

# West African Students Turned Entrepreneurs In Asian Trading Posts: A New Facet Of Globalization

Sylvie Bredeloup

► **To cite this version:**

Sylvie Bredeloup. West African Students Turned Entrepreneurs In Asian Trading Posts: A New Facet Of Globalization. Urban anthropology, The Institute, Incorporated, 2014, 43. ird-02874930

**HAL Id: ird-02874930**

**<https://hal.ird.fr/ird-02874930>**

Submitted on 19 Jun 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# West African Students Turned Entrepreneurs In Asian Trading Posts: A New Facet Of Globalization

Sylvie Bredeloup

IRD (UMR LPED / Aix-Marseille University)

Marseille, France

**ABSTRACT:** During the last decade, tens of thousands of African migrants have settled in the Asian market-cities, opening their own trading agencies or shipping companies around major wholesale markets to export all kinds of Chinese manufactured goods to sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, an increasing number of students joined this profitable market. Some of them held a Chinese scholarship under a general cooperation program or had completed graduate studies in the People's Republic of China (PRC), while others enrolled in the graduate programs of the Islamic universities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Finally a third set attended European or American universities and began to work in the academic sector before launching into the import-export business.

On the basis of fieldwork in Guangzhou, the center of China's world factory (2006, 2008), and in Dubai, the world re-exportation platform of Chinese products (2009, 2012), this paper explores how some former students, with relatively small economic capital but a solid social and linguistic background, gradually became major intermediaries in the trade of Chinese products to the African con-

minent. The focus is on the skills that they used at the same time to enhance their credibility among their peers, to contract with their suppliers, to interest the local partners, and to convince the local authorities of their ability to represent all the foreign communities with respect to specific legislations. This paper contributes to a better knowledge of the role of these graduate intermediaries in the process of globalization from below, by scrutinizing the lives of these African traders in Guangzhou and Dubai.

## Introduction

In most sub-Saharan countries, public university education has become a barrier to social mobility for educated youth, although they yearn for new horizons and want to participate in the new patterns of consumption and success that are glorified by the media. Alternative educational paths, such as training in technical colleges, are still at an embryonic stage and are so deprecated that they do not attract those young people who are in search of technical vocational and educational training (Mazzochetti 2009; Orivel 1991). For those who have the means, leaving the country offers an alternative to being unemployed or in a precarious situation. Leaving also stokes the hope of social advancement upon return. Thus, lack of opportunities in the home country leads to new departures and new waves of emigrants. Due to a combination of structural adjustment policies, impasse in the universities, and several decades of economic crisis in the formal sector, educated youth in Africa have lost the hope of finding a lucrative job at the end of their schooling.<sup>1</sup> "Today's [Senegalese] students compare themselves with preceding generations, who could count on getting a government job as soon as they had a degree, and they see themselves as an abandoned generation" (Cruise O'Brien 2003: 168). Young people used to believe that a university degree would guarantee a good job and a secure future, provide material wealth and a comfortable life, and by the same token ensure

recognition among relatives and other social relations. Instead, they find themselves dependent on those who are employed, who know the right kind of people, or who are wealthy. Their situation can be described as one of “conscious precariousness,” that is, they reject the status of a poor man, which is projected upon them (Laurent 2005).

At the global level, the number of young people who went to study abroad has almost tripled over the last two decades: more than a million students studied abroad in 1985 and 2.7 million in 2005 (OECD 2007). Students primarily go from the South to the North: 70% of the foreign students hailing from the South are enrolled in college in one of the OECD countries. Numerous studies have examined the large increase in the mobility of international students, especially of African students, whose migration for educational purposes rose long before the global market for tertiary education expanded and became highly competitive. African students were driven to study abroad because a number of universities in their own country were privatized and started setting the tuition fees at a level that was exorbitant for most students (Gérard 2008; Mazzella 2009; Nedelcu 2004; Tati 2010). According to the French Ministry for National Education, more than half of the international students who enrolled in French universities in the 2004-2005 school year were from Africa. The notion of “brain drain” came to light in the early 1960s, but recently it has been replaced with the notions of “brain gain” and “brain mobility,” which explain the growing scale of student mobility and the mechanisms triggering international students’ decisions not to return to their country of origin, or to delay their return (Ennafaa and Paivandi 2008; Meyer and Hernandez 2004; Michaelis 1990). These studies show that international students from the South are more likely than international students from the North to settle in the country where they carried out their university education.

In this article I investigate South-South mobility.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, I examine the trajectories of West African traders in Guangzhou, People's Republic of China (PRC), and in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who, unlike the majority of their fellow countrymen, earned a college degree before engaging in transnational business with Africa. Most of them obtained a scholarship from the host country by enrolling either in an academic program within the framework of Sino-African cooperation or in an Islamic university in the UAE. Others started a university program in one of these places after obtaining a degree in their home country or in Europe or America, and eventually went into the import-export business in the PRC.

Based on my fieldwork in Guangzhou, the center of China's industry for the global market (2006, 2008), as well as in Dubai, the platform for the distribution of Chinese export products (2009, 2012), my aim in this article is to understand how former students gradually become major intermediaries in the trade of Chinese commodities to the African continent, although they can invest only relatively small amounts of money. In the last decade, tens of thousands of African migrants have settled in Asian market-cities and around major wholesale markets, where they opened their own trading agencies or shipping companies to take part in the export of all kinds of Chinese manufactured goods to sub-Saharan Africa (Bertoncello and Bredeloup 2007; Bodomo 2010; Li et al. 2007). They hail from about 40 different countries. The trajectories of African students who become entrepreneurs in these trading posts constitute a new facet of South-South mobility. No longer are China and Dubai seen merely as promising but transitory work-places that serve as way-stations before settling down in a Western country, but instead they have become ultimate destinations, hubs from which to build new networks or commercial empires. This paper explores how these students gain the trust of their countrymen, who are well established in transnational

trade, and of the suppliers with whom they do business. Additionally, it explores the skills they put forward in order to find local partners. By scrutinizing the lives of West African traders in Guangzhou and Dubai, this paper contributes to understanding the role of graduate intermediaries in the process of globalization from below.

### **A Note on Methodology**

The main objective of this research was to understand the participation of sub-Saharan Africans in the international trade of Chinese goods. Historical reconstruction on the basis of traders' narratives revealed that trading migration had been started both by graduates who had enhanced the value of their higher education in a sector where they were not expected as well as by illiterate people in a career change process. This outcome led me to review the research protocol in order to better understand the graduates' motivations.

A first explorative study carried out by Adams Bodomo, a Ghanaian socio-linguist and professor at Hong Kong University, in 2006 revealed the heterogeneity of these African populations passing through Chungking Mansions (a complex in Kowloon including inexpensive accommodations), with most of them originating from Ghana, Nigeria, Congo, Kenya, Guinea, South Africa, and Tanzania (Bodomo 2005). This same study showed that 27% of the sub-Saharan Africans living in the Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong had a college degree and 67 % had a secondary school degree.

Working in association with Brigitte Bertoncello, professor of geography at Aix-Marseille University, I tried at first to bring to light the functioning of the trade networks between several trading places (Dubai, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou) and to explain the respective role of the West African traders

durably set up in these city-markets as well as of the itinerant storekeepers (Bertoncello and Bredeloup 2007).

About 20 African traders, mainly settled in the Yuexiu district of Guangzhou (Xiao Beilu area) and coming from Mali, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Congo (DRC and PCR), Togo, and Niger, took part in the research. Most of them were interviewed several times between 2006 and 2008, often in different places (office, residence, fast food restaurant, café, stockroom, or warehouse). Additional interviews were carried out with visiting African traders, Arab traders, and Chinese interpreters. Another survey done in 2007 in the same area showed that most of the traders came in a descending order from Mali, Togo, Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, Senegal, and Congo (Li et al. 2007: 14). However, in the Baiyun district, in the area of Sanyuanli, the African business was dominated by Nigerians. The same methods were used in Dubai, where 10 in-depth interviews and narratives were conducted with Senegalese, Malian, and Comorian traders in 2009 and followed up in more detail in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Some of them had a trading agency in Guangzhou, but we did not meet them in both places. Additionally, I did participant observation in hotels where African visitors stayed. In July 2012, I carried out a new set of interviews in Dakar with Senegalese students who had graduated from Chinese universities and who had rapidly found employment in Chinese enterprises recently set up in the Senegalese capital. These findings were put in relation with an earlier inquiry among 30 African students in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) who had returned from Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, in order to appreciate if and how these students who had pursued international education in Islamic universities did find appropriate employment.

## Studying Abroad as a Means to Social Mobility at Home

Except for diplomats, the first sub-Saharan Africans to arrive in the People's Republic of China in the 1970s were students, who were welcomed in the name of "communist internationalism." They came after the Bandung conference in 1955, the first large-scale Afro-Asian meeting, which promoted economic and cultural cooperation at a point in time when most of the countries had just become independent.<sup>4</sup> The sub-Saharan students were primarily young men and a few young women hailing from Uganda, Kenya,<sup>5</sup> Cameroon,<sup>6</sup> Somalia, Zanzibar,<sup>7</sup> Ghana, Guinea,<sup>8</sup> Mali, Chad, and Sudan. They arrived in China as African nationalism had reached its peak, and in the middle of the international Congo crisis. Most had received Chinese government scholarships and spent their first years studying Chinese, usually at the Beijing University for Foreign Students. Then they spread out to universities across China to study arts and humanities, medicine, electronics, computing, civil engineering, petro chemistry, or agronomy. Their work and living conditions were difficult. John Emmanuel Hevi's book is one of the earliest autobiographical studies to describe the experiences of a Ghanaian student in the PRC in the 1960s and the problems faced on campuses, including the strictness of Chinese political control in the era of Mao (Hevi 1963). Firstly, the courses were given in Mandarin and language apprenticeship was long and arduous: the foreign students needed to master at least 3,000 Chinese characters in common use to be capable of reading simple newspaper articles and holding a conversation. Moreover, contact with the local population was highly limited, and mutual misunderstanding and ignorance of each other's ways and customs led to negative experiences; many students felt isolated within the university. In the 1960s, among the first generations of Africans in China, some students asked to be repatriated to their country of origin because they had suffered from racial discrimination and they thought the academic level



too low compared to their expectations.<sup>9</sup> They were housed in buildings for foreign students only, far from the Chinese students; superintendants (*shifu*) kept a close and constant watch over the visitors. In subsequent years, international students faced additional difficulties: their supplementary scholarships (paid by their own governments) were often transferred late by their embassies. The first generations of African students tended to return to their home country soon after the completion of their studies, partly because of their isolation and partly because they hoped to find well-paid jobs, even though the university degrees earned in China had less value on the labor market than those obtained in Europe. At that time, few people possessed university diplomas in Africa, so students returning from Chinese universities usually became part of the national elite, just as the students who studied at European universities. However, the frustration of Eric, a young Malian student, was a common experience. He returned to Mali with a degree in agronomy from a university in Guangzhou, but when he followed his French wife to France, this degree was of no use because it was not recognized in France. Only in 2002 did China sign a bilateral agreement mutually recognizing university curricula and degrees with 32 countries, among them France, Germany, and Great Britain.

In the decades that followed, the Chinese government engaged in many more development programs across Africa, and, after the opening of China in 1978, university cooperation programs extended to a growing number of African countries. Some of the students who came in the mid-1980s remained in China after graduation, primarily to work as teachers. In each of the communities that are the topic of this study, a few people settled down in China after graduation instead of returning to Africa. In 1987, however, clashes occurred between Chinese and African students in Shanghai (i.e., shortly before the 1988 events of Tiananmen in Nanjing), challenging and reshaping the terms of this partnership (Okouma Mountou 2008; Sulli-

van 1994).<sup>10</sup> While these tensions looked like ordinary racism, they were partly underlain by jealousy over foreign students' higher scholarships and better accommodation.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the relationship between Chinese and African students remained fraught, as Chinese students resented the lack of support of their African peers during the Beijing Spring.<sup>12</sup> African students had little room to maneuver, as their embassies had ordered them not to be involved in political unrest on the pain of repatriation. The following year (1990-1991), the foreign students returned to the PRC to finish their studies, and diplomatic activities fully resumed.

According to Chinese records, in 1993 10,742 foreign students were registered in the PRC. The influx of international students from Africa to China had quickened at an accelerated rate since the mid-1990s. The "great opening" of college education in China happened in 1999 after Jiang Zemin emphasized the key role of foreign students in the Chinese education development strategy (Lagrée 2012). As a well-established economic power, China could now develop its diplomatic relations that had been hitherto relegated to a position of secondary importance. But this was also the time when many African states built new relations with Taiwan and, as a result, broke their cooperation with China. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) became a decisive tool of the China African policy, an action plan based first of all on the development of intercultural exchanges and education (by setting up Confucius Institutes in Africa), as well as on university education and tourism. The first FOCAC took place in Beijing in 2000. From 1999 to 2007, the number of international students in the PRC more than tripled, while the number of African students more than quadrupled, jumping from 1,386 to 5,923 within eight years (Chinese Ministry of Education 2007). During the third FOCAC in 2006, and in the presence of 48 African heads of state, President Hu Jintao announced that China would double the number of annual scholarships awarded to African students, awarding

4,000 scholarships instead of the previous 2,000.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, local authorities in Beijing, Shanghai, and Chongqing, as well as a number of higher education institutions, developed advertising strategies to inform foreign students of scholarship opportunities. The following year, the number of African students holding scholarships in Chinese universities rose to 3,737, an increase of 40% compared to 2005 (when the number of scholarships was 2,757). In 2009, the number of African students had been 12,436, and it doubled in two years (Chinese government Ministry of Education website).<sup>14</sup>

The situation is entirely different in the United Arab Emirates. In the early 1960s, African Muslims who wanted to pursue higher Islamic education had limited choices because there were no faith-based secondary schools in the Islamic educational systems of their countries. At that time, Egypt was their preferred destination, and the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which accepted several hundred international students from West Africa, quickly became a political tool for President Nasser (Mattes 1993). During the African independence period, he played a key role in strengthening the ties between the countries on the two sides of the Sahara and he won the Muslims from sub-Saharan Africa to his side. Spurred on by the same desire to extend their influence south of the Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia also began to host international students from sub-Saharan Africa, offering them scholarships for religious education (Bahri 1993; Kane 2003). In the United Arab Emirates, the first public university was created only in 1977 by the federal government, and scholarships were made available to African students in the late 1980s. In other words, the internationalization of theological universities began long before the economic liberalization in Africa, as part of the strategic and political construction of the Muslim world.

The first international students who received degrees from these theological universities found it difficult to find a lucrative job when they returned home. As a substitute, many of

them started their own Koranic schools in their urban districts or villages, or worked as teachers or translators in one of the embassies. As they were educated in Arabic, a language rarely used in administration or in the business world, it was difficult for them to take advantage of their religious skills in the local labor market. The generations of students who followed them changed tactics and began to combine higher education in an Arabic-speaking country with education in Europe, in order to achieve a better command of the language of the former colonizer, which is invariably the official language in their country. As degrees obtained from Arab universities are recognized in France, Malian and Senegalese students often registered for post-graduate studies at French universities and were able to enroll in doctoral programs despite the fact that they did not fully master the French language. This strategy offered them better possibilities of finding a job when they returned home (Bredeloup 2009).

In the 1970s, the number of college-level theological programs for African students increased significantly, although still few countries in sub-Saharan Africa had institutions offering university degrees in Islam. Saudi Arabia opened its universities and accepted more than 2,000 international students from sub-Saharan Africa, in order to promote Islam and the use of Arabic in Africa. These students received their education in Arabic (Nyang 1982). Similarly, in 1974 the Libyan leader Gadhafi set up The School for the Call to Islam (also known in French as *La faculté de l'Appel Islamique*), which offered a range of university degrees and granted numerous scholarships to students from sub-Saharan Africa. The UAE joined this movement later. Unlike Egypt, it had no academic tradition before independence in 1971, and the first Arabic and Islamic university was founded only in 1976 in Al Ain, the town where the Al Nahyan, the Abu Dhabi reigning family, originated. The top priority was to provide the Emirates with well-educated senior administrators. Over time, a fierce competition started

between the four Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras-al-Khaimah) for becoming the university hub of the UAE and the Gulf region (Gueraiche 2012). As part of this rivalry, since the mid-1990s the four Emirates attempted to build partnerships with prestigious international universities and create private universities, and they also tried to attract African Muslims by offering them scholarships to study at their Islamic universities. The first generation of international students from Africa came to Al Ain University with scholarships, and upon graduation most of them returned home to teach religious studies in Arabic schools.

Only a minority of the African students stayed in Dubai or in another Emirate to work as teachers or lawyers. A few of them opted for a different path, becoming the pioneers in transnational trade with Africa. Religion and trade are connected worlds, as expertise in Islamic law and finance can be put to use in commercial activities. This is the case of Ali, who started his secondary education in Abu Dhabi in 1986 and later moved on to study Islamic jurisprudence at the University of Ras-El-Khaima. As with most African students from Franco-phone countries, it took him many years to become fluent in both Arabic and English. However, even before finishing his studies, he was able to find work legally as a lawyer and to preach in the mosque. He explained with pride that he was accredited to wear the traditional clothes (the *disdash* or *tawb*, which is a long, white robe and a white or white and red headscarf called *keffieh*) of Emirates natives. For him, this was proof of his integration into local society, even if he was not a citizen.<sup>15</sup> Ali planned to practice law in the UAE and conduct business, instead of returning to Mali. Before getting his license in 1997, he travelled to Brazzaville, the Republic of the Congo, to buy gold and precious stones to resell in Dubai. One of his brothers was an established merchant in the Congolese capital, and Ali established a partnership with him. Later he began to fill several containers in Dubai with merchandise for the market

of Brazzaville. Ali considers the president of the Congolese Republic (Denis Sassou Nguesso) his “second father” because the president favored the new trade link between the Congolese Republic and the UAE and supported him when he began to sell Congolese precious stones and gold in Dubai. After this first prospecting of business opportunities on the African continent, he attempted to export goods between Dubai and Valencia or Barcelona, and between Dubai and Paris. Then, he set up a freight company in the Deira district of Dubai, which was managed by a UAE native. According to the *kafala* and the current labor legislation in the UAE, immigrants who wish to work must have a contract with an employer who sponsors the entry visa and a residence permit. To meet these requirements, Ali joined a Pakistani immigrant managing a hotel in 2003, and they had to sign a contract for 20 years with the owner.<sup>16</sup> The hotel was located in Deira, and he opened an office at the hotel on the same floor as the restaurant. He turned over the restaurant to a fellow countrywoman who had as clientele African visitors. As his business thrived the same year, he opened a branch in Guangzhou, People’s Republic of China, thanks to personal links. His cousin was the most powerful Malian trader in this marketplace. But this branch did not survive. He could not rely on his partner, and with the harder competition in the PRC he preferred to pull back and strengthen his Dubai business.

Today, Ali has expanded the range of his activities. He settled in the Emirate Ras-El-Khaima, where he built a house, and he collaborates with a tile factory there. He sells large quantities of building materials and tiles to numerous loyal customers in Europe, Canada, and Africa. His visitors consider him an “honest and brave adventurer,” and his competitors see him as a powerful businessman in the Dubai Trading Post. According to him, only one other Malian student had previously taken advantage of his training and relationships in the UAE to succeed in the import-export business.

The Malian students who turned entrepreneurs in transnational trade while in the UAE are pioneers. Their efforts to establish themselves take place in a different context from that which Bava and Pliez observed for African Muslim elites studying at Al Azhar University in Cairo. In Egypt, the students entering transnational trade can draw on older, well-established migrants from their country, whereas in the UAE they depend solely on their own ingenuity and their capacity to consolidate their relationships with local students, which allow them in the long run to establish a business (Bava and Pliez 2009).

### **Studying in the United Arab Emirates as a Means to Work in Dubai**

Economic globalization, the succession of reforms that it caused, which have led to the rolling-back of the states (Hibou 1999), and the reorganization of global trade have contributed strongly to the privatization of higher education (Altbach 2010). Dubai joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in April 1996 and accepted the principles of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), thus allowing for the opening of the educational sector to unlimited foreign competition (Knight 2006). Although the presence of international students is not well documented, almost 40% of the students registered in the Dubai Emirate in 2010 were foreigners, coming mainly from Muslim, non-Anglophone countries (AUD 2010; Government of Dubai 2010), and, to paraphrase Ousmane Kane, from the Europhone world (Kane 2003). In recent years, the Gulf countries have witnessed a real academic revolution (Romani 2009), as the number of private universities has increased from five in 1997 to 72 today. In this period, the UAE has also experienced an unprecedented economic boom thanks to a combination of oil revenues, the founding of free-trade zones, and the tourist industry.

Contrary to current practices and legislation in Saudi Arabia and Libya, the African students who come to the UAE to pursue a theological program in the Arabic language also have the opportunity to complement their training with degrees in science, which are much more marketable in African countries. However, the first generations of students in the UAE were not aware of all the advantages they could get from their stay. Several came by chance rather than by choice. For many of them there had been a long period of vague talk about their going to Saudi Arabia or Sudan to improve their religious knowledge. One of my Senegalese contacts described how he had been chosen from 100 applicants to go to Khartoum but, at the very last moment, was not sent because others had received preferential treatment. He then tried his luck again, this time in Abu Dhabi. Cheikh, one of his fellow countrymen, described how the Senegalese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mustapha Niasse, played a key role in deciding his destiny. Niasse, who had Cheikh's father as a *marabout* (an Islamic cleric) in his childhood, took an interest in Cheikh's education and advised him to pursue an academic course of study. However, Cheikh wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and go to Mauritania, where his family's history of religious devotion lay. In order to overcome Cheikh's determination, Niasse, who was more aware of the opportunities that education outside Africa could offer, said to him: "I will find you a scholarship in the United Arab Emirates." Although the Senegalese government was conscious of the difficulties Arabic-speaking students encountered when they returned home, the remarkable economic development of the UAE was acknowledged and the Senegalese authorities now hoped that international students would help build a bridge between the two countries. In May 1987, Cheikh obtained his visa; six months later, he flew to Abu Dhabi with seven fellow countrymen. He had to look at a map to locate his new destination. "I did not know Dubai, or the Emirates. I had not really heard about these places, so I tried to find them on



the map but Google did not exist yet." This contrast between individual students' lack of knowledge of the possibilities that exist abroad and the power conferred upon him by his family network is interesting. The findings of a study in Cairo show that the sons of *marabouts* are more likely to study abroad and also receive the support of their network, both when they establish themselves in their country of origin and abroad (Bava and Pliez 2009). These Senegalese students are Murids (initiates into the mystical philosophy of Sufism), and most of the Senegalese students I met in Dubai belong to the upper class. However, the profiles of the Islamic migrant students in Dubai are diversifying and becoming more democratic. Today we find also youths of less privileged backgrounds who study or work in the UAE; this is at least true for the Comorians I met and has been confirmed by Michaela Pelican with regard to Cameroonian migrants in Dubai (see Pelican in this volume).

After a few years of studying in the UAE, young African students began to diversify their skills. As they doubted the value of theological studies in the contemporary labor market, they enrolled in private institutions for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) training or management and began evening classes to learn English. They had become aware of the difficulties that the students who had come before them had encountered when they had returned home having studied exclusively Islamic theology. At the beginning of the 1990s, when President Abdu Diouf visited his fellow countrymen studying in Abu Dhabi, they criticized him severely: they did not understand why their government encouraged them to return to Senegal when there were no job opportunities for those who mastered English, Arabic, and French. One Senegalese man stated, "I would like to go back home, but only if it were in a bilingual or trilingual country where we could use what we have learned to make a living." But the situation also changed in the UAE. While the Gulf War in 1990 temporarily caused a foreign capital flight, the 1990s promised to be a

booming economic period, and Dubai increasingly became a key trade hub worldwide. Historically the Emirates were all sparsely populated; hence they tapped into the international labor market and today immigrant workers constitute about 75% of the workforce. In this context that favors foreign workers, African students think about how to take best advantage of their situation. As they do not intend to join the ranks of the unemployed in their home country, they resolutely seek to build their future in the UAE. Bubacar, for example, arrived in Abu Dhabi in 1991 with a scholarship he had been granted in Senegal. Although his father was a nurse in the greatest hospital in Dakar and considered a “notable” (a literate person holding a regular job), he could not financially support his son’s education. In the first four years, Bubacar studied theology and science at the Al Ain Scientific Islamic Institute; then he turned to business administration at a UAE computer college that had English as the language of instruction. He followed this with a BBA at another university in Dubai, and when I met him he was working on an MBA in international business, specializing in marketing. He also took a short training course in London to improve his English, and before starting his own business he worked for four years for the airline company Emirates, where he was the manager of the Africa section of international airfreight. This is how he summarized his career: “I started with Islamic studies, I continued with modern knowledge about the market and business administration, and I finished with English.”<sup>17</sup> Bubacar was very strategic; he had accumulated academic degrees, technical qualifications, and language skills, and in this way, he had built his trajectory step by step. While his French was weak, he was perfectly fluent in English and Arabic, the two languages that allowed him to carve out a place for himself in the world of shipping in Dubai. He is currently managing his own company, specializing in sea and air freight, and employs five Senegalese people to carry out

the cargo and customs clearance of goods for a wide range of customers established across sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the first Comorian students, who also set up his own shipping company, came to the UAE the same year as Bubacar, in 1991. He had left Moroni, the capital of Comoros, to go to the Islamic University of Djibouti, where he spent three years before registering at a private university in Ajman Emirate. A training course in management, followed by a job in the transit company owned by a well-established Comorian, made him aspire to more promising jobs.

However, in the UAE, integration into the local business environment is only possible after having acquired and consolidated social relations with Emirati citizens, and it is through their university education that African students are able to cultivate enduring friendships with Emiratis. One of my contacts explained that a friend of his, a citizen of Dubai, who recently had been recruited to work at the Djebel Ali port, had facilitated his first employment. This had allowed him to suspend his studies at a time when he could no longer count on financial support from his family because his father had died. Another former student explained that he had been able to find a job in the airline company Emirates thanks to an Emirati student from the same cohort, who already worked for the company. Thus, the friendships struck during the years of study both with other international students and with the citizens of the UAE are key resources that determine African students' professional careers.

However, the students who turned into entrepreneurs in Dubai faced new competition. In the last few years, their trajectories started intersecting with African immigrants who earned university degrees in Islamic universities elsewhere in the Arab world. Many of the Malian and Senegalese students returning from Saudi Arabia and the Comorians who have degrees from Al-Azhar University in Cairo or the Islamic university of Khartoum fail to find employment in their home country

and come to the UAE to try their luck. Unlike the former students at educational institutions in the UAE, the newcomers primarily have religious education. They usually start working at a lower level in the shipping industry, where they work for freight brokers helping African traders, who are new to the UAE, with translation, knowledge about customs practices, port procedures, and the markets in the different Emirates. However, this new wave of immigrants rarely become business associates as the former students do. One of the African cargo managers explained that he preferred employees with a technical background (e.g., a master's degree in international trading or a higher national diploma in transportation and logistics) or an on-the-job experience acquired in Europe or in the United States (which would guarantee good knowledge of business English and French) rather than a fellow countryman educated in an Islamic university exclusively.

### **Studying Abroad as a Means to Work in China**

Practices similar to those in the UAE are found in Guangzhou since China opened its doors to international negotiations in 2001 by entering the WTO. An increasing number of African students enrolled in Chinese universities thought that after graduation it was more advantageous for them to stay on to develop a business in the PRC. The commercial system in the capital of the province of Guangdong, however, was completely different from the one in the UAE. The first wave of West African migrants who started businesses in Guangzhou in the early 2000s located themselves in the Baiyun and Yuexiu districts close to the Canton fair. They came to Guangdong from Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Jakarta and had extensive knowledge of and experience in transnational commerce. For 15 years or more, they had developed import-export businesses linking

the Asian markets with Africa and they had opened offices in a number of African cities (e.g., in Lomé, Brazzaville, and Nairobi). Most of these migrants were from Mali, Guinea, and Nigeria, and they had gained professional experience gradually in commerce rather than through studying. Some of them had started by trading precious stones from the DRC and Angola in markets in Hong Kong and Bangkok, or by assisting Indian and Japanese engineers in the construction of textile industries in Africa. Others had travelled to Thailand and Indonesia to source printed fabric of cotton, rayon, and other fibers directly from the textile industries. Their relocation to China and the establishment of a new commercial base resulted in the extension or the reorganization of their commercial networks (Bredeloup 2012). These networks quickly became indispensable because they sourced various commodities directly from Chinese factories located in the hinterland and in the Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen and brought them to the attention of visiting businessmen, primarily from Africa. It was trade-in-the-making, and some of the African students who came to China to study in the mid-1990s were approached by the first-wave migrants who needed translators. Some took up the offer of employment because they found their situation as international students tedious due to the financial limitations of their small scholarship and the feeling of isolation in the PRC. Others took employment because they had almost finished their studies, and others yet because they had dropped out or had had to suspend their studies and were worried about their professional career. In short, African students seized upon the opportunity to work in China for different reasons.

Two Nigerians, who today head a trading company, explained their reasons for having turned into entrepreneurs after having interrupted their university studies in China. One abandoned his medical studies in the fourth year, married a Chinese woman, and began teaching English in a Chinese secondary school before being persuaded to work as an inter-

preter during the Canton fair. The other one had not finished his civil engineering studies when he was recruited to work in a trading company managed by a migrant from the Maghreb. He was recruited primarily because of his fluency in Mandarin. Both of them moved up the ladder gradually within this small world of trade and succeeded in establishing themselves in a Chinese trading company. Other former students tried to establish themselves back in Africa, but when they failed to do so they came back to China. H el ene Le Bail recounted the itinerary of a student from Benin who had studied at the Agricultural University of Guangzhou. Before finishing his studies in agronomy, he was approached by a Tunisian friend who facilitated temporary employment as an interpreter for a Nigerian agency that worked with African traders prospecting the Guangzhou market. At the end of his mission and after a quick visit to Africa, where he found his first Chinese customer, he returned to Guangzhou to open his own agency (Le Bail 2009).

Until recently, few of the African traders in China had pursued tertiary education, and the transformation of students to entrepreneurs is a recent phenomenon. It came about at a time when border controls had become tougher in Western countries and economic openings easier in the PRC. The members of earlier generations of African students did not have these opportunities and rarely planned to stay on in China. One of them, Amadou, who had studied in Beijing and Shanghai between 1985 and 1991, and was recruited by the company Henan China in Dakar as a senior manager, told me: "At that time, we studied and we left; now things are different, people study and stay [in China]. They come as students and they make *business* eventually." His own route was emblematic of expectations that most of the African students have at present: to find the means to settle in Europe or in North America. Amadou had never thought of working in China when at the

end of 1990s he had attempted in vain to settle in France after finishing graduate studies in international trade.

Okouma Mountou, a Gabonese author, explained in his autobiographical book that “the visa would be a foreign woman” (Okouma Mountou 2008: 141). In other words, in China, the African students courted French, American, Australian, or Japanese students to get married and to emigrate with them. Some of them became trade intermediaries during their winter or spring holidays in Hong Kong and Canton (Guangzhou) or Macao in order to supplement their scholarship. This business was very profitable: exempted from customs dues thanks to their student status, they could import all kinds of goods bought in Hong Kong or Macao. They worked at first for Chinese businessmen and then for the very first African visitors who ventured into China. But in 1992, faced with the growing scale of the phenomenon, the Chinese administration put a stop to the privileged status of the students and this profit-making business.

Among the traders we now see former students, who came to China with the aim of specializing and getting more advanced university degrees, but rather than returning to their country of origin with their newly acquired expertise, they chose another path. They plan to permanently settle in the PRC, which is now possible. This is the case for Abdul, a migrant from Niger, who has established himself in Guangzhou since 2000 under the name Dr. Abdul. After studying medicine for six years at the University of Batna, Algeria, he worked as a veterinarian for the Niger government.<sup>18</sup> He received a scholarship to study genetics, cloning, and animal reproduction in China through the China-Niger Cooperation, but he was also offered an internship in Belgium through another institution. He chose to continue his studies rather than doing the internship, but he realized in the course of his degree work that it would be difficult to use the new skills in Niger or for his former job as veterinarian. As a result, he chose

a completely different path, which was more risky but also more profitable. Everett Hughes, the first sociologist to work on unforeseeable transitions between different periods in the life course, called this situation a “turning point” (Hughes 1953). The same revelation could have had different outcomes, had Abdul not seen an economic opportunity in the PRC. Not only did he terminate his contract with the Niger government, he also launched himself into an occupation, in which he had no former experience. “Before I was scared of commerce. I do not come from a family of traders. My father was a customs officer and my mother a nurse.” On one side, the political and economic opening of China made these turning points possible in the professional careers of these African elites. On the other, the values attached to social success have also changed in Africa as the status of civil service jobs dropped. From now on, new generations are freer to make their professional choices. Dr. Abdul exports from China primarily medicines and products for veterinary use to North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe. He sources these products directly from factories in the northern provinces of China by drawing on the knowledge acquired through study and work. Thanks to his marriage to a Korean woman who speaks Mandarin, he has ameliorated his language skills and is now fluent in Mandarin, English, Arabic, and French. Abdul’s economic niche is exceptionally specialized, and the competition he faces is still weak. At the same time, he can use his wide social network to reinstate his links with the Niger government, which did not readily accept that one of its best-educated officials chose to emigrate. Today, Dr. Abdul has become the honorary consul for Niger; he mostly conveys the demands of the students holding scholarships at Chinese universities when a minister from Niger visits Guangzhou. From his perspective, he strives to transform *brain drain* into *brain gain*.

Another African migrant, Patrick, saw similar advantages during his studies in China. Originally from Kinshasa, the



Democratic Republic of the Congo, he had decided to pursue a Ph.D. in development economics at a university in Guangzhou after having obtained a postgraduate degree in economics in France and an MBA in Canada. Originally he thought that at the end of his studies he would return to the DRC and work as an expert. But during his Ph. D. studies he married a young woman from Guangzhou and had a daughter with her. To support his small family while studying, he started conducting export trade with the DRC, and he rapidly flourished with this opportunity. "We have become traders in the course of time. Earlier you would never meet a Congolese in international commerce, the Congolese used to be bureaucrats working for the administration."<sup>19</sup> Once again, we see an example of how a migrant's life can be transformed with an event that tips his career in a completely different direction than he first planned. A few of his countrymen had paved the way, but the demand for manufactured goods was far from being saturated in the DRC, where political crisis had led to the destruction or abandonment of most industries across the country. Patrick's trading company exports primarily construction material, machine tools, and office supplies from China to the DRC. In his view, he makes good use of the theoretical knowledge that he acquired by studying economics and management. He is also one of the leaders in the association of Congolese in Guangzhou and, similar to his colleague from Niger, he uses his social relations and his knowledge of the local culture and norms to help his fellow countrymen if they are arrested or have other problems with the Chinese authorities. Like the first wave of non-schooled African traders from Mali, Guinea, and Nigeria, Patrick functions as a key intermediary and has thereby taken upon himself the same social responsibilities towards newcomers as they have.

Some of the African traders in the PRC have done most of their university or technical education in the West. Some who were political refugees had the ambition to make a career

and use their professional skills in their European country of adoption, but because of the daunting competition they were forced to find other paths. China often provided an alternative path and allowed them to start anew with a second wind. This is how Sileye, who had left his native Guinea in 1989 because of political turmoil, was able to reevaluate his ambitions after having finished a degree in ICT in the United States and having worked as a computer technician in New York. In 2002, he began to resell generators and transformers that he bought directly from Chinese factories. He profited from the relations he had made while working in the United States with clients from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa. Moreover, he benefited from a number of contacts he had gotten in Mozambique and Angola through an older brother who was an established trader in Brazzaville. After travelling back and forth between the United States and China for a while, he opened a small office in Guangzhou, hired a Chinese interpreter, and used his American nationality to distinguish himself from the other traders originating in Africa.

Another example is Aziz, who pursued technical training in his native Mali before he migrated first to Guinea and later to Gabon. He was employed by a company prospecting for oil before following the same path as Sileye and trying his luck in the United States in 1986. Unable to find work commensurate with his qualifications, he had to take numerous low-paid jobs. "It was difficult to have to do menial work when you are in fact an experienced technician, but I had to earn money. My wife had joined me; she wanted to train as a nurse and that was expensive. In the end I went to commerce. I worked in Bangkok and then I came to China in 2003. I sell laundry detergent in the States and computers in Africa. I have brothers who live in different African countries and they have helped me find customers." Aziz did not have an office, only a telephone. He worked from cafés located near office blocks. This more flexible way of working, which became possible thanks to greater

mobility, tends to expand as rents increase and competition turns stiffer (Bredeloup 2012).

Another trader, John, had left his native Ghana because he was involved in the political opposition. While pursuing his studies in journalism in Great Britain and the Netherlands, he began to envisage a future in transnational trade between China and Ghana.

Likewise, Romain Dittgen (2010: 10) describes how a Mauritanian student obtained a master's degree in economics in France and then left for China because he had married a Chinese woman while in France. Her brother advised him to establish a trading company in Yiwu, the world's largest free-trade zone, which is located in Zhejiang Province, a two-hour drive from the city (Bertoncello et al. 2009; Guiheux 2007). He got involved in transnational trade (Dittgen 2010).

These unexpected twists and turns in the course of life shape the fluid constructions of identity and the porosity of social statuses and demonstrate migrants' varying capacities in assessing the opportunities open to them and in combining their full range of competencies.

### **African Students as Cultural Ambassadors and "Cross-Cultural Bridge Builders"?**

The situation of foreigners in China, whether students or traders, has deteriorated since new and stricter immigration laws were passed in 2007, and this has compelled all foreigners to reconsider their stay in China. The duration of visas was shortened considerably; for example, one-year visas allowing multiple entries were replaced by 30-day visas. First, this change drove African migrants to increase the number of trips by train to Guangzhou, Macao, and Hong Kong to renew their visas, then to arrange with private travel agencies to have

their visas renewed.<sup>20</sup> Roughly 30% of the African businessmen returned to their country of origin or moved to other trading posts, such as Yiwu in China (south southeast of Shanghai), India, and Vietnam. Likewise, the process of substituting a working visa for a student visa became much more difficult. As a matter of fact, since the tightening of immigration laws made it almost impossible to obtain a residence permit, many Africans began to apply for a student visa with the intention of doing business. However, as soon as the Chinese authorities became aware of this tactic, they revised and tightened legislation. Immigration control and raids in the Xiao Beilu and Sanyunli districts burgeoned and increasingly led to brutal arrests, which in turn drove African businessmen to respond by demonstrating in the streets or by employing private guards, whose job it was to warn them of approaching police.

Despite the tightening of immigration laws and the hardening of the ways in which the Chinese authorities treat foreigners, African migrants continue to come to China on student visas but with the aim of reorienting towards trade, even if doing so illegally. The expanding China-Africa relationship has led to a growing number of young Africans being attracted to China for both study and business. They do not need to register their business to engage in trade, and most of the recently arrived international students from Africa enroll in technical studies, which give them sufficient spare time to combine study and trade.

According to official sources, half of the African students arriving in China today are postgraduate students who have only recently obtained their degree. These sources, however, need to be verified. On 24 June 2010, *Radio France International* broadcast a program entitled "China-Africa, The Business of African International Students" (author's translation), which described the ways in which African students who were enrolled at universities in Shanghai feverishly repositioned themselves as businessmen, irrespective of whether they had

scholarships. Among the students interviewed, some shipped containers with a range of commodities to their country of origin, while pursuing a university degree in international trade and management. Others preferred to interrupt their education to fully capture this new economic miracle and to accumulate as much hands-on know-how as possible.

However, in the course of time, competition grew between African and Chinese businessmen involved in the export-trade to Africa of goods made in China. All of them were driven by the search for a niche, which would secure their place in the front, while also having to reflect on strategies to reduce conflict. The students in Beijing took advantage of their proximity to Yiwu, and they engaged directly in buying commodities for export. In Guangzhou, on the other hand, some of them worked for a trading company while others launched in customs brokerage. The latter is not a licensed profession in the PRC, but those who do not have the means to set up a trading office, a cargo firm, or a logistics company turn to offering consultancy services to newcomers. They help African businessmen who are inexperienced in China by picking them up from the airport or train station and showing them the cheap hostels, the discounted rooms, and the Chinese underground banks that offer good rates when exchanging foreign currencies. Customs brokers also offer information about sourcing, assist in establishing contacts with factories, and with flight attendants. Brokers constitute a minority, but they nevertheless hold an important position because they mediate between marginal visiting businessmen and those mastering the export-trade to Africa. Drawing on Edna Bonacich's pioneering work "A Theory of Middleman Minorities" (1973), African customs brokers could be labeled middlemen, since they have strong links to their compatriots in the PRC as well as in their country of origin despite being expatriates. It is exactly these strong links that allow them to hold an effective intermediary position between the different groups involved in the trans-

national trade between Africa and China. African cultures do not necessarily predispose these students to assume the role of middlemen despite their having experienced discrimination and hostility in some parts of the PRC. But the tightening of visa regulations and the increasing of local tensions lead these students to innovate, to draw on their social capital, and to extend their networks of kin. They use their linguistic skills and their knowledge of the host society to attempt to promote better communications between Chinese trading partners and African visitors.

Like the other African traders, students work to build business connections in order to find a place among the community of merchants, but they try also to build cultural connections with their Chinese hosts (Bodomo 2010). New spaces of mediation are thus created by former students who have remained in China. One Ethiopian, for example, who had come to Beijing in 2007 to study electrical engineering, initiated a support network for international students from Africa. Young African Professional Students (YAPS) was founded in 2009 as a non-profit network and is today sponsored by several African embassies in China (Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Zambia). On its home page, the network is described as follows:

YAPS consists of a group of individuals who are interested in advancing Africa brain gain progress through Sino-African relations. It is our group's effort to help fashion and implement the best strategies for our members to pool and utilize their knowledge skills and networks to support [a] continental agenda.<sup>21</sup>

This network promotes entrepreneurship in Africa by helping returning international students to contribute to knowledge and technology transfer between China and Africa. Moreover, it encourages the "absorption of Africa-China Alumni into the civil society sector" (YAPS homepage). Another network is the Beijing Axis, which aims to facilitate the employment of African

graduates from Chinese universities and colleges in Chinese enterprises in Africa.<sup>22</sup> Another strategy was employed by a professor from Cameroon, who in 2008 created a website to invite Chinese hosts to open up to African cultures and build a bridge between Africans settled in the PRC and Chinese people who have an interest in China-Africa relations.<sup>23</sup> Bodomo (2010, 2012) has already shown how Africans living in the PRC try to make the Chinese understand African culture in particular through food. African restaurant owners are increasingly becoming cultural ambassadors within the host communities. Finally, former international students frequently describe the lives of African students in China in articles and novels, usually with the aim of promoting and reinforcing diplomatic relations between China and the African continent.

In Dubai, where the labor market is highly hierarchical and the cultural exchanges between UAE citizens and migrants occur in small pockets, former UAE students cannot easily use their cultural capital to build bridges to the local community in Dubai. It is even difficult for them to convert their intellectual capital and knowledge of the UAE and Africa into marketable skills. Nevertheless, thanks to his impressive professional career and migration trajectory, Keba Keinde from Senegal has assisted Africans in Dubai in building lasting relations between their country of origin and their host country. This has earned him the nickname "the best banker in African affairs." Formerly a telecommunication student in Paris, he quit the world of engineers to move to finance by earning an MBA at MIT. Then he worked first for Lehman Brothers and then for the World Bank before moving to Dubai to head an impressive group of international bankers in the enterprise Millennium FC, which he founded in 2005 with support from the Dubai Islamic Bank. To obtain this support was an achievement in itself, and the rapid growth of the enterprise, despite focusing primarily on the global South, caused Millennium FC to be perceived as a sort of UFO within the business world. Furthermore, Keba

Keinde, previously unknown in the world of politics, moved into the limelight by becoming a presidential candidate in the 2012 elections in Senegal. His aim was to represent the businessmen who lived abroad.

## Conclusion

The central issue in this article has been to throw light on a new facet of globalized mobility. I have addressed this issue by examining the ways in which African students entered transnational trade in the trade hubs of Dubai and Guangzhou in a multitude of roles, ranging from trader to cargo agent, customs broker, and business consultant. This article describes the new links between educational migration and migration among businessmen, using the example of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in China and the UAE. Pursuing university education in these places was for a long time considered to be the default choice for all African students who did not manage to enter programs in American or European universities. However, studying in Asia also had the potential of turning into a great advantage, though opportunities have changed over the years. Both Chinese and Emirati universities have become very popular in recent years among prospective international students from Africa.

These changes cannot be explained solely by the globalization of higher education and increasing competition between countries to attract international students, not even in the countries where globalization brought the validation of diplomas from other countries and a privatization of universities. On the one hand, the new opportunities seized upon and the different directions taken by African students are an outcome of the emerging power of China and the UAE in the global economy. On the other hand, the tightening of immigration politics in these countries affects the immigrants' choices. At first, the eco-



conomic boom and the increasing importance of the PRC and the UAE in the global economy gave former international students, who had not yet returned to their country of origin, a second wind professionally and allowed them to turn to activities in the host country that brought them closer to the African continent. This is how language teachers became interpreters and intermediaries in trading companies and, in the longer term, cultural mediators who promoted a *brain gain*. The following generations of African students envisaged tertiary education in China or Dubai as a springboard to profit from their new competencies and find a place (temporarily or permanently) in the host country. Others, despite having acquired education in the North, preferred to capitalize on their knowledge and competencies in these new promising countries in the South, at the same time turning into pioneers in this new South-South circulation in an increasingly globalized world. More recently, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have come to perceive enrolment in Chinese universities as a disguised means to legalize their stay in China and to penetrate the import-export sector.

Furthermore, this article describes how the behavior and strategies of different generations of African students in China and Dubai have changed to foreground the plethora of competences that have been key to African graduates' transformation into businessmen. To safeguard their place relative to other African traders and to local traders in a highly competitive market, the (former) students must take advantage of their qualities as intermediaries. They need to convince their suppliers and their clients of the advantage of using them as intermediaries when securing transactions, getting ahead of their competitors, guarding their business against local authorities, and when needing guidance. The latter is particularly important in Guangzhou, given the absence of diplomatic representation. Together these strategies make them seem like the "middleman minority," a term that Bonacich (1973) used in the 1970s and that seems still to be valid.

Finally, although this study primarily sheds light on the professional trajectories of African international students who have chosen to develop their career away from home, in another country in the global South, it is important to note that this is not a sign of brain drain. First, we have a methodological bias in that we mainly interviewed those students who had not returned to their country of origin. To say anything about brain drain, it is crucial to also look at the international students who do not delay their return. Future research focusing on graduates and postgraduates who have returned from China and Dubai could help us situate the longer-term strategies both of those who remain in the country where they studied and of those who returned home after finishing their studies. Additionally, whether educated in the North, South, or East, internationally educated professionals from Africa are highly mobile. Their degrees and the numerous other competencies acquired in different places have opened the door to a new international mobility, and their experience in situations of mobility reinforces access to global circuits and opens even more opportunities. As part of the new elite in sub-Saharan Africa, the highly educated businessmen can decide today not to return to their country of origin. This does not prevent them from investing economically or politically in their country, as the example of Keiba Keinde showed. Likewise, they may also decide to move on to other places, if the conditions for success shrink in China or the UAE or if their priorities change because their family is growing.

We cannot explain why people of certain nationalities have a greater presence in Asian cities by considering only the economic and political agreements or the bilateral treaties concluded between the Chinese or the Dubai governments and the African country from which the migrants come. The settlement of African migrants in Asia or their conversion to trading is also a matter of individual or family initiatives. The decisions African students make to become businessmen thus

depend on their assessment of the possibilities lying ahead for them in the long term as well as immediately, which in turn depend on their life course, their responsibilities to other people, their character, and all kinds of contingencies that impact people's personal lives and make them shift paths in unpredictable ways. The professional life courses of African students who go into the export business have an uncharted nature, the outcome of a complex interplay between aspirations, possibilities, and barriers.

### NOTES

- 1 African universities suffer in general from overcrowding both in lecture halls and in student residences, as university funds have been cut back. In the last 15 years, repeated strikes by lecturers have resulted in wasted years for students, because they cannot take exams to finish their degrees. Moreover, human capital in terms of education is gradually losing its value in African societies because higher education does not increase the likelihood of finding secure and well-paid work in the national labor market. Higher education is thus in competition with other ways of gaining social status, for example, economic or political entrepreneurship (Bianchini 2004; Brock-Utne 1996; Faye and Naugmann 1999; Gérard 1999; Proteau 2002).
- 2 In its political connotation, the term "South-South" is related to the framework of dependency theory or world system theory and dates back to the post-colonial period of the Cold War. Today it is increasingly problematic to use this term with regard to China, which has become the second-largest economy in the world, or the UAE, which has turned into a financial superpower.
- 3 I express my appreciation for financial support from "ANR MIGRELI" to extend the research to Dubai.
- 4 In 1963, Zhou Enlai, Mao's minister of foreign affairs, set about travelling to Africa. He visited 10 countries, giving priority to the North (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia), and the communist countries or the first independent countries (Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Sudan).

- 5 Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia were the first East African countries to recognize the PRC to the detriment of Taiwan.
- 6 According to Hevi (1963), most Cameroonian students in China in 1961 belonged to the Union of Populations of Cameroon. This political party was repressed then dissolved by the French administration in 1955. Its main leaders went underground and initiated an armed uprising after the declaration of independence of Eastern Cameroon in January 1960.
- 7 The People's Republic of Zanzibar and Pemba was created in 1962 after the Zanzibar Revolution. In 1964, the United Republic of Tanzania merged with Tanganyika but Zanzibar kept its own government.
- 8 Guinea was the first sub-Saharan African country to set up diplomatic relations with China, followed by Mali and Ghana. In 1959, the Chinese embassy was opened in Conakry, and the following year, Seku Toure was the first African head of state to visit China. Kwame Nkrumah first went to China in 1961.
- 9 In the 1960s, certificates delivered at the end of the academic year gave evidence of students' coursework but did not specify if they had passed their examinations. The issue of the validity and equivalence of diplomas became relevant when African students returned home.
- 10 The Hehai University at Nanjing attracted a large quota of African students. Just before the year's end, annoyed at being victims of repeated thefts in their dormitories, some of them decided to retaliate by vandalizing a wall, that had been built to separate them from Chinese students precisely on the pretext of safety. The university asked for damages from the trouble-makers. As it was not reimbursed, the Chinese administration deducted the costs for the damages from the African students' scholarships. On Christmas Eve, the tension intensified and degenerated into a fight between African and Chinese students when university security guards asked the Chinese women who had arrived with African students to complete entrance registration. The next day, thousands of Chinese students took to the streets and chanted "death to the black devils" after a false rumor began to circulate, suggesting a Chinese teacher had been struck to death by an African student during this fight. In spite of the protests of the African embassies, some African students who were considered leaders were arrested, and were to be imprisoned before being expelled from China (Sullivan 1994).

- 11 The African students shared rooms for two, while Chinese students were packed six to a room.
- 12 Indeed, in May 1989 at the University of Beida in particular, the African students were also taken to task by some Chinese leaders of the protest movement for not joining their protest marches.
- 13 This increase in Chinese-funded scholarships was not targeted at African nationals only. President Hu Jintao wanted to double the total number of foreign students in Chinese universities in 2007. African students represented only 2.3% of the total number of foreign students.
- 14 In 2009, 12,000 African students had studied in the PRC under government scholarships since 1993, with about 8,000 more studying with their own funding or with funds from international organizations (Bodomo 2010).
- 15 Only the Emir and his extended family have full citizenship with all the associated rights and obligations. All workers of foreign origin need to be under the patronage of a citizen, even when they are well integrated (Piolet 2009).
- 16 Another migrant, who had come from Comoros to study in the UAE, had gone down the same route and was managing a hotel in another part of Deira.
- 17 Interview 18 March 2012 (Dubai, Deira district).
- 18 There were only around 50 veterinarians in Niger who worked for the state and a number of international organizations, and Abdul was the only one to move away from this work to enter into trade.
- 19 During several decades, the trade in the two Congos (DRC and PRC) was mainly held by Western Africans, who had been the first auxiliaries of the colonization (Lawrance et al. 2006; Manchuelle 1987). Malian and Senegalese merchants set up in these two countries moved to Hong Kong and then to Guangzhou to stock up and bring back their goods to Congo, joining in the global trade trend (Bredeloup 2007). From the beginning of the 1990s, the civil service status did not imply enrichment anymore; this situation led Congo elite to turn into traders and to fall in behind West Africans.
- 20 Since the end of the 1990s, Macao and Hong Kong have become Special Administrative Regions with a high degree of autonomy in domestic affairs for a period of 50 years under the principle "one country, two systems" (Chabanol 1992). Until 2010, the special status allowed African residents or tourists to extend their visa (see also the contribution of Morais in this volume).
- 21 <http://www.yaps.asia> (last visited September 25, 2013)

- 22 The Beijing Axis group, founded in 2002 by a South African, is a China-focused international advisory firm known primarily for its business and support services related to investment and mining operations in China and Africa. Its main offices are located in Beijing and Johannesburg. Note the chairwoman of YAPS also comes from South Africa.
- 23 This website was entitled "MyEverybodyOnline." It is no longer active.

### REFERENCES CITED

- Altbach, Philip J. (2010). The Realities of Mass Higher Education in a Globalized World. *IN Higher Education in a Global Society*, D. Bruce Johnstone, Madeleine D'Ambrosio, and Paul Yakoboski (eds.) New York, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 25-41.
- AUD (2010). American University in Dubai. Undergraduate Catalogue 2010-2011. Dubai.
- Bahri, Jalal (1993). Le Lycée de Rekada: Une Filière de Formation pour les Arabisants d'Afrique Noire en Tunisie. *IN Le radicalisme islamique au Sud du Sahara: Da'wa, arabisation et critique de l'Occident*, René Otaïek (ed.) Paris: Karthala, pp. 75-95.
- Bava, Sophie, and Olivier Pliez (2009). Itinéraires d'élites musulmanes africaines au Caire: D'Al Azhar à l'économie de bazar. *Afrique contemporaine* 231 (3): 187-207.
- Bertoncello, Brigitte, and Sylvie Bredeloup (2007). The Emergence of New African 'Trading Posts' in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. *China Perspectives* 1: 94-105.
- Bertoncello, Brigitte, Sylvie Bredeloup, and Olivier Pliez (2009). Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Yiwu, de nouveaux comptoirs africains en Chine. *Critique internationale* 44 (3): 105-121.
- Bianchini, Pascal (2004). École et politique en Afrique noire: Sociologie des crises et des réformes du système d'enseignement au Sénégal et au Burkina Faso (1960-2000). Paris: Karthala.
- Bodomo, Adams B. (2005). An Emerging African-Chinese Community in Hong Kong: The Case of Tsim Shua Tsui's Chungking Mansions. *Conference on Afro-Chinese Relations: Past, Present and Future*. Johannesburg, November 23-25.
- Bodomo, Adams B. (2010). The African Trading Community in Guangzhou: An Emerging Bridge for Africa-China Relations. *China Quarterly* 203: 693-707.

- Bodomo, Adams B. (2012). We Are What We Eat: Food in the Process of Community Formation and Identity Shaping Among African Traders in Guangzhou and Yiwu. *African Diaspora* 5 (1): 3-26.
- Bonacich, Edna (1973). A Theory of Middleman Minorities. *American Sociological Review* 38 (5): 583-594.
- Bredeloup, Sylvie (2007). *La Diams'pora du fleuve Sénégal: Sociologie des migrations africaines*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Bredeloup, Sylvie (2009). Les étudiants Burkinabè de retour des pays arabes. IN *La Mondialisation étudiante: Le Maghreb entre Nord et Sud*, Sylvie Mazzella (ed.) Paris: Karthala, pp. 361-377.
- Bredeloup, Sylvie (2012). African Trading Post in Guangzhou: Emergent or Recurrent Commercial Form? *African Diaspora* 5 (1): 27-50.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit (1996). Globalisation of Learning - The Role of the Universities in the South: With a Special Look at Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development* 16 (4): 335-336.
- Chabanol, Ghislaine (1992). Le statut de Hong Kong après 1997: Un défi au droit international. *Perspectives Chinoises* 1: 30-36.
- Chinese Ministry of Education (2007). [www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/1205393837304296.htm](http://www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/1205393837304296.htm); [www.moe.gov.cn/website18/en/international\3.htm](http://www.moe.gov.cn/website18/en/international\3.htm)
- Cruise O'Brien, Donald (2003). *Symbolic Confrontations: Muslims Imagining the State in Africa*. London: Hurst and Company.
- Dittgen, Romain (2010). L'Afrique en Chine: L'autre face des relations sino-africaines? China Institute. [www.china\\_institute.org/articles/L\\_Afrique\\_en\\_Chine\\_I\\_autre\\_face\\_des\\_relations\\_sino\\_africaines.pdf](http://www.china_institute.org/articles/L_Afrique_en_Chine_I_autre_face_des_relations_sino_africaines.pdf).
- Ennafaa, Ridha, and Saeed Paivandi (2008). Le non-retour des étudiants étrangers: Au-delà de la fuite des cerveaux. *Formation Emploi* 103: 23-39.
- Faye, A., and C. Naugmann (1999). *L'éducation en crise: Le cas du Sénégal*. Développement et coopération 2. Frankfurt: DES.
- Gérard, Étienne (1999). Être instruit en tous cas: Représentations du fait scolaire en milieu urbain (Burkina Faso). *Autrepart* 11: 101-114.
- Gérard, Étienne (ed.) (2008). *Mobilités étudiantes Sud-Nord, trajectoire scolaire des Marocains en France et inscription professionnelle au Maroc*. Paris: Publisud.
- Government of Dubai (2010). Government of Dubai, Knowledge and Human Development Authority. *The Higher Education Landscape in Dubai 2010*. Dubai: KHDA.
- Gueraiche, William (2012). L'enseignement supérieur aux Emirats Arabes Unis, entre émiratisation et contrats de marché. *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 131: 183-199.

- Guiheux, Gilles (2007). Sociologie historique des marchés de Yiwu (Province du Zhejiang). Communication à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Mondes patronaux et territoires, Paris.
- Hevi, John Emmanuel (1963). *An African Student in China*. London: Pall Mall Press.
- Hibou, Béatrice (1999). De la privatisation des économies à la privatisation de l'État: Une analyse de la formation continue de l'état. IN *La privatisation des états*, Béatrice Hibou (ed.) Paris: Karthala, pp. 11-70.
- Hughes, Everett C. (1953). *Cycles and Turning Points: The Significance of Initiation in Human Culture*. Eighth Annual Conference on Theology in Action. New York: National Council of the Episcopal Church.
- Kane, Ousmane (2003). *Non-Europhone Intellectual*. Working Paper. Dakar: Codesria (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa).
- Knight, Jane (2006). *Higher Education Crossing Borders: A Guide to the Implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for Cross-Border Education*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning-UNESCO.
- Lagrée, Jean-Charles (2012). Coping With the Internationalisation of Higher Education in China. IN *China's Internal and International Migrations*, Li Peilin and Laurence Roulleau-Berger (eds.) London: Routledge: pp. 174-201.
- Laurent, Pierre-Joseph (2005). The Process of Bricolage Between Mythic Societies and Global Modernity: Conversion to the Assembly of God Faith in Burkina Faso. *Social Compass* 52 (3): 309-323.
- Lawrance, Benjamin N., Emily Lynn Osborn. and Richard L. Roberts (eds.) (2006). *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Le Bail, Hélène (2009). Foreign Migration to China's City-Markets: The Case of African Merchants. *Asie Visions* 19. Brussels: IFRI (The Institut Français des Relations Internationales).
- Li, Zhigang, Desheng Xue, Michael Lyons, and Alison Brown (2007). *Ethnic Enclave of Transnational Migrants in Guangzhou: A Case Study of Xiaobei*. International Conference of China Urban Land and Housing in the 21st Century, December 13-15, Hong Kong.
- Manchuelle, F. (1987). *Background to Black Emigration to France: The Labor Migrations of the Soninke, 1840-1987*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.



- Mattes, Hans Peter (1993). La Da'wa libyenne entre le Coran et le Livre Vert? IN *Le Radicalisme islamique au Sud du Sahara: Da'wa, arabisation et critique de l'Occident*, René Otayek (ed.) Paris: Karthala, pp. 37-73.
- Mazzella, Sylvie (ed.) (2009). *La mondialisation étudiante: Le Maghreb entre Nord et Sud*. Paris: Karthala.
- Mazzochetti, Jacinthe (2009). *Etre étudiant à Ouagadougou: Itinérances, imaginaire et précarité*. Paris: Karthala.
- Meyer, Jean-Baptiste, and Valérie Hernandez (2004). Les diasporas scientifiques et techniques: État des lieux. IN *La mobilité internationale des compétences: Situations récentes approches nouvelles*, Mihaela Nedelcu (ed.) Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Michaelis, Anthony (1990). Brain Drain and Brain Gain. *Interdisciplinary Science Review* 15 (3) : 23-35.
- Nedelcu, Mihaela (ed.) (2004). *La mobilité internationale des compétences: situations récentes approches nouvelles*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Nyang, Sulayman (1982). Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy Towards Africa. *Horn of Africa* 5 (2): 3-17.
- OECD (2007). *The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Perspectives des Migrations Internationales*. Sopemi, Paris.
- Okouma Mountou, Samuel (2008). *La vie des étudiants africains en Chine*. Paris: La Bruyère.
- Orivel, François (1991). La crise des universités francophones subsahariennes. *Perspectives* 21 (3): 377-385.
- Piolet, Vincent (2009). Les Émirats et Royaumes Arabes: Les travailleurs migrants au pays des free Zones. *Hérodote* 133: 136-151.
- Proteau, Laurence (2002). *Passions scolaires en Côte d'Ivoire: École, état et société*. Paris: Karthala.
- Romani, Vincent (2009). *The Politics of Higher Education in the Middle East: Problems and Prospects*. Middle East Brief 36. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University.
- Sullivan, Michael (1994). The 1988-89 Nanjing Anti-African Protests: Racial Nationalism or National Racism? *The China Quarterly* 138: 438-457.
- Tati, Gabriel (2010). *Migrations estudiantines en Afrique du Sud: Le cas des jeunes originaires de l'Afrique francophone. Espaces, Populations et Sociétés: Nouvelles mobilités dans les Suds* 2-3: 281-296.