

TERRITORY AND BORDER CROSSING FOR LIVELIHOODS AMONG (VOLUNTARY AND FORCED) MIGRANTS FROM DRC TO SWAZILAND: THE RE-IMAGINING OF A BORDERLESS SPATIAL SYSTEM

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Introduction

In people's livelihoods, migration across international borders represents an important strategy for asset accumulation (Moser and Dani, 2008). On the continent, men and women have always migrated to neighbouring countries or further afield in search of opportunities. Taking the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a case study for the generation of cross-border migration, this paper examines ways in which, through the spatial trajectories of migrants from Democratic Republic of Congo, different meanings are assigned to bordered territories. It interrogates the extent to which (voluntary and forced) migrants create a borderless spatial system that circumvents the geographically defined state. I make use of an interpretive approach to demonstrate the extent to which migrants' experiences with border crossing are a livelihood and asset accumulation strategy within a somewhat borderless spatial system. My core argument is that the interplay of weak institutional policy apparatus along the inter-state borders makes it easy for migrants to create their own rules for free movement to fit their social aspirations and in this process a meaning to cross-border mobility is socially assigned and values are developed over time across geographical boundaries. To empirically substantiate this argument, life stories of migrants living in Swaziland were obtained from in-depth interviews. To link internal migration with international border crossing, each migrant is followed from the place of origin (in the Democratic Republic of Congo) to places of destination (in the sequence reflected in the successive moves to Swaziland). Narratives collected from migrants are used to inform on the changes affecting their socio-spatial strategies (motives, social networks of reference, labour use) as they cross one border after another to end up in Swaziland. To contextualise the narratives, it is important to provide some elements of historical and political backgrounds to cross-border mobility throughout the state formation trajectory.

Cross-border in historical, political and social contexts

The Democratic Republic of Congo (here and after DRC) shares land and water borders with a large number of countries of the central and great lakes region of Africa. The borders institutionalised since colonial times have never however ended the common cultural, social and economic ties that

historically characterise transmigration of people. Most of the populations in the region share common cultures, and have maintained relationships across borders, both before and after independence. This inter-relationship of communities in the region partly forms the human basis for the existence of cross-border mobility. Adepoju (2000) argues that movements across frontiers, fostered by shared culture, language and colonial experience, noticeable in many parts of Africa, as well as frontier labour migration, blur the distinction between internal and international migration, as well as that between migration in regular and irregular situations on the continent. Cross-border migration is not therefore a post-independence phenomenon as far as the DRC is concerned. It is part of the history and culture of the peoples of that country. In the pre-colonial time, most parts of the countries known today as Congo-Brazzaville, DRC and Angola (referring especially to its enclave of Cabinda) formed a territorial entity which was under the authority of the Kingdom of Kongo (Kongo-Diatotila or Banza Congo). The needs for survival and escape from domination pushed peoples to travel short and long distances, and settle in new areas. Nation states borders in politically defined terms were inexistent, although chieftaincies were defined according to customarily assigned symbols. From oral sources (gathered by this author), it is narrated that historically the kingdom of Loango which presided over the creation of the city of Pointe-Noire in neighbouring Congo-Brazzaville, was formerly established by one of the sons of the King of the Kongo peoples by the name of Nimi Lukeni. He rebelled against his father and fled all the way from the Equator region (in Zaire) to the Atlantic region of Congo. He migrated with a large number of his father's subjects, recruiting others along the way. The linguistic similarities between *Tsivili* spoken in Pointe-Noire, *Tsiliji* spoken in Cabinda and *Tsiyombi* spoken in the Bas Congo (southern province of DRC) are reflections of this historical transmigration of peoples. Through this, a culture of belonging to the same space was certainly fostered which, with time, has transcended the numerous constraints imposed by official borders on the mobility of peoples.

From the onset of independence, the informal trade in what was named Zaire (today the country has been renamed DRC) has always been influenced by migrants crossing the border to neighbouring countries (Brown, 1995). Under the Mobutu regime, the collapse of the formal economy led to this phenomenon reaching dimensions unknown elsewhere. Men and women flocked to neighbouring countries in search of income and survival, to trade or look for casual work. The same trend is being observed in today's DRC. The mobility of these traders is not specific to a destination country, rather it operates in a regional system influenced by a changing set of factors which include the political and macroeconomic frameworks in the DRC, the regional and political and economic environment and the international arrangements around economic integration such as the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the *Communauté Economique et Politique des Etats des Grand Lacs* (CEPGL, the Economic and Political Community of Great Lakes States) and the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the globalisation of economic interests (exploitation of mineral resources).

Since the 1990s, with the end of Mobutu's regime, the Great Lakes region in which the DRC is located has witnessed some rapid transformations of which cross-border population mobility occupies a major place in the processes of spatial reconfiguration. The migration of peoples has gained further momentum because of the diversity in new forms of mobility –refugees, economic migrants, religious migrants and student migration, which add complexity to the many other aspects of the dynamics of the eastern African region. The DRC has numerous points of entry and exit along its very long borders with Zambia, Uganda, Sudan, Angola, Rwanda and Burundi, which facilitate transit to other countries further east or south. Monitoring these points efficiently is a very difficult task because of their location in undeveloped forest areas. The pervasive insecurity perpetuated by militia has doomed all attempts to control the borders to failure. The conditions mentioned above, combined with the understaffed and underfunded border control, have been compounded by the sensitive political issues raised by the continued flows of forced migrants at the borders and internally displaced persons in near-border towns. It is widely admitted that bilateral initiatives to reduce the flow of irregular cross-border migrants have had insignificant impact. Long and porous borders have rendered bilateral agreements ineffective. If migrants cannot enter through legal channels, they will break the law as illegal migrants or in disguised forms as long as they look for viable sustainable livelihoods or security. This form of mobility has increased over the past years because of the persistent violent crises and various institutional barriers that constrain the effective inclusion of mobility across national borders into the mainstream frameworks of regional economic integration.

Theoretical framework

For the sake of clarity, it is important to give a scope to what cross-border mobility covers and what it theoretically implies. Conceptually, cross-border mobility is defined to include all types of mobility, whether they operate near or far from the borders of the DRC, provided all these forms of spatial mobility involve passage from one country to the next. Most analysts recognise that the dynamics of migration can be adequately understood by embedding it in a system of interactions such as the one proposed by Giddens (1984) in his theory of restructuration. This provides a foundation for this study to build upon the structuration theory in order to understand the sub-processes associated with cross-border migration. Along these lines, such a system is composed of institutions, organisations or social agents driven by values and principles. Thus, in the system, migration (human behaviour) and social structures (components of the system, including families and households, where it takes place) are intertwined at varying interacting levels. People decide where to move within the spatial system according to the codes of signification they attach to places. It is therefore theoretically justified to analyse cross-border migration as embedded in social structures. Goss and Lindquist (1995: 7) claim that “inasmuch as people are restrained by the structure, they also allow the emergence of a certain time-space-structure”, be it informal. In other words, people make use of the existing structure-rules, resources, institutions or, through

rules they create for themselves, they contribute to the creation of structures that suit their behaviours. Thus the interactions mentioned above operate in a two-way direction, migration \leftrightarrow social structures, with feedback effects. It is therefore assumed that although migrational behaviour may be restrained in space and time by social structures, it can also be creatively shaped by them. Hence the importance of the links that migration has with such institutions as market, family, household, regional integration policy, civic organisation, interest group, to name but a few. I regard cross-border migration as a part of a large, interacting, and interrelated bundle of changes, which the nations of the Great Lakes and southern regions have so far experienced. These changes include globalisation, regional integration, institutional restructuring, family transition, state reconfiguration, market failures, commercialisation of personal relationships, and so on.

Previous studies in the Great Lakes region have indicated that the movement of people across the borders is associated with various motives, among which those of survival play a major role (World Bank, 2011). The motives that drive this mobility display a great deal of heterogeneity. While some people have unclear objectives, for others the reasons for moving are subjectively well designed. These cross-border migrants are often denied equal access to formal resources and markets in the country where they temporarily reside. Repeated cross-border mobility is predominantly male-dominated, as it is adventurous physically, very demanding and risky to personal safety. The migrants are often young with lack of adequate education, training, and capital. Consequently, they tend to rely on social networks and other personal resources. Their migration proceeds on foot and is often of a short distance, moving temporarily to locations where the induced costs are low. Cross-border migration has always been associated with livelihoods drained from the informal sector (Brown, 1996) because people have to rely on temporary work in areas where they relocate.

With the increase, on the one hand, in market failure and tension and, on the other hand, inadequate initiatives of economic integration, governments in the Great Lakes region have somewhat lost control over their formal borders (World Bank, 2011). The reality of today is that for most people relying on their connections, moving across the border is much easier because the states have become to a large extent "borderless". Brettel (2000: 12) argues that cross-border migrants from one country to another are part of transnationalism. This author defines this phenomenon as "a social process whereby migrants operate in social fields that transgress geographic, political and cultural borders". Social distances between sending and receiving countries are now shortened, not only because of the various modes of travelling, but also because of the facilitating role of migration networks. Migrants transcend the constraints imposed by official borders by means of informal channels of communicating and moving from place to place. According to Ananta and Arifin (2004), they can maintain their contacts with others in the home countries. In the same vein, they use contacts they have to facilitate their move to other places. Places of stay for migrants become "one" integrated within a spatial system. They are not uprooted, but they move back to forth and freely, between different or similar cultures, social, economics, and political

systems. In places where they have relocated, migrants not only send economic remittances, but also social, cultural, and perhaps political remittances (Ananta and Arifin, 2004).

In moving across the border from country to country across the Great Lakes region, it is hypothesised that migrants do not rely on the so called “shadow” network of labour brokers, contractors and transporters as frequently reported in South Asian countries (Asis, 2004). They make use of their personal relations and resources to cover costs and find a way to the destination. As observed by Asis (2000) in the case of Asian migrants, families and friends stand out as the most cohesive element in the migration process.

Methods of information gathering and analytical framework

Using the migratory histories collected from eight self-settled Congolese refugees in Swaziland, an attempt was made to organise or rearrange, in a narrative manner, a set of differing individual experiences in relation to migrant status, location and housing, work and livelihoods. The migration trajectories were collected during the fieldwork I conducted in urban Swaziland in 2006 within the framework of research on Congolese migrants and assets for livelihoods. This research also collected data from 135 respondents using a semi-structured questionnaire. To gain deeper insights into the migratory trajectories, I supplemented this survey with fifteen in-depth interviews with informants who voluntarily revealed their migration stories from their place of birth to Swaziland (Tati, 2006).

The migratory story of each informant was gathered over a period of time from their departure from DRC to relocation in Swaziland. When gathering information, I focused on process, ambiguity and changes in one’s personal life, assuming the absence of order and rationality. Thus I made use of biographical approach, focusing on personal crises and psychohistory (for details on the methods see Babbie, *et al*, 2010: 283-287). To bring individual’s practical consciousness to a discursive level (Giddens, 1984), the in-depth interviews sought to scrutinise the practical consciousness underlying their mobility by asking them to report on the social and economic activities they were involved in at various stages in their trajectories.

Thus, rather than bringing together the eight narratives into thematic sections punctuated with verbatim quotes from respondents, as is the case in most narrative accounts using qualitative material, I have chosen to use each individual’s piece of life to preserve the integral sequencing of events the interviewee went through during that period of his or her life from the first move in DRC to settling in Swaziland. The point is not only the determination of migration, but also way in which individuals assess the options open to them within a spectrum of multimodal alternative destinations. The interest in the narratives is focused on the circumstances of their initial move from their place of birth, what motivated them to cross the border and move to transit places, their economic and family situations at different

places (including Swaziland) and their ties to their area of origin. For ethical reasons, their real identities have not been used.

Narratives on migratory trajectories

Before narrating the individual migratory experience, it is important to first draw some cut-crossing features from the nine migratory histories. The migratory trajectories suggest some common traits emerging from migrants: a family-rooted departure from a locality, different places of transit within and outside the DRC and relocation in Swaziland through different events. All these events seem to have taken place without the individual acquiring an advanced educational or professional status. For clarity's sake, the trajectories are first examined separately, and then insights from the different migratory histories are brought together into a tentative grounded theory of the re-imagination of a borderless spatial system.

Trajectory 1

Identification: M. K. K.

Year of departure: 2001

Place of residence: Manzini (Fairview)

Year of birth: 1970

Sex: male

M. K. K. left the Democratic Republic of Congo three months after the sudden, violent death of President Kabila. Since 2003 his place of residence has been Manzini. He did not provide a detailed track line about his family background (when asked about his ethnic group, he even refused to reveal it on the grounds that he was suspected of being associated with the Baiamulegue ethnic group). He only said that he was from a family of nine children and was his father's second son. He spent his early childhood in a locality called Tshikapa, part of the Kananga district in the Province of Kasai-Occidental. His father could not afford to provide education to all of them. He always wanted to leave his parents and join his uncle living in Lusaka (Zambia), where he thought life was much better than in his home place. The military unrest that followed the power take over by Kabila motivated his parents to let him travel to Kipushi, close to the border with Zambia. He got there by road, and the trip was financially supported by his father. He then crossed the border and found his way to Chipata as, at the time he was leaving his parental home, he was told that his uncle had moved to this secondary city of Zambia to set up a furniture making business as a professional carpenter.

Upon arrival in Chipata, he stayed with two Congolese fellows from DRC who, through their local network of relations, helped him to trace his uncle. In the end, he managed to get in touch with his uncle. M.K.K decided to become a carpenter as advised by his uncle. After 14 months of training, he was not very satisfied with the way his uncle was making a living from his business. His apprenticeship was only on a part-time basis, as he gradually came to realise that being a carpenter was not the right occupation for him. Besides, aged 23, he felt that it was high time for him to become autonomous. He left his uncle's

workshop and entered a new apprenticeship deal with a Zambian running a hairdressing salon, convinced that this activity was more lucrative than being a carpenter. Being in a new country, he had no other choice but to accept these terms of training. He reckoned that under this agreement he was incapable of getting the necessary amount to “free” himself, and felt he was “trapped” for life in this apprenticeship deal. All this time, his residence status was not clear; he was neither a formal refugee nor an asylum seeker. Like most Congolese migrants, after several attempts, he managed in the end to obtain a letter from the UNCHR stating that his application for refugee status had been received and was being processed. Not further communication, however, was given to him by the UN agency in the following year.

The acknowledgement of his application was however an indication that he could use the letter from the UNCHR as official recognition of his status. At age 25, he decided to leave Zambia as he could no longer pay the fees for his apprenticeship. M. K. K. joined two friends of his, a Zambian and a Congolese, who were travelling to Maputo (Mozambique). At the border, he and the Congolese companion presented themselves as asylum seekers. They were transferred and admitted to an UN-assisted camp for refugees, while their applications were being processed for clearance. As in most African countries, movement of asylum seekers between the camp and Maputo was not restricted, and this free movement allowed him to make the necessary arrangements for crossing the border to Swaziland. Why did he choose Swaziland? To this question, M. K. K. responded that the information he had about Swaziland motivated him to envisage better living conditions in that country than in Mozambique. Besides, he also heard from friends in Maputo that it was much easier to move to South Africa from Swaziland than from any other country within the SADC region. In 2003, he successfully crossed the border (after a first failed attempt to do so), and once in Swaziland he submitted an application as an asylum seeker.

Since leaving his family home in DRC, M. K. K. has never gone back there for visit. It is too far by road and the border crossing from Zambia has become more risky than before. Relations with relatives at home are kept alive in letters sent home through an informal courier service using road travellers linking southern Africa and DRC, via Zambia, or by telephone (mobile phone using the network made available by MTN). The informal courier service is also used to send voice-recorded tapes to communicate with relatives at home.

Trajectory 2

Identification: N. E.

Year of departure: 1998

Year of birth: 1975

Sex: male

Place of residence: Manzini

N. E., born in Goma, has been living in Swaziland for just 4 months. He was interviewed on the premises of the Department of Home Affairs where he came to enquire about his refugee status

application. In his words, he is a forced migrant. The displacement of N. E. started in the same dramatic conditions caused by the military unrest. The period that followed the takeover by President Kabila (the father) was a very difficult time for most people living in Kayemba in the Kwango region, where the city of Goma is located. The physical context was characterised by a breakdown in the communication infrastructure, isolation of the city and barriers in trading with most places around the country. It was a time when most of the residents, especially the young ones, were looking for ways of leaving the city, and N. E. was one of them. He took advantage of the lack of control at the border caused by the military unrest to relocate in Angola in a locality called Soyo, in the region of Zaire, though the situation was even worse there than in his place of origin. From there, he moved to Lobito, a port city, where he was accommodated by a Congolese apostolic priest who had been living in the area for six years. He then decided to acquire some skills in gardening as it was the only offer of training he found available there from a florist's shop. The training itself was relatively short, and after this N. E. worked as an assistant florist in the shop where he was trained, as a way of repaying his apprenticeship. For a year and a half he could not change this job because he did not have enough money to pay his debt back. From 2001 to 2002, his occupational trajectory was not exactly predictable. Within a period of two years, he worked for four different florists involved in selling exotic flowers across the border to Namibia and South Africa (he claimed that he left each of these companies voluntarily). The last florist he worked for sent him to serve as a representative of his timber business in the Lubango area, which was under the permanent risk of being raided by UNITA at that time (before the death of Savimbi). After five months of employment, he lost his job because he did not want to be transferred to another site. Using transport by road, he managed to resettle in Luanda after a life-threatening journey in the company of some other internally displaced refugees. There, using his meagre savings from previous jobs, he set up his own business as a florist.

Living illegally without legal refugee status (he has never applied for this status though he always perceived himself as being entitled to it at that time), he was constantly harassed by the city authorities. He said that there was a prevailing xenophobic attitude toward Congolese among the locals. It is partly because of this that he relocated to Namibia, close to the border with Angola, using the contacts he had at the time of his training. But soon after arrival in Namibia, he was forcefully expelled back to Angola as he did not have proper documentation. Back to Angola, he worked again as a gardener in the same small town of Lubango, located close to the border with Namibia. N. E. did not stay there long and went back to Luanda. In the capital city, he rented a room which he shared with his female partner. His partner, a divorcee, was an Angolan national owning a grocery shop. From this liaison, he had a daughter while his female partner had also a daughter from a previous marriage. The only detail he provided about his itinerary to Swaziland was that he travelled by road to Swaziland passing through Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. From the interview, it emerged that N. E. has never visited his relatives at home. He said that he inherited two plots of land from his deceased father (who passed away one year after his departure

from Kayemba). One of his uncles, the youngest, is farming the plots. N. E. has no intention of going back to his village of birth, with which he has so far maintained weak links.

Trajectory 3

Identification K. K.

Place of departure: Kalima

Place of residence: Mbabane

Year of departure: 1999

Year of birth: 1964

Sex: male

In 1999 K. K. left his parental home of Kindu in the surrounding area of Kalima to move to Bukavu at the age of 32. From the description he gave about his social background, his parents were very poor. The father had three land holdings however. At the age of 22, he was compelled to find an income-generating activity. The motivation to find a job came from his father and his uncle, both heavily indebted, as they had to repay a debt. He first worked as a shop assistant earning a very meagre salary, for several working hours each day. From his parental home, he moved to Busuka because he wanted to escape from his tiresome, demeaning job. He reckoned that, even after moving to Busuka, his living conditions were not as different as they were at his parents' home. At 37, K. K. decided to move to South Africa as he heard that many DRC citizens were finding fortune there after claiming to be refugees. He found it extremely difficult to pay the passage fee required for the trip to South Africa however. He decided to become a pot maker and joined an artisan who was making a living by selling aluminium cooking pots. After a while, he could not stand the rude attitude of his boss. Unsuccessful in making ends meet and living under harsh conditions, he constantly thought of going back home. He even worked as canoe runner (ferry man) in a locality called Bembi, a job that familiarised him with the continuous influxes of refugees heading for Uganda. Perhaps this familiarity with people on the move motivated him in the end to cross the border and relocate in Marghuta Peak. He then moved to Kampala. From there, his ambition of moving to South Africa forced him to travel southward all the way to Swaziland in March 2000. He did not provide any details on how he travelled to this country, and restricted himself to just a few words "it was difficult, but I coped" (from an unconfirmed source, it was alleged that he travelled under a false identity as a Mozambican; I could not however confirm this allegation). He reckoned that his life in Swaziland had become more stable and that he had achieved some kind of autonomy. K. K. pointed out however that, despite his age, he had to start a new apprenticeship cycle to work as an operator in a laundry facility service. A more stable family life started for him as well in Swaziland. Five months after arrival, he was joined by a female partner he met in Uganda, and with whom he had a child there. While in Swaziland, he was informed that his cousins were exploiting the small plantation of palm trees left by his deceased father without sharing the profits from it with his old mother.

From the narrative above, one has to admit that the migratory itinerary of K. K. is particularly complex and his life course, for most of it, has been characterised by periods of life events that are not

clearly relatable or collectable, so to speak. There is a heavy presence of family influence in his cross-border migratory trajectory. Despite all these difficult events, K. K. has managed to stabilise his situation in Swaziland. The salary paid to him by the laundry's owner allows him to accommodate his family in an acceptable modest house equipped with electricity and to afford the costs of his daughter's schooling. He said that, having now settled down, his intention was to go and visit his mother. He has not seen her since leaving his home town. His plan is to go there by road to Lubumbashi, via Zambia, but he pointed out that the persistent military unrest and lawlessness in the region does not offer enough security for making it this way.

Trajectory 4

Identification: A.S.

Place of residence: Manzini

Year of departure: 1996

Year of birth: 1968

Sex: male

A. S has had a very long migratory life (13 years) as he reckoned it with a tone of bravery and adventure. His mother was his father's second wife in a family of 11 children. Two of the sons from his father's first wife also migrated and one was living in Germany and the other was living in South Africa at the time of the interview. The social background in which he grew up was relatively modest. At 22, A. S. was sent to Lumumbashi by his father to stay at his aunt's place to go to college. From that age, A. S. resided successively in Lumumbashi, Likasi, before moving to Swaziland. With the exception of Lumumbashi, the other steps were rather short. While in Likasi, he visited his family's home twice. In Lumumbashi, he provided some assistance to his aunt in the management of her business, a kind of informal restaurant located in a very popular market place in the city centre. At 26, while he was living in Likasi for about two years, he went back home and stayed there without working. In the heat of the fighting between the military factions, A.S. decided to stay there for a while (he said he wanted to join one of factions supported by Professor Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, but later changed his mind as his girl friend was raped by two fighters from that faction).

His migration to Likasi was quite specific in that he arrived there at a relatively young adult age and found accommodation at his father's half-brother's place (from the same mother). During that same period, he settled down with a woman from the area with whom he had two children. Finding it difficult to make ends meet, A. S. decided to move to Swaziland, advised to do so by his female partner. He was accommodated by his partner's brother, before finding his own place to rent. His professional life took a different path, as he went through relatively long periods of informally salaried job tenure interrupted by unemployment periods. His second child was born at a time when he was unemployed. He said that the reason for him marrying a foreigner was because he could not go back to his home place due to the war in DRC.

However, he did not perceive his relocation in Swaziland as a way of ending his career as a house builder (mason). This is reflected in his drive for entrepreneurship. A. S. also mentioned a third source of income related to the links he maintained with his place of origin. He frequently managed to send home some money he saved from his previous contracts, through his niece who was studying in Johannesburg, South Africa. The money sent home has served to build a small house that is being rented out by two of his three sisters. The rent is also partly used to cover the medical expenses of treatment of his mother's diabetes.

A. S.'s quite fragmented migratory life evolved in three steps. One can look at them as three distinct migrations. In each of these, there was neither a plan nor a personal long-term strategy. His first migration was motivated by his father's death, and since that first move A. S. has mostly remained connected to his place of origin during his migratory trajectory. He admits however that upon arrival in Manzini, the links with his home place have tended to weaken. Also he did not indicate whether he had any plan to apply for refugee status in Swaziland. All signs tend to point to a willingness to find his way in the host society as an economic migrant.

Trajectory 5

Identification: T. A.

Place of residence: Manzini

Year of birth: 1969

Year of departure: 2001

Sex: male

When one looks at his assets or his position as a prominent person within the community of origin, T. A. is to a large extent the archetype of a successful migrant. When he departed from Yangambi, close to Kisangani, his family home could be classified as satisfactory living conditions. His father was a primary school teacher and, at the same time, a landowner casually involved in land selling. He and his siblings attended primary and secondary school. T. A. left his parents at 23 to study at the University of Kisangani. His studies were not successful as he failed to get a degree (BSc). He then decided to train as a nurse and was admitted in what was then the only state-sponsored institute of public health in Kisangani. After graduation he decided to look for a job in Kisangani. While in search of a job, he found accommodation at the house of one of his teachers at the institute. He worked for two years as a laboratory assistant in a private clinic. Unhappy with the low wage paid by the clinic's owner, he moved to Kinshasa to look for a better job in 1991. After a search that lasted two months, he ended up with one offer as a laboratory technician. The laboratory, owned by an expatriate from Belgium, was looted during the downfall of Mobutu's regime. He then left Kinshasa to look for a job in South Africa, but could not find one as he could not get a work permit. He reckoned that the two years he spent in Johannesburg without proper documentation were the most difficult of his life. He lived in hiding most of the time. His life took a different turn after he met a physician from Ghana who was visiting the owner of the house where he was living illegally. The doctor was working in Swaziland. He advised T. A. to try his luck there as the public

sector of that country was in dire need of bio-medical analysis laboratory technicians. It took him five weeks to finalise the arrangements for his relocation to Swaziland. He first lived in Manzini where he stayed at the Ghanaian's place for four months. With his host's assistance, he was eventually successful in finding a job as a laboratory analyst in the public dispensary at Manzini under an employment contract with the Ministry of Health. On the family side, at the time of interview he had eight children by two legally married wives. The first, with whom he had six children, came from DRC via South Africa to join him around 2000. The position of laboratory analyst has helped him to acquire a luxury car and to help his two wives set up their own businesses. An educated, experienced professional, A. S. is a person of reference within the community of migrants and refugees from DRC. He served as an elected representative of the community for almost three years. During his mandate, he set up an office in the business district of Manzini to deal with issues pertaining to the welfare of DRC citizens in Swaziland. The office also fostered links and collaboration with other migrants from DRC living in Swaziland's neighbouring countries, especially those living in South Africa and Mozambique. The Congolese diaspora in the United States was also one of his networks. The office was quite a popular place as it also served as a meeting point for DRC nationals living in Swaziland, to discuss community welfare issues and mobilise resources.

A.S. displays quite a few other signs of a wealthy man for whom migration has paid off. He is in the process of buying a free-standing house in a residential area called "66", an affluent suburb of Manzini. He once owned a taxi run by a Ghanaian driver he is employing, as financial problems he experienced forced him to sell the car to repay a debt. During the field work, I picked up from other informants allegations that the money he was paying for the property was taken from the funds of a saving scheme set up by the Congolese. Accused of embezzlement, A. S had to resign his position as representative. His private business is now limited to two maize mills run by one of his daughters in the vicinity of the Manzini market. Nonetheless, A. S. is a clear example of a successful migrant who has managed to consolidate a comfortable life in the host society.

Trajectory 6

Identification: M. L.

Place of residence: Mbabane

Year of departure: 1991

Year of birth: 1977

Sex: female

M. L. has lived in Mbabane since 2001. Her life story illustrates the extent to which women in some parts of Sub-Saharan African, even when they are married, are relatively autonomous in their decision to migrate. This biography also provides a strong illustration of how complex a residential system can be in the reconstruction of a migrant's social life.

M. L. left her birth place, a small place called Kibombo in Kasai Oriental, at the age of 13 to relocate to the town of Kindu with her mother. She said that it was her mother's second migration to that

town for a marriage-related reason. She then moved to Goma after her mother divorced her first husband. M. L. stayed in Goma for eight years, and during that time she did not pay a single visit to her birth place, though her father and sister were still living there. Thus it does not come as a surprise that she could not recollection of the living conditions she had had in the Kasai before moving to Goma. In the first five years of residence in Goma, M. L. trained as a tailor and assisted her mother who was selling locally grown vegetables at the market place. At 21, she married a man who was involved in cross-border trading between Rwanda and DRC. She settled with her husband in Kigali and had two children with him. Five years after the marriage, the husband migrated to Zimbabwe, and later to Swaziland. She gave no clear indication of the reasons for these successive moves. What came out of the interview was that they had to do with her husband's association with some Asian traders involved in the wood pulp trade.

M. L. joined her husband by her own means in 2001, as she could not go back to Kasai due to the military unrest around the border area between Rwanda and DRC. Soon after her arrival in Swaziland, she discovered that her husband was living with another woman from Zimbabwe as his partner. The husband had no source of personal income, and was materially supported by that woman. Because of this illegitimate liaison, M. L. could not stay with her husband and ended up renting a room to accommodate her and the two children she had with her, while waiting for her application for refugee status to be processed. She has not had a stable activity since resettling in Swaziland and is actively looking for start-up capital for a business. Despite his extra-marital life, her husband would like to go back home or relocate elsewhere in the country with her, once she has been granted refugee status by the Swaziland home affairs department. She does not consider refugee status to be a strong reason for settling in Swaziland. She intends to relocate with her two children to South Africa, which she sees as a good place to be as far as income-generating opportunities are concerned.

Trajectory 7

Identification: A. M.

Place of residence: Mbabane

Year of birth: 1970

Year of departure: 2000

Sex: Male

A. M. is the third son in a polygamous marriage. He is the only person in the family with migration experience. The reasons for his first migration, however, cannot clearly be defined. He first left his home place at the age of 19, while he was finishing his first year of secondary school (equivalent to grade 11). He enrolled at a school in Bukavu as a vocational student to train in basic electronics. He failed to pass the three-year course and decided to drop out. Using some skills learned from the training, he then joined a friend who was running an informal workshop providing electronics repair services (TV, radio, etc.). He said that the time spent at the workshop was used fruitfully to improve his practical skills in providing the service and later make a living out of it. He did not however pursue that plan, as in the end he decided to work as a security guard for a supermarket in one of the city wards. The city was predominantly inhabited

by Uthu refugees from Rwanda who fled there in the aftermath of the well-documented genocide of Tutsis. He decided to change jobs as he settled down for two years with a female partner with whom he has one child. He set up a electronics repair workshop in Bukavu but the business was unsuccessful due to the persistent climate of unrest perpetuated by the militia.

In 2001, he crossed the border and moved to Kabwe in Zambia (after a two-week stopover in Lumumbashi) by road via Kipasthi (a locality bordering Zambia) to join his wife's brother, after he was informed him one about a possibility of setting up a business there. He reckoned that making a living in Kabwe was harder than in Bukavu. One year after, he decided to migrate to South Africa, stopping first in Zimbabwe. The problems he encountered with immigration officers at the border dissuaded him from using this itinerary. He dropped Zimbabwe for Maputo (Mozambique). This step in his migratory trajectory was characterised by a quite unstable residential locations in the capital of Mozambique.

He lived in many parts of the city -from inner Maputo to the peripheral suburbs- in search of more secure accommodation. A distinctive trait of his Maputo itinerary is the way in which he set in motion a few adjusting strategies that were both diversified and complimentary in accumulating assets. A. M. is what one would call a "self-made and forward looking person". From 2002 to 2004, he held three positions as a salaried worker. Evidence gathered from him about his job tenure suggests that for each of them the decision to quit or end the contract came exclusively from him. He indicated, for example, that his decision to quit the second position was mainly motivated by his Portuguese employer refusing to increase his salary. Throughout the different stages of his migratory trajectory A. M. obviously demonstrated a strong drive towards material achievement. In Maputo, the first house he rented was of an acceptable standard. He proudly stated that the last house he rented cost him one third of his monthly salary. He owned a refrigerator and his house had air-conditioning. He had a stereo system and a gas stove. He stated with a note of dissatisfaction, however, that his earnings were much better in Maputo than in Swaziland. In Mozambique, he managed to save enough money to buy a plot of land in Bukavu and build a comfortable house on it, had he wished.

This high drive for social achievement did not however prevent him from investing in the schooling of his children. Since relocating to Swaziland, two of his children are attending an English middle school in Mbabane and at the same time he is providing assistance to his second-born son attending secondary school in Goma. He also said that his first-born daughter at his birth place also relied on him for subsistence. He did not give any details on how the remittances he sent home reached his children. Information gathered from other sources suggests that he may also be using a Western Union money transfer service in the border town of Tsipaka on the Mozambique side to send remittances home.

Looking into the diversified strategies he is involved in, we find a particularly complex life space. Mbabane is indisputably the principal centre (job, family, housing, etc.). Bukavu, where one of his sons is attending school, is the secondary centre, and the third is his home place where his daughter lives. He

also has some cultural projects for his home place. Throughout his migratory trajectory, he has kept positive memories of his childhood there. He intends to visit it soon to seek membership from the traditional leadership of the village. In line with this plan, he said that he was saving enough to cover the costs of the traditional membership ceremony. A secondary motivation for the visit is his intention to claim back a plot of land that he inherited from his father, which has been mortgaged by his uncle to cover the costs of his son's marriage.

Trajectory 8

Identification: T. M.

Place of Residence: Mbabane

Year of departure: 1999

Year of birth: 1974

Sex: male

Through the trajectory of T.M., we can see an illustration of “destabilisation”, deliberate marginalisation and the repositioning of a forced migrant on fortuitous grounds. The same trajectory however reflects the individual's ability to take advantage of any opportunity that arises. T. M. is the fourth-born of a family of 12 children. As was the case of A. M. above, he too indicated that he was born in a remote rural area of the Bukavu region. His father did not possess land for all of them, and on his death, T. M. was left landless due to his young age. His two elder brothers are settled in Kinshasa and Matadi. When he was 14 years old, his uncle took him to attend a catholic school in a nearby small town. He passed the official exam Minerval, equivalent to General Certificate at 17 years old (which was a relatively good achievement for someone of his age), but failed to pass the General Certificate of Education (GCE A levels) after two attempts. He returned to his parental home, where he casually worked as a primary school teacher and, at the same time, provided some home-based private lessons in elementary mathematics to children from wealthy families. With the savings made from teaching, T. M. set up a stationery shop in the small town where he was living at his uncle's place. Lacking the required experience in business, or possibly because of the town's dormant economic activity (no major administrative functions were available there), he had to close down the business after two years.

At the age of 26 he migrated (voluntarily) to the city of Goma in the hope that his previous teaching experience would help him find a suitable job. His migratory trajectory from his small town of Dikese (quite far from Goma) to Goma is quite difficult to track properly. He said that he first stopped at Kalima and then moved to Punia. From there, he went back to Kalima and then moved to Goma with short stops along the way. It was a singularly erratic migration during which his sojourn at any of the places rarely exceeded 6 months for him to be considered as a resident at each of these. In Goma, his failure to get a job as a teacher forced him to search for a better alternative. The spreading war in the region also made things difficult as the environment was not conducive to finding employment job. He joined a religious group (by faith, he said), which was touring the region as part of a missionary crusade organised by an apostolic church. It was then that he met a pastor from Uganda who was living in Swaziland. T. M.

had some ambitions to migrate to South Africa for better living conditions, and the meeting with the pastor was quite critical to him as he saw Swaziland as a way of getting closer to this destination. After the crusade, he travelled to Swaziland by road with the pastor and the rest of the church members. Along the way, the pastor helped him secure shelter and subsistence. He also facilitated his integration into the church community. It was during the trip to Swaziland that he got acquainted with a woman from the same church, who became his partner soon after.

Upon arrival in Swaziland, the pastor advised him to use his knowledge of French to teach the language at a local primary school. For five months, he tried his luck in the small town of Siteki (in the Lubombo region) teaching in a nearby school while waiting for his application to be processed. Throughout this period, he did not get a job, and was finding it hard to carry on day-to-day life in Swaziland, although the stay in the camp was a good way of not paying rent. His female partner during the trip provided him with modest financial support by selling fruit and vegetables at the local market. This unsuccessful job search motivated T. M. to relocate to Manzini, where he finally found employment in a Chinese shop. He perceived his job of shop assistant as a step down from the teaching position, even if the salary was much better than what he used to earn in Goma as a teacher. The job in the shop was also precarious. At the time of the interview, he was on a two-day visit in Manzini in search for a better job. With regard to his migration plans, he has no intention of going back to his country from which he has hardly received any news from family members in the last three years.

Some reflective insights from the differing trajectories

Through the examination of time-space in nine trajectories, the cross-border migrants from DRC appeared to be active social agents capable of using their knowledge of structures to move around, achieve goals in a step-wise manner and, through agency, reproduce their livelihoods in places of relocation. The biographical approach used in this paper builds on a structuration position in order to explore the concept of practical consciousness as developed by Goss and Lindquist (1995) in an attempt to identify the embeddedness of cross-border mobility in the individual search for livelihoods along the lines suggested by Giddens (1984). Giddens (1984) argues that practices and discursive consciousness inform conveniently about the conditions of the migrants' actions; what they know and say or verbally express about the social conditions of their actions. The interpretation of these values gets significance in the construction of rationalised self-identity that underpins certain aspects of voluntary or involuntary displacement. The biographical analysis informs that for each of those (forced) migrants, the place has a meaning that is not statistic. International borders seem to do little in preventing them from moving to places that can provide betterment. The trajectories seem to indicate that the people involved move across a borderless spatial system. Regardless of the length of stay in a location, each place of transit from the borderland to more distant destinations displays a set of intersecting social relations within a borderless spatial system into which the migrants are structurally embedded. The migrant appears as an

intentional agent capable of influencing or being influenced by the social environment in which s/he is located. This influence translates into repeated mobility across different borders. Interestingly, from an empirical perspective, it must be noted that despite the focus of this investigation on self-or family-initiated mobility, the narrative accounts indicate that the interviewees did not invariably choose the refugee status or the security concern as a dividing line in their self-definition of their life stages. This would suggest that interviewees were not overly concerned by this “refugee angle”.

It must be acknowledged that the level of biographical details collected was particularly limited by memory problems in recalling events. This was mostly present in the exercise of eliciting migrants’ formerly held values and interpretations that have been overwritten by their current perceptions of the meaning of their experiences as reported retrospectively at the time of a single interview. To unveil the meaning of migrants’ experiences, the biographical interviews were supplemented by information collected from direct observation using a survey questionnaire. The life stories examined suggest that the meaning of an individual’s migration or relocation decision is situated in the perception that boundaries are not institutional barriers across time and space, rather than just in the moment when the decision is made. It is not just a matter of reconstructing livelihoods from one border to another. When asked about their reasons for moving, migrant’s responses provided some unambiguous, though limited, statements of their motivations. The responses revealed how a relocation or migration decision was embedded in values developed over a certain (if not entire) period of life course, rather than being linked only to some circumstances in the period immediately prior to departure. Some individuals wished to migrate regardless of the prevailing military conflict, suggesting that the intention to move long predated it.

It comes out that the trajectories are not linear but rather illustrate a step-wise or back and forth sequence in the temporal generation of movements across different borders. They serve to illustrate the long-time sequence involved in the generation of each move across the borders, be it involuntary. A set of values around which collected narratives concur or intersect is the significance of professional achievement or betterment that comes with the crossing of a border. Through this, mobility is a means of advancing materially or moving closer to that stage within a spatial system that is not geographically confined to officially bordered territory. The space of mobility expands as new aspirations arise. The differing trajectory patterns reveal that the border creates the conditions of social contacts and attainability of these aspirations.

Also reflected in the trajectories is, on the one hand, the developing meaning of migration to the individuals involved and, on the other hand, the multiple social influences shaping their perception of places. The personal objective of being independent of parents is juxtaposed with the perception of a happier life elsewhere. In the end this juxtaposition makes migration an option worth considering. The trajectories and biographical accounts also reveal a complex web of cultural values which one can interpret as favouring migration. The sources of social influence are also present in the shaping of

migration. Family environment, affiliation to a religious community, marital ties and countrymen contributed, to a varying degree, to the construction of the desirability of relocating elsewhere. These social influences are nested in the individual's general socio-economical milieu.

Certainly, an inherent problem in these narratives is that of practical consciousness. Understanding the motives behind the different trajectories becomes a complex task when one is seeking to establish what these persons knew about the implicit social conditions of their actions and values, but which they cannot express discursively, that underpinned their spatial mobility. As reported in this paper, the activities the individuals engaged in and the time period allocated to them to some extent reflected the importance of these activities in the particular social milieu in which they were situated. A set of values around which most collected narratives concur or intersect is the significance of professional achievements or betterment of one's life. To some of the migrants, these achievements appear to be a central goal in life, as illustrated by A. M.'s trajectory (number 8). Through the reported narratives, mobility is closely linked to the desire to advance materially or in terms of wellbeing. The biographical accounts demonstrate the link between an individual's move and the motive to achieve.

By way of concluding this paper, it must be pointed out here that a comprehensive analysis of the practical consciousness of these (forced) migrants would require more detailed documentation of incidences of temporal social interactions, and analysis of actions and conversations in which they were involved. However, such an analysis would demand more resources than were available to this project. Within the limitations of this study, it is not intended to claim that the different trajectories have revealed in detail all aspects of the interviewees' practical consciousness. Rather by approaching the issue from various angles for every life stage as defined by the interviewees, we were able to begin to trace the accepted values which shaped the meaning of their mobility decisions, and way in which their values and goals developed over time or across geographical boundaries.

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