CONCEPTUALIZING AFRICAN MIGRATION TO SOUTH-EAST ASIA: STUDENT, TRADER, BUSINESSMAN & FUTURE OF POLICY IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the results of a two-year research project on African migration to Southeast Asia, namely Malaysia and Singapore, at the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), the National University of Malaysia. It was conducted from 2011-2013 and followed-up with online interviews of respondents from 2014 till the end of 2015. The purpose of the research project entitled, "African Migration to Southeast Asia: Characteristics, Impact and Future of Policy", was to highlight the character, specificities, policy contexts and outcomes of African migration to Southeast Asia. African migration to both East and Southeast Asia is relatively new and unknown compared to the older and more established Eurocentric migration of Africans to Europe and West. As the African presence continues to grow while the inner dynamics of this new migration appear hidden, it has puzzled policy-makers and bureaucrats alike, caused consternation, outrage and is experienced as a sceptre of invasion among the local populations. It is argued that the new African migration is to be understood as constituted by a self-regulatory process of African migrants comprised of relations among logics of migration, socio-economic networks, institutions and a set of State policies across domains. While transnational institutional change, including 'look East' policies of African States, the changing climate for migration in Europe and Malaysia's vision to become a high-income country by 2020, are among the permissive causes, it is the actual social relations of African migrants in a particular location which shape migration outcomes. As can be observed empirically and argued, African migration to Southeast is increasingly similar to Chinese migrations in the global context. Hence African migration to Malaysia may be seen in terms of the dynamics, social relations, institutions and transactions of overseas Chinese and transnational Chinese studies. The future of policy in Malaysia, as across Southeast Asia may be understood as the relationship of developmental States to the self-regulatory process of African migrants and emergence of Africa-town, with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Transnational migration, International Education, African Traders, Africa Town, Overseas Chinese, China-Africa Trade, 'Belanda Hitam', Malay Archipelago, Straits Settlements, Malaysia, Singapore, Southeast Asia, South-South Cooperation, Asia-Africa development comparisons.

1. At the Outset

A few decades ago and up until 1995, there was no inkling of what has become commonplace; the preference of enterprising Africans to obtain their higher education, as migrating traders and businessmen to the cities of East Asia – Seoul, Taipei, Beijing, Hong Kong – and of Southeast Asia – Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Bangkok, Manila – and in the process by-pass the former capitals of empire – London, Paris and Brussels. Where Africans

previously migrated to Europe and the West, as fleeing undemocratic regimes or as economic, educational, cultural and religious migrants, they now arrive as students, traders, businessmen and professionals to their preferred destination of China in East Asia and Malaysia and Singapore in Southeast Asia. By 2013 around 20,000 Africans had embarked on these journeys to Malaysia and many more to East and Southeast Asia. These arrivals were motivated by several rational choices and reasoned arguments about the purpose of migration, expectations and outcomes.[1] Different logics of migration were held by individual African migrants even from the same country. Africans from the same and different countries juggled several migrations and outcomes across transnational borders in Southeast Asia.[2] Yet collectively a pattern was emerging that was different from the conventional motivations for travelling to Europe, judging from migrants own discourses. The journeys East to Asia were not as refugees fleeing drought, civil war and the scourge of disease. In few cases this was the case, such as the Somali, Sudan and Liberian migrations to Malaysia. For reasons of refuge-seeking, African migrants still migrated in the majority of cases to Europe rather than Asia. In fact many Africans moving to Europe as refugees, while seeking refuge in the old cities of empire, also questioned the role of the West for the state of underdevelopment, conflict and war in their countries.

A decade and half ago, before the present refugee and migrant crises hit the shores of Europe (an outcome of several causes including; the U.S. war in Iraq, post-Arab Spring civil war in Syria and rise of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra in Iraq and the Levant), a tide of xenophobia had gripped the West. The rise of anti-Islamic political parties in Europe and anti-Muslim sentiment was all too evident during the election campaigns of the far right in the aftermath of the September 11th attack in 2001 by self-styled jihadists on the U.S. [3] In this atmosphere of resurgent xenophobia, anti-Islamism, anti-Islam and anti-Semitism also reared its head.[4] With the rise of far right political parties in Europe, an open-minded dialogue based on relativism was being sidelined (see Mammone et al 2012). A polarising approach became main-stream then and has remained in the discussion of Islam, migration and European-born minorities with non-European parents. The debate in Europe since then has questioned how far Islam was compatible with and can co-exist with western liberal values, and if Muslims fit-in with democratic society.[5] African migrants being unsure about the future of Europe and in European cities, embraced refuge-seeking as a discourse of migration to Southeast Asia. From the beginning of the new millennium, many African migrants embraced a preference to be part of the massive investment in modern information and communications infrastructure, availability of broadband internet, world-class higher education, opportunities for start-up entrepreneurship and general economic dynamism in

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[1] See Report of Meeting on African Students in Malaysia, KITA-Africa Unit Reports, 2009, Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

[2] Interviews with new African student arrivals, Kuala Lumpur International Airport, May 2011

[3] For a discussion on the roots of terrorism as incubated in big super-power rivalry of the Cold-war See Mahmood Mandani (2005) "Good, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror", Harmony Publishers

[4] A good analysis is presented on the debates between separation of religion from the State as well as the presence of liberal values in all scripture in Mustafa Akyol (2013)"Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty", New York, W.W. Norton & Company

[5] For arguments describing Islamism and democracy beyond western conceptions of liberalism see Jeremy Menchik (2016) "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism", Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press.

Southeast Asian locations while xenophobia continued, European cities fell behind in structural reform and Europe reeled in recession.[6]

1.1.   Race to high-income country, knowledge economy & Internationalisation

In 1991 and at the presentation of the 6th Malaysia Plan, Dr. Mahathir's administration announced Vision 2020, the long-term policy framework to transform Malaysia into a high-income per capita country.[7] In Vision 2020, the Malaysian political elite anticipated the rising importance of the knowledge-economy, Information and Communications Technology and the Services sector in the transformation from middle to high-income country. The government self-consciously promoted Malaysia as a knowledge economy (K-economy), ICT gateway and regional educational hub in Southeast Asia. Policies facilitated the internationalization of higher education as an income-generating Services Sector activity. A cumulative set of massive government interventions under Dr. Mahathir and the Malaysia Plans implemented policies to accelerate or sustain the already high rate of economic growth across industrial sectors. By the early 1990s, massive modernisation of infrastructure was already implemented through State-led investments. With basic infrastructure on a comparable level with Singapore through public investment projects, a wave of privatization was being implemented especially in the services sector to increase the degree of openness of the Malaysian economy.[8] In the process Malaysia embraced the notion of an industrial and services hub for the inter-linked regional economy in Southeast Asia. From an electronics assembly hub dating to the early 1970s, it became a tourism gateway to Asia (under the flagship 'Malaysia Truly Asia campaign'), ICT and multimedia hub with the launch of the Multimedia Super Corridor as Asia's first Silicon Valley; and an educational hub for ASEAN and other developing country students wishing to pursue higher education in the non-West. Educational reforms were implemented with privatization and internationalisation of higher education in 1996.

The capital surplus from middle-income country status (compare with capital shortage in low-income sub-Saharan African countries) in the context of the vision to become a developed country by 2020 enabled the Malaysian developmental State to embark on the rapid modernisation of infrastructure. Even though it is argued by some scholars (see Menkhoff et al 2011, Evers 2003, Evers 2002b) and institutions (OECD 2013, 2008) that Malaysia still has a considerable knowledge-gap, in less than a decade, State policies and investment helped to bridge the information and communications technology infrastructure gap between developed and newly-developing countries. A visible outcome of the rapid modernization of infrastructure is how far Malaysia was transformed into a location in Southeast Asia facilitating global commerce, aviation, logistics, services with dynamic economic growth but also a world metropolis for all kinds of migrations.

From the perspective of African students, businessmen, professionals and tourists, the institutional environment for competition and growth which previously, was only possible in Europe, was now a present-day reality in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. Across a range of

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[6] Personal interview of 2 African entrepreneurs, who are residents of Paris and London. They were en-route to relocate to Kuala Lumpur as partners in a new web animation and designing venture. Amsterdam Airport, April 2010.

[7] Ahmad Sarji (1997) "Malaysia's Vision 2020: Understanding the Concept", Subang Jaya, Pelanduk Publications

[8] For an elaborate historical and comparative political economy account of the race to create open economies in ASEAN through public policies, see Alidsair Bowie & Daniel Unger (1997)"Politics of Open Economies: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand", Cambridge Univ. Press.

subject-matter, interests and preferences, whether it concerns; the value-chain for global brands in industrial manufactures and fashion; presence of modern educational campuses, shopping malls and condominiums as social spaces for networking and economic exchange; the delights of quality hotel accommodation, alluring holiday resorts, gastronomic repertoires and hospitality service; world-class highways and modern transportation systems, including the regional aviation hubs of Kuala Lumpur and Changi International Airports; Malaysia, Singapore and other Southeast Asia have emerged as competing alternatives or surpassed Europe and the West. Altogether, a mix of icons of modernization in the area of infrastructure, services, policies and development of cultural heritage attracted a younger generation of Africans. Youth from Africa, the Persian Gulf, Middle East and even Europe have moved to Southeast Asia, to Singapore and Malaysia in particular, to further their education, professional careers or immerse in the vibrant economic growth and creative energies of the youthful population. Some also sought business opportunities or preferred to be part of the Asian heritage, including nature tourism trails, mostly lost in Europe and the West.

While Malaysians dispute the openness of electoral politics, democratic space and citizenship rights, some African migrants were attracted to Malaysia by the relatively liberal economic and social environment compared to their African country of origin. Other soft-power characteristics also attracted African migrants. These include the speed of construction of modern infrastructure (a condominium project is completed in 3 months); availability of high-speed broadband internet, e-commerce platforms, e-banking and e-government; a business friendly regulatory environment; and the lower cost of higher education. Furthermore, African migrants as well the political and business elite tend to rationalise Asian alternatives to Europe and the West as imposing less transaction and social costs in economic, political, cultural and ideational terms. Consequently, a new norm which emerged in their international relations, more or less, around 1995 was to 'look East' as a policy perspective. Such has been the thinking behind Africa's 'look East Policies', which focused on industrialising Southeast Asia and China. Look East as a conscious policy of diversification away from Europe and West as far as that was possible, brings to, a more or less, decisive end, the centuries-long Eurocentric dominance of the African political and economic scene.

Africans migrating to Malaysia arrived from mainly sub-Saharan Africa. An insignificant section of African migrants arrived from North Africa and the Maghreb region, preferring to migrate to Europe. Africans migrants also arrived in Malaysia and onward to Southeast Asia from the Middle East. Some had settled previously in Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, including a number who preferred to live in a more liberal Islamic environment than in their own country of nationality. From 2008, and since the global financial crises, African migrants tend to turn-away from the former cities of empire – Paris, London, Brussels – and set their sights on Southeast Asia. Taking the global financial crises of 2008 as a historical marker, the continued growth and resilience of Southeast Asian economies compared to Europe made Malaysia and Singapore the foremost destination of varieties of migration.[9]

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[9] While not constituting part of the subject-matter of the research, it is noteworthy that Fresh European graduates with a Masters degree and those holding doctorates from west Europe and Southeast Europe, also arrived to start-up their enterprises. These upheld similar arguments as Africans migrating to Malaysia with respect to the state of the European economy and lack of growth. They set up micro-enterprises and ventured into Architecture and Designing, IT Consulting, Advertisement and new Multimedia, Market Consulting, using Malaysia as a hub in order to move to the larger Chinese market after a few incubation years.

1.2.   Contested outcomes and policy ambivalence

As I argue in this article, Southeast Asia's own success made it a focus of varieties of migrations. The geographical location of Malaysia and Singapore, as gateways to East and Southeast Asia, and globalisation strategies positioned them as cost-effective providers of global services for multinational enterprises, as facilitators of international trade and intermediate stop-over hubs for air travel. Rapid industrialization has also provided the capital-surplus to invest in world-class higher education that was comparable or surpassed the West and to build modern cities, infrastructure and transportation systems. Such a scale of modernisation over a short period of historical time, which offered Asian alternatives to African migrants, would not have been possible only through the workings of markets. Arguably, such rapid growth and transformation was incubated and sponsored with State-business coordination in Asian developmental States (Amsden 2003, Woo-Cummings 1999, Wade 1992). Even though critics, Western observers and Asian scholars have drawn attention to the pervasive corruption and corrupting elites who constitute State-business coordination (see Case 2010), attendant money politics (see Jomo & Gomez 1997), corrupt party officials and political party systems (Gomez 1991) which all point to the genesis of 'reformasi' movements, microeconomic opportunities have been opened for new entrepreneurial dynamism to take off across sectors through business-friendly policies and the institutional environment of governed markets.

In addition to modernisation of infrastructure and economic dynamics, characteristics of 'soft power' attracted African migrants to Southeast Asia. To name a few; the collective culture, cultural mores, social life and freedom to dialogue constantly (which on occasions invoked libel and sedition laws out of proportion), the chance to be part of the Asian heritage and "things Asian" were among the attractions. The sustained flow of migration foremost by African students, then traders, businessmen, professional classes and even the criminal gangs were all constituted by the comparative economic success of Southeast Asian countries when compared to sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. While the corporate sectors in Southeast Asia are interested in international ventures in Africa, devoting considerable resources to scout for investments, State policy-makers and bureaucrats devote attention to the South-South cooperation framework, but with ambivalence about the new African migration. African migration is denied in official policy in Southeast Asia (and in East Asia).[10] This denial or rather ambivalence in official policy towards African migration has several causes, including the empirical outcomes of the African presence to date.

The outcomes of this new African migration are hotly contested in Malaysia and Southeast Asia but also among African migrants themselves. Many in Southeast Asia, out of exasperation, have concluded all African migrants as part of criminal networks. The sources of this generalisation are varied. Some, not given to the notion that international students on sponsorship still engage in income earning activities or the reality that non-student Africans possess apparent purchasing power, questioned the source of survival of African migrants in Malaysia. Others interrogate the confusing and (often changing) economic identity of African migrants which present as student-businessman, trader-student or hidden businessman who pursues a course of study, taking more than the required period to graduate from such studies. Others simply blamed the government for lack of robust immigration policies, measures or implementation. These argue that State policies in Southeast Asia fail to deny immigration at

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[10] Personal interview, officials of 2 diplomatic missions of two Southeast Asian countries, in Kuala Lumpur, July, 2011. These officials had argued that very few African migrants have been given a residence permit and even fewer have applied for such permits.

the border, as in Europe, but consciously seek to postpone the denial of entry deep within the border often with little success.[11]

African migrants spared no reflections on their own migration to Malaysia and Southeast Asia. In Malaysia and Singapore, their online forums (and some are exclusive, requiring membership) contain the continuous and enervating dialogue which interrogate and weigh the net present value of migration in highly economic terms. Monies invested were counted, loans repayable summed-up, new educational sponsors in African were sought and rising cost of living on university campuses in Southeast Asia cities were compared. Even electoral rhetoric by political rivals during general elections that may impact Africans is scrutinized for xenophobic and anti-African content.[12] As many sections of the African community have interrogated their migration location in Southeast Asia, it led to a movement back and forth – between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, from Hong Kong and Guangzhou to Kuala Lumpur, between Manila and Singapore, away from Bangkok to Penang, again in Kuala Lumpur en-route to Kota Kinabalu.[13] As observed in this research, African migration mimic overseas Chinese in these circular migrations to their favourite Southeast Asian countries; their journeys within and between cities; initiation and maintenance of socio-economic networks; pragmatic outlook and unrelenting search for profit-making opportunities; and uncertainty about State policies affecting their interests. Hence, the approach which views African migrations to Southeast Asia from the perspective of overseas Chinese migration was a matter of the empirical reality upon which concepts could emerge.

1.3.   Hidden character of migration & burning questions

African migration to the Malay Archipelago or "Nusantara" is not new. Much earlier on, in the 17th century, East India Companies of the Dutch and British sailed through the port of Melaka with their wares of the spice-trade, which included Africans captured or enslaved, on their way to work in the spice factories in Bengkulu (Bencoolen) in Java (see Jayasuria 2009). The present-day African migrations to Malaysia, Singapore and across Southeast Asia, is new in the sense of being self-regulatory rather than forced migration. An observable characteristic of African migration to Southeast was that the African presence was hidden (see Jayasuria 2011) across a range of issues. To be certain, the physical presence of Africans in Malaysia and Southeast Asia was visible and these were in no way assimilated in any culturally identifiable sense. Yet the totality of African migration, which include, the relations among various dimensions of the self-regulatory process was not meaningful to local Southeast Asians interested in the phenomenon or experiencing the new African presence as a sceptre of invasion. An instance of this lack of meaningfulness of the inner world of African migrants to the local population in Southeast Asian cities highlights this hidden characteristic. How African students survive post-graduation while no longer making claims to academic sponsorship or how income and profits flow from being embedded in domestic social networks, the commanding of resources sufficient to enjoy comparable purchasing power as locals with highly remunerated careers, under conditions where domestic companies are unwilling to offer employment, all present as a lacuna in knowledge. Whether in Malaysia or other locations, including Singapore, Jakarta, Bangkok and Manila,

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[11] Interview at Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, Unit for Bilateral Diplomacy, Wisma Putra Complex, Federal Government Administrative Centre, Putrajaya, June 2013.

[12] Focused group interview of Africans in Kuala Lumpur (Jan. 2013), Penang (Feb. 2013), Puchong (March 2013).

[13] Focused group interview of African students and African Art & craft traders, "Little India", Singapore (March 2013).

the social relations and transactions which sustain the African presence appeared as an unknown variable across Southeast Asia.

With the growth in African migration to Southeast Asia, policymakers and State bureaucrats in Asia, overwhelmed with the growing trend of African 'journeys East', where historically, none or little of such migration existed, turned to heavy- handed measures on occasions to intervene in the flow. Government officials too in sub-Saharan Africa interrogate this new trend to understand in how far the new migration to Southeast Asia may profit African development without yet a good grasp of the inner dynamics of the phenomenon. In similar fashion, the gaps in knowledge about this new migration haunts academics, journalists and international institutions alike and other observers interested in post-colonial studies, China-Africa relations and Asia-Africa development comparisons. They too continue to gaze into the closed box of African migration in order to formulate specific questions to pose. Thus there is consternation that with a growth in the phenomenon, much less is known, analytical frameworks are inadequate or lacking with respect to the inner workings and outcomes of the new African migration to Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

If anything is certain, it is that the growth in the African presence in Malaysia and across Southeast Asia has not translated into a better understanding of African migrants, social networks and economic transactions which are hidden. Further, if as assumed in the migration and development debate (see Collier 2015), the growth in South-South migration in the past decade,[14] has a positive impact on the migrants themselves as agents of development, then to pose relevant sets of questions purposely, may help to understand African migrants, the inner dynamics of their migration to Southeast Asia, outcomes and impact on policies. With the intuition that strong relationships are configured between African migrants, domestic institutions and policy, the outcomes of the new migration can be questioned from the dual perspective of migrants and that of policy-makers and bureaucrats.

Three sets of questions may be posed about African migration to Southeast Asia. The materialization of the African migrant in the Southeast Asian context and Malaysia in particular, rationalizations of migrants about their own migrations and self-reported strategies of survival constitute a single set of questions. The social relations, institutions and transactions which sustain African migration within Malaysia and keep it hidden formed a second set of questions. The third set of questions concern the State-mediated and policy roots of contemporary migration as both permissive and active causes driving growth in the African presence. The questions collectively interrogate and analyse the origins of migration and actors, domestic associates and liaisons, circuits of financial sustenance of African migrants as well as the policy-driven institutional dimensions, which encompass policymakers, policy-managers, bureaucrats and other powerful actors in Malaysia. They seek to immerse the analysis (and the observer) into the hidden social world of the new African migrants.

As I hypothesize and argue in this research, an interest in the configuration and relations among the logics of migration held by African migrants, their socio-economic networks, institutions and state policies (which partly shaped the origins of the new migration), is plausible in the effort to uncover the hidden dynamics and particular outcomes of African migration in a particular Southeast Asian location. Three outcomes of interest in

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[14] The total stock of South-South migrants is 62 million and this constitutes 36 per cent of global migration. South-South migration contributes 34 per cent of global remittances. See World Bank (2015)'Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook', *Migration and Development Brief*, No. 24, April 13, 2015.

African migration to Southeast Asia which materialised over time were the knowledge-seeking orientation, commercial and capital accumulation motives, and the orientation to be part of the Asian heritage, values, culture and 'things' Asian. The various end-outcomes juggled by Africans are related to the self-chosen preferences, justifications and rational choices of migrants about the purposes of their migration; a variety of transactions which emerge from liaisons and contacts in the Southeast Asian location, modifications of domestic institutions to their purpose; and the set of policies which collectively opened-up the space for migration and created these migrants. In the case of Malaysia, the vision to become a developed country by 2020 imposed the need to re-position the country's role in globalisation. This in turn provided the framework of government policies and institutions which unleashed the entrepreneurial spirit, the reforms which created educational and other migrants as well as circuits for their economic survival.

1.4.   Concepts, perspectives, hypotheses

Without theories, perspectives, concepts and hypotheses to be verified, the world is hardly intelligible. A variety of intuitions and musings about social relations and visible phenomena over time may not necessarily constitute a validation of truth and knowledge. To help in the process to understand the inner dynamics of the new African migration, a working hypothesis was conceived as follows. The specificities and outcomes of African migrations, especially their role as agents of development was a relationship between the migrants' own logics of migration, varieties of social relations and institutions, including domestic ones which modified these dimensions, State policies and institutional change arising from State-driven actions. Consequently, what I describe as a self-regulatory process of African migrants was also shaped by an array of State policies in a Southeast Asian location. These developmental State policies which arise from long-term national visions of continuous catch-up to more developed countries, increasingly seek to re-position the economy in globalisation. The requirements of openness, internationalisation, entrepreneurship, innovation, highly-educated skills and modernisation of infrastructure required created these migrants both as intended and unintended consequences of policy. From the fore-going analysis, the self-regulatory process of African migrants and State policies are both implicated in the new migration to Southeast Asian cities and locations.

Following the results of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Malaysia between 2011 and 2013, and thereafter online till 2015, and demonstrated empirically, there were more than mere instances of African migrants who juggled several migration logics by responding to the local situation. Some African migrants who set out to pursue higher education in Malaysia ended up within the trading networks due to their connections with local Malaysian and overseas Chinese. With windfall profits to made, African migrants and their local Chinese business partners (the license holder who registers the venture), jointly ventured in the export of low-cost electronics and smart-phone accessories to several African countries. Other Africans from the merchant classes turned to higher education when State policies changed to promote particular service and hospitality industries to meet the growing demand. Yet others had turned into rentier capitalists lending their savings to small local Chinese and Malay micro-businesses who were facing a periodic financial crunch. Some African traders who had interests in real estate invested their surpluses via intermediaries into low-budget hotel outlets, so that these merchants indeed became hoteliers.

With the emphasis on the hidden-ness, 'unknown variable' character and newness of African migration to Southeast Asia, a comparative perspective was an important part of the

analytical toolbox. Adopting a historicised perspective and surveying African migration since the colonial period shed light on varieties of locations and migrations. The forced migration of Africans to Southeast Asia by European East India Companies, stand in sharp contrast to the self-regulatory process of African migrants to cities in Europe in the post-colonial period and new migration now underway to Southeast Asia, China and East Asia. Whether African migrants journeyed to Europe or preferred Southeast Asians cities as their new destinations for higher education, trade, entrepreneurship or professional career, they made rational choices, created social networks, modified social institutions in the location and interacted with State policy. An interest among various variables, namely; how migrants conceive and constitute their migration and particular locations; actual social relations both in the location and as mediated by social media; changing institutions; and State policies across domains; all opened up the analytical space to compare African migration to Southeast Asia to other migrations in the global context.

With the analytical frontiers of what was comparable in social institutions, politics, preferences and rationalisations of the actors in question extended, the new African migration to Southeast Asia is conceived to be similar to Chinese migration in the overseas and global context. That is to say that, observed empirically over time, the dynamics and outcomes of African migration to Malaysia and Southeast Asia is very much similar to overseas Chinese migration. While the data is extensive, this article presents in condensed form the major highlights and findings of the new African migration to Malaysia, taking into account the history, politics, economics and policy preferences that enable a comparison with other migrations. With no theoretical aim at hand, the analysis may help with particular ways to conceptualise African migration in what is often misunderstood and unwelcome phenomenon.

1.5. Relevance of Malaysia as empirical field

The relevance of Malaysia as an empirical field, for the study and understanding of transnational migration, globalisation, and as a form of post-colonial knowledge, cannot be gain-said. In many ways Malaysia is at the cross-roads of several inter-related debates on globalisation, in particular the importance of location-specific advantages and catch-up development. The quest to innovate out of the middle-income trap to high-income developed country, which remained elusive for many sub-Saharan African countries and even Malaysia itself, is one such debate.[15] Another debate concerns the capacity of the State to intervene and regulate transnational processes including migration, terrorist networks, and new communication spaces such as blogs, social media, internet-mediated trade, auctions and financial flows which all appear to follow a self-regulatory dynamic and actor preferences. Yet another debate concerns the development of domestic capacities, including highly-skilled labour; a national system of innovation; innovation mindset and business start-up culture; which create advantages to compete in new competitive global industries. For an understanding of multiculturalism as 'de facto' norm of many metropolises, global cities and urban areas; viewed as successes versus pitfalls; it is once again Malaysia with its diversity of communities, languages, cultures, religions and a new location for global migration that empirical observations can produce new insights. The State in Malaysia within its public policies recognised the weight and importance of migration in the strategies to move to high-income status by 2020. It also acknowledged the impact of migration measures on other

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[15] For a good debate see Gary Gereffi (1996) 'The Elusive Last Lap in the Quest for Developed Country Status' in James H. Mittleman (ed.) (1996) Globalization: Critical Reflections, Boulder, Co., Lynne Rienner Publishers

policy domains especially on sectoral policies.[16] This research turns this acknowledgement on its head. I argue that it is State policies, whether sectoral or industry-specific, and policy objectives across domains, such as education, knowledge economy, service economy, the creation a caring, harmonious and socially cohesive society which shaped new migration spaces.

1.6.   Ethnography and African migrants

As proposed earlier, without concepts, theories and juxtaposition of perspectives, it is almost an impossible task to make meaningful sense of the growing phenomenon of African migration to Southeast Asia. The variety of outcomes of African migration to Southeast Asia in general, and Malaysia in particular, are shaped by relations among migrants, social networks, institutions and state policies across domains. As argued in Glick Schiller (1997: 155-156), transnational migration, unlike globalisation, is concerned with the actual social interactions which migrants maintain and construct across borders. However like globalisation studies it is pre-occupied with the outcomes of the transnational re-organisation, restructuring, dislocation, disruption to the stable order at local, national, regional and global orders. Considering that actor narratives, stories and perspectives on migration, institutions and policies was a major focus, the research was highly ethnographic.

Sharing a common interest with transnational studies that distinguish their approach from mainstream globalisation perspectives (by the pre-occupation with actual social relations of migrants and the politics of place), the research perspective was broadened to include online communities and forums where these migrants enact their experience. This outlook was in keeping with the empirical reality that 'location' in African migration was not only a territorial concept. Malaysia may be conceived then as an organising territorial location or hub for the circular migrations of Africans in Southeast Asia. Setting the perspective beyond Kuala Lumpur as city of arrival and territorial hub of African migration, ethnographies of the online exchanges of African migrants and sojourners with associates and liaisons in Singapore, Jakarta, Bangkok and Manila were also an important part of their construction of Malaysia as a destination. Hence, the inclusion of territory as a social, political and economic space in which State policies, surveillance, and power was exercised as well as online communities, as discursive spaces across borders where African migrants enacted their own biographies of migration, possessed analytical utility. By constructing these subject-matter arenas, the scope of the research was broadened without compromising depth in data collection with respect to in-depth interviews, informal conversations and participant observation of social media and online forums where migrants enacted their biographies.

Laying aside the problem of location, as not necessarily single but multiple and a juxtaposition of locations in African migration, the notion of an 'African migrant' itself is contested. Often reported, a migrant from an African country was asked, in iterated interactions with different locals of a Southeast Asian country, of her acquaintance with the leader of an NGO, a CEO, a Pastor or other personality from another African country, all of them being African. This prevailing assumption was commonly held by some locals in a given location in Southeast Asia, that Africa is one country and the logical inference that all African migrants are the same. Often presented as innocent curiosity, this image of all Africa and African migrants as one and the same is 'orientalist' in origin. Said (2002:573-577) has

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16 See report of the Roundtable on the "Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Malaysia" organised by OECD and European Union, 17 April 2014, GTower Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

subsumed such apparently innocent curiosities and the 'othering' descriptions that flow from them as properly a part of the rhetoric of identity. For lack of space in the present article, suffice it to say that Africa is made up a wide diversity of nations, languages, traditions, cultures, religions and countries.

Conceding that Africa is diverse, there is then hardly a thing as 'African migration' or an 'African migrant'. Rather it is apt to speak of a Nigerian migrant or a migrant from Sudan, Lesotho, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, respectively and so on. Keeping to the nation-State as a convenient social aggregation and State as political actor, helps to provide a temporal fix to these contradictions. Consequently, taking the position that these and other migrations out of Africa are products of commonly-shared rationalisations held by migrants, a roughly similar experience of State policies and institutional change, a social construction of 'African migration' and the notion of an 'African migrant' was plausible. These contradictions were resolvable, epistemologically, also by reference to the self-identifications of Africans in Malaysia and across Southeast Asia as belonging to an imagined transnational African community. [17] In the presence of a vibrant African community in Malaysia, the temptation was to conduct a study of its leading members. That, however, would not contribute to collective biographies but rather to a collection of social facts that were top-down. A bottom-up approach based on in-depth interviews, narratives and stories of migrants across a diverse group of respondents was fruitful.

1.7. Collective biographies

Compared to structural theories which emphasize the role of families and communities in migration decisions (Taylor 1999b), but which did not go far enough, migration network theories reflects better the empirical reality in contemporary globalisation. One of the analytical usefulness of the migration network approach is the emphasis on the collective agency of migrants and communities in organising migration. Transnational theories capture the present re-ordering of global space by new transport and communications technologies that make it easy for migrants to maintain long-term relations – economic, social, cultural and political links across borders. Accordingly, transnational communities (diasporas) are becoming increasing important as social actors (Castels (2009). Massey et al (1990: 60) make a similar argument, that while immigration has economic and social foundations, the formation of migrant networks is probably the most important. Networks build into the migration process a self-perpetuating momentum that leads to growth over time, in spite of fluctuating wage differentials, recessions and increasingly restrictive immigration policies.

A preference to move beyond the network level of analysis was an exploratory approach in studying African migration to Southeast Asia. As an outcome, the construction of collective biographies, provide a more in-depth reflection into migrant networks. Collective biographies function as a heuristic framework to bring a semblance of order into the plethora of experiences of African migrants coming from different African countries and holding different expectations of end-outcomes. The strategy and image of collective biographies is not one of meta-data or does it represent edited summaries of themes in biographies. In fact it was only possible to construct a collective biography through individual in-depth narratives of migrants from different African countries. By collecting these accounts within the different rationalisations or migration logics, it was possible to construct both 'African migrants' and 'African migration' along these dimensions. Collective biographies mirror the inner life as it

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[17] This author was among a core-group of Africans in Malaysia who set out to create the African network of professionals in Southeast Asia in 2012.

were of African migrants as well as their social relations. They make modest claims to the construction of the hidden social world and transactions of African migrants by constructing a subjective ethnographic narrative from the perspective of both the respondent and researcher. It combined interviews, participant-observation, textual narratives, observations of social media exchanges and online forum conversations of migrants.

One of the merits of the framework of migrant collective biographies is to point to new institutions that African migrants construct in their migration. These are matched by other institutions, regulatory, economic, cultural, aesthetic, in the Southeast Asian locations which re-shape and redefine these migrants-own institutions. An example refers to the African culinary repertoires that are seized upon by African migrants within the capital accumulation logic of migration. Realising that original African recipes can be transformed by fusion with Southeast Asian gastronomic repertoires, which appeal to a larger constituency, an African entrepreneur in Cheras district, in Malaysia, did not only incorporate Malays and Chinese in the Chef's department, he took over a Chinese food outlet and retained the Chinese writing of the menu. Many local Chinese customers had flocked to the new food outlet with Chinese characteristics only to discover a new African-Malaysian fusion location. The interaction between migrant's logics and domestic institutions resulted in new outcomes and deeper integration of African economic networks into the universe of micro-enterprises and family businesses in Southeast Asia.

2. African journeys 'East': historical rewind

Both historically and at present, Malaysia remains a gateway to East and Southeast Asia. The port town of Melaka provided an intermediate location in the maritime age of commerce linking many trading networks between the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia to the Cape in Southern Africa. As the limited information available on earlier African migrations to Asia demonstrate, Africans migration was forced as part of the rival imperialisms of European trading companies who paraded the oceans with their human cargo and spices. It is a largely unknown that African migration to Southeast Asia and the 'Malay world' or 'Nusantara' (encompassing Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Borneo, Indonesian, East Timor and Philippines) is not a new phenomenon in itself. Compared to Europe and the West, much less is known about African migration and settlement in Southeast Asia. A picture of African journeys 'East' to Asia in the past, conjures up the Indian Ocean trade networks in the era of rival imperialisms of European trading companies. European trading companies had employed Africans on plantations and forced them as labour migrants in the 17th to 19th century. That period of great commerce engulfing Southeast Asia (see Reid 1993), lends room for the notion of a South-South migration, which flowed in both directions between Asia and Africa. These journeys to the Malay Archipelago and back, depending on which trading company ferried cargo, whether British East India Company or Dutch East India Company, were very much tossed up and down the waves by the promptings of profit, the quest for new commodities to supply the maritime trading vessels and labour recruitment.

2.1. Port of Arrival - Sumatra & Java

African journeys to Asia within the Indian Ocean-Southeast Asian trading network or for short, South-South migration were less fortuitous historically. With profit windfalls in the production, shipment and distribution, in the spice trade by the 18th century, all major Western powers, including the Portuguese, British, Dutch and French, had sponsored their

East India and West India companies. Explicitly bearing the name, the British East India Company and Dutch East India Company, all depended on forced labour from coastal sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, rather than the local Malay population in Southeast Asia. Historians of African migration to Asia have strained any evidence they can find, to tell the tales of forced migration, the harsh conditions of labour recruitment (for greater part), the lives of migrating Africans and relocation under conditions of colonialism. As described by Jayasuria (2009) in vivid detail, the British East India Company transported hundreds of Africans as indentured labour in harsh conditions on ships that were part of the Indian Ocean trading network from Mozambique, Angola and Madagascar, to their pepper factories in Bengkulu (Bencoolen) in Sumatra. Africans joined Asian convicts from South India and Bengalese in multi-ethnic labour forces employed by the company to supply the spice trade. Again, based on Jayasuria (2009) and his account, which is drawn from company records of the British East India Company alone, a total of 2,643 African slaves were known to have worked on Bencoolen in the 18th century (Jayasuria 2009: 213-214). Africans as well as the multi-ethnic labour forces entered into liaisons with local Indonesian and other Asian women.

Being accused of polygamy, it is not clear how many extra-marital liaisons and offspring these African workers had in the different locations on Bencoolen. As the Dutch had exchanged Melaka with the British in 1824 for its possessions in Bencoolen in Sumatra, African slaves and retirees of the British East India Company known as "coffrees" were given the option to remain in Sumatra or move to other British settlements. As argued by Jayasuria (2009: 215-217). Some Africans remained on Bencoolen with their local Indonesian wives, family and children, while others agreed to move to the straits settlements of Penang, Singapore, Melaka and Labuan. Many African migrants and their descendants would have assimilated into the local populations in Southeast Asia having lost connections with Africa. In that age, without jet travel, internet, Google and Social Media, connections between these Africans and the homeland were lost.

2.2. African militia in Sumatra & Java

Another wave of African migration to Asia is described in the context of the recruitment of Africans from West Africa, especially the Elmina coast of present-day Ghana, as soldiers between 1831 and 1872 to serve in the colonial Dutch army in the Netherlands East Indies (van Kessel 2007). Known as "Belanda Hitam" in Malay or the Black Dutchmen, around 3000 African soldiers formed part of the lower elite of the Dutch army. The African soldiers also lived in the same barracks with their Indonesian wives and children in Java as their Dutch colleagues, mainly in Jakarta and also in Central Java; Semarang, Salatiga, Solo and Purworejo close to Jogyakarta. Based on van Kessel, a supposition being made that, African soldiers had a higher status, because they received a higher salary than local soldiers recruited by the Dutch army from local Malay population of Indonesia, these migrants would have had a good life. With the option to repatriate back to Africa, go to the Netherlands or remain in Indonesia, some veterans remained in Java and present day Jakarta. Just as in Sumatra, the liaisons of the West African soldiers with local Indonesian women created communities of mixed African and Indonesian parentage called Indo-Africans.

Furthermore, a precursor to the present-day tendency in African migration where the best performing generation of African students pursue higher education in East and Southeast Asia was already visible in the story of two Ashanti Princes in the 19th century. Kwasi Boachi, and his cousin, Kwame Poku, were sent by the Ashanti King to be educated in Holland in 1837 as part of a trade deal. Later, becoming guests of the Dutch royal house of Orange,

Kwasi Boachi studied Architecture at the Delft University and later in Weimar Germany. Kwame joined the Dutch colonial army and repatriated back to the Gold Coast not willing to change his identity to live up to his Dutch upbringing. Kwasi Boachi on the other hand, having assimilated considerably became an officer in the Dutch East Indies and until his death lived on the tea plantation in Java with his Indonesian wife and children (Japin 2002). In contemporary migration of Africans to Southeast Asia, there was continuity in the custom of sending the 'princes' abroad to pursue higher education.

African journeys East in the past, can be summed-up from three perspectives. Seen from the perspective of the European trading companies, it was the incorporation of cheap and oftentimes indispensable labour by these mercantilist enterprises into the profitable spice trade. Without these labour forces, the methods of coercion to force a work-day regime of 16 hours a day in the sweltering heat, the cheapness of their wages and captive status (inability to escape the spice Island), it was improbable that these companies would have survived as going concerns. Secondly from the perspective of African migrants, they were forced to migrate and subject to inhuman treatment, employed daily as beasts of burden and exchanged as property between rival powers, without the protection of citizenship or treaties to which they could make claims. Considering that mercantilism was a prelude to colonialism, the African migrants became part of the geopolitics and inter-state rivalry leading up to the colonial period. Again, forced incorporation into colonial armies implicated African migrants in the colonial enterprise, although not willingly or of their own choosing.

2.3.   Present-day outcomes of past Journeys 'East'

The earlier African migrations to Asia certainly deserve introspection and study to uncover the African presence in Asia but also to understand present-day Asia-Africa relations. An outcome of previous migrations which is popular in the historical studies school of African migration, is the presence of the Indo-African communities of the descendants of African soldiers resident in the Netherlands and a countless unknown numbers in Indonesia. As I would argue, there are other African-Asian descendants across the Straits Settlements, including Penang, Melaka, Labuan and Puchong in Malaysia. While the evidence is minutiae, a high probability exists that Africans serving in the Netherlands East India colonies fought as soldiers with Dutch militia units as they attacked the Padri village in the Minangkabau-Dutch war in 1832. This can be explained by the mining skills of Africans from West Africa, especially the Gold Coast (or modern Ghana), which would have been useful in the gold-rich Minangkabau regions. The conversion of gold-miners into militia was reflective of the multiple identities African migrants were forced to adopt under colonialism.

In the contemporary migration, very few African journeys 'East' were caused by the activities of multinational enterprises or trading companies. If anything is more certain, African traders and globe-trotting merchants, driven by the profit-motive have self-organised their movement to Southeast Asia and East Asia, especially China and Hong Kong, to transact trade from the Shenzen Special Economic Zone and other locations such as the Yiwu consumer goods markets and international trade fair. Sponsored students for higher education have also self-chosen to study at the Southeast Asian campus of the major European and Western universities rather than in Europe itself. Unlike in the 18th and 19th centuries, the crucible of many African migrations is a complex relationship between the migrant's own preferences, domestic politics, economic realities, natural disaster, civil conflict and South-South cooperation. Rather than competition it is cooperation between Asia with its industrialism attempting to create income surplus economies by 2020 and Africa with

agriculture and minerals wealth working to catch-up as middle-income countries, that defined a part of the transnational institutional change driving the positive growth trend in African migration to Southeast Asia.

3. City of Arrival - Kuala Lumpur, Gateway to Southeast Asia

It was an early morning in 2009, in the month of Ramadan, when Emeka and Alhaadi arrived from Nigeria and Tanzania respectively, at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) aboard Emirates Airlines. Emeka gained admission to Nottingham University Malaysia campus to pursue post-graduate courses from the Autumn Semester. Alhaadi arrived from Zanzibar (famously known as spice Island) to pursue his Masters at the National University of Malaysia (UKM), one of the 5 Research Universities in Malaysia. On the same flight were other African students. Aneesa had arrived from Kenya to attend the KDU College in Damansara, in the Petaling District. Sindisiwe from South Africa was enrolled at the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology located in Cyber-Jaya (or Cyber City). Cyber Jaya, and the newer concept of 'Educity' (Education City) which seeks foreign direct investment to develop Malaysia's international education hub (see Knight & Morshidi 2011), all form part of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC)-Malaysia. MSC-Malaysia was established by the Mahathir Administration in 1996 as Asia's first Silicon Valley to promote, research, innovation and entrepreneurship in the setting of Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

A few months later, in January 2010, a new batch of African students arrived to pursue courses at the Nilai College in the region of Negeri Sembilan. African students of different nationalities– including Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana, Somalia, Sudan - with an interest in finance and management, formed the majority of the international student population at the FMTS (Financial Training & Management Services) Global College. The FMTS received accreditation from the Malaysian government and invested in a new campus in Cyber Jaya, housed in the location's characteristic modern infrastructure. The FMTS had also established two foreign campuses in Mauritius and Uganda in response to the growth in African enrolment.[18] A majority of Africans, especially sponsored students from Nigeria, chose to pursue their college degrees at University College Sedaya International (UCSI) Kuala Lumpur campus at Taman Connaught, in the Cheras District, a densely populated and bustling commercial suburb near Kuala Lumpur.

The map of African student enrolment in Malaysia radiates from Kuala Lumpur outwards to the far reaches of Kota Kinabalu and across disciplines. African students with financial sponsorship, no longer selected London or Paris as first choice for further studies, as in the period between independence from 1952 until 1990. Instead they preferred to pursue their higher education at private university colleges, foreign branch campuses, public universities (among which were 5 research universities in Malaysia – University of Malaya, National University of Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, the Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Technology Malaysia) in Peninsular and East Malaysia.[19] Internationalisation of higher education and globalisation of Malaysian companies overseas in sub-Saharan Africa may account for the permissive causes of African educational migration. On the other

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[18] Personal interview, International Student Recruitment Manager, FMTS Global College, Kuala Lumpur, July 2010

[19] There are 20 public universities in Malaysia, 5 of which are endowed with the status of Research University. Of private universities they number 43. Further Malaysia has 31 private university colleges and 9 foreign university campuses. See https://studymalaysia.com/education/top-stories/list-of-universities-in-malaysia

hand, Malaysian higher education became popular in sub-Saharan African countries and brought many more students to Malaysia through the marketing campaigns and international recruitment agents (some of African nationality) of Malaysian private institutions of higher learning.

African migrants arrived in Kuala Lumpur from various African destinations, typically, boarding Middle Eastern airlines.[20] For many African students, the first encounter with rapidly modernizing Southeast Asia and Malaysia was the airport of arrival, Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Set within a high architecture facade of glass and steel, KLIA enchanted African students and migrants who stopped-over from other airports – such as Charles De Gaule, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Heathrow, Cairo, Istanbul, and Abu Dhabi.[21] Compared to Malaysia, the state of infrastructure in different countries of origin of African student migrants was comparatively poor. Modernisation was held back by unreliable power supply, lack of finance to complete infrastructure investment, a breakdown of maintenance, use of older generation technologies and so on.

3.1.   Emergence of Africa-town

Similar to the origins of Chinatown from the spatial, economic and cultural concentration of overseas Chinese and its spread into a global phenomenon across almost all countries, so did the increasing presence of Africans in Malaysia set in motion the beginnings of Africa-town. In Malaysia, Africans migrants, arrived and stayed close to overseas-Chinese and local Chinese communities. The pattern whereby African migrants settled around market places or near a trading post, in outlying suburbs (or 'zongo'), which often has a mixed population of foreigners, was common across Southeast Asia. Over time, the population of Africans in Malaysia has grown since 2001, especially student sojourner-migrants, forming the nucleus of Africa-town. Coming close to the socio-economic organisation of the African trading post in Guangzhou (see Bredeloup 2012) which is concerned mainly with the import and export trade, Africa-town in Malaysia was different. The difference reflects the imprint of State policy, its customs and identity in international relations. The historical practice of the rulers of China to allow foreign concessions for trading at the outer frontiers may have shaped the character of the African trading post in Guangzhou and the African merchant presence in the Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong (see Matthews & Yang Yang 2010). Africa-town in Malaysia in contrast was different, being centred within the urban metropolis and not as a frontier phenomenon. Africa-town in Malaysia, presents as a juxtaposition of the growing visible presence of Africans, particular locations within the city and spatial concentration of their educational, economic, social and professional networks, which tend to be embedded within Chinatown or in close proximity to predominantly Chinese communities and quarters.
Two emerging Africa-towns in Malaysia, located in Cheras and Puchong, in the Selangor region, became the hub of African migrations. Cheras is a bustling commercial suburb near Kuala Lumpur which has grown famous for its 'pasir malam' (or night market) and for its African student population who have enrolled into the UCSI (University College Sedaya International) Kuala Lumpur Campus. Puchong, the other location of Africa-town, in the Petaling District, is a region where migrants from Java and Sumatra had settled. The earlier migrations of Javanese and others from Sumatra possibly included those of African ancestry

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[20] Both Emirates and Etihad Airlines inserted themselves into the Asia growth story over the past decade, providing cheap flight packages to students from sub-Saharan Africa, Persian Gulf and greater Middle East to Asian locations.

[21] Interview, 2 Students from Tanzania, 20 Feb., 2010 (Kuala Lumpur City Centre), 1 student from Nigeria, 23 Feb., 2010, Puchong,, Petaling District

who migrated from the spice factories in Bengkulu (Bencoolen) during the creation of the Straits Settlements – Penang, Melaka, Singapore - by the British in 1826.[22] As discussed above there were historical precedents to the contemporary African journeys 'East' that led to different outcomes than the contemporary exodus to Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, African migrants were more likely to be hosted by a fellow countryman or lodge-in with a student from another African country in a condominium or flat in an emerging Africa-town, rented from a Chinese owner or broker.[23] Condominium owners, agents and brokers who ignored the negative press on Africans in Malaysia and willing to let, were part of a countless trail of intermediaries. They were linked to other Chinese Malaysian entrepreneurs who saw a niche in building educational institutions across different education sectors with the liberalisation of higher education in 1996.

Judging from the emerging dynamics of African migration to Malaysia, Africa-town reflects the dynamics of globalisation in all dimensions – economic, political, technological, cultural, information - in which transnational actors seek to participate in the varieties of opportunities offered by the opening of the global marketplace. With the exception of Singapore and Beijing, but unlike African communities in Bangkok, Jakarta, Manila, Hong Kong and Guangzhou, migration for higher education rather than trade shaped the character of Africa-town in Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur.

3.2. Diversity of African communities

A heady mix of migrants of diverse African nationality arrived as students, traders, businessmen and professionals to Malaysia. From the 1990s till 2000, the largest population of Africans in Malaysia originated from Southern Africa; South Africa, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Swaziland. The concentration of African migrants was followed by East African countries of Tanzania and Kenya and from Sudan, before the creation of South Sudan in 2011.[24] Since 2000, the growth in African migrants from West Africa changed in the decade-long pattern of migration from sub-Saharan Africa. The changes in the concentration of different nationalities of African migrants in Malaysia reflect the success of the educational outreach programmes in sub-Saharan Africa by Malaysian private entrepreneurs (or "Edu-preneurs"). They also point to specific national histories, political shifts and institutional change that provide a glimpse into the permissive causes of migration. An instance concerns African migrants from Liberia, who topped the numbers from West Africa in the early 1990s due to the Liberian civil war. Since 2000, Nigerian migrants increased their presence, outstripping all other nationalities from sub-Saharan Africa. The growth in African migrants from Nigeria to Malaysia and Southeast Asia is a response to decades-long political crises around redistribution of oil revenues (see Alao 2015) and more recent causes, including the threat of terrorism from Boko Haram, which for lack of space cannot be elaborated in detail.

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[22] In the case of Singapore, Africa-town emerged close to "Little India" market hub and was connected to the Woodlands industrial complex. It was a more trader, export-oriented and professional class dominated Africa-town where the spatial concentration of the African presence was less physical and more in terms of social media and economic transactions

[23] Personal interview, African students in Puchong and Cheras, May 2011 A subsequent interview with Chinese owners of two condominium units was conducted in early June 2011

[24] This structure of African migration to Malaysia was confirmed by various officials of respective countries at their diplomatic representation in Kuala Lumpur, nevertheless without hard data or numbers.

4.   Theoretical Moorings

African migration has been dominated historically by the Atlantic experience or movements to Europe or other Western countries, which tends to obscure migrations to other locations (Jayasuria 2010). Hitherto, South-North migrations informed theories of migration, economic development and State policies in Europe and the West. Viewed from that perspective, the recent south-south migration of Africans, either as students, traders, businessmen and highly skilled personnel to Southeast Asia (and to East Asia), present discontinuities from the post-colonial pattern of South-North migration. The European model of African migration is by far the most established because of colonial relations. It has been driven in part by economic and policy developments in Europe, as well as migrant's strategies and migration networks too (Grillo & Mazzucato 2008: 175-198). A specific characteristic of African migration to Europe is the spectre of invasion and images of desperate Africans fleeing from poverty, civil war, genocide, disease and political oppression dominated the European model (de Haas 2007). African migrants have been constructed in ambivalent terms ranging from development resource to security threat to public order, the economy, national identity and the welfare state (Huysmans 2000: 751). Since the events of 11th Sept 2001 ushered in a new security dilemma the construction of migration as a security issue or securitisation accelerated (Munck 2008: 1227-1246). As the geography of migration has been altered by globalisation - from the past movements from Europe to a few places, Europe as a key location for immigration and now the non-west or global-south - contextualising the new migration in terms of the historical and institutional setting of East and Southeast Asia may yield more meaningful understanding of their impact. It follows that the recent migration of Africans to Malaysia may be understood in terms of the different and often complex empirical realities of Asian societies compared to Europe.

Studying this new migration promises to offer insights into how differences in the role of the State lead to uneven participation in globalisation, which in turn shape differences in economic opportunities, growth and wealth of nations in the South. In particular, it interrogates how the State in Africa, upholding a market-mindset and beholden to market civilisation (see Gill 1995), has lacked behind in development. Simultaneously, it offers the lessons of Asian developmental States, who, governing markets and providing modern infrastructure, have become new centres of capitalism and growth locations; of global industries, in education, technological innovation, finance, infrastructure, information and communications technology and so on. Intuitively but also observed empirically, it is noteworthy that the different and continuing differences in development outcomes between Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan African tend to structure the new African migration 'East'.

To re-conceptualize, understand, differentiate and characterize the new African migration to Southeast Asia from earlier Euro-centric African migrations is also to point to the role of domestic policy in particular industrializing Southeast Asian countries.
Consequently, new knowledge, insights and even intuitions (or hypotheses) which may emerge from a study of the recent African migration to Southeast Asia compared to the older post-colonial movement to Europe is not only relevant to migration, transnational or diaspora disciplinary studies. Such body of knowledge is theoretically interesting across a range of disciplinary perspectives including globalisation and transnational institutional change, post-colonial studies, development studies, international relations, comparative and international political economy among others. The variety of perspectives and approaches which constitute Transnational Studies, or are characterised by a common interest to research the actual social relations of migrant communities, nevertheless differ on how far the State, country

boundaries and policy frameworks are relevant in migration (see Levitt & Jaworsky 2007). To privilege transnational networks and globalisation as 'de-territorialisation', and weakening of the regulatory power of the State, may be true, referring to electronic transactions across the globe, information and communications technology mediated interactions and capital flows; which tend to be footloose. It is still to be contested whether the State has lost all power of surveillance, control and coercion. Human flows, migrants' journeys, sojourning or residence are of a different order of relations than flows of goods, services and communications. African migrants have been caught, imprisoned and deported at State borders. Some have been denied entry, or pulled out of the queue, questioned extensively, their belongings scrutinized and threatened, even when they possessed all requirements.

Development Studies and International Development Studies do also engage in reductionism in transnational migration by focusing on the remittances framework (World Bank 2006b). Recent modifications and analytical shifts within the remittances framework to move beyond money remittances or what may be described as "Western Unionization" of migrants' transfers (Western Union Money Transfer being the dominant mode of money transfer) are inherently critical of such reductionisms. A turn to other remittances such as knowledge, know-how, technology, social and cultural remittances, which include behaviours, norms and values (Levitt & Nyberg-Sorenson 2004), is particular useful and can be instrumental to understanding the new African migration to Southeast Asia. Yet, as I would argue, a section of African migrants in Malaysia transferred monies in reverse; from sources back in the homeland in Africa to sustain their activities in Southeast Asia. The case of some African migrants in Malaysia hence fits-in better with a notion of reverse remittances or non-remitting migrants. It may also be argued that economic globalisation studies, especially varieties that attempt a description of the dynamics of Asia-Africa trading networks and migrating Chinese entrepreneurs to sub-Saharan, when modified to address the political economy questions of who benefits, when, how and why, all form parts of the conceptual as well as analytical threads for the new African migration.

While countless empirical examples can be accumulated or shown to render many of the transnational perspectives on migration unfitting or otherwise helpful for understanding the new migration, suffice it to argue, that a puzzling complexity of analytical domains need to be integrated to understand the new African migration to Southeast Asia. A multidisciplinary perspective has more utility, though not theoretically elegant to the objective to unveil the institutions, social relations and policies that collectively created these new migrants and re-oriented contemporary migration from the West to Asia. As an intrinsic part of the new migration, is the notion that Europe is no longer the place for African migrations as it used to be or rather that Southeast Asia offers viable alternatives. Given that African migrants tend to by-pass former cities of empire, preferring present-day centres of growth, dynamism and wealth creation in Southeast Asia, it is not far-fetched to hypothesize that new valuations, norms and re-orientations have emerged in African migration. Ongoing changes in transnational processes and institutions hence require that perspectives also need to change. As such migrants own understandings about the new geographies of power emerging and shifting to Asia (see Mawdsley 2007) and re-orientation of the global economy back to its original Asian centre (Frank 1995) are important, much in the same way as strategies of foreign direct investment may unveil the dynamics of economic globalisation.

4.1. Historical versus new approaches

With respect to African migration, there are old and new approaches. Old approaches claim a theoretical, even ethical and moral, interest to dig into the past. On occasions and embedded in these approaches was the desire to correct the historical narrative from the existing records, point out injustices and constructing new epistemologies. Historical approaches often focused on African migration within the subject matter and context of colonial empire of the West, slavery and settlement elsewhere. These entail the historical digging into and exploring the archival trail of colonial records that is typical of methods of historical research. To this group belong the scholarly efforts of Jayasuria (2011, 2009, 2008) and countless scholars. Their approach has nevertheless gone beyond the accumulation of historical evidence, to include critiques of the politics of, the reproduction and circulation of colonial knowledge. As I describe these as historical approaches to African migration for lack of a better term, it is in the meaningful sense that they tend to focus on the historical in both the colonial and post-colonial sense. In the colonial sense, the scholarly contribution attempts to accumulate sparse evidence to support hypotheses. As it concerns the post-colonial, this body of work offers searing critiques of the grand narratives, biographies, icons, dissimulations and 'othering' of the non-West in the enterprise of empire. They share a common epistemological framework with post-colonial, Diaspora and Transnational Studies. However, one of the limitations of the historical school approach to African migration to Asia, which is concerned with whether communities exist, survived or disappeared, is the self-evident conclusion that Africans assimilated, had no contact all with the homeland or that there is limited information.

The main point of divergence between these historical and existential studies of African migration, and the approach developed in this research, is the assumption of the self-historicising African migrant. The present research, assumes from the empirical reality that the new migration of Africans is self-historicising or that Africans are both contemporaneously creating and reflecting on their histories. Its focus is instantaneous, multiple and flexible, in that African migrants to Southeast Asia live in many locations and socio-economic worlds at the same time; and a historical homeland in Africa is just one of them. Underlying the phenomenon of circular African migrations, multiple lived experience and multi-locality are possibilities offered by the development of ICT infrastructure; the cheapness of jet travel; educational tourism and ease of web-based enrolment; economic opportunities unleashed by China's advent on the world stage; medical tourism; the beckoning of exotic places in heritage tourism and so on. Africans themselves make decisions and have not been forced by a colonizing power to migrate outside their rational choice preferences. The footloose and uprooted character of these African journeys is very much situated in the currents of present-day globalisation which is different from the 18th century and even the post-colonial period till the early 1990s.

A second limitation in these studies is that knowledge is constructed hardly from the perspective of the African migrants themselves as there is no written record of their life, diaries and transactions. Left with only records of merchant companies, these historical narratives and explanations are constructed by these scholars from a policy perspective. That is to say, the subject-matter of these studies are analysed and distilled from the business, administrative and managerial policies as well as competition strategies of the British, Dutch, French, Portuguese and other European 'East India' companies. These constituted State-policy in fact, to the extent that these companies were floating city-states controlling a vast economic empire across maritime Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean and Atlantic coasts of Africa. We understand these perspectives also then to be Eurocentric and not embracing other

perspectives, namely that of the migrants whose life story is prosecuted as it were in absentia. An example in this respect concerns the charges of polygamy levelled against the African migrants in their liaisons with Indonesia spouses. Without being an apologist for the practice of polygamy, it is obvious that the role of Islam and Islamic culture in sub-Saharan Africa was ignored or has been subsumed under the European view of love and conjugal relationships. Within that particular religious environment, marriage to up to 4 spouses was permitted under certain conditions. If religious doctrine is subject to adaptation to local cultural influence, then customs of the African migrants and 'adat' of the Indonesian tribes of origin of their spouses, allowed those multiple betrothals, if indeed the records clearly bear them to be so, to the women. A Eurocentric perspective, which is non-admitting of other perspectives, may be less useful conceptually and analytically in understanding African migration to Southeast Asia.

4.2. Asia-Africa development comparisons as a perspective

What amounts to a massive shift in orientation of Africans and African countries away from Europe, the West and things European, to which Africans were historically beholden, has much to do with the fast-pace of industrialisation and modernisation with Asian characteristics and values, which has matched or surpassed the West across various domains. Asia-Africa development comparison seeks to understand the complex sets of relations across political, economic, technological, ideational, cultural, social and development domains and so on, whereby Asia's post-war high economic growth and rapid industrial transformation did not only surpass Africa and the West but has become an alternative model for Africa's development away from Eurocentric neo-liberalism. A central tenet of Asia-Africa development comparisons is to deepen and widen the scope of the economic, political and ideational contestation of Western-inspired politics, economics, cultural and ideational hegemonies which began with the East Asian economic miracle, by the accumulation of new empirical and historical evidence to that effect. This disciplinary perspective helps to define a new African Studies and studies (of and in Africa) which are comparative in relation to Asia rather than Europe and the West. Asia-Africa development comparisons, is to comparative and international political economy, what Occidentalism is to post-colonial and cultural studies.

4.3. Applying Transnational Chinese Studies

Taking the perspectives of Asia-Africa development comparisons into account implies that it is possible to develop hypotheses by viewing African migration within transnational Chinese studies and vice versa. The juxtaposition of a study of African migration to Southeast onto Chinese transnational studies is to re-anchor new African studies in Asian values whereas these were anchored in Western values historically. The ensuing epistemological jump is not intended to deny African agency. To the contrary, the purpose of this conceptual exercise is to enrich African values by providing it with other alternative perspectives than the current norms, as they were shaped by disciplinary neo-liberalism. Given that the Asian values debate itself, is drawn out and complex, it is particular institutions within Chinese transnational migration behaviour that is relevant to African migration to Southeast Asia. Being a relatively new and burgeoning field as it concerns contemporary globalisation and transnational studies, the literature on African migration to Southeast Asia (and indeed East Asia) is not only sparse, it is lacking in comparative analytical frameworks. Even where comparisons have been made, they have posed different questions and not been concerned

with the African presence in Southeast Asia from the perspective of other migration experiences.

The scope and focus of much of the literature has been China-centric or it was concerned with, and has analysed African migration to China. To its credit, the China-centred literature helps to reclaim African agency in globalisation. It highlights the persistence, entrepreneurial drive and varied transactions innovated by African traders in the import-export business under the shadow of second-class citizenship or illegal status in China (Matthews & Yang Yang 2012). The role of African migrants as economic bridge-builders between China and Africa has also been analysed in more optimistic accounts such as Bodomoh (2010). Bredeloup (2011) also contributes to the emerging literature by describing the flexible trade practices of African merchants who participate in the two-way Africa-China trade networks, displaying the capacity to reside in different countries in East and Southeast Asia, circulating between Hong Kong, Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Guangzhou.

As I demonstrate in this research, it is one of the observable social facts of African transnational migration that, the social relations, institutions and outcomes of such migration show a high degree of similarity with Chinese migration and overseas-Chinese encounters with local populations. Africans migrants in the global context in fact live often like overseas Chinese in their social organisation, outsider status, purposes and logics of migration, discourses and outcomes. Rather than see this conflation of Chinese trans-nationalism and African migration as pushing Africa into the back-seat role, it is argued that the perspective of overseas Chinese broadens the African heritage (in the social, economic, ideational, cultural and other senses). It re-anchors African studies within Asian values, whereas, hitherto, Africans have been beholden to Western values and ideational frameworks.

It is the thesis of this article then, that over time, African migration presents outcomes that are similar to overseas Chinese migration. This is due in part to the close socio-economic nexus between African migrants, overseas and local Chinese in Southeast Asia and as between Chinatown and the emerging Africa-towns. The emerging relationships between African migrants and Chinese in Southeast Asia may be conceived in terms of commodities and their circulations. Following Sutherland (2000: 187), a commodity chain approach, places relationships within an explicit commercial context, in which complementary search for profits, transcends divisions between political entities and ethnic groups.

The immediate problem which arise from taking a perspective on Chinese trans-nationalism or of the Chinese in the global context, is the absence of homogeneity among overseas Chinese, Straits-born Chinese and Chinese in Southeast Asia. Keeping the perspective on mainland China alone, does not avoid misconceptions about the heterogeneity of cultural attributes of the Chinese, of which they may vary according to region. One such myth is about the belief in the exclusivity of Chinese business networks (see Crawford 2000). Against a picture of variety and plurality of Chinese-ness which emerge from the authoritative work of Wang Gungwu over decades (see Gwungu 2003 & 2002) the particular trans-nationalism of overseas Chinese from which to understand the new African migration to Southeast Asia needed reflective attention. Here too the empirical realities of present-day African migrants in Malaysia intervened in the construction of a framework. African migrants in Malaysia, live in close proximity to overseas and local Chinese. Overseas and local Chinese in Malaysia saw Africans as 'xinke' or newcomers without home-town associations, and hence willing to offer them credit and help them in self-interested profit-making ways. This location-defined proximity fostered a blending-in of African migrants into

things Chinese. As can be observed, African migrants in Kuala Lumpur participated in the overlapping socio-economic networks of overseas and local Chinese, imitating their Malaysia-defined entrepreneurial spirit and other attributes. African migrants internalised much more of the Chinese way of life than that of Malay, Indian and other communities. In one particular case, African migrant entrepreneurs set up an African restaurant with Chinese characteristics and advertised their food outlet and menu in Mandarin to the confusion of Chinese visitors. As a cautionary tale of interdependence, in which trustworthiness, 'xinyong' and social connection, 'guanxi', develops in accordance with the piecemeal accumulation of transactions over time, the emerging African-Chinese relationship in Southeast does not merit any cultural-essentialist explanations as applied often to the entrepreneurial success of overseas Chinese.

Methodologically standing in opposition to perspectives which argue for supposedly intrinsic qualities (derived from Confucianism) as accounting for Chinese success (see for example, Redding 1995), implies that it is counter-productive to seek particular exceptional attributes in the networks, institutions or transactions as organising principles in the mutual economic self-interest of African migrants and Chinese liaisons. Anchoring African migration to Malaysia (and indeed to Southeast Asia) within a Chinese-centred and Africa-town perspective however brings into view the descriptions of Africans elsewhere in Asia. Yet, rather than pursuing low-end globalisation with small capital, semi-legal or illegal transactions as in the Chungking's Mansions in Hong Kong (see again Matthews & Yang Yang, 2012), African migrants in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere in Malaysia pursue a different kind of globalisation. Immersed into comparable socio-economic and political setting, African migrants pursue knowledge-accumulation globalisation, as well as trading and entrepreneurial activities. Their transactions are not semi-legal or outright illegal because they are jointly owned or joint-ventured with Malaysia Chinese associates.

5. Growth in the African presence: policies, profits, institutions

Hitherto, when Southeast Asian development was at par or behind sub-Saharan Africa, there was just a trickle of Africans embarking on journeys to cities in East and Southeast Asia. Beginning in the early 1990s, and over the years, a section of African migrants arrived in Kuala Lumpur and after a sojourn of roughly a year continued to other Southeast Asian countries. It led to temporary suspension of the academic trajectory.[25] Some migrants returned to Malaysia after a sojourn in Singapore, Bangkok, Manila, Hong Kong and Guangzhou in mainland China. Kuala Lumpur or KL became the migration hub and epicentre of African journeys 'East' and movements back and forth within Southeast Asia. Flexible and circular migration of African migrants, across cities in Southeast Asia (and even East Asia), actually point to a high degree of socio-economic networking and strategic positioning of actors in current globalisation. Relationships among policies, institutions and profits provide a historical configuration of causes whose momentum ensures that the new migration of Africans to Southeast Asia has hardly come to its climax. In the first place, Malaysia-driven causes centred on State policy and profit-seeking. Secondly, causes related to older locations of migration, namely Europe and European cities, and in particular, the inhumane treatment of refugees,[26] contrary to popular narratives. Thirdly, particular African home-country-driven

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25 Interviews; academic registrars and recruitment managers of KDU College Damansara campus, Univ. College Sedaya International (UCSI) Kuala Lumpur, Univ. Putra Malaysia, Sedang.
26 With respect to Asylum procedures, both the European Court of Human Rights and European Court of Justice have both handed down rulings which castigate EU member states for inadequate protection of refugees,

causes played a role. Finally, African migrants' own rationalisations of these within the self-regulatory process, constituted another domain of causes.

Referring to Malaysia-driven causes, the vision to become a high-income country by year 2020, South-South cooperation, the creation of an International Educational Hub offer a an analytical framework whereby policies, institutions and profit motives drove African migration. The framework of dialogue, coordination and smart partnership initiated by the Mahathir Administration and sub-Sahara Africa since the first 'Langkawi' International Dialogue' in 1995, opened up Malaysia as an alternative location for higher education than former cities of empire and a dynamic trade and investment partner. Without the South-South dialogue, the relatively high cumulative growth rate in African migration of 2.1 per cent to Malaysia between 1990 and 2015 would not have occurred or facilitated by Malaysian authorities. Other causes which created the institutional context for the growth in African migration form part of the analysis. They include the privatisation higher education in 1996; establishment of the Multimedia Super Corridor, as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and initiatives for FDI to build 'Educity' (see again Knight & Morshidi, 2011), to leap-frog Malaysia into the information age, and knowledge economy; increase in the budgetary allocation for education since the 6th Malaysia Plan to create an international education hub in Malaysia, which has continued under the Economic Transformation Programme;[27] the money-seeking response of both private educational entrepreneurs and public universities in Malaysia (Tham 2013), internationalisation and international recruitment strategies in sub-Saharan Africa. Irrespective of the critiques by the critics, the international educational hub continues to offer a compelling argument in the rational choice of African migrants and international students to relocate to Malaysia.

6.   Socio-economic networks, institutions & transaction flows

The presence of entrepreneurial overseas and Malaysian Chinese alike in close proximity to Africa-town opened up opportunities for all African migrants irrespective of purpose of migration - student, post-grad, trader, entrepreneur and professional - to enter into business or profit-making ventures. Living in close proximity, immersing in leisure activities shared by Malaysian Chinese, and liaisons established by African migrants, including spouses, proved profitable and helped to enlarge the circle of merchant and trading networks to sub-Saharan Africa.[28] The student and post-graduate community formed one community to which was common, a particular institution of higher learning or academic discipline. Post-graduates who had exhausted their sponsorship after a 3-year academic program at Malaysian institution of higher learning, which in the majority of cases was extended by 2 years, entered a phase of indebtedness in their migration biography. Pressure to settle indebtedness to variety of creditors compelled some African migrants to explore income-earning

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insufficient reception facilities and inhumane detention and transfer of persons to other EU countries where they faced degrading treatment under the Dublin Regulation (January 2011 M.S.S. versus Belgium & Greece – countries violated article 3 & 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights by trying to send asylum seekers back under the Dublin Regulation; in December 2011, the EU Court of Justice ruled in the case of NS & ME that member states had the obligation not to transfer asylum seekers to Member States were they would face inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of Article 4 of the Charter). See http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/protection-in-europe/10-dublin-regulation.html (downloaded on March 13, 2016)

[27] The 2015 budget increased the allocation to education by RM300 million in terms of the overall budgetary adjustment. See the "10th Malaysia Plan: 2011-2015.

28 Personal interview of two African entrepreneurs at Taman Connaught, Cheras, near Kuala Lumpur, February 2011

opportunities. Often, Chinese associates introduced African compatriots to Purchasing Managers of multinational companies based in African countries. Over time some Purchasing Managers relied on African migrants for their 'Asia sourcing' strategies, which attempt to guarantee quality of sources of raw material across a wide range of commodities in Malaysia.[29] Acting as local agents for global corporations, African migrants provided economic intelligence on competing buyers, the state of regulatory oversight and compliance in a particular sector for Plant Variety Protection and expert advice, in exchange for fees. This intermediation helped to cut down costs and make Sourcing trips to Malaysia and Southeast Asia better focused and effective for these Purchasing Managers.

Unlike overseas Chinese communities with whom they live in close proximity, the absence of hometown associations or trade guilds among the African trader and entrepreneurial migrants, meant that interpersonal relations, social networking and community bonding was largely conducted in shopping malls, entertainment outlets and street corners. These classes adapted local institutions in Malaysia such as Ali-Baba relations, which historically facilitated the micro-entrepreneurial spirit, to their economic advantage. They had inserted themselves into the ASEAN regional buyer-supplier networks and the Kuala Lumpur 'Petaling Street' vendor system through their Malaysian Chinese liaisons. Being the first-hand intermediaries for both the domestic and offshore producers, buyer and supplier agents, Chinese businesses bosses encouraged a multiplicity of commercial networking with the trade and business-oriented African migrants.[30] A booming trade emerged at Malaysian ports involving undisclosed African and Chinese owners engaged in joint ownership overcoming the strictures of illegality of residence for income-earning activities.

Ethnic produce stores and food and beverage outlets were a major area of investment for the African entrepreneurial classes in Malaysia. Four modes of investment in food and beverage were applied by members of this section of the entrepreneurial class. One mode was co-ownership with local Chinese of a food outlet serving Malaysia cuisine. The African migrant was the dormant partner, provided his capital and reaped a share of profits. The second mode of entry was a food outlet serving African cuisine. The third mode of entry of these African entrepreneurs was through mergers and acquisitions of Chinese food and beverage outlets in residential districts with growing African populations, including the Cheras Cuepacs area. A fourth mode of entry into business in Malaysia for the Africans was the hawker market food stall. While culturally off-limits to Africans and foreigners, the hawker market food stall was but welcoming to a few Southeast Asian family business owners from Indonesia, Southern Thailand and Myanmar. Africans with capital to invest but falling to obtain a license, offered a Chinese associate the capital and shared in the profits.

Savings accumulated from student scholarships, private sponsorship, personal loans from relatives back in Africa all found their way into micro-enterprises owned by Africans in Malaysia. Some African migrants became 'rentier capitalists' who provided credit and bailed out local Chinese hawker stalls and Malay small business owners in need of extra capital or

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[29] The portfolio of commodities handled by African migrants include essential oils, spices, aromatic plants, palm oil extracts, hibiscus and Kinabalu gingers, which used for a range of cosmetics, fragrances, lotions, skincare products, detergent and so on.

[30] An instance of the African migrant-local Chinese networking is in the franchise and re-seller markets for ICTs products and accessories to supply the growing middle classes in Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. African migrants became re-sellers of Malaysia ICT products – laptops, mini notebooks, local brands of mobile phones, wholesale distribution of accessories from Malaysian ICT malls, including Low-Yat Plaza mall among others.

indebted.Profits were also ploughed back which in turn has been offered as soft loans to other Africans engaged in the Petaling Street reseller brand system or invested in personal care services such as hairdresser and beauty salons at shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur, including Berjaya Times Square and Sungei Wang shopping complexes.

7.   A self-regulatory framework

African migration to Southeast Asia and indeed other migrations are self-regulated by migrants. The opposite of self-regulation is forced migration invoking dire human rights, ethical and moral consequences. Preferences, rational choices and decisions, about the purpose for migration, location and transit routes are all made by the migrant itself. Other dimensions which define the totality of migration, including, liaisons and alliances and domestic institutions which are adapted to the logic of migration, are likewise self-regulated. Just as States fail in the regulation of self-regulatory market processes within globalisation, their intervention to regulate African migration is without consistent success. In the empirical case of Malaysia as location, State authorities lack both juridical and administrative means to intervene in all aspects of the self-regulatory process short of exceeding legal boundaries, violating human rights norms, or use of coercion. It is this self-regulatory character of African migration which render it elusive to intervene, control, and manage; being left for migrants themselves to shape outcomes within a given framework of polices and institutions. Hence it is meaningful to posit a self-regulatory framework of African migration constituted by three inter-related elements. Firstly, it is comprised of three organising principles or logics held by African migrants, namely, knowledge-seeking, business-trading, refuge-seeking and heritage-embracing which also shape end-outcomes of migration. Secondly, it integrates the social networks the African migrants create and maintain, transactions (economic, political, cultural, religious, ideational, aesthetic etc) which flow and the domestic institutions they adapt within their alliances, liaisons, and cross-cutting ties with locals. Finally, it is inclusive of State policies and other location-specific institutions which shape particular domains (such as education, trade, entrepreneurship), in a particular Southeast Asian country, which migrants contest, use to their advantage or attempt to by-pass.

9.   Future of Policy

The future shape of policy in Malaysia and Southeast Asia with respect to the self-evident mindset of most States to control, manage and effectively curtail uninvited migration flows, concern how the State and agents of the State relate to the self-regulatory dynamics of African migrants. As I argued at the outset, official denial persists in Southeast Asia about African migration and there is growing ambivalence about African migrants in Malaysia. The denying of migration as a juridical fact, in sense that no residence permits or "MyKad" has been issued to many of these new migrants, did little to erase the reality of the growing African presence. While the empirical reality of the growing African presence is accepted unofficially, in contrast to the juridical and policy denial, ambivalences about African migration were based on the actual historical outcomes. Fee-paying African international students made their self-interested and rational choice to pursue higher education in Malaysia rather than the U.K., France, or U.S. Their enrolment and migration supported the survival of many Malaysian private education providers and colleges in a market which has grown to US$2billion by 2013 across the globe. Yet the lack of career and job opportunities post-graduation often hit hard on the heels of the pursuit of higher education in Southeast Asia.

This outcome was often attributed to a variety of causes by African migrants related to labour market dynamics, race relations and negative identity construction by the Malaysian media.[31] Without further empirical research, none of these explanations on their own can fully account for the limited scope for career opportunities. On the other hand, a perspective may be offered on the causes based on a time-lag hypothesis. Invariably in African student migrations, a time lag has emerged between the completion of studies and the next phase in the migration trajectory. The decision to pursue further studies, move to another Southeast Asian location, return back to Africa, or enter entrepreneurial ventures often spanned a few years. This period is observed by the local population as an unproductive phase. This unproductive period, combined with the hidden character of migrants' socio-economic relations and apparent purchasing power, to fuel doubts whether African migration has a positive impact in Southeast Asia. The absence of a long-term vision of Malaysia's strategic partnership with African countries (such as the China Africa policy of 2006) resulted in ad-hoc approaches. Given that Malaysia is the largest investor in sub-Saharan Africa ahead of China, the positive trend growth in African migration, the cloud of policy ambivalence and pessimism over African migrants, the merits of an Africa policy and underlying Africa Studies programs at public universities deserve further research. Such an Africa policy may guide the hand of the State in Malaysia as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa to reinvent migration policy for bridging the knowledge and innovation gap.

Acknowledgements

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[31] Three causes were upheld by African migrants. Firstly, a segmented labour market self-selected other Asian migrants - from Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, South India, Bangladesh and mainland China. Alternatively, internal migrants from Borneo to Peninsular Malaysia received a preference in job opportunities in the commercial and services sector. Secondly, the presence of inward-looking race relations among the major communities- Malay, Chinese, Indian, Thai, Filipino among others, was experienced as a roadblock economic mobility of African migrants. Thirdly, the pessimistic construction of African identity in negative terms and circulation of anti-African narratives by the Malaysian media was counted among the causes.

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