Reflections on migration in sub-Saharan Africa

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To begin, a short story

Migration =
international + internal migration flows

This focus on both sets of migrants changes:
mobility profiles and
policy challenges

*not least since policy now needs to consider human &
economic rights and needs not only of foreigners in a new
country but also of newcomers in their own country.*

A call for governments to reduce restrictions on movement within and across their borders

Why?

1. the ability 'to decide where to live is a key element of human freedom.'

2. 'Our main message is that mobility has the potential to enhance human development— among movers, stayers and the majority of those in destination societies.'

This clear and simple statement – backed up in the UNDP Report with evidence from a number of regions – needs to be <u>qualified</u> in important ways.

1.

Voluntary and forced migration

To decide where to live, a person must be free to take a voluntary decision.

Many migrants cannot.

2. underlying assumption that migration leads to higher status - that *spatial mobility leads to social mobility*

3. the implementation of context-independent "best practice" will tend to fail unless *context-dependent practices* emerge.

How then to describe
the sub-Saharan African context
relevant to migration, and how does it
differ from
the European context?

After the Second World War there were recruitment drives for manpower…
from other European countries, from former colonies and as a result of guest worker policies

This welcome by Europe of the world's poor, was withdrawn in the 1970s. Nonetheless, migration streams have accelerated.

After 1970s, the transformation of European industries was accompanied by massive layoffs.
Many workers became redundant and most immigrants decided to remain with their families in their European countries of employment.

the birthrate of native Europeans has been plummeting for years, and is now at the lowest levels ever recorded in any major region of the world.
Consequently. Europe is only able to maintain its size and dynamism by importing non-Europeans

In contrast to Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing extraordinarily rapid urbanization

This unprecedented urban growth is primarily politically driven

Politics is also *pushing* people there,

as a refuge from civil wars, from rural banditry, and from an economically collapsing countryside.

After the global economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s , African cities informalised:

workers became self-employed - rather than wage-employed - due both to casualisation and informalisation of labour.

The cities were powerless in the face of problems posed by this avalanche of fleeing immigrants and of informally employed residents.

It was now that Africa became the continent of slums.

What does this tell us about the migration context in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Sub-Saharan Africa's urban population is exploding and that population is young:
Over the next 40 years in fact, Europe's working age population will decrease by 23% and Africa's will increase by a staggering 125%.

only 3 percent of Africans live in a country different from where they were born and fewer than 1 percent of Africans live in Europe (popular perceptions in Europe notwithstanding). People living in poor countries and poor regions are the least mobile.

Forced migration is a major challenge, although most migration in Africa is not conflict induced and most Africans move for the same reasons as everyone else.

there is little reliable demographic data in the region. There is an urgent need to improve these data and make them available to planning initiatives.

Southern Africa and the role played by South Africa here

- Southern Africa 'has constituted a coherent regional unit over the past century or so.

- The event which served as the catalyst for the melding of diverse peoples into such a unit was the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886.

- This initiated the building of Africa's single most potent economic force and attracted capital investment to other, less important focuses of development, such as the copper mines of Zaire (DRC) and Zambia, the farms and ranches of Zimbabwe, and the plantations of central Mozambique and southern Malawi.

- The links that were rapidly constructed to weld together the various territories of this region – and their societies – included ties of finance, trade, political influence, and, especially, migrant labour.'

After apartheid, more international immigrants from more diverse backgrounds, importantly now from African (and Asian) countries, are entering South Africa; they are younger than before; and there is an increasing proportion of women.

There is also a significant brain drain to Europe and North America of highly skilled professionals.
The skills shortage in South Africa is similar to that in the European Union.

The exaggerated image in the public consciousness of masses of foreign African immigrants, both documented and undocumented, flooding into the country is also similar to that in Europe.

Today, it is estimated that one and a half million foreign immigrants reside in South Africa, making up about 3% of the population.

Many remit part of their earnings to neighbouring countries, Mozambique Lesotho Zimbabwe

Similarities with the European Union disappear when we consider internal migration streams. These are much, much larger than international migration streams

Over the period when the national population increased by 20%, increases in rural municipal areas increased by 10% whereas those in metropoles rose by 40%.

Internal migrants are young They come from provinces where educational and health facilities are inferior to those in their provinces of destination. Most arrive with skills disadvantages and high expectations. Most settle in poorly serviced informal settlements (slums) within the cities to which they have chosen to migrate.

most of these migrants belong to the "middle poor" since the most destitute typically cannot afford to migrate at all.

South Africa has completed massive infrastructural programmes since 1994 so South African cities may not be as powerless as other African cities in the face of huge urbanization streams. However, local governments are weak and South African cities are battling like their counterparts on the continent to succeed in urban formalization so as to be able to offer all their residents, both new and old, a better quality of life.

In 2008, violent xenophobic outbursts that took place in South African cities, sometimes perceived to be pitting internal migrants (with entitlements) against international migrants (without such entitlements).
- government did little to reduce anti-foreigner sentiment.
- Its migration policy was *security and sovereignty centred*

Is policy change possible?

Given the continuing search by internal migrants for income and jobs in South African cities, given the forced migration streams that continue to traverse South African borders, and given the deep-seated culture of entitlement among many young South Africans, this is no easy task for government.

On the other hand, the migration system of Southern Africa – that shaped 'Africa's single most potent economic force' over a century – is becoming a closed system within which migrants move back and forth, thereby establishing ties of mutual recognition and respect. The economic ties so established may well over time lead to the political acceptance of a regional rather than South African–centred approach to the fate of both international as well as internal migrants, not simply because of "best practice" policies of regional cooperation but as a result of more than a century of common economic experience.
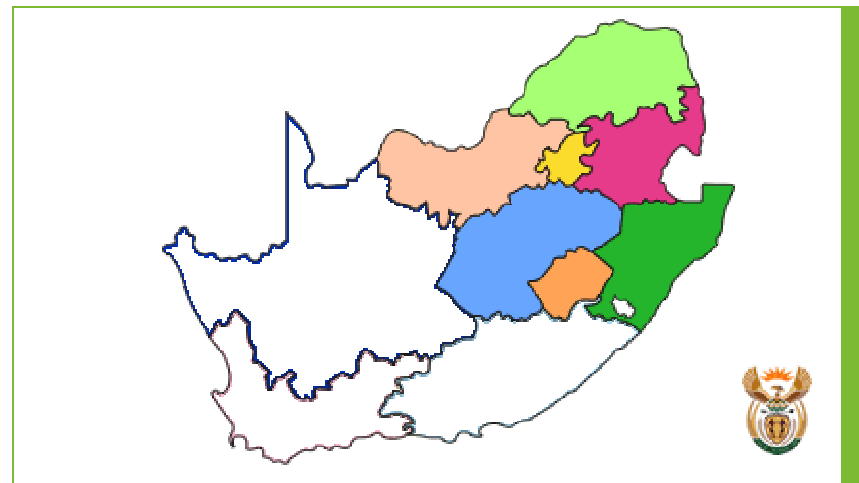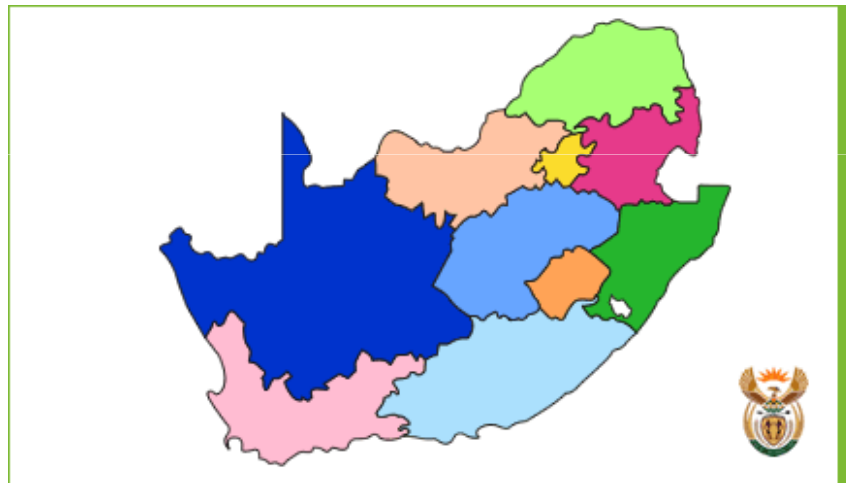
So the gradual shift from rural-urban circulatory migration to rural-urban gravity flow migration where the migrant and her children accept an urban future for themselves may be accompanied by the emergence of a Southern African identity shared by both internal as well as cross-border migrants in this region.

Let me finish by illustrating this with a second short story.

Birthplace of adult Western Cape residents 2001, by ethnic group
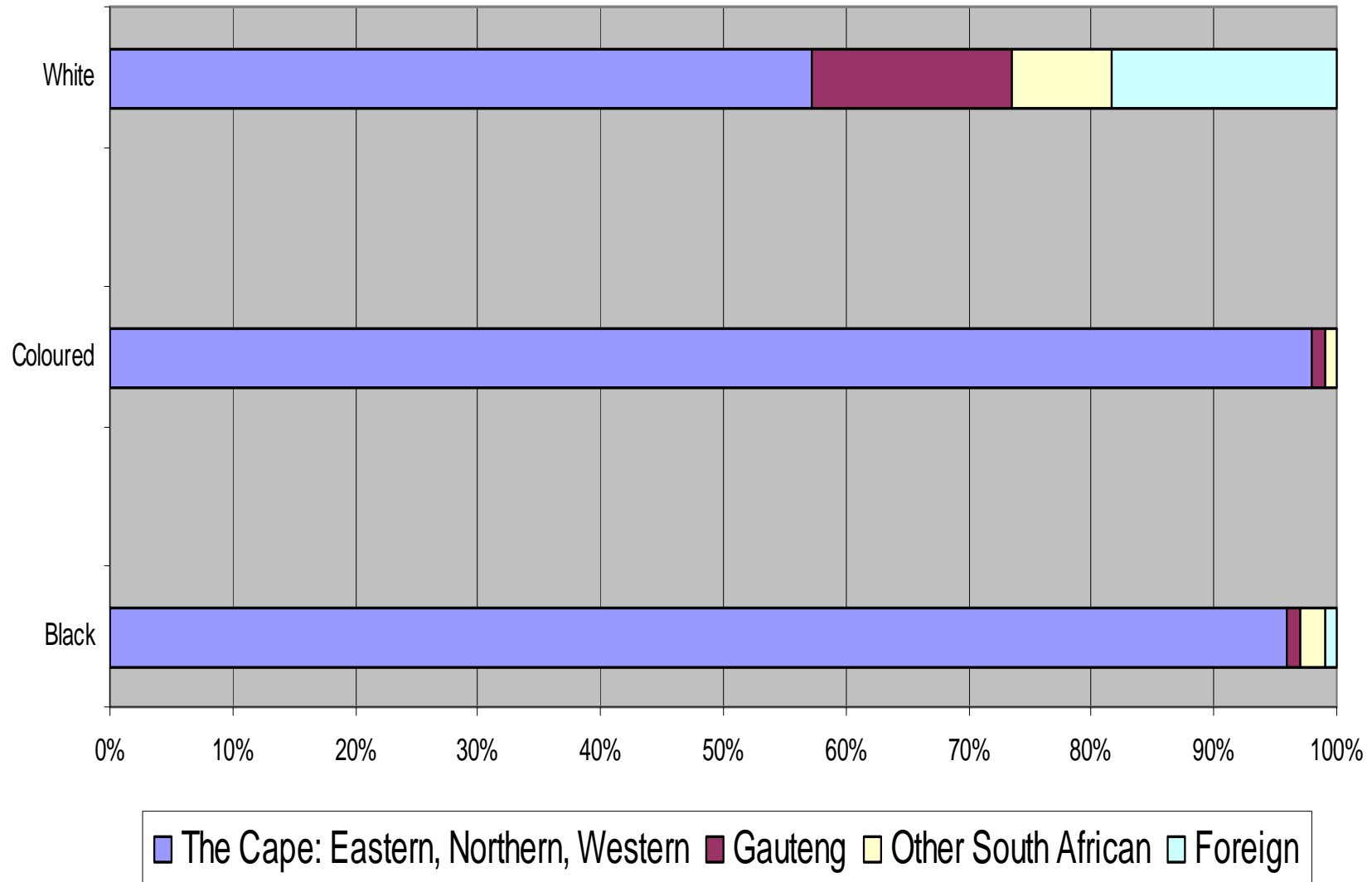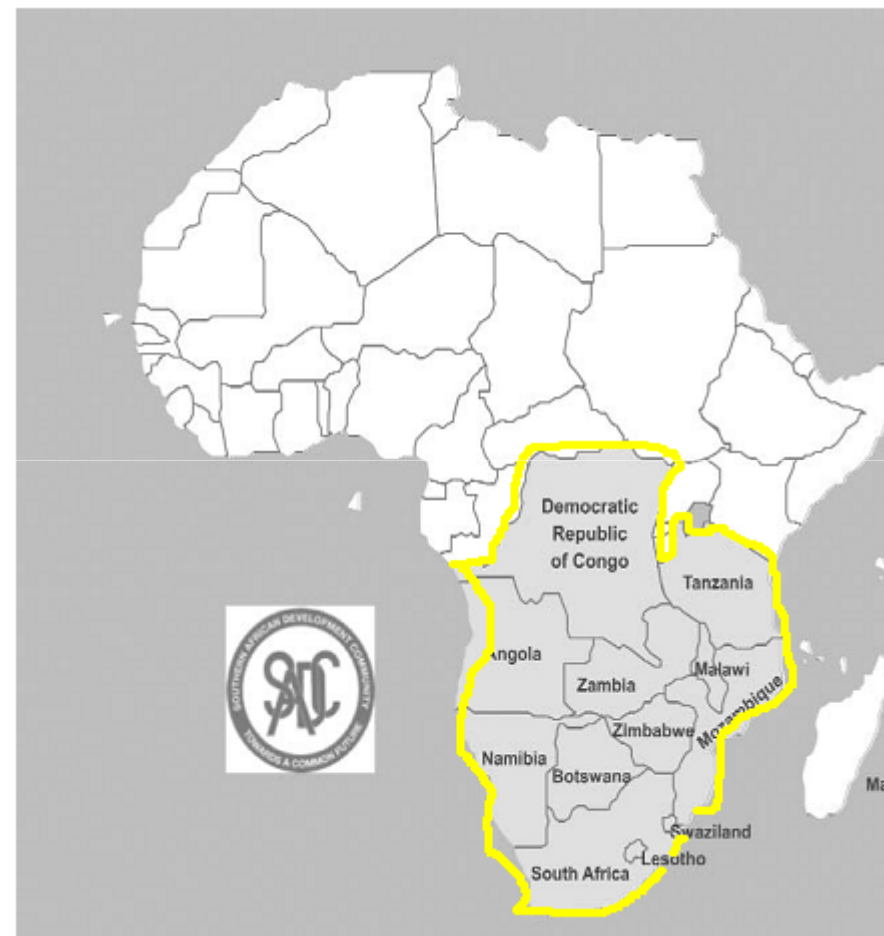

Legend: Western Cape | Rest of South Africa | Foreign
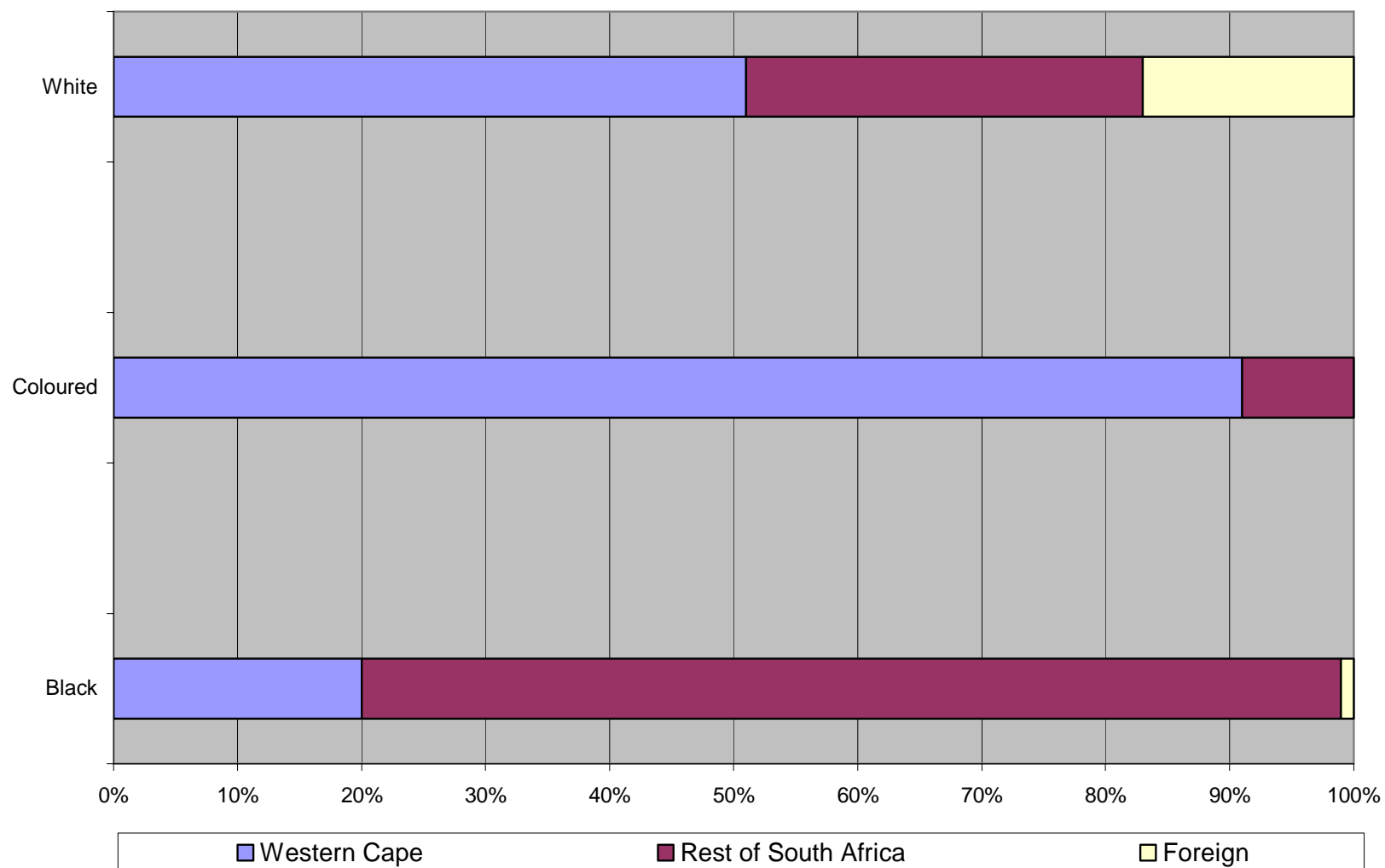
The old 'Cape'

BirthPlace of adult Western Cape residents 2001, by ethnic group

□ The Cape: Eastern, Northern, Western ■ Gauteng □ Other South African □ Foreign

Thank you

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