The process of integration in the context of migration is closely linked to the duration of the stay in the host country and to the passing of the generations. American sociological migration research has long been interested in changes from one generation to the other, with regard to assimilation and integration processes, as exemplified in the early twentieth century by Hansen’s law: the first generation migrates, the second generation escapes to assimilation, and the third comes back to the origins. Although this so called law can be (and has been) criticised, the debate that it raises reveals the deep interconnections of migrants’ generational transmissions and processes of belonging and citizenship. Since the middle of the twentieth century, migratory flows have substantively developed and been acutely shaped by the social, political, cultural and economic characteristics of globalisation. As has been widely documented, the movement of people around the world in various numbers and for different lengths of times is an important constituent part of these sets of global flows and processes (King, 1995; Vertovec, 2009).

Although the migration of people is far from being a new phenomenon, for example see Winder (2004), many agree that the so-called new mobilities paradigm of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Urry, 2000) has led to an increased amount and greater diversity of global migration. The implication of such migration for processes and practices of citizenship and belonging has been significant. African migration around the world, as part of global migration, is being deeply shaped by these current trends. In order to build an analytic framework for examining African migration into France, Britain and South Africa, this chapter focuses on generational relations as recursive and dynamic processes in relation to citizenship and belonging. The first part deals
with an overview of parent–adult child relations in migrant families, with reference to the main theories in the field of ageing, generations and family studies from a pluri-disciplinary perspective. The second part places the migration process in a broader perspective, by focusing on processes and practices of citizenship and belonging. It is such an understanding of the intertwining of generational dynamics, citizenship and belonging that orientate the main research questions within this book, presented in the conclusion of the chapter.

3.1 Generational relations in the context of African migration

The study of generational relations is a key issue in understanding the dynamics of migration, particularly those relating to African migration and changes over time. It lies at the crossroad of several research fields in social sciences, mainly family, intergenerational relations, ageing and migration.

First we have to clarify the concept of generation. Its various meanings often overlap and result in confusion both in popular discourse and social scientific writing. Four main meanings (at least) are to be distinguished (Attias-Donfut, 1988; Attias-Donfut and Arber, 2000): first – the demographic sense of birth cohort; second – the family generations, which can be conceptualised as a genealogical rung of the ladder within a family lineage; third – a measure of time historically representing the number of years between the age of parents and children; and fourth – historical or social generations, in the sense drawn from Mannheim’s theory, defined as people born in the same era (belonging more or less to the same birth cohorts), sharing historical experiences, which have shaped their vision of the world. The above distinctions should be completed by a fifth, specific to the dynamics of migration, namely the common use of the term generation with the meaning of ‘wave of migration’, historically shaped. As an example, the decolonisation in Africa has deeply influenced the migratory flux to ex-colonial countries, like France and Britain, giving specific characteristics to the ‘generations of migrants’ of post-colonial times. In present times, the economic crisis is resulting in specific selection among migrant waves, depending on destination country (better educated generations of migrants required, unskilled migrants needed and so on).

Our main focus in this study is on family generations, exploring the relationships between the first generation of African migrants and their adult children; many of the latter were born in the host country while