

Moving Towards Uncertainty: Migration and the Turbulence of African Urban Life

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1. Introduction

This is a discussion paper. It does not aspire to be a comprehensive review of the vast work on urbanization or migration. The paper assumes the continuation of an accelerating process of social change, both in rural and urban areas. It seeks to address several areas where the intersection of urbanization and migration, as a locus of research, might be most fruitful. How migration impacts on urbanization; how urbanization impacts on migration.

It seeks to pose the possibility—as opposed to arguing a fact—that the nature of these changes has been so extensive and deep as to have substantially displaced most functional centers of social gravity in both the countryside and the city. In other words, clearly discernible anchorage points—of institutions, conventions, cultural practices, local territories, and so forth—have been either been so twisted out of shape or simply erased so as to make conceptual navigation related to trajectories of migration increasingly difficult. If tracing the flows of movement --in terms of its conditionalities, vectors, motivations, and benefits--requires some semblance of clear distinctions among rural and urban and localities (historical particularities of social, economic and political organization), the grounds for this clarity are not being sustained. There have been years of warfare, popular disillusionment with African states, labor-intensive demands of securing basic needs, an entrenched "negotiability" of justice, and deleterious effects of internationally mandated and supervised economic reform processes. This accumulation of realities has largely overwhelmed the effectiveness of community life based on social reciprocity and the continuous interaction of complementary diversity.

As a result, the mechanisms through which local economies survive, let alone expand in scale and coalesce into new political formations are often unclear, as well as often murky and problematic. They can entail highly tenuous and frequently clandestine articulations among, for example, religious and fraternal networks, public officials operating in private capacities, clientelist networks mobilizing very cheap labor, foreign political parties, and transnational corporations operating outside of conventional procedures.¹ With these economic scenarios come more flexible configurations of associational life, more deterritorialized frameworks of

¹ M.Shaw 2002, "West African Criminal Networks in South and Southern Africa." *African Affairs* 101: 291-316; S. Ellis 1999, *The Mask of Anarchy*. London: Hurst and Company; P. Gastrow and M. Mosse 2002, "Mozambique: Threats posed by the penetration of criminal networks. Institute of Security Studies Regional Seminar, *Organised Crime, corruption and governance in the SADC Region*, Pretoria 18-19 April 2002.

social reproduction and political identity, as well as autochthonous preoccupations with belonging. Consequently, the efforts to "juggle" contradictory scenarios of wellbeing become more volatile and uncertain.

In response, both rural and urban dwellers pursue ways of collaborating with people often very different from themselves with whom they work out highly particularized relationships and ways of dealing with each other. These networks are not constructed in terms of conventional organizations or grassroots associations, but often involve large numbers of people who implicitly coordinate their behavior in the pursuit of objectives that have both individual definition but mutual coherence among participants. These are highly risky ventures. When they work, they work remarkably, providing participants with new opportunities and resources. When they don't, which given escalating levels of immiseration, is the more frequent occurrence, there is little to fall back on except to try and re-piece some scheme, some collaboration together again.

Within this remaking of everyday life, what constitutes the difference between voluntary and involuntary migration, political refugees and economic migrants, and even in some respects urban life and rural life can become vague. The sweeping nature of these changes does not mean the absence of any persistence of stable moral economies, viable livelihoods and production systems. Rather, these economies and systems must now try and survive within a context where their capacity to socialize and to be an authoritative structuring of people's practices, anticipations, and loyalties must increasingly co-exist with more "grab what one can however one can" economies.

Some General Features of Urbanization and Migration

Urban growth rates in Africa remain high, at nearly 5% on aggregate. Growth rates for Southern African nations with a high urban population as a percentage of total population, such as Zambia and South Africa, have slowed considerably, while traditionally non-urbanized societies, such as Mozambique and Tanzania, are experiencing urban growth rates of over 7%. Dar es Salaam and Maputo are some of the fastest growing cities on the continent. But cities simply can't keep up with the demands placed upon them. Africa's population base remains young, in part as life expectancy remains under fifty years and is declining with the impact of HIV/AIDs, even as fertility rates decline. Sixty-four percent of African household income is spent on food, as the poorest 20% of the population controls only 6% of national incomes.

Despite urban growth rates, on aggregate, access to clean water and sanitation facilities have not improved in twenty years, with a statistical majority of the region's population still without basic amenities.²

In a general climate of impoverishment and diminishing human services, there are often marked discrepancies in access to health services and education, safe water, and economic opportunities for women. While South Africa provides safe water for 90% of its urban population, Mozambique's coverage is only 17%. Health expenditure in Kenya constitutes 5.4% of the GDP, whereas in Senegal it remains at 2.1%. While 67% of the Nigerian population claims access to basic health care, this is true for only 25 % of Ghana's population, even though Ghana's poverty profile is generally less dire than that of Nigeria. Rates of illiteracy, pupil progression, public expenditure on education and primary enrollment ratios vary as well.³ Divergent trajectories of development including particular histories of national investment, environmental conditions, and political stability produce marked contrasts among nations in terms of distinct opportunities and resources for particular social actors. This patchwork of nation spaces both constitutes a complex topography of migratory flows and a potential motivation for this movement as well.

Despite disparate distribution patterns and impoverishment, it seems that city dwellers make concerted efforts to invest in an urban existence. Even when their consumption levels decline significantly, there remains an ongoing attempt to secure greater access to basic conditions of sustenance, such as water and electricity.⁴ Thus, the collective orientation of the poor—i.e. to engage the city as embodiment of specific long-term aspirations—can contrast markedly with the almost parasitical inclinations of ruling elite, which seem not adverse to running cities into the ground as they pursue sometimes perverse levels of consumption.

While urbanization by definition does not proceed in any orderly fashion, social and economic disarticulation within cities is intensified by frequently hostile receptions to migrant populations—more often those coming from other countries, but even increasingly to fellow nationals. Maintaining sizable numbers of urban residents in a position of uncertainty in terms of

² World Bank 2002, *African Development Indicators 2002*.

³ *ibid*

⁴ M Grimm, C. Guénard and S. Mesplé-Soms 2002, "What has Happened to the Urban Population in Côte d'Ivoire Since the 1980s? An Analysis of Monetary Poverty and Deprivation Over 15 Years of Household Data." *World Development* 30, 6: 1073-1095; Scientific Committee of the African Development Bank-OECD-CILSS 1995, *West Africa Long-Term Prospective Study*. Paris:OECD; Bamako: Sahel Institute.

accessing livelihood opportunities and their capacity to consolidate secure niches in urban space cheapens labor inputs, extracts various unofficial surcharges on consumption, and excuses public authorities from having to assume responsibilities for social reproduction.⁵ As villages and towns have historically invested in migration, especially in according status and prestige to those who do migrate to urban areas, there is great pressure on them to accumulate resources.⁶ If these migrants are unable to make sufficient money in cities, dwellers in rural areas, towns, and even secondary cities are more inclined to pursue more radical and localized measures to ensure accumulation opportunities.

This enforced precariousness of existence also strains the social fabric, prevents cities from a more comprehensive and effective use of urban productivity and forces larger numbers of residents to invest time and resources into distancing various points of engagement with formal urban institutions. Alternately, it introduces large measures of duplicity into these relationships.⁷

In many respects the logic of rule based on enforced precariousness of urban populations is related to the inability of regimes to secure sufficient resources to maintain power or thwart opposition by increasing the opportunity costs of opposition or rebellion. Once regions were able to cultivate elite from competing regions and/or ethnic groups within a nation through a balanced investment in education opportunities, human services and accumulation opportunities, and tie them to the state. But marked changes in the position of African nations within global economies have substantially diminished public resources available to states.⁸

When availed to education opportunities, and thus access to the most lucrative wage labor—usually located within the public sector—acculturation process exerted by both urbanization and conjoint participation in the state cements solidarity across regional and ethnic identification. The range of mechanisms employed for distorting markets, and thus extracting implicit forms of taxation from the non-urban areas, in favor of an urban elite are legendary. Participation in these distortions is usually conducted, however, in the interest of generating as many resources for the state, in turn to be distributed throughout the country.

⁵ Human Rights Watch 2002, *Hidden in Plain Sight: Refugees Living in Nairobi and Kampala*.

⁶ F. Machuelle 1997, *Willing Migrants: Soninké Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

⁷ M. Agier, 2002 “Between War and the City: Towards an urban anthropology of refugee camps.” *Ethnography* 3: 317-341; G. Kibreab 1999, “Revisiting the debate on people, place, identity and displacement.” *Journal of Refugee Studie* 12, 4. A. Amin and N. Thrift 2001, *Re:Imagining the Urban*. London: Polity Press.

⁸ J-P. Azam 2002, “Looting and Conflict between Ethno-Regional Groups: Lessons for State Formation in Africa.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46: 131-153.

As state functions are narrowed and oversee a process of substantial retrenchment of public employees, the subsequent decline of urban incomes, and the privatization of major economic interests, governance it is itself increasingly informalized. Specific dominant ethnic or territorial groups use this process of dismantling to transfer significant resources to private spheres which the state then uses its authority to mask.⁹ Those who are disadvantaged in this process increasingly resort to various forms of plunder and looting.¹⁰

The capacity to migrate, with its concomitant institutional underpinnings and preliminary planning, is also used to support a carefully cultivated political orientation to place. For example, migration sometimes embodies a willingness to "up the ante", so to speak, in struggles for access to and control over resources and power.¹¹ Prospective or actual movements can serve as bargaining chips to win from the state greater concessions or opportunities, since cross-border movements can affect inter-state relations. Ethnic and regional groupings have also been known to configure themselves transnationally in order to exert control over specific flows of cross-border commerce. They also can draw upon migrations outside of these immediate contexts, such as work in Europe, in order to promote greater control over such trade.¹²

In some contexts, migration has long been a normative means of articulating places and exchanges, bringing together discrete activities and domains, and as such, an integral part of multiplying livelihood opportunities, as well as ensuring their flexibility.¹³ Therefore, migrants are, in some instances, poor and rich, landed and landless, originating from regions steeped in long migratory traditions and from those without such traditions. There is also no specific hierarchy in connecting the spatialization of migration to particular states of efficacy. In other words, rural to rural migrants sometimes make out better than those that go to the city. Sometimes migration acts to intensify inequality; in other instances it decreases it. Depending on the nature of a person or group's pre-existing networks, migratory streams are sometimes

⁹ B. Hibou 1999, "The Social Capital of the State as an Agent of Deception." In J.-F. Bayart, B. Hibou and S. Ellis, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*. London: James Currey; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

¹⁰ J-P. Azam 2002, "Statecraft in the Shadow of Civil Conflict." *International Forum on African Perspectives*. African Development Bank and OECD Development Centre, Paris 4-5 February 2002.

¹¹ C. McDowell and A. de Haan 1998, "Migration and Sustainable Livelihoods: A critical review of the literature." IDS Working Paper 65. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.

¹² J. Egg and J. Herera (eds.) 1998, *Echanges Transfrontaliers et Integration Regional en Afrique Subsaharienne*. Paris: ORSTOM.

¹³ J. B. Adekanye 1998, "Conflicts, Loss of State Capacities and Migration in Contemporary Africa." In R. Appleyard (ed.) *Emigration Dynamics in Developing Countries, Volume 1: Sub-Saharan Africa*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

highly segmented; at other times, they cut through such segmentation.¹⁴

States have increasingly attempted to profit from migration through steering remittances into more formal channels of exchange.¹⁵ One-third of Mali's population lives outside Mali¹⁶ and one out of every twenty Senegalese presently resides outside Senegal. Formally accounted remittances in the latter--a marginal total of the overall amount--in 1994, nevertheless, averaged \$1, 731, 666 per month, and there were \$30 million of postal checks. In 1993, it is estimated that Senegalese immigrants in France remitted \$110 million dollars, primarily through informal channels.¹⁷ The Senegalese government has developed programs to encourage the participation of Senegalese abroad in a national effort to promote economic development. The components of these programs include the development of vocational training centers and medium scale industries. Senegal has concluded agreements with several countries so as to extend social security benefits to citizens working overseas. There is an effort to maximize the use of formal bank transfers, as evidenced by the nearly \$1 million that is transferred to the Banque de l'Habitat du Senegal from Libreville every month.¹⁸

Across Africa, individuals have known since childhood that emigration was probably inevitable and that one should prepare for it years in advance. Even if emigration is not possible, as it often is the case for many of the poor, it is still often necessary to become accustomed to and seek opportunities from continuous internal migration within a limited radius of movement. Such is the case, for example, in Greater Nairobi, where limited security of tenure combines with land grabs and land speculation to force larger numbers of the population to move from one informal settlement to another.¹⁹ In Brazzaville, the political *cum* ethnic balkanization of the city has in the past forced relocation into homogenous ethnic enclaves, which then serve as platforms for invasions aimed at claiming "external" territories, forcing relocation for others yet again.²⁰ Disparities in land and housing costs between central cities and the periphery in many countries

¹⁴ J. Ouchou 1995, 'International Migration and Sustainable Human Development in Eastern and Southern Africa.' *International Migration* 33: 31-53.

¹⁵ K. Hamilton 1997 "Europe, Africa, and International Migration: An Uncomfortable Triangle of Interests." Population Studies and Training Center Working Paper #97-02, Brown University.

¹⁶ McDowell and de Haan 1998

¹⁷ M. A. Diatta and N. Mbow 1999, "Releasing Development Potential of Return Migration: the Case of Senegal." *International Migration* 37, 1: 243-263.

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ E. Werna 1998, "Urban Management in the Provision of Public Services and Intra-Urban Differentials in Nairobi." *Habitat International* 22, 1: 15-26.

²⁰ F. Bernault 2000, "The Political Shaping of Sacred Locality in Brazzaville, 1959-97." In D. M. Anderson and R. Rathbone (eds.) *Africa's Urban Past*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey.

combine with diminishing formal employment to motivate homeowners to rent out their properties and relocate to self-built informal housing at the periphery.

Regardless of escalating crime, resurgent parochialism, the sprawl of urban areas and the cost of transportation, trajectories of individual movement appear to encompass larger distances and more of the city than once was prevalent.²¹ In part, this is a process facilitated by the diminishing efficacy of neighborhood surveillance imposed on resident's movements and activities, but which, at the same time, remains motivated largely by the very scrutiny that neighborhoods still attempt to exert.²² Whereas intensifying levels of insecurity may reaffirm the necessity of extended family and neighborhood ties, the insufficiency of these ties, as well as the constraints and costs of such dependency "force" people out into the city at large. Such extension, coupled with the counter-balancing reassertion of more "traditional" social organizations, will have a significant effect on the shape of urban politics.

Within Africa, a mixture of geopolitical pulls drives larger and more diverse populations into some form of migration. These include the virtual implosion of some nations, the intensifying dependency of some states on external ones, the gravitational force exerted by a small number of powerful states, as well as the intensified incorporation of some territories within global capital circuits and the marginalization of others. Sometimes these territories fall within the same national ambit. Within this macropolitical context, it is often difficult to make clear distinctions between refugees and various other categories of economic migrants.

This lack of clear distinctions is just one facet of what often appears to be a "hedging of bets" on the part of various African actors. Various strategies of livelihood formation, social affiliation and decision-making are attempted, with often no clear process of adding and discarding. What ensues is a space of heightened ambiguity, and accordingly, the following thematic discussions have much to do with how such a space is to be analytically navigated.

²¹ These observations are based on research in progress on "municipal identity" underway in Dakar and Douala.

²² I. Lourenço-Lindell 2002, *Walking the Tight Rope: Informal Livelihoods and Social Networks in a West African City*. Stockholm Studies in Human Geography 9. Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell International

2. “Movement” as an Emergent Concept

Movement As Its Own End

Africa is a space of intensified movement. Movement in a very broad sense, encompassing migration, displacement, and accelerated social mobility. But this movement is not totally subsumed by these categories. Movement has been appropriated as a multifaceted strategy of urban survival, accumulation but also control. It reflects the increasing material unavailability of specific urban territories as platforms on which to constitute the semblance of stable and coherent social existence. It also reflects the use of movement as an increasingly “normalized” social practice deployed to constitute both an experience of stability linked to the capacity of individual and social actors to continuously orient themselves to shifting terrain of economic activity and political disposition.²³ Movement is also a process without foreseeable end. When rural populations come to the city, they are deemed migrants, but an ongoing career of sometimes incessant shifts in places of residence and work within the city are often viewed analytically as separate from migration.

Movement also has little sense if it is not set against a process of staying still. Who migrates and who doesn’t remains a tricky difference, even when both parties face common economic and cultural situations. Simply raising this issue introduces necessary complexity in how we characterize particular local fields, forcing us to recognize the intricate interweaving of access to social networks, gender, age, physical location, asset holdings and political voice in migration decisions.²⁴ As migration for better livelihoods also proves more of a gamble, the abundance of stories concerning increased hardship and poverty being produced by migration gets potential migrants to reassess their plans. Equally important in this assessment is the extent to which either structurally or experientially people have specific place to go. To what extent are particular places linked through various flows and networks to a highly differentiated “larger world”—in terms of their relative inclusion in a broad topography of interconnections or an exclusion which compels people to leave even when knowing the risks involved.²⁵

²³ N. Papastergiadis 2000, *The Turbulence of Migration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

²⁴ U. Kothari 2002, “Migration and Chronic Poverty.” Working Paper No. 16, Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester. G. Malmberg 1997, “Time and Space in International Migration.” In T. Hammar, G. Brochman, K. Tamas, and T. Faist (eds.) *International Migration, Immobility and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford: Berg.

²⁵ P. Marfleet 1998, “Migration and the Refugee Experience.” In R. Kiely and P. Marfleet (eds) *Globalisation and the Third World*. London: Routledge.

The relatively new entrance of new actors is also shaping these considerations. For example, there has been an upsurge in number of women migrants in recent years.²⁶ This upsurge has varied consequences, from the reformation of transnational trading syndicates to the substantial expansion of sex trafficking. Women are being used to “trail blaze” new navigational paths into previously difficult to penetrate countries and regions, or carve out new niches in heavily gendered markets such as service sectors in Europe—often reversing conventional domestic roles of child care and household production in the process.²⁷

Migration has also conventionally tended to connote relocating a sense of belonging. Here, the migrant either attempted to incorporate their new positionality within a pre-existing space of belonging or sought to act on their new domain of operation in ways capable of incorporating the place from which they came. These ways might include either accommodating additional members of their social network or their customary social practices. A less common analysis is to see the process of movement as a means of effacing specific constraints posited by both environments. In other words as a particular means of continuously remaking spaces of operation by setting distinct environments “in face” of each other through their embodiment by the migrant, and in ways which owe no specific allegiance to the conventions of either.

Movement in this sense indeed reflects a kind of “dispossession.” But, it is one in which the migrant seeks to configure a certain capacity for improvisation so as to best capitalize upon economic and social opportunities opened up by the very inability of the city to fully incorporate—house, employ, and service—all those who make demands upon it. In other words, where migration may have been compelled by the long-term inability of many rural environments to provide for even subsistence needs²⁸ or the livelihood opportunities concentrated in cities, the proliferation of movement comes close to constituting its own enlarging and self-reproducing logic.

This is not quite movement for movement’s sake, but approaches a situation where the focus of investment, both in time, money and human resources, is directed toward ongoing movement despite whatever efficacy is derived from a particular destination at a particular time. The very

²⁶ C. Oppong 1997, “African Family Systems and Socio-Economic Crisis.” In A. Adepoju (ed.) *Family, Population and Development in Africa*. London; New Jersey: Zed Books

²⁷ A. Adepoju 2000, “Regional Integration, continuity and changing patterns of intraregional migration in Sub-Saharan Africa.” In M.A.B. Siddique (ed.) *International Migration into the 21st Century*. Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing.

ability to accrue the earnings from one's labor to the progressive development of a specific territorial position is increasingly doubted and held in suspicion.²⁹ The notion is that limited savings must be directed toward ensuring a capacity to act flexibly in face of uncertain social, economic and political conditions. This is a burgeoning anticipation that everything that will be possible to do in the future is necessarily provisional. This provisionality threatens to undermine all gains if actors are compelled to defend their positions in given territories rather than to acquire an increased ability to adapt to a wide range of them. With both increased affiliation and affinity with movement, a highly mobile collective subject is configured³⁰—the identity of which, though unstable and not thoroughly consolidated, does resonate with long and multiple African traditions of locality.³¹

Structuring Movement

There are of course constraints on movement. Constraints structured according to specific geographic and political locations. The aspiration for emigration out of many Southern nations exceeds the capability to move, and as such, accounts for the fact that a larger volume of migration does not occur.³² The nature of local resources capable of being deployed for emigration and the various national and regional policy frameworks and regulatory instruments applied to controlling migratory movements combine to elaborate specific modalities of migration. Here, movement is enabled under specific auspices, each with their own associated requirements, risks, and costs—i.e., labor permits, family reunification, political asylum, illegal status, overstaying tourist visas.³³

This interaction of individual or local capacity and external regulation, in turn, structures specific practices of “enrolling” external, non-local territories as important facets of the project of life-making and entail particular meanings about the places that individuals call “home” or about where they are presently “located.” In assessing specific individual and regional

²⁸ S. Snerch 1995, *Preparing for the Future: A Vision of West Africa in the Year 2020*. Paris: WALTPS/CILSS/Club du Sahel/Cinergie.

²⁹ Savina Ammassari and Richard Black 2001, *Harnessing the Potential of Migration and Return to Promote Development: Applying Concepts to West Africa*. Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex.

³⁰ D. Cordell, J. Gregory, V. Peché, *Hoe and Wage: A Social History of a Circular Migration System in West Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

³¹ J. Hanson, “Islam, Migration and the Political Economy of Meaning: *Fergo Nioro* from the Senegalese River Valley 1862-1890,” *Journal of African History* 35 (1994):37-60.

³² T. Faist 2000, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*. Oxford: Clarendon.

³³ J. Carling 2002, “Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, 1: 3-42.

orientations to movement, how particular meanings are ascribed to emigration must be considered.³⁴ The very aspiration to migrate itself may be largely a culturally defined notion of proactivity, and as such, carries with it a series of embedded obligations to elaborate networks and institutions of concrete support. These in turn face more proficient instruments mobilized to monitor migratory flows, and assess the veracity of claims made to access external spaces.

In much of the continent a long-term normalization of cross-border movement as a way of life interacts, sometimes with marked complicity and at other times with marked turbulence, with population displacement as a tool of regimes, rebellions or private forces consolidating power, populating or emptying out contested regions.³⁵ The status of particular regions or territories within competing popular imaginations, competing claims on the part of both local and multinational companies, and the exigencies of “domesticating” actual or emerging conflict render larger numbers of people expendable or objects of manipulation. These dynamics severely complicate resettlement of displaced populations. This is particularly the case in situations where there is the persistence of strong arguments as to not only where specific populations rightly belong, but also to their various positionalities in these places, as well as the popular perceptions of the rights and resources to which they can legitimately claim.³⁶

In post-conflict situations, there has often been a marked rearrangement of status and access to wealth and resources in areas where the bulk of the conflict was played out. These are disparities which most political settlements do not address, and which leave key areas in many nations having experienced unrest vulnerable to seething tensions among groups who must share territories without relinquishing new and historical resentments. Sudden accumulations and divestitures supplement profiles of constant impoverishment. The rush to normalcy on the part of regimes often entails transferring ownership of productive assets, such as land and infrastructure to the ownership or management of large private companies. This is a move which attempts to quickly rationalize the distortions, predation, and illegalities prevalent in the conflict and circumvent debilitating internal competition but which fail to address the inequities that

³⁴ L. M. Guarnizo and M.P. Smith 1998, “The Locations of Transnationalism.” In M.P. Smith and L.M. Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from Below*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction

³⁵ S. Van Hooyweghen 2001, “Sovereignty in Postcolonial Tanzania.” *New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper 49*, United Nations High Commission on Refugees; O. Bakewell, 2000, “Returning refugees or migrating villages? Voluntary repatriation programmes in Africa reconsidered.” *New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper 15*. United Nations High Commission on Refugees.

³⁶ J. Crisp 2000, “Africa’s Refugees: Patterns, Problems and Policy Challenges.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 18, 2.

often fuel conflict in the first place.³⁷ In the prolonged absence of effective state management of its domain, let alone the rule of law, transition periods are often marked by the quick grabs of available assets. The return to some kind of normalcy, then, can be almost as unsettling as the conflict itself, particularly as populations who either left their homes or adamantly stayed put discover that their respective orientations and strategies will produce few prospects for the future. As Addison indicates, lingering high levels of uncertainty reduce incentives on the part of local populations to invest in the practices, institutions, and norms capable of generating long-term benefits as opposed to incessantly opportunistic behavior.³⁸

Still, with escalating fluidity, there are still powerful mechanisms of emplacement that persist even as shells or shell games. For even in regions where functional state authority has largely collapsed, the sovereignty accorded to states by the international community still renders them important resources, not only for the accumulation of wealth and opportunity, but a locus through which the disadvantaged can ensure a modicum of predictability to life events.³⁹ Even when state institutions fail to operate in the way that they are supposed to, ministries and bureaus become sites for making connections, structuring a wide range of transactions and operating as loci for mitigating the total arbitrariness of local decision-making. Judgements, licenses, documents and certificates are issued which find forms of negotiability, even if not the ones intended and which can still find currency in a larger space of operations. The surface legitimacy of state institutions—even those devolved into providing the seal of legitimacy to basic pillage—still are primary conduits for development assistance and foreign direct investment, sometime the primary source of external capital for many localities.

Although movement is performed by seemingly disconnected individuals uprooted from home and stable places of belonging, the agendas and motivations that reflect those of autonomous individuals do not necessarily drive it. Rather, the danger posed by individuals as disconnected agents constitutes a persistent and deep-seated concern of many African societies. If stabilizing particular configurations of social and institutional life within the confines of

³⁷ T. Addison 2000, "From Conflict to Reconstruction." In T. Addison (ed.) *From Conflict to Reconstruction in Africa*. Helsinki: UNU/WIDER.

³⁸ T. Addison 2001, "Reconstruction from War in Africa: Communities, Entrepreneurs and States." Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford. A. Hoefler 1999 "Challenges of Infrastructure Rehabilitation and the Reconstruction of War-Torn Societies." Background paper for African Development Bank Report 1999 REP 200-02.

specific territorial placements is either materially not viable or generates unacceptable levels of internecine conflict, social stress, or unmanageable reciprocal obligations, then local institutions should be flexibly shaped to incorporate shifting social compositions. Thus, a sense of stability is forged from the very instability of the compositions and relations of those institutions that try to provide a platform for social connectedness and collaboration.⁴⁰

To “place” individuals, then, does not mean to incorporate them as permanent members of a specific locality, but rather orient the construction of “locality” to an ability to continuously, if only temporarily, root specific persons to a series of collaborations and obligations. Not only do social institutions accommodate themselves to such assumed and potential mobility, but also become drivers of it—as the principles and terms of affiliation and cooperation are more heterogeneous and contingent.

Movement reflects a growing inability of individuals to “remain in place. Yet, the very sustenance of specific places themselves requires movement. This requirement exceeds the narrow sense that remittances derived from earnings away from “home” are required to maintain a functional sense of “home”, or at least a continued sense of ancestral identification. The need goes beyond the injection of funds. Rather, the logic by which many of the critical local social institutions operate cannot be sustained without the continuous ebb and flow of specific populations or without the coming and going of diverse members plying diverse networks in various locales. Without understanding movement as part and parcel of the very lifeblood of particular local social institutions, analysts miss possibilities of policy and programmatic engagements with an important social infrastructure-- albeit of limited visibility due to its dispersion and complexity—that cuts across rural, peri-urban, urban, national and regional boundaries.

Populations come to seem more rootless and rooted than they may be in actuality. The efficacy of mobile and flexibly structured local institutions still depend upon a sense of anchorage or emplacement. Yet, policies oriented toward making the many facets of populations

³⁹ P. Englebert 2002, “Congo’s Nationalist Paradox: International Sovereignty and the Dynamics of Self-Determination.” Working paper for Queen Elizabeth House Project “Global Cultural and Economic Discourses of Self-Determination in Developing Countries.”

⁴⁰ M. Ferme 2001, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History and the Everyday in Sierra Leone*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press. P. Donnelly-Roark, K. Ouedraogo and X. Ye 2001, “Can Local Institutions Reduce Poverty: Rural Decentralization in Burkina Faso.” Economic and Social Development Unit, Africa Region, the World Bank. M. Wan 2001, “Secrets of Success: Uncertainty, profits, and prosperity in the Gari Economy of Ibadan 1992-94.” *Africa* 71, 2.

in movement less problematic act to undermine this limited but necessary anchorage, and then in ways that turn such population movements into the desperate meandering they have too often inaccurately been taken to be.

3. Patchwork Economies

Rural Change

Much of rural Africa is in crisis. The degradation of environments due to climatic change, the attenuation of local knowledge systems, and a more desperate approach to resource use undermine livelihoods. But perhaps more important, the institutional structures of rural life, which served as a locus for resource regulation, social reproduction and the production of new adaptive knowledge are being depleted.⁴¹ These structures managed complex interchanges of actors, and could ensure a balanced approach to the need for productivity and equanimity. As specific territories are less able to provide for the basic needs of tenant populations, and as violent political conflict becomes entrenched as a modality of economic accumulation, these populations become more transient, and the subsequent destinations more prone to contestation over rights of use and settlement.⁴²

As the socializing capacity of local institutions declines, so does their capacity to structure productive activities. Non-farm related employment in the rural areas increases as agricultural activities among urban residents increase. Extended family systems are less able to draw upon their members for labor, thus instilling a greater dependence on wage labor for agricultural activities and providing individuals with a greater range of exit options when faced with intra-household tensions regarding the use of available assets. The trade in secondary rights to land thus becomes more prevalent but remains an insecure form of tenure, especially as land market transactions are increasingly lucrative in the escalating demands by the political elite for land, urban housing and corporate agriculture.⁴³ At the same time, the deployment of remittances

⁴¹ W. Franklin and G. Cardy 2002, "Environment and Forced Migration: A Review." In Michael B. K. Darkoh and Apollo Rwamire (eds.) *Human Impact on Environment: Sustainable Development in Africa*. Oxford: Ashgate.

⁴² M. Mwanasali 1999, "The View from Below." In M. Berdal and D. Malone (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*. Boulder;London: Lynne Rienner; M. Duffield 1998, "Post-Modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection." *Civil Wars* 1, 1: 66-102.

⁴³ B. Mararo 1997, "Land, power and ethnic conflict in Masisi 1940s-1994." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30: 503-537.

from migrants into land investments wane as the costs of education, health care and consumer goods increase.⁴⁴

A shrinking public sector, and the concomitant phasing out of agricultural subsidies, extension programs, and marketing programs attenuates the links between local rural institutional life and larger markets and institutional spheres. Incentives for export-led primary production have tended to intensify the marketization of land and production at scale, constraining small farmers from expansion, boxing them into overuse of limited land holdings, and often disrupting the various ways in which rural actors could negotiate access to opportunities and resources.⁴⁵ The emphasis on enhanced procedural clarity and rationalization of land production, as well as adjudication of claims and resource rights, has eroded intricate complementarities among diverse actors, making it difficult for them to rely upon those complementarities as a means of securing some access to livelihood, no matter how limited.⁴⁶ Competition is intensified, but without new inputs and capital, such competition seldom produces more efficient and sustainable resource use. Instead, it exerts a debilitating effect on the coherence of rural communities. Even when new national policies provide for varying forms of communal ownership, security of tenure, and long-term usufruct agreements, they tend to further incorporate rural domains into the purview of the state and its administrative structures.⁴⁷

With limited access to credit that can be used to upscale production activities, coupled with continuous high costs of transportation and storage, small farmers are always vulnerable to a range of external shocks. This situation can tighten the hold on land exerted by customary tenure systems that usually impose narrow terms of inheritance and entitlement. There are few opportunities for local investment in infrastructure and thus limited opportunities for capturing investment-level remittances from migrants. As the levels of remittances decline, in part due to increases in the cost of urban living, the absolute dependency on them for daily rural sustenance

⁴⁴ C. Tacoli 2002, "Changing rural-urban interactions in sub-Saharan Africa and their impact on livelihoods: a summary." *Working Paper Series on Rural-Urban Interactions and Livelihood Strategies*. Working Paper 7. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

⁴⁵ D. Bryceson 1999, "Sub-Saharan Africa: Betwixt and Between." De-Agrarianisation and Rural Employment Research Project. African Studies Centre, University of Leiden; D. Bryceson 2002, "Multiplex Livelihoods in Rural Africa: Recasting the terms and conditions of gainful employment." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, 1: 1-28; E. Francis 2000, *Making a Living: changing livelihoods in rural Africa*. London: Routledge.

⁴⁶ S. Berry 1995, "Stable Prices, Unstable Values: Some Thoughts on Monetization and the Meaning of Transactions in West African Economies." In J. Guyer (ed.) *Money Matters: Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; London: James Currey.

⁴⁷ A. Wiley 2001, "Reconstructing the African Commons." *Africa Today* 48, 1: 77-99.

increases.⁴⁸ It is clear that in many rural areas the moral economy that links rural and urban, local and migrant residents remains strong, and remains concretized through financial means. There is even the elaboration of more reciprocal relationships in the flows of resources—monetary, consumable, symbolic—between rural and urban areas.⁴⁹ Still, greater rural social differentiation begins to emerge as larger numbers of migrants operate at greater physical and emotional distance from their places of origin.⁵⁰

In their study of the Limpopo Province in South Africa and five regions in Botswana, de Haan et al found a persistence of largely circular patterns of migration, with migrants maintaining rights to land use and other assets, although the lengths of stay were growing longer. In this study, household wealth is positively correlated to both the incidence and capacity of migration, as remittances continue to play a critical part in improved rural livelihoods. Concomitantly, greater availability of land or other assets to less endowed persons or households does not appreciably slow down out-migration.⁵¹

As the cost of urban living has risen enormously in the post-structural adjustment period, a two-fold character to urban provisioning has emerged. On the one hand, trade liberalization regimes have flooded local markets with cheap imports, undermining what limited manufacturing sectors did exist in urban areas. On the other hand, the diminution of national economies has been in some cases so extensive that even these cheap imported provisions have become too expensive for local consumption. Dependency on the urban hinterland for most basic consumables grows. Depending on the geographical positioning of cities, as well as the characteristics of the built environment, transport and communications systems, natural resources and institutional proficiencies, the implications of this burgeoning reliance on urban hinterlands may either have severely negative ecological consequences or posit new opportunities for urban sustainability.⁵² A critical issue remains the enlarging footprint of the city as it, for example,

⁴⁸ C. Tacoli 2002

⁴⁹ S. Findley 1997, "Migration and Family Interaction in Africa." In A. Adepoju (ed.), *Family, Population and Development in Africa* London; New Jersey: Zed Books

⁵⁰ M. de Bruijn, R. van Dijk and D. Foeken, eds. 2001, *Mobile Africa*. Leiden: Brill. G. Schrieder and B. Knerr 2000, "Labour Migration as a Social Security Mechanism for Smallholder Households in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Oxford Development Studies* 28, 2: 223-236

⁵¹ A. de Haan, J. Kirsten, J. Rwelamira "Migration and Rural Assets: Evidence from Surveys in Three Semi-Arid Regions in South Africa, India and Botswana." Poverty Research Unit, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

⁵² T. Dietz and F. Zaal 2001, "The Provisioning of African Cities, with a Case Study of Ouagadougou." In I. Baud, J. Post. L. de Haam and T. Dietz (eds.) *Re-aligning Government, Civil Society and the Market: New Challenges in urban and regional development. Essays in Honour of G.A. de Bruijne*. Amsterdam: AGIDS, pp. 309-328; A. Allen

must draw water and the sources of biomass fuel far beyond the city boundaries and thus compete more directly with rural uses of land.

The recent surge in the diversification of rural incomes, with the vast majority of rural households now having one or more non-agricultural income sources, leads to a greater individuation of economic activity. The structures of economic rights and responsibilities are changing within peasant households, and they take an increasingly ambiguous character.⁵³ As economic individuation spreads, the labor-intensive mechanisms of negotiation that have come to characterize local institutions in many rural settings—precisely as ways to reduce ambiguity through availing different actors to various conduits through which to access resources and opportunities—become less viable.⁵⁴ Diminishing viability is also due to the continued cultural and political valorization of rural existence as an agricultural one, even if farming makes up less and less of the total volume of livelihood. There is thus a subsequent disjunction between social and economic realities as agricultural work continues to constitute the basis of social status in most rural settings.⁵⁵

The factors driving diversification are also complex. To some extent weak financial markets and social insurance must be compensated with the pursuit of diverse sources of income in order to mitigate consumption variability, as rural dwellers must compel as much as they can from a limited range of assets—which may be generating diminishing returns.⁵⁶ Diversification also stems from the fact that, as economies of scale are rarely operative in African agricultural production, agriculture itself must be practiced across heterogeneous landscapes and climatic conditions.

What is critical is that diversification in its own terms does not stem from or guarantee a larger asset base. While nonfarm income is clearly associated with higher welfare, access to high return nonfarm activities can be significantly constrained by a preexisting lack of land,

2001 “Environmental Planning and the Management of the Periurban Interface.” Keynote Paper for the Conference Rural-Urban Encounters: Managing the Environment of the Periurban Interface. London 9-10 November 2001.

⁵³D. Bryceson 1999

⁵⁴ S. Berry 1997 “Tomatoes, land and hearsay: property and history in Asante in the time of structural adjustment,” *World Development*, 25, 8:1225-1241; K. Meagher 2001, *The Bargain Sector: economic restructuring and the non-farm sector in the Nigerian savannah*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

⁵⁵ T. Kelsall, 2000, Governance, Local Politics and Districtization in Tanzania: The 1998 Arumeru Tax Revolt’, *African Affairs*, 99, 397 (2000): 533-551.

⁵⁶ T. Reardon 1997, “Using Evidence of Household Income Diversification to Inform Study of the Rural Nonfarm Labor Market in Africa.” *World Development* 25: 735-748.

tools, resources, and status.⁵⁷ For example, better-off farmers frequently seek labor saving technologies in order that household members can be freed to participate in better-paid nonfarm labor.⁵⁸ As women often assume primary responsibility for subsistence food production, policies that have emphasized liberalization as a mechanism to capacitate export-oriented agriculture cause them to suffer from increases in the price of inputs yet benefit little from rises in producer prices.⁵⁹ Left with a limited diversification of assets and income portfolios, the poor are trapped in low-return activities, while those of greater capacity use the increasingly diverse cross-sectional portfolios to acquire a larger share of available assets in land, labor and capital equipment. As a result, social differentiation within rural domains becomes more marked.

It is estimated that 70-75% of the rural population in Sub-Saharan Africa lives on fragile lands—lands whose phosphorous deficiencies, low rates of water infiltration and retention and low organic content severely limit agricultural production.⁶⁰ The actual proportion of national territories constituting arable land is contracting. This is particularly the case in Southern Africa, where, for example, the proportion of arable land in Zambia and Zimbabwe is presently no more than 7%.⁶¹ The volatility of land politics in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, coupled with adverse climatic conditions is presently severing compromising food security and spurring significant population movement.⁶²

Whereas rural institutions were largely oriented toward amplifying a concrete reciprocity among actors, with an attendant effort to minimize the visibility of disparities in access and income, the sense of a disparity has grown. This may not be attributable as much to changing local dynamics as it is to a greater awareness on the part of local actors as to the larger political and economic context in which they are situated. A procedural democratization of most African societies has generated new economies of information flow. As a result, citizens are much more

⁵⁷ Barrett, Christopher B., Thomas Reardon and Patrick Webb. 2001. "Nonfarm Income Diversification and Household Livelihood Strategies in Rural Africa: Concepts, Dynamics and Policy Implications." *Food Policy* 26(4): 315-31.

⁵⁸ T. Reardon 1997

⁵⁹ J. Leavy and H. White 2000, "Rural Labour Markets and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa." Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

⁶⁰ World Bank 2002, "Living on Fragile Lands: Inclusion, Innovation and Migration." *World Development Report 2003: Sustainable Development in a Dynamic Economy*.

⁶¹ CIA World Fact Book 1998.

⁶² FAO, 2002, "HIV/AIDS, Agriculture and Food Security in Mainland and Small Island Countries of Africa." Twenty-Second Regional Conference for Africa, Cairo 4-8 February 2002. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations.

aware of fundamental inequities. When the distribution of inequity is spatialized, actors will attempt to relocate themselves in contexts where incomes are expected to increase.⁶³

At the same time, rural orientations and even rural agricultural production in some countries are reinforced by specific trajectories and constraints of urban operation, which make clear divides between the rural and the urban ambiguous. For example, in Jens Andersson's work examining Buhera migrants in Harare, rural investment as a sociocultural disposition—i.e. a means of elaborating particular frameworks and practices of belonging—becomes a basis for different ways of working in the city. Access to work, shelter and sociality in urban areas is contingent upon how Buhera urban residents relate to particular rural resources, such as land, rural livelihoods and local politics. In other words, what urban residents are able to do in the city—e.g., how they can acquire urban shelter, how they can work collaboratively with others to elaborate urban livelihoods—remains in large part a function of how they position themselves in relationship to their rural historical ties.⁶⁴

In Lilongwe, Harri Englund found rural and urban areas linked in complex moral economies that at one and same time required clear differentiation between the two domains but also thick inter-linkages that made clear distinctions between domains difficult. Residents frequently tolerated poor urban living conditions as a means of maintaining relatively prosperous rural positions, while many rural residents were clearly dependent upon a range of inputs derived from urban social networks. As the price of food and shelter has increased substantially in the city, in light of structural adjustment policies which eliminate price subsidies and permit a liberalization of trade, attachment to rural areas is reiterated as a means of access to food production. Given an overarching context of economic hardship, such complementarities require both the reiteration of reciprocal obligations between rural and economic households as well as a means of modulating the degrees of mutual demand. Such a task requires moral economies that both efface the “distance” between the urban and the rural as well as amplify it.⁶⁵ A translocal topography predominates which incorporates urban and rural, not as a clearly defined and opposed domains,

⁶³ H. Solomon 2000, “Emigration Dynamics in Southern Africa.” Unit of African Studies Working Papers, University of Pretoria.

⁶⁴ J. Andersson 2001, “Reintegrating the Rural-Urban Connection: Migration Practices and Sociocultural Dispositions of Buhera Workers in Harare.” *Africa* 71, 1: 81-111.

⁶⁵ H. Englund 2002, “The Village in the City, the City in the Village: Migrants in Lilongwe.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28,1: 137-159.

but fractured ones, with different connotations, expectations, practices and strategic orientations.⁶⁶

In Dakar, escalating rural and urban crises intensify the need to maintain various kind of networks and linkages. Socio-cultural and regional networks have long been depended upon to receive migrants coming from the rural areas. However, as a migration is largely a collective strategy to diversify the sources of household income, migrants can't simply operate within these reception networks. Migrants must also seek footholds in a broad range of other more urban-based affiliations. These include occupation and institution-based networks, local neighborhood-based associations, informal sector networks of various apprentices and entrepreneurs, and confraternity networks of various kinds.

In fact, relationships among these networks operate as channels of interchange. They channel information and resource flows, with confraternity networks operating as vehicles to support informal sector economic networks, and vice-versa. Movement from one network to another enables the migrant to broaden and make their social interaction with the city more complex. This “enriching of the fabric” of their urban lives, in turn, puts them in a better position to reinvest in rural areas. This investment, in turn, helps reproduce a rural population, a portion of which continues to migrate and need various socio-cultural solidarity networks⁶⁷.

Urban Strains

African urban life was primarily generated out of the imposition of an external world upon local economies—i.e. where the city became the locus for an articulation between the local and external, and where the terms of externalities largely dominated the subsequent shape of urban life. Even within these frameworks of marked disparity in power and its accompanying bifurcation of the political and cultural, the city still came to be what Coquery-Vidrovitch sees as the “integration of households into new networks of capitalist production; the invention of new webs of concepts and practices of land and land laws; new patterns of foodstuff consumption; new regulations governing social and political life..all these processes involving new relationships to the broader economy which is neither Western nor traditional behavior” (73).⁶⁸

⁶⁶ J. Ferguson 1999, *Expectations of Modernity: Myth and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press; B. Chukwuezi 2001, “Through Thick and Thin: Igbo Rural-Urban Circularity, Identity and Investment.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19, 1: 55-66.

⁶⁷ A.S. Fall 1998, “Migrants’ Long Distance Relationships and Social Networks in Dakar,” *Environment and Urbanization* 10, 1: 135-145.

⁶⁸ Ibid

Urban public institutions have largely failed to draw upon this substantial history. Dynamic communities require an ability to actively situate their present circumstances into an historical perspective. Such perspective concerns how the community comes into existence, what has been tried, and how the current arrangements of everyday living are always in part an expression of what it was possible to do in the past. Without such a perspective, communities are haunted rather than enriched by what has come before.

Increasing numbers of Africans are situated in what could be called “half-built” environments—i.e. under-developed, over-used, fragmented and often make-shift urban infrastructures—where essential services are not only erratic or costly, but whose inefficiencies themselves induce the cultivation of new health and social problems and the “urbanization” of existing ones. The majority of Africans still do not have access to clean water and sanitation. They lack appropriate nutritional intake and, on the whole, live no longer than they did twenty years ago, even though the *raison d’être* of built environments would seem to suggest a continuous trajectory toward the improved welfare of inhabitants.

No matter the quality of these built environments, urban Africans become increasingly rooted in complex markets required for the supply of food, water, energy, products, and services to residents.⁶⁹ Public urban institutions increasingly play a diminished role in attempting to regulate these markets and coordinate their intersections. Efficiency gains are fixed to the progressive institutional differentiation of, for example, infrastructure development, service production and provisioning, and the subsequent parceling out of discrete operational facets to a wide array of contractual and institutional relationships.

Access to essential urban products and services increasingly means negotiating transactions with a larger number of commercial actors and shifting the cost-bearing responsibilities to individual and household consumers.⁷⁰ Marketized relationships purported to be best adaptable to the particularities of end use and local demand nevertheless end up targeting availability to

⁶⁹ T. W. Luke 2001, “World Health and the Environment: Globalization’s Ambiguities.” Presented at the Third Annual Staff Development Conference, University of Wisconsin System Institute of Global Studies, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin October 28-30, 2001.

⁷⁰ J. Erbach and J. Gaudet 1998, *Urbanization Issues and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Africa Bureau, Office of Sustainable Development, United States Agency for International Development.

high-end users, further fragmenting the social spaces of city, making effective supply chains and delivery networks even more complicated.⁷¹

With a limited overall economic base, there is great incentive on the part of that small fraction of Africa's urban population able to accumulate significant wealth to transfer the costs of environmental problems and truncated service production to the spatial settings of the poor majority.⁷² Faced with increasingly precarious physical and economic environments, precipitating poor health and limited nurturance, the social stresses of everyday life intensify, reiterating the degree of people's vulnerability and exclusion in the city.

The conditions that have been relied upon to sustain dynamic and stable urban quarters--fraught though most have been with major problems concerning urban services and ineffective management--are becoming increasingly strained⁷³ These strains are sometimes political as quarters are given more official responsibility to manage different urban services.⁷⁴ This responsibility generates new modalities of collaboration, but also intensifies competition.⁷⁵ In some instances, communities have become polarized along lines of social stratification that were more open-ended in the past.⁷⁶

The strains are also economic in that employment of any kind—formal and informal—is increasingly difficult to access.⁷⁷ As a result, formerly highly elaborated extended family and

⁷¹ O-H Fjeldstad and J. Semboja 2000, "Dilemmas of Fiscal Decentralization: A Study of Local Government Taxation in Tanzania." *Forum for Development Studies* 27, 1: 7-41. J-M Offner 2000, "'Territorial Deregulation': Local Authorities at Risk from Technical Networks." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, 1: 165-182.

⁷¹ J. E. Hardy, D. Mitlin, and D. Satterthwaite 2001, *Environmental Problems in an Urbanizing World*. London: Earthscan.

⁷³ K. Dey and D. Westendorff (eds.) 1996, *Their Choice or Yours: Global Forces or Local Voices?* Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development; C. Monga 1996, *The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner; A. M Tripp 1997, *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press.

⁷⁴ E. A. Brett 1996, "The Participation Principle in Development Projects: The Costs and Benefits of Participation." *Public Administration and Development* 16: 5-19.

⁷⁵ P. Schübeler 1996, *Participation and Partnership in Urban Infrastructure Management*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Management Program, the World Bank.

⁷⁶ A. Al-Kenz 1995, "Youth and Violence." In S. Ellis (ed.) *Africa Now: People, Places and Institutions*. The Hague: DGIS; R. Devisch 1995, "Frenzy, Violence, and Ethical Renewal in Kinshasa." *Public Culture* 7: 593-629; M. Diouf, H. M. Fotê and A. Mbembe 1999, "The Civil Status of the State in Africa." *Codesria Bulletin* 1 & 2: 39-47.

⁷⁷ P. Collier and J.W. Gunning 1998, "Explaining African Performance." WPS/97-2.2, Working Paper Series of the Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford; International Labor Organization 1998, *Jobs for Africa: A Policy Framework for an Employment-Intensive Growth Strategy*. Geneva: International Labor Organization; S.V. Sethuraman 1997, *Africa's Informal Economy*. Geneva: International Labor Office.

residential support systems find themselves overburdened.⁷⁸ It is estimated that roughly 75% of basic needs are provided informally in the majority of African cities, and that processes of informalization are expanding across discrete sectors and domains of urban life.⁷⁹ Whereas unemployment has long been a persistent reality for African cities, available compensations now require more drastic action.⁸⁰ At the same time, various components of economic rationalization have opened up possibilities for the appropriation of formerly public assets—land, enterprises, services—by private interests, particularly for the emerging elite well-positioned in the apparatuses managing structural adjustment.

At the beginning of 1998, 22 African countries were engaged in IMF brokered structural adjustment agreements emphasizing reduced inflation rates, reduced budget deficits, elimination of current account and balance-of-payment deficits and efficient debt management. These actions are purportedly undertaken to create a platform for human resource development and poverty alleviation. Despite an allocation rate for potentially productive public expenditures which exceeds that of the rest of the developing world, the record of the African public sector is “underwhelming”, in part, because the public sector has been used mainly to create employment rather than deliver services. Even when allocations for social service reach providing institutions, the bulk is used to cover wage bills.⁸¹

In its impact on the public sphere, structural adjustment exceeds being simply an instrument of institutional realignment or fiscal calibration. While a semblance of social cohesion and collaboration continue to be reproduced or reworked, how people are connected to each other is something that has given rise to great anxiety, conflict and experimentation in urban Africa. Increased mobility of urban populations among locations marked by ever-increasing disparities in economic capacity means that city residents witness more people suddenly accumulating and losing material wealth. As a result, the pressures for maintaining a sense of cohesion within the

⁷⁸ N. Kanji 1995, “Gender, Poverty, and Economic Adjustment in Harare, Zimbabwe. *Environment and Urbanization* 7: 37-55; A. Harts-Broekhuis 1997, “How to Sustain a Living: Urban Households and Poverty in a Sahelian Town of Mopti, Africa. *Africa* 67, 1: 106-131; C. Robertson 1997, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men and Trade in the Nairobi Area 1890-1990*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

⁷⁹ Van Arkadie 1995, “The State and Economic Change in Africa.” In H-J. Chang and R. Rowthorn (eds.), *The Role of the State in Economic Change in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; K. King 1996, *Jua Kali Kenya: Change and Development in an Informal Economy 1970-95*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

⁸⁰ J. Lugalla 1995, *Crisis, Urbanization and Urban Poverty in Tanzania: A Study of Urban Poverty and Survival Politics*. Laham, Md.; London: University Presses of America; K. Emizet 1998, “Confronting the Apex of the State: The Growth of the Unofficial Economy in Congo.” *African Studies Review* 41, 1: 99-137; J. Roitman 1998, “The Garrison-Entrepôt.” *Cahiers d’Etudes africaines* 150-152: 297-329.

⁸¹ Collier and Gunning 1998.

framework of extended family systems and the practices of resource distribution that go with it are enormous.⁸²

In part, the solidity of social connections enabled extended family members to seek out livelihood possibilities far from home. It enabled them to be prepared to shift gears at any moment, to undertake arduous journeys and live under precarious circumstances. Whatever benefits accrued from migration were largely remitted back home and sometimes became the primary income of many families. Distance from home did not connote disconnection from place.

But in recent years an intensity of disconnection has set in. Increasingly, emigration is motivated by the sense that the only way to remain at home is to accumulate large sums of disposable cash, or at least acquire the credentials that can be converted into well-remunerated status. While household dependency on remittances and inter-household transfers has increased, migrants are less concerned about using their labor to help families to remain in place.⁸³

Even efforts at consolidating a sense of place can make the city seem less cohesive. For example, Dakar, Accra, and Lagos have witnessed the explosive growth of housing starts in the past decade, as repatriated earnings are invested in land acquisition and home construction. While at one level, this investment represents an ongoing commitment to consolidating a place in the city, the widespread corruption and shabby work of contractors, the inflated costs of building materials, and the volatility of financial transactions have acted against much of the long-term security sought by investors. In addition, since the bulk of such investment is placed in construction, rather than in explicit production-centered activities⁸⁴, the notion of what place is becomes increasingly narrow. In other words, property is divorced from the prospective viability of the larger economic context in which it is situated, thus in turn, requiring greater levels of transactions with other places, most usually Europe, in order to sustain it.

⁸² P. Geschiere, 1997, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia.

⁸³ J. B. Adeganye, "Conflicts, Loss of State Capacities and Migration in Contemporary Africa." In Reginald Appleyard, ed. *Emigration Dynamics in Developing Countries, Volume 1: Sub-Saharan Africa*. Aldershot: Ashgate. A. Adepoju, 1998, "Emigration Dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa." In Reginald Appleyard, ed., *Emigration Dynamics in Developing Countries. Volume 1: Sub-Saharan Africa*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.

⁸⁴ There has been marked controversy over just exactly what constitutes "productive investment", see R. Rogers, 1990, "Return Migration, Migrant's Savings and Sending Countries: Economic Development Lessons from Europe." Washington, D.C.: Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development. No. 30, May.

In cities with shrinking resources and opportunities, increased conflict emerges over who will control the vehicles of inter-mediation and transaction among communities, between communities and the state, and between the state and larger scales. Given the anxieties associated with the elaboration of social connections and the intensified concerns about who can legitimately do what with who under what circumstances, these more expansive instances of social collaboration may often require heightened levels of invisibility in order to be functional.

In contrast to conventional notions of transparency, such invisibility allows a space of operation for actions that everyone may know are taking place but without having to be recognized in a direct visual way. For if such clarity is produced, it may compel a spiraling need to make comparative assessments--in other words, assessments about which kind of people get to have what kinds of rights, resources and opportunities as compared to others. These are comparisons that many urban Africans, who have valued a strong sense of social equanimity, have attempted to avoid.

While a sense of caution, consensus and inclusiveness is often important to livelihood in conditions of scarcity, it has often been achieved at the expense of dynamic contributions to the public sphere. Making action plans based on deterring potentially negative reactions on the part of diverse actors with whom an individual, household, community or institution is connected too often settles for the minimum when bold strokes are called for. As Emmanuel Eze points out, such boldness needs confidence in a set of practices that anticipate and cope with fundamental social disagreements.⁸⁵

4. Regional Approach

Changing Histories

Households continue to invest in one of their members finding job opportunities away from home—the preference clearly, if possible, being Europe or the U.S. Additionally, long-distance trade plays a major role in supplying needed inputs to many African cities. This trade is now plied along well-traveled routes, e.g. Johannesburg-Brazzaville-Lagos; Banjul-Dakar-Nouakchott; Addis Ababa (or Nairobi)-Dubai; Kano-N'djamena-Khartoum; Mombasa-Nairobi-Kampala-Juba; as well as links to Europe, Southeast Asia and the United States.

⁸⁵ E. Eze, 1997, "Democracy or Consensus? A response to Wiredu." In Emmanuel Eze (ed.) *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. Oxford.

Even though elaborate trade routes are re-traveled or reconfigured, there is always the challenge of trying to forge viable articulations among discrete places, between homes or home and non-home. This is not only a question of spatial maneuvering but time as well. How long away is too long for the migrant to lose a sense of being rooted. How short of time spent away is too short not to develop new networks and contacts that constitute a base of social capital for local extended families. How much difference between home and the site of emigration is too much difference, so that navigation itself doesn't generate a range of psychological and cultural difficulties. How dense must the contacts be between places?

All of these issues are brought to bear in assessing the productivity of remittances; particularly the prospective multiplier effects of investments in houses and consumption often, and many times inaccurately, thought to be of limited productive value.⁸⁶ Similarly, the efficacy of return migration cannot be clearly assessed in terms of the relative success or failure of the time spent away. A complex interaction of initial agendas, local support, length of time away from home, level of skill, labor markets of host setting, and the intensity of discordance in values between home and site of emigration all combine to produce different dispositions. These dispositions can be mobilized or constrained in many different ways, with many different implications.⁸⁷

New entrepreneurial groups are also formed as the cost of travel and distributive trade increases. Individual traders may form small, short-term consortiums to make bulk purchases, share transportation and importation costs. As these arrangements become more common, the fluidity of traditional marketing networks increases. Where once the disposition of goods was largely tied to a steady network of retailers and hawkers, the growth of distributive and cross-border trade, in response to market liberalization, means that traders are not assured of buyers for their goods.

Because the movement of funds still relies on the interactions of familial, entrepreneurial, and frequently religious and ethnic networks, economic competition assumes an over-determined social character. Individual economic choices and actions are largely made in reference to their effects on networks to which the individual or household is related. Such reference produces

⁸⁶ S. Ammassari and R. Black 2001, "Harnessing the Potential of Migration and Return to Promote Development: Applying Concepts to West Africa." *Sussex Migration Working Papers*. Sussex Centre for Migration Research.

⁸⁷ K. King 2000, "Generalization from the history of return migration." In B. Ghosh, (ed) *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair*. Geneva: International Organisation of Migration/ United Nations.

numerous scenarios depending on the nature of the ties and the position of the specific network within a larger social field. These scenarios can include the overcrowding of specific sectors, the maintenance of inefficient or non-innovating enterprises, the availability of large pools of unregulated cheap labor, and apparent or hidden complementarity among apparently discrete activities.

Given this situation, there is an increasing need for economic autonomy on the part of individual actors as well as increased but always shifting interdependencies among discrete economic activities. This is seen in, for example in Southern Africa in intricate collaborations among women engaged in petty cross-border trade, truckers, taxi drivers, customs officials, former mineworkers who have specialized in informal distribution systems, and wholesalers of discounted consumer goods.⁸⁸ Messina, for example, has become one of the most active commercial borders in the region, through which 7,000 truckers pass every month, approximately 200 informal traders every day, and hundreds of various types of migrants. An interweaving of sex work, transportation, customs circumvention, and small business development ensues.⁸⁹

There has been a recent focus in Southern African migration studies to ground models of transnationalism in the concrete, gendered, and local experiences of new migrant communities. In part this emphasis is driven by the need to understand how specifically a long-term historical reliance upon labor flows to South Africa has been remade given the shrinkage of formal wage labor opportunities for foreign workers in the mines and in agriculture over the past four decades. As national regimes pursue strategies of extraversion to maintain holds on the state apparatus--often in the process marginalizing certain ethnic groups who themselves look outwards for opportunities to consolidate tenuous positions--the domain of the nation becomes increasingly fluid.

The current trend, represented by the Southern Africa Migration Project (SAMP), coordinated by Queens College over the past decade, is to take two complementary approaches. One approach emphasizes how migration is a lived, materialist experience shaped by household

⁸⁸ W. A. Ongaro 1998 "Informal Cross-Border Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa: Methodological Approaches and Preliminary Results: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe." In *Border Region Development in Africa: Focus on Eastern and Southern Sub-Regions*, edited by Anthony Asiwajo, I. and M. E. J. A. (Marlies) de Leeuw, 79-122. UNCRD Research Report Series, no. 29. Nagoya, Japan: United Nations Centre for Regional Development; People's Republic of China: Development Research Center of the State Council.

practices, personal histories and economic opportunities. The second approach attempts to set these specific experiences into larger historical patterns. In the process, the development trajectories of distinct communities are articulated through marked changes in local social and political dynamics whose subsequent rearrangements tend to re-scale the nature of how decisions are made and resources produced. Traditions are continuously readjusted and reinvented to describe and sometimes justify contemporary phenomena.⁹⁰

For example, Lubkemann points out that Machazian women in Mozambique ultimately lost power in the household as a result of changing migration patterns. Years of civil war saw a more permanent form of male migration into South Africa, where males would take South African wives and begin families there, while leaving their Machazian wives in Mozambique, living with their parents, or initially, possibly, in refugee camps. Machazian women, expected to remain at home and take care of the family and subsistence farming, were not given the opportunity to migrate to South Africa with their husbands. Men didn't want them to be influenced by urban lifestyles and assert independence. Yet, fearing the curse of angry ancestors, they would send money back while beginning new families in South Africa. Increasingly, the men rarely returned, sent fewer remittances, and the wives subsequently lost the power and benefits that they would have in the relationship if the men were more present.⁹¹ Increasingly, the women attempt to find ways to increase their own mobility. As their local anchorage often dissipates with their status as wives, women re-embed themselves in other more loosely configured networks of petty trade and rural labor.

There has been an upsurge of female migration into South Africa. Agriculture employers are now seeking specifically for women migrants, citing their "natural" skills for that type of labor. Men, on the other hand, are losing the mining jobs they once had due to layoffs, placing more of them on the unemployment line. Agricultural work, however, is at the lowest end of desirability as low pay, abuse and horrible working conditions characterize it. Despite these conditions, it

⁸⁹ USAID 2000, "Corridors of Hope in Southern Africa: HIV Prevention Needs and Opportunities in Four Border Towns. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development.

⁹⁰ J. Crush and D. A. McDonald 2000, "Transnationalism, African Immigration and New Migrant Spaces in South Africa: An Introduction." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, 1: 1-19.

⁹¹ S.C. Lubkemann 2000, "The Transformation of Transnationality among Mozambican Migrants in South Africa." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, 1: 41-63.

provides a locus of income generation outside of the household for women, altering the balance of power within and among households in many communities throughout the region.⁹²

As specific domains in the Southern African region seek to stay afloat through diversifying both the trajectories and economic activities of migration, many South African communities, with a history that combines internal displacement with strong territorial control, are threatened by this mobility. Much has been made about the xenophobia of black South Africans regarding the influx of their “brothers and sisters” from the north. Foreign Africans have been subject to incessant harassment at all levels of South African society, thoroughly dissipating the once flourishing sense of excitement in the early 1990s that the country was going to be a place of opportunity for all Africans who seemed to share the experience of liberation.

5. Urbanizing Social Relations

Making Real Cities

Across urban Africa, there is a persistent tension as to what is possible to do within the city and the appropriate forms of social connections through which such possibilities can be pursued. Increasingly, more ephemeral forms of social collaboration are coming to the fore, and more effective formal governance partnerships often succeed to the degree to which they can draw on them. This emergence is a means of circumventing the intensifying contestation as to what kinds of social modalities and identities can legitimately mobilize resources and people’s energies. Throughout these efforts lingers the question as to how urban residents reach a “larger world” of operations. What happens within the domain of the city itself that allows urban actors, often highly rooted in specific places and ascription to operate outside these confines? How are apparent realities of social coherence and cohesion maintained while opportunities, that would seemingly require behaviors and attitudes antithetical the sustainability of such cohesion, are pursued?

These questions are particularly important as regulatory institutions increasingly lose their capacity to socialize bodies in specific ways. Frameworks of constraint and possibility, although existent, are relocated in more provisional arrangements where individuals and groups both try to “push” their way into fleeting opportunities and crowd out others. People without predictable

⁹² T. Ulicki and J. Crush 2000, “Gender, Farmwork, and Women’s Migration from Lesotho to the New South Africa.” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, 1: 64-80.

and institutionally available resources use their profession or withholding of loyalty to others, who are perceived as more powerful, as a means of survival. Crises occasioned by a shifting economy of loyalties, obligations, betrayals, and deceit bring about seemingly endless compensations for these crises. The compensations frequently put together a different set of social ties. Because of its compensatory status, such an economy does not really institutionalize itself into predictable behaviors and consequences. This is a situation that leads to further crises.

Given increasing levels of uncertainty, African residents “invest” heavily in opportunities to be socially visible in a variety of ways that are not organized in terms of formal associations. This investment is a critical aspect of making lives in urban quarters. The task is to find ways to situate oneself so that you can assess what is happening around you--e.g. who is talking to who, who is visiting whose house, who is riding in the same car, who is trading together, or buying from each other.

Public space is “filled” then not only with actors who seek to reconfirm social ties or legitimate everyday practices and attitudes. There are also public actions which exist in order to create impressions that certain social realities, alliances, loyalties, political and economic activities are taking place—regardless of whether or not they are taking place in actuality. For example, evening markets are often improvised, not so much to actually buy and sell things, but to mark a place where people can mingle with and observe each other outside of the pressures and obligations that usually mark most other social events. “Working” assessments are made of potential opportunities and prevailing realities. A potential network of relations is maintained that need not be activated right away, but which exists in some immanent state for future mobilization when necessary.⁹³

This investment in positions, and of using formal organizations as a vehicle through which to put together more short-term, informal ways of collaborating, has much to do with the difficulties involved for residents trying to orient themselves to changing local conditions. More than ever, localities need more diverse links with the larger world. These links maximize sites of opportunity and resources. At the same time, such heterogeneity can also undermine civility and a shared sense of belonging. For as links to the outside world are diversified, so are the inequities present within communities. Such inequities foster substantial disruptions in the way localities once understood, and perhaps tolerated, internal differences and disparities in wealth

⁹³A. Bayat 1997, “Uncivil Society: The Politics of ‘Informal’ People.” *Third World Quarterly* 18, 1: 53-72.

and power. Sudden and inexplicable accumulations, opportunities or losses generate additional confusions as to who is doing what to who, who has access to what, and to what extent these changes are attributable to things not being what they appear to be.⁹⁴

In most African cities, a complicated interrelationship between the visible and invisible sometimes seems to dominate the concerns of urban residents. In some ways it is very clear what is happening in the city—i.e., people are doing whatever they can to survive. As there are not a whole lot of different kinds of opportunities to do this, whatever people usually end up doing doesn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. As there are also many unemployed people and those without a project that consumes the bulk of their time, it also appears that many residents simply wait. They wait for something to happen or are on the lookout for something to happen. They stay put, in front of their compounds, in front of the local stores, in front of the major intersections near their homes, seeing what comes to the neighborhood and what comes to them. They see what new products or persons arrive; who visits whom. On the other hand, livelihoods are also made and opportunities accessed by virtue of always being on the “go”—e.g. transporting goods or messages, going to offices and markets, canvassing the city for the best prices or opportunities.

Combining these acts of waiting and moving, whatever takes place in the city, at a certain level, is highly visible and knowable. Little can seemingly occur without someone one knowing about it. Secrets are few and far between. This heightened sense of visibility has helped regimes control the city, even when they have little legitimacy and few concrete tools of repression. If spaces and opportunities for acting outside intense scrutiny are to be created, the act of making things visible itself must be manipulated. If you don't want people to know about something or to wonder about whether or not something is taking place, that something must, in many instances, be performed right under their “noses.”

Because life is hard, the city has become a place where there is a tendency for kin, friends, neighbors and other associates to find ways of “joining in” whenever a person accesses some kind of opportunity. This possibility of joining in plays a big role in enabling people to make it in the city. Still, this practice can make it difficult for individuals to consolidate those opportunities and use them as a basis for independent action. They end up being overly encumbered with too many responsibilities and links to the activities and situations of others. In

⁹⁴A. Appadurai 1998, “Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization.” *Public Culture* 10, 2 : 225-47.

cities, people must often “try on things for size.” They must experiment with different ways of being and doing things. These efforts are often best done outside the scrutiny of a large number of other people.

Individuals shouldn’t be made to feel overly self-conscious about their ‘try-outs.’ At a different level, resources of some volume and or value must be shifted around, re-deployed, and applied to various objectives without it being too well known exactly what is going on. Things must be said, money must be generated, resistance must be expressed, and antagonists must talk to each other. All of these aspects often rely on large amounts of invisibility to do something effective and useful.

Therefore, the politics of what is visible and invisible is an important one in African cities. This politics does not simply concern identifying the forces and people responsible for the specific reality any given individual, household, or group might face. It is also about how the city is used to generate resources and opportunities. At times, households, associations and governments must be made to look as if all is well even when it is not. At different times, it is also useful to make it appear as if things are not all right even when they may be. For successfully managing impressions can avail one to opportunities or excuse one from certain obligations. These tactics for managing visibility may enable particular settings to operate with greater flexibility, but they also give them a tenuous character.

Already, cities are full of stories of sudden and inexplicable transformations and resurrections—of people who have nothing suddenly accumulating massive amounts of wealth only to lose it overnight and then have it “resurrected” at a later time. These oscillations are embedded in a context where the horizons of a reasonably attainable future and the capacity to imagine them have disappeared for many youth—now the region’s largest population group.

The significance of population movements in Africa should not be restricted to lessons about how to build cities more capable of providing sustainable livelihoods to their residents. The significance of such movement should not simply be reduced to a sign of just how weak people’s links are to place or locality. While these things may indeed be true, an exclusive focus on them tends to limit attention to the wide range of implications generated by movement. One of the most important of these implications is the extent to which the consolidation of place and locality uses movement itself as a critical resource. As indicated earlier in this text, substantive localization may require a heightened capacity of places to extend themselves outward into

larger arenas of transaction and involvement. The networks for this extensionality have themselves largely been shaped by population movements.

Cultivating networks is not by itself sufficient grounds for local viability. Especially now, the fate of localities as a whole are often enjoined to those residents and sectors whose networks are the most solidified. Nevertheless, an enlarged space is opened up for local initiatives undertaken at “home.” Public authorities can potentially appropriate such an enlargement of a space for local initiatives as an excuse to withdraw from certain responsibilities. Additionally, an increasing number of public relationships are threatened with privatization. Still, intensified local activism adds synergy to local capacities and makes institution building better suited to local realities.

Within in such a conceptual framework of urban place formation, migration, as a key practice articulating discrete cities and regions, becomes a potential resource. However migration may fragment the interiors of cities, no matter how much out-migration, particularly that of persons with skills, may under-develop particular places, and no matter what might appear to be “wasteful” expenditures invested in migration, migration remains a critical and concrete mechanism of interrelating places. As an urbanizing force, then—in the sense of a thickening of calibrations and reciprocities, of references and possibilities for collaborative action—the challenge is how to resource migration itself.

6. Concluding Note

Movement in Africa has a long and dynamic history. It is perhaps a way of keeping history itself in motion as the economic, political and cultural options of social transformation appear increasingly confined and dictated by powers elsewhere. While migration and displacement may reflect a lack of confidence in present social or political arrangements, they do not necessarily express a lack of confidence in the process of making viable lives, places or sociality. Sometimes, the very opposite is the case—i.e. where migration becomes a demonstration of faith in the capacity for renewal, for better lives. Most Africans act as if they are aware that realizing fundamental aspirations means that they cannot “go it alone.” But who to go with, and how often become increasingly uncertain questions? The ability to assume the solidity of certain social conventions, histories of customs or prevalent and enduring values is often not possible.

So movement becomes a locus of experimentation and re-calibration as much as it is a sign of desperation.

Clear distinctions between scales, territories, disciplines, sectors, classes and identities also are difficult to sustain, and sometimes doesn't make sense when difficult conditions require substantial leaps of faith or radical innovations. Here, intersecting actions and meanings that haven't fit together in the past become a potentially plausible way of securing comparative advantage in the search for new livelihoods and opportunities. This honing of new practices pieces together new spaces and domains of operation, so that practices are not simply instruments for dealing with predetermined spaces. The interaction among changing spaces and changing practices is a complex one. It means that there isn't a fixed notion of the functional city to which residents must adapt; nor does it mean that a specific set of practices will necessarily bring about a functional city. Thus, the urban development of discrete cities requires a broad engagement of actors and places far from the "city gates" themselves. How this engagement is defined also faces difficulties in staying within clearly discernible channels. Clear conceptual distinctions among migration, sojourning, displacement, tourism, short-stays, long-stays, economic status, political status are frequently difficult to make—all confront certain fuzzy indistinction.

In Africa, intricate interconnections continue to evolve among discrepant urban spaces, even when it is difficult to identify substantive articulations within a macroeconomic framework. These interconnections are formed in such a way that collective action can no longer afford to completely orient itself to the fuller materialization of local places at home. Urban actors must be prepared to re-think the implications of their assessments and collaborations increasingly in terms of enhancing the prospects for opportunistic articulations among dispersed "homes" or bases of economic and even political operation. In some ways migration has led the way, has been a key instrument of an urbanizing process on cities that were barely urbanized. In some instances it has deferred and depleted urbanization. The challenge is to understand and operate in the space in-between.