1973 further penalized agricultural exports, reducing the exchange value of cocoa, groundnuts, and palm products, and thereby the profit margins of cash-crop farmers (Collier 1988, 761). Deteriorating economic conditions in the countryside created a fertile ground for resentment toward strangers who were increasingly perceived as taking up scarce land and jobs. It is no coincidence that mass expulsions such as those from Ghana (1969), Uganda (1969, 1972, 1982), and Nigeria (1983, 1985) often took place in the wake of economic decline (Frankema, Chapter 15, this volume).

8 Conclusion

This chapter brought together experiences of rural labor migration that shaped the development of export agriculture in East and West Africa. Between the late 19th and the mid-20th centuries, the "cash-crop revolution" presented rural communities across these regions with massive economic disparities. As this chapter strove to show, individuals and households in ecologically frailer or geographically isolated environments did not merely watch from afar as the new export economy brought prosperity to other places. In a colonial policy environment that was sometimes reluctant and often indifferent to their efforts, hundreds of thousands of Africans chose to embark on long, uncertain journeys to secure a material share of international agricultural trade. They did so balancing significant costs and benefits to familiar and communal livelihoods, and often at great personal risk. The result were cash-crop migrations signaled by dramatic inequalities and struggles for livelihoods, but also extremely rich in displays of creativity and economic initiative.

By looking at the interactions between sending and receiving regions in a comparative framework, we aimed to identify the defining features of this era of intense and widespread rural migration and understand the forces that brought it into existence, the factors which made it endure, and the causes behind its final decline. Like many other experiences of labor mobility in global history, cash-crop migrations were effective responses to large and protracted economic opportunity gaps, and were sometimes also a way out of rural poverty and seasonal hunger. But, unlike most examples of large-scale labor migration elsewhere, cash-crop migrations emerged in connection with, and decisively contributed to, a fundamental change in the nature of labor itself: the momentous transition from slavery to free labor. Their routes were also particularly fine-tuned to environmental opportunities and bottlenecks: African export-oriented agriculture was, in the 19th and for most of the 20th century, narrowly confined by nature, physical infrastructure, and farming technologies to specific places and seasons, and so only a handful of receiving regions accounted for extremely large and varied catchment areas. Finally, cash-crop migration systems declined as incomes between sending and receiving regions converged, partly as a result of the quickness with which previous generations of migrants had responded and partly because of the limits of the cash-crop economies themselves, faced with the closing of the agricultural frontier and decreasing producer prices for tropical agriculture.

The "do-it-yourself" nature of the cash-crop revolution, which economic historians of Africa attribute chiefly to the market responsiveness of indigenous farmers in export zones, was also defined by these entrepreneurial migrants through their bottom-up decision-making, at the individual, household, and village level. Their strategies went beyond choosing to offer their agricultural labor elsewhere, and encompassed small-scale trading and price arbitrage, wage contract and sharecropping negotiations, as well as deciding between alternative forms of mobility, from circular migration to permanent resettlement. In so doing, they ushered in a new kind of large-scale, long-distance, voluntary economic migration: a powerful response to yawning inequalities in material living standards across rural spaces. When seen in the long history of African mobility, their quest for economic opportunity foreshadowed future journeys that would lead many away from the rural world and into big cities in Africa and far beyond.

Acknowledgment

We thank Ewout Frankema for his comments and suggestions.

Notes

[1] Henceforth, we use the names of independent African countries also when discussing the colonial period, provided their boundaries broadly coincide.

[2] On slavery in Buganda, see Richards (1954); Twaddle (1988); De Haas (2019).

[3] A wage ratio of 2 means that wage labor in the receiving region provided double the purchasing power in imported goods compared to the sending region.

[4] For comparison, wage ratios between the migrant-receiving New World and migrant-sending Europe during the 1850s (the onset of the "Age of Mass Migration," see De Haas and Frankema, Chapter 1, this volume) were between 1.7 (Britain) and 3.7 (Norway). In the 1870s, indentured Indian workers in British Guiana, the West Indies, or Hawaii earned over five times as much as they would at home, while Chinese moving to Siam navigated a wage ratio of 3 (Hatton and Williamson 2005, 136–7).

[5] For northern Ghana and Burkina Faso, the extent to which such "underdevelopment" was actively used to generate labor supplies has been extensively debated; see, for example, Destombes (2006) and Cordell and Gregory (1982).

[6] For Côte d'Ivoire, see tax rate in Bassett (2001, 66) and wage rate in Van Waijenburg (2018); for Ruanda-Urundi, see De Haas (2019, 398).

[7] This estimate is based on the wage rates in Figure 11.2 and textile prices in eight British African markets from Frankema and Van Waijenburg (2012).

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