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## About 'tribes'? Introduction to the Leidschrift issue on non-Western Migration

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# About 'tribes'? Introduction to the *Leidschrift* issue on non-Western Migration

*Marlou Schrover*

More than six years ago, my colleague Michiel van Groesen and I removed the portraits of 'old white men' from the corridors of our Leiden University History Institute, and reused the frames to hang up other images. What message were we sending to our students and staff, if our walls were lined with the faces of old white men only? To some measure the original portraits reflected a reality: these *were* the former professors of our institute and they *were* all white, old and male. The replacement of the pictures was an early attempt to express our wish to present a different version of history. 'Decolonising the curriculum' has in recent years become a frequently used phrase, but it is not always clear what it means, nor how it should be achieved.<sup>1</sup> What it is not – to paraphrase our colleague Karwan Fatah Black – is simply adding some pages about slavery and colonialism to a textbook and labelling these the black pages in 'our' history; pages that can easily be turned and forgotten. Decolonising history is also not including in the curriculum some articles by non-Western authors, or covering the non-Western world. It takes more than to 'add a chapter and stir',<sup>2</sup> as was said in the early days of women's history, when 'gender' and 'intersectionality' had not yet been accepted in mainstream history. It needs a rethinking of what we want to know and teach.

Historians and others have frequently argued for the need to move away from an Eurocentric approach, in which the West is presented as advanced and the Rest as backward.<sup>3</sup> Eurocentrism is telling history as the story about the triumphant development of Modernity and the progress in rights, equality and democracy, while ignoring how these concepts build on colonialism and racism.<sup>4</sup> It is a narrative based on 'First-the-West-and-then-

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<sup>1</sup> L. Meda, 'Decolonising the Curriculum: Students' Perspectives', *Africa Education Review* 17.2 (2019) 1-16.

<sup>2</sup> F. Gouda, "'Add a chapter on women and stir'". Weemoedige overpeinzingen bij IJkpunt 1900', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 29.1 (2003) 54-63.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York 1993).

<sup>4</sup> S. Rodríguez Maeso and M. Araújo, 'Eurocentrism, Political Struggles and the Entrenched Will-to-Ignorance: An Introduction' in: M. Araújo and S. Rodríguez

the rest'.<sup>5</sup> Eurocentrism's counterpart is Orientalism, which describes the 'Rest' as a world that accepts everything the West does not.<sup>6</sup> The introduction to this issue of *Leidschrift* does not try to decolonise history. Its aim is far more modest. It is merely an attempt to reflect on migration history with an eye out for that perspective.

Over time people have moved for largely the same reasons: because they could, had to, or wanted to. They were looking for freedom, love and work, or they were forced out, fled or carried off against their will. They were seeking greener pastures, golden mountains, pleasant company or splendid isolation. Frequently, reasons to move overlapped: people fled, but they directed their steps towards a country that offered both freedom *and* economic opportunities. In this respect there are no differences in migration. This issue focusses on migrations outside Europe. What this introduction does is list some points which are typical for the literature on migrations outside Europe, with a focus on examples referring to Africa. The choice for Africa is pragmatic; it is sheer impossible to discuss all migrations outside Europe in a 3000-word introduction.

## Biases

There are biases in migration literature, some which are generic and some of which apply to the non-Western migration specifically. Overall, there is much more literature about immigration, than about emigration: this is because authorities cared more about those who came than about those who left, and thus produced more material which we researchers can use. Furthermore, the literature about the migration of men is still larger than that about women, despite efforts to remedy this bias.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there are highly interesting

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Maeso ed., *Eurocentrism, Racism and Knowledge: Debates on History and Power in Europe and The Americas* (New York and Basingstoke 2015) 1-22.

<sup>5</sup> M. Perez Garcia, 'From Eurocentrism to Sinocentrism: The New Challenges in Global History', *European Journal of Scientific Research* 119.3 (2014) 337-352.

<sup>6</sup> I. Xypolia, 'Eurocentrism and Orientalism' in: Sangeeta Ray et al ed., *The Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* (2016) online.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview see: M. Schrover and D. Moloney, 'Introduction. Making a Difference' in: M. Schrover and D. Moloney ed., *Gender, Migration and Categorisation: Making Distinctions Between Migrants in Western Countries (1900) 1945-2010* (Amsterdam 2013) 7-54; M. Schrover, 'Feminization and Problematization of Migration: Europe

studies on, for instance, large migrations within China, such as the thesis by Ma Xinrong on ethnic Yi labour migrants in China.<sup>8</sup> A problem for me, and others who do not read Chinese, is that many noteworthy studies on Chinese migrations – such as for instance by Chen Yao on Early Modern guildlike organisations in China that regulated labour migrations along the Yangtze River<sup>9</sup> – are published in Chinese only.

The literature on migrations in the nineteenth and the twentieth century is much more extensive than that on earlier periods. Authors who write about earlier migrations mostly do not to publish in migration history journals, making it less likely that they will be noticed by migration historians specialised in later periods.<sup>10</sup> There is some justification for the emphasis on the last two centuries because human mobility did reach unprecedented levels in this period. Between 1840 and 1940, 60 million people left Europe, 21 to 23 million left South China, 30 to 33 million moved from China to Manchuria, 43 to 50 million moved within or left India, 20 to 40 million moved within China, 9 to 13 million left from the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia, 74 million moved within Europa and 35 million within the America's.<sup>11</sup> This was more than in previous eras.

Most important to this issue is that migrations from, to, or within the Western world have been described much more than other migrations. Attempts have been made to remedy that unbalance,<sup>12</sup> but it still largely

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in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' in: D. Hoerder and A. Kaur ed., *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations. A global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries* (Leiden 2013) 103-131.

<sup>8</sup> M. Xinrong, *Entrapment by Consent: The Co-Ethnic Brokerage System Among Ethnic Yi Labour Migrants in China* (PhD thesis Leiden University, Leiden 2017).

<sup>9</sup> C. Yao, 'Wooden Boats and Shipping Organizations in the Middle Reaches of the Yangtze River (1550 - 1850)'. Paper presented at the Yangtze River Conference, Rotterdam 2019.

<sup>10</sup> L. de Ligt and L.E. Tacoma ed., *Migration and Mobility in the Early Roman Empire* (Leiden 2016).

<sup>11</sup> J.C. Moya and A. McKeown, 'World Migration in the Long Twentieth Century' in: Michael Adas ed., *Essays on Twentieth-Century History* (Philadelphia 2010) 9-52; A. McKeown, 'Global Migration, 1846-1940', *Journal of World History* 15.2 (2004) 155-189.

<sup>12</sup> K.J. Bade et al. ed., *The Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe. From the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge 2011); I. Ness et al. ed., *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (Chichester 2013); Adam McKeown, 'Chinese Emigration in Global Context, 1850-1940', *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010) 95-124; Adam

continues to exist. One reason for it is a lack of data. The further away from the Western world, and the further back in time, the more difficult it becomes to estimate the number of people on the move.<sup>13</sup> In part this has to do with definitions (who is a migrant?), and in part with authorities caring less about certain categories of migrants. As Liesbeth Rosen Jacobsen shows in her article in this issue, they were more interested in the colonisers and less in the colonised, and they were puzzled by people who fell between categories. The lack of data is largely a result of a lack of interest, and a deliberate choice to not register some people at all.

Although most attention is paid in the literature to westerners on the move, the increase in mobility was a global trend. Some rather random examples can illustrate this. In the first half of the nineteenth century, few people crossed the border between Korea and Russia. In the 1860s, Russia started to develop its Far Eastern territories and the number of Koreans crossing into Russia increased rapidly. Migrants were seeking work as farmers, in mines or on railroad construction. Russia welcomed the immigrants, but also worried about control and introduced passport and visa requirements, very similar to developments elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Rather comparably, Brazil in the nineteenth century needed workers for its coffee plantations. When the number of Italian migrants to Brazil started to fall, the Brazilian and Japanese governments signed a treaty (in 1907) to stimulate migration from Japan to Brazil leading to a community with currently 1.5 million people of Japanese descent in Brazil.<sup>15</sup> The increase in mobility was a worldwide phenomenon and movement was not in one direction only. In the nineteenth century, Finns moved West to the goldfields in Alaska, and East to the oilfields in Azerbaijan.

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McKeown, 'Global Migration: 1846–1940', *Journal of World History* 15 (2004) 155–189; J.C. Moya and A. McKeown, 'World Migration in the Long Twentieth Century' in: M. Adas ed., *Essays on Twentieth-Century History* (Philadelphia 2010) 9–52; A. McKeown, 'Chinese Emigration in Global Context, 1850–1940', *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010) 95–124; L.H. Siegelbaum and L. Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land. Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca 2014).

<sup>13</sup> L. Lucassen and J. Lucassen, 'Measuring and Quantifying Cross-Cultural Migrations' in: J. Lucassen and L. Lucassen ed., *Globalising Migration History. The Eurasian Experience (16th–21st centuries)* (Leiden and Boston 2014) 3–54.

<sup>14</sup> A.I. Petrov, 'Koreans in Russia in the Context of History of Russian Immigration Policy', *International Journal of Korean History* 12 (2008) 157–97.

<sup>15</sup> Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective* (New York 2003).

The causes for increased migrations to, from and within Western countries were not very different from those outside them. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, for instance, shipping became much faster, cheaper, and safer. As a result, the number of Europeans crossing the Atlantic increased.<sup>16</sup> Changes in shipping, rather logically, also transformed movements across other seas and oceans such as the South Chinese Sea and the Arabian Sea.<sup>17</sup> In these areas, the number of travellers increased sharply as well. Especially the increase in the number of pilgrims from the colonies in Asia to Mecca worried colonial authorities.<sup>18</sup>

Migrations to, within and from Asia and Africa are largely presented in the literature as the results of what Europeans did or did not do.<sup>19</sup> Europeans *did* affect migrations in Africa. European ships, especially those of the Dutch West Indian Company, carried 11 to 14 million enslaved people across the Atlantic, as the article by Ramona Negrón in this issue shows.<sup>20</sup> West Africans were also brought to the Mediterranean world as enslaved people. It is estimated that between 800 and 1800, 9.3 million enslaved people were moved north across the Sahara.

Europeans disrupted existing migrations and rather randomly drew international borders on the world's map, turning people into cross-border migrants although their migration routes did not change. Since the borders were important to the colonisers but not per se to the colonised, some

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<sup>16</sup> T. Feys, 'The Visible Hand of Shipping Interests in American Migration Policies 1815-1914', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 7.1 (2010) 38-62; T. Feys, 'Steamshipping Companies and Transmigration Patterns: The Use of European Cities as Hubs during the Era of Mass Migration to the US', *Journal of Migration History (JMHI)* 2:2 (2016) 247-274.

<sup>17</sup> A. Kaur, 'Labor Crossings in Southeast Asia: Linking Historical and Contemporary Labor Migration', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 11.1 (2009) 276-303.

<sup>18</sup> M.N. Ichwan, 'Governing Hajj: Politics of Islamic Pilgrimage Services in Indonesia Prior to Reformasi Era', *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 46.125 (2008) 10.14421/ajis.2008.461.125-151; M. van Bruinessen, 'Muslims of the Dutch East Indies and the caliphate question', *Studia Islamika* 2.3 (1995) 115-140.

<sup>19</sup> P.P. Mohapatra, 'Eurocentrism, Forced Labour, and Global Migration: A Critical Assessment', *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007) 110-115.

<sup>20</sup> J. Lofkrantz and O. Ojo, 'Slavery, Freedom, and Failed Ransom Negotiations in West Africa, 1730-1900', *The Journal of African History* 53 (2012) 25-44; P. Matlou Matlotleng, 'Africa, South of the Sahara, Intra- and Intercontinental Population Movements' in: I. Ness et al. ed., *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (Chichester 2013) 460-467.

authors have argued against the use of the term ‘migration’ (with its implicit assumption that state borders are important), preferring the term ‘mobility’ instead. Mobility turn studies – on the shift from emphasis on migration to emphasis on mobility is called - underscore the need to make clear which boundaries matter to whom, when and why.<sup>21</sup> Colonisers moved people for work on plantations, on infrastructures, or in mines.<sup>22</sup> Complicated systems were put in place by colonial authorities in attempts to control, restrict and regulate migration in and between countries in Africa.<sup>23</sup> This was in line with a more general trend in which authorities worried about those who sought to evade control. The wish to control and the ability to control aligned more and more. The emphasis in the literature on forced migrations and control denies the choices people made (see the article by Oran Kennedy in this issue). The Nigerian professor of history Anthony Asiwaju has pointed this out in his rather extensive work about migrations that were a form of protest against colonial rule.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the migration history studies about Africa start with European colonisation, and only few authors try to map continuities, such as Walter Gam Nkwi does in his article in this issue. The migrations to Africa from other parts of the non-Western world are also addressed much less. Contact between the Indian subcontinent and East Africans goes back 2000 years. When Vasco da Gama arrived in Mozambique, Mombasa and Malindi in 1498, he was surprised at the number of Arabs and Indians he found there,

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<sup>21</sup> J. Urry, ‘Connections’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22.1 (2004) 27-37; T. Cresswell, ‘Towards a Politics of Mobility’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010) 17-31; M. de Bruijn, ‘Connecting in Mobile Communities: An African Case Study’, *Media, Culture & Society* 36.3 (2014) 319-335; L. Pelckmans, *Travelling Hierarchies. Roads in and out of Slave Status in a Central Malian Fulbe Network* (Leiden 2011).

<sup>22</sup> H. de Haas, *The Myth of Invasion. Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union*, IMI research report (October 2007); O. Bakewell and H. de Haas, ‘African Migrations: Continuities, Discontinuities and Recent Transformations’ in: P. Chabal, U. Engel and L. de Haan ed., *African Alternatives* (Leiden 2007) 95-118.

<sup>23</sup> R. Bright, ‘A ‘Great Deal of Discrimination is Necessary in Administering the Law’: Frontier Guards and Migration Control in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa’, *Journal of Migration History* 4 (2018) 27-53.

<sup>24</sup> A.I. Asiwaju, ‘Migrations as Revolt: The Example of The Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta Before 1945’, *Journal of African History* 17.4 (1976) 577-594, 577.

as Gijsbert Oonk observes in this issue.<sup>25</sup> Chibuene, in southern Mozambique, was a trading port that was active well before the arrival of Europeans, and continued to be so after their arrival. Between the sixth and seventeenth centuries, it was important to, for instance, the trade in exotic goods, especially glass beads, which were brought inland as far away as 1500 kilometres.<sup>26</sup> There was also migration from Hadramawt (currently in Yemen). This migration started before the time of Muhammad and continued for centuries (700-1500). It connected the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to the African shore.<sup>27</sup> The Red Sea region connected regional trading networks from Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean with intercontinental routes of the Indian Ocean, trading in spices, perfumes, woods and textiles.<sup>28</sup>

Pilgrimage and trade intertwined.<sup>29</sup> West African Muslims travelled to Mecca already in the early twelfth century. Rulers of Mali made the pilgrimage in the 1260s. Most famous was Mansa Musa, who made his pilgrimage in 1324, as witnessed and recorded by Italian traders. Mansa Musa was born in 1280 and ruled the kingdom of Mali from 1312 to 1337. His regime controlled the routes to the Bambura and Bambuhu gold fields. His fame, especially because of his pilgrimage, led to stories in the Middle Ages in Europe and the Arab world about an Island of Gold in central Africa.<sup>30</sup> Many people set out to find it, paving trade routes while doing so. The Mali Empire grew in size and power until the Songhai Empire started to dominate the western Sahel in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The Songhai Empire was one of the largest states in African history with Gao as its capital, and

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<sup>25</sup> G. Oonk, 'South Asians in East Africa, 1800–2000. An Entrepreneurial Minority Caught in a 'Catch-22'', *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 10 (2013) 59-81.

<sup>26</sup> L. Dussubieux and P. Robertshaw, 'The Glass of Chibuene, Mozambique: New Insights into Early Indian Ocean Trade Marilee Wood', *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 6 (2012) 59–74.

<sup>27</sup> C.D. Bahl, 'Reading Tarājim with Bourdieu: Prosopographical Traces of Historical Change in the South Asian Migration to the Late Medieval Hijaz', *Der Islam* 94.1 (2017) 234-275; B.G. Martin, 'Arab Migrations to East Africa in Medieval Times', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7.3 (1974) 367-390; L.W.C. van den Ierg, *Le Hadramout et les colonies Arabes dans l'archipel indien* (Batavia 1886) online access: <https://archive.org/details/lehadramoutetl02berggoog/page/n29/mode/2up>

<sup>28</sup> Kaur, 'Labor Crossings in Southeast Asia', 276-303.

<sup>29</sup> Bahl, 'Reading Tarājim with Bourdieu', 5.

<sup>30</sup> S. Keech McIntosh, 'A Reconsideration of Wangara/Palolus, Island of Gold', *Journal of African History*, 22 (1981)145-158, 145.



Timbuktu and Djenné as important towns. The golden age of the trans-Saharan trade ended with the collapse of Songhai Empire after the Moroccan attack in 1591. The shift to the Atlantic trade took place after the arrival of Portuguese ships on the Mauritanian coast in 1443.<sup>31</sup>

The more recent migrations within Africa and the migrations to Africa from non-Western countries also received less attention than those that did include Westerners. There were large-scale movements between countries in Africa. In the 1960s, Mauritania, Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, attracted Senegalese, Malian, Guinean and Gambian migrants. In 1969, after the 1966 coup, Ghana expelled 155,000 to 213,000 immigrants, mainly from Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso and Niger. In 1983 and 1985, during the economic crisis, Nigeria similarly expelled two million west-African migrants, mostly Ghanaians. In the 1970s and 1980s, people from Mali, Niger and Chad migrated to construction sites and the oil fields in Algeria and Libya. In the 1990s, Libya stimulated the entry of sub-Saharan Africans mostly from Sudan, Chad and Niger.<sup>32</sup>

As before, and similar to migrations elsewhere, categories of migrants overlapped. People fled from Yemen to Egypt in the late 1940s, after the suppression of workers revolts in Aden, which was one of the largest harbours of the world at the time. Also, a large number of young people from Yemen went to study in Egypt.<sup>33</sup> Students from the Horn of Africa had already been migrating to study in Cairo since the Middle Ages. Over centuries, students followed in the footsteps of traders and vice versa.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the discovery of oil led to migrations into the Gulf region. The migrants were senior staff of the oil companies from the United States and the United Kingdom, high-skilled workers from India, and low skilled migration from countries in the region.<sup>35</sup> After the discovery of oil, and the oil shock of the mid-1950s, the migration from Asia to the

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<sup>31</sup> See for example P. Masonen, 'Trans-Saharan Trade and the West African Discovery of the Mediterranean' in: M'hammed Sabour and Knut S. Vikør, *Ethnic Encounter and Culture Change* (Bergen/London 1997) 116-142.

<sup>32</sup> De Haas, *The Myth of Invasion*.

<sup>33</sup> A. Aviad Orkaby, *The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1968*. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2014, 54

<sup>34</sup> J. Loiseau and A. al-Azhar, 'Muslim Students from the Horn of Africa in Late Medieval Cairo' *Northeast African Studies* (2019) 61-84.

<sup>35</sup> G. Errichiello, 'Foreign Workforce in the Arab Gulf States (1930-1950): Migration Patterns and Nationality Clause', *International Migration Review* 46.2 (2012) 389-413.

member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council increased sharply.<sup>36</sup> Large numbers of construction workers moved to the Middle East during the oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>37</sup> Migrations ‘from the region’, which likely refers to the Horn of Africa, are treated with less detail in the literature than that from the other countries that were mentioned.

Migrations between non-Western countries continue to be studied rather separate from migration to, from and within the West. There were, for instance, large and long-standing Chinese immigrant communities in South Africa, Mauritius, Reunion and Madagascar.<sup>38</sup> In the 1950s to 1970s, the People’s Republic of China promoted and organised migrations to African countries as part of its anti-imperialist policy of co-operation and solidarity with the Third World. In the 1980, the number of migrants in African countries from Hong Kong and Taiwan increased. In 2008, there were 700 to 800 Chinese companies in Africa employing 80,000 Chinese workers.<sup>39</sup>

Lastly, the choice of words in the literature on migrations in Africa differs from that in the West, as illustrated in figure 1. The phrase ‘African tribe’ was used more and longer than ‘Asiatic tribe’ (figure 2). In the case of studies on Europe the word ‘tribe’ is mostly used to describe invasions into Europe, or for ‘exotic’ people being brought into Europe. In studies on Africa the word ‘tribe’ is used whereas studies on Europe use the word ‘people’, or ‘states’. The choice of words is not irrelevant or random. Referring to people as a ‘tribe’ connotes them as inferior and backward. The word is a colonial construction, and part of the rhetoric about the West and the Rest.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> N.M. Shah and I. Menon, ‘Chain Migration Through the Social Network: Experience of Labour Migrants in Kuwait’, *International Migration* 37.2 (1999) 361-381.

<sup>37</sup> M. Dito, ‘Arab Gulf Cooperation Council in Southwest Asia migration’ in: I. Ness et al ed., *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (Chicester 2013) 535-538.

<sup>38</sup> L.E. Neame, ‘Oriental Labor in South Africa’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 34.2 (1909) 175-182.

<sup>39</sup> G. Mohan and M. Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese Migrants in Africa as New Agents of Development? An Analytical Framework’, *European Journal of Development Research* 21.4 (2009) 588–605; E. Ma Mung, ‘Chinese Migration and China’s Foreign Policy in Africa’, *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 4.1 (2008) 91-109.

<sup>40</sup> M. Read, ‘Migrant Labour in Africa and Its Effects on Tribal Life’, *International Labour Review* 45.1 (1942) 605-631; V. Damodaran, ‘Colonial Constructions of Tribe in India: The Case of Chotanagpur’, *Indian Historical Review* 33 (2006) 44-75.



Figure 1. Use of the word 'tribe' in publications. Source: Studies as counted by Google Books 1800–2020 based on: [https:// books.google.com/ngrams/](https://books.google.com/ngrams/)



Figure 2. Use of the words Asiatic, European and African 'tribe' in publications. Source: Studies as counted by Google Books 1800–2020 based on: [https:// books.google.com/ngrams/](https://books.google.com/ngrams/)

## Conclusion

This introduction did not aspire to, nor could it, cover all migration outside the Western world. It merely sought to identify some points that characterise the literature, using Africa as an example. Africa was used in this introduction as a proxy for the 'Rest'. This approach can easily be criticised. There are of course clear differences between migrations to, within, between and out of Asia and those related to African countries. However, the biases that were highlighted using African examples are not that different from those in the literature on other regions. It is not true that there are no studies on non-Western migrations. There is a large number of these studies. However, they are still outnumbered by studies focussing on the West, and they are not as much integrated into the broader migration histories as they should be. Migration historians are responsible for creating a more balanced view in the future.