Social Inclusion
Open Access Journal | ISSN: 2183-2803
Volume 9, Issue 1 (2021)

Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight

Editor
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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion, 2021, Volume 9, Issue 1
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Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2º Esq.,
1070-129 Lisbon
Portugal

Academic Editor
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Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion

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DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.4076

Editorial

Decision-Making Under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight

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Submitted: 27 January 2021 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This thematic issue examines questions of decision-making under limited (and contradictory) information, focusing on migration decisions. Migrants are far from a homogenous population, but they commonly use narratives as heuristics. We observe much agency among migrants to pursue migration plans, with migration decisions best understood as chains of multiple decisions rather than simple push-pull or two-step models.

Keywords
Africa; decision-making; immigration; narratives

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

In recent years, migration has become highly politicized in Western countries and many seek stricter forms of control (van der Brug, D'Amato, Berkhout, & Ruedin, 2015). From the perspective of origin countries, however, we observe a desire to take part in the lifestyle and riches of the Global North (Auer, Römer, & Tjaden, 2020; Smith, 2019). Two distinct literatures study why people migrate: On the one hand, migration studies have given us two-step models where an ambition to migrate is distinguished from the capability to do so (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2011). Along with models highlighting social ties, two-step models help us understand why levels of migration are not higher given the extensive differences in economic and human development (Collier, 2013). On the other hand, contributions in economics and psychology have sharpened our understanding of rational decision-making (Kahneman, 2011): Often we make decisions in situations where perfect information is not available or costly, and individuals are probably bounded rational rather than purely self-regarding. Access to information also varies according to social and personality characteristics, which may include previous migration experience and social networks (Baláž, Williams, & Fifeková, 2016).

In the economics literature, two-step models are largely ignored, and the focus lies on wealth and income differences at the macro level, and human capital at the individual level. A key assumption continues to be that individuals and families optimize their situation within their possibilities, and often migration can improve the allocation of skills to the benefit of migrants and the economy (Constant & Zimmermann, 2013). While providing a good basis to understand bounded rational decision-making, structural factors reducing the ability to migrate are typically not taken on board. By contrast, migration studies seem to assume perfectly informed decisions (albeit in two steps; see de Haas, 2011). As a result, many policymakers are puzzled why immigrants try to reach Europe despite seemingly impossible odds, or by contrast, why efforts to reduce unregulated migration seemingly fail to affect migration flows (Smith, 2019). Without communication between literatures, and without considering the perspective of origin countries and the individuals involved, however, we do not understand well why individuals decide to migrate, and we open the door for right-wing populism

in destination countries politicizing against immigration that may encourage discrimination against immigrants and their descendants (Laurence, Schmid, & Hewstone, 2018; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). At the UN-level, migration control is sought because uncontrolled migration often means exploitation (Ruedin & Nesturi, 2018): Informed choices, effective policies, reduced risks for migrants on the move.

The objective of this thematic issue is to better understand how migrants decide whether to migrate and where to migrate to by considering the limited information available to them. All contributions in this thematic issue grapple with broader questions of decision-making. Examining migration decisions provides insights into mechanisms of decision-making that are otherwise too subtle to study. In the articles, we cannot find the homogenous group of 'migrants' as they are often perceived in destination countries: Great heterogeneity exists in ambitions to migrate, capabilities to do so, motives, routes, and reactions to changing circumstances 'on the way'—a 'way' which may never lead to the 'destination.' We do not observe naïve and gullible migrants ignorant of the risks and dangers of irregular migration, nor do we find masses of 'victims' tricked by fraudsters and smugglers. Instead, we observe individuals with aspirations, navigating a world characterized by limitations and boundaries. Information is patchy, but this has as much to do with the changing circumstances and opportunities—each risky to some extent. Under these circumstances, migrants show great flexibility to reach their goals, drawing on heuristics and narratives as is common in decision-making under limited information (Batista & McKenzie, 2020; Smith, 2019). In fact, migration decisions are chains of multiple decisions that build one on another and can lead to unexpected turns (Crawley, Jones, McMahon, Duvell, & Sigona, 2016).

2. Understanding Migration Decisions

The studies in this thematic issue contribute to understanding migration decisions in three areas: the decision to leave, decisions *en route*, and decisions as student migrants. Taken together, the contributions cover the entire journey and complexity of decision-making, and also include the retrospective view of migrants who have returned. First, several articles focus on ambitions to migrate and the initial decision to leave origin countries. Many individuals take considerable risks and take on debt in their endeavour to reach countries in the Global North. Narratives and images of economic opportunities, but also success stories from return migrants can trigger and amplify desires to migrate. Narratives play a strong role in shaping ambitions to migrate. These narratives help potential migrants to make sense of limited and contradictory information they may come across. They often present migration as highly desirable, where risks and failures in migration projects are downplayed and joked about, while benefits are glorified (compare Alpes, 2012). This explains why members of the family often provide funds for migration projects.

The articles emphasize poverty, lack of perspectives, and network effects where a successful emigrant is often followed by others (Moyo, Nshimbi, & Laine, 2020), but they distance themselves from almost mechanical perspectives where we can in principle calculate the probability of migration from objective (economic) factors. The articles are closer to the description of migrants as gamblers (Belloni, 2016), but emphasize a clear difference in that a gambler takes a known risk—the odds of winning are in principle known and fixed—whereas migrants make repeated decisions with limited, changing, and uncertain information. Drawing to some extent on two-step models differentiating ambitions to migrate from capabilities (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2011), the articles demonstrate that two-step models do not adequately capture the repeated decisions under changing circumstances, experience, and information.

Second, formal and informal migration may be mixed on the 'journey,' as are periods of movement and temporary settlement. For many migrants, the circumstances on the way change, and they show enterprising flexibility to adjust to changing contexts: changing routes, teaming up with others, staying put for a while, or returning home. While most individuals interviewed in the context of these articles were well aware of the dangers of their journey—being defrauded, getting stuck, running out of money, severe violence or death—the hope for a better future and a mindset of solving challenges when they arrive imply that lack of information is not the main reason for irregular migration. Migration journeys are often not unidirectional but characterized by many decisions at each step of the journey (Bolay, 2014). The articles show that different narratives and information can influence the migration journey as individuals learn more about risks and likely outcomes as they progress, and as migrants adjust desired routes and channels of migration. Many articles identify strong hurdles against returning 'empty-handed,' even though there are narratives that blame bad luck or unfortunate spirits to 'save face' for individuals with 'failed' migration projects.

Third, with the increasingly difficult routes across the Mediterranean, some individuals formally sign up for studies in countries such as Northern Cyprus or Arab countries as an intermediate destination, mixing formal and informal migration (Dako-Gyeke, 2016; Piguet, Nassa, Ndiaye, Oumarou, & Wade, 2020). Student migration may offer a credible alternative for individuals seeking a better life in Europe, but levels of information are often low and incomplete, meaning that potential students navigate in narratives rather than research their own information. At the same time, student migration serves well to highlight immobility: There are students who eschew their opportunity to spend time abroad, despite their stating an ambition to live abroad for some time and having the financial support from the universities—migration velleity rather than ambition.

This counterfactual constitutes an important piece in understanding decision-making, as it helps us identify how different narratives play a role in actual migration decisions, and why ambitions and capabilities alone do not necessarily translate into migration.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the articles in this thematic issue offer an opportunity to better understand migration decisions under limited and contradictory information. It transpires that narratives are used as heuristics to make sense of the world sketched by bits and pieces of information, but also that complex decisions like migration should better be understood as a series of decisions all under great uncertainty. Seen this way, providing 'better' information is simplistic and does not do justice to the role of narratives as heuristics to navigate uncertainty, and the fact that some migrants are indeed well-informed and aware of the risks of migration. Narratives play an important role at each decision, which are embedded in particular contexts and social networks that spread and filter information. The articles in this thematic issue highlight that 'migrants' from Africa are far from a homogenous population (see also Crawley et al., 2016), and underscore the agency and flexibility of migrants in reaching goals.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), and the National Center of Competence in Research nccr—on the move funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, under grant number 51NF40–182897.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 186–195
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3653

Article

Extreme Risk Makes the Journey Feasible: Decision-Making amongst Migrants in the Horn of Africa

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Submitted: 30 October 2020 | Accepted: 2 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This article explores how some potential migrants in the Horn of Africa incorporate the prospects of extreme danger into their journeys. It draws on evidence from qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with over 400 respondents, mainly from Ethiopian and Somali communities. It shows that the risks of migration within the Horn of Africa are often well known, thanks to strong migrant networks and improved mobile communications. Indeed, migrants may be better informed of the risks of the journey than they are about their prospects of securing a good living upon arrival. However, rather than discouraging people's migration, high risk may open up new possibilities. This article supports this argument with two examples. First, as Yemen descended into civil war, the breakdown of state control created new opportunities to move undetected, notwithstanding the threat of injury and death. This helps explain why the number of Ethiopians passing through Yemen increased with the conflict, contrary to expectations. Second, some young Somalis are soliciting the services of smugglers to help them move towards Europe, knowing that they are likely to be abused and held for ransom en route. They gamble on their captors' demands being met by family members, who would not otherwise have endorsed or paid for their journey. These findings challenge common assumptions about risk and decision-making, and suggests that some migrants may move because of, rather than in spite of, the risks involved. It also calls into question initiatives that seek to deter migration by raising awareness about the risks of the journey.

Keywords
Ethiopia; human smuggling; information; migration control; risk; Somalia; Yemen

Issue
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1. Introduction

Migration is an inherently risky process with varying probability of a negative outcome. With this high level of uncertainty, it is impossible to know what lies ahead. The dangers are exacerbated for migrants moving in the context of extreme poverty, insecurity and the absence of rule of law. Risk is generally seen as something to be minimised. Potential migrants need to know about the perils of their journey so they can make an informed decision. Many observers assume that if the risks are too great, the rational choice will be not to move. However, people continue to use the most dangerous routes. This apparently irrational behaviour tends to be explained by two concerns: first, their lack of information about the dangers; second, their assessment of the huge potential gains from migration that outweigh the risks. In this article, we draw on empirical evidence from Puntland

(Somalia), Djibouti and Yemen to suggest two alternative angles to the issue of risk in migration.

First, this article depicts a clear distinction between migrants and external actors when it comes to their perceptions and evaluations of risk. They are coming from different decision spaces, almost parallel worlds, where there may be occasional points of contact but no way to move from one to the other. This raises questions about what is at risk, and whose version of risk we are taking into account. Second, there is a new twist, where the extreme risk of the journey is used by migrants as a critical element in their migration strategy. In the case of young Somalis seeking routes into Europe, without the risk of kidnapping and death on the way, they would not be able to move. In the case of Ethiopians transiting through Yemen, widespread insecurity generated by the five-year civil war gives them a greater chance of crossing borders undetected. Both groups are acting rationally to achieve their ends—to reach their destination—but the risk they are concerned about is as much that of failing, as that of being injured (physically or mentally) or killed on the way. From this perspective, these dangers may improve their prospects of success.

This article starts by considering the different ways in which risk is conceptualised within the migration literature. This is followed by an overview of migration patterns between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, and beyond, to the Gulf and Europe. Having set the scene, the article goes on to consider the ways in which migrants weigh up risks, suggesting that they are not only aware, but also accepting of the abuse and exploitation they are likely to endure en route to their destination. What is more, while migrants have to tolerate unavoidable risk in this way, in some cases, the extreme dangers open up new opportunities that may facilitate their movement and it may even play a critical role in their decisions about how and where to migrate. In light of these findings, the article raises questions about contemporary migration policies, in particular perceptions around smugglers and the effectiveness of campaigns that provide information about the risks and dangers of migration.

2. Risk in Migration Studies

The idea of risk is embedded in different ways within many migration theories. In cost-benefit analysis, the value of factors is discounted depending on the level of risk involved—the benefit of the movement to the city is reduced according to the probability of remaining unemployed or failing to reach the desired level of income (De Jong & Fawcett, 1981; Harris & Todaro, 1970). Here, we are concerned with risk that is incurred as a consequence of migration and it moderates the associated calculation of losses and gains.

The new economics of labour migration takes a much broader view, seeing risk as a fundamental aspect of the lives of poor people. Rather than considering risk as a by-product of moving, new economics of labour migration puts it at the centre of a household's decision-making about migration. It analyses the movement of an individual as part of a household's strategy to diversify its sources of income and thereby spread risk and improve the household's livelihood security (Stark & Levhari, 1982; Wouterse & Taylor, 2008). Looking beyond the household, research into networks and transnational connections draws attention to how these wider social structures can help defuse the costs and risks of migration in destination areas by providing assistance to migrants on first arrival, smoothing access to jobs and housing, and so on (Hugo, 1981; Massey, 1990; Portes, 1995).

The literature discussed so far has focused on the risk associated with the outcomes of migration on arrival. Can I secure a job and the income needed to make migration worthwhile? However, there is also a body of literature on the risk associated with the journey. There are two broad strands of analysis here. First, there is research into different migrants' assessment of the risk and their attitude to it. Research into the (non-Jewish) migration from Ecuador to Israel challenges the importance of the household strategy in shaping migrants' decision-making. Instead, there is evidence of a more individualist approach to migration and risk from a "new type of migrant" who operates autonomously from family and community, has little established connection to their destination, and makes the decision to migrate hastily and with little information (Kalir, 2005). While these migrants take on the risk of travelling alone, many still connect with transnational networks once they reach Israel.

A second strand of analysis focuses on the nature of the risks faced by migrants on the journey and strategies to mitigate them. This is often framed in terms of protection risks—the likelihood of people's basic human rights being violated, even to the extent of losing lives (Spagna, 2017). These risks are exacerbated when it comes to irregular migration—or more specifically irregular border crossing. This often involves dangerous routes, especially those involving smugglers, and the risks of violence and exploitation are real and well-documented (Busza, Teferra, Omer, & Zimmerman, 2017; Davy, 2017). Migrants may start their journey by making a contractual agreement with a smuggler to help them cross borders illicitly. All too often, they end up in the hands of traffickers, who cheat, abuse and exploit them to extract maximum profit from the migrants, their families and friends. While both smugglers and traffickers work illegally, and there are often fuzzy boundaries between them, the critical difference is that the former act with the consent of the migrants (clients), while the latter coerces them (victims; Ati, 2017, pp. 7–10).

While recognising this dangerous slippage between smuggling and trafficking, there is an alternative narrative that is built on notions of solidarity and reciprocity, and which recognises the potential social and collective role that smuggling can play in facilitating mobility (Achilli, 2018). This more nuanced narrative has arguably gained momentum in light of the externalisation of EU

migration policy. Indeed, Ayalew (2018) even suggests that, in the context of a restrictive migration regime that criminalises movement, smuggling can be seen as a "system of refugee protection from below" when safe or legitimate means of mobility are increasingly eroded. Seen from this perspective, it is the state-sponsored efforts to manage migration and prevent migrants from reaching Europe that have created the obstacles to movements that oblige migrants to take more dangerous and risky itineraries—rather than smugglers themselves (Rodriguez, 2019).

It is often assumed that people only take extreme routes when they do not know the full scale of the perilous position in which they are putting themselves. Once informed of the risk—that they may be kidnapped, raped, enslaved, maimed or killed on the way—the rational behaviour is not to migrate in this way. However, a growing number of studies critique this focus on rational behaviour by showing that the significant risks of the journey are well known to migrants, but that this does not deter them from making the journey. In the case of Malian migrants, Dougnon and Gagliardi (2013) argue that migration is not just a rational economic deduction of access to property or earnings—it has deep and powerful cultural ramifications around the realisation of youthful dreams, social aspiration and a rite of passage. Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) also adopt a social constructionist approach that sees risk as determined by culture and open to different social interpretations.

Other studies of risk and migration adopt a gambling analogy, whereby the decision to move is akin to a bet, the outcome of which is seen in terms of luck and the successful conclusion of the journey as "winning the jackpot" (Belloni, 2016). Just as people play the lottery even though the chances of winning are almost zero, the chance—albeit small—of successfully arriving at their destination urges migrants to take the gamble and try their luck, even against high odds of danger and risk (Belloni, 2019).

These approaches can shed light on the failures of sensitisation campaigns that seek to deter migration by spelling out the risks and dangers. If only migrants—or their families as the primary decision-making body—knew about the dangers, they would act differently. The policy response is to focus on the flow of information to potential migrants and their families. Instead of recognising the cultural embeddedness of migration and alternative local conceptualisations of risk, they categorise those who embark on irregular journeys as reckless or irresponsible—a position vested with moral overtones that has been used to justify repressive measures to stop their journey and criminalise those who help them (Gerver, 2019).

3. Background to the Study

Before presenting our findings in more detail, this section gives a brief overview of the background and the methods used for the study, which was undertaken by the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) in 2017. The REF is a research consortium led by SOAS University of London with the University of Manchester and Sahan, a Nairobi-based thinktank in Kenya. It is funded by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to conduct independent academic research into the drivers of instability, migration, and displacement in the greater Horn of Africa (for more details see the *Research & Evidence Facility* website at https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch).

The project set out to explore what is driving the growth in migration from the Horn of Africa to Yemen in spite of the risks and dangers. It also assessed the extent to which smuggling and trafficking networks are involved in facilitating these movements, as well as the impact of these movements on the lives of migrants, the local communities and wider society. The full report (Sturridge, Bakewell, & Hammond, 2017) offers more details of the methods and findings of the study.

The research adopted a comparative approach, looking at migration through the two main routes from Puntland (Somalia) and Djibouti towards Yemen. Teams of local researchers were established in key research sites to identify informants and conduct semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In Puntland, the research team focused their work on Bossaso, Qardo and Garowe. In Djibouti, the focus was Djibouti town and Obock. In Yemen, the teams were located in Sana'a, Aden, and Al Hodeidah. Over a six-month period between January and June 2017, the research team consulted over 400 respondents in these locations—including migrants, community representatives, people involved in smuggling, government officials, the UN, NGOs and donors. It is hoped that the dataset will be deposited in an archive to made available for further research, subject to ensuring that sufficient contextual information can be removed from transcripts to make them fully anonymous.

In order to ensure comparability of findings, a set of common research questions was drafted by the REF and refined in consultation with the research teams to ensure that the questions were appropriate for each specific research site. Following the data collection, the qualitative data set was coded and analysed along themes initially guided by the original research questions. Each country research team was also responsible for writing a field report that provided a first analysis of their findings. This fed into the overall project report. While the interview guidelines asked respondents what they knew about the risks faced by migrants crossing to Yemen, risk was not a central theme at the outset of the original study. However, through the analysis of the data from the multiple sources, it emerged as a critical factor, sometimes shaping people's movements in counter-intuitive ways, to the extent of opening up new opportunities to move. This article focuses on these new insights into the attitudes of Ethiopian and Somali migrants to risk and the role it played in making possible their journeys towards the Gulf

and Europe. We have a limited aim of demonstrating that risk does play this strategic role in shaping movement for some, rather than making any claim that this is the case for all. With this in mind, we are drawing on anonymised quotations from a range of respondents that illustrate the points (note, all names used are pseudonyms).

4. Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen

There is a long history of migration back and forth between the Horn of Africa and Yemen (de Regt, 2014; Thiollet, 2014). The majority of crossings towards Yemen have comprised Ethiopians, Somalis, and Eritreans. For the most part, Ethiopians are moving with the aim of travelling onwards to find work in Saudi Arabia (RMMS, 2016). Many of them are from the Oromo region of Ethiopia, where they have faced political and economic repression including exclusion from employment and seizure of land. The majority are young, single men, often with limited levels of education, but there is a sizeable and growing number of female migrants attracted by the considerable demand for domestic workers in the Gulf states (Fernandez, 2020; Zewdu, 2017). Key informants from multiple agencies including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggested they could make up 20 to 30 percent of the Ethiopian migrants crossing to Yemen. Indeed, sources in Djibouti suggest that women make up a large percentage of those crossing the border, but they are not seen at the points where people seek assistance and are instead moved in vehicles between smugglers' houses and during the journey carry out domestic work in private homes, which limits their visibility in public spaces.

Over the years, the movement of many Somalis to Yemen has been driven by the need to escape conflict and insecurity and there has long been a Somali refugee population staying in Yemen. Government and NGO key informants observed that, more recently, there has been a growing number of Somalis crossing to Yemen with the aim of reaching Europe, travelling on a convoluted and extremely dangerous route via Yemen back across the Red Sea to Sudan and then through Libya. Their background is more mixed than the Ethiopian migrants, ranging from uneducated people from very poor backgrounds to those with tertiary levels of education and coming from rather wealthy families. There has been less research into which migrants are using this relatively recent route so there is limited knowledge about the numbers or gender distribution (respondents suggested that this route is mostly used by men, but the research team were able to interview almost equal numbers of Somali men and women who were embarking on the crossing to Yemen).

Wherever their origin in the Horn of Africa, few migrants aim to stay in Yemen. Some move relatively quickly on to the next stage of their journey. Others stay on in Yemen for a number of weeks, months and even years, while they work to save up for their next move or recover from illness or destitution. There has also been movement in the opposite direction, most notably among Yemeni refugees fleeing the war that has engulfed their homeland (Mohamud, 2016). Most migration over these routes is undertaken irregularly and under the control of smugglers. African states, supported by donors (including the EU) and international organisations (in particular IOM), have responded to these irregular movements by enforcing new regulations, border controls, cross-border agreements and information campaigns directed towards potential migrants. Saudi Arabia has also been extremely active in deporting irregular migrants from Ethiopia (Fernandez, 2020, p. 30). However, the smuggling and trafficking networks that facilitate these movements have remained resilient and (according to respondents) even increased since 2015, and the numbers of migrants remain high.

With the escalation of the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen in 2015 and 2016, it would have been reasonable to expect a marked fall in the number of people heading to Yemen across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Instead, however, the numbers continued to increase to their highest recorded levels (Botti & Phillips, 2019; Frouws, 2016). While there could be little doubt that the drivers of out-migration in Ethiopia and Somalia—political oppression, insecurity, widespread poverty and drought—continued unabated, it was unclear how the complex array of factors intersected to shape the dynamics of migration between the Horn of African and Yemen. Indeed, the overall picture driving migration was more about the underlying chronic conditions that make it impossible for people to see a desirable future where they are living than with particular or isolated crises. For example, when it came to explaining why they wanted to leave, young Somalis talked first of having no future in Somalia—especially when they had completed what education they could and saw no prospects of getting a job or income that would give them the lifestyle to which they aspired. The immediate crises of drought and insecurity were less prominent as rationales for movement. Only one migrant respondent made explicit reference to the drought in spite of the fact that drought in Somalia during 2016 and 2017 affected over 1.7 million people (OCHA, 2017). Such crises may exacerbate people's sense of frustration and make them more inclined to start on their journey, but they are rarely the primary reason.

5. Weighing Up the Risks

Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen has long been characterised by danger and risk. Migrants described being increasingly coerced into using smugglers' services, or risk facing detention. They endured deplorable conditions during the journey and upon arrival at their intended destination, suffering from abuse and hardship, illness and death. In addition to frequent reports of abuse, many migrants lack food and

water, basic services, shelter and livelihoods; difficulties that are compounded by generalised insecurity and an inhospitable climate en route. These dangers are faced by both men and women, but there were also more gender-specific risks. Women were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, with many referring either to their own or others horrific experiences of rape and other assaults. For men, moving across Yemen brought the potential danger of being caught and conscripted into military service with rebel forces.

Migrants that were interviewed generally knew that the journey was dangerous and involved high risks. Many of the Ethiopian respondents had previous experience as irregular migrants and had spent some time in Saudi Arabia working; they spoke of knowing about the journey already, including the risks it entails:

> Because of my previous experience, I know, the biggest risk emerges during sea-travelling; it's a three-day journey with hunger and thirst. If the waves make the boat hard to control, smugglers beat people and offload them forcefully into the sea. (Salim, Ethiopian man, age 25, Bossaso)

Less experienced migrants relied on information from friends and relatives already abroad at their destination. Their pre-departure knowledge was then supplemented by information from other migrants, smugglers and communities they meet along the way. Whatever the source, the expectations were bleak:

> I know all the risks, including loss of life, harassment, detention, and so on. (Filan, Ethiopian woman, age 24, Bossaso)

> The smuggling group might demand more money when I reach Libya; they might torture me; I could get killed or the inflatable boat sinks; I know the trip is not easy, but I want to do it. (Bashiir, Somali man, age 24, Bossaso)

> To me, it was a suicide mission, it was between death and life, but I was ready for it, if lucky I would survive! (Bifani, Ethiopian woman, age 24, Bossaso)

While awareness may encourage migrants to adjust or reconsider which route they take, it is not enough to deter them from migrating in the first place or continuing with their journey once started. Furthermore, migrants are less likely to change their minds about migrating the further they progress along their journey, as the investments and sacrifices increase, and they are reluctant to return empty handed to family back home who may have contributed their savings to make the journey possible. Instead, they take precautionary steps to minimise the consequences of anticipated abuse and exploitation. Some respondents described arranging for family members to keep aside money to pay ransoms to smugglers, while Ethiopian women have been known to take contraceptives to prevent pregnancy if raped:

> I knew that I might be arrested by smugglers who ask for ransom, so I prepared my family for that to keep some money aside in that case. (Heeran, Ethiopian man, age 25, Sana'a)

These kinds of safety measures suggest that migrants are not only aware, but also accepting of the abuse and exploitation they are likely to endure. Nearly all Ethiopian migrants described the journey as hard, long and very uncomfortable. They spoke of hunger, thirst, illness and physical danger, including a truck overturning and other accidents on the road. Payments were demanded with menaces, but this was discussed as part of an accepted rough trade, comparable, perhaps, to the way loan sharks exploit their customers' inability to get their service anywhere else, make threats to ensure compliance, but still deliver the service in the end. Being beaten if money is not paid seems to be accepted as a fact of life.

The risks of abuse and exploitation are seen as a necessary part of the journey that migrants must tolerate in order to reach one's destination. Very few saw the risks as outweighing the potential benefit of their journeys. Half of the Ethiopian migrants interviewed in Bossaso felt they were already better off, and the journey was proving worthwhile, even in the face of the hardships. Others were more circumspect, expressing some uncertainty about the final outcome as they were still on the journey. Even among those who said things were worse, only three suggested they would return home if they could. The remarkable sense that things have worked out well in the end despite all the difficulties is illustrated by the responses of Abdi, an Ethiopian man (age 45). In the conversation below, he describes being held hostage with his wife by smugglers who beat him with a metal stick and threatened him with a knife until he agreed to pay the rates they demanded:

> Yes, they tortured us, held us hostage for two days and asked our families for ransom money.
>
> [Do you feel you have achieved your objective for moving?] Yes, I am more than happy, since I made my trip to here, now I feel safer.
>
> [What has worked out well?] In an overall sense, all has worked out well.
>
> [What has worked out badly/less well?] Besides the challenges of the trip, the only thing that happened unplanned was the extra money charged.

6. Seeking Out the Risks

For the majority of migrants interviewed during this research, the risk of abuse and exploitation is weighed up

as a necessary means to a more important end—arrival at one's destination. However, while some migrants tolerate unavoidable risk in this way, others seek out risky environments—as the opportunities these present for moving represent a decisive factor in their decisions about how and where to migrate. This relationship between risk and decision-making is highlighted by Ethiopian migrants transiting through Yemen, and, in the most extreme form, by Somali migrants hoping to reach Europe—cases that are now explored in more detail.

As noted above, the escalation of civil war in Yemen has not reduced the number of migrants travelling there. On the contrary, the breakdown of state institutions in Yemen and subsequent lack of policy and control has opened up opportunities for smugglers and traffickers to operate more easily. According to one smuggler respondent:

> Before the war in Yemen, our boats used to get fired at by the Yemeni Maritime forces patrolling their sea, but now after the war, we don't encounter any problems—but sometimes ships belonging to the Saudi-led coalition can intercept these boats. (Somali smuggler based in Bossaso)

Similar views were echoed by other key informants, while migrants reported having to take the routes as directed by the smuggler they had contracted. As the situation changes rapidly, these migration routes are adjusted in response to gaps in state control—or take advantage of state actors' fluctuating complicity with smugglers and traffickers. How far these purported gaps in control actually result in an easier journey for migrants, especially for Ethiopians who aim to cross Yemen to reach Saudi Arabia, is unclear. There is limited information about what happens to migrants once they enter Yemen (Frouws & Akumu, 2016). There seems little doubt that Yemen has become a more dangerous and unpredictable space: a number of Ethiopian respondents were left severely injured after treading on landmines while trying to cross the Yemeni-Saudi border in Sa'dah.

The chaos of war and collapse (or severe degradation) of state systems in Yemen created a space of irregularity—where state controls were absent or more open to manipulation through bribery or other means, and in which smugglers could operate with impunity. Similar spaces have been observed elsewhere, in particular, in Libya, which has generated huge interest as it was seen to open a direct route towards the Mediterranean and Europe (Baldwin-Edwards & Lutterbeck, 2019). However, this challenge to regular migration is not confined to war zones. Spaces of irregularity can be found in many borderlands across the developing world, where the concept of regularity may be almost meaningless (Bakewell, 2020). To draw a line between regular and irregular migration in such a zone achieves little. Movement continues and there is no means to make it regular—either because there is chaos, as seen in Yemen, or because there is no infrastructure to enable regular movement. If people cannot realistically pass via a border post or nobody has the papers or means to obtain papers to document their movement, how can any crossing be (or become) regular?

For the young Somalis setting off from Bossaso in the hope of reaching Europe, the calculus of risk was very different. They faced similar challenges in navigating spaces of irregularity as the Ethiopians. However, for them, the obstacle to their dreams was not just the state, but also their parents, who did not support their leaving and would not willingly offer them any help for their journey to Europe (for which they cited costs of US$8–10,000):

> [Do you know about anyone else taking actions to control movement—If so who? What do they do?] The only people we fear intercepting us from going is the parents. Once they become suspicious, they immediately communicate with checkpoints over all the possible routes. They also physically visit smugglers hideouts and camps. Parents also use secret intelligence agents for spying. (Zeinab, Somali woman, age 22, Bossaso)

These young migrants had heard the horrific stories of those held to ransom in the desert by traffickers. When asked what she knew about the risks she might face on the journey, a young female respondent listed "torture, rape, killing and extortion." But they see this as a lever to use against their families who did not want them to leave and would not, under normal circumstances, pay for their journey. Many of the Somalis interviewed intended to take up the 'leave now, pay later' scheme increasingly adopted by smugglers to entice would-be migrants, and were not planning to tell their families of their intention to leave. However, they calculated that their relatives would feel compelled to pay the costs of the journey on their behalf, for fear that they would otherwise be subjected to torture and abuse if they did not. If it were simply a question of running out of money, the family may demand that the son or daughter returns home. However, once the youths have committed themselves to the smugglers, the family is trapped into paying for an onward journey, they do not condone and, under normal circumstances, would never have funded. In these cases, it is the risk that makes the journey feasible:

> We negotiated the price until we agreed to $8,000….I didn't pay them; my family has to pay for them when I reach Libya….I didn't tell my family, but they will pay it when they know I am in Libya in the hands of the smuggling group. (Warsame, Somali man, age 22, Bossaso)

> It generally costs a maximum of $10,000 to reach Europe….But look, I shouldn't worry about that, they [smugglers] are ready to sponsor us till Yemen. From there, then it's up to parents who are forced to pay

> whatever it's going to cost them to rescue me, and they will not force me to come back from that distance. They would rather support me to proceed since I am almost close to the finishing line. (Amaal, Somali woman, age 22, Bossaso)

The remarks made by our respondents suggest something of an inter-generational tussle. Children are prepared to defy their parents and effectively blackmail them to pay for their departure. How this plays out in later life, it is hard to imagine. There is both the huge risk of being hurt, or killed, by trafficking gangs and then that of alienating one's family. The relatives may bail the young people out, but is there a price to be extracted later? Many have reported on the huge efforts many poor African migrants make to send money home from Europe—and the challenges it creates for them in establishing a livelihood there (Lindley, 2010). This is cast in a different light if one looks at the way some young migrants have arranged their journeys at huge, unplanned and unwanted cost to their families.

7. Incorporating Risk into Migration Policy

These findings present two challenges to the current response to migration, which are made all the more intractable by the very different perceptions of risk held by the various actors involved. First, it is clear that the relationship with the smugglers is much more nuanced than one of the exploiters and the exploited. They provide a service which is in great demand and, in many cases, they deliver it—at least in as far as getting people across to Yemen. Moreover, their operations, while illegal are deeply embedded in the local political economy, embracing the local authorities, business people and the migrants themselves. While some may create a gateway that leads migrants into the arms of more violent and ruthless traffickers, it is not clear that this is always the case. Not all smugglers are equal. They may all be breaking the law but in spaces of irregularity, where it is almost impossible to move within the law, this does not mean that they are necessarily a primary source of harm to migrants (Gerver, 2019). At times, being under the control of a smuggler may provide a form of protection. This was the case of Mona, an Ethiopian woman who, finding herself stranded without money to pay for the rest of her journey, was forwarded the money by a charitable smuggler:

> The smugglers in…asked me to pay an extra amount of money which I did not have, and ordered me to come out of the small transit centre together with some other people whom we had travelled with together. They asked me to come out and follow them but I declined and they tried to pull me out. But things seemed difficult till the other people intervened and fundraised for me some of money. The first smuggler whom I met in…helped me and sent the remaining cash. (Mona, Ethiopian woman, age 33, Bossaso)

These considerations raise important questions about what the primary aim of interventions should be. Is it to uphold national law? Or is it to uphold the basic human rights of migrants?

Second, these findings on the different ways that migrants assess risk must call into question campaigns to provide information about the risks and dangers of migration. The respondents knew there were risks and many seemed quite matter-of-fact about them. The families are also very aware of the risks and struggle to stop their children from leaving (Ali, 2016, pp. 42–43). Moreover, the smugglers, by offering 'travel now, pay later' deals, have managed to use the danger as a means to increase their custom among young Somalis looking to reach Europe. Migrants' determination to reach their intended destination, even at significant financial and physical cost, meant that awareness of the risks was no deterrent to their movement. This suggests that until young people in the Horn can see a future that enables them to live up to the wider social expectations of contributing to the household and starting their own families, it is a challenge to see how they can be deterred from moving elsewhere. This discussion is often framed as one of European states attempting to impose control on African states (Oette & Babiker, 2017). We also need to look more closely at the disparity of interests and analysis of risk between generations, where parents and older generations dominate political, economic and social structures.

8. Concluding Remarks

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of people embarking on incredibly dangerous journeys in order to move between countries is a huge problem. What is so striking about the risks today is how unnecessary they appear. People have embarked on perilous voyages throughout history, but for the most part the dangers were unknown, unpredictable and unavoidable. There was no safe way to travel from Portugal to the Americas in the 19th century, for instance. However, the work of pioneers at many different levels has helped to reduce the risk faced by future travellers—creating routes, identifying brokers and establishing networks of support services ranging from transport to accommodation. Now it is perfectly physically feasible to move with relative safety to almost any part of the world, if you have the money and it is politically feasible to do so. You have to have the right papers to allow you to travel and for many this is the main stumbling block.

We now have a growing array of stakeholders with an interest in selectively controlling or reducing migration—especially from poor parts of the world. Others have noted the vicious cycle of increasing border controls and barriers to entry resulting in pushing people into the hands

of ever more dangerous smuggling groups, creating a migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013; Schapendonk, 2018). Today, the successful migration of pioneers makes things harder for those who come after them, as routes are shut down, agents apprehended and costs soar. In this game, there is the implicit—or sometimes explicit—calculation that if the costs and risks are made high enough, it will deter people.

However, what this research suggests is that in this calculation there is too much focus on the journey, instead of thinking about the underlying project and its significance. This study points to some more fundamental questions and theoretical debates that need to be taken up. If we want to better understand the role of risk in shaping mobility, we first have to ask what is at risk. As noted above, the existing literature focuses on two main areas: the extreme hazards of the journey and the danger of failing to settle successfully at the destination. Another aspect of risk is that of staying behind. This is often raised in reference to forced migration, where people are subject to threats of death, multiple forms of abuse and other gross violations of their fundamental rights. There is also the structural violence that is evident in the gross inequality, economic and political exclusion that prevents people's flourishing. There is some evidence of both these risks driving young Ethiopians and Somalis to embark on the perilous journey to Yemen.

However, for some of the young people interviewed, migration appears to be a fundamental part of their individual life project. Their primary aim is not to secure their livelihood, or establish themselves abroad, but to live out their lives as fully human. This echoes the findings of Belloni, who analysed decision making for Eritreans migrating to Europe in terms of gambling—they take a bet with very low probability of success, but an extremely high benefit if they are successful (Belloni, 2016). She argues that this 'migration bet' is concerned with finding the conditions to make the transition to adulthood, where one can support the family, marry and have children. Similarly, in West Africa, Dougnon and Gagliardi (2013) found that, for young men in Mali, migration has a deeper cultural significance that defies economic rationality.

For some migrants, the hardships of the journey and the possibility of failing are risks worth taking to obviate the much greater personal risk of being unable to live a full life by not moving. For Ethiopians, this made the risk of moving into the war zone of Yemen worth taking. A more complicated story seems to be emerging for young Somalis engaging on this new convoluted route to Europe. The individuals take the risk to their lives, but they also put at risk the well-being of their families, who not only end up paying their ransom but are also sucked into the trauma of responding to the disappearance of their children. How this plays out in family relationships requires much more research. Ali (2016) has explored this in more detail for the case of young people leaving Somaliland heading north to Europe via Libya. Her work highlights the gap in perception between the generations. Parents who have sufficient resources are investing significant sums to set up their children in businesses to keep them from leaving, often to no avail. However, the 'travel now and pay later' offer from the smugglers enables young people to leave with no immediate cost. They are aware that payment will have to be made, but that future risk is discounted in their minds, so the dire consequences for their families are played down at the point of decision.

Therefore, we not only need to ask what is at risk, but also from whose perspective. It is clear that migrants and their families may have very divergent views. However, unlike Kalir's (2005) 'new type of migrant' that moved independently of the family, here we have migrants being utterly dependent on the family, but the family having very limited say in the decisions and yet facing a huge cost. This raises the question of who bears the risk. Perhaps this is one of the skills of the smugglers and traffickers; not only to move people but also to move some elements of risk away from those who are taking decisions. For the agents deciding to operate in the irregular space of Yemen, they have reduced their own risk of arrest and capture, potentially by putting migrants in greater danger of physical harm from the conflicts. Their 'travel now, pay later' offer enables young Somalis to push the risk into the future and divert it towards their wider families.

While we acknowledge that this is a limited study and these can be seen as extreme cases, they do highlight the polyvalent character of risk in migration. It is ascribed to multiple objects (the journey, the arrival, the life-project), by different actors (the migrants, their parents, smugglers, policymakers) and brings potential costs to the same or other actors. This means it (in its many forms) will act in complex ways to shape migration decisions and outcomes. Here we have shown how extreme risk can facilitate migration. Without making any claim of generalisability, this does challenge much of the analysis that underpins many current theories of migration and policies designed to respond to it. We hope that our ongoing work and that of others will helps to refine our analysis and start filling this critical lacuna.

Acknowledgments

This article draws on the findings of research undertaken by the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) on migration in the Horn of Africa, which was funded by the EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window). Their support is gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed in this article are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the REF or EU. We are particularly indebted to the team of researchers—Farrah Hussein, Hanad Mohamed, Idyle Abdourahman and Wameedh Shakir—who conducted the interviews for this research project in Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen in 2017. We are also grateful for

the constructive feedback provided by the anonymous reviewers, which greatly helped us in revising the text.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 196–206
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3718

Article

Ambitions of Bushfalling through Further Education: Insights from Students in Cameroonian Universities

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Submitted: 2 October 2020 | Accepted: 10 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
Following a surge in civil unrest, the need and ambitions to migrate have increased among young Cameroonians. This article explores how Cameroonian youth and graduates use education as a gateway for migration, selecting new routes and destinations to maximise their chances of migration. Drawing on in-depth interviews with aspiring migrants, I show that long-standing aspirations to migrate have led to a symbiotic relationship between aspiring migrants and migration agents who facilitate and determine the route and destination for the entire process. This relationship reflects aspiring migrants who desire to migrate at all cost rather than planning carefully, often with little information guiding in the process. I argue that migration responds to cultural and political influences as much as ontological (in)security that cannot be defined solely in economic terms. The meaning of 'successful' migration is produced and reified through the overt display and interpretations of migration.

Keywords
bushfaller; Cameroonians; education; further education; migration syndicate; youth aspirations

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Sitting at an internet café in Yaoundé, Cameroon in February 2019, as I watched those who came in to use the internet for various works, two young men caught my attention. They were using one computer. Judging from their conversation, I gathered that they were struggling to fill in online forms. I approached them to find out exactly what they were doing. Peter was helping Jake fill out an online application form to study in a Turkish University, but there was no programme for English or English Literature as envisioned, and so he discontinued with the application process. I followed them outside as they left. In an informal conversation with both, Jake told me he returned from Dubai in October 2018 and is currently exploring ways of going back or going out to pursue further education. Jake had hoped to work in Dubai, however, and articulated that:

> The 'line' [broker] that worked the Dubai connection gave me wrong information, with assurances that there's a job waiting for me. But after three months, I didn't get what I went there for within the timeframe I was in Dubai. So, when my visa expired, I had to come back because I couldn't find any good job and the menial jobs I had was just to pay rent for my bed space. I came back poorer than I left, all my money gone!

All the names used for personal communications in this article are pseudonyms. Jake regretted that his money could have been spent on studying in Cyprus but was instead wasted on a broker. Despite these failed attempts, Jake's interest to migrate was sustained: "They always say don't put all your eggs in one basket, right? I am looking for scholarships, if possible, to study out."

The struggles of Jake and Peter to opt for education as a means to migrate resonate with many Cameroonian Anglophone youth and students who want to "fall bush

at all cost" (Alpes, 2012). Migration, commonly referred to as 'bushfalling' is a farming metaphor that considers migration as going hunting or foraging and sending remittances or bringing hunting trophies to the families back home in the form of financial and material objects (Alpes, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2011). In this article, I draw on the stories from Anglophone Cameroonian youth like Jake and Peter, among others, to understand the prospective of pursuing education as grounding towards migration as well as the entrenched need to migrate as a deeply engrained culture within the fabric of the Anglophone society (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002).

Research that informs this study is underpinned by fieldwork that was carried in Buea and Yaoundé, Cameroon, in January and February 2019, and July and August 2019. In the first sojourn, eleven youths were interviewed—among whom one successfully got a visa to study in Cyprus—three parents who have paid money to migration agents to send children out, and one migration agent. In the second round, twelve participants were interviewed. This included a second migrant who also successfully got a visa to study in Cyprus, two focus group interviews, two migration agents, and one parent and a migrant who I had interviewed in my first sojourn, who I found upon my return had travelled to Cyprus. This last interview was conducted over the phone.

I also had follow-up interviews and conversations with participants I spoke with during my first visit to find out how far along they were with their plans to travel. For the purpose of this article, the aim was less to seek for representation of participants than to give detailed accounts of views of a small number of articulate participants that foreground the themes discussed here. To avoid any loss in translation, I have opted to keep participants' quotes in their original forms. In other words, quotes have not been edited in order not to alter the intended meanings/emotions that participants conveyed.

Given the well-known desire to migrate among young people, my focus was on people between 18 and 35 years of age, university graduates and current students.

There are two types among aspiring migrants: 1) Those aspiring to study abroad and go to Europe, Cyprus Turkey, and the USA, and 2) those going to Dubai to 'hustle.' In the latter case, the idea is hustling to get enough money to migrate to a better country in order to further their education. Significantly, interviews reveal the social mechanisms by which the culture of migration is transmitted within the Cameroonian youth. The data analysis followed a traditional grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006) in conjunction with manual thematic sorting. Grounded theory underscores how aspiration is fanned by the notion of 'bushfaller swag.' 'Bushfaller swag' speaks to the mannerisms of visiting migrants, the conspicuous material and financial wealth that they come home with and the ways they are highly regarded in the community which incites the youth with the desire to migrate. These attitudes support claims that aspirational values are not formed in isolation but are fundamentally social, shaped by our experiences and observation of others within a cultural context (Schewel & Fransen, 2018).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows: After the conceptual focus on the interlink between aspirations and cultural values that propel desires to migrate for education, I briefly look at the socio-economic and political situation in Cameroon that engenders migration aspirations. In the last two sections, attention is brought to the empirical findings of the research. I unpack the pathways of migration towards studies and the information flow that marks this. Lastly, I look at the role of migration agents and how they propel the desires to migrate by preying on aspirants with proposals that sound credible but at times result in failure.

2. Aspirations of Migration Underpinned by Cultural Values

Studies on the geography of education has tended to focus on individual levels of attainment (Waters, 2006), overlooking the fact that individual migration decisions and aspirations and education are inextricably linked and increase the likelihood to migrate (Schewel & Fransen, 2018).

From the vantage point of these linkages, migration aspirations are less easily dismissed as poor determinants of actual migration because such a view obscures the importance of migration decision, aspirations and education. Following Schewel and Fransen (2018, p. 557), aspiration is understood less as a simple cost–benefit analyses, than as the "subjective hopes and goals that guide decision-making processes, setting the horizons within which life choices are made." However, exploring aspiration alongside cultures of migration brings together attitude and societal norms that add insights on the "behavioural link" (De Haas, 2011, p. 16) and raises awareness of the complex desires to migrate. These complex desires identify the (desires) abilities, limits, and needs of the aspirant as well as the cultural traditions and social practices that frame those abilities and limitations through time. Part of these complexities are also stimulated by the expanding of migrant social networks and migration agents that give rise to a culture of migration in the sending community where migration becomes part of people's behavioural repertoires (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011; Timmerman, Hemmerechts, & De Clerck, 2014).

Included in these networks is the role of families and that of the migration agent/broker who impinge on the decision to migrate. This is more so when the desire to migrate is examined in conjunction with education given education is partly perceived as an accessible and effective strategy for attaining important goals (Carling, 2014, p. 9). Similarly, it is also a way to obtain visas and for families with economic capital to turn the desires into 'ability' (Carling, 2003). Through partic-

ipants' stories, I argue that education as an aspiration of migration is intrinsically motivated by a culture of migration that is deeply engrained in a societal value. In other words, the culture of bushfalling accentuates migration aspirations (Carling, 2014; Carling & Collins, 2018). I advocate that including theories drawn from cultures of migration add an overlooked facet to the work of Carling and Collins (2018) and Carling and Schewel (2018) on aspirations of migrants. While this addition highlights how drivers beyond the political and economic shape aspirations, it also contributes to a better understanding of migration aspirations that considers migrants' cultural repertoire. In doing so, I explain how cultures of migration not only influence aspirations of migration but give leverage to 'migration agents,' including migration brokers and recruiters. The central role of these actors challenges common assumptions that migrants draw on personal networks—rather than professionalized actors—to support migration processes.

From this perspective, De Haas (2011, 2014), Carling (2013, 2014), and Timmerman et al. (2014) maintain that migration aspirations are dependent on information, perceptions and value systems. Significant to ask here is what would counter information about migration produce. While the focus has largely been about information that drives aspiration, mental mapping is an important consideration as it elevates the desires into plans of where migrants would like to be and work towards its realisation. Consequently, returning migrants give credence to mental mapping while also acting as a reference group that stimulates the values attached to migration and the effects of these values on educational aspirations (Kandel & Massey, 2002, p. 984; Theo, 2003).

The advertising effects known among Cameroonian youths as 'bushfaller swag,' reifies the perception of migration as a spatial opportunity structure and a 'natural thing,' especially when broader aspirations of life cannot be fulfilled at home (Nyamnjoh & Page, 2002). Despite the elusiveness of aspirations of migration, Carling (2014) highlights its importance in underscoring how it propels mobility and immobility. This is precisely because of mental mapping that aspirants think, dream and see themselves already travelling while at home. His analysis suggests macro/micro/meso levels, which he conceptualises more to describe the conviction that migration is desirable and the preference for migrants overstaying their visas. Quite often, this is because of the "intrinsic and instrumental values" (Van Mol, 2016, p. 8) to be derived from migration. Van Mol, Snel, Hemmerechts, and Timmerman (2018, p. 2) allude to this as "normative influence" of migration aspirations. They refer particularly to the influence that previous migrants have on migration aspirations of prospective migrants, which ultimately creates a culture of migration.

Inasmuch as this culture resonates with Cameroonian youths, in Cameroon, it goes beyond influences of previous migrants to include a culture where migration agents become kingpins in deciding destinations for aspirants at a fee. Perhaps it is in this context that Eggert, Krieger, and Meier (2010) highlight the interdependence of migration and education decisions which are based on the need of skill formation in a context of exogenous migration and an imperfect labour market. Education, they note, could be halted in favour of skills acquisition as in the case of Cameroonians for who education is less an immediate concern of attending school than having the opportunity to travel.

Although the possibility of migration to developed countries encourages human capital acquisition, the ultimate is the fulfilment of the rite of passage as a 'bushfaller.' As social actors, aspiring migrants' decisions about their futures, according to Cohen and Sirkeci (2011, p. 14) are "framed by traditional beliefs, cultural expectations, and social practices/expectations that are embedded in their immediate and broader environment, which is characterized by a variety of conflicts and competitions affecting the likelihoods of decisions to migrate."

3. Contextualising Bushfalling Aspirations in Cameroon: Conflicts, Insecurity, and Unemployment

> Anglophones are complaining, students haven't gone to school and then we have people who have shut down businesses and ghost towns, and the economy is terrible. I have friends who are doing business, just like me, they had to close their shops and run and come here. There's insecurity, someone is killed and there's fighting everywhere. You cannot do business in such an environment. So, the Anglophones are suffering. Many people are fed up with Cameroon and they see this place as a hopeless place with massive corruption and unemployment, they don't have hope in the place anymore and they believe that when they go out there, they have greener pastures.

The above excerpt, from an interview with Peter, 11 February 2019, sums up the feeling of many Cameroonian youths who are despondent by the political elites' cronyism at the expense of young unemployed graduates. Cameroon is a multilingual country with over 268 ethnic languages and two official languages of English and French that reflect the dual colonial legacy. Approximately 80% of the population speaks in French as a first language, while about 20% speaks in English. However, the political agenda in Cameroon has become increasingly dominated by the 'Anglophone problem' as a result of political, cultural, economic and social grievances expressed by the English-speaking minority (Awasom, 2020; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997, pp. 207–210). Summarizing the problem, Awasom (2020, p. 265) avows that:

> Is it about the marginalization (political, economic, social, cultural, and a linguistic minority) problem? Is it the forceful assimilation of Anglophone Cameroon in line with the French colonial policy in Africa? Is it

> about bad governance owing to lack of democracy and free and fair elections? Is it simply the incompatibility between Anglophone and Francophone co-existence and ways of doing things?…Its apotheosis is the birth of the Anglophone putative state of Ambazonia and the military onslaught on the Anglophone people and nation by an aggressive, callous, extractive Francophone hegemonic colonial order.

Such marginalisation can be traced back to when the Anglophone regions were under the "administration of the Southern Cameroons as an appendage of Nigeria and led to the neglect of the region's development, consequently forcing the population of Southern Cameroons to vote for unification with French Cameroons on 1 October 1961 (Konings, 2011, pp. 17–18). The current marginalisation was hardly anticipated and has continued unabated. Moreover, despite the substantive oil reserves that were discovered in the Anglophone region, they did not benefit from the natural resource or from the political leadership appointments and employment in the refinery (Agwanda, Nyadera, & Asal, 2020; Awasom, 2020).

In October 2016, Anglophones, led by teacher's trade union and magistrates, clamoured for more autonomy against attempts by the central government to marginalize their language and culture. Among many other claims, the protesting lawyers "denounced the government's surreptitious deployment of jurists who were only conversant with French civil laws and not the common law that applied to the Anglophone regions" (Agwanda et al., 2020, pp. 5–6). Similarly, teachers complained of "Francophone teachers that were being posted to the Anglophone zone to teach in broken English thereby watering down the quality of education in the Anglophone zones" (Awasom, 2020, p. 283), all of which erode their language and culture (Anyangwe, 2014; Konings, 2011, p. 77). Such identity marginalisation dovetails Reader's (2009, p. 31) insight that identity can lead to conflict when there is the pursuit of competing needs and values within different groups or identities.

The protest reignited the Ambazonia movement that is pushing for secession or decentralisation (federalism) (Konings, 2011), and today the English-speaking regions have proclaimed themselves as Ambazonia (a name given to the English-speaking regions of Cameroon), pushing for statehood, resulting in violent clashes between government forces and militias across the two English-speaking regions of the country. Following calls for ghost towns, entire towns, cities, and villages in the Anglophone regions came to a standstill as schools were closed, banks and shops remained unopened, and even taxis were not operating. Between January to April 2017, internet access was cut in the two concerned regions (I myself witnessed internet blackout while out on fieldwork).

Subsequent years have witnessed vicious cycle of reciprocal killings, scores of villages being burnt to the ground, abductions, extrajudicial killings and countless numbers of both internally and externally displaced Cameroonians (Amin, 2018). The corollary has been devastating for the youths and school children following the interruption of schooling, high numbers of dropouts as they run out of conflict-ridden areas and massive unemployment for university graduates. Small and medium economies, often run by unemployed graduates, are negatively affected due to long periods of ghost towns, excessive fighting and destruction of properties. Most fled from the English-speaking provinces for safety in the French speaking areas.

Furthermore, the conflict arises within an already limping economy that has hardly recovered from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's structural adjustment programmes in the late 1980s to early 1990s. The reforms led to an economic downturn and retrenchment from jobs in the country (Nyamnjoh, 2011, pp. 703–704, 2020). The Anglophone crisis and the economic crisis provided a recipe for precarity/uncertainty, insecurity, corruption, and furthered unemployment, particularly among the young (Jua, 2003). The effect is a heightened aspiration to migrate (Alpes, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2014), as seen from Peter's words at the opening of this section. Against this backdrop, the Anglophone crisis serves particular narrative constructions of marginalisation among the youth who "imagine Cameroon as a prison rather than as a nation state" (Konings, 2009, p. 74). As a result, many graduates are obliged to defer their entry into adulthood because of their inability to attain economic independence. However, for many, entrance into adulthood is believed to find expression in bushfalling as an alternative pathway (Fokwang, 2008; Jua, 2003).

4. Pathways to Migration for Studies: Schooling and Scholarships

> I think that those who have aspired to go out and maybe have had disappointments have decided to use educational means to go out. Yes, so if they go out, maybe, since they have already applied for a university there, they may just go and study maybe nine months, six months and they just drop because their main interest was not to go and study but they use the educational means for them to easily have their visa and they travel. So, when they reach there, they can just study for some few months or few years and then stop so they can continue with their main ambition, what really took them there.

In this section, I draw on Tim's interview, date 25 July 2019, and those of other aspiring migrants and stories of migrants who have travelled from families left behind to show how, increasingly, education is seen as the easier option to migrate given the stringent visa regulations within the European Union countries and North America. Tim's excerpt expresses the sentiments shared

by almost all the participants of this study. In Anglophone Cameroon, young people and their parents connect migration with the process of 'becoming somebody in life' as a way of mitigating blocked socio-economic mobility impinged on them by postcolonial elites' continuous cling to power and resources (Fokwang, 2008). Although schooling and formal education is seen as a major route to socio-economic mobility and expansion of opportunities for individuals in society (Crivello, 2011), for most Anglophone youths, however, this has not been the case because education does not lead to socio-economic mobility given the high unemployment and the political/economic crisis that Cameroon is facing. Consequently, taking advantage of going out to study, even when it would not be followed through, is highly sought after (Atekmangoh, 2017; for studies in Ethiopia see also Schewel & Fransen, 2018).

Jonah elaborates:

> They are using studies like a passport to go and be doing their own things there. The main aim for them to go there is because here in Cameroon you cannot have a direct employment. If there was direct employment from countries over there, like Cyprus, Germany, people will not go directly for school, they will just go instead directly for job employment. So, when you go through school, they pay your fees, you can go like the first day, second day, then if you like, you start working your own with your company. After some time, if you have the money you go back to school.

Whereas the zeal for many aspiring migrants is to pursue education when they succeed in travelling, the socio-cultural pressures back home to send remittances outweigh studies. Similarly, the desires to embody 'bush-faller swag' dictates that they suspend studies in preference for work, as Ryan notes:

> Our mindset is that we are all going to school to have money at the end. The truth is that, for me, since I am in the master's program, I can say that, when I travel, I might not really have the intention to continue studies.

Beyond socio-cultural pressures, the need to become a 'man' reduces the appetite for studies in favour of coming of age. Being a man is rooted in cultural norms of 'rite of passage' that expect men within a certain age bracket to be economically independent—marry, have children and own a house as well as look after the family back home (see also Argenti, 2007, p. 7). For migrants, this requires living a frugal life to meet these demands to prove their capacity as a man (Nyamnjoh, 2014). Becoming a man therefore is imperative to avoid perpetual infantilization of young men who are derogatorily referred to as children in order to deny them power and agency. Peter explains:

> What is preoccupying my brain is to be a man. I want to have security in life that I know that if I have my children, I can take good care of them. Even if I'm married, I can take good care of my family. So being a man, is to have some financial security. You're sure that you can always be taking care of yourself and maybe some other person. So, I don't see myself like I'm already financially secure enough.

Hence, bushfalling becomes the pathway to successfully accumulate wealth and power to move out of this arrested childhood as well as negotiating transition to full social and cultural adulthood (Fokwang, 2008).

Besides the search for scholarships, Peter also looks for conferences that he can apply to for as a way of migrating. He has not been successful. He explains: "Sometimes I see conferences abroad….I apply. Like 'One Young World,' I applied but I wasn't taken. I have applied for several conferences that I see, and youth camps and I wasn't selected."

Peter's intentions of applying for conferences were clear—to go and not return: "If I go, and it's possible, I will not come back. But I never got selected."

Whereas the desire to travel is the norm, there are those who are determined to go and pursue studies and follow the legal route, as Eric explains:

> I know [that] after my studies I'm going to pursue the dream of actually going but in a legal way. And, so, maybe through…scholarship. Because I'm working very hard. I have a target this semester, 3.6 GPA upwards. Although I too have the desire to fall bush, I'm not obsessed about leaving through any *magu-magu* [illegal] way, I'll pursue my education.

Peter's willingness to use any means available contrasts that of Eric to go through a legal way and to pursue education. Eric's notion of travelling legally challenges the perceived notion in Cameroon among some youths that *book na scam*, loosely translated as 'education is a waste of time,' given that it does not lead to potential employment. According to my participants who subscribe to this notion, they opine that it is of less importance to accumulate certificates and end up unemployed, than seek ways of going out. Blaise explains:

> Even if you graduate, you're either underemployed or you're unemployed, you're no different from someone who has not gone to school or doing *buyam-sellam* [informal trader]. Hence, most try to figure out how to leave the country, they want to make money at all costs.

Making money at all cost ties in with the notion of being a 'man' because that is only when they move out of trapped adulthood.

Such desires are partly induced by the crisis in Cameroon, and steeped in the social normative values

of bushfalling, that is premised on the gains of migration ('bushfaller swag') and the display of 'development projects' at home, lavish spending and ostentatious consumerism (see also Atekmangoh, 2017).

Despite these desires to migrate, migration aspirations could lead to 'sour grapes' mechanisms (Van Mol et al., 2018), when all attempts to migrate yield no success—when aspirants apply for different scholarships with the hope of being selected, but nothing materialises. This is the case with Peter, whose unfruitful search for scholarships ended in his failed journey to Dubai:

> I started looking for scholarships, Mastercard, Commonwealth and DAAD scholarships and scholarships in different universities….Because the school fee is very expensive and I couldn't afford…I applied for several scholarships, [but] I was turned down.

During my second trip to Cameroon, I caught up with Peter again at the cybercafé we had first met, and he indicated that he has been sitting there for over five hours looking for and applying for scholarships. Going to the cybercafé is part of his weekly activities where he spends long hours to ferret for scholarship opportunities:

> I am always making research for scholarships. I have just been here and applying for scholarships. Unfortunately, I haven't had one. We [applied] and they selected 16 of us from Cameroon to write the final exam and do an interview with a professor in 2014, who came from Costa Rica for this purpose and, uh, he just needed one student from Cameroon.

Peter's determination to go out through education dovetails suggestions that formal education is a potential driver of both aspiration and capability to migrate (De Haas, 2014), despite the intimation by some that it is a scam. Most youths do not rely wholly on scholarship opportunities. Although women search for scholarships, most prefer to go under the guise of attending a conference or youth camp as their male counterpart. But for the most part, they depend on family networks to initiate the process for them.

4.1. Family Networks and Chain Migration

Studies have revealed the extensive help that migrant family members provide to enable the migration of those left behind (Nyamnjoh, 2014). This is either by facilitating family reunions or assisting travel to other destinations. Referred to as chain migration, this is seen as strategic ways of lifting families out of poverty and alleviating the financial burden of remittances on individual migrants (Atekmangoh, 2017). From this perspective, Sally explains how her uncle in the UK assisted her sister to travel to Cyprus using education as a pretext:

> My elder sister is in Cyprus. Yes, my uncle in the UK processed her documents, he got the contact of one girl who is presently in Cyprus. They processed her documents [and] she is going to study in a university in Cyprus, legally. The intention was to use school as a cover up even though the school said they will pay some of the tuition, but she said no, she cannot continue studying in the country. So, the intention is when she gets a base in Cyprus, she can easily access the European Union. So, she found a way to seek an asylum in the south and she is in the process of getting her papers there in southern Cyprus. Then, from there, seeks for citizenship and she can find her means into any European country (Sally, focus group interviews, July 17, 2019).

Sally's sister has done a mental mapping of her trajectory and where she sees herself in future. Like most migrants, the first destination is often a transit or liminal zone that is characterised by years of waithood.

In the absence of family networks for many who would like to travel legally, they resort to migration agents/brokers for help.

4.2. Taking Advantage of Their Aspirations: How Migration Agents Fuel Migration

I met Godlove at an internet café, which doubles as his office following the long hours he spends there. He is a migration agent and a *dokiman*—helps fill out visa application forms for those who want to travel (il)legally at a fee or procure falsified visa documents. Having served jail time for falsifying documents for one embassy in Cameroon, Godlove has not given up his trade. In a conversation with him, he indicated the different countries and fees, including flights, that he can help travelling to:

> I can get a study visa for undergraduate and postgraduate to Cyprus, Turkey, Georgia and Serbia for CFA 2.7 million FRS. For these countries, I have a partner who facilitates arrival and reception at the airport with temporary accommodation. Then there is also the Sweden asylum line for CFA 1.8million FRS. This line needs someone who is bold. The idea is to travel to Sweden on a false visa, and when one gets to the airport you create a 'motif' [deliberately lose the passport] and the police will take you to an asylum camp.

On the one hand, the increase in visa restrictiveness towards African citizens has change the character of migration to one of spatial diversification of migration (De Haas, 2014), on the other, it has deepened the gulf between dreams and legal realities creating a market in organized illegal passage (Collier, 2013). It has also emboldened brokers and aspirants to create and travel on fake documents respectively. While some brokers are known for being dishonest, Godlove's explanation of travelling on a false visa is still appealing to some whose

friends have been fortunate to follow that route successfully. For aspirants and agents, this modus operandi is a contestation of stringent measures by embassies and circumventing legal routes, given their mastery of which countries are easier to get study visas for aspiring migrants. This also means that we should recalibrate the one-dimensional perception of brokers as criminals to seeing the cultural role they play in facilitating the bush-faller culture for those who dare to travel. This, however, does not discount the fact that the agents are seen, in Jane's words, as:

> Individuals who are very ambitious, and they want to make money at all costs, so they tend to take advantage of peoples' desire to fall bush.

Jane's quote succinctly reveals the perception of migration agents by most, yet they are seen as an integral part of the migration process that cannot be by-passed. Migration agents are aware of the heighted desire to migrate and have taken to advertising their offers on Facebook, posters on streetlamp poles and walls of internet cafes frequented by the youth as seen in Figure 1. Similarly, others advertise their expertise in visa application processes.

These brokers seek to satisfy aspirants by 'convincingly' proposing various routes and university admission schemes with promises of facilitating the process at a fee. While such allures have been either met with marginal success, disappointment, loss of huge sums of money and frustrations, others have been able to travel through this route for education. Nevertheless, stories of frustrations abound given that syndicates prey on the gullibility of aspiring migrants by feeding them unverified information. Peter narrates his ordeal with an agent; he graduated from the university of Yaoundé 1 with an MA in English Language and Literature and has worked on various businesses to generate income to travel. In this journey, his parents had to borrow money from a micro-finance to complete what funding he had:

> I met someone, he's a travel agent here [Yaoundé], he assists people to get student visas, work and tourism visas to different countries, especially Dubai. So, I have a friend whom he helped to travel abroad. So, I went to the guy and unfortunately for me I went there when he was having financial problems. So, he decided to play a trick on me….He told me that he can help me to get a work visa but that I have to pay him CFA 1.5 million [approximately EUR 2,287]. That the company will pay the visa for me and pay a flight ticket for me to go and start working. I gave him an advance of CFA 1.000,000 FRS. And after some time, he told me that it would take about a month to do all of that. But he was turning me, and it took about three months. Later, he showed me a flight ticket that the company had paid for and the visa. And where I was living, I'd moved out of the house and sold my things. So, on the travel day he called me and asked me whether I was ready, I said yes. So later on, he called me again, I thought he was calling me that we should be going, but he told me that his brother who is in Dubai has just called him and told him that there is a problem in [the] company. That he is sorry, that he did not know, that the brother just called him now, that I should hold on a little bit, that he thinks that within the next few weeks the problem will be regulated and I could travel again….He offered to return some of the money and

Figure 1. From left to right: Pole advertisement by broker of courses to study in Ukraine and advertisement at a cybercafé for those in need of a *dokiman*'s assistance to fill out visa forms. Photos by the author.

> that's when I became suspicious…he stopped taking my calls and I found out where he lives and went and threatened him with death if he doesn't refund all the money. He finally refunded the money and I had to start life again.

The desperate desire of aspirants to fall bush, often without questioning the process or knowing where they are going often ends in frustration and agony, as in Peter's case. The general perception among the research participants is that the migration agents are economical with information, making it difficult for aspirants to make informed decisions. But importantly, they are noted to dabble in what Fokwang (2008, p. 243) terms as "an economy of *faux dossiers*" (forged documents). Consequently, like Peter, most aspirants fall into the agents' traps with very little recourse.

4.3. Misinformation and Misrepresentation of Destination Countries by Migration Agents

There is ample evidence that migration is self-sustaining owing to information received from existing migrants and networks (Nyamnjoh, 2014; Ramos, 2019). Such information is key as it prepares aspiring migrants towards eventual migration. However, the same cannot be said of most migration agents who care less about the welfare of their clients than about the fee to be made from assisting aspirants to travel (Alpes, 2017; Ullah, 2013). Often, the broker fee is raised by the families who either sell family-owned land or take loans, such as Ben's mother who borrowed CFA 2 million FRS (approximately EUR 3,048) and paid a broker to facilitate Ben's travel to Canada but failed. She lost the money. Similarly, Tim's sister was misinformed about a job opportunity in Kuwait and the family had to raise CFA 600, 000 FRS (approximately EUR 950) to pay the agent for her to travel. Tim explains:

> Last year, my sister followed one of the Kuwait lines [agent] and travelled for a job as a domestic servant. Prior to travelling, they gave her the job description and promised her a huge sum of money as salary. But when she got there, she realised that she was to [take] care of animals. So, she spent about one month [there] and…came back home.

The desire to travel at all cost (Alpes, 2012) appears to have intensified blind trust in migration agents and heightened gullibility in aspirants. It also points to the amount of risk that both aspirants and families are willing to take to turn aspirations into reality. Jonah concurs with the above by stressing how the gullibility of aspiring migrants play a role in the way they are preyed upon by brokers:

> Some just go out because of ignorance, they don't know. They just go, [some] of which…are not being educated that, if you are going to this country, this is what you meet, these are the challenges you have to face, you need to know this, you need to know that. Some of them [agents] they just say "ah *massa* [Mr.], it's easy to go out there." I have a friend who went to Dubai in the last two weeks, he is already back in Cameroon. He sold most of his property. He had two taxis on the road, he sold it [so] that he [could go] to Dubai. Because of the misinformation they gave him…

During this research, there was active campaign by NGOs dissuading youths from travelling to the Middle Eastern countries, especially Kuwait following numerous complaints from returnees. As most heeded the call, it signalled a downturn of business for brokers who had to devise other means of recruiting prospective migrants. They by-passed aspirants and spoke enticingly with family members abroad that are eager to send relations to Dubai.

4.4. By-Passing Aspiring Migrants to Sell 'Lines' to Family Members Overseas

The return rate of those who travel to Kuwait and Dubai following misinformation has become a signpost and deterrent for aspirants to look elsewhere, putting most migration agents working on these lines out of business. Consequently, they overlooked aspirants and contact family members of aspiring migrants abroad who might be willing to sponsor a relation about prospective opportunities in Dubai/Kuwait. Jonah narrates how the agent contacted his sister in America:

> My older sister in US has a friend in Dubai, who is collaborating with them [agents] and told her that, Dubai *dey fine* [is great]. They gave her all the impression that Dubai is superb….She called me to send her my passport, and she was telling me that she wants me to go to Dubai. I told her "I will not even step my foot there, don't even waste your time." Meanwhile, I had pleaded with my sister to pay my fee to study in Cyprus, but she refused. She doesn't have money to pay for me to study in Cyprus, now she's willing to pay a scammer 3 million [approximately EUR 4,573] for me to go to Dubai!

Jonah explained how this is done by someone with inside information about families abroad willing to sponsor someone at home. This comes at the backdrop of his parents' asking the sister to help him travel out. Alternatively, the brokers advertise on Facebook:

> They put it on their Facebook status—Dubai line 2 million, working permit 3 years, good salary, CFA 700,000 FRS a month, people are eager to go.

Inasmuch as brokers by-pass aspirants to make claim over them through other family members, the latter

equally overlook those they want to assist by affording them no say in the process. This demonstrates the interplay of structural forces that position young people into categories of dependency (Fokwang, 2008), thereby infantilizing them and excluding them of any decision-making processes. Migration brokers have often been looked at with disdain for preying on the vulnerabilities of aspiring migrants. Nevertheless, Jonah's experience with his sister exemplifies the complex and ambiguous relationship between aspirants and brokers. It (1) highlights the gullibility and risk taking of potential migrants and families in their desperation to migrate, (2) underscores the entrenched cultural values of migration that is reified by those abroad, and (3) shows how migration syndicates take advantage of people's naïveté. Jonah's excerpt shows the alluring imageries of a better life that is used to induce potential migrants and families to decide on moving overseas or sponsor the journey respectively (see also Ullah, 2013).

Despite the unscrupulous activities of some migration agents, there are those who explore new destinations, provide genuine 'lines' as well as networks in the destination country to enable migrants' soft landing.

4.5. "I Don' See Cyprus Line. I Have Found an Agent That Can Secure a Passage to Cyprus": The Search for New Lines and New Agents

A migration destination that is brokered by an agent is known as 'line,' though it is often not linear and entails lots of risk taking and anything could go wrong. Having lost about EUR 3,048 to unscrupulous agents for a failed Canada line, Ben's mother was not ready to entertain further conversations about migration agents until Ben told her that he has found a genuine 'line' to Cyprus. The losses incurred by families without repercussion underscore the moral economy that shrouds values and norms of brokering (Fassin, 2005), and highlights the hopes and fears of dealing with agents. Ben's mother was encouraged by the fact that the agent will be paid in instalments and the money will be completed after Ben arrives Cyprus. Despite her willingness to support her son to go out, she is however unwilling to pay the entire sum demanded by brokers following her recent losses, hence she welcomes the idea of paying this broker in instalments. What this shows is a sense of mutual responsibilities within families and therefore intergenerational continuity to ensuring the son becomes a 'man.'

According to Ben, the agent helped him look for university admission and accompanied him to the Turkish embassy to get a visa. When a slight complication arose, he was able to get more documents from the school to complete the consular-required documents and Ben got the visa and travelled.

The agent indicated that he is working with another friend who studied in Cyprus and who now works at the university. He said: "My aim is not to defraud anybody, we want to help young people who are desperate to travel, and for every successful journey, we get about five more because those who travel become our advertisers."

5. Conclusion

I have shown how migration aspirations and education among Cameroonian youths are intertwined and driven by cultures of migration. Extreme visa restriction, and heightened aspirations to migrate have altered the character of migration among young Cameroonians. Consequently, potential migrants use education as a front to apply for visa to migrate or intensify the search for scholarship. Nevertheless, socio-cultural prescripts have entangled and "bundled these aspirations in a way that makes it difficult to separate what is individual from what is collective, what is aspiration from what is expectation, what is for education from what is for work" (Crivello, 2011, p. 396). This is because the mindset is fixated on becoming a bushfaller in order to be a 'man' and hence a means for them to transition from children to adults.

Significantly, the desires are fed by existing socio-cultural values that elevate migration as a 'natural thing' to do in order to improve the living standards of the family as well as their status among peers. Conversely, a substantial educational attainment legitimises their case of having a visa on grounds of pursuing further studies, and perhaps providing the basis for supporting this "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004). Bushfalling which is legitimised through education that is not often acted on upon arrival, for the youth is the pathway to becoming somebody, for themselves as well as for their families.

Potential migrants' desperate desires to fall bush make them easy target for the agents who prey on their vulnerability and aspiration and often operate without a legal base and take advantage of the contemporary migration flow (Ullah, 2013). Often, in practical terms, brokers fit Fokwang's (2008) description as people who operate in forged documents. However, Godlove as well as Ben's agent are representative of agents as two sides of the same coin, not sure which way the coin will go when it is tossed. This is indicative of not painting brokers with the same broad-brush stroke as dubious as we miss the point but see each on its merit. The role of migration agents therefore places them within a complex and ambiguous position that challenges the primary components of the network theory that networks are helpful in migration, contest stringent border policing, and are looked up to by aspiring migrants as the person to unlock their destiny.

Parents play a key role in unlocking this destiny as they are the main funders of the journey when aspirations result in migration. Like Peter and Ben's parents, they are expected to come up with the requested amount to turn aspirations into reality. Despite the desires to migrate, there is inevitably a discrepancy between those whose aspirations to migrate became actualised. Of all the participants who were interviewed,

only three have finally migrated; one to Belgium and two to Cyprus.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. I am thankful to Liza Cirolia, Chioma Onukogu and Sue Nyamnjoh for additional comments. Special thanks to the youth who shared their time and knowledge throughout the research period. This article is based on research that was funded in the context of the Swiss Sub-Saharan African Migration Network (S-SAM).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 207–215
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3671

Article

Perceived Impact of Border Closure due to Covid-19 of Intending Nigerian Migrants

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Submitted: 18 September 2020 | Accepted: 19 November 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
With few exceptions, the European Council closed Europe for non-citizen travellers on 17 March 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many African countries, including Nigeria, have placed travel restrictions on or completely shut their borders to both travellers who want to enter the country and citizens who want to leave. These decisions affect many intending migrants seeking a way to reach Europe. Health and socioeconomic uncertainties related to lockdowns, border closure, and in some cases travel restrictions directly affect the dynamics of decision-making by migrants. This article employs in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to explore the perception of Nigerians who intend to migrate considering the influence of Covid-19. The study focuses on Nigerian migrants but touches on Nigerians in transit who are trapped in Niger en route to Europe through Libya and Morocco. While border closure by most of the sending and receiving countries led to a decrease in the intention of migrants to travel, Covid-19 as a pandemic does not significantly influence migrants' decisions primarily because of its global presence, merely leading to delays. In conclusion, after border reopening, intercontinental migration is expected to increase in both volume and intensity.

Keywords
border closure; Covid-19; lockdown; migration; mobility; Nigerian migrants; travel restrictions

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Covid-19 has become a health pandemic, but its impacts transcends health sectors and affect socioeconomic, political, diplomatic and, not least, migration trends. Lockdowns, travel restrictions, curfews, industrial closure and social distancing are making economic activities very difficult in most countries and completely impossible in some (World Bank, 2020d). This affects transportation especially in regions where entry into and exit from a country is banned. In this article we look at the case of Nigeria (John, 2020).

Studying the trend of migration in times of Covid-19 and its concomitant impacts becomes pertinent to unveil the effects of the pandemic in constraining migrants from travelling out, the impact of movement restrictions on labour shortages in receiving countries, as well as how anti-migration groups can exploit the fear created by the pandemic and masquerade it as a potential solution to a global health problem by pushing for strict legislations against migration (Natter, Czaika, & Haas, 2020). Exploring the potentials of these dynamics can provide insights that could aid policy development and preparation for a post-Covid-19 migration world—where fear, stigmatisation and global health politics are expected to govern migration, or at least influence it. It therefore points to the imperative of studying the uncertainties of migration amidst non-conflict restrictions such as temporary border closure.

Research linking migration to Covid-19 focus heavily on predicting the risk exposures of migrants and hosts (Ahsan, Iqbal, Khan, & Mobarak, 2020) and how the pandemic may change perception of people from hostility towards migrants to the realisation of human oneness and acceptance (Xhardez, 2020), while some topics dwell on its impact on laws and policies. Some studies

take a broader and generalised study of the impact of Covid-19 on migration including its effects on labour migration and the potential loss of migrant workforce in industries, probability of increase in inequality including racism and social exclusion, possible support for politicians with anti-immigrant far right ideology which could shut the door against millions of vulnerable migrants and resultant increase in irregular migration (Yayboke, 2020). While (Ramji-Nogales & Lang, 2020) and Yayboke (2020) heavily rely on anecdotes and policy briefs, this article explores the perception of intending migrants and documented their experiences, feeling, fears, hopes and thoughts. The survey was limited to Nigerian migrants that intend to migrate to Europe, which makes it particularly confined to African experiences of both regular and irregular migration patterns as they are affected by the pandemic. This article documents how intending migrants perceive the effects of Covid-19 on their decision to migrate, the conditions they live in transit countries and their expectations in a post-Covid-19 world.

2. Objectives of the Study

Our main objective was to examine the perception of intending Nigerian migrants on border closing due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on migration. Our main goals were as follows:

1. Examine the effect of Covid-19 on Nigerians' decision to migrate to Europe.
2. Assess the socioeconomic conditions of migrants on transit.
3. Examine post-Covid-19 expectations of intending Nigerian migrants.

3. Theory

"International migration…is continuously on the rise in an increasingly globalized context with substantial implications for population health policy and research" (Hossin, 2020). This statement captures vividly the intricate relationship between migration, policy change and the real or perceived health challenges that migrants present in the health dynamics of their receiving populations. Lockdowns, social distancing, intra-city movement restrictions and international travel bans brought untold difficulties to economic endeavours, leading to layoffs, diminishing economic activities, standstills and the outright closure of companies and other group associations (World Bank, 2020a). This foretells significant change, not only regarding migrant labour dynamics but also on matters of social acceptance or exclusion, stigmatization and racism.

Thus, while Covid-19 is a health issue, it has implications on all aspects of human life, including the economy, politics and policy making, migration and immobility. The pandemic presents far-right politicians in receiving countries with ample opportunity to push anti-immigrant policies that could restrict mobility (Gagnon, 2020). Justifiably, the weak testing capacity of countries in the Global South could render people migrating to Europe from Africa and Asia susceptible to discrimination, exclusion, denial or outright violence (Ahsan et al., 2020).

Remittances are major sources of foreign exchange in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. With the sudden stoppage of economic activities in Europe, increase in the rate of poverty in sending nations can be reasonably expected. This can constitute a push factor and fuel interest to migrate especially to countries that are anticipated to be able to bounce back from the economic effects of the pandemic. Within Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria remains the highest recipient of remittances (with $23.8 billion in 2019) far ahead of Ghana and Kenya (with $3.4 billion and $2.8 billion respectively; World Bank, 2020a). With a population of 200 million people, an increase in poverty and deprivation in Nigeria is likely to bring about alarming consequences, such as the fuelling of existing conflicts like Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, IPOB secessionist movements in the Niger-Delta and the Farmers-Herders conflict in North Central regions, all of which can push more people towards emigration.

This article interrogates the potency of Covid-19 in altering migration dynamics among intending Nigerian migrants who seek to travel to Europe but were inadvertently constrained by the pandemic and its concomitant travel policy changes. Do migrants respond to these restrictions by shelving their intention to move to Europe, or do they only bring their intentions to a temporary halt, pending lifting of travel bans?

3.1. Methods and Data

Data was collected from intending Nigerian migrants who are constrained by the pandemic and forced to stay and those who commenced irregular migration from Nigeria to Europe but got stranded in Niger republic en route to Europe via Libya/Morocco. The data were collected in two major streams, first from three officials of the Nigerian Immigration Service, then from interviews to 18 intending migrants. There was also one session of a focus group discussion held with seven migrants trapped in the Republic of the Niger. Purposive and snowball sampling were employed to identify a total of 28 respondents—10 in Nigeria and 18 in Niger. Respondents were identified through a snowball exercise where one respondent led us to the next. The group discussion in Niger was the result of time constraints: The seven migrants were not covered individually because they were working in a building site and we could only interview them during their one-hour break. Out of the 28 respondents, 21 are male and seven are female. They were engaged in discussions and the data collected were analysed using thematic narrative analysis of stakeholder submissions.

Respondents were given full freedom to choose whether to be interviewed or not and the right to

disengage at any point as well as the freedom not to answer any question they might not be comfortable with. Conditional consent was obtained from those that participated in the survey based on the principle of 'do no harm' and a pledge of utmost confidentiality. Those who did not agree were not interviewed. Transcribed interviews were the main focus of the analysis with emphasis on contents that offered insights into the main research questions. Interview contents were then compared against the research questions to identify patterns, which were latter grouped into sub-themes and presented in narratives. The identified themes were then analysed. Some statements that summarised common grounds are picked and presented in this article. The main theme of the interviews was to examine the extent to which Covid-19 and its concomitant travel restrictions affect the willingness of intending Nigerian migrants to reach Europe. We assess the hindrances that inhibit Nigerian migrants' movements, their fears, expectations and plans towards achieving their travel objectives.

The responses of all Nigerian intending migrants who aim to reach Europe are often presented as one: Although the data were collected from them individually, the analysis focuses on commonalities and does not systematically discuss individual cases. Doing so respects the wish of real anonymity among the participants, because almost all of those who travel through Niger to Europe are irregular migrants.

4. Findings: How Covid-19 Border Closure Affects Migration Decisions among Nigerian Migrants

Interviews with migrants who are still in Nigeria show that the lockdown in the major cities of Abuja and Lagos halted the formal processes of regular migration, making it impossible for migrants to travel legally. However, they remain firm on their decision to settle in Europe, thereby considering the hitches as only temporary. A 33-year-old migrant opined:

> Consular offices were closed indefinitely, which means even if we want to go ahead with preparations and wait for the borders to be opened, we cannot do that. This simply means everything is halted, but we know it is temporary.

This also indicates that though many migrants travel through irregular ways, a number of them pursue their European dreams through the formal, regular patterns. However, consular offices of many European countries resumed after relative successes against the pandemic (Artis, Carlei, & Bouteller, 2020; Chike, 2020).

Regardless of Covid-19 and its associated travel restrictions, most West African countries exempt transporters of food and medication from travel restrictions, prompting some irregular migrants to attempt and move on lorries to the next destination. There are stories of success among migrants trapped in Agadez and Dirkou in Niger. Around two thirds of the respondents did not have intention of cancelling their migration plans; they only consider temporarily postponing them. About one third of respondents wanted to cancel their travel plans for different reasons largely due to the economic hardship wrought by Covid-19 and general economic turbulence in transit countries. This is supported by the recent research that reveals that migrants are heavily affected by lockdowns and movement restrictions (Migration Data Portal, 2020). However, after lifting the lockdown and travel restrictions, the situation may change due to the possible reduction of economic pressures and resurfacing of opportunities that will support the journey. A respondent remarked: "We are praying and waiting to see what God will do, but if the situation does not improve, I will go back to my farm."

Maintaining their intention to migrate means waiting for the lifting of travel restrictions or moving through illegal, difficult and dangerous routes. In other words, due to the historical and cultural similarities of West Africans and the porous borders between countries, migrants take irregular routes and evade official checks at the borders to arrive at their next transit countries. Nigeria shares a border of 1,497 kilometres with Niger, 1,690 kilometres with Cameroon and 87 kilometres with Chad. Along this stretch there are more than 1500 illegal crossing routes that are increasingly difficult to monitor, especially because of the security challenges posed by armed groups (Bearzotti, Geranio, Keresztes, & Müllerová, 2015). This answers why the European Union and other international actors like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Spanish Guardia Civil, the German GIZ and the European Development Fund invested heavily in the provision of training and equipment to intensify and strengthen border controls in African countries in order to guard against migration and terrorism (Frowd, 2014), as well as making arrangements for Sub-Saharan countries to readmit returning migrants and clamp down on irregular migration in exchange for development aid—all as means of externalising border control (Haas, 2008). A secondary decision that migrants mostly take is paying for services of travel agents that smuggle travellers to Europe and end up dehumanising migrants on the way and at their destinations. A stranded 34-year old male migrant in Agadez narrated how he was separated from his wife and young child:

> We paid ₦470,000 [corresponding to about 15 months' minimum wage in Nigeria] to an agent to take us to Europe. When we reached Morocco we were separated into four groups to avoid being detected if we move as a large group. The group of my wife and daughter entered Spain, but our group was arrested by Moroccan authorities and detained for months before we were deported back home. I worked hard to save money and reunite with my family and having reached here, the borders are closed because of

> Corona, but we hope it will be opened soon, and we will reach Morocco.

Caused by socioeconomic problems in Africa, the scourge of human trafficking and smuggling along the Mediterranean routes has been a serious problem in West Africa for decades (Fleshman, 2009; Sawadogo, 2012; Triandafyllidou & McAuliffe, 2018), which resulted in concerted efforts by African and European nations to tackle it (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018). Regardless this collaboration, the significance of migration led scholars to conclude that "despite lip service being paid to combating illegal migration for political and diplomatic reasons, neither European nor African states have much genuine interest in stopping migration" (Haas, 2008). In addition, while the externalization of borders by European authorities facilitates the goal of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is to optimise regular migration to Europe, it also affects free intra-regional movement in the region, which is also one of the objectives of ECOWAS (2008). Argued in another way, the prevalence of human trafficking and smuggling across the Sahara to Europe only garnered momentum when European countries sought to externalize border controls and encouraged African countries to illegalize movements across the Sahara regardless of the ECOWAS free movement protocols (Brachet, 2018), resulting not only in failure of the European fight against 'invasion,' but also in an increased, albeit clandestine, movement across the Mediterranean. This is especially so after the adoption by Niger of a law against smuggling and trafficking of migrants on 11 May 2015 (UNODC, 2020b). The law was called the Law 2015–36 and adopted the Palermo Declaration that prohibits the smuggling of migrants by land, air and sea (Perrin, 2020). Before Law 2015–36, the Agadez route supplied about 65,000 migrants per year with about 45% coming from Nigeria alone, and most of whom were from the southern part of the country (BenSaad, 2003).

In some cases, the decision to migrate is affected by fear of social rejection while in Europe. Though most migrants believed Covid-19 is neither prevalent in Nigeria nor in any of the transit countries, they are afraid that they are likely to face social rejection on account of Covid-19 suspicions. Regardless, they are confident of finding their way to be accepted provided they can prove their health status and maintain adherence to preventive requirements as they are doing in Niger. A 25-year old female migrant in Dirkou posited: "Someone told me blacks find it difficult to be accepted and because our countries do not have good hospitals they will think all migrants are Covid-19 positive, but I believe they will understand." This may not be unexpected as migrants have always been stigmatised in crisis situations (IOM, 2020a) and during Covid-19, xenophobia and racism are increasing in Europe (Vertovec, 2020) and could lead to political, social and medical exclusion or even violence and crime (KAICIID, 2020).

5. Migrants Live in Difficult Socioeconomic Conditions during Covid-19

Niger has had open access to health facilities for all foreigners even before Covid-19 and placed virtually no employment restrictions apart from strategic organisations like security establishments like the army and the police, the civil service and elective offices. Migrants therefore work as porters, in the fashion industry, marketing of wares, on the farms and in private offices. This they do to feed, clothe and pay for rent—most of the migrants have dependents, either their own children, old parents or siblings which they hope to send remittances back for their upkeep. However, only very few of the respondents are migrating with a dependent, which increases the burden of surviving the journey especially for an irregular migrant. This has been the trend for more than a decade and is not expected to change anytime soon (Charriere & Fresia, 2008) leading to the conclusion that a quarter of all African migrants are children (UNICEF, 2019).

Around one in five of the respondents who were still in Nigeria, but who could not go back to their place of residence due to the interstate ban imposed in April 2020, engaged in petty trading along the Jibia–Dan Isa border: They commonly partake in selling second hand clothes, phone accessories and fruits. One respondent works as labourer in a construction site. These small-scale activities are common among both immigrants and emigrants in the country (Afolayan, 2009) and are mostly understood as temporary measures to earn income for food without deflating what was initially budgeted to finance the 'European dream.'

Migrants also face the dangers of human smuggling, where traffickers capitalise on migrants' desperation to feed their illegal businesses (Triandafyllidou & McAuliffe, 2018; UNODC, 2018, 2020a) with the proportion of female migrants increasing rapidly and, in most cases, ending in prostitution networks (UNODC, 2011). One of the female respondents in Dirkou (Niger) posited that:

> A travel agent asked me to pay ₦300,000 [equivalents of 10 months' minimum wage in Nigeria] for him to take me to Gibraltar [before Covid-19]. I paid half and some men told me he could be a *Yan Jigilan mutane* [trafficker], so when I asked him to refund my money he said since I don't trust him I should go and trust those who distracted me.

In times of movement restrictions, migrants, especially women, are prone to trafficking and easy subjects of sexual abuse. Shelley (2014) reported that 12,500 women, about half of all prostitutes in Italy, are Nigerian women that are trafficked into the country. Human traffickers could be registered travel agents or disguised as one to gain the confidence of potential victims. When uncertainty is so high, trust becomes pertinent in taking decision to wobble through uncertain waters and

reach Europe or distrust the 'agents' and stay foot. The travel agents replicate their experiences of finding a way through, especially within Africa where border officials pretend to allow legal travellers loaded on trucks to legal destinations and "pretend to ignore the final destination" (BenSaad, 2003). Smuggling of migrants generally increases by the day in both volume and sophistication (Anderson, 2016). The Nigerian groups are particularly noted to be highly structured: They try several methods of crossing over (UNODC, 2011) and hold the record of most success stories in reaching Europe (BenSaad, 2003). However, the fact that migrants are willingly engaging with the services of smugglers indicates that they may not be truly victims of traffickers. Sometimes they initiate the journey themselves, finance it and partner with the traffickers to facilitate their mission, as observed by Haas (2008).

All the migrants interviewed in Nigeria and the Republic of the Niger stated that they adhered to Covid-19 preventive measures provided by the countries. Indeed, the migrants I talked to in Niger expressed concerns that not all those who have shown signs of the disease are tested to ascertain their health status. However, they do not consider it a sign of discrimination against the migrants because the same limited testing also applies to citizens, primarily due to the shortage of laboratories that conduct the test in the country. Furthermore, "to reduce spread of the pandemic, non-governmental organisations such as IOM stepped up to create awareness and encourage preventive measures to protect stranded migrants in the country" (IOM, 2020b). Consequently, this resulted in emotional and physical stress because of the fear of infection and the knowledge that they are far away from relatives and their government, as well as the sudden change in ways of life especially being confined to one's room for a long time.

6. Migrants Have Mixed Expectations Regarding Post-Covid-19 Situations

Few migrants have the feeling that the economic crisis brought by the pandemic may result in rejection of migrants at workplaces due to job scarcity in European countries. It is predicted that Covid-19 will drive migrants to further unemployment and underemployment (Guadagno, 2020) with young migrants more likely to hold informal jobs and likely to be plunged into food and nutritional insecurity (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2020). The majority are very confident of getting a job and being integrated into European society once they arrive at the shores of Europe. Nevertheless, the hopes are neither built on reliable travel guidance nor any plan, but on hearsay and expectations, including scenes from European films. A 26-year old migrant in Agadez said: "We are seeing how they live their lives on TV, and if you compare it to our own, you can only hope to be there.''

Backlog of visa and travel applications may complicate regular migration processes and could easily spur an increase in the cases of irregular migration giving travel agents enough preys to feed on. As one respondent put it: "Many of us are waiting to apply for visa but some of us are resorting to travel agents but their fees are exorbitant." Increase in human trafficking is therefore a likely occurrence, especially across the Western Sahara, because the European externalisation of border control stepped up control measures in the Sahara to an extent that even legitimate travels are now made difficult by instruments such as Law 2015–36. Such restrictions are pushing travel agents to devise means of circumventing the laws by increasing the sophistication of human smuggling (Perrin, 2020; UNODC, 2020b). However, one of the respondents had a contrasting view: "What my elder brother used to send back home has stopped and it is all because he lost his job due to this Corona, so I am thinking of whether I can really get job if I join him in Valencia." Hence, he sounds discouraged by the hard economic realities of receiving nations.

7. Discussion

It is established that Covid-19 halts both regular and irregular migration due to the lockdown of cities and consular services as well as cross border travel restrictions that limits mobility of irregular migrants (Chike, 2020; Migration Data Portal, 2020; Yayboke, 2020). However, this points to only a temporary hitch resulting in accrual of intending migrants waiting for an opening. While fear of the disease is not a factor that stops migrants, the movement restrictions associated with the pandemic does (John, 2020). As soon as borders open again, Nigerian, Moroccan, Libyan and Europeans authorities, especially Spain and Italy, will have a hectic job of policing borders, deserts and waters to save lives and ensure adherence to national, regional and international laws of migration such as the 2015 Nigerian Immigration Act, the Law 2015–36, the ECOWAS' Common Approach on Migration and the UNHCR Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy. This route, as confirmed by the UNODC, is the most frequented by irregular migrants originating "from the Gulf of Guinea, crosses Mali and Niger and leads North, through Algeria, where it bifurcates east towards Libya and west towards Morocco. Agadez in Niger, Gao and Kidal in Mali, and Tamanrasset in Algeria are transit nodes" (UNODC, 2010).

After a temporary reduction in mobility along the Sub-Saharan and Mediterranean routes, migration flows from less developed countries have already picked up in June and the increase is sustained over the three months that follows, recording a total of 13,150 illegal crossings (UNODC, 2010), an increase of 155% from last year (Bielby, 2020; Yayboke, 2020). These findings validate the Raveinstein's (1885) claims that migrants are more inclined to short journeys thereby moving to nearby economic hubs on routes to destinations. This is because migrants along the Nigeria/Niger/Libya corridor are found to be organising their journeys in stages.

They first assemble in the Nigerian cities of Kano or Katsina, where they usually engage agents and sometimes make payments before stopping again in cities like Agadez or Dirkou (Niger) to work and earn money to facilitate the journey. Here they wait for the 'right moment' to move, as determined by the travel agents. When they reach Libya or Morocco, again they wait for another 'right moment' to sail across the Mediterranean. Nigerian migrants usually regroup in Nigerian cities such as Kano and Katsina and pay for their journeys in advance before reaching the doors of the Sahara via Nigerien cities such as Agadez and Niamey (UNODC, 2011).

This is because an increase in the rate of irregular migration from Nigeria and other West African countries to Europe after Covid-19 looks impending (Yayboke, 2020), and factors that accelerate the increase such as economic failures due to low oil prices (Onyekwena & Ekeruche, 2020), insurgency and other forms of insecurity (World Bank, 2020b), desertification and climate change-induced agricultural failures abound in Nigeria making the country's recession in worst in four decades (World Bank, 2020c). In this sense, uncertainties around Covid-19 and border crossing add just a little bit to a long list of uncertainties that characterise the expected migration experience of the respondents. On the pull side, the real and perceived opportunities in Europe makes migrants consider their journey a solution to misery, and thereby worth taking risks even through dangerous paths.

Imminently, the future of migration in West Africa will be dominated by smugglers and traffickers alike who masquerade as travel agencies and operate through clandestine methods to lure migrants (UNODC, 2020a) often robbing migrants on the way and abandoning them in the desert (BenSaad, 2003). With rising migrants' desperation and determined border surveillance by national authorities, travel agents claim to provide the solution which eventually attract lots of migrants (Fleshman, 2009; Shelley, 2014) resulting in more Nigerians being stranded in North Africa after unsuccessful attempts to reach Europe (UNODC, 2011). National and multinational arrangements to curb irregular migration and human trafficking will therefore face hectic times to deal with voyages of doom (Sawadogo, 2012)

Most migrants are building their hope on hearsay and fantasising European lifestyles without certainty of reaching Europe, obtaining a job and living a decent life. However, it can be hypothesised that with closure of companies and other economic activities in Europe, jobs are likely to be scarce, making it difficult to accommodate the stock of migrants heading to the Mediterranean waters to reach Europe. In the long run, a high supply of the migrant labour force, and a shortage of work opportunities will result in increasing migrant unemployment and migrants' willingness to return home while some may could be forced by circumstances to accept demeaning undeclared works with low pay, increased hours of work and against the national labour labour especially in agriculture and the building industry (International Labour Organisation, 2010) while the authorities and company owners leverage on the exploitation of cheap labour that enables them derive huge profits and afford the citizens opportunity to purchase quality produces at comparatively low prices (Bell, 2003). Millions of migrant workers battling poverty and unemployment are already returning home across the world after losing their jobs due to Covid-19 (International Labour Organisation, 2020). In Spain, migrant unemployment increased after the onset of Covid-19 to 70,200 (24% of total migrant population in the country) compared to 15,200 among nationals (European Union, 2020).

Uncertainty and Fear of social rejection and health induced stigmatisation could become certain especially when they reach Europe without proper documentation that will indicate their health status. This could be worse if European far right politicians use Covid-19 excuses to push for more restrictions against migrants which could affect social inclusion initiatives across the continent (Vertovec, 2020).

Most of the findings support Lee's (1966) assumptions that in both place of origin and place of destination there are many positive factors that keep people from moving and attract others to come in as well as negative factors that send people away and repel migrants. The essentiality of negative and positive factors in taking migration decision is however shaped by personal factors such as knowledge, awareness, intelligence, social connection and perception of the negative and positive factors that can be easily exaggerated or underplayed depending on the personal factors (Amaral, 2018). This explains the perceived greener pasture in Europe and repelling factors in Nigeria.

Hence, uncertainty regarding fears and expectations as perceived by individuals control decision of migrants moving from Nigeria through dangerous intervening obstacles to Europe.

8. Conclusion

This article examines the perceptions of Nigerian migrants en route to Europe via Niger who were affected by the Covid-19 movement restrictions. It documents their feelings, fears, living conditions and expectations with particular reference to the relationship between the pandemic and the intention or otherwise of migrants to engage in the voyage to Europe amidst the uncertainties and restriction wrought by the pandemic. This article reviewed stakeholder perceptions and related them to current literature in the field to validate claims, examine migration trends and predict future of migration from Nigeria to Europe.

The article concludes that migration—especially irregular movements—will probably increase in post Covid-19 times, as the respondents regard the pandemic only as a temporary setback as the decision to migrate to Europe remains unchanged. On the journey however,

migrants lived in difficult socioeconomic circumstances including personal and food insecurity, lack of shelter, and health challenges. As found by other researchers (Anderson, 2016; BenSaad, 2003), this article confirmed that migrants are often stripped of their properties, robbed and called degrading names while on transit especially where they are warehoused, tortured and maltreated with impunity in transit countries. Migrants also face challenges from the activities of traffickers that are cashing on migrants' desperation. Impliedly, the current consideration of migration across the Mediterranean as both a security and humanitarian challenge will continue beyond the pandemic in a passion described by Norman Myers and Jacques Chirac (as cited in Haas, 2008, p. 2) as a "flood" and the likely response of curtailing it will increase the propensity of trafficking (Haas, 2008) because the business blossoms whenever countries put more pressure to curtail illegal migration (Anderson, 2016). Thus, expectations of migrants when they reach Europe mirrors a flipped coin that is still in the air, either a greener pasture or a life of regret.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the Swiss Sub-Saharan Africa Migration Network (S-SAM) for sponsoring the publication of this article. I also appreciate the professional guidance received from Prof. Didier Ruedin of University of Neuchatel, Switzerland, and Malam Muhammad Kaku of the Public Administration Department, Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, Nigeria, for conducting the interviews.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 216–225
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3663

Article

Socio-Economic Inequity and Decision-Making under Uncertainty: West African Migrants' Journey across the Mediterranean to Europe

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Submitted: 15 September 2020 | Accepted: 17 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
Understanding the nexus between poverty, inequality and decision-making under uncertainty in migrants' journeys across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe remains a significant challenge, raising intense scholarly debate. Several suggestions have been offered on how to reduce migrants' journeys across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe in several guises, including the formulation and implementation of proper social, political and economic policies in Africa. Despite all odds and challenges, migrants from Africa cross state boundaries and stay in transit state(s) for limited periods, en route the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Underpinned by different migration theories and conceptual frameworks, our study applied a qualitative methodology to examine why migrants decide, under uncertainty, to cross the Mediterranean Sea from their countries of origin to the ultimate destinations in Europe. While focusing on the life experiences of purposively selected migrants from West Africa, the research seeks to address the underlying factors of irregular migration. The result of this empirical study clearly illustrates that limited access to opportunities, poverty and unemployment amidst precarious development challenges and the youth population bulge, exacerbate Africa's migration crisis. The study finally brings into focus empirical observations and provides suggestions for stakeholders' engagement in addressing African migration challenges.

Keywords
decision-making; Europe; inequality; Mediterranean Sea; migration; poverty; uncertainty; West Africa

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Migration in Africa, like other parts of the world, is a long-standing practice, spanning centuries. For diverse purposes, persons and groups in different categories, including students, highly- to low-skilled workers, artisans, nomads, professionals, refugees, asylum seekers and documented and undocumented migrants alike have been confronted with the choice of travelling within and beyond the continent. The diversity of mobility among Africa's population elucidates the significance of migration for Africa's development (Adepoju, 2000). This complex phenomenon has been propelled by diverse, overlapping and often shifting drivers (Carbone, 2017; Sithole & Dinbabo, 2016). Hence, analysing the drivers of migration requires understanding how migrants decide to migrate, where, when and by what means they decide to migrate, considering the limited information at their disposal and the inherent challenges in the process.

West Africa, as the name implies, is the westernmost part of Africa, bordered to the north by the Maghreb and North Africa, to the east by Central Africa and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and west respectively. It comprises 16 independent states, namely, Benin,

Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Most of these states (except Mauritania) are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an Abuja-based sub-regional intergovernmental organisation established on 28 May 1975 with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos. Officially francophone, anglophone and lusophone, the countries share similar native languages, culture, history and customs, and are bounded or separated by geographical features including vast lands, deserts (including the Sahara), mountains, savannahs and water bodies—rivers such as the Niger River, lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Language and geographical features are two key factors that enhance intra-African mobility towards socio-economic integration. Beyond the considerable number of intra-African migrants and other non-African citizens crisscrossing West Africa, the countries of the region serve as both origin and transit for large numbers of migrants, particularly en route to Europe.

It was the objective of our research to better understand the nexus between poverty, inequality and migration decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and people's decisions of where to migrate given the limited information available to them. Our study aggregates the aspirations of irregular migrants from West Africa both in countries of origin and transit and how they maximise their ability to migrate, particularly to Europe, despite seemingly impossible odds or difficult barriers. The two-step models, that is, the 'ambition to migrate' and the 'ability to migrate,' critically explain why migrants make decisions without adequate information and how contradictory information affects decisions, highlights the critical factors of narratives and expectations, the influence of human biases (preferences) and bounded rationality on the ambitions to migrate (Carling & Schewel, 2018). The subsequent sections provide a review of migration decision-making, the theoretical models, methodology and discussion of our findings. The final section offers recommendations and the general conclusions of our study.

2. Why Do Immigrants Move To Countries in the Global North?

Several arguments have been advanced on why immigrants move to countries in the Global North despite seemingly impossible odds (Baláž, Williams, & Fifeková, 2016; Carbone, 2017; Dinbabo & Carciotto, 2015; Smith, 2019). While expectations and narratives reflecting the preponderance of bounded rationality or biases shape ambitions to migrate, decisions to migrate are often affected by flawed and contradictory information. Nevertheless, the resort to maximise the capability to migrate in both countries of origin and transit deserves further examination. This article, therefore, undertakes a systematic review of literature involving the critical appraisal of significant views and theoretical models, and does a qualitative synthesis of our research findings.

The new decision space characterised by uncertainties has been unpacked in critical studies, including synthesis of uncertainty in analytical decision-making (Comes, Adrot, & Rizza, 2017; Kale, Kay, & Hullman, 2019). Technology, arguably, enables new forms of data aggregation and participation, and indeed presents a new stratum of complexity in decision- and policy-making, while not offering the end solution (Comes et al., 2017). This reflects the challenges of fragmented and 'post-factual' society and the contradictory nature of information, further amplified by complex socio-technical interdependencies and big data. Thus, the imperative of participatory approaches on decision-making in the big data era and enhanced roles of humanitarian actors is underscored. Accordingly, Kale et al. (2019) illustrate contemporary practices in applied research synthesis to match design challenges. The synthesis enables a feasible analytical comparison and shifts the emphasis from rationales of decisions to impacts on results. As established by revelations of canonical work, people's substitution of heuristic judgement for complex reasons characterises how they undermine uncertainty. Arguably, the desire to limit uncertainty leading to unwarranted expressions of certainty often produces negative decision-making consequences, individually or organisationally (Kale et al., 2019). Again, decision-making influenced by uncertainty may be infused by feelings of doubt or conflict, undermining the choice between alternative processes of actions. Thus, the synthesis of a possible analysis pattern, gathering information on the conviction behind choices, and the influences of interactive systems are significant to assessing an individual's judgement and decision-making under uncertainty.

Contrary to neo-classical theoretical assumptions, potential migrants contend with information overload and imperfect information in varying contexts (Baláž et al., 2016; Civljak, 2019). According to Baláž et al. (2016), the information overloads encompass the complexity of diverse socio-economic matters including crime, personal freedom, language barrier, health, climate and life satisfaction. In practice, the challenges of missing information are surrogated by existing knowledge or image of particular countries. Significantly, the study's experimental research methods enable proper identification of potential migrants' information search patterns. Secondly, it reflects on the decision weight attached to attributes of quality of life, especially economic vs non-economic criteria. Thirdly it highlights the individual's judgement in deciding on potential migration destinations under varying conditions of information (Baláž et al., 2016).

Similarly, individual preferences, socio-economic environments and social interactions are significant factors for predilection or choice of decision under uncertain conditions. These resonate where the desire for self-worth validation, career opportunities, a departure

from stifling societal or social norms, and prospects for 'normal and happy lives' inspire decisions to migrate (Civljak, 2019). Accordingly, the influence of family members, the purpose of starting a family, potential boredom with unworthy lifestyles, the probability of repatriation and further migration elsewhere and favourable opportunities enhance the so-called Serbian Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) decisions to live in the United States of America. The author underscores the significance of knowledge and transnational networks on the integration, acculturation and wellbeing of migrants amidst uncertainties. While migrants often live in metropolitan areas, transnational attachments induce opportunities among them, the SIEs' example reveals strong evidence of prospective professional and economic benefits through family connections and social networks as factors for migration decisions.

Moreover, migration networks, particularly social networks or location-specific social capital, influence migrants' decision-making (Haug, 2008), and by extension influence the decision to settle or return, particularly among highly-skilled first-time international migrants (Achenbach, 2017). The Bulgarian migrants' case illustrated in Haug (2008) reveals that social capital at the destination area positively influences emigration intentions and return migration. Contrariwise, social capital in the residence country or area may negatively influence return migration as illustrated in the study of Italian migrants in Germany (Haug, 2008). Migrants' actions reflect their larger social, economic, political and cultural environments, and are influenced by several factors. These environments influence their priorities and values, especially the aspects of employment and reproductive choices, settlement abroad and return migration (Achenbach, 2017). Therefore, the significant relations between economic and sociological facets of migration illustrate the impacts of social capital on migration decision-making and chain migration processes.

Furthermore, the current African migratory pattern towards Europe, compared with the 1970s influx of Mexicans to the United States of America, illustrates the influence of geographical proximity and adequate knowledge of the destination and routes (including irregular ones) shared between successful and prospective migrants; this significantly influences migrants' decisions against all odds. As a significant migrant reservoir, induced particularly by its youthful demography, Smith (2019) anticipates that over 100 million African migrants may cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe over the next two generations. While projecting Europe's demographic decline and rapidly ageing population to enable it to accommodate some 50 million immigrants by 2050, pervasive poverty, unemployment and inequality are central to migration decisions in sub-Saharan Africa. Such decisions, he argued, are made possible by access to information and affordability of internet or 4G telephony by half of Africa's population against defying odds (Smith, 2019). Hence, through the value and perception of his larger environments, a migrant makes decisions (certain or uncertain) on how to achieve goals or solve problems. The decisions to settle or return are further impacted by a migrant's (individual) attributes or internal processes of his social and economic environments. Therefore, the knowledge of the above and the policy towards it, are capable of influencing decisions on migration by diverse actors and for different purposes. These can be understood from several theoretical assumptions.

3. Theoretical Models

Given the increasing intellectual efforts in international migration and its interconnecting issues, the theorisation of migration remains inadequate when compared with related fields of international transactions (Wickramasinghe & Wimlartana, 2016). However, analysis of international migration may not be pinned down to a single theory due to the diversity and complexity of its domains. Thus, the theoretical perspectives of international migration and the categorisation of migration theories are conceived in the literature according to the origin of such theories, relevant discipline, patterns of migration, and the theories' application to modern contexts of migration. Wickramasinghe and Wimlartana (2016) conceive a level-based analysis of migration theories across three categories—micro-, macro- and meso-level. Such conception resonates across disciplines including anthropology, demography, development, economics, geography, and sociology which endeavour to theorise the causes and effects of migration, with special emphasis on economic, cultural, sociological, and geographic factors (Wickramasinghe & Wimlartana, 2016).

Similarly, Kureková (2011) categorises migration theories into two sub-divisions: 'determinants of migration' and 'perpetuation of migration,' based on the subject analysis. Yet, systems theory, new economics theory, human capital theory, dual labour market theory and neo-classical theory are classified within the 'determinants of migration.' The theories classified under the 'perpetuation of migration,' include transnational migration, network theory and migration system theory. In the same vein, Huzdik (2014) sub-divides theories explaining the 21st century's migration process into four classifications. These include historical structural approach, behavioralist and equilibrium tradition, migration systems and theory of segmented labour. These, accordingly, are influenced by factors including wage differences, individual factors, economic globalisation, economic culture, institutional capacities to enhance migration, labour market disparities, and regional contrasts in the demand and supply of labour. The classifications above reflect on different assumptions and hypotheses, research objectives, interests, pursuits and decomposition of analyses. Therefore, the study is underpinned by the network theory and the decision-making theory, as both embrace the three level-based migration categories—micro-, macro- and meso-levels of analysis.

The network theory explains the perpetuation of migration flows, based on the logic that potential migrants rely on current and former migrants, including their social networks and information provided in the destination countries towards cost maximisation and risk reduction (Castles, 2000). The theory underscores the meso-level factors—"social relations/ties among kinship or family groups, households, friendship circles, neighbourhoods and formal institutions" (Faist, 1997, p. 188). While migration is widely considered a process and not an event, and that macro analysis overlooks migrants and their families' agency and reduces their decisions to economic factors, especially labour in the Global North. Hence, decision-making theory encompasses the basic assumptions of rational actors and the rationality of perfect information. It centres on the following approaches: (1) normative, i.e., models of "how idealized persons think or act," (2) prescriptive, i.e., attempts to enhance the decision-making processes of persons and (3) descriptive, i.e., decision-makers' perceptions, constraints and processes of consideration (Achenbach, 2017, p. 49).

These illustrate the decision-making process of a migrant in respect of an individual's rationality, how (s)he processes a problem or concludes on a solution, and the timing and causality of the action birthed by the decision. Both micro and meso-level perspectives critically underscore rational explanations of cost maximisation and risk reduction (Achenbach, 2017). Considering the level-based analysis of understanding migration, the two theories integrate elements of micro, macro and meso-level categories in migration decision-making processes and outcomes. Therefore, this study understands migration decision as a process of the individual's rational thinking (primary element) and the permutations among integrated networks of persons, social groups and institutions (secondary element) towards the individual's objectives. The process of the individual's rational thought and behaviours channelled towards solving problems or prospective accomplishments and the push by the network of persons, social groups and institutions illustrate the interplay between the primary element (embodied in decision-making theory) and the secondary elements (epitomised by the network theory). This is critical to migrant's maximisation of costs, opportunities, information, resources and risks reduction in achieving desired outcomes.

4. Methodology

The research methodology employed a mix of secondary data analysis and field data collection to understand why migrants make decisions in conditions of uncertainty, to travel from West Africa, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to the ultimate destination of Europe. A purposeful selection of informants from West Africa, mostly from Ghana, the Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, including West African migrants in Libya, were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews were conducted in different geographical locations and spatial settings (West and North Africa and Europe). In total, 25 interviews were conducted with refugees, asylum seekers and return migrants as well as with employees from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As part of the field data investigation, a reformulation of the narratives presented by informants, taking into account the context of each case and the different experiences of each informant, was used. In general, the analysis helped in revising the primary data by researchers. Throughout the research process, data gathered from informants were treated with confidentiality and anonymity, as agreed during the consent process.

Given the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imperative of social distancing, online platforms/internet tools were used to collect data (telephone, WhatsApp and video conferencing facilities, such as Zoom) in the English language and then transcribed manually. The informants' particulars were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities. The findings were grouped thematically across four headlines: decision-making under uncertainty (cost maximisation and risk reduction), ability to migrate, sourcing information and expectations and prospects for migration, as deduced from both the literature and primary data. A framework analysis was applied in terms of identifying a thematic framework, coding, charting, mapping and interpretation. This was done manually using six iterative processes, i.e., data familiarisation, coding, themes identification, themes review, labelling and repetition (of processes) to produce coherent explanations. Findings were substantiated with purposely selected direct quotes. To arrive at conclusions, the degree of correlation between the information gathered and the theoretical/conceptual framework was used as a guiding principle and parameter.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1. Decision-Making under Uncertainty: Migrants' Rationality for Cost Maximisation and Risk Reduction

Decision-making under uncertainty is a consequence of several choices and a set of different outcomes. This reflects on the rationality of cost maximisation and risk reduction (Clemens, 1996; Pate-Cornell & Dillon, 2006). To investigate issues about migrants' decision-making under uncertainty or risk to leave the country of origin, informants were asked what/who influenced their decisions to migrate and if any customs or beliefs enhanced their decisions to migrate. Nearly 70% of respondents revealed that Libya's 'pull' factor has historically been its potential for employment opportunities and geographic location (accessibility to Europe). Many respondents also indicated that Libya served as a popular destination for

migrants seeking different types of opportunities. Some of those interviewed indicated clearly that the opportunities for economic gain remain a reality for them and Libya still presents a viable option for migration. Several informants suggested that the road to Libya is marked by a long desert crossing, frequently facing hunger and thirst, leading to death in precarious conditions. Some migrants were abused by smugglers who were supposed to ensure their safe passage, but were notorious for robbing them of their belongings and 'dehumanising' their 'customers.' Much of the time migrants are at risk, not just from smugglers' trafficking them but also from arrest and detention by the authorities of the different transit countries. The final stage of the journey is the boat ride across the Mediterranean Sea from the Libyan coast to southern Italy, Malta and elsewhere. The boat trip is a common experience of migrants of all nationalities travelling through Libya toward Europe. These underscore the 'pull factor' of travelling to access opportunities, as reasons for decision-making in uncertain conditions.

The informants alluded to the socio-economic circumstances in their countries, e.g., youth unemployment, poverty, inequality and difficulties in accessing opportunities, as reasons for uncertain decision-making. Hence, migrants make unpredictable choices in their lifetime to meet the daily requirements of family, individual and community members. To them, this does not require careful planning to travel from the countries of origin to the country of destination, and without thorough consideration to begin a long journey. A similar pattern, as captured in the following quotes, was recorded amongst migrants from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gambia:

> I did not inform anyone before travelling. I am a guy who rarely discusses my big steps in life with people. I made the decision, gathered some money and travelled to Niger. It was there I met some Nigerians of like minds to travel by road to Europe. (James, Nigerian migrant in Tripoli, Libya)

> Sometimes you must decide in a haste! Certain decisions require careful planning, but when it comes to travelling, you need to move. You have to take risks, else nothing good will come your way. (Favour, Sierra Leonean migrant in Tripoli, Libya)

> I know it is dangerous to travel by road to Libya but man must survive! When starvation is staring you in the face, nobody will decide for you, but do it by force! (Muhammed, Gambian migrant in Misrata, Libya)

> I was not certain of any danger, I made a daring move without a prior plan. I was ready to face death and survive [rather] than to starve to death. (Fred, Nigerian migrant in Malaga, Spain)

Overall, migrants do not consider the challenges of irregular travel. However, several respondents, especially migrants from West Africa, reported they take individual decisions under uncertainty to risk the long trip, with the final destination (Europe) uppermost in their minds. In this respect, the geopolitical location of Libya makes it a transit route for migrants moving to Italy and other states in Europe. However, most journeys end in disaster, with deaths of family members, acquaintances and fellow travellers:

> I have been to Libya since 9 January 2020, I arrived at about 7:00 PM because I wanted to cross the sea to Europe [Germany]. But I could not continue due to the Coronavirus pandemic. (Uche, Nigerian migrant in Misrata, Libya)

> I will move after some time. Libya is not safe. They are killing people now and then. Foreigners are vanishing without a trace….I am just gathering some money to cross the sea to Italy; that was my plan before coming here. (Favour, Sierra Leonean migrant in Tripoli, Libya)

Indeed, some respondents reported that they fled to Libya after escaping imprisonment or shortly after release from custody, mostly for a limited duration in various Libyan and Algerian towns. Despite these uncertainties, customs or values often motivated respondents' decisions to migrate, including out-migration to enhance their situations towards achieving their final goal. In the context of Ghana, there is a tradition or belief that a man is not expected to sit on his 'buttocks' but to walk! Respondents suggested they were born to make tough decisions and migration is one such decision. Parents usually advise youths (in Ghana and Nigeria) to settle elsewhere and start a new life away from the family home or hometown if they want to be happy or successful. This rationalisation, according to the respondents, has long-term impacts on those who fail to travel but live in their groups and fail to succeed. This situation causes many youths to look for alternatives in uncertainties and seek to travel overseas through Libya in search of a better life.

Some informants of Nigerian origin maintained that the need to be influential in their communities is among the reasons migrants resort to irregular means of travelling. Others see migration as part of the human tradition and link it to the Biblical Noah. According to one of them:

> Human beings started migrating in the time of Noah; hence, it is an age-long event and a part of our tradition. (Uche, Nigerian migrant in Misrata, Libya)

On the whole, West African migrants interviewed were youths, whose socio-economic problems and the perceptions of El Dorado in Europe propelled their decisions to leave their countries of origin amid uncertainties. Moreover, as mentioned by several informants, the absence of information, miss-perception about Europe and social/peer pressures enhanced decisions in uncer-

tain conditions. Following the Valletta Summit in 2015, African and European leaders unequivocally acknowledged the benefits of well-managed migration and committed to developing common strategies to address its inherent challenges (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020). In this regard, the International Organization for Migration is implementing a project funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to strengthen the protection and reintegration of migrants. As part of this initiative, an awareness-raising strategy is being developed to inform returning migrants about the possibilities of assistance and protection under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative. This strategy will also inform potential migrants, communities of origin and the public about the dangers of and the alternatives to irregular migration. The awareness-raising activities implemented under the project aim to ensure that migrants make informed migration decisions. In this regard, the IOM plays an important role in assisting return migrants and providing support for the needy across all West African countries, including Equatorial Guinea and Mauritania.

5.2. Ability to Migrate

This is defined as a set of tasks that an individual, community or a system are potentially able to undertake at a certain performance level with the use of internal or external resources (Robeyns, 2003). To understand and analyse migrants' ability to migrate, respondents were asked about their conditions when they considered out-migrating, what form of risks they took to facilitate their travel, what role the family or community played in supporting their travel abroad, and how they maximised resources amid challenges while in transit. From the available information, respondents decided to migrate using various means to facilitate their travel to Europe. Several migrants confirmed that the ability or resources to migrate include access to finance, a valid passport for international travel, the connection with smugglers of migrants across borders among others. These means are often sourced from migrants' savings, financial resources received from family members, remittances from successful relations and friends abroad and their connections. Some informants highlighted as follows:

> I was a businessman; I was making it very well in Ghana. The 5,500 USD paid was my own money. I didn't ask anyone for help. (Quarm, Ghanaian migrant in Algeria)

> I used my entire savings. Now the business has collapsed. I don't know how I am going to start again when I finally return to Nigeria. It's a dangerous thing I did. I pray nobody finds [themselves] in this situation. (Jude, Nigerian migrant in Benghazi, Libya)

> My brother assisted me to pay for my travel. He gave me 1,000 cedis equivalent to 171.09 USD]. At the community level, I can only mention my friend's support to get to Libya. (Kofi, Ghanaian migrant in Benghazi, Libya)

> My decision to travel to Libya was influenced by a friend. He had a brother in Libya who had invited him to join him in Libya. When he told me, and considering that things were difficult in Accra, I decided to join him. I informed my older brother who supported me financially to embark on the journey. My parents never approved of this, so we decided not to inform them. (Kyeremeh, Ghanaian migrant in Sirte, Libya)

For many migrants, the long journey to Europe, by road and sea, is fraught with risks and life-threatening circumstances. The journey usually consists of three stages: a desert crossing to the Maghreb to the Libyan border; heading from the border into the northern coastal towns within Libya; and a boat trip across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. The migrants usually give a large amount of money to traffickers at all phases of the journey to allow them to reach their destinations. Some of the migrants were adequately prepared, while some were less prepared for eventualities. This is captured in the following testimonies:

> I took a loan from the bank [3,000 USD] and sold my barbing shop for 2,500 USD in addition to my savings [1,500 USD], altogether 7,000 USD, to facilitate my travel to Spain. As we speak, I am still sending money home to settle the bank loan I took. (Yaw, Ghanaian migrant in Huelva, Spain)

> Because of previous experience, I knew my way out and what to expect in the desert, so I planned very well for it, had all my food, hid my money on me because you could easily meet bandits on the way and they would take everything from you. I also arranged to pay the bandits or soldiers we met on the way. (Kyeremeh, Ghanaian migrant in Sirte, Libya)

> I did not know a lot of things there, so I didn't make proper arrangements for eventualities. While in Niger, we were attacked by some robbers and they took everything from us. I nearly stopped travelling to Libya. I had to call my wife to send some money to pay for my transportation to Libya. (Martin, Nigerian migrant in Sirte, Libya)

These testimonies reveal that individuals' savings, support from household members and bank loans strengthened the migrants' capability to travel amidst uncertainties. While financial remittances were also an important factor, the past experiences, connections with 'travel agents' and the availability of professional smugglers in transit routes thus bolstered irregular migrants' capability to travel.

5.3. Sourcing Information

The objective of investigating the sources of information at migrants' disposal, is to ascertain how information influences the decision to migrate. Hence, informants were questioned about the knowledge or impressions of their destination countries, the proposed route, and information about transit/destination countries. This also included information about their household/family members and friends, resident in Europe. Respondents indicated that the existence of social media and other social networks including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, migrants' connection and relatives abroad and other technologies facilitated the sharing of opinions. Information shared through the building of virtual networks and communities aided migrants' decision-making. Accordingly, technologies provided them with quick means to communicate with family members, friends and acquaintances. Migrants usually engage with social media via smartphones, web-based software or web applications when sourcing information on travel to Europe. A range of views expressed by respondents include the following:

> Significantly, the network I built with my friend helped in shaping my life. Some people rely on Facebook and other social media to get a 'connection man' to support their travel abroad. I did not do that, thanks to my friend. (Yaw, Ghanaian migrant in Huelva, Spain)

> My relationship with my friend helped a lot in the sense that he guided me through the decision-making process, who to contact on the way, and even at the final destination in Libya. My transit was fruitful, thanks to my friend. (Kyeremeh, Ghanaian migrant in Sirte, Libya)

> Social media? Look, the 'burgars' [i.e., local name for travellers in Ghana] will usually take pictures in a very nice environment and sometimes in front of a beautiful car and share on Facebook. These are beautiful images of fulfilment you would want to experience….Any time I see those pictures, I feel like I am the one there, and that influenced my decision. (Quarm, Ghanaian migrant in Algeria)

> Social media has informed my decision. The only contact person we had in Libya was my friend's brother. (Christian, Ghanaian migrant in Benghazi, Libya)

5.4. Expectations and Underlying Prospects for Migration

To assess the expectations and motivations for migrating, informants were asked different questions. These included their knowledge of the destination countries' opportunities, goals they planned to achieve or problems they proposed to solve, by migrating to the destination countries, as well as their possible decision to return. Well above 80 percent of the respondents identified the search for survival and greener pastures as the major factor for millions of youths, including women from parts of West Africa, to risk possible death in their attempts to cross the Maghreb and the Mediterranean Sea, en route to Europe. Such individual decision-making under uncertainty, despite the dangers associated with leaving the country of origin, is fuelled by the lack of economic and employment prospects, political turmoil, unfavourable social relations, peer pressure, misunderstandings, and the quest for a better future. Such factors have led to a large proportion of the population looking for alternatives to better livelihoods for themselves and their families (Smith, 2019). Interestingly, most of the migrants planned to return to their countries of origin. The following comments reflect some of these perspectives:

> Job opportunities! I still have that image today—I believe there are opportunities in Europe. Due to the work prospect, I paid a huge amount to the agent. I was convinced that once I reached Italy I would be able to make it in, multiple times. (Quarm, Ghanaian migrant in Algeria)

> The fact that there are jobs for people in the construction sector, influenced my decision. I was not worried about the dangers—my interest was in job opportunities. (James, Nigerian migrant in Tripoli, Libya)

> I knew Niger is a transit country for most Africans travelling to Libya. The fact that there will be a lot of people coming here to start their journey influenced my decision to come back to start my business. Because, once people transit through here, I believe they would need some items to take along. (Fred, Nigerian migrant in Misrata, Libya)

Some of the responses on return migration include:

> Oh yes! I will go back one day to Ghana. We need to go back to show that at least we have also made it in life. (Yaw, Ghanaian migrant in Huelva, Spain)

> Yes, I want to set up my own business in Ghana, so I would like to go back when I made enough money. (Kyeremeh, Ghanaian migrant in Sirte, Libya)

> To Nigeria? Not now, my brother! Maybe in the future when I feel that I have made enough [money]. But to go back to Nigeria this time, ah ah. (James, Nigerian migrant in Tripoli, Libya)

> There is no going back for me. I have suffered a lot there! It is better here for me than to go back to the stress in The Gambia. (Muhammed, Gambian migrant in Tripoli, Libya)

The above empirical evidence clearly shows that migrants' decision-making under uncertainty to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe is based on expectations of escaping poverty, and hopes of a better life. Accordingly, the journeys undertaken by large numbers of migrants from West Africa to Europe usually take place by boat, across the Mediterranean Sea. On these long journeys to Europe, most migrants are at risk of serious injury, human rights abuses, or even death, during these perilous trips of desperation. The fragility of the Sahel states also heightens uncertainty due to conflict or militant insurgency and militarisation of migrants routes by local and foreign-backed mercenaries most especially in Libya and Niger. The growing insecurity and political instability have contributed to the lack of opportunities for young African populations. This brings to light how such conditions create the means for traffickers and smugglers of migrants to operate along viable transit routes in the Sahara, the Maghreb and through the Mediterranean. Consequently, the need to migrate significantly explains the sustained movement of Africa's youths through the Sahara despite the inherent dangers.

6. Conclusion

The foregoing illustrates that socio-economic inequity, most especially the lack of opportunities and expectations of a better life underlies decision-making in uncertainty among African migrants. This phenomenon echoes Smith's (2019) postulation that limited access to opportunities, poverty, inequality and unemployment amidst precarious development challenges and youth population bulge, exacerbate Africa's migration crisis. The empirical evidence provided by West African migrants to the Maghreb (Libya and Morocco) and Europe, further underpinned by the Decision-making and Network Theories, reveal that factors external to migrants, the ability (resources) to migrate, sources of information/networks, and the prospects/expectations of a migrant are among the crucial social, cultural, economic and political dynamics that uniquely mix to influence every migrant's decision-making process differentially. The external factors impacting on migrants include customs/beliefs; family; the migrant's society—the 'push' factors—and the characteristics of the destination country—the 'pull' factors (Dinbabo & Badewa, 2020; Dinbabo & Nyasulu, 2015). The migrant's ability factors may include financial capacity; household support, including remittances; ability to take risks; plans for eventualities; and resilience against unforeseen circumstances particularly in transit or destination countries. This also encompasses families' support, communication and concerns for migrants' wellbeing towards risk reduction and cost maximisation (Pate-Cornell & Dillon, 2006).

Moreover, sourcing information (about the transit routes, destination and means of travel) may be influenced by social media, and social networks, including family, friends, returnees, and professional migration agents. Finally, expectations or motivations of migrating may be shaped by the impressions of a destination country and the opportunities it provides, the role of transit countries, the impact on return migration and accomplishing (the migrant's) goals. Hence, individuals' judgement to decide on potential migration destinations varies according to diverse information, support systems and prospects for opportunities (Baláž et al., 2016). In other words, a migrant's reflection of his larger socio-cultural, political and economic environments influence his priorities and values, choices of settlements and prospects for return (Achenbach, 2017). The above level-based analysis of migration decision-making under uncertainty incorporates the micro-level, macro-level and meso-level factors of migration decisions, underscored by the combination of both network theory and decision-making theory.

The study acknowledges that Africa's chaotic migration policy environment, coupled with regional security threats in the Sahel-Maghreb corridor and the European Union external borders policy, exacerbate irregular migration practices across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Nevertheless, the phenomenon cannot be checked without the proper understanding of its underlying factors and political-economy. This is because prominent individuals, traditional authorities, state security agents and private enterprises, particularly banks, migrant smugglers, transporters and shelter providers are involved. Therefore, the transformation of irregular migration routes and the entire region into a Special Economic Zone, tourism and educational hub can change the narratives and thus address the region's growing human security challenges and youth disempowerment. Indeed, critical stakeholder engagement towards addressing poverty and inequality, regional insecurity and migration crisis should be entrenched in the region. These may be mediated among national migration governing agencies, NGOs and civil societies and intergovernmental organisations—e.g., the African Union, ECOWAS and the European Union—as well as relevant UN agencies on migration, refugees and development—e.g., the IOM, the UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme. The above-mentioned capacity-building will promote intra-regional mobility such as (seasonal) labour migration, cross-border trade, mixed migration and remittances for development in the spirit of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and enhance the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063 and its Migration Policy Framework for Africa.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of respondents who took valuable time away from their day to participate in the research. Without them this empirical study would not have been possible.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 226–234
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3706

Article

Information Sharing and Decision-Making: Attempts by Ghanaian Return Migrants to Enter through Libya

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Submitted: 30 September 2020 | Accepted: 27 January 2021 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This article examines the relationship between irregular migration, access to information and migration decisions. Using semi-structured interviews of thirty irregular return migrants who failed to reach their European destinations through Libya, I show that irregular return migrants from Ghana rely predominantly on interpersonal sources, including colleagues, neighbors, friends and relatives, for information on migration. Return migrants seek information from those who have relevant experience with that kind of migration. Existing research focuses on information from 'formal' sources such as traditional print media, social media, library or workshops. Here I argue that this focus on access to information conceals the activities and practices of irregular return migrants who perceive European destinations as 'greener pastures' and seek information to travel through dangerous routes. Most irregular return migrants interviewed in this study indicated they had access to information from 'informal' sources often shared as 'jokes.' Although irregular return migrants perceive the information they gather through their everyday activities as reliable, their interactions involve complex and unstructured social processes.

Keywords
decision-making; information access; information sources; irregular migration; return migrants

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

The persistent and increasing trends of irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa with the desire to migrate to European countries (Clemens, 2014; de Haas, 2007; Skeldon, 1997) should be viewed in broader contexts to include the critical role of information sharing on decision-making. Although there is a plethora of studies on migration information, people who decide to migrate irregularly share information with others who have that kind of migration experience because 'formal' sources may not have information on dangerous, irregular routes. Irregular return migrants, therefore, seek information from multiple interpersonal sources and put the pieces of information together to make the trips.

Scholarly literature has debunked conventional views on emigration from sub-Saharan Africa as poverty, war, and famine driven (Adepoju, 2000; Ezra & Kiros, 2001; Zuberi, Sibanda, Bawah, & Noumbissi, 2003), as a security threat associated with crime, trafficking, and terrorism (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014; Lutterback, 2006), or as a development failure (Bakewell, 2008). Contemporary research emphasizes migrants' aspirations and capabilities and extrapolates how those aspirations and capabilities drive future migration (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Creighton, 2013; Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014; Dalen, Groenewold, & Schoorl, 2005; de Haas, 2010). Other studies have pointed out the need for rigorous research on migration within Africa (Agadjanian, 2008) and increased knowledge on trends of sub-Saharan African migration into Gulf countries (Atong, Mayah, & Odigie, 2018). Debates on mobilities of migrants which help with the analysis of tensions, frictions and emotions in migration engagements have

been considered (Cresswell, 2010; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Flahaux and de Haas (2016) have posited the need for an investigation into how cultural and social changes such as improved information influence aspirations and capabilities to drive future migration. In this article, I examine how irregular return migrants and intermediaries use information from prior travels as alternative resources when faced with difficulties in obtaining 'formal' information or are skeptical of formal avenues of information access.

Extensive studies on drivers of migration notwithstanding, the role of vital information for emigration from sub-Saharan Africa needs more attention. Migrants' decisions prior, during, and post-migration require vital information. Migrants confront major decisions: whether to migrate, where to migrate and when to migrate (Palm & Danis, 2002; Tabor, Milfont, & Ward, 2015). Silvio (2006) argued that migrants know the importance of information and search for information for decision-making. As a result, many studies have examined how skilled migrants seek and use information from organizations and institutions, traditional print media, libraries, social media and how they deal with information overload from these multiple sources (Balaz, Williams, & Fifekova, 2016; Palm & Danis, 2002; Tabor et al., 2015). Other studies have pointed out the use of cell phones to access information (Newell, Gomez, & Guajardo, 2016). This study is, however, interested in irregular return migrants who use alternative sources of information which are not 'formal' to inform the decision to migrate. Although Sibal and Foo (2016) indicate that information from interpersonal sources is usually devoid of sophisticated content and vital detail, I argue that this assertion does not hold for irregular return migrants whose activities and practices involve an unstructured and complex everyday word-of-mouth information sharing. This study therefore, brings to the forefront contextual issues in information sharing and provides insightful contributions to the literature on irregular migration.

This article explores the social spaces of information sharing among irregular return migrants in two ways. First, it investigates the specifics and nuances of information shared among irregular return migrants. Second, it investigates how information sharing between irregular return migrants and intermediaries occurs. Third, it examines how information obtained from prior migrations is used to fuel migration desires and aspirations. These relatively unexplored areas would provide a new glimpse into the interconnection of irregular migration and information sharing.

1.1. Conceptualization of Access to Migration Information and Information Infrastructure in Migration Decisions

Information flow for migrants is emphasized as an important factor for influencing perceived migration opportunities to European destinations (Hiller & Franz, 2004; Thulin & Wilhelmson, 2015). The important role of information, as Palm and Danis (2002) point out, is that it serves as a measure that reconfigures and transforms people's knowledge, conceptions, and preferences for a place. Migrants' access to information fosters their decisions to select destination countries (Balaz et al., 2016; Lee, 1966; Lutz, 2017; Sibal & Foo, 2016; Silvio, 2006; Tabor et al., 2015) and serves as a source of knowledge for social, economic, political and cultural advancement (Gigler, 2008; Khoir, Du, & Koronios, 2015). Thus, empirical studies need to provide insights into irregular return migrants' access to information for migration decision-making.

In this study, I operationalize irregular return migrants as those who have made one or more trips outside their home country and have returned to the home country, using routes considered dangerous to travelers. In view of the important role information plays to migrants, migration researchers have long identified how everyday word-of-mouth facilitates information sharing (Case, 2012; Pettigrew, Fidel, & Bruce, 2001; Sin & Kim, 2013; Tazreiter, Pickering, & Powell, 2017). Other studies have focused on emerging virtual practices, rapidly transforming social media and network usage, and migration information from search engines (Sin & Kim, 2013; Thulin & Wilhelmson, 2015). Countless studies on training workshops to equip professionals with the best means to disseminate accurate information for the public have been explored (Newell et al., 2016). Since the early 2000s, the relationship between information communication technologies (ICTs) and migration experiences has become an important subject of social and academic analysis. Transnational scholars have conducted many studies on ICT (Newell et al., 2016; Panagakos & Horst, 2006; Thulin & Wilhelmson, 2015) and ICT studies continue to occupy recent research agendas. But the practices and activities of irregular return migrants who cannot access these sources of information but are compelled to rely on information sharing by word-of-mouth from others with relevant migration information should also be considered.

While leaning heavily on extensive work on motivations, aspirations and capabilities to migrate (de Haas, 2007; Lutz, 2017; Sell & DeJong, 1978) to provide a framework, this study also integrates information sharing to determine migration decisions. Empirical evidence on why people migrate has shown complex and divergent views in scholarship. The emergent human development and social transformational perspectives have refocused migration studies to identify the potentials of migrants. Stemming from this perspective, de Haas (2007) stipulated that demand for skilled and low skilled labor by the developed world would persist as the forces of globalization and socio-economic development increase. As a result, demand for both regular and/or irregular low skilled labor would increase in Western economies. Even when the reverse occurs, where an effort is made to promote development in origin countries, attempts to slow down migration would

fail (de Haas, 2006; Skeldon, 2010). This paradox, according to Flahaux and de Haas (2016, p. 16), explains development-driven emigration booms in contrast to conventional interpretations. Castles and Miller (2003) reiterate the need to consider migration studies as an integral part of development.

Development-focused migration studies draw from agency-structure conceptualizations to argue for recognition of aspirations of people to migrate and capabilities of migrants to make independent decisions (de Haas, 2010; "UN Migration Agency launches," 2018). Lutz (2017) argues that migrants do not make arbitrary decisions. Rather, they base their decisions on the value and meaning they attach to the migration phenomena. Migration decisions are shaped by the interactions of individual agency and macro-structural opportunities in the economic, political, and environmental structures (de Haas, 2009). In sub-Saharan Africa for example, Agadjanian (2008) argues that potential migrants ponder migration opportunities not only in the region but also regarding European destinations. For example, migrants weigh the expected costs and benefits of migration. Other scholars argue that migrants' aspirations are reinforced by their capabilities to secure better prospects such as employment opportunities and higher-paying jobs (de Haas, 2010; Khoir et al., 2015).

Using the development-focused arguments help to premise migration decision-making on three basic assumptions: migrants are individual actors; there are networks of family and friends that influence people to migrate; and there are conditions of macro-structural economic, political, and environmental effects on decisions of individual actors (Haug, 2008). This multilevel model critiques linear approaches. The 'win-win-win' approach envisaged highlights the argument that development is good for the origin country, host country, and the migrants themselves (Bakewell, 2008, p. 1355). Using this approach, skilled migrants with access to information from the internet, print media, and social media are winners. But Eshet (2004) argues that digital and information literacy are usually more complex for irregular migrants with low literacy skills. According to Burrell and Anderson (2008), the internet helps people gain a fuller understanding of places as living environments. Information from the internet provides general facts about geographical location, population size, communications, physical environment, culture, sports, and many more. Expectedly, irregular migrants with alternative access to formal sources of information are regarded as disadvantaged. However, irregular return migrants rely on various kinds of networks, colleagues with prior experiences, brokers and private actors to fill the information gap.

This study also engages with debates that conceptualize the migration industry as an infrastructure (Xiang & Linquist, 2014) to include social infrastructure. In conceptualizing intermediaries in the infrastructure who facilitate the movements of migrants, Xiang and Linquist (2014) pointed out that migration infrastructure makes up the social processes that portray the activities, practices and technologies of migrants. The discussion of migration infrastructure shifts the focus from migrants as the primary subjects of migration into determining the social processes of mediators who facilitate migration (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). These mediators have also directed and controlled migration (Franck, Brandström, & Anderson, 2018). In the migration processes, Xiang and Lindquist (2014, p. 132) further stipulate that "commercial, regulatory, humanitarian, and networks of social infrastructures" shift the focus away from the non-linear movement or even the circular interrelated elements of migration flow into a multi-directional focus that considers self-adjustments in migration (see also Mabogunje, 1970). The interlinked activities and practices of migrants have been geared towards migration negotiation that influences the barriers and challenges of the process (Mengiste, 2019). Information sharing with a multidimensional focus that engages with information shared between irregular return migrants themselves and with their intermediaries is a critical issue.

Several mediators have been identified in the migration infrastructure. For example, Mengiste (2019) identifies commercial recruitment intermediaries to include smugglers and travel companions. Other intermediaries are friends and family networks in the homeland. These private actors facilitate forms and meanings to the migration infrastructure and play a central role in migration decisions in the industry. In the migration industry, Akesson and Alpes (2019) argue that some brokers micro-manage mobility and in the process mobilize legitimacy. Mediators establish knowledge communities to take charge of the migration process. These activities, though unstructured, produce a complex form of interactions and relationship-building to promote and sustain the industry.

Additionally, in operationalizing migrants' agency, this study determines the mediating influence of actors and networks (Franck et al., 2018) on irregular return migration. Information infrastructure stabilizes and creates the interconnections not only among migrants but also with their mediators. Irregular return migrants engage in information sharing with those with relevant information from their migration experiences to structure mobility and organize migration.

1.2. Irregular Return Migrants from Libya

Throughout history, the economic-politicization of South-North cooperation of Ghana-Libya migration has been recognized. The daily exodus of sub-Saharan Africans migrating into North African countries, especially into Libya, dates back to the pre-Gaddafi era but intensified during the Gaddafi era (Bob-Milliar & Bob-Milliar, 2013).

The Gaddafi era saw the rising desire of sub-Saharan Africans migrating into Libya as a final destination. It is notable that when there is a boom in business, people make enough income to cover the costs of migration.

During the Gaddafi era, West African migrants, mostly from Ghana and Nigeria, migrated into Libya to take up economic activities for income. Brisk business interests of West Africans in Libya have produced economic communities named after business centers in West Africa. The uprisings in the Maghreb region and the conflicts that led to the death of Gaddafi in 2011 exposed the magnitude of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa living in Libya. Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar's (2013) study indicated that the fall of the Gaddafi era and the post-Gaddafi era conflicts that ensued shifted the geopolitics of migration. Perceived 'illegal' migrants were identified and to avoid persecution, many of them successfully or unsuccessfully used Libya as a route to enter Europe or they involuntarily returned to their country of origin. During the post-Gaddafi era, about 18,000 Ghanaian migrants returned home.

Although successful and unsuccessful migrants from Europe occasionally return to their origin countries (de Haas, 2007), this study concerns people who migrated to Libya but when they unsuccessfully attempted to cross the Mediterranean into Europe, they either returned home immediately or chose Libya as a final destination. The peculiarity of this group is that, for those who return, after a brief stay in Ghana, they begin making preparations towards another journey into Libya. The involuntary return of irregular migrants produces continuous high risk and dangerous trips (Kleist, 2017).

2. Method

This empirical research explored information access, sources and decision-making of Ghanaian return migrants from Libya. The data were collected through interviews designed to elicit responses from the rich experiences of return migrants. Narratives were used to fit specific, delimited, local situations and problems (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Respondents were reached through snowballing and recruited into the study at their homes and workplaces.

The focus of respondents' narratives was about themselves and their experiences, opinions, and feelings as migrants. Migrants narrated their everyday information access, sources and migration decision-making to provide in-depth analysis in a concise and logical way (Bernard, 2011). The narratives of the findings gave voice to participants who shared their experiences, richly describing their stories to offer new insights into the interconnection of information and migration. They also gave their perspectives to shed light on their sources of information.

Thirty return migrants and two connection men or travel agents were interviewed. The two connection men who have the success of the markets in which they operate (Akesson & Alpes, 2019) served as migration experts who charged negotiable fees and managed the journey from Ghana to Libya. Informal and semi-structured interviews were conducted with different categories of return migrants, including migrants who voluntarily returned to Ghana following unsuccessful attempts to cross the Mediterranean into Europe (n = 14), migrants who traveled to Libya to work for income to cover future travel costs from origin country (n = 5), migrants who were deported after they failed in their attempts to cross the Mediterranean into Europe (n = 11), and connection men who served as mediators for migration journeys (n = 2). The interviews took place between September 2019 and February 2020. Interviews were conducted in Twi, Fante, or English, depending on a respondent's preference. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and complemented with daily field notes. Data analysis was weaved together for recognition of emerging themes, identification of key ideas, and quotes were picked to reinforce the themes and ideas. Data analysis involved theme-centered analysis. Data were organized based on relevant questions and key topics that recurred. These topics were narrowed down to the three main categories: (1) networks of friends and family that shared information in the homeland, (2) information from those who mediated the journeys, and (3) physical communities that formed in destination countries and functioned as information-sharing hub for improved immigrant life (Akesson & Alpes, 2019).

3. Findings and Discussions

This study investigates information sharing and decision-making processes of irregular return migrants. Other issues considered include the demographic characteristics of irregular return migrants.

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Return Migrants

This study shows the distribution of all respondents by age, the number of dependents, marital status, sex, educational level, formal skills training and intended destinations. Demographic characteristics of respondents assessed return migrants' experiences prior to their first travel to Libya. Respondents reported an age range between 18 years and 25 years. From the study, seven respondents reported they had children and 23 respondents had no children. In terms of marriage, ten respondents were married and 20 were unmarried. The interviews showed that 20 respondents had no formal education, eight respondents had formal education up to the primary school level, and two respondents had formal apprenticeship training. No respondent had a secondary school or tertiary education. The connection men also had no formal education.

Insights were drawn from respondents' experiences in attempting to cross into Europe. Each respondent was asked to report on their failed attempts in Libya: Two respondents reported they had failed twice in their attempts to enter Europe through Libya; 25 respondents had unsuccessfully attempted to do so three times; and three respondents unsuccessfully attempted to do so six times. One respondent attempted to enter Europe

through Algiers and five respondents who lived in the coastal towns of Ghana indicated that they had earlier attempted to enter Europe by sea.

While 25 of the total respondents indicated their aspirations and attempts were to enter into Europe, five respondents revealed that they had lived and worked in a Ghanaian community in Libya to raise income for business start-ups in Ghana. However, the five respondents were quick to add that they would have entered into Europe if the opportunity showed up. Two of the respondents travelled to Libya in the Gaddafi era to work as *malaga*, i.e., masons in the booming construction industry. Although this study interviewed irregular return migrants in Ghana, Portes (1996) shows that because of the uncertainties that surround their lives and activities, migrants create stronger bonds of support through large physical communities in transit or in their final destinations. The communities pre-socialize potential immigrants of what to expect through the sharing of information regarding job opportunities, loans, accommodation, and offer many other forms of support to irregular migrants.

An irregular return migrant revealed that:

> After several years of living abroad, we opened our shops in Libya and continued our business activities. For us, Libya is 'home.' We have lived in Libya for twenty years. Apart from running our shops, we rent out rooms to new migrants.

Although civil wars, deportations, and other events may disrupt the migration process for irregular migrants, they may seek information from other persons to move into another part of the destination country to avoid detection from the Police and Immigration Services. Economic, moral and other expectations from networks in the home country may prevent migrants from returning home. However, networks in home country play key roles in offering support to return migrants, especially when migrants do so involuntarily.

3.2. Migration Networks and Brokers

To gauge decisions to migrate, respondents were asked to narrate how they accessed information for their initial travel to Libya. They reported stories from acquaintances as the main sources of information. One respondent who narrated how he accessed information through his interaction with his customer remarked:

> I am an auto-mechanic. While I repaired my customer's car one day, I spoke about a land dispute with my landlord to the customer because my landlord had threatened to re-sell a piece of land I purchased from him. My customer told me if I would go to Libya, I can 'make it' there or possibly continue to Europe. He owned a small business in Libya. I could work to make enough money to buy another land for replacement. A coworker nicknamed *Aponkye* overheard our conversation. The weeks that followed saw us making further enquiries to travel to Libya. Two other coworkers joined us. Having deliberated on the journey with friends and family for six months, we left Ghana for Libya.

The narratives of information sharing among respondents and their acquaintances could be attributed to the strong social ties produced in social settings. Daily interactions between master-apprentice, employer-employee, or business owner-customer in social settings foster information sharing. Respondents, who do not initially aspire to travel beyond Ghana, later on may be convinced to migrate after these interactions take place. The findings aligned with the literature which showed that everyday word-of-mouth information sharing among persons is usually serendipitous and a taken-for-granted activity that emerges from different forms of interaction (MacKenzie, 2003). Migrants' responses showed that, although they received initial information by word-of-mouth, they planned their migration activities between three months and one year. According to one respondent, "when we begin preparations to migrate, we gather information from multiple interpersonal sources to inform our decisions and to guide us." Respondents revealed they are fulfilled when they receive the information they need, whether they have prior experience or not.

The findings also showed that information sharing from interpersonal sources becomes more urgent during migration. Respondents receive information from intermediaries to facilitate migration activities. Intermediaries provide insights into how irregular migrants may migrate (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Intermediaries serve as migration experts that constitute a knowledge community to control the irregular migration process. However, respondents also spoke of contradictory information they gathered from intermediaries about the itinerary, routes, travel documents, travel partners, travel agents, and many more. One respondent gave an account on his journey but expressed his frustrations to the question of how they accessed information for their journey when he replied:

> I arrived at Tudu, a bus terminal in Accra, to board a bus to Lome in Togo with two friends. At the terminal, we joined other young guys, totaling twenty-seven, also travelling to Libya. At the terminal, we were introduced to the connection man or travel agent for this cohort. We paid our fee and started the journey, setting off in the night to avoid detection. Only six people possessed valid passports or travel certificates, but no one had a visa. Between the Ghana–Togo borders, we were quizzed at each point by border guards, but the agent talked to them or negotiated with them and we proceeded into Togo. The connection man then handed us over to AG, another agent in Togo

> and returned to Ghana. After a lengthy talk with us, AG detailed all the difficulties we would encounter on the way. One member of my cohort informed us about an easier route from Kumasi. Four of us returned to Accra to use the Kumasi route to Libya through Burkina Faso.

Respondents who knew about visa applications mentioned that they were afraid the consulates would deny their visa application because of strict visa requirements. From respondents' narratives, intermediaries such as connection men showed expertise in migration, negotiating migration barriers to ease travel and when necessary, using alternative infrastructures (Mengiste, 2019) along the route. These connection men, with prior experience, build a strong knowledge community to aid irregular migrants with the ability to pay for their services from their homeland to destinations. Even those who could not meet the total expenditure to secure the services of a connection man would intermittently fall on them when the need arises. Regardless of their preparations, all respondents indicated that they began their journeys from their respective towns but converged at Agadez, a transit town on the Niger-Libyan border, to embark on what respondents referred to as the "most dangerous journey" or the "desert journey."

It is noteworthy that respondents indicated that information gathered at Agadez had the most contradictions. According to one respondent, "stories of desert heat, frequent attacks from bandits, or even death came from multiple sources with a lot of contradictions." They continued their journey from Agadez to Libya with hired escorts or 'macho men' to deter robbers. Vehicles carrying migrants to Benghazi or Tripoli from Agadez moved in convoys.

3.3. Physical Communities for Information Access and Sources in Libya

Life in Libya was reported with mixed feelings. Apart from the difficulties they faced with law enforcement agencies, respondents indicated they did not have enough information about life in Libya before entry. For example, they had no information on where to seek refugee assistance or other forms of assistance during times of rampant police harassment. Here, their only source of support came from the existing physical communities. The only sources of information continued to be from migrants and intermediaries living in the existing physical communities in Libya.

When respondents were posed with the question of why and how they made several trips to Libya despite the difficult experiences they had expressed, one respondent explained:

> I have made six attempts to reach Europe. I have tried to enter Europe both by land and by sea. My first attempt was a trip to Algeria with friends I met at Agadez. The group abandoned me at Algiers and continued their journey. After two weeks, I run out of funds and returned to Ghana. As I travelled through Agadez, I met another group that told me stories about better opportunities in Libya. With that information, I went to Libya eight months later. I lived in an African community in Benghazi. As a new migrant, I was accommodated and introduced to *malaga*, or masonry apprenticeship, but I was arrested and deported to Ghana. Later on, a friend told me two of my colleagues who travelled with me on my second trip had successfully entered Europe. As soon as I heard the news, I started preparing for a third trip because I believed that I would rely on information from my friends to be successful. I was unable to contact my friends when I arrived in Libya. After two years and having made many failed attempts to enter Europe, I returned to Ghana. I went to Libya for the fifth and sixth times without making any headway. I am still waiting to hear back from my friends.

All 30 irregular return migrants interviewed for this study narrated similar stories. Reflecting on the responses, the back-and-forth movement was a result of lack of reintegration and other intervention programs for return migrants in Ghana. According to respondents, irrespective of the number of trips they made, they continued to tap for information from multiple interpersonal sources.

The 'win-win-win' approach for the origin country, host country and the migrants themselves (Bakewell, 2008) envisaged in the migration industry cannot be realized with irregular migrants whose only source of information is interpersonal. Contrary to the developmental debate, this study showed that many irregular migrants made arbitrary decisions to migrate to meet their needs. They were influenced by images of affluence, wealth, and better life in European destinations from the stories they were told, and 28 of the total number of respondents affirmed they would migrate again. They also mentioned the need for organized channels of information. Knowing that such a demand was unlikely to occur, one respondent reassuringly argued: "Our current sources of information have met other people's needs and they will meet our needs one day." Only two respondents answered that they will not travel again because of family commitments. These two respondents had wives and children and were running their private businesses in Ghana.

3.4. Funny Stories and Information Sharing

To gauge the nuances of how migrants access and share information, respondents shed light on relatively unknown process of funny stories in information sharing. With information flow from many directions, the social atmosphere and conditions foster how information was shared. Interactions among migrants and actors produced funny stories to provoke humor and laughter. "Stories of arrests of irregular migrants, police harass-

ment, sleepless nights on pavements or streets were told to us as funny stories," declared one respondent.

Narrating their interactions with AG, the connection man in Togo, one respondent revealed that:

> AG was a very *funny* man who gave us a vivid account of his journeys to Libya. He told us he travels to Libya at least once a week to do business. His business involved two activities: he showed his clients 'the way' to reach Libya or he accompanied them to the end of the journey. However, the latter involved a higher fee. He boasted that he does not accompany groups that cannot pay fees as huge as his stature, and this man was about six feet tall. When we chose the former option, he began his funny stories. He demonstrated how he had slept in a sinking boat or buried himself in sand dunes in the desert. This generated a lot of laughter and reduced our fear and anxiety for the journey. We negotiated the charges, collected our map that showed details of the trail and the people who would assist us, then we set off. By the time we began the journey we had built a powerful bond of support.

Another respondent who talked of his experience with funny jokes explained:

> They never tell us about the horrid nights they spent sleeping in train stations, open spaces, pavements or telephone booths. They never mention their arrests or police harassments. Even when they speak of unpleasant experiences, they tell them as funny parts of stories and make jokes about it. They give images of a good life in Europe. Of course, we do the same when we return to our country of origin and share information because once we meet people who need information on the trips, we don't want to tell depressing stories when we are expected to have fun.

Reflecting on these findings, irregular return migrants integrated jesting, funny stories, and humor into information-sharing to produce laughter. The jokes and funny stories shared during interactions with actors of irregular migration from Ghana to Libya create the continuous information process that irregular migrants have to deal with. Migration brokers and networks provide information that causes people to fantasize about living in Europe so whether they reach Europe or not, they feel they would meet their migration dream and this causes them to engage in continuous migration practices.

4. Conclusion

Drawing on empirical data, this research set out to investigate persistent attempts of irregular return migrants from Ghana planning to enter European destinations through Libya. A majority of irregular return migrants rely on interpersonal sources such as coworkers, neighbors, friends and family to alternatively provide them with information. Although Palm and Danis (2002) claim that information from interpersonal sources is devoid of vital details, this article has demonstrated that 'informal' sources of information inform the migration decision-making of irregular return migrants. Thus, friendship networks, solidarity networks, resilient networks and many others (Portes, 1996) provide alternative sources of information that are fluid, dynamic and complex. However, irregular return migrants and intermediaries navigate these processes so as to participate in the field of migration.

Consequently, information from interpersonal sources increases people's desire to migrate. Although migrants' aspirations drive future migration (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016), this study has shown that information sharing may increase the migration desires of people, with or without aspirations, to migrate. Moreover, images of availability of employment, higher-paying jobs and 'greener pastures' are produced during information sharing. Irregular return migrants with migration aspirations rely on colleagues with previous experience to exchange information and fall on brokers for support to migrate.

This empirical study shows that sharing information through jokes consolidate the relationship between the migrants and mediators. Socio-cultural anthropologists have shown how relationship building has been established through joke sharing. What this study reveals is that stories told through jokes have helped shape relationships among irregular return migrants as well as between migrants and mediators in the migration industry (Franck et al., 2018). Juxtaposing the position of intermediaries within the migration industry (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), this article shows that jesting, humor and funny stories have been used to produce relationships among migrants as well as between migrants and mediators. The funny stories and jokes that mediators use to share information on the migration process are employed to allay the fears of the dangers and hardships along the trails from West Africa to Libya and to generate subtleties of the otherwise difficult situations. A form of social control develops from this relationship building and contributes to the sustainability of these knowledge communities whose practices and activities are difficult to penetrate and/or disentangle, especially when they previously engaged in the same back-and-forth movements. Jokes carry assumptions in information sharing and influence the perspective from which knowledge is constructed (Akesson & Alpes, 2019). The use of jokes warrants further investigations in migration studies.

Finally, this study has shown the complexity of the processes that foster irregular return migration. The desires of migrants to leave their home country, then return to their home country and after a while return to Libya produces a back-and-forth movement which tends to disrupt the perceived linear migration processes (Kleist, 2017). But this article has contributed to discus-

sions that reveal the complexity of engagements at the individual, micro-level as well as networks of meso-level actors within the migration information infrastructure.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) for the funding support extended to me to undertake this research through the Swiss Sub-Saharan Africa Migration Network (S-SAM).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2022, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 235–246
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3715

Article

Disentangling Mining and Migratory Routes in West Africa: Decisions to Move in Migranticised Settings

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Submitted: 2 October 2020 | Accepted: 23 October 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This article scrutinizes the trajectories of African men whose cross-border movements intersect two types of mobility routes: mining and migration routes. Drawing on field research in Mali and Guinea, as well as phone interviews with male miners/migrants in North Africa and Europe, this article provides a case to empirically question some of the premises in the approach to migration decision-making by giving a voice to African men moving across borders who do not necessarily identify as (prospective) 'migrants.' Building upon International Organization for Migration data and secondary sources, this article starts by sketching where migration and mining routes overlap. It then examines, in detail, the mobility trajectories of men who were sometimes considered migrants and other times miners in order to identify how these different routes relate to one another. While overseas migration is certainly not a common project for itinerant miners, the gold mines constitute a transnational space that fosters the expansion of movements across the continent, including outside the field of mining. Rather than encouraging overseas migration, gold mines appear to be more of a safety net, not only for seasonal farmers or young people in search of money and adventure, but also, increasingly, for people who are confronted with Europe's intra-African deportation regime.

Keywords
artisanal and small-scale mining; border regime; Guinea; Mali; migration; mobility; North Africa; West Africa

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

West Africa is considered to have the most mobile population in the world, with intra-regional mobility accounting for 70% of all cross-border movements according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Intense mobility in West Africa has deep historical roots (De Bruijn, van Dijk, & Foeken, 2001) involving interwoven migration cultures of kinship and ethnicized labour specialization, as well as mobile livelihood and education strategies (Hahn & Klute, 2007). As Bilger and Kraler (2005, p. 10) argue, mobility, rather than sedentariness, is considered the norm in the region. This article jointly examines two important forms of movement that are part of this intense West African mobility, but which have so far been analysed separately: labour mobility in artisanal gold mines and migration mobility to North Africa or Europe. The article proceeds by analysing how mining and migration intersect in the mobility trajectories of African men who work, or have worked, in gold mines and who have, or intend to extend their mobility to North Africa or Europe. In doing so, the article asks whether and how these men strategically articulate these two forms of mobility. By giving a voice to people who regularly cross-national borders, but who do not necessarily identify themselves as 'migrants,' the article provides a case that challenges some of the premises in the approach to migration decision-making.

The reason for this common approach to apparently separate 'flows' is twofold. First, the mining boom of the last decade has led to an increase in informal artisanal mining sites along the Birimian belt in Senegal,

Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, and more recently in the northern Sahel and Sahara in Mali and Niger, with the result that the routes of miners and migrants are likely to overlap. Secondly, there is little dialogue between the growing literature on artisanal mining and the literature on migration. Researchers in both fields tend to use their own categories of 'livelihoods' and 'migration' to refer to people on the move as either 'miners' or 'migrants,' whereas the lived experience of these men may relate to one or the other of these categories at different points in their trajectories. Furthermore, with the increasing criminalization of cross-border movements due to the externalization of European borders into Africa (Andersson, 2014; Brachet, 2018), the current context inevitably raises highly political questions such as whether artisanal mining has become a common source of funding for 'irregular' international migration routes out of Africa (e.g., Yonlihinza, 2017). To avoid ambiguity, let me state at the outset that the answer developed in this article is no. However, the actual overlaps between mining and migration routes and the fact that 'miners' can sometimes be 'migrants' and 'migrants' can sometimes be 'miners' nevertheless deserves sustained attention. In particular, because their trajectories call into question certain assumptions in the literature on the decision to migrate, such as the identification of different stages in the ambition and capacities to migrate (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Haas, 2011).

From this point of view, a brief methodological note is important. The mobility profiles on which this study is based do not quantitatively represent a large share of male 'miners' or 'migrants.' However, they illustrate qualitatively how different types of mobility intersect along the mobility trajectories of West African men, something that the migration approach to 'decision-making' can hardly capture. As their narratives show, the elusive identification of a decision to migrate can, in their case, obscure the processual adjustments in men's search for livelihoods and social recognition, for which mobility is used within and outside West Africa. A second noteworthy point is the gendered aspect of the trajectories scrutinized in this article. Neither migration nor mining mobility are male prerogatives. As Hertrich and Lesclingand (2013) recall, labour mobility for the youth is equally important among young Malian women as it is for men, yet they partake in different expectations and projects. While male mobility is part of households' economics and strengthens their family status, as will be shown in the next section, female mobility is rather seen as a personal project geared towards acquiring life skills more prone to be obtained in cities than in gold mines (e.g. learning the national language or acquiring domestic 'know how'). Yet, women represent 40% to 50% of the workforce in informal gold mines (Huggins, Buss, & Rutherford, 2017). In terms of mobility however, women are more likely to be from neighbouring villages from where they commute, and thus conciliate domestic labour with generating cash incomes by working as panners or petty traders in the mines. Though women, like men, seek financial autonomy (Brottem & Ba, 2019; Werthmann, 2009) by undertaking short-term circular moves to the gold mines, they are less likely, as Dessertine argues (2013), to continue such a mobile lifestyle on the long run. The trajectories examined in this article—ranging from 3 to 10 years of travels—are, from this perspective, typically male gendered. Taking the lens of these 'mobility trajectories' (Schapendonk, van Liempt, Schwarz, & Steel, 2018), the article argues that these African men, who, paraphrasing Hui (2016), are 'sometimes migrants' and 'sometimes miners,' primarily seek to increase their mobility, which in turn, is increasingly hampered by the expansion of European migration control and repressive policies on the continent.

In making this argument, I draw on field research conducted in 2020 in Mali and Guinea, telephone interviews with male miners/migrants in North Africa and Europe, as well as on data from a series of surveys on migration to artisanal mining sites in West Africa conducted by IOM as part of the broader programme "Protection and Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants in West and Central Africa." The article begins with a discussion on the notion of mobility trajectories (Schapendonk et al., 2018) in relation to the migration decision-making framework, and highlights its relevance in capturing the multiple constellations of movements that are characteristic of West Africa's mobile 'normality.' Next, I draw on IOM data to sketch the main patterns of mobility in the informal gold mining sector in order to identify where mining and migration routes overlap. Finally, I use in-depth interviews with seven miners/migrants to propose two main relationships between mining and migration routes, which I call 'mobility expansion' and 'refuge relationship.'

2. Mobility and Migration in Mineralised West Africa

Although there is a recent trend to overcome certain epistemological separations through the use of reflexivity (Dahinden, 2016) and mobility-based approaches (e.g., Moret, 2018; Schapendonk, 2020; Schapendonk, Bolay, & Dahinden, 2020), studies on mobility and migration in and from Africa often demonstrate an epistemological ambiguity inherent in the decoupling of approaches by researchers rooted either in livelihoods and development research or in migration research. It is, for example, revealing that cross-border movements within the region tend to be labelled as mobile livelihoods and labour mobility (e.g., d'Errico & Di Giuseppe, 2018), while cross-border movements across the Sahara and beyond tend to be labelled as international migration (Adepoju, 2006). In fact, both often meet similar criteria in terms of border crossing and time spent in another country, except that they face different 'mobility regimes' (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013) and 'migration industries' (Andersson, 2014; Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018).

Yet these two approaches share the predominance of the economic prism to explain why people move, at the expense of other factors, and therefore fail to explain why people engage in mobility projects whose outcomes are at best uncertain and at worst deadly (Smith, 2019). Why move to an artisanal mining site knowing that the chances of becoming rich are so small compared to the risks of being injured, getting sick or dying in a collapsed shaft? Why move across the Sahara and possibly the Mediterranean knowing that the risks are so high? Without downplaying economic factors, the anthropological record provides a relatively solid body of knowledge about culturally embedded mobility practices in West Africa that can help broaden the understanding of how decisions to move are made.

Without going into all the ethnological details for reasons of conciseness, it is nonetheless useful to recall the importance of social recognition, or the continuing struggle to "produce personhood" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 273) and "avoid social death" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 274) in a wide range of African contexts. In the Mandé region, where most of my informants come from, social identities are strongly marked by norms of gender and seniority, with contradictory injunctions well encapsulated in the twin concepts of *fadenya* and *badenya* (Bird & Kendall, 1980; the Mandé region here refers to the Mandé speaking area including Malinké, Bambara, Dioula, Mandinka, and Soninké language groups spread across Guinea, Mali, Norther Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, and the South and East of Senegal; for more on the sociocultural organisation and political history of this designation see Amselle, 1990; Conrad & Frank, 1995). Drawing on the figure of the Mandé hero, they replicate the typical relations between classificatory brothers born to different mothers and are used in everyday talk to qualify and attribute different values to behaviours and actions. The *fadenya*, because of the competition between collateral brothers, "is associated to centrifugal forces of disequilibrium: envy, jealousy, competition, self-promotion—anything tending to spin the actor out of his established social force field" (Bird & Kendall, 1980, p. 15). In contrast, the "*badenya* is associated with centripetal forces of society: submission to authority, stability, cooperation, those qualities which pull the individual back into the social mass" (Bird & Kendall, 1980, p. 15), that is, obedience to norms. The *fadenya* and *badenya* can therefore be described as the two sides of masculinity, each enacting apparently contradictive moral principles and temporalities of action. Young men are thus expected to empower themselves and become adults by engaging in adventurous endeavours (Bredeloup, 2008), while at the same time contributing socially and economically to the perpetuation of the home village and the household through their presence. The home village, where lineage genealogies are enacted and reproduced, and where social personality is ultimately granted, embodies ideals of permanence, which are realised through physical presence, visits, remittances and, more generally, the maintenance of social ties (Dessertine, in press; Gaibazzi, 2015; Whitehouse, 2012). These antagonistic expectations have long been resolved by the circular mobility of labour within and outside Africa (Amselle, 1976; Manchuelle, 1997; Meillassoux, 1975).

But in a context of deagrarianisation, mass unemployment, conflict-related violence and the increasing criminalization of displacement, these age-prescribed journeys are increasingly difficult to achieve. As a result of this condition of 'involuntary immobility' (Jónsson, 2011), young men are likely to engage in relatively indeterminate forms of 'social navigation' (Vigh, 2009) that involve making and maintaining movements in uncertain settings. This is manifested not only in the 'turbulent trajectories' of irregular migration to Europe (Schapendonk, 2012), but also in growing mobilization in war economies (Hoffman, 2011), the performance of migration in immobility (Fioratta, 2015), or mobility within artisanal gold mines across the continent (Bredeloup, 1994; Dessertine, 2016), which may in turn hamper hopes for connectedness among those who stayed (Gaibazzi, 2019). From the point of view of the trajectory of African men on the move, these different forms of mobility are likely to intermingle and overlap with one another without following a precise roadmap. Consequently, these routes can hardly be captured through concepts such as the 'migratory journey' with supposedly well-separated phases of preparation, travel, transit, arrival and settlement (see Schapendonk et al., 2020). The approach to the mobility trajectories adopted in this article is therefore better suited, as it leaves more room for notions such as incoherence (Massa, 2018) or chance (Gladkova & Mazzucato, 2017), to show that cross-border mobility within and outside Africa does not necessarily result from a migration project, nor is it necessarily conceived as 'migration' by those undertaking those cross-border movements.

In what follows, I begin by sketching how mining and migration mobility overlap based on IOM data on mobility flows in West African gold mines; I will also use data from Flow Monitoring Points at two sites where mining and migration routes to North Africa/Europe intersect.

3. Overlapping Migration and Mining Routes

The continued expansion of artisanal mining in West Africa (Hilson & Garforth, 2012) has recently taken a turn with a new series of gold rushes in the Sahel and Sahara (Chevrillon-Guibert, Gagnol, & Magrin, 2019). While traditional mining areas were mainly concentrated along the Birimian belt in the southern Sahel and tended to overlap with rural areas of 'migration departure' as formulated by the IOM, these new mining areas overlap with what migration research calls 'transit places' along the central Mediterranean route, such as Kidal in Mali or Agadez in Niger.

A quick comparison of two recent maps illustrates this point. As can be seen below (Figure 1), the largest

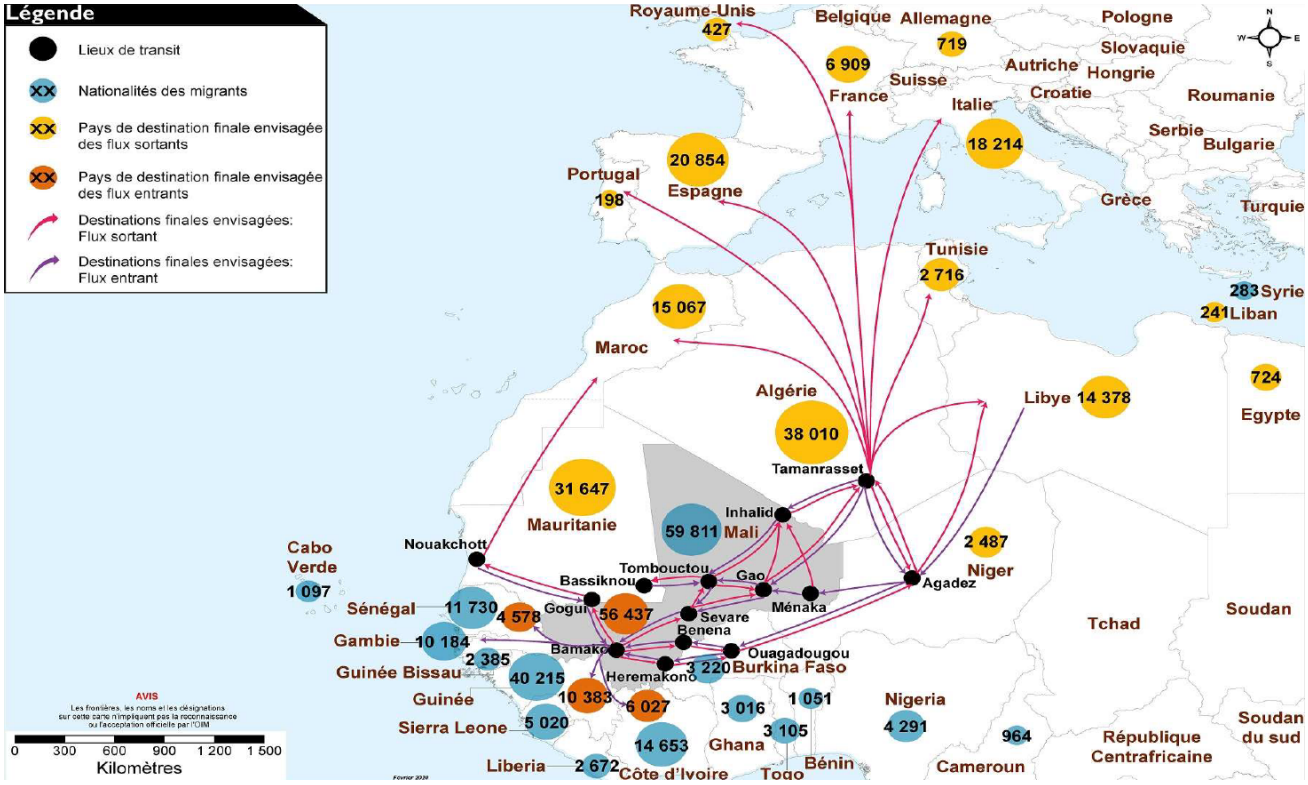

Figure 1. Map of migration routes. Notes: The designations employed and the presentation of material on the map reproduced in this article do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the IOM; all data are based on estimates. Source: IOM (2020).

flows recorded at the Flow Monitoring Points of the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix pass through Mali and Niger, whose northern areas are also the scene of some of the current major Saharan-Sahelian gold rushes (Figure 2) and where some 'transit' sites such as Inhalid or Agadez are located next to intense artisanal mining operations. In addition, the countries with the largest number of potential migrants (Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal) are also countries where artisanal mining is a major activity, with an estimated 500,000 miners in Mali, 250,000 in Guinea, 500,000 in Côte d'Ivoire and between 50,000 and 100,000 in eastern Senegal (Alliance for Responsible Mining, 2020).

3.1. Overlapping Routes in the Southern Sahel

Mobility in informal artisanal mining occurs in different patterns. Mining is most often undertaken as a complementary activity to agriculture, with alternating dry and rainy seasons (Cartier & Bürge, 2011). In such configurations, most miners are locals or come temporarily from other locations before returning to agriculture. However, for some miners, gold mining turned into their main activity. For example, out of the 54 respondents with whom I conducted network interviews on their mobility, 83% had kept mining as their main activity for more than four years and 63% had moved outside their country of residence to mine gold. This second configuration, on which this article focuses, involves continuous transitions and temporary settlements between successive mines, depending on opportunities (Bryceson, Bosse Jønsson, & Clarke Shand, 2020) and evictions from workplaces due to illegal operations (Bolay, 2014, 2016a; Dessertine, 2019).

Recent studies conducted by IOM on gold mining sites in Senegal (n = 221), Guinea (n = 705) and Mali (n = 436) are useful in assessing miners' types of mobility and contextualizing them for possible future migration. All three studies highlight the important mix of nationalities in the sub-region, with almost half of the miners' population coming from neighbouring countries (Guinea: 42%; Senegal: 72%; Mali: 52%), underlining the intensity of movements between mining sites spread across national borders. Moreover, while miners, who are on average under 30 years old at all sites, stayed for periods ranging from two weeks to three months in Guinea and up to a year in Senegal, they generally had no longer-term prospects. The Malian study, which is more detailed, also indicates a high turnover rate between mining sites, with 64% of the miners having visited and worked in more than two mines successively. In another manifestation of what could be called the transnational space of artisanal mining, the vast majority of prospective miners had obtained information prior to their visit from other artisanal miners. It is also interesting to note that 21% of respondents in Mali had initially obtained information from migration brokers, suggesting that some of them may have first entered the mines

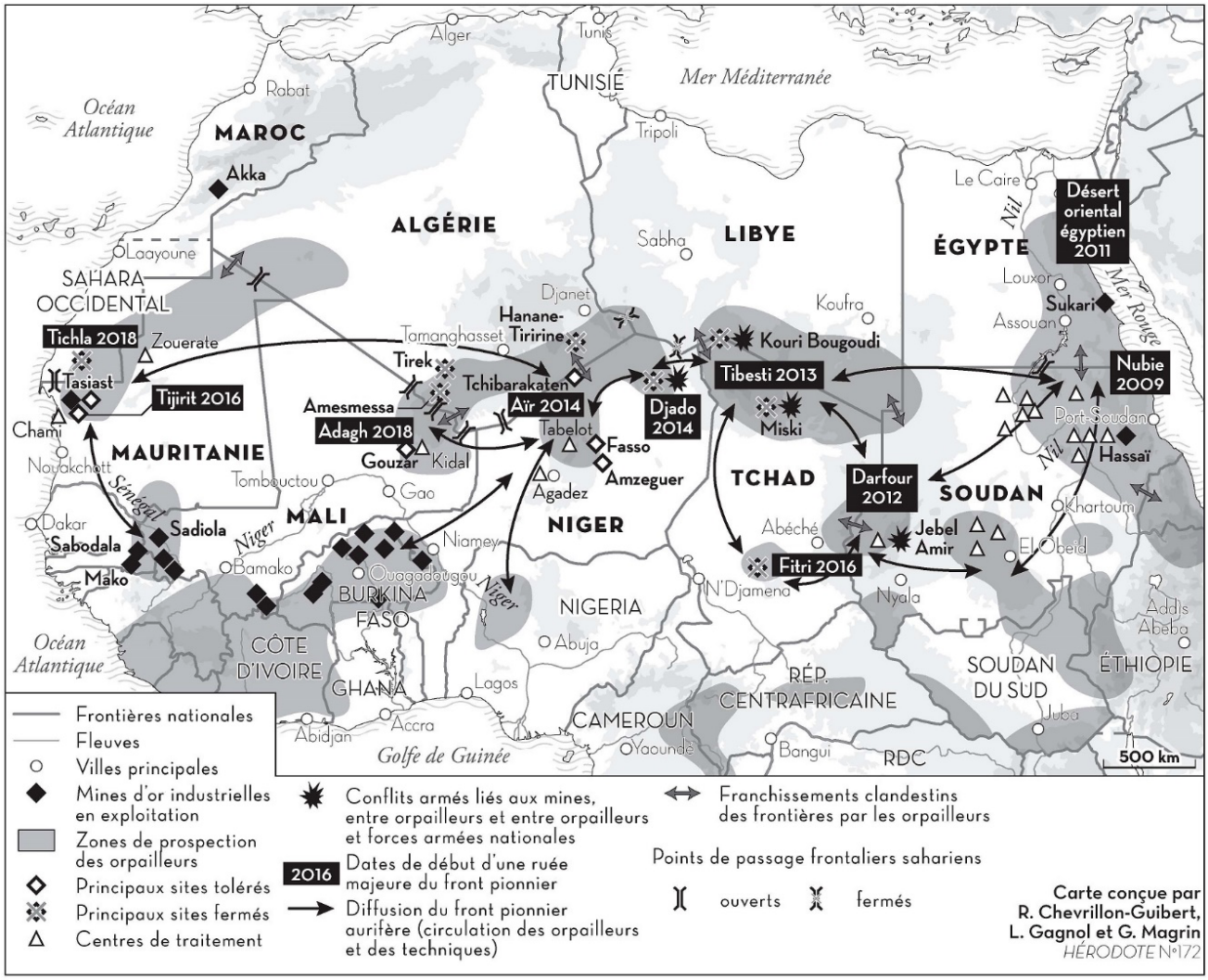

Figure 2. The artisanal front of the gold pioneers in the Saharo-Sahelian space. Note: Reproduced with authors' permission. Source: Chevrillon-Guibert et al. (2019, p. 196).

to collect money to fund an extra-continental migration project later on. Finally, in terms of their prospects for future travel, while most respondents planned to return home or to continue mining in the region, 9% in Guinea and 7% in Mali did mention Europe as another possible destination, but only 1% clearly saw mining as a step in a migration project. In an interview (20 February 2020, Bamako), IOM researchers also added that the vast majority of respondents who were not seasonal farmer-miners did not know what their next destination would be. Thus, although prospective miners may have general medium-term objectives (to return home with capital, to pursue mining routes, or less frequently to cross the Sahara at a later stage), the precise steps to reach them are largely undetermined and subject to the opportunities they may encounter along the way.

To summarise the main conclusions of the IOM studies, artisanal gold mines in the southern areas appear as a circulatory space (Tarrius, 1993) made up of ever-changing destinations spread across national borders. This space supports the mobile livelihoods of young men who are under economic pressure and who have very few other means to follow cultural scripts of constructing adulthood.

3.2. Overlapping Routes in the Northern Sahel

While IOM has conducted research in the 'traditional' artisanal mining areas—the southern areas in Figure 2—what the research does not address is the current Saharan–Sahelian gold rush (Chevrillon-Guibert et al., 2019), which has led to the emergence of a number of new informal gold mines in northern Mali and Niger (see Figure 2). Due to the political instability in the region and the presence of several extremist groups, information is still extremely scarce. Recent research in Mali (Bolay, in press a) indicates that, in contrast to the 'traditional' areas in the south, workers tend to come mainly from Niger, Chad and Sudan—where this new 'pioneer front' originated (Chevrillon-Guibert et al., 2019). Similarly, in the Nigerian sites in the Aïr and Ténéré regions, reached from Agadez, Grégoire and Gagnol (2017) also observed

that workers came mainly from these same countries, including many 'repatriates' from Libya. However, with the increasing discharge of the repression of overseas migration to Algerian and Libyan authorities (Brachet, 2018), a growing number of sub-Saharan Africans have been expelled from Algeria and Libya to the Nigerian and Malian borders. For example, in August 2019, the IOM registered 417 persons returned to the Nigerian borders by Algerian authorities. This trend was reinforced by the stricter enforcement of borders' closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to the confinement of deported populations in IOM camps (Afane, 2020), from which many have escaped. In the absence of economic relief opportunities, the current situation also raises the question of whether the deportees might not end up looking for livelihoods in the nearby mines (Afane, 2020). Although there is currently not enough information to support this hypothesis, research in the region of Kidal (Mali) and Agadez (Niger), which are both central nodes for migration routes and departure points to artisanal gold mines, suggests that the local migration industry has already begun to adapt to this overlap of mines and migration routes. For example, transporters in Kidal (Bolay, in press a) and in Agadez (Pellerin, 2017) have started to serve the routes to the Saharan artisanal mines, in addition to their usual transport of goods and irregular migrants across the borders.

While IOM surveys provide a useful quantitative 'snapshot' to identify points of overlap between mining and migration routes, they give no indication of how these different forms of mobility intersect along people's trajectories, nor how individuals move from one activity and destination to another. The following section addresses these issues qualitatively on the basis of in-depth interviews with men whose trajectories involved both mobility in the gold mines and across the Sahara (and possibly beyond).

4. Disentangling Mining and Migratory Mobility

This section is based on seven in-depth interviews with men, all under the age of thirty when they first left their rural homes. These men represent relatively well the very diverse mix of nationalities present in artisanal mining in West Africa, with three of them from Guinea, two from Mali, one from Niger and one from Nigeria. They also represent one specific type of engagement in mining, which could be coined after Hilson and Garforth (2012, p. 353) as "full-time miners" whose mobility is not dictated by agricultural cycles. My aim here is to disentangle the mining and migratory mobilities along the trajectory of these itinerant miners in order to understand them in relation to each other. To do this, I pay particular attention to the general objectives and reasons given by the miners/migrants for leaving their home place as well as the way they adapted along the way, to the temporality of successive phases and forms of mobility (and immobility), and to the role of these different places (mines and places of 'transit') in shaping their future movements.

To reach out to men who combined or had combined mining and migration mobilities in their trajectory, I contacted informants I knew from previous research who themselves had such a profile, or who could put me in contact with others. I took the opportunity of a short field research trip in Mali in January and February 2020 to meet two of them in person—Kader was temporarily in Bamako before returning to the mining area of Kenieba, and Bo had stopped traveling and was now settled in Bamako. The other interviews were conducted by phone and WhatsApp during the same research stay, often in several shots because of connection losses or cuts due to empty credit. While these conditions somehow complicated the flow of the discussion, they nevertheless allowed for an exchange with people who were either in another country at this time or in remote locations in Mali. These trajectory interviews consisted in retracing the travels of the informants from their first departure to elicit the reasons that motivated their transitions from one place to another. For the analysis below, I selected those turning points where migrants became miners or miners became migrants and paid attention to the reasons that they gave for undertaking a new phase of mobility. In addition, I also took into consideration the temporal ordering of mobilities framed as mining and as migration, as well as their role in relation to the other along broader patterns of movement in the region. This framework made clear the theme of escape as a fruitful transversal descriptor to explain the relation between phases of immobility and mobility, both in mining and migratory contexts. It also helped define the relation between mining and migration either as an expansion of mobility, or as a refuge determined by the confrontation to Europe's intra African borders. For detailed information see Table 1.

4.1. Departures: Aspirations and Capacities to Move, Not to Migrate

All the stories collected share a similar starting point, namely the context of widespread poverty and lack of opportunities that characterised the respondents' lives when they left their place of residence in rural areas. To contextualize these stories, age is an important index, as all but one of the respondents were unmarried and did not have children at that time. Their status as young adults helps to explain why 'poverty,' a condition to which they all refer, is not expressed in terms of material deprivation, but rather in what could be described after Sen (1993) as a 'lack of ability' to carry out the projects expected at their age, such as being recognised for their social and economic contribution to the well-being of the *lu* (large household) or starting a family. As other researchers have shown, social and geographical immobility is indeed often perceived as two sides of the same coin among youths (Gaibazzi, 2015). 'Involuntary

Table 1. Informants selected for in-depth trajectory interviews (the names used are pseudonyms).

Informant	Nationality	Years of travel	Overseas migration as a project at the time of departure	Temporal relation mining to migration labels	Location at the moment of the interview	Medium of the interview
Ali	Guinea	6	no	mining, migration, mining	Guinea	Phone
James	Guinea	8	no	mining, migration, mining	Mali	Phone
Bo	Mali	10	no	mining, migration, home	Mali	In person
Ibrahim	Guinea	3	no	mining, migration	Italy	Phone
Moussa	Mali	6	no	mining, migration, mining	Senegal	Phone
Kader	Niger	5	yes	migration, mining	Mali	In person
Felix	Nigeria	11	yes	migration, mining	Guinea	Phone

immobility,' as Jónsson (2011) has put it, can lead to a sense of 'uselessness' (Fioratta, 2015) that young men seek to escape by various means. One of the most accessible options in this region being the mines, it is a frequent first destination.

For example, James explains how he "remained seated most of the time, sometimes doing small jobs for the family" when, according to him, "in reality [he] had nothing to do." Similarly, Ali expresses that he was simply "discouraged by the lack of opportunities" and that "instead of waiting, [he] preferred to go and find money on his own." In this context, mobility rather than a specific migration project, is often a goal in itself. Following Carling and Schewel's (2018) distinction between aspirations and capacities to migrate, one could say that my informants had the aspiration to move (socially and geographically) and not the capacities to migrate, in particular to Europe. In a way, they manifest Carling and Schewel's (2018) argument in the other direction: Not having the capacities to migrate, most of them did not initially develop the aspiration to do so either, preferring to engage in 'adventurous' travels across the continent.

With regard to what my informants considered to be their point of departure, only Felix and Kader had designed their trips to resettle in another country, in their case a European country. All the others had seen travelling as a way of looking for money and seeing different places, with the firm intention of returning to their home place afterwards. Although this ideal pattern is rarely achieved, it nevertheless manifests what Dessertine (in press) calls the 'topocentric' conception of space that prevails in West African societies. Whereas Eurocentric sedentarist epistemologies define space by its limits materialised by borders (Molland, 2018), West African epistemologies define space by its core, in this context the place of dwelling or *fabara in the* Mande (literally the place of the father), and its expansion by mobility practices which do not question the centrality of the *fabara*. Mobility, including cross-border mobility, across the Sahara or the Mediterranean is, from this point of view, rarely conceived as migration, in the sense of resettlement towards the creation of a new core. However, the expansion of the mobility regime of Europe's borders in Africa is an empirical reality that contributes to the migranticisation (Dahinden, 2016) of people, routes and places, and thus shapes mobilities in Africa and beyond. The following section examines how the phases of mining and migratory mobilities intersect along the trajectories of miners/migrants.

4.2. Intersecting Phases of Mobility along Miners/Migrants' Trajectories: Indebtedness, Escape and Refuge

While most of my informants began their travels with age-related aspirations to earn money and social autonomy in order to progress along prescribed steps towards male adulthood, their travel experiences were rarely correlated with financial gain or greater freedom. On the contrary, they regularly found themselves captive, both socially and physically, in situations from which they tried to escape by resorting to new phases of mobility (for a discussion in the European context, see Schapendonk, 2020). Such situations echo Van der Velde and van Naerssen's (2011) argument that decisions to undertake (cross-border) travels are highly volatile and depend on specific situations along the trajectories (see also Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon, & Sigona, 2018). Below I briefly discuss three such typical situations in gold mines, migration routes, and border areas.

With regard to informal gold mining first, the social organization of work is strongly structured by what Panella has called 'worlds of debts' (2010), in which access to work, housing and gold itself is intertwined with supportive and dependent relationships based on the principles of friendship and patronage (Bolay, 2016b; Grätz, 2004). In their quest for financial autonomy and freedom of movement away from the *fabara*, young men who engage in mining work inevitably link themselves, to varying degrees, to such types of relationships which, if carefully managed, can enable them to support their mobile lifestyle, or otherwise can immobilize them against their will. Second, international migration is also often made possible by the mobilization of complex patterns of support. These relations of social and financial indebtedness blur the notions of "voluntary or autonomous choice" in migration decision-making (O'Connell Davidson, 2013, p. 177). While this has been

well-documented at the presumed 'departure stage' (e.g., Konseiga, 2007), people on the move are in fact continuously engaged in 'network work' (Schapendonk et al., 2020) imbued with moralities of exchange and dependency to gain support along the way, thus contributing to shape their future movement possibilities. Finally, the European discharge of part of its migration control and repression apparatus to African states and international organisations (Andersson, 2014; Brachet, 2016) has been accompanied by an increase in legal and illegal practices of detention (cf. in Libyan prisons and IOM camps) and deportation (from Algeria or Libya to Niger) of 'irregular migrants.' These three modalities of movement conditioning, related to specific places, are regularly at stake along the trajectories of miners/migrants. As will be shown below, these modalities play contradictory roles, as they all have the power to trap individuals or to lead them to expand their movements by strategically engaging in new phases of mobility in order to escape.

Ali's story illustrates the first modality well. After managing to leave the harsh work of mining to become a small itinerant gold trader, Ali was robbed of a week's worth of work plus the financial advances from his sponsor, a trader based in Siguiri (Guinea). Feeling "disoriented" and knowing that he would not be able to repay his sponsor, Ali decided to leave not only the mines but also the country:

> I decided to leave everything and continue the adventure. I had no idea about migration at first. But as I had to find money and couldn't stay [there], I decided to go and see in Libya. I wanted to work there, but it's difficult for us [sub-Saharan Africans] because we can't find good jobs. I did some painting for a while and it was good….A lot of people want to move [to Europe] there. I didn't plan that myself. But we were caught with other [sub-Saharan] Africans and brought to Niger anyway. (Ali, 17 February 2020, phone interview)

After some hesitation, he joined his family in Macenta (Guinea) where he obtained support to pay back his sponsor and resumed itinerant mining to pay back his family.

James' story shares very similar traits. Like Ali, after a few years of travelling to various gold mines, he suddenly decided to leave Guinea because of a family conflict over his own marriage. He travelled to Mali and Algeria to join a friend who was working in Morocco. Faced with difficulties entering Morocco, he stayed in Algeria for more than a year, working in construction, until one night the police arrested him and other sub-Saharan workers and expelled them 30 kilometres from the border with Niger. He and others were rescued by IOM buses which took them first to Arlit and then to Agadez. In order not to be forcibly sent back to Mali or Guinea, some of his travel companions escaped from the camp, allegedly to find work in the nearby mines and pay for passage back to Algeria or Libya. As he himself was "too tired," he took the IOM transport to Bamako, and from there returned to the mines in Kenieba (Mali) in order not to return home to Guinea where his dispute was still unresolved.

While these two men inadvertently encountered the repressive migration regime during their mobility trajectories and then found refuge in the mines, Felix's trajectory highlights a reverse enterprise. Felix left Nigeria with the clear intention of passing through Libya to Europe. After a failed attempt to reach Italy, Felix was briefly imprisoned in Libya where he suffered daily police violence. When he was released, Felix was too scared to attempt a new passage and thought only of leaving Libya. In his case, it was the harsh encounter with Europe's intra-African borders and the discomfort of "going home with nothing," which would mean not repaying the moral debt of his absence, that led him to continue his travels. First he went to Niger and then to Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea where he spent most of his time working and travelling from mine to mine, which seemed to him to be the most accessible livelihood option away from home.

Finally, it is interesting to look at the story of Ibrahim, the only informant who actually crossed over to Europe and got to Italy. Paradoxically, Ibrahim states clearly from the outset that "[he] never decided to emigrate [but he] continued to travel and took advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves," until he found himself in Libya and later in Italy. Like Ali and James, Ibrahim had already travelled through several countries (Ivory Coast, Mali, Liberia, Guinea), spending most of his time working in gold mines, and occasionally also in diamond mines. He decided to extend his mobility to Tunisia after realizing that "mining is too hard work if you don't have a good position yourself. You'll always have something at the end of the day, but it's never enough to move you forward." So, he planned to join a friend of his who had been living in Tunisia for several years, with the idea of building up capital and later investing it in mining operations. A few weeks after Ibrahim got to Tunisia, his friend left for Libya with the aim of moving to Italy, but without success. When Ibrahim learnt that his friend had been imprisoned before returning to Guinea "with almost nothing," Ibrahim curiously decided to "try his luck." As he says, "I hadn't really imagined being so close to Europe. I thought that, even if I hadn't worked towards this aim, since I was there and that my friend had left, I could try it too." When we spoke, Ibrahim was detained in Italy and waiting for his asylum application to be processed. However, he had already decided that it was not worth waiting for the outcome of the procedure and was already planning to travel to Spain as soon as he had the chance, as one of his friends had assured him that he would help him find work there.

The four vignettes presented above have in common that the trajectories of their protagonists successively cross mining and migration routes. Their travel decisions are less concerned with specific destinations than with contingencies linked to the contexts in which they are

taken, and which young men often seek to escape by further expanding their mobility. When they travel to places labelled as migration routes, they inevitably face the violence that Europe's externalised borders exert on travellers from sub-Saharan Africa, regardless of whether they want to migrate to Europe or not. Gold mines play a more ambivalent role in their trajectories. On the one hand, the transnational circulation of territories that gold mines constitute socialises young men to cross borders in precarious conditions, which can sometimes drive them to continue their journeys further when they had not originally planned to. On the other hand, with virtually non-existent barriers to entry and a geography that intersects with migration routes, gold mines—despite the prevailing harsh working conditions—also seem to act as spaces of refuge for men who are forcibly expelled at Europe's externalized borders.

5. Conclusion

This article began with the observation that mining and migration routes are increasingly overlapping in Africa, raising the question of whether mining has become a common step towards migration out of the continent. By examining how mining and migration routes intersect along the trajectories of young West Africans on the move, the article confirmed IOM's findings that miners rarely engage in mining with a migration project in mind. However, by examining the mobility trajectories of some of these men who were sometimes considered migrants and sometimes miners, the article identified in more detail how these different routes relate to each other. While overseas migration is certainly not a common project for itinerant miners, the gold mines constitute a transnational space that favours the expansion of movements across the continent, including outside the field of mining. Rather than encouraging overseas migration, gold mining seems to be more of a safety net, not only for seasonal farmers or young people in search of money and adventure, but also, increasingly, for people who are confronted with Europe's intra-African borders. From this perspective, while suspicions that gold mining would be a stepping stone to overseas migration seem largely unfounded, the fact that travellers—expelled or deported from areas designated as migration routes—often have little choice but to seek refuge and economic relief in artisanal mines, calls for greater attention to the effects of the increasing criminalisation of travels (Brachet, 2018). Artisanal mining has now become the second largest source of livelihoods on the continent (Hilson, 2016), largely due to the lack of opportunities in other sectors which were historically structured by seasonal migration. The repression imposed by Europe's expanding mobility regime, therefore, not only restricts these options, but through its externalized borders also actively produces a heterogenized reserve of labour (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013) and indirectly feeds the informal artisanal mining sector with a low-skilled, cheap and unprotected workforce. Cynically enough, the product of their labour (gold) finds its way into licit markets through complex global supply chains that cross cut the realm of the formal and the informal, the licit and the illicit (Bolay, in press b; Verbrugge & Geenen, 2020), and, as has been well demonstrated (Pieth, 2019), allows intermediaries and end producers partly based in Europe to make significant profits.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Swiss Subsaharan Africa Migration Network (S-SAM; project Artisanal Miners) and supported by SNF (Project No. 173354). The author warmly thanks Didier Ruedin who coordinated the Network and the thematic issue, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their generous comments. I am grateful to Sandaly Kourouma, and the IOM office in Bamako for their help.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 247–256
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3691

Article

Choosing to Stay: Alternate Migration Decisions of Ghanaian Youth

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Submitted: 28 September 2020 | Accepted: 15 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This article focuses on nationals from Ghana who have lost interest in pursuing migration dreams to Europe and North America after failed attempts to migrate. Many less experienced youths who attempt to migrate to Europe and North America face challenges such as strict immigration laws, high cost of financing migration plans, or illegal recruiters. Some risk their lives through dangerous routes to achieve their migration goals. The negative consequences recorded are numerous, including death en route to Europe and North America. Using life stories, this article lets failed migrants recount the frustration, wasted resources and years spent to fulfil their migration dreams. It discusses individual factors such as experiences that affect the decision not to pursue migration dreams despite the culture of migration in their communities. The article concludes that strict immigration policies in Europe and North America have restricted international migration among less experienced and less skilled youth in Ghana, leading to personal decisions not to migrate but adjust to the conditions at home, and later describing their stay as a preferred decision.

Keywords
involuntary mobility; voluntary mobility; stayers; Ghana; migration aspirations

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Why people stay has received less attention in the migration discourse, despite the relatively high proportion of immobility compared to the smaller percentage (3.5% as a proportion of the world's population) of persons who are internationally mobile (UNDESA, 2020). The situation is much more worrying, even though increasingly, globalisation has led to advancement in technology and telecommunication while at the same time, facilitating movement and interactions through transnationalism (Carling, 2014). The works of scholars like Massey et al. (1999) and De Haas (2014) on immobility have shown that explaining only why people move offers a unidirectional understanding of the migration narrative. The frequent neglect of immobility and overemphasis on migration has prompted Carling (2002) to describe the contemporary situation as an age of immobility. Schewel (2019) calls this neglect of immobility a "mobility bias." In Sub-Saharan Africa, where human mobility is enduring (Tonah, Setrana, & Arthur, 2017), studies by Esipova, Ray, and Pugliese (2011) have shown that over half of adults (51%) in Sub-Saharan Africa do not desire to move to another country.

Migration theories mainly explain why people migrate but not why they stay. For example, the neoclassical economics theory expounds international migration in terms of differences in wages, which causes migrants from low-income countries to move to high-income countries (De Haas, 2010). Meanwhile, these disparities have not translated into increased volumes of people moving from less to higher endowed countries, leaving the majority of the world's population immobile (Carling, 2002). The new economics of labour migration theory explains why households determine who and why some individuals in the household deserve to migrate rather than others. This is because migration is seen as a means by which the households diversify resources as a strategy to decrease their income risks (De Haas, 2010). Here too, there is reason to believe that not all those who have been chosen by households are able to realise their migration goals, thereby contributing to the

high immobility numbers. The focus of these theories on reasons why people migrate leaves a gap in the migration literature about why people stay (e.g., Massey et al., 1999). This research gap calls for the need to explore factors and processes of choosing to stay as alternate migration decision.

This article seeks to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the challenges of migrants leading to the staying processes as well as reasons influencing their decision to stay. The article focuses on Ghanaian youth who have lost interest in pursuing migration dreams to Europe and North America after failed attempts. Using life stories, the article recounts potential migrants' frustrations, wasted resources and years spent in their attempt to fulfil their migration dreams of travelling to Europe and North America. The article relies very much on Carling's aspiration/ability model. Additionally, the article contributes substantially both to the model and to the immobility discourse through in-depth exploration of the processes through which potential migrants move into immobility: particularly from involuntary immobility to voluntary immobility; and why? This contribution is important for us to understand what happens to unfulfilled migration aspirations and whether to pursue migration projects despite the obstacles or non-migration.

2. Conceptualising Immobility: A Review of Literature

The aspiration/ability model remains a coherent framework for analysing immobility with a central focus on involuntary immobility in the migration process. In Carling's aspiration/ability model, "a migration 'aspiration' is defined simply as a conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration" (Carling, 2002, pp. 12–13, also cited in Carling & Schewel, 2018, p. 946). By aspirations, Carling meant "a specific type of attitudes: a subjective evaluation of an object or concept which in this case," and he refers to it as migration (Carling, 2014, p. 3). Migration aspirations are described as "the social norms, and expectation about migrating or staying, opportunities for migration and the structural forces facilitating or constraining particular migration trajectories" (Carling & Schewel, 2018, p. 952). In the model, the varying degrees of migration aspirations shows that for those who aspire to migrate, some will have the ability to do so; they are the 'actual migrants' while others may have the migration aspiration but may lack the ability to do so; and they are described as 'involuntary non-migrants' (Carling & Schewel, 2018). Carling further distinguishes between involuntary and voluntary migrants based on their abilities. The voluntary non-migrants are "those who stay because of a belief that non-migration is preferable to migration" (Carling & Schewel, 2018, p. 946). Taking inspiration from Sen's (1997) capabilities approach and De Haas' (2014) aspiration–capability framework, Carling and Schewel (2018, p. 956)) define ability as "the element that symbolises whether potential migrants can turn their migration aspirations into actual migration." These abilities are equally important for potential migrants who eventually make the alternate choice of staying, instead of turning migration aspirations into reality.

As a point of departure, this article operationalises ability, rather, as the element that represents whether potential migrants would turn and channel their migration aspirations into a non-migration decision. Here, ability is an opportunity for the involuntary immobile person to exercise his or her agency to move into the category of voluntary immobility. Agency is used here to refer to the individuals' ability to exercise their own free will and make their own choices (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), in this case, making a choice to stay voluntarily. The process of staying in itself can be conceptualised as an element of agency (De Haas, 2014). The involuntary immobile makes conscious effort to invest in him/herself in the home country to enable growth and empower him/herself to pursue many different life paths. The extent to which agency is implemented depends on several other factors—individual, social and economic, among others. Emphasising this point, Schewel (2019, p. 330) argues that "for many non-migrants, staying reflects and requires agency; it is a conscious choice that is renegotiated and repeated throughout the life course."

Still in the aspiration/ability model, some major micro- and macro-level elements that are analysed include the emigration environment and the immigration interface (Carling, 2002, p. 13). The emigration environment seeks to question why several people want to emigrate. Immigration interface includes all the available modes of migration, with associated requirements, costs and risks (Carling, 2002). Migration aspirations and the ability to migrate are informed by both the macro- and individual-level factors. The macro-level factors include "social, economic and political context, available modes of migration, with associated requirements, costs and risks" (due to restrictive immigration policies; Carling, 2002, p. 13). The micro-level factors are "gender, age, family migration history and social status, educational attainment and personality traits" (Carling, 2002, p. 13). The model helps in framing the analysis and unearthing individual's aspirations and agency to choose to stay or not to stay. It further explains why and how Ghanaian youth who aspire to migrate to Europe and North America, eventually decide to stay.

In spite of the usefulness of this model, what is not clear is the aftermath of people within the involuntary immobility, whether they remain involuntary immobile for the rest of their lives or decide to move from being involuntary immobile to voluntary immobile: At what point do they engage in such decisions? What processes shape such decisions and why? The migration aspiration of the Ghanaian youth is not a guarantee that migration is automatic or even attempted. Among these youth, the processes of pre-migration may be frustrating and expensive; and may decide to find alternative means of meeting their life aspirations. Indeed, as expounded by Carling

and Schewel (2018, p. 2), not everyone—in this case, not every Ghanaian youth—aspire to migrate, even if they have all the resources at their disposal (be they financial, social and capital resources) to do so. Despite the culture of migration in some contexts (Schewel, 2019, p. 3), some may not harbour migration aspirations for various reasons.

Relatedly, Schewel (2015, p. 8) highlights the notion of retain, repel and internal constraints as factors likely to influence immobility decisions. She further categorises these factors into economic and non-economic factors. Retain factors are the "favourable conditions that encourage staying at home" (Schewel, 2015, p. 8). The economic retaining factors include rational choice theory, and location-specific advantages accumulated overtime. Rational choice theory stipulates that people will prefer staying if the cost of migrating offsets the benefits of staying. Meanwhile, the location-specific advantages highlight that when people have 'insider advantage' due to consistent location and relationship with a place, the likelihood of them staying is high (DaVanzo, 1981). Among the retaining non-economic factors include voice, loyalty, religion, family and community ties (DaVanzo, 1981).

Repel factors describe "conditions elsewhere that diminish the aspiration to migrate" (Schewel, 2015, p. 8). Repelling economic factors comprise job opportunities in potential destination and financial costs of migration (cf. Epstein, 2008). Repelling non-economic factors also consist of stress of leaving home, dangers of the journey, xenophobia and racism. Knowledge of these factors are usually disseminated through people's own personal experiences as a result of failed migration through networks, media reportage and migration messages (Schewel, 2015, p. 8).

Internal constraints factors are "more nuanced influences on decision-making at the level of individual psychology that attempt to explain why some people may not meaningfully consider alternatives to staying" (Schewel, 2015, p. 8). Internal constraints on decision making cuts across threshold of indifference, lacking achievement motivation, an underdeveloped capacity to aspire, and risk aversion.

These factors serve as a starting point to understand the elements that influence the decision to stay. As noted by Schewel (2015), these factors are not necessarily mutually exclusive in a real-world situation. Debates that promote economic reasons as dominant factors are flawed mostly in their argument: Complex reasons have led to why people take certain decisions, even if they are economic reasons, although often there are other social reasons. Fischer and Malmberg (2001), in their study in Sweden using life course perspective, noted that people who have strong ties to, for example, places and people may not be motivated to move. Particularly, they cite children, owning a house, marriage and employment as social circumstances that can cause people to stay and not move. They also offer explanations for the non-economic values and aspirations which could refer to people who prefer to stay and contribute to shaping the economic and political environment than to exit (Hirschman, 1970; Schewel, 2015).

3. Study Context, Research Methods and Profile of the Participants

The case of Ghana is important in this study because, in 1960, Ghana recorded large numbers of immigrants from in and around Africa due to its economic and political stability; it later turned into a major migrant sending country due to poor economic and political environment. However, since the last two decades, the changes in global issues and the relative political and economic stability in the country has resulted in a balanced net migration rate (Quartey, 2009), which has led to varied mobility patterns including emigration, immigration and transit migrations at international levels (Quartey, 2009). The improved performance of the national economy since the 1990s may have had some potential influence on staying behaviours. In 2008, Ghana attained the status of a middle-income country with a per capital income of US $1500 in 2009. In addition to income earned from the production of gold, cocoa, tourism, exports of non-traditional goods and remittances from Ghanaians abroad, Ghana started the commercial production of oil in December 2010. These developments resulted in considerable confidence in the economy by foreign and local investors. Additionally, the general economic conditions for doing business in Ghana has been quite favourable and have a high likelihood of influencing people's decision to stay in the country, especially in the midst of tightened immigration laws and restrictions on travelling abroad, particularly, to Europe and North America that require valid travel and employment documents (Setrana & Tonah, 2016, p. 553).

Seven participants (five males, two females) were recruited for this study through chain referrals by the initial contact and personal contacts. All seven participants included in the study were potential migrants who were unsuccessful in their attempts to migrate to Europe or North America; but currently, have little to no aspiration, desire or dream to migrate to Europe or North America. These participants were purposively selected from the city of Accra—a primary destination for different migrants both local and international (cf. Setrana & Tonah, 2016). While four of the participants had made two failed attempts, all the other three had made one attempt to migrate to Europe or North America. A key challenge for this study is related to difficulties in identifying failed female potential migrants because, in addition to not wanting to share their own experiences, Ghanaian women do not take much risk when it comes to migration to Europe or North America through dangerous irregular channels.

I used snowball technique to recruit participants for this study; the failed potential migrants are hard to reach because the topic of failed migration is sensitive and

difficult to talk about. I used flexible in-depth interview guides to conduct all the interviews. The interviews were organised using a life history approach. A key reason for using this technique is that it allowed gaining in-depth understanding (cf. Eastmond, 2007) of the issues but with emphasis on participants' migration aspirations, and experiences as well as their staying processes. The technique also enabled me to gain individual subjective evaluation of their social experiences including their own failed migration aspirations, migratory processes, the material and non-material dimensions of immobility and the decision to pursue (im)mobility. This allowed for unearthing commonalities or variations within and across the participants own unique social experiences.

Thematic analysis was done on participants' migration decisions and attempts, decision to stay as well as the factors that influenced their decision to stay. Although, discussing immobility experiences with the failed potential migrants does not necessarily place them in a vulnerable position, I was aware that conversations related to past struggles linked to any attempt to migrate to Europe or North America could engender uneasiness. Consequently, established guidelines for dealing with various ethical issues, including informed consent and guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, were strictly observed to protect these participants. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in locations that allowed the participants to speak freely and safely. Each participant decided on and chose a preferred location for the interview. Several contacts were made with participants to build trust prior to the actual interview date. I introduced the purpose of the research and secured informed consent from each participant before the actual interview. The interviews were conducted in English and Twi. The ones conducted in Twi were translated into English for analysis. I use pseudonyms in the narration of the participants' experiences to protect their identity. The in-depth nature of the interviews contributes to adding to the abstract theories of the migration and immobility discourses, in particular the aspiration/ability model by Carling (2002). However, in replicating such a study, the contextual specific factors such as migration history and culture, economic and social milieu are crucial and must be taken into consideration.

The participants were between the ages of 19 and 28 at the first time they took the decision to pursue their migration goals. The Table 1 shows the detailed demographic characteristics of the participants.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Migration Processes and Decisions

The preferred destination among the participants were UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, US and Canada. Depending on the preferred destination, some countries in Europe were described as transit countries by the participants, in their words, a "stepping stone" to the actual preferred destination. In their previous attempts, transit countries included Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa, Benin and Saudi Arabia. Five of the participants contacted agents or connection persons, one was supported by his association and another was seeking the opportunity through the assistance of his friend and an agent.

The in-depth interviews make it clear that the decision to migrate is never a one-time event (see also Setrana, 2017), rather it is a process spanning many years. Indeed, the decision to migrate is a stepwise process that includes earning money for the journey, finding the right contacts and obtaining migration information. During the early youthful stages in the lives of these participants, migration was perceived, in their words, as the "only means to an end." The path to a successful life could only be imagined through the lens of migration. While the purpose of migration differs for many young people; for these participants, the main motive for migration was economic, such as better employment and income, among others. However, others stated that they were influenced by their peers.

Although economic factors were the main reasons for migration, other social factors were also discussed. At the age of sixteen, Kidi migrated from his village in the Northern zone of Ghana to a suburb in Accra to pursue his migration to Europe dream. On his arrival, he contacted and settled with his eldest sister. Accra was a transit location for him to earn income for his journey as well as find agents who could assist him move to Agadez in Libya. Between 1997 and 2008, Kidi worked tirelessly and saved enough money to self-finance his trip. His decision to migrate was in part influenced by the display of wealth by returnees from Nigeria. He stated: "I made up my mind to migrate when I saw people who returned from

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants.

Name	Sex	Current Education Status	Job	Age when first pursuing migration goal	Current Age
Faud	Male	Junior secondary certificate	Trader	24	38
Kidi	Male	Junior certificate	Trader	23	43
Dul	Male	Senior certificate	Trader	24	32
Ako	Female	Primary certificate	Caterer	27	45
Dina	Female	Senior secondary certificate	Business woman	25	38
Mansh	Male	Senior secondary certificate	Business man	28	43
Zuri	Male	No formal Education	Trader	19	22

Nigeria display lots of wealth." In the 1980s, Ghanaians who emigrated to Nigeria came back home with lots of goodies. However, after Nigeria's economic crises, Ghanaians began to move to Libya to work as both professionals and labourers. Kidi further explained:

> For those young guys from my village who migrated to Libya, they moved on to Italy while others who moved to Morocco continued to Spain. Migration to Europe through Libya became a necessary competition in my village since almost every household had a migrant living in these places. I didn't have any family member abroad and so, I decided to initiate this process myself on behalf of my family. But I had no money at that time. One of my friends from my village who had successfully landed in Italy, contacted me after his arrival to give me information on his experience through the desert to Libya. He knew I was also planning to migrate to Europe; he gave me the contact details of the agent who assisted him to also aid me in my process. He asked me to find a minimum amount of $400 which is the boat fee from Agadez to Italy.

Kidi's narration shows how his choice of migration channel was influenced by the kind of information he received from his contact person. Kidi decided to migrate using an irregular route because this was the channel used by his network. His choice of channel was not only associated with strict immigration policies, but also lack of information among potential migrants, especially those who had less education and experience.

In the early years of his youthful life, Faud made the decision to migrate to Europe or North America. He lived and grew up in a suburb of Accra, a community, where migration is seen as the norm for every young person. He said:

> I had a bit of money, and my brother also supported me financially, because he was aware of my decision to migrate. After my high school education in 2006, I worked hard to mobilise money for migration. In the evenings, all the *borgas* [term used to refer to the return migrants or those in diaspora] gathered at the 'base' [a local English expression which means a physical place of meeting for a group of people]. Here, they discussed all kinds of issues, including migration opportunities and challenges, some were from Italy, the USA, etc. They always had lots of foreign currencies with them and this further heightened my desire to migrate. Because of them, I just convinced myself that Europe must be a nice place for me to live.

Similar to Kidi's experience, Faud's influence was due to peer and community pressure. However, the mode through which he gained migration information was quite different from Kidi's: He gathered information on migration through his interactions with return migrants.

On the other hand, the two females rather sought a migration opportunity through other means such as labour export, marriage and/or visit. Ako shared her story:

> I had the dream to migrate to Europe as I was growing up, but I had no relation or friend there. I was told by my colleague that I could apply to work in Saudi Arabia. And hopefully from there, find my way to Europe. I accepted to work in Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker. My plan was to continue from Saudi Arabia to Germany or somewhere Europe. I got the job in Saudi; my employers paid all the fare and lo and behold I was in Saudi.

Dina also said:

> After my high school education, my father hired a connection man to assist me migrate to the UK or anywhere in Europe or North America. The whole process was sponsored by my dad. Because I knew I will be migrating abroad, I didn't pursue any further education, but was waiting for the chance to fulfil my migration dream. My father thought that the best security he could give me was to send me out of the country.

Similar to the two male stories, the narration of the females points to ways of raising money and gathering resources to fund the desire to migrate. There is a difference in the ways and sources of fundraising among the participants: Kidi and Faud sought to work hard in the urban area to mobilise funds for their journey, although Faud was supported by his brother. Ako found a job in Saudi Arabia that then allowed her to gather enough resources to pursue her dream of migrating to Europe or North America. On the other hand, Dina's father was wealthy and found migration abroad as the most secured future he could offer her daughter, so, she could also support her other siblings once she managed to migrate.

As part of the migration preparations, migrants either made the decision alone or with their families. For the two females, both of their migration decisions were taken with their families. In both cases, Dina and Ako were the first daughters of their families. In Ako's view, the only means to help her family stay out of poverty was for her to migrate. The decision to migrate was influenced by the migration culture in the communities of the participants, access to information, networks as well as interactions with return migrants.

4.2. Migration Connections and Frustrations in the Process

The frustrations narrated by the migrants were itemised under the various attempts they had each embarked on, namely the resources (i.e., time, personal energy and money) they had wasted in these processes and the prob-

lems of navigating strict immigration policies. The narration of the participants shows that attempts to reach Europe or North America comprised of many efforts and frustrations, such that they claimed to have engaged in numerous sacrifices that were likely to influence any subsequent migration decisions. Beyond the problems associated with immigration policies (Carling, 2002; Spijkerboer, 2018), other forms of frustrations such as time wasting and personal energy drain, are hardly accounted for in the discourses surrounding migration processes. They may broadly be referenced within costs and risks, but in such context, time may lose its significance because calculating time spent may be a difficult task compared to monies spent.

In this section, I discuss the detailed account of the failed attempts by some of the participants. At the age of twenty-one , after his senior high school, Dul attempted to migrate to the USA through Canada and Mexico on two occasions. He recounts his two-times failed attempts as follows:

> In 2012, my relative who lived in America connected me to his friend in Canada. The 'deal' for the visa was in South Africa. The agent processing the documents directed me to submit my passports to the Canada High Commission in South Africa for processing. I didn't know that I was expected to have a visa for South Africa to demonstrate that I was indeed in the visa issuing country. The journey to South Africa was through illegal means, I couldn't have any visa as evidence. It took me more than one month before retrieving my passport with the Canadian visa from South Africa, I was issued a three-months tourist visa. The challenge afterwards, was how to get on board with my passport without any South African stamp but with a Canadian visa from South Africa. On three occasions, I couldn't board the plane because I had a strict flight attendant. I didn't want to be questioned as to why I had a Canadian visa from South Africa; I was scared. On all the three occasions, I did change my flight and paid the penalty fee of $100. The process repeated itself until the visa expired.
>
> The next connection after the Canada episode was to have a Mexican visa, which could then help me enter America through Mexico. There was no Mexican Embassy in Accra at that time. To have a Mexican visa, the consular had to give approval from Ghana for me to go to Abuja, Nigeria, where I could submit my visa application documents. But the good news was that I did skip the Accra approval and travelled directly to Abuja. I made a commitment fee of over $400. I travelled to Abuja with seven other guys for this 'connection' [a local English expression which means either contract or project, also sometimes referred to as a 'deal' by the participants]. The Ghana agent handed us over to his partner in Abuja. Fortunately, the process in Abuja was smooth, we eventually had our visas with the help of the second agent. Now, there comes the problem! In addition to the $400 commitment fee, we also paid $500 as visa fees, making a total of $900. The deal as we got to know was that each person was supposed to pay $1,500 for the visa which the agents didn't inform us. We were hoping our agent in Ghana will transfer the $400 each we paid to the Nigerian agent, but he refused. After four weeks of being stranded in Nigeria, we returned to Ghana but without our passports. I further mobilised the remaining $1000 to be paid to the Nigerian agent through my Ghana agent, but the agent squandered the money. Up until now, I never received my passport from Nigeria.

Very important to involuntary immobility category, using Dul's experience, are the connectedness of intermediaries across countries which is gaining prominence in the migration industry debates. The challenges of immigration policies go beyond obtaining visas, but other obstacles need to be overcome as part of the immigration interface which was a problem for Dul and his friends. As hinted earlier, an average cost of $US 3000 was spent during this unfruitful process, not only has money been lost, but part of his prime years of economic activeness was also spent on chasing a migration project. This was the turning and final point for Dul; he said that he felt such monies could be invested in better opportunities back home. Expanding on the aspiration/ability model by Carling, involuntary immobility among these youth has not been a permanent stage for them. Rather, the immigration interface challenges compelled them to find alternate decisions to their migration project, progressing to a state of voluntary immobility. In this case, voluntary immobility could be described as a state of exercising agency on the part of the frustrated participant, to divert human and financial resources, which would have been spent on the unsure migration project towards their own personal well-being and growth in Ghana.

Faud decided to fulfil his migration goal at a time when he was single with no child. He joined the Ghana Supporters' Union for several reasons, including the opportunity to migrate and visit other countries. The Ghana Supporters' Union is an association with the aim of cheering up the national men and women football teams to ensure victory for Ghana in and outside the country. Through this association, Faud said he got the chance to live in Equatorial Guinea with the aim of continuing to Europe. He narrated his attempt this way:

> Through the supporter's union, I had the chance to migrate to Equatorial Guinea. I went to Equatorial Guinea by air. I was issued my visa from Togo. Life in Equatorial Guinea was very difficult. The Black Stars [Ghana national football team] were having a tournament, so, I went with them on a tourist visa. At the end, it was waste of money. I didn't get the chance to work, neither did I have the opportunity

> to move to Europe. I was informed that once I managed to arrive in Equatorial Guinea, obtaining any European visa could be easy compared to Ghana. When I extended my stay after the tournament, the police chased me out of the country. About 400 of us were arrested by the Police in Equatorial Guinea and later deported.

Upon this experience, Faud decided to stay in Ghana because it is his home. Since he had sold his business and invested the money in the Equatorial Guinea trip, he had to find capital to start a new business. According to Faud, he did not have the financial resources to pursue his migration project. Relating this finding to the aspiration/ability model, Faud lacked the ability (e.g., restrictive immigration policy, illegal entry) to achieve his migration project; and therefore, decided to stay in Ghana. He willingly took a decision to begin his economic life again (exercising his agency), but strategically veer his human and financial capital (the left-over available ability) into sustaining himself in Ghana without investing anymore in migration aspirations.

Kidi said he finally mobilised some money in the urban centre at the age of sixteen with only basic secondary school education. He had a cash fund of $500 that could support his trip to Libya and a driver's license. He said:

> I left Accra one morning to visit my brother in Cotonou; I heard it was easy to travel to Libya through Cotonou. I spent a couple of days with him and before I realised the money was 'gone.' He assured me he will help me get my money back. But things became difficult for us, so I returned to Accra to start life all over again.

Kidi's narration shows that when he lived in Cotonou, he did not have visa issues because Benin and Ghana are both members of the ECOWAS, enjoying free movement. However, he said, his main challenge was his trusted brother who squandered his money. The interviews depict how he had to find a job and earn some money before he could pay for his transportation back to Ghana. From the in-depth interviews, participants emphasised the important role trust plays in the migration processes, and the fact that having money and smooth immigration policies were not enough because they sometimes made them vulnerable to exploitation. An example is portrayed in Kidi's narration. Mistrust has emerged as a key factor resulting in the unsuccessful migration projects, although, (mis)trust does not arise as obvious analytical approach in discussing involuntary immobility; Lyon (2000, pp. 664–665) argues that trust operates when there is confidence in other agents, despite the uncertainties, risks and the possibility for them to act opportunistically. However, for these participants, none of their agents or intermediaries was able to achieve any of their migration projects, despite the participants' trust in them. Based on these and other related issues, Kidi also decided to forego his migration goal; and, rather, establish himself in the Ghanaian labour market.

4.3. Choosing to Stay Is about Choosing Not To "Begin the Whole Process Again"

The narration of the participants emphasised the fact that choosing to stay was about choosing not to "begin the whole process again." Here, the whole process as used by the participants referred to the migration process as they have narrated above. In the view of participants, they began to appreciate the need to find alternatives to their migration decisions. To the extent that, even when opportunities of migration are presented on a 'silver platter,' their progression from involuntary to voluntary immobility does not compel them to revert their current decisions. Just as migration drivers influencing migration can be strong determinants, the alterative—choosing to stay—could even be stronger. Supporting the literature discourse on immobility, choosing to remain reflects and requires agency that needs to be negotiated over time (Schewel, 2019) in the context where migration is a culture and the goal of many other youth. Dul says, he has given up after several failed attempts. He narrates how he arrived at his decision to remain. He said:

> After all those frustrations since 2013, I have given up on my migration decisions. I felt I have wasted so much time and resources, all in the attempt to go to North America. Shockingly, in recent times when I need those offers no more, I have been receiving invitations to migrate for all kinds of reasons including work. But I have given up. Recently, a friend of mine abroad said his company in UK needed to recruit workers, he asked if I was interested but I refused. He sent me invitation letter, but I explained to him that I had businesses to take care of which needed my attention. He later asked if I could recommend someone; my cousin is now working in the UK. The invitation was genuine, he paid for nothing, and no bank statement, among others. Within some few days, the visa was ready. No struggle!

According to Dul's narration, unlike his previous experience, he has an invitation letter and a job offer—the two elements he struggled to acquire in his earlier failed migration attempts. These elements represent the key immigration factors for Dul to bounce back to his migration aspirations, however, because he is voluntarily immobile, he rejected the offer.

The participants indicated that the major reasons for remaining voluntary immobile are due to economic reasons such as having better/dignified employment, receiving stable income, better opportunities and better use of time and human resource. The participants also indicated non-economic factors such as the desire to stay

with family or support development back home, as reasons for staying in Ghana (cf. Hirschman, 1970). Although the differences between home and abroad still exist, for these participants they emphasised their preference to remain in Ghana; hardly does the literature on migration explain the above macro-level factors (referred to as emigration environment in the aspiration/ability model) of staying behind. The urge to seek a better job elsewhere, among others, are not incentives enough to drive many of these participants out of Ghana anymore. At the beginning of their youthful lives, migration and its benefits were so critical that, the challenges they faced did not scare them. They did not bother about the risks, cost and dangers. Yet later, when they have attempted and failed, they claimed to have recognised that chance and time were not on their side, and abandoned the migration goal. Kidi shared his decision to remain:

> At first, we all wanted to go abroad but now, I have lost interest in migrating to Europe or North America. I can't go and start life all over again there; and as to the type of work I will be offered, even if I manage to go now, I have no idea. I might even wash dishes at a restaurant, but I won't do that in Ghana. Perhaps if one is unemployed, that person can afford to travel abroad and make a living. But if that person has a purposeful agenda or business in Ghana; then he/she has no business leaving. Even if the income is less than $50 or $100, it is sustainable. There is no need to worry and struggle to move to Europe or North America. For what purpose?

Similarly, Rauf also shares his decision of staying behind:

> When you travel and things don't go well, you lose interest. That is how I felt. My passport has expired but since I have lost interest I am not thinking of renewal. I won't bother myself to travel because I don't really have that time to start the processes again. I am not desperate anymore. I have heard a lot of opportunities since my return. There is Dubai, and other places, but I don't want to waste my hard earn money and come back to 'square zero.'

4.4. Staying Home as a Preferred Choice

As indicated in the literature, "staying behaviour" could be analysed across either involuntarily or voluntarily (Schewel, 2015, p. 330) by identifying factors influencing staying-decision making. The decision to stay is influenced by layers of factors such as economic, social and personal traits. The underlying frustrations experienced during the migration process propelled the participants who were involuntary immobile to think about staying and moving into the category of voluntary immobile. The initial migration process cannot be detached from their current voluntary immobility decisions because experience has taught them lessons. Among these participants, the decision to remain voluntary immobile were influenced mainly by transnational links, positive emigration environment and individual factors such as jobs, international links with diaspora, a relatively comfortable life, marital life, children and other dependents, their extended families as well as a distressful past they would not want to go back to. Indeed, through advanced telecommunication, the immobile persons connect with the transnational space. Depending on the type of immobility, the reasons differ; when participants were involuntary immobile, their connection with diaspora was for them to achieve their migration goal while the state of being voluntary immobile is vice versa. The contact with diaspora had impact on the kind of evaluation participants made with regards to staying decisions. Generally, the literature on immobility describe these factors as retain (attractive conditions at home) and repel (conditions abroad diminishing migration desires) factors (Schewel, 2019).

Other factors influencing the voluntary immobility decisions of the participants were individual factors such as marriage, children, age, gender and education, among others. Participants' strong attachment nurtured overtime through children, owning a house, and being married are conditions that constrain migration but attracts them to immobility. It is obvious that these elements become constraints and attractions to remain in Ghana since these factors are hardly transferable or replaceable (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001; Schewel, 2015).

Dul shared why he has decided to remain in Ghana. He said:

> I am self-employed, trading in car spare parts. If I make the mistake of leaving my job to anywhere abroad, my business will collapse. Also, I am a family man, with a wife and kid. I have several dependents I am caring for. Imagine I travel in the midst of all these responsibilities, there will be a huge problem. The other problem is also that in Ghana I have my freedom. I decide when and what time to report to work; my cousin in the USA cannot do that at his work place. On the other hand, my cousin in the USA, earns more than I do here in Ghana but does not have the freedom. I know [that], with time, I will earn much more although with a bit of struggles.

One key factor for choosing to be voluntary immobile is for him to be free and independent without instructions from anyone—a factor not well highlighted in the migration and immobility debates. Similar to Dul, Mansh also shares how he enjoys his freedom. He said: "I enjoy my independence and ability to willingly decide what and how I wish to lead my life." The term 'free' expressed here by the participants can be explained by the nature of their businesses; all the participants owned and managed their own small to medium scale enterprises, giving them control over their own lives and economic activities.

Similarly, Akos also feels that she has control over her life in Ghana compared to living abroad. She shared:

> My brother who is in Southampton, for instance, told me that his monthly salary is 1,440 pounds. He pays 270 pounds for accommodation. He sometimes spends less than 100 pounds on food. At least he is able to save about 900 pounds every month. In Ghana, if one is not a politician or doing any better job, it is difficult to save. With all my years of working, I have not been able to even save $280 per month. One advantage is that I run my own business, employing more than five workers, so, even if I am not at work, the job still progresses. Unlike me, my brother, goes to work at 6 AM and closes at 5:30 PM. By the time he closes from work, he is tired and has to retire to bed; and the routine continues the next day.

As in the case of Akos, although the repelling factors—wages abroad—is higher compared to what she earns in Ghana, the other retaining non-economic factors are stronger causing her to abandon her migration decisions. By comparing herself with her brother, she sees herself as being in a freer environment compared to her brother.

Rauf, on the other hand has a different narration. He said:

> I run my shop as you can see [pointing to the shop]. I sell telephone accessories. I have my wife and child. The second baby is on the way. In Ghana, everything is hand-to-mouth; paying for rent, water bills and feeding, among others. The money I earn is not enough for me to save. I take care of many dependents from my extended family. As for the money, it's seriously not enough for me. In Europe or North America, you don't really spend much money. When you live as a group in an apartment, you don't get to spend so much. If the rent is $500 a month, each room member will pay some amount, and this helps saving some. The problem abroad is also that I cannot find my desired job, as I am engaged in here in Ghana. Even if it has to do with bathing a dead body, once you are outside Ghana, you have to appreciate that offer because that will be the only way to survive.

Rauf shares a similar storyline with Zuri. They are both not excited about their living conditions. Both Zuri and Rauf wished for better lives, yet the distressful experience with migration, job (trading in phones) and marital status prevent them from harbouring the desire to migrate to Europe or North America. The lack of financial resources is mixed in complex factors, influencing Rauf and Zuri's decisions to stay. Although both participants have decided to be voluntary immobile, comparing themselves with other emigrants, they are not happy with their current situation. Unlike the other participants, Rauf and Zuri indicated that for them, voluntary immobility remains the only option because of family, business, lack of financial resources and other obligations. While for others, it is an alternate choice than a compelling option.

5. Conclusion

The article has explored the failed attempts by potential migrants, their frustration, wasted resources and years with the intention to fulfil their migration dreams in Europe and North America. The article has highlighted the factors leading to their decision to stay in Ghana. Their decision to stay is prefaced by the frustrated migration processes, mistrust, wasted time, money and personal energy and later solidified by job opportunities, positive self-evaluation with diaspora links, the relatively comfortable life than before, marital life, age, children and other dependents. Other key findings also include issues of risk taking when participants were much younger, freer, and felt could try different opportunities no matter how risky. Although the initial migration was taken based on narratives and perceptions of there being "no future" and "no alternative," it turns out that there are alternatives for these participants. The frustrated migration processes outlined are not explicitly explained in the aspiration/ability model. Consequently, the article concludes by providing a more qualitative understanding of the actual staying processes which has received less attention in the immobility literature. That is, over time, people who remain in the home country find alternative immobility goals to migration, they move from the stage of involuntary staying to a voluntary staying—a process which is not captured in the aspiration/ability model. Unfortunately, not all of the youth expressed excitement about their economic situation in Ghana, although, they had chosen to stay, they hope their situation would improve. Here, it means that based on conditions of staying, voluntary immobility could further be categorised. For these Ghanaian youth, it is not a simple matter of categorising them into involuntary and/or voluntary. The complexities highlighted by the qualitative approach of this article has shown that further studies on the actual staying process and categories of immobility are critical and needed to shape the bias discourses of migration scholars.

Additionally, the article concludes, ability (i.e., age, time) and agency are significant determinants in the staying process. Choosing to stay is an ability that demands the exercising of agency which has to be negotiated by the Ghanaian youth over a period of time, in a context, where migration is a culture and the goal of many other youth.

Acknowledgments

The project this article is based on has been funded by the Swiss—Sub-Saharan African Migration Network (S-SAM). The author is grateful for the valuable comments from the anonymous reviewers and Didier Ruedin,

the academic editor of this thematic issue. The author would like to thank all the participants in Accra whose openness and support have made this project possible.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 257–267
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3729

Article

Rational Actors, Passive and Helpless Victims, Neither, Both: EU Borders and the Drive to Migrate in the Horn of Africa

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Submitted: 7 October 2020 | Accepted: 28 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This article argues that neither borders nor the ways in which migrants see them constitute significant deterrents to the migrants' resolve to migrate. The argument is based on an investigation of migrants en route to Europe from the Horn of Africa and the ways in which they see EU external borders and how that contributes to the decision to migrate. The article advances critiques of rational choice models of migrant decision-making that are based mainly on economic factors and contributes to theoretical explanations of why some people in the Horn of Africa migrate irregularly, despite measures enforced by state authorities to curb their movement. The article draws on a qualitative thematic analysis of personal face-to-face interviews conducted with migrants from four countries in the Horn of Africa who were in Ethiopia at the time of the research. In the interviews, there was sufficient evidence that migrants had realistic perceptions of European borders and that life in Europe might not be rosy. But this did not dampen the resolve to migrate. Solutions other than those that inhibit movement but understand, are sensitive to and include the perceptions of migrants are more likely to effectively address challenges associated with irregular migration.

Keywords
borders; European Union; Horn of Africa; migration; migrants' perceptions

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Migration and the deaths of thousands of people attempting to cross the EU external border for refuge, better life and economic prospects were among the most prominent and dramatic events that dominated the first two decades of the 21st century. This culminated into the so-called 2015 European migration crisis, in which over a million irregular migrants crossed into the EU from the Middle East and Africa and allegedly threatened to undermine the EU culture and single market (Diez, 2019; Mezei, 2018; Rogelj, 2017). Although the majority of people migrating to Europe in 2015 probably came from Syria, mainstream media and some academic literature suggest that migrants originating from Africa through the Mediterranean Sea significantly contributed to the crisis (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Flahaux & de Haas, 2016; Hammond, 2015; Inwood, 2017; Mackintosh, 2017; Mussi, 2018; Thorleifsson, 2017). Details of the migration events of 2015 are significant here because such events continue into the 2020s. As elaborated shortly, this article seeks to understand why this is the case from the perspective of migrants from the Horn of Africa. Migrants and asylum seekers from this region followed two major routes to reach Europe including, the Western Mediterranean from Morocco and Algeria into Spain and the Central Mediterranean from Tunisia and Libya through to Italy (Lampedusa). That irregular migration continues post-2015, with some of it originating in the Horn of Africa countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.

The EU and member states responded to the crisis by reinforcing respective nation-state borders that had existed before they established the Schengen Area.

The Common European Asylum System seemed to have been thrown into disarray. Particularly noteworthy was German Chancellor Angela Merkel's suspension of the Dublin Regulation in late 2015 in order to accommodate Syrian refugees (Holehouse, 2015; Scally, 2019). The suspension effectively meant that Germany defied EU rules or the Common European Asylum System, which required asylum seekers to seek refuge in the first safe EU country of arrival. This is also noteworthy because, as Belloni (2016) argues, the Dublin Regulation of the EU has not been able to prevent refugees from repeatedly trying to exploit possibilities of achieving legal status in second EU member states after they arrived in Europe, despite it being nearly impossible for them to gain asylum in second countries.

In the wake of the 2015 crisis, countries like Germany at the global level also backed the multilateral process that led to and culminated in the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018. The assumption behind the GCM is that legal pathways constitute viable means for addressing irregular migration. The argument in this regard has, indeed, been made that irregular migration occurs because the EU or member states close off legal avenues for admitting regular migrants (Czaika & Hobolth, 2016). The EU and member state's responses to the 2015 migration crisis as well as the drafting of the GCM, therefore, both seem to suggest that irregular migrants remain the target of restrictive migration legislation. Three quick points arise here in relation to what seems to be the major concern that irregular migrants from Africa in particular raise for governments, academics and anti-immigrant groups in the EU.

Firstly, some scholars, development and civil society organisations strongly indicate that more migration actually occurs within Africa than outwardly (Mercandalli et al., 2019; Nshimbi & Fioramonti, 2016) for it to warrant concern within EU countries. Secondly, significant voluntary, orderly and safe (as opposed to irregular) migration of the type that the GCM and EU countries aspire to achieve also actually occurs within Africa than outward. But thirdly, discourses in policy, public and academic circles assume that African migrants opt to engage in irregular rather than regular migration to the EU (see, e.g., Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon, & Sigona, 2017; Ruedin & Nesturi, 2018; Spencer & Triandafyllidou, 2020). Within those debates, very few examine the role that the migrants' resolve to migrate plays in migration processes, seeing that irregular migration towards the EU continues to occur. While some studies examine why unauthorised migration occurs, less than a handful really examine actual individual choices to engage in irregular migration (Ruedin & Nesturi, 2018). Further still, very little is known about the determination and motivations as well as how those individuals who opt to engage in irregular migration perceive processes of migration, especially physical barriers (like borders) enforced to curb their movement.

In this article I argue that the borders do not deter the migrants from their resolve to migrate. Accordingly, I investigate the ways in which African migrants who have already started off from their home countries on their irregular sojourn to the EU perceive the EU external border and the role of the migrants' attitudes towards the borders in the migration process. The article is set out within the context of the shared concern with irregular migration which I have highlighted. A proper understanding of individuals' views of apparent obstacles to irregular migration—such as borders—is essential to dispelling misleading assumptions about African migration that inform purported interventions to solve the problem. Efforts to protect and secure the EU's external border against unwelcome immigration are indeed said to have failed and the investments poured into them, wasted (Andersson, 2016; Castles, 2004).

Despite this, it is business as usual for both EU policy makers and the migrants. There is, however, research that adds agency to the understanding of African migration and distinguishes between African people's aspirations to migrate, the ability to migrate buoyed by their prosperity, and opportunities that present themselves for them to migrate (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016). Similarly, other studies explore aspirations further and add to them, desire and drivers of migration (Carling & Collins, 2020). These studies question common and widely held stereotypes of Africa as a continent attempting to escape poverty, war and pestilence (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016).

I extend these works in an attempt to contribute to unravelling why some Africans undertake irregular migration despite EU states enforcing measures and running information campaigns to discourage them from migrating. In the article, I focus on migrants' resolutions that inform the ways in which they perceive and respond to borders as formidable obstacles to their movement. My central argument is that as far as the migrants are concerned, borders do not constitute significant obstacles to their intent to migrate. What really matters to them is what they actually do if or when they encounter the borders. This argument arises from the response to the question why Africans from the Horn of Africa seem so determined and attempt to migrate to Europe, despite knowing that barriers and challenges exist to their movement.

Belloni (2016, 2019) has investigated Eritrean refugees in Italy and why they try to acquire new refugee status in second EU member countries despite the measures in the Dublin Regulation designed to stop such practices as well as a range of risks inherent to irregular migration. Belloni (2019, p. 1) asks "why gamble resources, time and energy again for an unsure outcome," and uses a theory of gambling to argue that the refugees in Italy engage in a "migration lottery" of continuously attempting to proceed to northern European countries in search of asylum in the hope that it will be granted. This is because living conditions in Italy are poor. It is more so because as far as the refugees and

their relatives are concerned, the refugees had not yet reached their final destination where they would fulfil family expectations and find safe havens and degrees of existential and socioeconomic stability. Belloni emphasizes luck, cost and reward of the bet or chances taken on migrating and the feeling of entrapment in the migration process already started as factors that compel the refugees to continue migrating until the process is completed. Whereas Belloni studies Eritrean refugees in Italy and their attempts to migrate further beyond to northern Europe, in this study I investigate secondary movement within Africa of not only Eritrean but also Ethiopian, Somalian and Sudanese migrants whose intended destination is Europe. I examine migrants who face the certainty of encountering the EU external border and the possibility of being sent back. Hence, why embark on such a journey in the first place? The empirical section of the article will show that the migrants were fully aware and extremely well-informed about the risks of migration, conditions in Europe, and border control measures. Their perceptions are largely accurate and reflect the reality of EU policies. The key insight that will emerge from the migrants is their determination to continue the journey to Europe despite what they know. The theoretical considerations and discussion of data and methods in the next two section provide the context within which I discuss these realities in the rest of the article.

2. Migration and the Resolve to Migrate: Some Theoretical Considerations

Examinations of migration decisions suggest the need for interpretations that go beyond commonly held explanations to better understand migration in the 21st century, because dominant explanations emphasise rational economic choices as drivers of migration. The neoclassical economics approach, for example, assumes that an abundant supply of labour exists in developing countries and this contrasts the abundant capital in developed countries. People from developing countries in search of better socioeconomic and living conditions, therefore, make rational decisions to migrate and take up work in developed countries. The new economics of migration complements the neoclassical economics approach in positing that an individual migrant's extended family helps decide too as well as shares in the costs and benefits of the individual member's migration.

The push-pull theory assumes rationality of the migrant too. Wage differentials between the migrant's country and the intended destination, levels of labour supply and demand as well as the migrant's desire for greater employment opportunities and aspirations for higher wages drive them into migrating. A range of factors within the migrant's country of origin too such as conflict, poverty and unemployment influence their decision to migrate.

These theories are distinct in terms of disciplinary background but complement each other (Massey et al., 1993) in the analysis of human migration. Further attempts to explain migration extend the focus of these theories to shine the spotlight on migrants' aspirations, desire and the drivers of migration (Carling & Collins, 2020). They foreground aspirations and desire and bring attention to migrants' subjectivities that interact with rational economic narratives in explaining drivers of migration. This article advances narratives of migration beyond economic rationality. Considering the ways in which migrants relate to migration possibilities, their capabilities and desire, the article adds on an examination of the role that resolutions and perceptions play in the migration process. Because the informants in this article had already initiated their migratory journeys, the article uniquely highlights migrants' convictions within motivations that they were better off leaving their homes than staying (Alpes, 2016; Carling & Collins, 2020). The article extends this aspect of migrants' aspirations and desire in the drive to migrate and demonstrates the resolve among migrants already in the process of migrating to proceed to their desired destination, Europe. The resolve is strongly expressed in the responses some key informants gave during interviews. This article distinguishes itself from many studies of Africa–Europe migration by engaging with the subject from the viewpoint of the migrants.

3. Obstacles to Migration and Power of Perceptions: Methods and Instruments

3.1. Data and Methods

This article follows a qualitative research design. The primary data, which was collected through interviews, was subjected to qualitative content analysis. After it was prepared and organized for analysis, a lot of effort was made to carefully identify and then group the data into common and recurring themes found in the interview responses. The themes spoke to migrants' perceptions of borders, the impact of various kinds of information from a variety of sources on decisions to migrate and knowledge/understanding of life in Europe in the migration process. This condensed and coded information formed the basis of the discussion in the next section. For example, salient themes that suggested 'knowledge' or 'understanding' of the existence of borders, risks involved in or realities of migration or life in Europe formed the basis upon which some informants' responses were picked and presented as pieces of evidence in the article. Attitudes that suggested migrants' agency such as 'hard work' or 'try,' equally informed the analysis and pointed to their effort and resolve to migrate.

In all, 28 migrants provided this information through semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the Swiss Sub-Saharan Africa Migration Network pilot project. The respondents originated from four countries of the Horn of Africa including, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. They all had already started off

on their journeys to Europe and were, therefore, interviewed en route in Ethiopia. The purposive snowballing method was deployed to select seven respondents per country. The Eritrean migrants were interviewed in refugee camps in Tigray, Ethiopia; Sudanese migrants were interviewed in the city of Humera, in Tigray, bordering Sudan; and Somalian and Ethiopian migrants were interviewed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The profile of informants was inclusive and diverse by design, capturing respondents by age group, gender and educational attainment. Fifteen of the respondents indicated that they were young, 10 said they were young adolescents and three said they were adults. The sample also included 13 females and 15 males. While graduates of junior and senior high school (12 and 9, respectively) dominated the sample, respondents who held diplomas (5) and certificates (2) or that had been trained in technical and vocational training institutions formed part of the sample too.

The interviews were conducted from February to July 2019 and facilitated by researchers in an Ethiopia-based think tank. No interpreters were necessary, as the data collectors were native speakers of the languages in which respondents conversed. The semi-structured interviews mainly focused on the migrants' narratives of their journeys. Follow-up questions sought to draw out information on how the migrants perceived borders and the migration processes. All the respondents had already made the initial move in their sojourn to Europe and were interviewed in Ethiopia. This distinguishes this study from others of its kind. Other studies interview people still at 'home,' who have not yet initiated but are pondering migrating, or are failed migrants or returnees (see, e.g., Alpes, 2016). The initial plan in this study was to employ the triangulation of methods of data collection namely, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and life story narratives. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and declaration of the pandemic, it was not possible to undertake the latter two methods. This is because the target countries, like the rest of the world, enforced strict measures such as the closure of nation-state borders and restrictions on gatherings, which curbed the mobility of researchers and ability to hold focus group discussions. The researchers, therefore, had to limit themselves to key informant interviews only.

4. The African Migrant, Perceptions and the EU Border

4.1. The Dangers of Irregular Migration and Perceptions of a Better Life in Europe

Several studies argue that poverty, wars and conflict characterise Africa and the socioeconomic and political realities on the continent (Douma, 2006; Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000; Goodhand, 2003; Rustad, 2019). They go on to posit that this, along with factors such as environmental degradation, increases the propensity and forces Africans to migrate in search of better economic and livelihood opportunities (Dako-Gyeke, Kodom, Dankyi, & Sulemana, 2020; Flahaux & de Haas, 2016; Raleigh, 2011; Schwartz, 2018). The studies argue that Europe is the most preferred destination by these migrants (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016; Lenoël & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2018). According to the arguments presented in these studies, the capital abundant industrial countries of Europe promise better standards of living and offer socioeconomic prospects and opportunities that are absent in Africa. The promise of higher wages, greater opportunities for employment and better standards of living in EU countries theoretically present significant pull factors for migrants, according to these arguments. Accordingly, the migrants have a nirvana view of EU countries and aspire to live there. Specifically, economic opportunities including better jobs and incomes are among most commonly cited pull factors towards Europe.

Yet, it became clear during interviews with the migrants who were already in the process of migrating to Europe from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan that they had realistic expectations of what life might turn out to be for them after they got to Europe. The expectations were best underscored by a young male Somali migrant, who said:

> We know that life in Europe is not a bed of roses. Let alone for migrants, even for Europeans, hard work is required to have a decent life. There is no easy money to be collected. We know for sure our family members coming from Europe may not tell us the ugly part of life in Europe. However, we are very sure that at least hard work in Europe pays well. With skill and education people can succeed a lot. That is why better quality of life is the attraction for many of us. Otherwise, racism, religious discrimination against Muslims and the moral decadence of European sexuality are things most Africans look at with contempt. (personal communication, 1 April 2020)

Much as they perceived life to be better in Europe, therefore, the migrants also expressed that there was no guarantee that it would be 'rosy.' Actually, the cited young Somalian assumed that life for Europeans themselves could be difficult without hard work. And he even ventured to suggest that his family members and relatives who had been in Europe might hide the ugly reality of difficult life for people back home who intended to migrate. But we see one aspect of the migrant's perception of life in Europe that contributes to strengthening the resolve to proceed with migrating there. This is the confident perception that hard work in Europe pays well and that skill and education can lead to success. Moreover, he points to a better quality of life that presumably comes with hard work, skill and education. The quality of life he mentions speaks to pull factors of migration (Dustmann & Okatenko, 2014; Rasool, Botha, & Bisschoff, 2012). But

over and above this, his assumptions are informed by his perceived understanding that applying oneself through hard work, skill and education produces better outcomes in Europe.

It is also interesting to see the migrant lowered his expectations and revealed a sober judgement of what he expected of a life that even threatens racism and discrimination based on his religious orientation in Europe. However, even that does not seem to have changed the perception of his country of origin (just like the young Eritrean man cited in the next sub-section and his negative view based on the uncle's killing and father's imprisonment) and the destination.

Further, it was evident from the responses obtained from all respondents that they too, just like the young Somalian respondent above, knew the dangers and risks involved in irregular migration very well. In fact, the question was asked if the journey to EU countries was worth making given the obstacles that existed on the way. Most of the respondents framed the issue as an existential matter. A young adolescent Somali female's revelation in this regard was intriguing. She said:

> People think that migrants do not know the risks involved. They consider us as innocent victims of fascinating stories created by human traffickers. This is not true at all. We are very realistic. We have not better life that would not allow us to take risk anyway. Life is all about opportunity cost. If the opportunity cost of going was more expensive than staying at home and languish in poverty and miserable life, why do you think people would decide to migrate than stay at home. It is a pure gamble. If you stay you are going to die of poverty anyway. Why not trying to achieve something meaningful or die trying. (personal communication, 21 April 2020)

The young lady raised interesting issues in her response. Castles (2004, pp. 209-210) underscores the role of migrant agency as a key issue in explanations of why the migration policies of European states and supranational organisations fail. In her response, the young adolescent Somali lady in this regard shrugs off victimhood and projects herself as a realistic risk taker. Her response corroborates Castles' argument that migrants are social beings who actively shape the migratory process in the quest for better outcomes for sending families and communities and themselves. The Somali lady also seems to be very calculating as she demonstrates that she made a cost-benefit analysis of migrating. She exhibits reasoning that is beyond the motive to migrate associated with the notion that leaving her country is better than staying (Alpes, 2016). And her view that the migration process is "a pure gamble" not only confirms her conscious risk-taking attitude but the strong resolve to proceed, based on the way that she contrasts it with the motive to stay at home and die. She, like a young adolescent Eritrean male and a female adult Sudanese respondent, also knew that among the obstacles she was likely to face on her journey was the "death during travel" or "death on the sea" (personal communications, 8 April 2020, 4 May 2020, 20 May 2020). In fact, all respondents said they knew that the possibility existed of dying or getting captured along the way. They based this on what they had seen on television, their smart phones or heard from friends. Nonetheless, they would continue with the journey. The migrants seemed to be fully aware of both the dangers and risks involved in irregular migration and that they might not achieve a better life in Europe. Yet, this did not dampen their resolve to proceed with the migration.

4.2. Intentions to Migrate and Perceptions of European Borders

The resolve to migrate by the key informants is strongly expressed in the views of a young Eritrean male migrant:

> Once you left your country to migrate to a foreign land, there is no alterative to perseverance and patience. I am not going back to Eritrea to the hand of a butcher that killed my uncle and imprisoned my father. If this time it failed, I will keep on trying until it is realized. I will not tire or retire until I make it. That is how thousands of Eritreans made it to Europe crossing treacherous terrains and the sea. (personal communication, 8 April 2020)

His response indicates a couple of issues in his resolve to continue with the migration to Europe. The issues actually extend beyond the motive (that drove him to embark on his journey in the first instance) that leaving is better. First, migrating to him was the only option. And that option demanded perseverance mixed with patience. Based on this, second is therefore the expression that he was prepared to never stop until he made it to Europe as desired. His resolve in this regard corroborates evidence in some studies that reveals that undocumented migrants employ complex strategies to weather forced repatriation through processes of return (Galvin, 2015; Kleist, 2017). Galvin's examination of undocumented Zimbabwean labour migrants in Botswana, for example, shows that they experience deportation as a constant threat and not a single event and this has become a normal part of their daily transnational lives. Third, the young Eritrean was inspired in his resolve to keep on trying by the success of thousands of fellow Eritreans gone before him. So too, the view that they made it to Europe because they did "not tire or retire" until they made it. Fourth, it is noteworthy that the young migrant's resolve was also driven by a negative perception based on negative experiences back home. That gave him the resolve not to return. Lastly, therefore, the migrant's response helps underscore the suggestion I make that a proper understanding of African migration in the 21st century, particularly towards destinations outside of Africa, is no exception insofar as concerns the need to go beyond

dominant and widely held rational economics models of migration as well as advancements that integrate motivations and migrants' subjectivities regarding migration possibilities.

The young Eritrean's response and those of other migrants raise the question why they are so determined to migrate and do not see turning back as an option. An overlooked element that can be gleaned from the young Eritrean's response is political motivation. He had relatives killed and imprisoned in Eritrea. This made him an asylum seeker who might face death or prison back home. His experience shows that it is not just economic factors that might be significant in migrants' resolve to migrate. Political motivations have a role to play too. It is actually argued that many Eritreans living outside of the country are not ready to return because of human rights violations and they are opposed to the government there (Ambroso, Crisp, & Albert, 2011). Eritrea is known for compulsory conscription of youths into unlimited military service. This is besides the restrictions which the government imposes on people's various freedoms like freedom of movement, freedom of expression and freedom of religion. The absence of meaningful political contestation that is evident in the hard-handed way in which opposition groups are treated; the absence of free, fair and regular elections; the arbitrary detentions; as well as persecutions of many people because of their ethnicity, social and political orientations or religion indicate the challenging political conditions, governance environments and systemic issues that compel some people in Eritrea and some of its neighbours to migrate (Nshimbi, 2018). Many studies and majority of policies posit that migration from such countries is largely driven by economic factors, which boil down to poverty and that the migration could be discouraged by highlighting the risks of migration. Information provided by migrants and further analysis, however, seem to suggest that focusing solely on the risks of migration ignores the risk of staying home or returning as respondents quoted in this article make clear.

The migrants also knew that nation-state borders existed and expected to encounter both the EU borders and the agencies and officials that enforce them. The migrants' knowledge of borders and enforcers resonates with the function of borders with respect to the cross-border movement of people and international migration. Borders in this respect are regulators of the movement of people, besides goods and services (Nshimbi, 2019; Wilson & Donnan, 2012). They determine who should move, or not, between and across state territories. This is worth pointing out here because, generally, Africans should obtain a visa before traveling to Europe to not only permit their entry but also stipulate the purpose of travel. As alluded to so far, the migrants discussed in this article travel to EU member states for purposes of engaging in work. However, they lacked the visas required for them to enter Europe. Hence the label irregular migrants. Because they travel outside of the regulations, laws and international agreements that govern the movement of people between/across state territories (see, e.g., Sironi, Bauloz, & Emmanuel, 2019; International Convention, 1990). Hence, also, the discussion of their experiences in this article.

All the informants were fully cognisant of the border, border policies and requirements. They also knew the consequences of encountering the border and border agencies if they did not possess the necessary visa or travel documents. But they had resolved to make the journey, nonetheless. An overwhelming majority of the migrants said they expected to meet European border officials in the course of the journey and only a few believed they would not. Among the former group of respondents, a young adolescent Sudanese female and a young adolescent Ethiopian male expressed the conviction that it was rare to escape the scrutiny of European border officials because the border officials were equipped with high technological systems for detecting the infiltration of migrants through their borders (personal communications, 18 May 2020). Although they did not specify the technological systems, a system to which they could have been referring might be the one that Spain deploys in its approach to irregular migration management where it focuses on detecting and apprehending irregular migrants early (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011). The *sistema integrado de vigilancia exterior* (SIVE), as the system is called, centrally coordinates the interception of suspicious vessels based on information transmitted from mobile devices about the vessels to a central command. There is also EURODAC, a software system that captures asylum seekers' biometric information that is shared between EU members. The members can then use it to detect abuse such as applications for asylum in multiple member states.

Among the informants who believed they would not encounter border officials, a young adolescent female Sudanese, a young adolescent male Sudanese and a young adolescent female Somalian went on to say that EU borders were porous and easy to infiltrate (personal communications, 18 May 2020, 19 April 2020). They cited the influx of Syrian migrants into Southern Italy and that of West Africans into Spain via the Canary Islands to prove their claims.

But most of those who expected to encounter EU borders and officials said they expected the officials would be unwelcoming, cruel to them and uncompromising. A young adolescent Eritrean migrant from May Ayni refugee camp put it this way:

> We know what the Italian border guards did to our people during the tragedy of Lampedusa. It could have been avoided. The migrants' cry for help was denied. Humanitarian support from a humanitarian rescue organization working on helping migrants was curtailed. They left them to die on the sea as a deterrent measure to other migrants. I do not expect any positive gesture from them at all. Yet, I will try my

> chance of sneaking around and getting to Europe unnoticed. (personal communication, 8 April 2020)

This migrant's response shows what he expected of the border officials in the anticipated encounter. It also shows his full knowledge and that he was well informed about the goings-on at the border, in border encounters with officials of EU member countries. He did not expect any positive outcome from an encounter with the border or in interactions with border officials. He knew, based on the experience to which he referred that even death at sea was possible. However, he resolved to proceed and take chances to sneak around the border. This shows that neither the prospect of being harshly treated nor the threat of suffering the most extreme and negative form of outcomes—death—in the migration process dampened the respondent's resolve to continue.

Despite the challenges and negative experiences that all the migrants anticipated to encounter with European borders and officials, all of them insisted they would nonetheless continue with the migration. We see here, again, determination to enter EU territory. This superseded the anticipation of borders marked by physical and technological infrastructure, stringent border enforcement and "unwelcoming," "cruel" and "uncompromising" border agencies and officials. It also superseded other measures designed to deter migration to Europe such as information campaigns that highlight the risks of migration.

4.3. Deterring Irregular Migration to EU Countries and Information Campaigns

Several research and policy studies recommend equipping (intending) irregular migrants with early legal and realistic information about risks and the dangers of migration (Angeli, Dimitriadi, & Triandafyllidou, 2014; Omelaniuk, 2012; Triandafyllidou & Maroukis, 2012). However, the evidence provided so far shows migrants' resolve to migrate notwithstanding such information. The informants clearly suggested that information campaigns designed to inform migrants en route to Europe about the risks or dangers of irregular migration are unlikely to significantly impact or deter them from migrating. Their responses to questions on where they obtained information about the migration process, the EU and life in EU countries provide further evidence of their resolve in the face of information campaigns and knowledge that risks and dangers of migration were an actual reality. A young adolescent Eritrean migrant had this to say about that reality:

> I learned from colleagues who made it to Italy and Germany that there is great risk of losing one's life and being kept prisoner of the human traffickers operating from Libya. I think I must cross at least five countries before getting to Germany. I already crossed one from Eritrea to Ethiopia. Then via Sudan to Egypt and Libya then finally to Italy and Germany. (personal communication, 8 April 2020)

This migrant had his route planned out and information campaigns to dissuade him, let alone his own knowledge of risks and dangers, could not cause a rethink of his planned passage through Sudan, Egypt, Libya and on to Italy and Germany. Actually, a young Sudanese migrant seemed to suggest that not even information on social media platforms could reliably inform decisions to rethink migration:

> Social media is open to misinformation and disinformation. There is no mechanism of making sure that everything you get from social media is right. However, it remains to be one of the sources of information for migrants. Specially this is vital in alerting violent incidents happening on migration routes like the capsizing of migrants. (personal communication, 29 May 2020)

Social media for this migrant seemed to mainly have been a means through which to obtain important information about incidences of violence on migration routes. The response seems to suggest that the migrant relied more on family abroad as an information source and not campaigns on migration risk and dangers. This was confirmed by a response of another migrant who said:

> As you know it very well almost every family have at least one member of the family in diaspora. We keep close contacts with family members in Europe to get valuable information about the route and life in Europe. As many who used the same information and made it to Europe later confirm to us, there is no reason to doubt the information they provide us. We believe it is true. (personal communication, 8 April 2020)

It is very clear from the cited responses that, if anything, the migrants possess state of the art information about the world in general and their intended destinations in particular. The majority of them were actually connected through smart phones and used them to obtain current virtual information. The information also included stories and images of people like them, attempting to make the journey to Europe but got intercepted, rescued or drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. And some of these events occurred on the same Mediterranean routes the migrants were planning to use. All the respondents also disclosed that they used their phones to communicate with families and friends back home, to keep them informed about their situation in the migration process. They also revealed that they used the phones to communicate with friends and members of families abroad, to keep connected with other migrants who were in the process of migrating and, some, to communicate with traffickers to get route information and information

about destination country. The point to make out of this is that information campaigns aimed at dissuading migrants from engaging in irregular migration (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Musarò, 2019; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007) may not only carry similar information to what the migrants are already exposed and fail to discourage them from migrating. But migrants have access to other information sources too.

Therefore, it is also possible and easy for them to use their own sources to either substantiate or refute information presented in those campaigns. In fact, when asked how they learned about the countries to which they were migrating many of the migrants listed family members abroad, friends in those destination countries or returnees, social media, television and radio, other migrants, brokers and human traffickers. Hence, the knowledge available to migrants about their destination, indeed, influences the decision to migrate. But put together, it is clear that for the most part, the information that feeds the migrants is from people with whom they are connected or in their networks. The majority of them obtained their information from families, friends, other migrants and brokers and very few from social media, television and radio sources combined. The question, thus, is which of the two information sources—their own or that from information campaigns—do they appropriate and use as bases upon which to make migration decisions. From the evidence presented here, we can say human connections and not information campaigns constitute dominant and, therefore, more influential sources of information for migrants about destination country. The extent to which this information is accurate, especially when compared with that produced in information campaigns, is subject to debate. The extent to which it is received and believed in ways that make it contribute to migrants' resolve to migrate cannot be disputed.

5. Concluding Remarks

I conclude the article by moving away from the data to briefly muse over some of its implications for borders, information campaigns, civil society/academic scholarship, and, generally, the role that migrants' resolutions play in migration processes. My study of migrants from the Horn of African, who had already started off on their journeys and were in the migration process, challenges the idea that restrictive borders, policies and practices are a very effective way of stopping irregular migration. It equally questions the effectiveness of information campaigns that target (would-be) migrants to discourage them from migrating to Europe by touting restrictive borders and practices and highlighting risks and dangers of migration. Regarding the former, measures as well as physical and soft(ware) infrastructure and technologies are actually in place to 'protect' or 'secure' Europe's borders (Andersson, 2016). But their effectiveness is questionable. This is in view of the reality highlighted in the introduction of this article that irregular migration from the Horn of Africa continues post the so-called 2015 migration crisis. And concerning the latter, other studies corroborate the information provided by migrants in this article that underscores the failure of advanced and sophisticated technologies and border control measures to curb irregular migration from Africa (see, e.g., Andersson, 2016; Castles, 2004). Targeted information about dangers of migration and sombre stories of irregular immigrants' lives in Europe seem to have achieved little in terms of a rethink about embarking on unknown journeys among migrants too. Approaches to addressing irregular migration that deploy information campaigns are informed by rational choice assumptions that migrants desperately want to escape poverty, war and are attracted by prospects of better life in destination countries. If migrants are informed about the perils of irregular migration, the recommendation goes, they will not migrate. However, the migrants in this article said they were very aware of potential dangers they faced in migratory journeys but resolved to migrate nonetheless. The Horn of Africa, from which all the informants originated, has long and continues to be a major source of migrants destined to Europe. They continue to migrate despite the information to which they are exposed about the risks of migration and the touted protective and security measures to curb their movements.

In view of this, this article has attempted to extend research that centres on the role of aspirations and desires in migration to underscore the importance of migrants' resolve in shaping migration decisions. Attempts to understand irregular migration should transcend rational economic choice interpretations and rather consider how migrants themselves see the measures informed by such theoretical views and designed to regulate their movement. Migrants are already fully aware of the physical barriers to migration and the dangers and risks involved in irregular migration. This reality demands a better understanding of the migrants, apart from a fixation with enforcing borders. The article has shown that the migrants either have a dismissive attitude of EU borders and downplay their effectiveness or are ready to encounter them and the border officials. Their resolve makes them ready to keep on trying to cross into EU territory to the point of death.

This finding is consistent with Belloni's (2016, 2019) examination of secondary refugee movements in Europe triggered by unpalatable conditions in the refugees' first country of arrival. Whereas the refugees would be expected to stay in that country, or to even return to their country of origin, it is shown that the EU's migration policies driven by the intention of the Dublin Regulation to stop the refugees from seeking asylum in second EU countries fail to prevent the refugees from doing so. The refugees mediate the effect of such policies with the way in which they perceive risk; with what they expect of migration; and how they view the EU policy restrictions as barriers which they must overcome

and not hindrances to their migration (Belloni, 2016). On its part, this article has shown that even when still in Africa, migrants expect to face physical obstacles and even the threat of losing life itself, during the migration process. They are already aware of the tightened policies designed to restrict entry into Europe and are also well informed about restrictive border measures, infrastructure and software such as SIVE and EURODAC. Yet, they set their eyes on attaining to the life to which they aspire in Europe. This implies that fixation with the physical barriers at the margins of the EU as the point at which to curb irregular migration is counterproductive as the associated activities are ineffective.

The determination to migrate also, finally, indicates a couple of issues the literature on migration tends to either misrepresent or fails to emphasise. It dispels assumptions that migrants in Africa embark on journeys for which they lack information. Majority of the informants in this article had smart phones, which they used for communication and to access information and news on world events and their desired destinations. This corroborates Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011), who contrary to Koser and Pinkerton's (2002) assertion that informal social networks of migrants spread stale information about conditions and policies in destination countries, argue that the migrants consider themselves better informed to the extent that they dismiss as biased propaganda, any seemingly biased information in campaigns that warn of the risks of migration. The resolve, therefore, also indicates migrant agency, an important consideration for any who would want to properly understand irregular migration from Africa. The point must be emphasised that irregular migrants are neither mere rational economic actors nor passive and helpless victims in migration processes. They are perceptive in an aspirational manner and this drives them to take risk to the point of a daring perseverance in migration processes. Push factors such as harsh political and governance conditions only strengthen the migrants' agentive resolve to move on and not return and face possible death or imprisonment. Initiatives other than those that attempt to inhibit movement but understand, are sensitive to, and include the perceptions of migrants are more likely to effectively grapple with the challenges associated with irregular migration.

Acknowledgments

Research for this article was made possible with generous funding from the Swiss Sub-Saharan Africa Migration Network (S-SAM), University of Neuchâtel, under the project "What You See Is What You Get: Perceptions of European Borders and the Drive to Migrate." The author acknowledges the data collection support of fieldworkers in the Horn of Africa and is also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their critical engagement with the text and constructive feedback.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 268–277
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3721

Article

Hope, Disillusion and Coincidence in Migratory Decisions by Senegalese Migrants in Brazil

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Submitted: 4 October 2020 | Accepted: 10 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
Uncertainty is an essential characteristic of our lives. However, by moving from one country to another, from a familiar context to an unfamiliar one, uncertainty becomes a key element of migrants' decisions. In times of restricted mobility regimes, migrants often do not know if they will be able to reach the desired destination. Even if they manage to do so, it is still uncertain if they will be able to fulfil their aspirations. However, uncertainty also leaves room for hope. Departing from the conceptualisation of hope as the simultaneity of both potentiality and uncertainty and from the concept of circumstantial migration, this article analyses (1) retrospectively the decision of Senegalese migrants to move to Brazil and (2) the intentions of onward migration. Based on empirical data collected through ethnographic fieldwork in four Brazilian cities, this article shows how migration as a form of social hope is redirected to new destinations and that this redirection is a consequence of circumstances and coincidences, which enable or prevent movement. Potential positive outcomes of migration outweighed negative ones, which play a minor role and hardly affect decisions to leave Senegal. However, decisions to emigrate are often based on incomplete information and ill-informed expectations regarding the circumstances at the destination and can lead to feelings of disillusion. The impact of uncertainties shows a more differentiated picture in the context of onward migration intentions. While some migrants are willing to take big risks in onward migration, others try to minimize uncertainties.

Keywords
Brazil; hope; uncertainty; Senegalese migrations; south-south migration

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Hope is without a doubt an essential feature of migration decision-making, a "crucial dynamic motivating migration processes" (Mar, 2005, p. 364). Prospective migrants hope, for instance, for a better life, financial or professional success, or safety. Migratory aspirations in its multiple forms would hardly turn into actual movement without the existence of hope that one will be able to achieve them. However, hope, as an anticipation of the 'not yet' (Bloch, 1986), also implies that the fulfilment of these aspirations is uncertain. Failure and disappointment are possible outcomes. While uncertainty is in some form or another a part of our lives, it becomes a central element of our decisions and activities when we exchange a familiar context for an unfamiliar one, for example, the movement from one's home country to an overseas destination. Aspiring migrants do not know if their migratory project will be successful and if, one day, they will come back to their country of origin as a prosperous returnee. Moreover, as a consequence of restrictive migration policies and control, migrant journeys often include high risks and have become increasingly longer in time and space, turbulent and dangerous (Schapendonk, 2012; Vammen, 2019). Migrants cannot be certain that they will be able to reach their desired destination and which conditions they will encounter during their journey.

Despite these uncertainties and the enormous obstacles that (aspiring) migrants must face, migration is not only seen as a possibility, but often as a necessity for many citizens in West Africa (Graw & Schielke, 2012). In other words, the hope to achieve a better life through migration remains strong throughout the region. Three aspects are crucial in this context. First, in many West African countries crises and uncertainties are experienced as a constant condition (Vigh, 2008). Thus, uncertainties and risks at places of departure need to be considered for the understanding of risk-taking behaviour (Alpes, 2012). Secondly, throughout the region and especially in countries with a strong migration culture like Senegal, international mobility has become a synonym for social mobility (Graw & Schielke, 2012). Finally, due to mass media, returning migrants, transnational spaces, and the presence of goods from the global market, the 'global world' is increasingly a constitutive element of people's everyday world (Graw & Schielke, 2012; Kleist, 2017). People's expectations and imagination of a 'good life' are shaped by these global flows, but globalization is often experienced as absence (Graw, 2012). A better life or opportunities structures to obtain such a life are, therefore, often imagined and sought elsewhere. Migration becomes a central element of social hope.

While hope is a driving force of migration aspirations, actual mobility behaviour is eventually determined by the ability to move (Alpes, 2012; Carling, 2002). Restrictive immigration policies and migration control increasingly hinder the ability of West Africans to move internationally, above all to the most desired destinations in Europe and North America. In the context of restrictions and simultaneous widespread aspirations to emigrate, migration opportunities are a scarce and much desired event. This scarcity affects the way decisions are made and how destinations are chosen. A person needs to grasp an opportunity when it emerges. These opportunities can channel movements in direction that do not head, at least not directly, to an aspired destination. They often emerge suddenly, resulting from network contacts, information flows and processes of mediation and can trigger unplanned departures (Alpes, 2012; Carling & Haugen, 2020; de Boeck, 2012). However, sudden departures and the necessity and willingness to grasp opportunities may also increase risks and uncertainties of migrations since migrants may take decisions without much information about the conditions and opportunities structures at the destination. This may lead to feelings of disillusion and desires for renewed movements.

This article discusses questions of hope, ability, uncertainty, disillusion and coincidence in the context of mobility decisions by Senegalese migrants in Brazil. These questions are analysed retrospectively regarding the decision to emigrate from Senegal as well as in the context of onward migration intentions and aspirations in Brazil. For this purpose, I adopt the framework of hope analysis proposed by Kleist (2017) and combine it with Carling and Haugen's (2020) concept of 'circumstantial migration.' Hereby I seek to demonstrate that in times of restrictive 'mobility regimes' (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), hope in migration is redirected to new destinations, in this case Brazil, and that this redirection is a result of processes of mediation and the emergence of opportunities. I will show that decisions to migrate to Brazil are driven by the hope to improve one's socioeconomic situation and here potential positive outcomes of migration outweighed negative ones. Therefore, uncertainties play a minor role and hardly affect emigration decisions in Senegal. However, the assessment of uncertainties shows a more differentiated picture in the context of onward migration intentions. This difference is connected to spatialized or temporalized forms of hope and feelings of disillusion, but also show the possible impact of migratory experiences and knowledge on risk-taking strategies. The article seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on hope in migration, the development of interregional south-south migration and onward migration processes.

The presented empirical data results from an ethnographic research conducted with Senegalese migrants in Brazil between 2017 and 2019. During four periods of fieldwork, each lasting from two to four months, I collected data through biographical and problem-centred interviews, informal conversations, and direct and participatory observation. Research sites were in the city of São Paulo and in Praia Grande, a coastal town which is located about 80 km east of the metropolis, and in the two medium-sized cities of Caxias do Sul and Passo Fundo, which are important industrial and agricultural sites in Brazil's most southern state, Rio Grande do Sul. The four cities were chosen due to their importance in Senegalese immigration in Brazil. São Paulo, Caxias do Sul and Passo Fundo have relatively big Senegalese communities but are also important for other forms of mobility and circulation of Senegalese within the country. During the Brazilian summer months Senegalese street hawkers move temporary to Praia Grande and sell their products at the local beaches. In total, I conducted 25 interviews with 21 migrants. Additionally, a migration history chart (Carling, 2012) was elaborated together with 16 of the interviewees. All interviews and conversations were held in Portuguese or French. Interview quotes used in this article were translated to English. The names used in this article are pseudonyms.

2. Hope, Uncertainty and Coincidence in Migration: An Analytical Framework

In recent years, a growing number of scholarly accounts have called for the consideration of hope as an essential feature of migrants' decision-making. Vammen (2017, p. 40) argues that "hope as an analytical lens for migrant mobility, can capture phenomenological aspects of how imaginaries frame and affect livelihood strategies, mobility, and notion of the future." Kleist (2017) proposes a framework for the analysis of hope in migration based

on four dimensions: (1) The distinction between societal and social hope; (2) the different repositories of hope; (3) the temporal and spatial horizons of different modes of hope; and (4) the relationship between existential and physical (im)mobility. The four dimensions are interrelated and will be shortly presented below.

Hope describes an anticipatory expectation, a desire for "something better" (Mar, 2005, p. 364) and is characterized by the simultaneity of potentiality and uncertainty of the future. It is a social and collective phenomenon that is embedded in and inspired by social imaginaries and realities. Hage (2003) calls the perception of a better future within a particular society 'social hope.' In many West African countries, crises and uncertainty are experienced as a constant condition and this effects negatively the hope to live a meaningful and dignified social life within the society. 'Societal hope' (Hage, 2003), e.g., the confidence in the capacity or even the willingness of the state to provide the conditions for its citizens to achieve a better life, to experience social mobility within society, is a rare phenomenon in this context. Lubkemann (2017) argues that under conditions of social exclusion, hope relies above all on spatialization rather than on temporalization, as in the case of seeking the improvement of life conditions and social status with time through education or hard work. In Senegal, international mobility has become almost a synonym for social mobility and a ritual for the transition to adulthood (Mbodji, 2008; Prothmann, 2018). It represents a spatialized strategy for constituting social hope. Thus, migration is understood as a means to overcome existential immobility, to escape social death (Vigh, 2009). Repositories of hope are the sources of knowledge, institutions and forces that are perceived as brokering or facilitating social hope (Kleist, 2017). With regards to migration these repositories can be, for instance, actors of the migration industry or social networks that may help one to overcome international mobility barriers, issue documents or provide information about opportunities at the destination.

Hope as an analytical framework is especially useful to understand migration decisions in times of restrictive mobility regimes and increasing risks and uncertainties. According to Williams and Baláž (2012) uncertainty is the result of two different factors: imperfect knowledge and the unpredictability of the future. While the latter cannot be influenced by aspiring migrants, they can try to improve the former by obtaining information about obstacles at the route or conditions at the destination. Information about opportunities structures, immigration legislation, border controls, etc., can reduce risks and uncertainties with regards to migratory movements and are often transmitted through migrant networks that hereby impact migration decisions (Haug, 2008; Snel, Engbersen, & Faber, 2016). However, the information may also be selective and one-sided. Since migration is often connected to high expectations and social status, migrants may not tell their relatives and friends at home about the difficulties they experience abroad. It was for long assumed that migration decision-making is based on the possession of information about labour market conditions, for instance wages and employment opportunities, at the destination. Most prominent proponents of this line of thought are neoclassical theories like the microeconomic model of individual choice, according to which prospective migrants compare wages and employment opportunities at the destination and place of origin, and under the consideration of costs of movement measure the expected net returns of a migration (e.g., Harris & Todaro, 1970). Migrants would be expected to choose their destination on account of the expected highest net returns. However, neither are migration decisions solely economic (Halfacree, 2004), nor are prospective migrants in possession of all-encompassing information about the conditions elsewhere.

Salazar (2011, p. 586) writes that "imaginaries play a predominant role in envisioning both the green pastures and the (often mythologized) memory of the homeland.'' Distant places are a constant element of people's life worlds all around the globe, from a global city like New York to a small town in the Senegal river valley. Images about other places are transmitted globally through a variety of channels, and besides the stories of (returned) migrants, mass media is crucial for the construction of imaginaries (Appadurai, 1996). However, these images do not necessarily represent the reality, in contrary they are often misrepresentations. Though they transmit some sort of information, they may lead to illusions of the life and opportunities structures at another place. Migrants expectations may not be matched after arriving at the destination, resulting in disillusion, "the feeling of disappointment resulting from the discovery that something is not as good as one believed it would be" (Belghazi & Moudden, 2016, p. 41). Nevertheless, migrants should not be conceptualized as uniformed adventures, who would not have moved if they would have been better informed. In some form or another, prospective migrants have some idea about what to expect during the migration journey. They are aware of the risks of migration and of unsuccessful attempts (Alpes, 2012; Fiedler, 2020). But failed attempts are often attributed to bad luck or lack of effort, which are often interrelated in the discourses of both prospective and actual migrants. As Hernández-Carretero (2017) shows, luck or chance must be actively pursued. In Islamic societies luck is connected to destiny and although "fate is conceived as a predetermined set of events decreed by God…, individuals are expected to play an active role in fulfilling their destiny by scouting out the routes to what has been allotted to them in this world" (Gaibazzi, 2015, p. 228). Hope related to fate and luck may explain the disposition to take risks and face uncertainties of migration. Migrants take their chances in the anticipation that the outcome will be positive (Hernández-Carretero, 2017, p. 116). Moreover, uncertainties and risks at places of departure need to be considered in order to understand the risk-taking behaviour of migrants (Alpes, 2012), or in

the words of Vigh (2009, p. 105): "The escape from social death entails risking one's physical existence."

Recent studies have also shown that in many cases migration decisions are rather determined by opportunities of movement than by the possession of information, highlighting both the role of mediation and coincidence for migration decisions and trajectories (Carling & Haugen, 2020; Alpes, 2012, 2017). Carling and Haugen (2020, p. 2) suggest the concept of circumstantial migration to describe the unpredictable ways in which migration trajectories and experiences unfold under the influence of coincidence and micro-level context. Coincidental factors that act at the micro-level include chance encounters with others, good or bad luck at critical junctures, and accidental discovery of opportunities. The authors argue that the consideration and analysis of coincidence and micro-level context allows us to understand "twist and turns as constitutive elements of many migration experiences," i.e., the non-linearity of migration, as well as the "prominent role circumstances play under certain migration regimes" (Carling & Haugen, 2020, p. 3). Moreover, it allows to examine the interrelation between plans and serendipities. The necessity, but also the willingness, to grasp an opportunity to migrate when it arises is one of the consequences of restrictive mobility regimes. The concept of circumstantial migration can be a fruitful addition to the analysis of hope as it allows to examine how hope is created or lost in specific situations and under specific circumstances.

3. Senegalese Migrations to Brazil: A Recent Phenomenon

Senegalese immigration in Brazil is a recent phenomenon and cannot be understood without putting it in the global context. Although a limited number of Senegalese citizens, mostly students, arrived in Brazil during the 1990s and early 2000s, it was only around 2008 that the South American country started to attract a growing number of Senegalese migrants. This growth occurred at a time when much of the world was suffering from the consequences of the 2007 financial crisis, which impacts affected Brazil only a few years later. Moreover, this period is characterized by increasing difficulties for Senegalese to migrate both 'regularly' and 'irregularly' to Europe. The securitization of European borders in the Mediterranean area and increasing patrols in West African waters, together with a growing number of bilateral and multilateral agreements between the European Union or individual member states and countries in North and West Africa, hinder movements via the Canary Islands and North Africa (Adepoju, Van Noorloos, & Zoomers, 2009; Vives, 2017). At the same time restrictive immigration policies in Europe made a regular entry almost impossible (Finotelli & Sciortino, 2013).

Parallel to these developments, Brazil experienced an average economic growth of 4% between 2000 and 2011 and the economic and political cooperation between Brazil and a variety of African countries increased (BRASIL, 2010). Moreover, through its role as a member of the BRICS and the realization of major global events such as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, the country became more visible on the global stage. These developments contributed for Brazil to emerge as a destination for African, Asian, and Caribbean migrants. Furthermore, Senegalese movements to Brazil are connected to regional developments in South America. Until November 2015, Ecuador's open-door policy (Freier & Holloway, 2018) allowed Senegalese migrants to enter without any visa regulations and put a foot on South American soil. Brazil was also a transit country for Senegalese migrants on their way to Argentina, a movement which started in the end of the 1990s (Minvielle, 2015; Vammen, 2019). Finally, the country is both the origin and destination for multinational migrations, which are an important factor for the development of Senegalese migratory movements to Brazil. In short, it was the interplay of factors on a global, regional and national level that contributed to Senegalese migration to Brazil. However, the argument that the difficulties of migrating to the 'Global North' are co-responsible for the emergence of Brazil in intercontinental south-south migrations may mislead to the assumption that Senegalese migrants can move freely to and within the region. It neglects the fact that immigration policies in Brazil, but also in other countries in the region, hinder the arrival of migrants from Senegal. The increasing difficulties for Senegalese migrants to obtain a visa at the Brazilian embassy in Dakar prevent them from moving directly to the country and often result in long and dangerous trajectories, whose risks and uncertainties increasingly reflect the struggles that migrants face in other regions (Vammen, 2019).

Although we do not know the exact figures of the entry of Senegalese migrants into Brazilian territory, the available data suggests a significant increase between 2012 and 2015. In total 8.486 Senegalese migrants applied for asylum between 2010 and 2018 (BRASIL, 2020). However, the likelihood of Senegalese migrants to earn asylum is very small. Only 14 out of 5.281 requests were granted until May 2017 (personal communication, Diego Nepomuceno Nardi, UNHCR Brazil, 9 May 2017, Brasília). Nevertheless, most Senegalese migrants use this process to get the temporary permission to stay and work in Brazil and later try to get a residence permit through other procedures. Furthermore, the Brazilian government decided in November 2019 to allow Senegalese migrants with an open asylum request to apply for a residence permit through a special procedure (BRASIL, 2019). The actual number of Senegalese migrants in the country is difficult to estimate. Asylum requests allow to estimate the number of arrivals of Senegalese migrants in Brazil since 2010 and deduce an increase of Senegalese immigration during this period. But we do not know if they still reside in the country. Moreover, undocumented migrants are not included in

the statistics. Until 2015–2016 there was a high demand for Senegalese migrants' labour force in southern Brazil, especially in the slaughter and cold storage sector, and in construction and gastronomy, but the following economic crisis forced many Senegalese in the informal sectors, where they work above all as street hawkers and often suffer repressions by police and supervision officers. The devaluation of the Brazilian Real further negatively impacted the capacity of Senegalese migrants to support their families at home. The economic crisis may have also prompted Senegalese migrants to leave Brazil.

4. Brazil as a Destination: Opportunity, Hope and Disillusion

Migration is an open-ended, often non-linear process and cannot be understood solely as the movement from one country to another. Migrants aspire to achieve something by moving and not just to move. Hernández-Carretero (2017) argues that emigration and return should be understood as stages in the same project of socioeconomic prosperity. This idea can be extended to onward migration, which are further stages of the same project. In this sense, the use of words like 'origin,' 'transit,' and 'destination' refers to spatial movement, a specific journey done by the migrant, not to a life project. As was shown above, the integration of Brazil in the horizon of Senegalese migrants is directly connected to developments regarding Senegalese migration in other countries and regions. Migration decision-making need to be examined in consideration of these interrelations. In this context, it is especially the ability to move to Brazil which strongly influenced the choice of the country as a destination or a potential stepping-stone for further movements. Abdou, a 24-year-old man from Casamance, who arrived in Brazil in 2015, after taking the long route via Ecuador and Peru, explains why he chose Brazil:

> I actually wanted to go to Italy. I applied for a visa for Italy, but it did not work.....We learned about Brazil [at school] in Casamance, but I never imagined that I would go there one day. The first place I had in my head was Italy.....But when it did not work, a friend told me that entering Brazil is a little easier.....I paid a guy there. He is a friend of my uncle. My uncle told him that he has a nephew who wants to travel and tried to go to Italy, but it did not work, and who wants to leave in any case. He said to my uncle: I know a guy. If he wants to go to Brazil, they will do the visa for him. You will get a visa. I did not know that there was no visa for Brazil. Only later he told me that I have to go to Ecuador. He arranged the journey for me. (Abdou, April 2019)

Although Abdou did not have friends or relatives in Brazil and no accounts of Senegalese migrants living in Brazil, he decided to seek a better life by moving there. For Abdou, the achievement of a better future was connected to spatial movement and Brazil was considered as an alternative to Italy. He redirected his social hope in form of migration to another country. A few of my interviewees stated that they applied first for a visa for a European country or the USA, but their requests were denied. Others desisted from migrating there, due to the expected difficulties of getting legal papers or the expected risks of irregular migration routes. Brazil, but also Argentina and Cape Verde, from where migrants later moved to Brazil, were regarded as alternatives for emigration from Senegal. The decisive factor was to be able to leave Senegal, or in the words of Elimane, a 52-year-old Senegalese man living in Caxias do Sul: "I did not choose the country that I would go to, just to get out of Senegal." Similar to descriptions by Carling and Haugen (2020) and Alpes (2012, 2017), the ability to go to Brazil is a main factor influencing its choice as a destination. While Brazil is not considered as a top country in their 'destination hierarchy' (Belloni, 2020), it still allows migrants to sustain their hope of a better future through spatial movement. The destination is here almost secondary. The open-door policy of Ecuador was central for the increase of Senegalese immigration in Brazil between 2013 and 2015. My Senegalese interlocutors, who took the route via Ecuador, Peru and sometimes Bolivia, often did not try to apply for a visa at the Brazilian embassy, but instead decided immediately to take this long journey, which often took them several weeks and costed between 3.000 and 4.500 Euros. In most cases it was the migration broker who directed their attention to Brazil. In a similar way, Minvielle (2015) describes how Senegalese emigration to Argentina increased through the mediation and facilitation work of migration brokers, who actively recruited aspiring migrants. It seems likely, that migration brokers also played an important role for the growth of migrant journeys through Ecuador to Brazil. In the context of involuntary immobility and limited opportunities to migrate, migration brokers are important repositories of hope, who allow aspiring migrants to develop or maintain hope.

Hope as a result of social imaginaries is strongly connected to information and images. All the interviewees possessed some sort of information about Brazil, and most of them received them, among others, through migrant networks. Migrants with relatives or friends who already had moved to Brazil, were often actively encouraged by them to try their luck there. Only five of my interviewees did not possess any kind of contacts in Brazil, not even in form of weak ties, prior to their journey. Their intention to move to Brazil developed either through stories about the success of Senegalese migrants and the positive development of the country or was directly influenced by migration brokers, as mentioned above. Economic opportunities, both real and imagined ones, also impacted the choice of Brazil. Personal accounts from migrants and statements by persons in Senegal describing positive developments of Brazil shaped the

image of the country in Senegal. This image is further moulded by the media, which often either reinforce stereotypical images of drug traffic and violence or create unrealistic expectations due to the presentation of wealthiness in Brazilian telenovelas. Positive attributes were also constructed through global events in Brazil, which stimulated migration intentions. None of the migrants had arranged employment prior to the migration. Hence uncertainty with regards to economic and employment opportunities was a central aspect of their migration decision but did not negatively affect it. The potentiality of the future in Brazil was valued higher. It was much more attractive than staying in Senegal. Cheikh, 54-year-old, who already lived several years in different European countries and worked all around West Africa, describes how he had lost the hope in Senegal after losing his job:

> I hoped that it would be better than staying in Senegal. I did not have any more hope there….I lived too long outside of Senegal and therefore I had the idea that I could no longer stay in Senegal without doing anything.…I never wanted to travel again, because really….I do not know how to put it; I had lost the desire as they say. (Cheikh, March 2019)

Cheick wanted to stay in Senegal with his family but did not see any alternative to leaving Senegal again. Also, the following example of Souleymane, 58-year-old, who left Senegal for the first time in 2014 and emigrated to Brazil, demonstrates how social and societal hope impacted his migration decision and how hope lost its temporal dimension and became spatialized. Souleymane, who is originally from the region of Kaolack, was already successfully working, for several years, in the import sector for used cars in Dakar. But in 2010, the government under Abdoulaye Wade changed the law and banned the importation of cars over 5 years old in Senegal. Due to this change, Souleymane's job as intermediary became needless and after the government of Macky Sall, which was elected in 2012, did not revoke the law, he lost his hope that he would be able to support his wife and three children if he stayed in Senegal. "It was because of the system that I needed to leave Senegal," he told me. It was the absence of societal hope that pushed him, at the age of 52, to reorient and spatialize his hope. In 2014, a time when Brazil became increasingly popular as a destination, he decided to seek his luck there. His choice of Brazil was not only determined by the ability to go there, but also by a positive image of the country. He explains how the holding of the Football World Cup in 2014 shaped his image of Brazil:

> Well, I chose Brazil, because at that time, in 2014, they had to organize a World Cup. I said to myself that that was an opportunity….I thought that since the country is receiving a World Cup, it must be a country that is developed, and I can make my life there….If it is not a big country, an emerging country, it cannot organize a World Cup. (Souleymane, April 2019)

However, his expectations were not met. Today he is strongly disillusioned:

> When I left Senegal, I believed that I would earn money when I go out [emigrate]. But unfortunately, my dream is shattered. Unfortunately. Because Brazil, the country that I thought could bring me something, disappointed me when I arrived….It is a disappointment for me because I believed that here is the 'El Dorado.' But it is not. There are people here who are poorer than the people in Senegal. (Souleymane, April 2019)

While I conducted the interview with him in April 2019, he was in a state of hopelessness. He has lost both temporalized and spatialized forms of hope. Only one day early, during our first meeting on the streets of Passo Fundo, the police and the local fiscalization officers confiscated his products. This was just one of the several setbacks and disappointments Souleymane experienced during his migration. These unique incidents on the micro-level shaped his overall negative experience in migrating to Brazil and need to be considered for the understanding of his feeling of disillusion. It would be too easy to relate it solely to unrealistic expectations and his idea of Brazil as a new 'El Dorado.' Souleymane undergoes what Haugen (2012) called a second state of immobility, which is both spatial and existential. He lacks the means to move elsewhere and cannot go back to Senegal 'empty-handed.' "It is better to die here," he said frustrated.

Maguette, a 27-year-old Senegalese unmarried man from Mbour, whom I met for the first time in December 2017 in Passo Fundo, is another example of the failure of hope, but also one for its reorientation. After finishing secondary education, he wanted to study abroad, get to know other cultures and find a better life. He desired to go to Canada, but the migration broker, who he entrusted with his visa request, did not perform as wanted. Maguette wanted to leave Senegal anyway and the broker told him about Brazil and referred him to another one, who could organize the travel. Maguette decided to try his luck and seek a better life in Brazil and paid around 3.000 US$ for the journey, which took him through Ecuador, Peru, and almost the complete extent of Brazil. However, things did not turn out to be as desired:

> The hope we had was to come here to Brazil, get a good job and help our families in Senegal. There are some who were able to get a good job, some managed to get along quite well. Some not. For others, things are even worse. So, for me, the hope that I had, what I expected of Brazil, I have not found it yet. I spend some time here, but if I look, if I really look [at it], I think it is a waste of time….It is very different, because in reality we did not find what we hoped for. That is the reason why we have other

> things on our minds, like to get out of here. The things we have hoped for, so far we have not seen anything. (Maguette, April 2019)

Over time, he became increasingly disillusioned with his stay in Brazil and developed an urgent desire to leave the country and seek his fortune elsewhere. Maguette's story is one of hope, opportunities, risk-taking, disillusion and renewed hope. Contrary to Souleymane, he reorientated his hope after being disappointed by Brazil, which lies now on the movement to Canada. Some migrants had more success in Brazil than they thought, but many share the feeling of disillusion and disappointment. According to Maguette, the lack of concrete information and false assumptions were responsible for the growth of Senegalese immigration in Brazil:

> In 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, the flow of emigration from Senegal to Brazil began. But that also happened because many of them were wrong. Many of them came here without one, without any clue. They just said that they want to leave Senegal.

While this may be true in some cases, many migrants, especially the ones with network contacts in Brazil, had a more accurate image, but could not foresee the economic crisis. Most Senegalese migrants arrived at a time marking the transition from economic growth to recession, and the negative impact of the economic crisis on the formal labour market was felt by immigrant employees only in 2016 (Cavalcanti, de Oliveira, Araujo, & Tonhati, 2017, p. 78). Several of my interviewees, who arrived between 2010 and 2015 had first benefited from the demand for labour, but later lost their job due to the crisis. Therefore, it seems more accurate to argue that both the unpredictability of the future and ill-informed expectations are reasons for the disillusion and the feeling of suffering from unexpected economic difficulties.

5. Onward Migration Intentions: Circumstances, Potentiality and Risk-Taking/Strategies

Without doubt, economic factors play an important role in the development of intentions to leave Brazil and move to another country. But not all interviewees, who expressed theses intentions, experienced economic difficulties in Brazil. Intentions of both 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' migrants are shaped by social imaginaries that divide the world hierarchically (Belloni, 2020). North America and Europe are at the top of this hierarchy of destination countries. Migration to the USA is regarded as better and more desirable as to Brazil, which, in the words of some migrants, is almost the same as Senegal. These hierarchies shape the imagination that things will be even better in another country. Maguette, who already was quoted above, is one of the migrants who was not able to meet his aspirations in Brazil. He expresses his desires to move to Canada:

> My plans now? To leave Brazil! And go to Canada or some other country. I saw that in Canada you have job opportunities. You have study opportunities. If I get a visa tomorrow, I will leave tomorrow….Today I have the experience. I am telling you that I want to go to Canada. But what I suffered here, I will not suffer there….I am going to succeed faster…because here in Brazil I gained a great experience. I have seen a lot. I have heard a lot. I have already attended several things. Understood? I already have that potential, you know. (Maguette, April 2019)

During my last visit to Passo Fundo in April 2019, Maguette was searching for a language school in Canada. The enrolment in a language course, together with his enrolment at the University of Passo Fundo, would strengthen his claim for a visa. He was in constant contact with a Brazilian friend, whose acquaintance he had made and who was now living in Canada, seeking for information about schools and bureaucratic processes. Several times he stated that the ability to go there, or more precisely the ability to leave a Brazilian airport and travel there, is what counts. He was convinced that once he arrives in Canada, he will be able to get around, for instance by applying for asylum. Due to the expected opportunities structures in Canada, it is worth trying, despite the risk of deportation. His willingness to take great risks is strengthen by the assumption that his experiences in Brazil will help him succeed faster and the feeling that he has nothing to lose in Brazil. Despite his negative experience of migration, he does not fear that migrating to Canada could be unsuccessful as well. Maguette shows a renewed hope that is postponed to the new future and simultaneously spatiality reoriented. The projection of his hope elsewhere allows him to remain optimistic about his future, even though his ability to move there is clearly restricted and the fulfilment of his desire remains extremely uncertain. Desire for onward migration is widespread among the Senegalese migrants I met in Brazil, but their ability to do so is limited. Once again, they find themselves waiting for favourable circumstances, for opportunities to emerge that allow them to pursue their hope elsewhere.

While the desire to move onward does not necessarily depend on the economic situation of the migrant in Brazil, the strategies of successful or unsuccessful migrants differ strongly. Success does not only refer to the financial situation of the migrant, but more in general to a feeling of accomplishment and the meeting of his or her aspirations. In contrast to Maguette, migrants with a stronger sense of achievement try to minimize the risks of onward migration. Seydou, 32-year-old and married to a Brazilian, owns a business in Caxias do Sul. He wants to start a family and dreams about raising his children in an anglophone country, like the USA or England, indicating his hierarchies of destinations:

> I want to raise my family in a country where English is the official language. In other words, the United States, England, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland. No matter which one of these countries, I am willing to go. And I am also thinking that by 2020 I will leave Brazil….But it is a challenge to leave the work that I have here, the income that I have here, and go to another country and start from scratch. It is a very big challenge. But it is a challenge that I want to overcome….Because after I came here, I already have a way of understanding [things]. Nowadays I am not going to get up and go to a country out of nowhere. For example, if I want to continue and live in the United States, I will make a point of going there for at least 20 days to observe before I move [definitely]….I would not do it the same way as I did here, because I know the difficulties that exist. (Seydou, March 2019)

Like Maguette, Seydou mentions the importance of experience for his plans of onward migration, but in his case, experiences affect migration decision-making in a different way. He does not want to take risks. Migration experiences together with the concern of starting all over again in a new country and undergo the same difficulties again that he had successfully overcome in Brazil, lead to a different approach to further movements. A temporary movement for exploration purposes is a strategy to minimize risks of disillusion and failure, and was also mentioned by other migrants, especially the ones who are doing relatively well in Brazil. By contrast, migrants who have nothing to lose or no other obligations, for example a family in Brazil, often would not hesitate to move again without precautions to another country. While Seydou's aspirations for onward migration are well developed, he still leaves room for a change of plans. He did not completely lose societal hope in Brazil. The recovery of the economy and better foreign exchange rate of the Real would be arguments for staying in Brazil. His social hope is not solely connected to spatial movement, but also persists in its temporary form.

6. Conclusion

Migration opportunities for Senegalese are becoming increasingly rare and the ability to move internationally is limited in times of restricted mobility regimes. This impacts the choice of Brazil as a destination in two ways. First, the country is seen as an alternative for emigration, especially in the case of unsuccessful attempts to emigrate elsewhere. International migration as an important element of social hope in Senegal is redirected to Brazil. Positive images of the country based, among others, on its economic growth until 2014, the realization of global events, and accounts of successful migrants contributed to this redirection. Secondly, in the absence or scarcity of migration opportunities, migration brokers influence decisions by mediating and facilitating movements and even by actively encouraging migrants to try their luck in Brazil. Migration brokers can be understood as important repositories of hope, who allow aspiring migrants to develop or maintain social hope. In consideration of widespread migration aspirations in Senegal, prospective migrants need to grasp an opportunity when it appears. This sudden emergence of opportunities results from contacts, networking and processes of mediation on the micro-level.

In this context of limited opportunities, uncertainties and risks of migration are often less strongly weighted and, as the results show, played a minor or no role in the context of emigration decisions in Senegal. Moreover, since migration from Senegal to Brazil is only a recent development, the knowledge and information about the country in Senegal are limited. A lack of information and ill-informed expectations often characterized the choice of Brazil as a destination and resulted not only in uncertainties, but also in feelings of disillusion experienced by Senegalese migrants in Brazil. In other cases, it was the unpredictability of the future in the face of the economic crisis that created uncertainties and shattered the hope of a better life in Brazil. The impact of uncertainties in onward migration intentions shows a more differentiated picture. Depending on the degree of satisfaction in Brazil, migrants' attitude regarding uncertainties changes and they adopt different strategies for onward migration. Migrants with a strong feeling of disillusion and disappointment are in general more willing to take risks than migrants with a higher degree of satisfaction and economic success in Brazil. In the cases of migrants who lost the belief that their situation in Brazil will change for the better, hope is connected again solely to spatial movement and, as before, with the decision to leave Senegal, uncertainties and risks are deliberately accepted and do not strongly affect the decision.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors for their helpful feedback. My special gratitude goes to all my Senegalese informants, who gave me their trust and shared their experiences and histories with me. This research was supported by the FCT, the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (grant number PD/BD/128347/2017) and the DiasporaLink Program financed by the Research Executive Agency (grant number 645471).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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COGITATIO

Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 278–287
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3647

Article

How Sub-Saharan African Countries Students Choose Where to Study Abroad: The Case of Benin

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Submitted: 13 September 2020 | Accepted: 3 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This article provides new evidence on how students choose a country of destination to conduct their academic studies. Based on a multinomial logistic model, it examines the contribution of the quality of education, institutions and the host country's economic factors to the choice of the destination country. The results indicate that quality education and institutions in the host country are the reasons why students show preference for Western countries—North America and the EU. On the other hand, China is chosen as a destination country for its quality of education—compared to Benin—and not because of its institutional infrastructure. Furthermore, the results do not confirm the hypothesis that African student migration is poverty-driven, as economic factors do not affect the choice of any destination country.

Keywords
academic life; Benin; China; economic opportunities; education; European Union; migrations; North America

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

The last three decades have witnessed a steady growth in international migrant flows. Between 1995 and 2019, they have grown by 56% and recently, they are estimated to be about 3.5% of the world's population (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Economic factors such as unemployment, poverty (Mayda, 2010; Migali & Scipioni, 2018; Neumann & Hermans, 2017) and non-economic factors such as political instability and human rights abuses (Hatton, 2016) are identified as the driving forces behind migrants' movement. International students, a subset of international migrants, have also grown in number. Between 1998 and 2017, international student flows increased from 2 million to 5,3 million (OECD, 2019); African students in countries other than theirs are also growing in number (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Terrier, 2009).

The choice of the host country is critical to migrants. Doherty and Evershed (2018) pointed out that international student flows to the UK and Australia have increased recently. However, only a few African migrants migrate to these countries; instead, the majority of potential African migrants have expressed their willingness to migrate to Western countries and other African countries (Sanny, Logan, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). Regarding African students, most of them are willing to study in Europe and North America (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014). China is also an attractive destination to international students due to its recent rapid economic transformation (Cui, 2006).

To explain why international students choose a particular destination for their studies, Abbott and Silles (2016) identified the host country's quality of education as a critical factor. Students from developing countries nourish the ambition to be educated in developed countries where highly ranked universities provide world-class education. Their goal remains to quench their thirst for knowledge and increase their expected future income (Abbott & Silles, 2016; Basford & Riemsdijk, 2017; Beine,

Delogu, & Ragot, 2018; Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014; Cui, 2006; Van Bouwel, 2010). The availability of educational facilities (Beine et al., 2014, 2018) and scholarships (Basford & Riemsdijk, 2017) are motivating factors. Contrariwise, the lack of educational facilities in their home country is a pushing factor that further encourages them to improve their human capital in developed countries (Rosenzweig, 2006). Moreover, with highly globalised higher education, developed countries attract the best brains from developing countries as sources of scientific productivity (Gaulé & Piacentini, 2013).

Institutional factors play a role in the decision to migrate and the choice of the destination country (Bergh, Mirkina, & Nilsson, 2015; Docquier, Rapoport, & Salomone, 2012), as they determine transaction costs, the level of certainty and motivation. Students are thus more likely to study in countries that are less corrupt (Poprawe, 2015), have a similar religious affiliation (Connor, 2012) and colonial ties (Didisse, Nguyen-Huu, & Tran, 2018) to their countries of origin. Students from democratic countries are more likely to study in democratic countries as they value democratic freedom. In this regard, Didisse et al. (2018) showed that the freedom to leave and internal conflict predict the student migration.

Although there is an extensive literature concerning international student migration (Abbott & Silles, 2016; Basford & Riemsdijk, 2017; Cui, 2006; Docquier et al., 2012; Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Terrier, 2009; Tilly, 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2014; Zhao, Yuan, & Wei, 2019), the contribution of institutions in the choice of the destination country has been overlooked. No evidence exists on the effect of differentials in education capacities and institutions in a comparative setting. While the international allocation of western students has been extensively explored within the global economy of knowledge, only a handful of empirical studies have been concerned with African students (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Zhang & Zhang, 2014), particularly with Beninese students.

Benin is a perfect ground on which the link between institutions and education and student migrants may provide new insights. Firstly, Benin's education system performance depends on political institutions; political instability and the dictatorial regime from 1960 to 1990 weakened the education system. As this would have reduced future incomes, students may have opted for migration (Bertocchi & Strozzi, 2008). Secondly, the high unemployment rate due to the poor performance of the education system (Dakpo, Yarou, & Flénon, 2011) forces Beninese students to study abroad to increase their international competitiveness. Third, the majority of Beninese students study in Europe because of colonial ties with France or in the USA for their institutional similarity to France.

More concerned with the intention to migrate than the actual migration, this article has assessed factors that motivate Beninese students' choice of destination countries. Specifically, it has analysed the role played by institution and education differentials between Benin and preferred destination countries and reexamined the contribution of economic factors. Taking into account the role of institutions and education, the determinants of the choice of the destination country are heterogeneous and vary with the country of destination. The main findings show that, regardless of the preferred destination, the quality of education is crucial. On the other hand, in addition to the quality of education, the choice to study in Western countries is influenced by their democratic institutions. These findings have strong implications for development policy. Policymakers in the Global South ought to invest in their educational system to make it more efficient and to implement institutional reforms.

2. A Review of the Literature

2.1. Concepts and Theories

International students are seen either through a 'mobility' lens or a 'migration' lens (King & Raghuram, 2013). Through a migration lens, they are portrayed as a subset of international migrants. For the United Nations (2012, p. 2), an international migrant is any person or individual that leaves his or her country of origin for a minimum period of one year (the long-term migrant) or three months (the short-term migrant) for any kind of motive. The International Organization for Migration (2003, p. 9) defines international migration as "the movement of a person or a group of persons across an international border.''

Two theoretical strands, namely the supply-side and the demand-side, have enlightened international student migration. The first one states that the forces that structure student migration are on the side of the students. It privileges demand for overseas education. The supply-side theory argues that international student flows are shaped by immigration policies in the destination countries, the financial interests of those who organise, supply, and market elite higher education opportunities (Findlay, 2011). This theory also concedes that international students are attracted for their talents (Waters, 2006) and their cultural capital (Findlay, 2011), highly valued in the destination countries.

2.2. Education, Economic and Other Non-Economic Determinants

Though migration and intention to migrate are understood as two different concepts, they are driven by the same factors (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Lu, 1999). In this respect, the determinants of migration presented in this section are treated as determinants of intention to migrate. These factors are classified into two broad categories, namely pulling and pushing determinants (Lee, 1966).

Unemployment, poverty and lack of employment opportunities have been identified as economic pushing factors (Population Council, 2016) while economic

development and the availability of jobs in destination countries are economic pulling factors. Being unemployed fuels the desire to migrate (Migali & Scipioni, 2018). Young migrants from developing countries are on the move for better jobs (International Labour Office, 2016). Mayda (2010) reported in a study that economic growth in destination countries is correlated with increased migrant flows. Non-economic factors include institutional, educational and social factors. For example, in fragile states where political instability affects people's daily lives, people migrate in search of a better life. Cultural proximity (Lanati & Venturini, 2018) and linguistic similarities (Lanau, 2019) affect the direction of migration flows; colonial ties between countries of origin and destination reduce institutional differences and make life easier for migrants in their countries of destination. Browne (2017) has shown that migration is education-driven. Giulietti, Wahba, and Zenou (2018) and Docquier, Tansel, and Turati (2020) highlighted the role of social capital; the network abroad (friends and family) facilitates access to information, financial support and assistance in finding jobs (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2016).

As student migration is subsumed in international migration (Findlay, 2011), both share the same determinants. Economic factors such as development deferential between countries of origin and destination (Abbott & Silles, 2016) and economic growth in the country of destination (Cui, 2006) are instrumental in attracting international students. Regarding non-economic determinants, the focus is laid on cultural (Zhao et al., 2019), socioeconomic (Abbott & Silles, 2016; Migali & Scipioni, 2018) and political factors (Plopeanu et al., 2018). Furthermore, social networks (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014), migration experiences (Migali & Scipioni, 2018) and family support (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Palloni, Massey, Ceballos, Espinosa, & Spittel, 2001) count for international student migration.

One of the most important decisions regarding study migration is the choice of the study country. In light of the literature review, factors that affect the decision to migrate matter when choosing the destination country. A recent study by Basford and Riemsdijk (2017) concluded that students' perceptions of the quality of education and the availability of scholarships affect their choice of the destination country. For Efionayi and Piguet (2014), African students choose to study in Europe because of the quality of education and the availability of educational facilities. The choice of Chinese universities by international students has been explained by the availability of scholarships (Zhang & Zhang, 2014), the quality of education (Lu, Li, & Chen, 2019), China's rapid economic growth and the low cost of education compared to Western countries (Cui, 2006) and the development gap between China and other developing countries (Yue, 2013). The following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Students pick a country if its quality of education is greater compared to their home countries.

H2: The more a country is economically developed, the more it attracts students.

2.3. The Role of Institutional Determinants

5 Playing a pivotal role in the choice of the destination country, institutions matter for student migration. Through three strands, institutions have been linked to migration. The first strand deals with the effect of the home and host country's institutions on migrant flows (Ariu, Docquier, & Squicciarini, 2016; Bertocchi & Strozzi, 2008; Connor, 2012; Docquier et al., 2012; Poprawe, 2015; Tilly, 2007). The second strand is more concerned with the effect of migration on the home countries' institutions (Docquier, Lodigiani, Rapoport, & Schiff, 2016; Li, McHale, & Zhou, 2016). For the third, migrants can affect host countries' institutions through voicing and voting (Hirschman, 1970). The fashion in which this article links institution to migration, falls in the first strand. What are thus institutions? Which role do they play? How are they related to migration regarding the first strand?

Defined either as a set of rules that govern interactions in society (North, 1991) or as rules of the game (Coase, 1937), institutions contribute to the reduction of uncertainty and transaction costs and provide incentives (North, 1991; Vaal & Ebben, 2009). Classified in two broad categories, institutions can be informal—taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct or formal—constitutions, laws and property rights. Regardless of their nature, the fundamental role of institutions is to reduce uncertainties, both environmental and behavioural. The first is related to the alteration of the conditions that define exchange and the second pertains to opportunistic behaviour including the purposeful disguise and distortion of information (Sen, Te Velde, Wiggins, & Cali, 2006). Mo (2001) argues that corruption, at a certain level, generates sociopolitical instability in the sense that it creates uncertainty and reduces productivity.

Empirical studies on migration-institution nexus (Ariu et al., 2016; Bertocchi & Strozzi, 2008; Connor, 2012; Docquier et al., 2012; Poprawe, 2015; Tilly, 2007) reported that skilled migrants are interested in the host country's institutions. The guarantee of economic freedom in the host country attracts migrants, resulting in their departure from the country of origin. Ariu et al. (2016) reported that highly skilled university students migrate to countries with adequate institutions, while host-country institutions do not attract low-skilled university students. The authors justified the weak interest of unskilled students in the destination country's institutions by their limited access to information on foreign institutions. A study by Bergh et al. (2015) assessed the effect of global governance indicators on the decision to migrate using a gravity model; the results show that migrants choose to migrate to countries with sound democratic institutions. Labour market institutions are integral to migration flows; Migali (2018) showed that

an increase in the host countries' trade union density is associated with lower flows in migration. Informal institutions such as interpersonal trust (Tilly, 2007), corruption (Poprawe, 2015) and religious institutions (Connor, 2012) are also germane to migration decision:

> H3: Students pick a country if its institutional infrastructures are better compared to their home countries.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data Collection

In this study conducted in Benin, two universities were randomly selected: the University of Abomey-Calavi, which is the largest public university in Benin, and the Haute Ecole de Commerce et de Management (School of Business and Management), which is a private institution. On a random basis, a sample of 414 students was drawn from a list of students obtained from the students' associations. These students were surveyed between January and February 2020. A questionnaire written in French was digitised using KoBoCollect for data collection. After a pre-test, the questionnaire was considerably improved. Data was collected on the socioeconomic characteristics of students, their perceptions on the institutions and the quality of education in Benin and their preferred countries of destination using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Data was also collected on culture, economic factors in the preferred host country. Table 1 (in Supplementary File 1) presents the variables and their metrics.

3.2. Methods

The empirical model employed in this article is derived from a simple theoretical model developed by Bertocchi and Strozzi (2008) in which the migration decision is explained by wage and institutions differential. The explicit model is given by the following equation:

$$d_t = \left(W_t^d - W_t^b\right) + \delta\left(I_t^d - I_t^b\right) - c \quad (1)$$

The decision to migrate (d_t) is a function of the wage differential $\left(W_t^d - W_t^b\right)$, between the country of destination (d) and the home country (b), the institution differential $\left(I_t^d - I_t^b\right)$ and the cost of migration (c). t stands for time and δ is the weight of the gap in institutions (institution differential). As we are working on cross-sectional data, the subscript t is replaced by i. An individual decides to migrate when the gains of migration are superior to the costs incurred.

As migration decision is conditional on the destination and the send countries' characteristics, we model the choice of the destination country as a function of the student's socioeconomics characteristics (P_i), the discrimination variable (D^d), the cultural proximity between the host country and Benin (Cul_i), the economic condition in the destination country ($E^d{}_i$), the institution differential ($I^d{}_i - I^b{}_i$) and the gap in education or the differential in education quality between Benin and a given preferred chosen destination ($Ed_i^d - Ed_i^b$).

This article is not concerned with actual migration; rather, it examines the destination choice within an intent framework. Thus, students were asked—regarding institutions, education quality and economic opportunities in the destination country—what their preferred destination country would be in their intention to migrate for studies. Consequently, the dependent variable is polytomous, taking five values concerning the preferred destination countries (or regions)—North America, EU, China, African countries and other destinations. That fits a multinomial logistic model. Taking African countries as a reference, the probability that a student chooses a destination country among the four other destinations has been estimated. The mathematical expression of the fitted multinomial logistic model is as followed:

$$P_i = P_r(D = i) = \begin{cases} \dfrac{1}{1 + \sum_{m=2}^{k} \exp(Z)} \text{ if } i = 1 \\ \dfrac{\exp(Z)}{1 + \sum_{m=2}^{k} \exp(Z)} \text{ if } i > 1 \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

with $Z = X_j \lambda_m i = 1, 2, \ldots 5$

P_i stands for the probability that a student preferred a country i, D for the destination country, λ_m represents the vectors of the parameters to be estimated and X_j the vector of the explanatory variables.

The explicit form of Z is:

$$Z = \lambda_0 + \lambda_1 P_i + \lambda_2 D^d{}_i + \lambda_3 Cul_i + \lambda_4 E^d{}_i + \\ + \lambda_5\left(Ed_i^d - Ed_i^b\right) + \lambda_6\left(I^d{}_i - I^b{}_i\right) \quad (3)$$

The variables that measure the level of discrimination in the host country (D^d), the cultural proximity between the host country and Benin (Cul_i), the economic factors in the destination country ($E^d{}_i$) are respectively proxied by the index of discrimination in the preferred destination country, the index of cultural proximity and index of the host country's economic factors. Furthermore, we have computed the index of education quality for Benin and the preferred destination country and have taken their difference as the proxy for the institutions differential or the gap in the quality of institutions ($I^d{}_i - I^b{}_i$). The same computation was also performed to calculate the gap in the quality of education ($Ed_i^d - Ed_i^b$).

These indices are calculated by Principal Component Analysis, a statistical method that aggregates the collinear individual variable to obtain a composite index that captures as much information as possible from the individual variables. Since the idea is to account for the highest possible variation in the set of individual variables, using very few factors, the indices calculated are no longer a function of the dimensions of the data on the individual variables but rather of the statistical

dimensions of the data. To illustrate that approach, the results concerning the calculation of the index of the quality of education and institutions are reported in Tables 7 to 14 in Supplementary File 2.

In the empirical model, indices measuring discrimination and cultural proximity, the characteristics of the respondents (P_i), including age, gender, the type of university attended, the student and father's level of education are control variables. The expected signs and descriptive statistics of all the variables in the empirical model are presented respectively in tables 2 and 3 in Supplementary File 1.

4. Empirical Results

4.1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 4 of the Supplementary File 1. The surveyed students are 15 to 34 years old with an average of 23.8. 69% are 20 to 24 years old, 11% are 15 to 19 years old, 51% are 20 to 24 years old and 38% are between 24 and 34 years old. The majority of respondents are Catholic (57%), male (69%), enrolled in a public university (83%), and studying economics, law and political science and humanities. In terms of their level of study, 38% are sophomore, 14% are in a bachelor's year and 27% are enrolled in a master or doctoral programme. As for foreign languages, although all speak French and 35% understand English, only 4% understand German and Chinese, while 6% understand Spanish. Concerning the level of education, 80% of their parents (fathers) are educated compared to 20% uneducated.

4.2. Choice of Destination Countries

The distribution of respondents by preferred country of destination is depicted in Figure 1. It appears that the majority of the surveyed students have expressed their willingness to study outside Africa, particularly in Western countries. 43% of the respondents would like to study in North America and 39% in EU countries whereas only 6% and 7% of them would like to study respectively in China and other African countries. Respondents' preference for studying outside the African continent, notably for Western universities, could be explained by how easily they can find a job and even embrace a university career with a degree earned in Western universities (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014). Overall, the symbolic prestige attached to degrees obtained abroad and the resulting ease of social mobility explain the preference for studying in Western countries (Waters, 2006). Efionayi and Piguet (2014) explained the enthusiasm of African students for North America by the quality of education. Another reason that may well explain the preference for North America is the quality of its institutions. For instance, Canada is known and often cited for its democratic calmness and peaceful land; furthermore, the USA is described as a land of democracy. These countries' soothing study conditions, due to their institutions, would explain the preference for them.

4.3. Perceived Quality of Education and Institutions in Benin and Host Countries

After choosing the destination country, respondents were asked to justify the extent to which the quality of

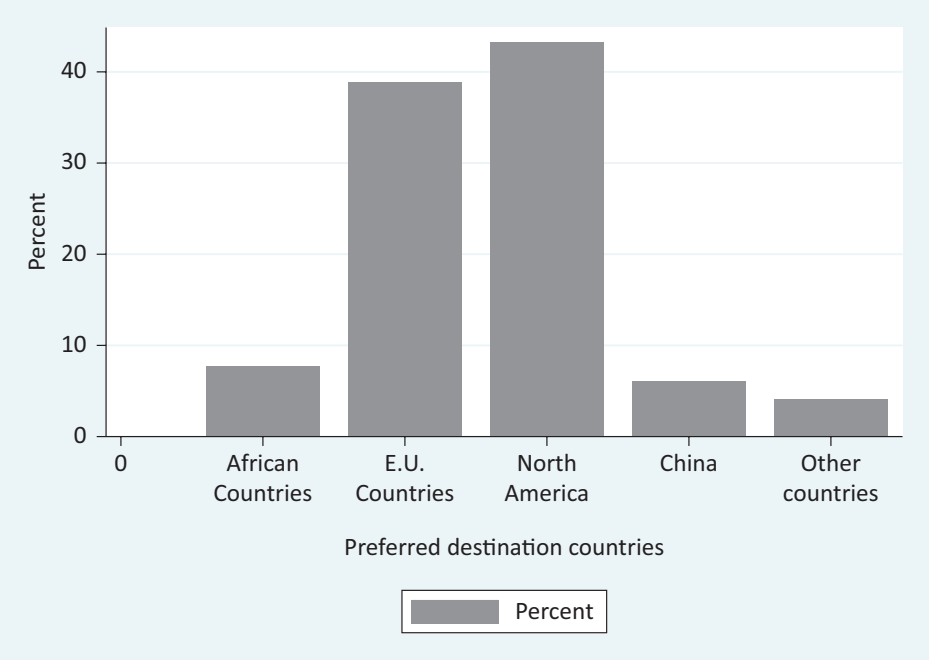

Figure 1. Destinations of choice for students from Benin.

institutions and education both in the preferred destination region and in their home country Benin contributed to this choice. The aim was to link the choice of their country of destination to the quality of institutions and education system in Benin and the preferred destinations. Figure 2 depicts the average scores of institutions and the quality of the education.

Its analysis reveals that the institutions' average score is lower in Benin than in the destinations. Respondents gave low scores to items that measure the quality of institutions at various levels. They felt that the judiciary is not efficient, property rights are poorly protected, corrupt practices are not at their minimum level and that administrative procedures are sometimes cumbersome. Furthermore, from the respondents' perspective, the institutional state in Benin is a result of democratic freedoms being weakened (Table 5 in Supplementary File 1). Unlike Benin, the average institutional score is higher in the destinations. Countries of the EU and North America have the highest scores, followed by China, other African countries and other possible destination countries. The high level of the Western countries' institutional score is due to their democratic freedoms and efficient judiciary, as the scores attributed to these institutional variables are higher in Western countries than in other destination regions.

The average score for the quality of education shows the same distribution as the average score for the quality of institutions, with some exceptions. Indeed, the average score for the quality of education in Benin is lower than those of destination countries; in this respect, the distribution of the score for the quality of education is similar to that of institutions. Compared to the destination countries, Benin's education system is less efficient, as stated by the respondents. While respondents consider Benin's education system to be moderately efficient, they feel that it does not have sufficient infrastructure (classrooms, libraries, qualified teachers, teaching materials, accessible computers and Internet, etc.) to ensure quality education; nor does it offer sufficient scholarships to students (Figure 2). On the other hand, the distribution of the quality of education score is no longer similar to that of the quality of institutions when looking only at destination countries. China and Western countries have the highest scores, with China leading slightly. From the respondents' perspective, the provision of scholarships to students and the sufficient availability of infrastructure explain the efficiency of the Chinese education system, as well as the low tuition fees at Chinese universities compared to the tuition fees charged by American, English and Canadian universities.

4.4. Determinants of Preferred Destination Countries

4.4.1. Education Quality

The quality of education is an instrument in the choice of destination country when the intention to migrate is expressed by students. Before deciding on a country of destination for study, a comparison between the home country's quality of education and that of the country of destination is performed. This basic calculation is the basis for the decision regarding the choice of a country of destination. The willingness to quench their thirst for knowledge in universities that provide world-class education explains this calculation. The education gap becomes the yardstick for the choice of the destination. Better quality of education in the destination country acts as an attractive factor, while a lagging education system in the country of origin is a repulsive factor.

The results of the econometric estimates of the multinomial logistic model are reported in Table 6 in Supplementary File 1. Figure 3 presents a graph of the estimated coefficients of three key variables, including the education differential, the institution differential and host country's economic opportunities along with their

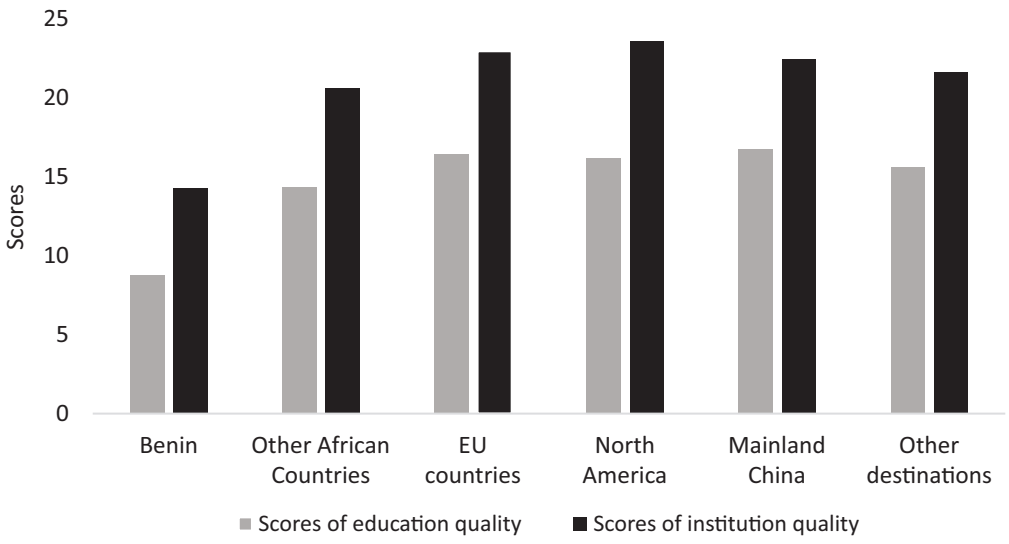

Figure 2. The average scores of institutions and the quality of the education.

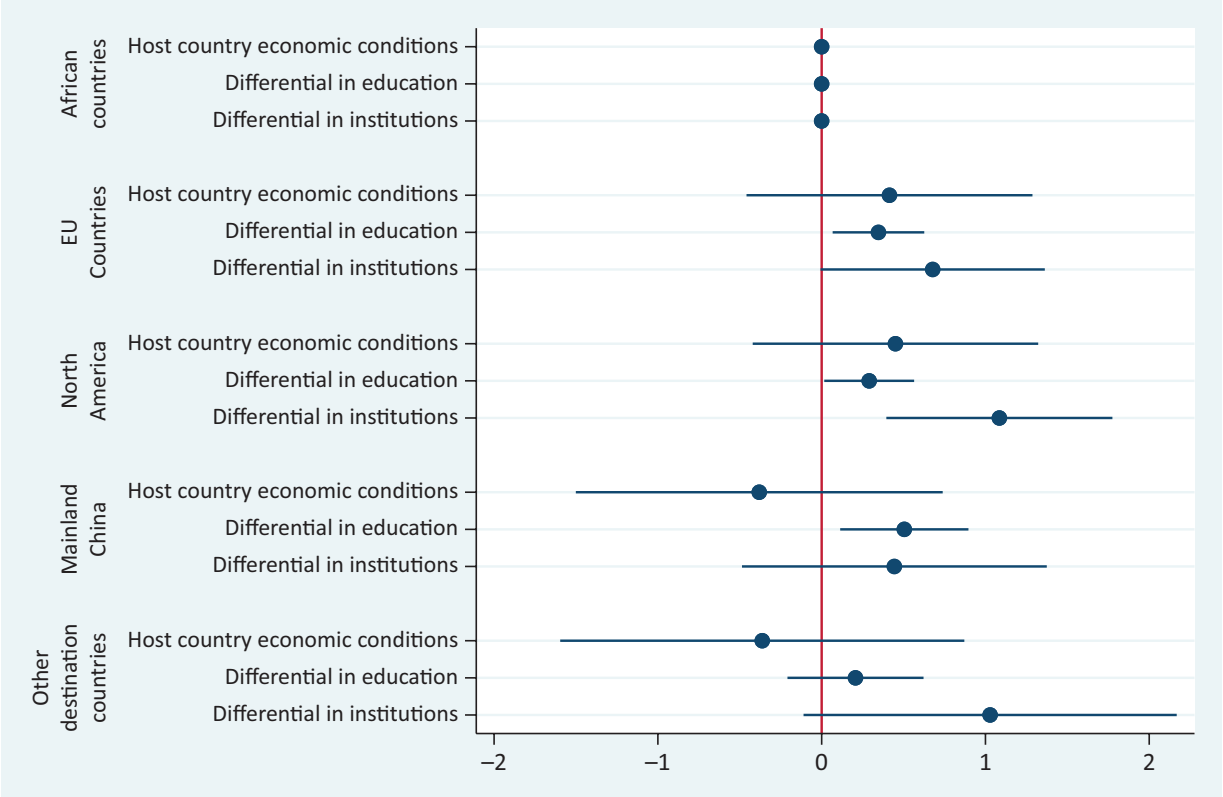

Figure 3. The plot of the multinomial model's point estimates and 95% confidence intervals. Notes: Figure 3 plots only the coefficients of the explanatory variables of interest regarding the choice of a destination country, including the differential in institutions, the differential in education and the host country's economic opportunities. The control variables are the index of discrimination, cultural proximity and the characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, the type of university attended, the student and father's level of education (see Table 6 of the Supplementary File 1). The dependant variable is polytomous, taking five possible destinations which are the EU, North America, mainland China, African countries and other possible destinations; African countries are treated as the reference destination (base outcomes). The red reference line at zero indicates which point estimate is significantly different from zero. The data used are collected on a sample of 414 Beninese students in 2020.

confidence interval at 95%. It indicates that the coefficient associated with the education differential is positive and significant at 5% threshold concerning the choice of EU countries, North America and China, but not significant for the choice of other regions. The education differential is a perfect predictor of the probability that a student decides to study in Western countries and China. Beninese students are attracted by the availability of infrastructure such as libraries, computers and study rooms that guarantee better study conditions, the availability of well-defined curricula, better teachers and researchers, and which allow them to compete in the global labour market.

4.4.2. Quality of Institutions

The institutional environment in the destination and origin country is a determining factor regarding the choice of the host country. As studying abroad is understood as a type of investment, the risk related to such a decision is integrated in the calculations, not only to ensure the success of the investment but also to guarantee the profitability of this investment. Lower-quality institutions increase the uncertainties and risks that could impede the success of studies. To this end, it is easier to study in a politically stable, less corrupt country with an efficient and independent judiciary than in a country where institutions deny democratic freedoms and political instability fosters violence of all kinds.

Figure 3 shows that the coefficient related to the institution differential is positive and significant at the 5% threshold in the choice of EU and North American countries as destination countries. However, it is not the case for China and other destination countries. The probability that a student chooses to study in Western countries rather than an African country is positively related to the institution differential. In their intention to migrate to Western countries for their studies, Beninese students compare the institutions in Benin with those in their destination countries and decide accordingly. The image of America described as a land of freedom and democracy would have contributed greatly to this result. Unlike North American and EU countries, Beninese students do not take into account the differential in the

quality of institutions between China, other regions and Benin. Although respondents have a favourable opinion of the quality of institutions in these two regions compared to Benin, the choice of China and other destinations as a host country is not motivated by the institutional infrastructure.

4.4.3. The Host Country's Economic Opportunities

So far, education differential determines the choice of Western countries and China as a destination country; furthermore, findings show that the gap in institutions does not count in the choice of China as a destination for study. Regarding the host country's economic opportunities, findings in Figure 3 indicate that they do not contribute to the choice of the host country. The coefficient associated with the economic opportunities in the host country is not significant in any destination. Though contrary to our expectations, it does say more about the reasons why African students go to study in developed or emerging countries such as China. It sheds light on the fact that the migration of Beninese students is not driven by the economic conditions in the destination countries. At most, these findings corroborate the role of institutions and the quality of education in the choice of destinations.

Concerning the control variables, the age of the respondents, the type of university attended, the cultural proximity and discrimination in the country of destination are not significant in any of the equations in Table 6 of the Supplementary File 1. These variables therefore do not contribute to the choice of the destination country for Beninese students. Also, female students and those with highly educated parents are more likely to study in North America. Students with higher levels of education, on the other hand, are less motivated to study in China.

5. Conclusion

This article has contributed to the debate on the factors that affect the choice of the destination country for studies abroad. It has focused on the role of institutions and reexamined the effects of the host country's economic opportunities and the institution differential on the choice of a destination. Since skilled migrants contribute to the strengthening of human capital in their destination countries, this article is also a contribution to the debate on the role of institutions in economic development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2010). Specifically, the following questions were answered:

Does the difference in the quality of education between the destination and host country affect the choice of the host country? The results show that the quality of education in the preferred destination country is a pulling factor while that of the country of origin is a pushing factor. Beninese students are attracted by the top-notch education quality in Western countries and China and pushed by the relatively low educational standard in Benin. This finding confirms findings of previous studies such as Lu et al. (2019), Yue (2013), Efionayi and Piguet (2014), Zhang and Zhang (2014), Basford and Riemsdijk (2017).

What is the role of institutions in the choice of destination countries? Findings have confirmed their importance; the quality of institutions motivates the choice of Western countries as destinations. The gap in the quality of institutions is an important factor in the choice of the destination country. In this regard, institutions are included in the elementary calculations that lead to the choice of a destination. Thus, countries of the highest institutional standard which reduces uncertainty, even in the presence of limited access to information, are valued. However, this is not the case for China and other regions. The results obtained here are in line with Docquier et al. (2012), Poprawe (2015), and Ariu et al. (2016).

Do students choose a host country based on its economic opportunities? The main findings indicate that the host country's economic factors do not contribute to the choice of a destination. Deciding to study in the EU, North America and China is not conditioned by economic factors. These results contradict previous findings from Cui (2006) and Abbott and Silles (2016) and confirm those of Efionayi and Piguet (2014) that challenge the common belief that African student migration is poverty-driven.

The findings of this survey lead to some policy implications. Policymakers in Benin ought to implement several institutional reforms to limit corruption, improve the efficiency of the judiciary and access to public services. In addition to that, massive public investments must be directed towards educational infrastructures to ensure that students receive a quality education.

Acknowledgments

This research is funded by the Swiss Sub-Saharan Africa Migration (S-SAM) network, a network that builds and strengthens long-term partnerships between migration researchers from Sub-Saharan Africa and Switzerland.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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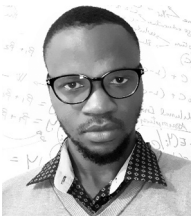
About the Author



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Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 288–298
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3769

Article

A Systematic Review and Conceptual Model of International Student Mobility Decision-Making

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Submitted: 23 October 2020 | Accepted: 14 January 2021 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
This research synthesizes the most recent studies on the international student mobility of higher education students. Our aim is to begin to conceptualise and predict the barriers, enablers and determinants from an organisational psychology perspective that may contribute to the limited decision-making of higher education students to become internationally mobile. Previous studies were used to examine the uncertainties and difficulties documented in other international student groups to try to understand the determinants of internationally mobile versus non-internationally mobile students, and make transferrable conceptual links to South African higher education students. These conceptual links are framed in an organizational psychology perspective. This article uses a systematic review methodology and began by framing review objectives, identifying relevant publications, establishing criteria for selecting the studies that were analyzed, summarizing the evidence found, and drawing relevant conclusions. A conceptual model is proposed as an extension of the current international student mobility literature and merged with organizational psychology theory to develop a new future research line. Research limitations are addressed, and practical implications are discussed to assess whether interventions can be created to support international mobility decision-making amongst international students in general, and South African higher education students in particular, to create a globally competitive workforce and sustainable employment paths.

Keywords
global workforce; higher education students; international student mobility; internationally non-mobile students; mobility barriers; mobility decision-making; mobility determinants; mobility enablers; organizational psychology; South Africa; sustainable employment

Issue
This article is part of the issue “Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight” edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

International student mobility is one of the career transitions fraught with uncertainties. International student mobility here is defined as students who follow a time-based cross-border movement, this includes all types of international student mobility, driven by the underlying intention of gaining better education or professional opportunities in the face of unstable world-of-work opportunities (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2012). Career-related migration has gained increasing popularity as an avenue to gain access to world-of-work opportunities that may not have been accessible in an individual’s host country (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015). International student mobility has been linked to increases of transferrable skills that would facilitate graduates’ employability in a world-wide market (Souto-Otero, Huisman, De Beerkens, Wit, & Vujic, 2013). International student mobility has taken precedence to develop a future workforce that aims to increase the

level of acquired skills, allow students to be able to compete in the global marketplace, enhance the interaction between citizens of different countries, and stimulate labor markets (Institute of International Education, 2011). Therefore, the present study aims to examine the decision-making processes of higher education students' migrant aspirations or migration motivations, which answers the call for research that aims to enhance student employability in a local and global world-of-work from an organizational psychology perspective.

1.1. Recent Statistics Regarding Mobility of South African Students

Specifically, South African youth (aged 15 to 34) are vulnerable in the labor market, with an unemployment rate of 63.4% (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Amongst graduates in this age group, the unemployment rate was 31%, which shows that education increases young people's prospects in the South African labor market. Approximately 56.4% of the 10.3 million South African youth (aged 15 to 24 years) are reported not to be in employment, education, or training (Statistics South Africa, 2019). In addition, a rural-urban divide results in limited educational and career development opportunities for the youth, which are perpetuated by the poor quality of schools in South Africa's historically disadvantaged areas (i.e., Townships; see Blustein, Franklin, Makiwane, & Gutowski, 2017). Due to these contextual realities and disparities, higher education in South Africa has not reached its full potential or capacity to level out residual post-apartheid inequalities (Potgieter, Harding, Kritzinger, Somo, & Engelbrecht, 2015).

International student mobility programs have been established to facilitate access to international university education opportunities to equip students with transferrable skills and tools that help to navigate a globally competitive job market (Efiritha, Nogget, & Nyevero, 2012). However, it is unclear what factors are underlying South African students' hesitance in becoming internationally mobile. Previous research has found that if children have parents who were born outside of their home country (i.e., outside of South Africa), then these children would be more likely to anticipate in international mobility (O'Flaherty, Skrbis, & Tranter, 2007). A similar phenomenon occurs when the individual was born overseas, then he/she will anticipate moving to another country in the future, in comparison to individuals who are born in a country and raised by citizens of that country. Additionally, there is a rural-urban divide, where many South African students need to be mobile within South Africa for educational and work opportunities, and so it may be that these individuals only move as far as is necessary to achieve a certain objective, and that these movements are not anticipated to be international (Skrbis, Woodward, & Bean, 2014).

Migration in South Africa is a multi-layered and a contentious point, with anti-foreigner attitudes and a flux of migrants and students from other African countries entering South Africa. According to Afrobarometer research (Mataure, 2013) the outgoing movements range between 1 to 5%, which are far less than the 28% who aspire to leave South Africa (but never do), and the 67% of South African youth wanting to stay in South Africa. In addition, only specific destinations are taken into consideration, these are the UK, Australia, and North America, rarely are other international countries considered. Nonetheless, what the underlying reasons or what the decision-making processes may be for these choices remains unclear. In a South African context specifically international student mobility is under-researched, but there is a growing concern of higher education institutions that South African university students are not applying for existing exchange programs.

2. Methods

Seeking to contribute to the literature gap on international student mobility, this study analyzes South African University Students' determinants of international mobility aspirations or motivators through a systematic review of the recent corpus of literature on the topic using an organizational psychology lens. The main overarching research purpose of our study is to contribute to the sustainable employment and transferable skill development of higher education students. We achieve this by identifying the motivators, barriers, and enablers to international mobility, and give suggestions for the development of interventions that should facilitate mobility decision-making. Our two more direct objectives are the following: (1) To examine the uncertainties or difficulties documented in international student groups to understand the decision-making processes and determinants of internationally mobile versus non-internationally mobile students; and (2) to make transferrable conceptual links to South African higher education students that extend beyond socioeconomic conditions and other relevant determinants to present a conceptual model that can be used. In a follow-up study we will also intend to empirically test the conceptual model developed in the present article, thus directly contributing to the field of international student mobility. Therefore, we offer some new perspectives for higher education institutions and other role players interested in improving their position in the international education market by understanding the determinants of international student mobility aspirations.

2.1. Search Strategy

Although international student mobility has been extensively researched, we were interested in examining this phenomenon from an organizational psychology perspective and this interdisciplinary approach is notably absent in the literature base. In addition, research on South African university students and international

mobility is limited. As a result, we used a two-step process to try and gain as many relevant literature matches as possible. In the first step, we used the following combination of keywords to explore the research topic: "international student mobility" and/or "enablers" and/or "barriers" and/or "determinants." These keywords were selected based on the number of hits that resulted in their combined usage and based on terms often used in an organizational psychology context. Then, as the second step, we added (and/or) "South African students" to the search string to assess what South African studies had been published or were in press. Due to the large number of studies that emerged, we screened the studies to be included in the present study using our research objectives from an organizational psychology perspective.

2.2. Selection Criteria

We limited our search to peer-reviewed journals that were readily accessible, published between 2010 and 2020 in English. In a South African context, the language of education and commerce remains English, so we were not concerned about our language choice being an exclusionary factor. In our sifting process we identified the most influential and so-called classic papers, indicated by a high number of citations within the last 10 years to attain an overview of research published on this research topic. We focused only on higher education student samples and international student mobility and excluded any other population groups. In the first step of our research process, we searched databases that were internationally renowned as high quality, such as Scopus, ScienceDirect and Taylor & Francis. We included content that was general to international student mobility that discussed worldwide challenges, enablers and determinants of higher education students in undertaking international mobility experiences. In the second step of our search process, we also included databases that would allow access to South African research studies such as Sabinet, Google Scholar, and Academia. We also included content that discussed South African students and their higher education trajectories and any mobility experiences (i.e., rural to urban, other local South African movements and international mobility) mentioned to gain as much perspective into the phenomena in question. Papers were excluded in the two-step process that focused on: acculturation; psychological adjustment; identity development processes linked to international mobility experiences; and subjective experiences of students who had migrated. Exclusions were also made on a case-by-case basis if the research papers were too focused on specific population groups or countries and if we believed that these findings could not be transferred to other contexts (i.e., other international student mobility groups or the South African context).

2.3. Assessment Procedure

Our first step was applied in the ScienceDirect database, where we initially identified 931 research papers based on the number of hits that combined usage of our main search keywords in titles, abstracts and/or keywords. Of these, 485 papers were excluded because they were published before 2010. Another 471 papers were excluded because the abstract revealed that they did not focus on our selection criteria. The full texts of the remaining 14 papers were then reviewed and 12 papers were excluded because they examined variables that were not directly linked to international student mobility barriers and determinants. As a result, we included two papers on international student mobility in the current review from ScienceDirect.

The same process was applied to the Taylor & Francis database, where we identified 10,052 papers, 5103 of which were excluded because they were published before 2010; 4869 papers were excluded because the abstract revealed that they did not focus on international student mobility barriers or determinants. The full texts of the remaining 80 papers were then reviewed and 78 papers were excluded because they examined variables that were not directly linked to our selection criteria. As a result, two papers from Taylor & Francis were selected.

In the Scopus database we identified 1309 papers with the combined usage of our main search keywords in titles, abstracts and/or keywords. Of these, 828 papers were excluded because they were published before 2010; another 440 were excluded because the abstract revealed that they did not focus on international student mobility barriers or determinants. The full texts of the remaining 41 papers were then reviewed and papers were excluded because they examined variables that were not directly linked to ISM barriers and determinants. As a result, two papers from Scopus were selected.

The second step of our procedure was applied to the Sabinet database to identify South African published papers. Initially we had 1345 hits in titles, abstracts and/or keywords; 683 papers were excluded because they were published before 2010 and 653 were excluded because the abstract revealed that they did not focus on international student mobility barriers, determinants or South African students. The full texts of the remaining nine papers were then reviewed and seven of these were excluded because they examined variables that were not directly linked to international student mobility barriers and determinants. As a result, we selected two papers from Sabinet.

The same process was applied to the Academia database, where we identified 10,895 hits in titles, abstracts and/or keywords; 683 of these papers were then excluded because they were published before 2010 and 653 were excluded because the abstract revealed that they did not focus on international student mobility barriers, determinants or South African students. The full texts of the remaining nine papers were then reviewed,

seven papers were excluded because they examined variables that were not directly linked to international student mobility barriers and determinants. As a result, we selected two papers from Academia.

Finally, the second step of our procedure was also applied in the Google Scholar database, resulting in 10,400 hits in titles, abstracts and/or keywords. Of these, 1470 papers were excluded because they were published before 2010 and 7928 were excluded because the abstract revealed that they did not focus on international student mobility barriers, determinants or South African students. The remaining 1002 papers were then reviewed and only 130 were easily accessible. 125 papers were excluded because they examined variables that were not directly linked to international student mobility barriers and determinants, and an additional three papers were excluded due to repetition. As a result, we included two papers from Google Scholar is our study. In total, we included 12 articles in this review.

3. Findings

In the 12 articles that we selected to review (see the Supplementary File for details) there were dominant themes that emerged. In the section below we will provide an overview of the international student mobility research studies conducted in the last 10 years from an organizational perspective. Thereafter, these findings will be applied to a South African context due to the lack of studies documented in a Global South context. Lastly, a theoretical integration and a conceptual model is presented that could be used to predict future mobility motivations and aspirations in university students in general, and South African students in particular.

3.1. Description of Mobility Movements

Mobility movements in the articles reviewed were discussed from different perspectives. The first perspective is that of occupational mobility (Yakhina, Yakovlev, Kozhevnikova, Nuretdinova, & Solovyeva, 2016), and the second perspective is based on mobility movements centring around a global demand for education (Prazeres, 2013). Finally, mobility movements were discussed according to key demographic variables that Skrbis et al. (2014) have examined.

The first perspective is that of graduate students needing to become occupationally mobile, which is tied to social, labor and occupational mobility as presented by Yakhina et al. (2016). The underlying motivations for an individual to undertake these types of mobility are inequality, power, education or prestige. Social mobility is usually described as a change in the individual's status (vertical mobility), a change in location without a change of status (horizontal mobility) or, in some cases, a combination of both. Labor mobility, on the other hand, is the transition of place of employment, changes in the sector of employment or the nature of the work. Most importantly, occupational mobility refers to the qualities of the person, activities, and processes undertaken to reach self-actualisation in occupation and life environments (Yakhina et al., 2016). This concept can be easily tied to the concept of a boundaryless career orientation, which is used in organizational psychology to facilitate successful worldwide movements in social, economic, cultural, and political interactions.

Another perspective focused on mobility movements cantering around a global demand for education, where students worldwide were attracted to prestigious educational programmes in the Global North. Noticeably, there seems to be a lack of research on movements to and from the Global South, and the recommendation was made for future research to explore international student mobility to and from developing world countries. According to Prazeres (2013), the movement of students from developing work countries to higher education institutions in developed countries was described as "vertical mobility" to indicate economic advancement. In comparison, "horizontal mobility" was used to describe the movement between higher education institutions of more or less the same economic advancement and academic quality. The key findings were that students were attracted to higher education institutions with high programme quality and who could afford the costs linked to mobility movements, which were either short-term, linked to a degree or transnational (i.e., completing higher education in the home country but enrolled in a foreign university programme). A global demand for education often translates into the demand for an English-speaking and Anglo-Saxon higher education, thus making English-speaking countries a popular destination for students (i.e., USA, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand), but Germany and France were also popular destinations. Regardless of the destination, mobile students had better job and economic opportunities than those who were not mobile, so mobility increased their cultural capital. In comparison, students who stayed in their origin country had more familial ties, viewed higher education institutions at home as reputable and lacked a "mobility culture.''

The last perspective on mobility movements was tied to three key structural variables in an Australian context as presented by Skrbis et al. (2014). Patterns of mobility aspirations were seen to vary based on gender, school sector, and geographical location variables. Girls were observed to have a more positive mobility outlook than boys, and championed future mobility across all variables. In terms of the school sector, students from independent schools were more likely to report considering future mobility internationally than those from inter-state schools, which reflects differing socioeconomic statuses and financial resources that influence mobility decision-making. However, geographical location seemed to have a limiting effect, where students who resided in remote areas had increased ambitions to move within their state, but they had dampened ambitions to move internationally. Therefore, socioeconomic

variables were seen to limit mobility decision-making processes even if these factors were not found to significantly predict mobility aspirations. However, the financial costs limited international movements directly by denying access to prestigious scholarships or indirectly by impeding the development of a boundaryless mindset.

3.2. Determinants of International Mobility

In the reviewed articles, there were four main determinants mentioned in the decision-making processes of students who aimed to become internationally mobile. The first determinant was the cost of the higher education programmes students were applying for (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007), the second determinant was the financial and living costs present in the host country in comparison to the future potential income that could be generated by taking up this international mobility opportunity (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2013). Thirdly, socio-political ties and trade flows between a student's home and host country acted as the third determinant (Hou & Du, 2020). The fourth determinant was described by Gesing and Glass (2018) as the student-driven demand for quality higher education, which often outpaced the higher education demand.

The first determinant, according to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), was the cost of higher education. This factor was amongst the top factors influencing the decision to study in a country. For example, for Chinese students who are traditionally New Zealand's largest overseas student population, the key motivational factor was the comparably low cost of an overseas education in New Zealand. In addition, countries such as Japan and Canada had affordable provisions, as well as emerging destinations such as Malaysia, Singapore, and China, with their affordable but prestigious educational courses and low living costs, which made these destinations attractive.

The second determinant of international mobility was costs-benefits calculations that students made of comparing the living costs of the host country versus the future income potential of becoming internationally mobile as described by Beine et al. (2013). The determinants of international student mobility were examined and financial and living costs were identified to increasingly be likely to motivate students to apply to particular destinations, and to deter them from applying to others. The high value of certain currencies could arguably dissuade students from going to high-cost nations, since unfavourable exchange rates exacerbate the financial strain of foreign students, especially those from Africa and Southeast Asia. In this article, students from Africa only represented 11,6% of international student mobility, in comparison to the strong mobility presence of European students. The motivators of mobility are based on securing a higher income and/or to move to a new country which presents more favourable employment opportunities in the long-term than the student's home country. International student mobility returns are based on the higher education value in terms of the average level of education in their home country or can lead to movement to a third country to seek better education or employment opportunities.

The third determinant of international mobility were socio-political ties and trade flows, although these forces operate on a macro-level, students used these fluctuating factors in their decision-making processes to select the host country. In Hou and Du (2020), an analysis is presented of the international student mobility flow to different countries. Confirmed movements that were observed were that Western developed countries were destinations and developing countries were mainly source countries, showing a clear 'East to West, South to North' movement (Hou & Du, 2020, p. 10). However, international student mobility patterns fluctuated due to economic and higher education development in emerging countries, as well as changing political and economic connections between countries. Factors that are involved are geographical distances, trade relations, political connections, language differences, historical colonial links, levels of economic development and education quality. Therefore, mobility as a rational individual choice or a family economic decision is made more complex and situated within a temporal socio-political climate of the student's home country as well as that of the host country.

As a result, market forces play a predominant role and reflect inequality and imbalance of higher education development worldwide, where other countries are becoming regional hub countries (i.e., China, Australia, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia). South Africa was cited as an emerging strong semi-periphery country strengthening in exchanges and cooperation with core western countries, whilst building regional links to other countries (i.e., South America, Israel, Latvia, and Estonia), as well as being the destination of choice for students from sub-Saharan African countries. Therefore, the economic connections, political relationships, existing historical colonial ties, and linguistic proximity promoted bilateral exchanges.

The fourth determinant of international student mobility was students' demand for quality higher education which was outpacing higher education capacity. Findings presented by Gesing and Glass (2018) indicated that higher education enrolment growth was being driven by students from low- to middle-income countries. This led to the increasing numbers of "glocal" students (i.e., students seeking an international education whilst staying in their home country) who attended higher education institutions at international branch campuses. This new generation of international students were viewed seen as price-sensitive and career-minded, whilst focused on short-term mobility for employment goals. They were first-generation students looking for pathways to work opportunities supported by national immigration policies and were engaging in new forms

of cross-border, hybrid, and online higher education programs. This fast-growing international student population aimed to ensure that short-term mobility would lead to upward social and economic mobility, regardless of regional conflicts, economic crises, and pandemics.

3.3. Enablers of International Mobility

In terms of international mobility enablers, we found two main enablers, the first enabler was the desire to gain an advantage over fellow students and that international mobility could help students achieve this aim to gain employment (Findlay, King, Findlay, Ahrens, & Dunne, 2012). Secondly, another international mobility enabler is described as intellectual capital, which presupposes an existing network in the host country, high academic qualifications, and language proficiencies, which focuses a certain student demographic (Li, Lo, Lu, Tan, & Lu, 2020).

The first enabler was the desire of students to gain a competitive edge to facilitate employment, this enabling factor for international mobility was described by Findlay et al. (2012). The search for international student mobility opportunities was based on attending a high status university to gain a form of "distinctiveness" that would be used in an international world-of-work arena to differentiate their employment credentials from peers. International student mobility was based on symbolic capital as 'a distinguishing identity marker' (Findlay et al., 2012, p. 128). Students believed that their international experience could be deployed advantageously in their future career trajectories. Furthermore, international education and the resultant cosmopolitan identities associated with international student mobility would assist building an international career. The possibility of working abroad and developing an internationally mobile career trajectory based on human capital influenced international student mobility decisions.

The second enabler was international mobility driven by gaining intellectual capital, otherwise known as intellectual migration, as proposed by Li et al. (2020). In this study, the decision to undertake international student mobility is influenced more by career aspirations, contextual factors such as (im)migration regulations and the socioeconomic-political conditions of their origin and destination regions. Intellectual migration contends that migratory decisions, trajectories, and trends are tied to gaining intellectual capital. International capital is based on a combination of academic training, (foreign) language proficiency, work experience, knowledge-based translocal and transnational connections (which are personal and professional connections), socio-cultural adaptability, and influential leadership. Intellectual capital was further influenced by the migrants themselves, their social networks, as well as the economy and policies in sending and receiving regions.

Other variables mentioned by Beine et al. (2013) which may act as enablers or barriers to student international mobility were the physical distance from their home country (i.e., negative), a lack of host country language proficiency (i.e., negative), colonial ties (i.e., positive or negative associations), and whether a network is already present in the host country (i.e., positive associations). In addition, Hou and Du (2020) mention that similar cultural background and language were viewed as enabling factors which limited the psychological distance and reduced a sense of strangeness, that could hinder host interaction. These factors are dependent on the student's home country and the trade and historical ties to the host country, which could be dual entities acting as enablers and/or barriers.

3.4. Barriers to (and Benefits of) International Mobility

Articles in our review cited many barriers to international mobility, and Souto-Otero et al. (2013) undertook an exploration of the barriers that prevented students from taking part in the Erasmus programme. The main barriers that non-mobile students faced were financial costs (61% compared to 41% of mobile students), separation from the social support system (i.e., family, partner and friends), which was cited by both non-mobile (47%) and mobile students (23%), and 43% of non-mobile students expected their international mobility studies to take longer to complete. Further barriers included struggles in finding accommodation and a lack of understanding of administrative procedures, living conditions, currency exchanges, necessary insurance, and credit transfers. Additional barriers were overseas academic-related teaching methods, academic content, foreign language instruction, limited academic support, and high workload of courses. Non-mobile students preferred to finish their higher education training as soon as possible, to save the costs associated with international student mobility and keep their support systems in place at home. Psychological barriers were also mentioned, such as the fear of new places and creating new social contacts, a lack of self-confidence, and losing connectedness to their home country.

Although international student mobility has many barriers, there are many benefits of mobility. King, Findlay, and Ahrens (2010) examined the relationship between an Erasmus year abroad and subsequent professional life and key benefits of international student mobility. The results show there is a positive impact of international student mobility on employment and the type of work students end up taking. According to King et al. (2010), benefits of mobility include: (1) a high level of satisfaction with current work, (2) a positive impact on income, (3) continuous use of the language of the host country, (4) the ability to use knowledge of the host country professionally, and (5) travel to host country for professional reasons.

Moreover, other findings indicated that reasons for international students to complete programs are to enhance academic credentials, get better paid employ-

ment opportunities, and provide entry to influential professional networks. This means that there are negative implications when students do not undertake international student mobility opportunities, which can be seen as a potential barrier to students' career development and create unequal employment opportunities.

4. Applications to a South African Context

South Africa has been cited as the most unequal country in the world with a Gini coefficient of 65.0 (The World Bank, 2015), with high income inequality, high unemployment, and relatively low growth rates. This inequality is pervasive in the educational system, despite conducive efforts to level post-Apartheid inequalities. The differential pathways of South African students through higher education in the article of Cosser (2018) is presented by tracking a cohort of students from school graduation into and through the South African higher education system. There were vast differences observed in student's performances in school and higher education that are based on socioeconomic status which further impacts the probability of employment and the returns of education of South African workers. The key findings were that persistence and socioeconomic status is a differentiating feature in student progression through, the retention within and completion of higher education programs (Cosser, 2018).

The implications for international student mobility are then painted starkly in terms of socioeconomic status, privileging students from a high socioeconomic background, which could explain the limited number of internationally mobile South African students. However, this does not entirely answer the question of why some South African students who are offered international scholarships often may not accept the opportunity. We would like to argue that there may be some individual differences as stipulated by the boundaryless career theory (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), regardless of socioeconomic status, that may make an individual more likely to want to distinguish themselves in an extremely limited and competitive South African job market for university graduates. These individuals can be described as having a boundaryless career orientation and want to ensure they have a skillset that ensures sustainable employability.

Yet, there is an overlooked cultural domain that may hinder South African students from becoming internationally mobile. Collectivistic elements are distributed across South African population groups with some population groups being more or less collectivistic (Albien, 2019). Therefore, differences in career orientations and international student mobility aspirations and motivations may manifest in university students from the Global South countries such as South Africa. As a result, South African students may waver between utilizing international student mobility opportunities needed for their occupational mobility, as well as fulfilling familial obligations, and finding a compromise that may increase their mobility within South Africa but limit their mobility internationally. Therefore, a theoretical framework for international mobility that merges organizational theory with migration theory and takes socioeconomic status into consideration was introduced. We hope that this model proves useful and can be used for different international student population groups from an organizational psychology perspective. This theory will be used as the foundation for the conceptual model that was developed as the second aim of the research article.

5. Discussion and Theoretical Implications

Although there are numerous migration theories due to an increasing interest in international migration and mobility, there is a lack of integration between organizational theories of career-related movements and the migration theoretical base. As an overview, migration theories have been described to function at different levels (micro-, meso-, and macro-level), according to discipline (sociological, economic, geographical, etc.), or according to initiation or perpetuation (for a complete review please see Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). In the present research, an integration of migration system theory, boundaryless career theory and the social cognitive model of career self-management (CSM) will be used as our theoretical foundation.

In migration system theory, the core tenet is that migration contributes to changes on economic, cultural, social, and institutional conditions in the receiving and sending country, with a focus on the macro (economy, political, and cultural systems, etc.) and micro (individual, kinship, and friendship systems) linkages of the places linked to the migration process (Kritz, Lim, & Zlotnik, 1992). Unlike other migration models, this model emphasizes the link between migration and development (De Haas, 2010), which allows a broader perspective that views development not only as economic in nature but also social. Therefore, it can be argued that migration has the ability to influence the socioeconomic development of the country of origin, encourage subsequent migration at macro- and micro-levels, enhance the individual's human and social capital and improve an individual's employability at a micro-level (university students). In the section below, we aim to present an integrated conceptual framework that links the migration system theory, the boundaryless career theory and the CSM to provide a comprehensive account for international student migration that includes micro- and macro-levels and could be applied to various student population groups but here will be applied to the South African context.

An organizational psychology theory, the boundaryless career theory was integrated to provide an understanding of factors that contributed to career mobility behaviours in individuals and has an established research base that included associations with boundaryless career orientations (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The boundary-

less career theory explains that a career involves physical and/or psychological mobility and has moved to the forefront of career self-management. Physical mobility is the transition across boundaries (i.e., jobs, firms, occupations, and countries), and psychological mobility is the perception of the career actor of his/her capacity to make transitions (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). A boundaryless career can be viewed and operationalized by the degree of mobility exhibited by the career actor along both the physical and psychological mobility continua.

The CSM (Lent & Brown, 2013) has been applied in various research studies to career exploration and decision-making outcomes in higher education students. Currently scant research exists that examines higher education students in a South African context. It has been predicted that self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations promote goals to engage in exploration/decisional actions and ultimately the follow-through of career exploration into career decisional outcome behaviours (Lent, Ezeofor, Morrison, Penn, & Ireland, 2016; see Figure 1).

However, the alignment of variables with the CSM model that facilitates the movement from goals to decisional goals, actions, and, ultimately, behavioural outcomes, is still under-researched (Ireland & Lent, 2018). An extension can be provided of the CSM research base by examining the link between exploratory goals and behaviour, which has been called for in previous research.

5.1. Proposed Conceptual Model

In the current study, behavioural outcomes were theorized to be measured by the international student mobility experiences undertaken. This creates a clear follow-through pathway where students can self-report if they have been mobile or non-mobile. The importance of this documentation answers the call to facilitate the movement from goals (understood here as mobility aspirations) to decisional goals (understood here as mobility motivations) that result in actions and, ultimately, behavioural outcomes of being internationally mobile (Ireland & Lent, 2018). This model allows the decision-making process and determinants involved in international mobility to be explored. Also, the need for self-directed career management competencies (SDCM) based on the CSM model became a research strand that aimed at developing competencies that would enable individuals to navigate unpredictable career trajectories. SDCM has been described as consisting of personal dispositions, readiness, or abilities/competences that can be developed to create employability and sustainable employment.

The conceptual model depicted below, acknowledges the influence of socioeconomic and other demographic variables (that include collectivistic elements) on students' international mobility aspirations and posit that career resources and career resilience may serve a moderating or mediating role. Barriers and enablers have also been included in the model below to assess how students interpret these factors to hinder or enable their decision-making processes that ultimately result in undertaking an international student mobility opportunity.

Career adaptability, employability, proactivity and resilience competencies have been emphasised as skills that will aid individuals to traverse increasingly complex career-life transitions and traumas. The conceptual

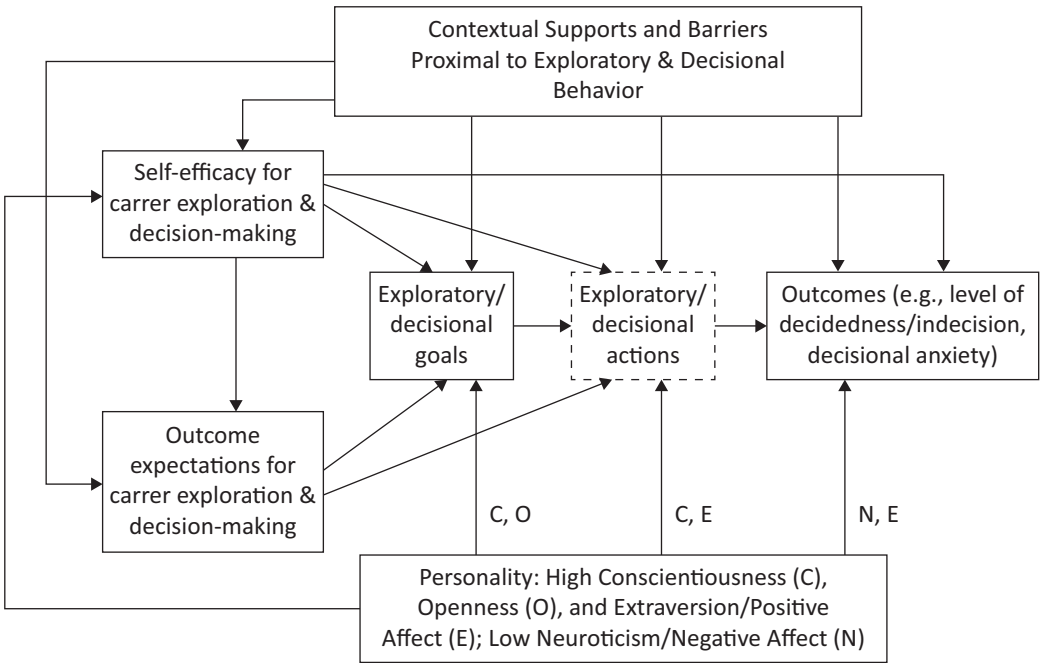

Figure 1. Model of career self-management adapted from Ireland and Lent (2018, p. 38). Reprinted with permission.

model proposed here depicts the influence of socioeconomic and demographic factors on international student mobility aspirations as seen in Figure 2. Therefore, based on the conceptual model, career resources and career resilience are believed to function as moderators or mediators between mobility aspirations, motivations, and international student mobility in students. However, this model will be empirically tested in a follow-up study to assess the applicability to South African student groups in particular, and then findings will be critically discussed if they can be transferred to international student population groups in general. Thereby, the literature base of international student mobility research is extended with the inclusion of a conceptual model that is based on organizational psychology theoretical underpinnings.

6. Conclusions and Future Research

This article provides a systematic review of the corpus of literature available on international student mobility barriers, enablers, and determinants. In the second step we extended the findings to a South African university student group, due to limited of research studies on international student mobility in a Global South context. And lastly, we presented a theoretical integration and presented a conceptual model that could be used to predict future mobility motivations and aspirations not only in South African University students but other international student groups. This model will be tested in a future follow-up study where two student groups will be assessed (mobile versus non-mobile) to measure the differences that emerge and to what extent they mirror those that were documented in the international student mobility studies presented here, as well as other relevant international student mobility findings that may be outside the scope of this study. Once we have understood the interplay of all the factors discussed here, interventions can be created to support international mobility decision-making amongst students who qualify for international scholarships that would cover the costs of their international mobility experience, whether it is a short-exchange opportunity, an online hybrid international programme or a relevant training programme. This would facilitate the transference of international skills to make graduate students globally competitive, something that is particularly relevant in the transition to sustainable employability, supporting the demand and economic integration of professionals who will be able to adapt to a continuously changing world of work and enable sustainable employment. We believe that the conceptual framework and model we have created has a priori wide applicability to all international students because the model includes variables that have not yet been examined together in describing student mobility decision-making processes.

In conclusion, we believe that the theoretical integration and conceptual model presented here could be used to predict future mobility motivations and aspirations of international students worldwide by identifying the influences of socioeconomic factors, career orientations, barriers and enablers involved in this decision-making process.

Acknowledgments

We would like to give special recognition to Dr. Didier Ruedin from the University of Neuchâtel and the Swiss

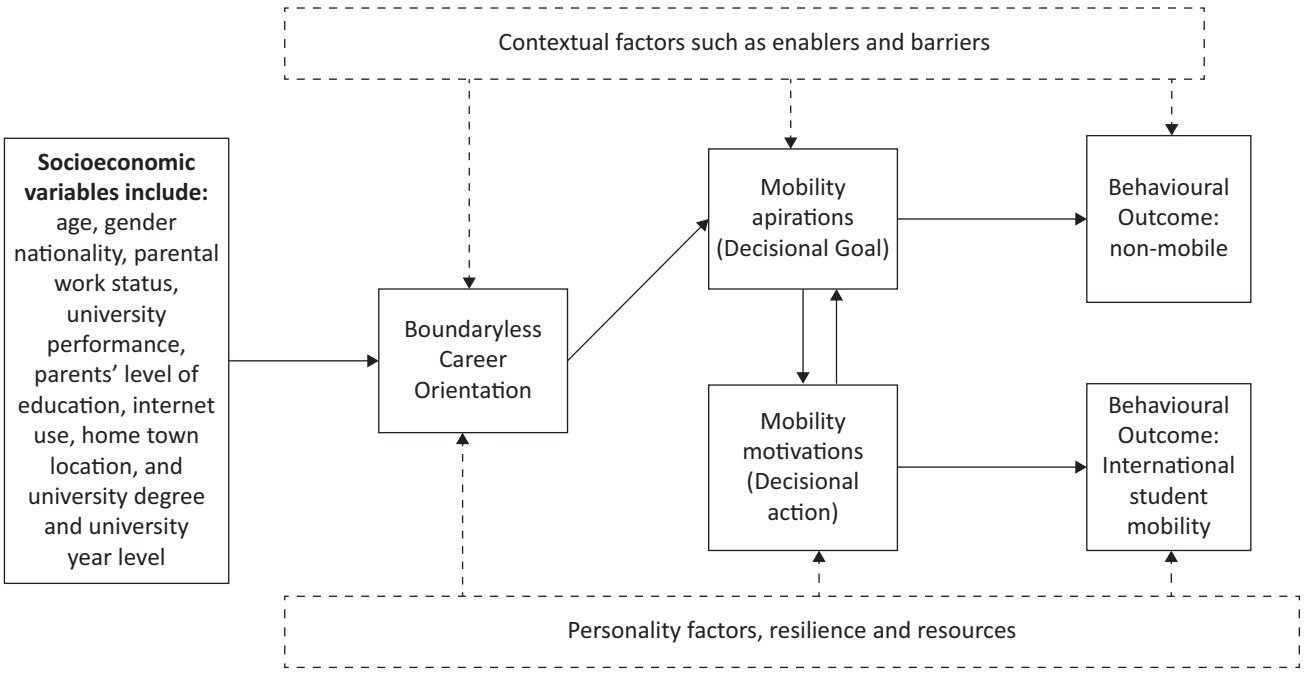

Figure 2. Boundaryless career conceptual model of international student mobility decision-making.

Forum for Population and Migration Studies (SFM) Grant as part of the Swiss–Sub Saharan African Migrant Network (SSAM) Project. We also thank the University of Bern and Stellenbosch University for collaborating with the authors in this research project.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 299–307
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3690

Article

"I Have to Further My Studies Abroad": Student Migration in Ghana

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Submitted: 28 September 2020 | Accepted: 19 November 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
The literature on migration intentions of university students and their decisions to travel abroad as student migrants is limited. This article outlines how the thought of student migration is created and nurtured. It investigates how facilitators and/or constraints influence the decision to migrate as students. Using a multi-sited approach, fieldwork in Ghana focused on prospective student migrants, while fieldwork in the Netherlands provided a retrospective perspective among student migrants. Life story interviews were adopted in the collection of data. In the minds of the respondents, there is a clear distinction between the idea of 'migration' and the idea of 'student migration.' The article concludes that childhood socialization shapes the idea of 'migration' that culminates in the thought of 'student migration.' Apart from studies, experiencing new cultures and networking are among the notable expectations that inform the thought of student migration. Religiosity categorised as prayers and belonging to religious community is a cultural principle employed to facilitate the fulfilment of student migration intentions. With a shift from the classical economic models of understanding the decision to migrate, this article elucidates the fears, anxiety, joys and perplexities that are embedded in the thought of student migration.

Keywords
Ghana; migration behaviour; migration intention; student migration; university students

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

Most of the literature on human mobility from the Global South to the Global North has focused on labour migration, human trafficking and irregular forms of migration (Adepoju, 2005; Anarfi, Awusabo-Asare, & Nsowah-Nuamah, 2000) because of their consideration as having substantial social, economic and security implications. An emerging category of persons who migrate with the prime aim of studying in the host country have received little attention in the migration literature on West Africa. Studies that focus on graduate and professional migration problematize brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation from the Global South to the Global North (Adepoju, 2005; Dako- Gyeke, 2016; Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Mutume, 2003). In this article, I shift from the human capital discourse (Rosenzweig, Irwin, & Williamson, 2006) in migration decisions to emotional challenges, joys, perplexities and anxieties embedded in the day-to-day activities of persons (Wang & Chen, 2020) who aspire to travel as students. First the research outlines how the thought of student migration is created and nurtured among prospective student migrants from Ghana. Secondly it investigates the socio-cultural facilitators and constraints that influence the decision of Ghanaians to migrate as students.

The OECD (2019) asserts that over the last three decades, the rise in international student migration superseded total international mobility. As of 2013, over 4.3 million tertiary students were enrolled outside their national borders (OECD, 2013). Student migration has become an important contributor to the global higher education landscape over the past few decades. International students in higher education worldwide rose from 2 million in 1998 to 5 million in 2016, according to UNESCO (2018a). In 2017, the OECD (2019) projected

that the total number of internationally mobile students will reach 8 million by 2025. In spite of the rapid rate of growth of student migrants, student migration remains the least regulated and restricted form of international migration (Rosenzweig et al., 2006).

Contemporary research has begun to problematize student migration and looked into why students may be mobile, what influences their choice of mobility and the impact of mobility on their future (Cairns, 2014). Kell and Vogl (2008) argued that the approaches used in studying international students are more instrumental and tend to emphasize 'market analysis,' which overshadows students' social, cultural, emotional and educational experiences. UNESCO (2006), for instance, reported that the United States, United Kingdom and Australia are the three key players when it comes to international student market. Börjesson (2017) identified three different logics in the flow of student migration, which includes market logic, colonial logic and proximity logic. Interestingly, an element of market logic runs through all the other forms of Börjesson's (2017) logic. This article shifts the student migration discourse from classical economic models' homogeneous factor of wage differentials to emotional and cultural motivations that shape student migration decision-making. I focus on how the decision-making processes of prospective student migrants are embedded with frictions, barriers and anxieties that are coupled with micro-politics of subjectivities.

2. Conceptualising the Decision to Migrate and Student Migration

The decision to migrate originates from the home country as an idea which becomes actualised or not (Edelstein, 2000). The decision to migrate is a multi-phase process which precedes the actual movement to a different country. The process is shaped by multiplicity of micro, meso and macro factors that are crucial in the decision-making of prospective student migrants, many of which are subject to uncertainty. This research is inspired by conceptual frameworks that originate from social psychology and have been drawn into the migration decision-making literature: The theory of planned behaviour is drawn from social psychology and central to the theory is that individual's intentions are the primary determinant of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Intention is defined as a person's motivation and perceived likelihood to perform a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The intentions of an individual in carrying out behaviour are enshrined in motivational factors that indicate how much a person is willing to invest in order to achieve that particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The theory posits that behavioural intentions may lead to behaviour itself that is the carrying out of concrete actions. There are, however, constraints and facilitators that directly affect the accomplishment of the behaviour which the theory refers to as non-motivational factors for example the availability of time, money, skills, cooperation of others (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). De Jong (2000) incorporates the theory of planned behaviour into migration decision-making discourse and differentiates between migration intention and migration behaviour. Empirical studies on De Jong's (2000) two-phase model have provided conflicting results (Creighton & Riosmena, 2013; van Dalen & Henkens, 2013) as migration intentions are mostly not fulfilled as migration behaviour. Fundamentally the argument holds that when the expectation of moving to a different location will fulfil the achievement of a certain goal rather than the momentary place of living, a person is likely to migrate which is summarised as value-expectancy (De Jong, 2000; De Jong & Fawcett, 1981).

Kley (2011) builds on De Jong's (2000) two-phase model drawing from the psychological Rubicon model and divides the migration decision-making process into three-phase models namely the pre-decisional, pre-actional and actional stages. The pre-decisional stage involves the initial conception of the thought of migration without any engagement or preparation and this phase ends when a person decides to migrate (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). The next stage that the model refers to as migration behaviours are the preparatory actions towards migration that are distinctly divided into two (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Kley, 2011). The pre-actional phase begins with the exploring of migration possibilities through the gathering of information from various networks but with no obligations as they are tentative. The last stage is the actional phase (Kley, 2011) which consists of the concrete execution of migration by making arrangements for the movement to the destination country for schooling.

When prospective student migrants realise that their aspirations are not likely to be fulfilled in the home country, they look for alternative solutions outside (Ferro, 2006). Potential student migrants therefore make rational calculation, but this process is not limited to economic and monetary calculations of the self. The cost-benefit calculations are also articulated by the push and pull elements in personal experiences, family and social networks. In the push and pull discourse, the prospective student migrant evaluates the expectations of life abroad and the deprivation at home that may deny the attainment of the desired aspirations (Ferro, 2006). For Findlay, King, Smith, and Skeldon (2012), student migration has to be perceived in a wider life-course perspective. The classical economic models of wage differentials as the homogenous factor that explains migration flows have, however, been limited in delving into the dynamics and nuances that motivate migration (Fischer, Reiner, & Straubhaar, 1997). Faist (1997) argues that the network framework for explaining migration decision-making is more successful in studying the direction of flow rather than the volume.

From micro sociological perspective, I transcend the human capital and economic models and focus on the emotional dimensions of fear, joys, anxieties and

perplexities embedded in the day-to-day activities of persons who aspire to be student migrants. I argue that the lived experiences of frictions, barriers, happiness coupled with micro-politics of subjectivities have not received attention in the decision-making process of student migrants. I take into account how potential student migrants and student migrants develop their migratory project at the personal level considering factors such as expectations, aspirations, values, beliefs and personal experiences as indicators in migration decision-making (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Tabor & Milfont, 2011).

In conceptualising student migrants, the OECD (2011) makes a distinction between international students and foreign students whereby it describes international students as persons who move from their country of origin with the aim of pursuing academic activity. Foreign students are rather students who are non-citizens of a country in which they are enrolled but are long term residents or were even born in that country. Foreign students according to the OECD (2011) encompass students who entered the host nation through family reunion, labour migration, asylum, as refugees, and even those who were born in the host nation.

Since 2015, UNESCO, the OECD and the European Union's statistical office use a joint definition that considers international students as persons who enter a host country for the purpose of studying there and are enrolled for tertiary degree or higher (UNESCO, 2015). They also clarified the duration by stating that the length of stay is more than one year and expands up to seven years. These clarifications set international students apart from foreign students and credit-mobile students who spend one or two semesters abroad. I define student migrants as anyone who leaves his or her home country with the prime aim of pursuing academic formation which lasts at least one year. Student migration is conceptualised as the movement from one country to another for the purpose of obtaining a diploma in an academic institution with a formation that lasts at least one year.

3. History of Student Migration in Ghana

When Ghana gained independence in 1957, Ghana had inadequate skilled personnel that partly delayed the government's plan of rapidly transforming the economy from an agrarian to an industrial economy. The government therefore sponsored some Ghanaian students to undertake specific studies in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the former USSR and in countries like Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States (Anarfi et al., 2000). About two-thirds of the student migrants returned after their education—as foreseen—while others continued to stay abroad (Tonah, 2007).

In the early 1980s, Ghana experienced economic hardships, political instability and political persecutions that were coupled with natural disaster. The harsh Ghanaian situation and the unstable economic and political environment of neighbouring countries like Nigeria and Ivory Coast gave birth to new waves of labour emigration with Europe and North America as the main destination places. Studies have investigated international labour migration across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe, the United States and Canada (Adepoju, 2005; Anarfi et al., 2000; Tonah, 2007). The literature also abounds with the integration of Ghanaian migrants in Europe (Agyeman, 2011) as well as their religious, political and economic transnational practices (Kyei & Smoczynski, 2019; Kyei & Setrana, 2017; Kyei, Setrana, & Smoczynski, 2017). Studies have also examined the re-integration of return migrants into the Ghanaian society (Setrana & Tonah, 2014). Student migration of Ghanaians has not received much attention in the migration literature since the new wave of labour migration began in the 1980s.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the International Organization for Migration estimated that 67,000 African university graduates left the continent for industrialized countries between 1960 and 1984, and since 1984 this figure has been increasing by 20,000 per annum (Mutume, 2003). About 41% of African immigrants that migrated to the United States between 2008 and 2012 had at least a university degree (Mutume, 2003). Black, Tiemoko, and Waddington (2003) suggested that 15% of Ghanaians with university education have migrated to the United States and another 10% to OECD countries. Intriguingly, according to UNESCO's (2018b) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2019*, people with tertiary education are five times more likely to migrate abroad than people with primary education.

4. Data and Method

This article adopted a multi-sited ethnography (Candea, 2009; Falzon, 2016; Marcus, 1995) so as to have holistic understanding of migration intention and behaviour of prospective student migrants and student migrants. The research sites were Ghana and the Netherlands. The fieldwork in Ghana took place between September 2019 and December 2019. Multiple methods were employed during the fieldwork in recruiting the respondents. Some of the prospective student migrants were recruited at education fairs organised in and out of university campuses in Ghana while other respondents were recruited through personal networks. Sixty-five university students and graduates from five public universities in Ghana participated in the research. Life story interview techniques were employed in conducting the interviews. Life story refers to the "narrated life as related in a conversation or written in an actual present-time" (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 59). Each interview was divided into three main stages. In the first stage, I presented the main themes of the interview (see Supplementary File) and asked the respondents to recount their life story around the themes. That said, respondents were not limited to the themes and could speak uninterruptedly. In the second part of the interview, I asked the respondents

questions based on what they recounted and in the final part I asked questions more specific to the themes of the research questions. Each interview was a product of the mutual relation between me and the respondents, as they did not produce prefabricated stories from their life; rather they created the story in the social process of the interview (Rosenthal, 1993; Svasek & Domecka, 2012).

Five focus group discussions were subsequently conducted with 35 of the university students who participated in the individual interviews. Education fairs for the recruitment of students were attended in Kumasi and Accra. The education fairs brought together universities from the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany and the Netherlands to recruit students from Ghana. I interviewed 15 representatives of the schools from abroad as well as eight of the event organisers.

Subsequently, in the months of January and February 2020, 23 African student migrants in the Netherlands were recruited to participate in the research. The respondents were recruited through snowball sampling technique. Data collection, data analysis and writing in qualitative research are not always distinct rather they are interrelated and happen concurrently (Denzin, 2008). The audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. I organised and prepared the data for coding. I read through all the available data carefully in order to have general understanding of what participants were saying and how they were saying and their credibility and how to use the available information (Flick, 2009). Line by line, I categorised the data into analytic units under descriptive words or category names. I organised the information into themes and subthemes (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). As a way of obtaining validity of the work, transcripts were cross-checked to ensure that clear errors were avoided and there were constant comparison of data with the codes generated (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). The research findings do not claim generalization by representation rather due to the thick information gathered, there is generalization by categorization.

Among the prospective student migrants, 34 were men and 31 were women. Eighteen of the men were undergraduate students, seven were postgraduate students and nine were graduates undertaking their one year obligatory national service. Sixteen of the women were undergraduate students, five were postgraduate students and 10 were national service personnel. With the exception of one, all the 23 student migrants interviewed in the Netherlands were enrolled in postgraduate programmes or had just completed their postgraduate studies. Eleven of the respondents were women while 12 were men, and they were situated in different parts of the Netherlands but most of them were located in Amsterdam.

5. Findings and Discussions

In this section, I present three empirical sub-themes that depart from the well-established economic models of wage differentials and economic opportunities to emotional motivations of values, beliefs, prestige and anxieties in decision-making processes of student migration. The first theme is presented in chronological manner to unfold the conception of the thought of migration vis-à-vis the thought of student migration which are shaped by childhood socialisation. Subsequently, the findings discuss the multiplicity of migration expectations that motivate the thought of student migration. The last theme presents the constraints and facilitators that dwindle or enhance the thought of student migration.

5.1. Thought of Going Abroad

Identifying the conception of migration intention (De Jong, 2000) in the lived experiences of both prospective student migrants (referred in the quoted transcripts as PSM) and student migrants (referred in the quoted transcripts SM) were challenging. When the question "when did you first have the thought of studying abroad?" was raised, most of the research participants were fascinated by the question and spontaneously distinguished between the thought of going abroad and the thought of student migration. Ike recounted that:

> As regards the thought of going abroad, it started as a child because we aspired to go abroad one day and we played about it. If you say study, then it was during the transition period from final year student to a graduate that I started thinking of how to continue with my education. (PSM 5, Kumasi; 12 September 2019)

Ama reiterated that:

> I grew up with the thought that Europe and the US were places where almost all dreams were fulfilled, so I really desired to go there if I had the chance. The idea of studying abroad, however, is recent as it started when I was about completing my university education. (SM 3, Amsterdam; 12 January 2020)

The dichotomy created by the respondents manifested how migration decision-making is a process that is nurtured and built upon rather than instantaneous. The thought of migration was created and nurtured at an early stage in the life of the respondents awaiting the opportune moment to transform into pre-actional stage. The status as university student or graduate serves as the currency in moving beyond the pre-decisional thought of migration engulfed in uncertainties to student migration intention. The self is not acting in isolation or out of vacuum rather migration decision-making is informed by the social networks, media and narratives that position the global North as the geographic location where the aspiration of attaining postgraduate education are fulfilled. This article argues that through childhood socialisation abroad is translated into the values and beliefs of

university students that inform the decision to migrate. The values may, however, generate false representation of the 'other' geographic location.

5.2. Expectations Abroad

The thought of travelling abroad is enhanced or curtailed depending on the motivational factors or expectations of the potential migrant (Ferro, 2006). The availability of information is critical in shaping potential migrants' expectations in the host country and their subsequent decision to migrate (Dunsch, Tjaden, & Quiviger, 2019; Shrestha, 2020). The attainment of information as resource through social networks of friends, online portals, institutions and personal experience inform prospective student migrants that their aspirations are less likely to be fulfilled in the present location as such the need to find alternative remedy through student migration.

A sizeable number of the research participants had information that the quality of education was relatively better abroad compared to Ghana, and so they aspired to benefit from such opportunities. Andy narrated: "I have researched the schools to know the facilities that they have. I know that their style of teaching is not just theoretical, but they are very practical" (PSM 11, Kumasi; 27 November 2019). Moreover, most of the respondents also commented that the style of teaching in the global North was more practical due to the class size compared to the large class size of students in the country of origin. Tiz noted that: "I will be well prepared out there due to the quality of formation" (PSM 64, Tamale; 12 October 2019). The prospective student migrant operates within the pendulum of expectation of life abroad and the deprivation at home in making informed student migration decisions. The pendulum this research holds is not value-free as they are embedded with anxieties, fears and joys that shape the actions and inactions of prospective student migrants.

Information is however, never fully obtained, as recounted by Ida:

> I was informed of going to a school in the United Kingdom, but the travel agent took me to Ukraine and I stayed there for six months. I got frustrated and it was there that I found this Dutch school and I applied and moved here. (SM 9, Amsterdam; 01 February 2020)

Adequate information is never enough and student migrants have to go through trajectories of sorrow, despair and uncertainties before getting to their final destination which are not always fulfilled. These trajectories contain emotional costs that are seldom accounted for rather they are ignored or taken for granted.

Expectations that inform the process of making migration decision among student migrants are not limited to the quality of education abroad. They also take cognisance of the exploration of new cultures, avenues and environment that are to be explored in the host nation. For most of the respondents, the migration intention is not only to study and return home but also make use of the new space to develop a new self. Eli explained that:

> I did my undergraduate studies and MBA in Ghana, so I wanted to experience a different study environment where I will encounter people from different cultures. The different engagements open up new avenues for me to be part of the networks of the global village. How can I do all my studies in one place in this global era? I need to explore and get connected. (SM 1, The Hague; 31 January 2020)

Joy also narrated that:

> Ghana is a developing country, so most infrastructures are almost absent but if I go to a country in Western Europe or Canada where they are advanced in technology, I am going to experience what I have seen on the television screens or read in books. For me, apart from the studies, I aspire to learn new cultures and have first-hand experience of how Ghana will look like when it becomes developed. (PSM 22, Accra; 19 December 2019)

Intriguingly, Tina mentioned that

> I was compelled to travel abroad for studies because of the social pressure that mounted on me due to being single and not married at age thirty-three. Those around me were all married, so I had to escape the daily questioning. (SM 12, Leiden; 11 December 2020)

There is a thin line between volition and non-volition in the decision-making towards student migration which emanates from social interactions at the micro level. I describe the situation as involuntary mobility because student migration is an escape route to freedom from social environment that oppresses life situation. If the respondents could achieve the same in Ghana, it appears that many would.

At the meso level, families of prospective student migrants also express their expectations abroad. Within the Ghanaian cultural setting, families envision seeing their children travel outside the country not just for the economic returns but for the prestige and favourable perception that are attached to the act of travelling abroad and especially for studies. Pat recounted: "The news of my intention to travel abroad erupted in my parents feelings of joy and smiles on their faces. For the thought of having their child planning to study overseas was gratifying" (PSM 2, Kumasi; 10 October 2019). Nelly reiterated: "My parents and siblings were overwhelmed with the news of my decision to travel abroad. I was a bit

embarrassed because I was only expressing the thought of travelling as student without any concrete preparation" (PSM 55, Accra; 11 November 2019). At the micro and meso level, this article uniquely reveals the emotions of joy, fear and anxiety attached to migration intentions.

5.3. Non-Motivational Factors

Non-motivational factors (Ajzen, 1991) of time, religion, money, institutional challenges, and visa regimes are facilitators and constraints that direct the path of student migration intentions and behaviour. This article is interested in emphasising the moments of anxiety, fear, joy and tension prospective students and their families live through these moments of uncertainties. All the prospective student migrants and the student migrants expressed concern about the financial investment needed to study abroad, but the approach of the two categories of respondents were different but not mutually exclusive. It manifests how the actualisation of migration intentions creates unanticipated nuances. Zak related: "Without scholarship I am not travelling abroad because I will not have money to fund my studies. My parents are not in a position to sponsor me abroad for studies" (PSM 2, Cape Coast; 04 October 2019).

Lin explained:

> Education abroad is expensive and I cannot burden my parents to continue to take care of me while abroad as I have younger siblings. I am navigating for scholarship so that my dream of studying in Europe, Canada or the US will be realised. I have applied to more than five schools so certainly one of them will be positive. (PSM 41, Kumasi; 22 November 2019)

Prospective student migrants emphasised how their ability to embark on student migration depended on the availability of scholarship. The path of migration intentions is directed by facilitators and constraints at the micro, meso and macro levels. The lived experience of the student migrants in this research, however, revealed that they had to rely on parent's property and personal income before they could travel abroad:

> I applied for schools with scholarships abroad but all of them did not go through as I was admitted without any financial help. In the third year, when my parents saw the desperation in not realising my aspiration, they decided to intervene and support me when I got a school in the Netherlands without a scholarship. It was a big sacrifice because they went for a huge loan from the bank. I am indebted to them (Ange, SM 10, The Hague; 31 January 2020).

Tot also recounted that:

> I had partial scholarship that covered part of the tuition and accommodation, so I had to find financial support for the remaining expenditure. After family consultations, my parents made a substantive decision to sell their piece of land to help me travel to Rotterdam for my studies. (SM 8, Rotterdam; 21 January 2020)

Migration intentions do not necessarily yield to migration behaviour due to the non-motivational factors that may hinder or not the achievement of the desired aspirations. Human capital formation through university education may be considered as resourceful tool in anticipation of probable migration (Stark, Helmenstein, & Prskawetz, 1998). From the data, the financial cost of travelling are bottlenecks to all the respondents and majority of the prospective student migrants interviewed were emphatic that without scholarship they may not embark on student migration. It is interesting to note how families sacrifice life savings to satisfy the student migration aspirations of their wards. The process of making the financial sacrifices is informed by multiplicity of aspirations.

The article further reveals the emotional stress and trauma that individuals and their families endure in order to fulfil migration aspiration. Love narrated:

> I got admission to three universities but none of them offered me scholarship. I applied for student visa, but I was refused. I was demoralised and shattered when I was refused the UK visa. It took some time before recovering from that shock. (SM 20, Amsterdam; 25 January 2020)

Stringent visa regimes are also forms of micro-politics that inflict pain, stress and anxiety in the migration decision process of student migrants.

Intriguingly, I discovered how religiosity sets in as non-motivational factor that seek to facilitate the thought of student migration. At the micro level, the research participants seek spiritual assistance from their religious groups and religious leaders. Roy noted: "I do pray over my travelling intentions and I have also requested intercessory prayers from my pastor and religious group" (PSM 18, Tamale, 02 October 2020). At the meso level, families embark on spiritual exercises to boost the transitioning from student migration intention to student migration behaviour of their relations. Kobi recounted: "As a family, we pray together but the prayer line is directed towards the success of my intention to study abroad" (PSM 32, Accra, 17 December 2019). Religiosity permeates the cultural fabric of the Ghanaian society that shapes the approach adopted to address migration intentions and desires.

6. Conclusion

Empirically, this article contributes to the West African literature on student migration by advancing the understanding of a category of migrants who travel with the

prime aim of academic advancement in the host country. I have argued that student migration may not have substantial socioeconomic and political effect in the migration discourse in West Africa compared to irregular migration, family reunification and labour migration but it carries unique features. The process of student migration decision-making is distinct from the other forms of migration that require further investigation and attention especially in recent times when the competition for foreign students is on the rise in the Global North.

Moreover, the empirical literature has elucidated the non-economic motivations that are embedded in the migration decision process. The article found that prestige and experiencing of new cultures are expectations that prospective student migrants and their families aspire for abroad. The imbalance in the global economic growth between the Global North and Global South tends to overshadow the discussion in migration decision-making as such the non-economic aspect of the migratory phenomenon is somehow overlooked. I argue here that the migratory phenomenon is not always quantifiable in monetary value.

This article establishes that migration decision is a process that is value laden with information. The information shape and reshape the expectations of prospective Ghanaian student migrants in the migration decision-making process. The information generates the desire to experience new forms of education and also to be part of the global system. Due to the fluidity of information, prospective student migrants obtain both resourceful information and misinformation that result in the mixed feelings of disappointment, illusions, happiness and perplexities in their quotidian and lived experiences in the transition from migration intention to migration behaviour.

From the findings, I discovered that religiosity which is categorised as belongingness to a religious group and prayers is a cultural principle that serves as non-motivational factor in student migration intentions of Ghanaians at the micro and meso levels. At the micro level, potential student migrants resort to prayers as a means of facilitating their migration intentions. At the meso level, families and religious groups pray and offer assistance to the prospective student migrants. Recourse to the supernatural Being by most of the respondents is a reflection of the more than ninety-five percent of Ghanaians who profess to be religious according to the 2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

This article contributes theoretically to the emerging migration literature that focuses on the frictions, challenges, joys and emotions of prospective migrants and migrants (Boccagni, 2017; Collins, 2018; Wang & Chen, 2020). I argue that De Jong's (2000) migration intention–migration behaviour nexus is not progressive rather it is a pendulum that prospective student migrants constantly negotiate their position with facilitators and constraints that determine the path of student migration aspiration. In the process of engaging with the social structures, prospective student migrants experience emotional challenges, joys, perplexities and anxieties. In conclusion, the personalities of prospective student migrants may be transformed into a new self that is the embodiment of resistance, compromise and negotiation of student migration aspirations.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editor for their time and resources in engaging with my work.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Social Inclusion (ISSN: 2183–2803)
2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 308–316
DOI: 10.17645/si.v9i1.3698

Article

Push/Pull Factors, Networks and Student Migration from Côte d'Ivoire to France and Switzerland

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Submitted: 30 September 2020 | Accepted: 15 December 2020 | Published: 25 March 2021

Abstract
Since 2011, the Ivorian government has invested heavily in higher education to meet its labour market's growing demand. In this article, we analyse the drivers of Ivorian student mobility from Côte d'Ivoire to France and Switzerland, highlighting the central role of migrant networks. We focus on the decision-making process and find that migration networks play an important role at every step: from initial aspirations to concrete plans and efforts to study abroad. Using 38 in-depth interviews and two focus groups with Ivorian students who aspire to study in France and Switzerland, members of the education board, migration officers, and members of the Ivorian diaspora, we reveal that the functioning of the Ivorian higher education system is a factor of uncertainty for many students who consider that salvation can only come from migration. In addition, social representations linked to foreign diplomas inspire Ivorian students to choose international mobility. Migrant networks further encourage Ivorian students to move abroad because stories from successful migrants sharing their mobility experience are coupled with the provision of key resources to support mobility projects.

Keywords
Côte d'Ivoire; decision-making process; migration aspirations; migration network; student mobility

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Decision-Making under Uncertainty: African Migrants in the Spotlight" edited by Didier Ruedin (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa / University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland).

1. Introduction

For a long time, student migration has been considered, to some extent, as an understudied phenomenon, although new studies have been conducted in the last few years (Bereni & Rubi, 2015; Dia, 2014; King & Raghuram, 2012). Indeed, the scientific literature points to a growing interest among researchers in this phenomenon, related issues and its contemporary dynamics. Since the beginning of the 21st century, international student mobility has increased rapidly (Gérard & Voin, 2013; Renggli & Riaño, 2017) and in 2015 the OECD estimated that there were 5 million international students (Renggli & Riaño, 2017). We also perceive a significant concentration of student mobility flows to Western Europe and Northern America (Campus France, 2018) even if south-south international student migrations are increasing (Razafimahefa & Raynal, 2014). A major and growing part of this student inflow comes from developing countries, with sub-Saharan countries having the highest international student mobility rates (Campus France, 2019). This rise in student mobility (especially towards Western Europe) seems to be a consequence of the implementation of educational policies and the development of the knowledge economy, which aims to attract highly qualified students from around the world.

Despite the comparatively low levels of education on the continent on average (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014),

African student mobility is growing rapidly as a result of youth bulge (demographic growth) and the positive outcomes of educational policies promoting universal access to school and the great expansion of primary and secondary education (Razafimahefa & Raynal, 2014). In West Africa, national tertiary educational systems have a limited capacity to absorb all these new tertiary students, and many universities face governance problems. Consequently, the leading causes of African student mobility are related to push factors such as the low quality of university education and lack of facilities, as well as frequent strikes and social turmoil inside campuses (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Mary, 2014).

To overcome these challenges of governance and education quality, the government of Côte d'Ivoire has made extensive investments in its education system to make it more attractive and competitive. Indeed, in 2011, 168 million euros were invested in renovating the main universities (the University Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the University Nangui Abrogoua of Abidjan and the University Alassane Ouattara of Bouaké) and creating new ones (the University Peloforo Gon Coulibaly of Korhogo, the University Jean Lorougnon Guédé of Daloa and the University of Man). These investments were especially focused on tertiary education and the creation of new universities that fostered the adoption of the French-style licence-master-doctorate (LMD) system for better recognition of Ivorian diplomas. In addition, the Ivorian government reinforced its partnerships with universities in OECD countries such as France, a strategic partner in terms of tertiary education and scientific research. This partnership has strengthened the French presence in the Ivorian higher education system, resulting in the issuance of 56 French university titles by Ivorian higher education institutions during the 2018–2019 academic year. As part of this bilateral partnership, French universities want to significantly increase the number of university diplomas delivered to Ivorian students from 56 (in 2018) to 100 in 2022.

Despite these initiatives, we observe that the number of Ivorian students abroad is rising (9,679 in 2014, 10,611 in 2015 and 12,229 in 2016). The Campus France (2018) report noticed that France is the first destination country for these students (7,135 in 2017 and 8,085 in 2018). We also observe an important diversification of destination countries among Ivorian students (the United States, Canada, China, India, Morocco, Switzerland, etc.).

Migration networks and information play an important role in realizing one's student mobility project (Efionayi & Piguet, 2014; Touré, 2015). International mobility projects are rarely individual projects, and many actors and members of the student's network contribute directly to the realization of a migration project. This contribution could involve various actors that provide strategic resources to the potential migrant (such as information, money, connections, tips and advice; Dako-Gyeke, 2015). Even if the role of these networks is often analysed in quantitative studies (Touré, 2015), qualitative approaches could also reveal the complexity of migration networks' influence on student mobility and the kind of resources provided to the potential migrant.

These observations led us to focus on the following research questions: What are the main drivers (push and pull factors) of student mobility in the Ivorian context? To what extent do migration networks influence the social construction of student mobility, and how do they influence the decision-making process of students? What kind of key resources do they provide to ease this migration project?

1.1. Push/Pull Factors, Migration Networks and Sub-Saharan African Student Mobility

Many references tackle the migration network and its influence on nurturing migration flows and immigrant integration (see, among others, Haug, 2008; Mazzella, 2016). Haug (2008) explained the influence of social capital in migration decision-making processes and its influence on chain migrations. She argues that the possession of social capital in host countries has a positive impact on emigration and return migration, defining migration networks as "a composite of interpersonal relations in which migrants interact with their family or friends" (Haug, 2008, p. 588). Migration networks facilitate migration by providing financial support, accommodations, and help in crossing borders (legally or illegally). Migration networks involve migrants, non-migrants (families sited in home countries, for instance) and greatly foster labour migration. Haug (2008) proposes five hypotheses that explain the relation between migration networks and the migration decision-making process:

1. The affinity hypothesis analyses the influence of the links to a community that can prevent migration and the role played by the presence of relatives in the destination country.
2. In the information hypothesis, when the migration candidates have relatives sited in many places, their interest in migration is more significant. Foreign places look more attractive because the network members provide information that influences the decision-making process.
3. In the facilitating hypothesis, the members of the network sited in the host country promote this place, making it likely to foster the integration of migration candidates.
4. The conflict hypothesis states that familial conflict or disputes in the home country may also represent a push factor for migrants who want to gain some friendship and a sense of autonomy.
5. The encouraging hypothesis describes when families incite their members to carry out labour migration to increase their households' income and to create new opportunities abroad.

This analytical framework appears relevant for the present study as it allows an understanding of different aspects of the importance of migration networks in decision-making processes such as the composition of the networks (families, relatives and migrants) and the resources it provides (information, financial support, assistance for integration, etc.). However, it does not stress the push and pull factors that explain student migration, except, to some extent, the conflict hypothesis. In our case, such information is available in the increasing publications related to international student migrations. These publications sometimes stress international student migration factors from developing to developed countries (Mary, 2014). Student migration is often presented as a consequence of (pull and push) factors such as the unequal development of science and technology globally and the implementation of certain educational policies that aim to attract the most qualified migrants (Campus France, 2019).

Campus France (2019) highlights a set of push factors leading African students to migration: the lack of qualification of higher education teachers, the lack of doctoral programs, the low recognition of universities, teachers and their work internationally, the low rate of professional integration of graduates due to the mismatch between the training offered and the real needs of the labour market, etc.

Kabbanji, Levantino, and Ametepe (2013) also noticed a significant increase in international student migration from sub-Saharan countries in the last two decades due to the inability of higher education institutions to meet the growing demand for education. In addition, the decision-making process mainly depends on the availability of information, the reputation of the higher education system of the potential host country, the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad in the home country, and geographic proximity. Migration networks also have an important role: Most international students in France say they have family members there before their arrival (Borgogno and Volenweider-Andersen, as cited in Kabbanji et al., 2013).

Fall (2010) addressed the importance of migration networks in every stage of international student migration processes. He stated that Senegalese migrant candidates choose their host countries according to the pre-existing diaspora network living in the city where the migrant plan to study. He also showed off student families as key actors of migration networks. Indeed, Senegalese families and relatives encourage students to move to OECD countries to gain cultural and social capital. In addition, Fall (2010) highlighted some push factors that heavily influence Senegalese student mobility, which included the low quality of the higher education system in Senegal, the unavailability of specific training programmes, strikes. These pushing effects are exacerbated by the pulling factors of the destination universities, which are more attractive and competitive. For instance, France possesses several pull factors: language, the 'low' cost of schooling and the value of diplomas issued by universities in these countries. Otherwise, Efionayi and Piguet (2014), who studied international student migration from Côte d'Ivoire, revealed the importance of transnational networks. In fact, migration decision making depends on migration networks and the surroundings in the home country. As an essential part of the network—which has a key role in the conception of mobility projects—the centrality of families is underlined. According to Efionayi and Piguet (2014), in Côte d'Ivoire, moving abroad for studies provides important symbolic capital because foreign diplomas are highly valued.

In the wake of this current research, Mankou (2014) also addressed international student migration issues. Focusing on the Cameroonian case, he noted that the deterioration of Cameroon's economic conditions and its effects on the education system leads students to migrate to northern countries. These migrations are sometimes facilitated by the granting of scholarships to students and researchers. Moreover, Mankou (2014) remarked that student migration is sometimes a pretext for simply relocating to northern countries and obtaining access to their attractive labour market. He emphasized the significant role played by the migration networks (notably the family diaspora's members) who provide financial support and accommodation and who facilitate migrant students' integration. Mary (2014) underlined how the Malian elite used their networks to facilitate the international migration of students to maintain their social and political domination over the rest of society.

Charlier and Croché (2010) analysed the role played by families as key actors in migration networks. They noticed that some families help their members move abroad for studies because this mobility fosters social distinction (for both students and their families) and allows them to maintain their social reputations.

Dako-Gyeke (2015) studied youth migration projects in Ghana and pointed out that their willingness to move abroad is much more developed than that of other societal groups. However, this migration project is not always related to the youth's personal ambition, but it is integrated into a familial strategy for developing and diversifying their international network. With this in mind, these families encourage students to move to northern universities and even decide for them. In return, these students have certain social obligations to help relatives join them in the host country (chain migration), including providing them with information and facilitating their integration.

This overview of the literature reveals that student migration from sub-Saharan Africa to northern countries is generally a consequence of the combination of push factors like the lack of qualification of higher education teachers, the lack of doctoral programs, the low recognition of many sub-Saharan universities, etc., and pull factors such as the value of diplomas issued by the uni-

versities of northern countries, for instance. In addition, migration networks play a key role in this by providing information, financial support and help for integration in the host countries. This literature review also presents the selected conceptual and analytical frame used to construct data collection tools and the analysis.

2. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative methodology that fosters an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon, relying on the participants' viewpoints and insights into the social context where the phenomenon occurs (Cresswell, 2014). This approach appeared to be the most suitable, as it allows capturing students' views about the Ivorian higher education system, their perceptions of foreign studying conditions and the value of diplomas to analyse how migration networks influence decision-making and the types of resources provided by networks for the realization of the youth mobility project.

The study was carried out in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, from November 2018 to January 2019 with participants from several public and private universities. We also attended an informational session at the French Cultural Institute and a meet-up organized by private agencies that promote student migration, where we interviewed some Ivorian students who wanted to study in French universities. The Swiss Centre for Scientific Research (SCSR) provided us with a list of candidates for Swiss government scholarships (*bourse de la Confederation*). We selected candidates from this list to conduct our interviews. In addition, our investigation included members of the Ivorian education board, migration officers from Campus France and the SCSR, and members of the Ivorian diaspora.

We carried out 38 individual in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. The use of these data collection techniques was driven by a desire to capture the participants' individual experiences, compare their points of view, and triangulate our sources (Baribeau & Germain, 2010). Data collection was conducted in French. Collected data were analysed through the method proposed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This method has been implemented with specialised software (Max QDA 2018). Concretely, the first stage of the analysis process was the full transcription of all the interviews carried out. Once the transcriptions were completed, the corpus was coded, sometimes with predefined codes, sometimes with codes emerging directly from empirical data. The second stage of the analysis process was gathering the codes to create categories, which are concepts used to describe the different aspects of the studied phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The third stage of the process was linking categories to describe the social construction of Ivorian student migration to France and Switzerland by focusing on the push/pull factors and the role of migration networks.

However, we specify that the data collection and analysis processes were carried out iteratively to ensure that saturation was reached.

3. Main Findings

3.1. Push/Pull Factors Leading to Ivorian Students' Migration

According to the participants, in Ivorian public universities, regular strikes, violence and the particular way the otherwise French-style LMD is implemented leads many students to choose to move abroad. In fact, recurrence and the length of students and staff strikes negatively affect these universities' reputation and academic schedules. These strikes sometimes rise to the level of clashes between police officers and students within the university campus. This situation is illustrated by Aurelia, a participant who attended a public university before shifting to the private Catholic University of West Africa to avoid this instability issue:

> I was admitted into a public university right after I graduated from high school. I did not know that things were like this, that there were regular strikes. One day, there was a clash between the police and the students. That day, we were in the middle of a class and people started to run around. There were regular incidents like this. Sometimes, we would go for a month without going to college. I could not continue to study in such a bad condition, so I have decided to move to a private university.

Delays in academic programmes, which are a direct consequence of regular strikes, lead to overlaps in academic years. For example, in January 2019, the Department of Law, Administrative and Political Sciences at the University Félix Houphouët-Boigny was still organizing exams for the 2017–2018 academic year. This situation nurtures feelings of frustration and bitterness among public university students who think that they are disadvantaged compared to international students. This erratic functioning is a factor of uncertainty for many students who consider that salvation can only come from migration.

Even though private universities do not face strikes and schedule delays, Ivorian students face some structural constraints, such as corruption and bad governance, that justify their desire to move abroad. In addition, some participants argue that the conditions for admission to a research masters or doctorate programme at a public university are more restrictive due to a lack of university resources and employment opportunities. Moreover, Ivorian students face some difficulties accessing university residences and managing their daily urban transport between their house and the campus. These problems could also represent a push factor that determines Ivorian students' aspirations for

international mobility, as share by Jean-Philippe at the Department of Law, Université des Lagunes, Abidjan:

> My sister and I used to wake up at 3:30 AM. We attended the University Félix Houphouët-Boigny. We woke up at 3:30 AM because we did not want to miss bus 49, which connects the Abobo area to the university, in order to be in our amphitheatres at 6:00 AM. We had to be there early to get a seat. We used to go back home, on the same bus, at 9:00 PM. We could hardly revise our courses, but we tried….We preferred to stay in our amphitheatres after the class for revising for two hours before going back home.

In addition to the structural factors mentioned, the quality of training in Côte d'Ivoire and the perceptions related to foreign education (especially in France and Switzerland) are also important factors underlined by the participants. The impact of the quality of training on Ivorian students' migration can be seen at two levels: the attractiveness of the French higher education system and other OECD countries, and the poor quality of training in Côte d'Ivoire.

The French higher education system is highly valued in Côte d'Ivoire. Studying in France is seen as a guarantee of quality and expertise. Indeed, the participants argued that French universities offer practical training to turn students into professionals in their fields. This training included practical courses and internship opportunities. They look for a fit with labour market demands. Our interviewees also emphasized French university professors' professionalism, especially in the supervision of research work in masters and doctorate programmes that contribute to the positive reputation of French diplomas. Conversely, the training content in Côte d'Ivoire is unsatisfactory because the knowledge is too theoretical. Participants sometimes criticize university professors' skills. The same goes for their commitment to supervise students' research:

> In Côte d'Ivoire, there are many university professors who do not like hard work. They are on strike very often for their bonuses when they are not hard workers. They do not care about their students. (Abou, Department of Law, University Félix Houphouët-Boigny)

According to the students, the relation between MA and PhD students and their supervisors is restrictive and conflictual, and it constitutes a push factor. Students particularly stress their difficulties communicating and collaborating regularly and efficiently with their supervisors, who do not let them develop their ideas and research projects. Similarly, the learning conditions and the availability of pedagogical resources are also seen negatively, and the students face some problems in obtaining access to updated and relevant scientific literature.

The perceptions of the Ivorian diplomas truly contrast with the social representations related to foreign diplomas. For Ivorian students, obtaining a foreign diploma (especially from a renowned northern university) could facilitate their socio-professional integration in the local labour market. There is a widespread perception that in Côte d'Ivoire, recruiters give priority to those who hold foreign diplomas. In addition, these diplomas are expected to enable them to obtain quick access to higher professional positions. Therefore, student migration represents an effective means to improve and broaden employment opportunities in the domestic labour market:

> Professional prospects matter a lot. Going to France increases your chances in the labour market. When you have studied in France, you have more opportunity to quickly obtain a valued job and to be well paid. (Eric, Department of Communication, Catholic University of West Africa)

Conversely, the Ivorian diploma looks less valuable because of the quality of training and Ivorian universities' weak reputation, despite the huge investments of the Ivorian government. All these dysfunctions mentioned above encourage many Ivorian students to consider going abroad.

3.2. Migration Networks, Decision-Making Process and Realization of Migration Project

Decision-making, selection of host countries and effective realization of a migration project involve networks that encourage students to migrate and provide them with a set of resources. Migration decision-making is often a consequence of a network's action, which incites students to move abroad or make decisions for them. Generally, the migration of high school graduates and bachelor's degree students results from a decision made by the family. In line with predictions by Touré (2015), this decision is described by the students interviewed as a strategic step adopted by the family to avoid the difficulties of the Ivorian higher education system and to benefit from the prestige of the European tertiary educational system. In addition, the elites have established a mobility tradition in their families, which leads parents to send their children abroad as soon as they graduate from Ivorian high schools. In that respect, these wealthy families perceived student migration to France as a natural step in their children's academic trajectories:

> My older brothers studied in France. For me, it is obvious to go there, to start my higher education studies there before going somewhere else. We do not even consider staying in Cote d'Ivoire and being enrolled in a local university. (Alida, Saint Marie High School, Abidjan)

Otherwise, Ivorian students who have previously studied or are currently studying in French universities play a key role in promoting the French higher education system. Indeed, they present to their friend and relatives a positive and sometimes idealized view of French universities. In doing so, they emphasize the positive aspect of these universities, the quality of courses, availability and diversity of educational resources, and professionalism and competencies of university staff members, and hide the bad aspects related to their staying abroad, like budget constraints, administrative and immigration procedures, loneliness and homesickness.

The success story of some graduates returning from France reinforces the attraction for this destination. Generally, these graduates share their experiences with those remaining in Côte d'Ivoire, highlighting their brightest aspects. Given that Ivorian youths are strongly attracted by the Western way of life, these experiences can create some deep desires to leave:

> I have many friends who moved to France. They incited me to move too, but I was not interested….They sent me pictures via Facebook, and they took some photographs in their beautiful campus and in very fantastic and famous places like the Parc des Princes. What a dream! Finally, they convinced me to move abroad, and I plan to do it as soon as I gathered enough financial resources. (Paul, University Alassane Ouattara, Bouaké)

More interestingly, high school teachers and university professors encourage their students to move abroad. University professors generally recommend mobility to their students to pursue their specializations and gain strong, valuable expertise. Indeed, they share their own experience of student mobility and underline the positive consequences of studying abroad for their academic and professional careers. Generally, the most esteemed professors in Ivorian universities have completed a great part of their studies abroad (France, the United States, Canada, etc.). They represent a role model for local students who want to follow their successful path and could be an effective prescriber of international student mobility. Migration networks play a significant role in the selection of host countries. However, other important factors vary from one host country to another lead Ivorian students in the choice of their potential host countries.

3.3. Choose France, a 'Natural' Option

The preference for France strongly depends on the influence of migration networks. However, other factors, such as the cultural proximity between France and Côte d'Ivoire (which is a result of the colonial past mainly reflected by the shared language), the standard of living and the marketing of Campus France also play a decisive role. France is thus viewed as a 'natural' destination. In addition, many Ivorian students have relatives living there, which represents an important asset for migration candidates. These family members can help them realize their migration project by providing them with information and facilitating their social integration in the foreign destination. Indeed, many Ivorian youths seem close to and familiar with France, even if they have never been there:

> In France, I target one of the best business schools in the world [HEC Paris]. France is one of the most attractive destinations for Ivorian students because of cultural, linguistic and historical proximity. It is smart and pleasant, and I will not feel out of place because I have already been in this country and I have many friends there. (Isaac, a graduate of the Polytechnic Institute Houphouët-Boigny of Yamoussoukro)

It should be noted that the prestige of some public universities (Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne) or private business schools (HEC Paris) attracts Ivorian students who truly want to join their powerful alumni networks at the end of their studies.

3.4. Accept All the Possibilities

While France and Switzerland are particularly attractive to Ivorian students, they also look for opportunities from several countries in the north (the United States, Great Britain and Canada) and the south (Morocco, India, Saudi Arabia). During the interviews, we realized that the name of the destination country for some students does not matter as long as they enjoy good training and living conditions. This new migration trend is illustrated by the fact that many students chose to apply simultaneously for multiple scholarships provided by foreign embassies. Moreover, some northern African destinations (for instance, Morocco or Algeria) could represent a transit to OECD universities.

3.5. Stand Out by Choosing Switzerland

Ivorian student migration is generally based on a logic of social distinction. In fact, France is sometimes presented as an ordinary destination by students who prefer Switzerland (Renggli & Riaño, 2017). They perceived Swiss diplomas as rare and more precious because of the reputation of Switzerland in some fields such as finance, medical sciences, and the excellent ranking of Swiss universities in the Shanghai Index. In their view, the Swiss label is a precious symbolic capital that must be acquired:

> I think there is a difference between moving to France and moving to Switzerland. When someone goes to Switzerland, he is not housed in the same boat that someone who goes to France. France is an ordinary destination, but Switzerland is a more prestigious destination. (Alex, recipient of a scholarship from the University of Basel)

Even if Ivorian students express a strong desire to study abroad, many plan to return to their country at the end of their studies. They particularly expressed the willingness to put the skills acquired abroad to their home country's service and enjoy a pleasant life among their family members and relatives.

3.6. Resources Provided by Migration Networks

The realization of a student migration project is a complex process for youth who deeply rely on their network to provide them with strategic resources (information, financial and administrative support and integration guidance). Migration networks are essential providers of information about scholarship opportunities, the benchmark of destination countries and universities, and enrolment and immigration procedures. Ivorian international students living in France and diaspora family members appear to be a key part of these information networks.

Families also provide financial support, which is essential for the realization of the migration project. Parents partially or totally finance expenses related to immigration procedures, the university's enrolment process, and the cost of living abroad. Without this familial or hypothetical scholarship, it would be difficult for youth to realize their project to study abroad. This financial dependency explains why the family plays a decisive role in the decision-making process:

> I have the full support of my family. I talked to my father and he is ready to provide me with financial support to realize my dream. In addition, I plan to earn my own money when I [am] in France. (Luc, a graduate of the Polytechnic Institute Houphouët-Boigny of Yamoussoukro)

The support of the family, especially at the financial level, remains decisive, despite the presence of the other actors of the network and even sometimes when the student has his own financial means.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Carrying out the field survey in Côte d'Ivoire allowed us to produce an analysis mainly based on the perceptions of students who plan to move abroad. However, the experiences of Ivorian international students (interviewed in France or Switzerland) have enriched the phenomenon's understanding. In addition, the interest of this study is especially emphasized by the scarcity of research on student mobility in Africa and particularly on the influence of migration networks on the realization of such mobility.

As illustrated by the results of this study, international student migration from Africa to northern countries is generally a product of the combination of push factors observed in home countries and pull factors, which characterize northern countries. Many push and pull factors presented in the analysis of the Senegalese (Fall, 2010) and Malian (Mary, 2014) cases appear in our analysis: The low quality of the higher education system, the training conditions in northern countries and the job opportunities deriving from student migration appear to be important factors in international student migration from French-speaking West African countries to northern countries. The uncertainty that arises from the push factors seems to lead many Ivorian students to choose migration to France and Switzerland to access quality training, which can facilitate their professional integration. It was also observed that the potential of student migration in terms of facilitating Ivorian students' professional integration appears to be an interesting research avenue, given that several participants underlined the value of foreign diplomas on the Ivorian labour market.

Moreover, perceptions deriving from pull and push factors look to be key parts of the social construction of this type of mobility. This fact appears to be a constant both in the work of Negura (2017): Social representations produced by the push and pull factors incite individuals to choose mobility and to set up strategies in order to achieve their goal.

The growth of Ivoirian student migration illustrates, to some extent, the current dynamics of migration in Côte d'Ivoire. The country, formerly considered a place for immigration, now appears also to be a country of transit and a country of emigration (IOM, 2018). This increase in student mobility does not only concern Côte d'Ivoire, but all the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, there is a 48% increase of student mobility outflow from 2012 to 2017 (Campus France, 2019). The Democratic Republic of Congo shows an 60% increase while Sudan, Ghana and Angola respectively have a growth of 63%, 44% and 46% (Campus France, 2019). France is the first host country of students from Sub-Saharan Africa (49,736 students) ahead of the United States (38,628 students). South Africa is the first African host country for sub-Saharan students (Campus France, 2019).

This research also looks to align with Haug's (2008) findings. In fact, migration networks (families and relatives living in home and host countries) have a key role in the decision-making process: They incite (Ivorian) students to move abroad, share some experiences with them or deciding for them. These networks provide a set of resources to the candidates for migration information, financial support, administrative steps, and integration in the potential host countries. Again, we can notice some similarities between the Ivorian case and other West African cases approached in the literature (Dako-Gyeke, 2015; Mankou, 2014; Touré, 2015). However, Haug (2008) does not deal with the influence of push and pull factors, which obviously have an important role in the decision-making process.

Otherwise, the influence of migration networks on the selection of host countries appears as a permanent feature. Through the construction of chain migration

(Boyd, 1989) and because of colonial history (Fabre & Tomasini, 2006), some countries become favourite academic places for students belonging to some national communities such as African students from French-speaking countries who generally choose France as the host country. It should be remembered, however, that geographic proximity plays an important role in the selection of the potential host country (even if this is not true in this study).

The increase of Ivorian student mobility outflows, despite the investments of the government lead to questioning the efficiency of these investments. Otherwise, these investments must be accompanied by significant structural changes in order to make the Ivorian academic place more attractive.

Acknowledgments

The authors warmly acknowledge the Swiss Sub-Saharan Africa Migration (S-SAM) network for supporting this research and its publication.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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