The Back Way to Europe & everything in between

A study of Migration Culture in The Gambia

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Abstract

Crossing the Sahara to reach Libya for the purpose of onward migration across the Mediterranean to Italy is what in Gambia is called “The Back Way”. The aim of this study is to examine the ambitions and reasons behind a migratory project from The Gambia to Europe. By identifying the key constituents of a migration culture, I can get a broader insight into why the celebration of migration is evident, and how the ‘story of Europe’ is shaped. I have interviewed Gambians who are geographically in different places and who all find themselves in different life trajectories, most of them connected to migration. My conversations about migration, “The Back Way” and Europe stretches from interviews with repatriates, aspiring migrants and non-migrants. I have also interviewed Gambians in the Diaspora. In this study, I found a strong societal expectation and hope towards both migration and the diaspora which in return caused certain diasporic behavior that painted a misleading picture of Europe. I also found a strong hope and resilient aspirations in terms of social status and recognition believed to be attained easier as a migrant coming back from Europe.

Keywords

Keywords: ‘Culture of migration’, ‘migration’ ‘hope’, ‘vital conjunctures’ ‘immobility’ “The Story of Europe”, “The Gambia”
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INTRODUCTION

Can I reply with a picture? The earthquakes that have affected Italy in recent years have been explained as the African continental plate on a process of merging itself on to Europe. You can't avoid understanding it as a metaphor for what is demographically about to happen. The whole (African) population appears to be in motion towards Europe to get a piece of the welfare that's not been possible to obtain in Africa, and yes, that is terrifying.

Christian Gröndal - Author

In recent years, the topic of migration has come closer and closer to the forefront of public awareness and concern. A recurring image that appears on the news has captured my attention more than other migration-issues such as asylum procedures, border controls, and integration. The image I refer to is the one that that encapsulates the story of contemporary illegal migration from West-Africa today. It is the image of the inflatable half sinking boat on the Mediterranean Sea loaded with bodies. Many of them West Africans. Some dead. All illegal. It is this image Gröndal refers to above when comparing it to a demographic earthquake forcing itself onto Europe. Most European states have implemented increasingly restrictive asylum and migration policies. In the process, the terms migrant and refugee have become conflated into one category, which is now widely connoted with persons whose mobility is considered illegal and purely motivated by economic motives. To me, this implicit narrative gives little justice, depth or understanding of the protagonists themselves, likewise does the tremendous amount of migrations studies that according to Easthope has mostly

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1 Radio Show on DR p1. DR. P1 Debatt: Angsten 2017


been econometric, and “push-pull” studies of migration.⁴ Such studies fail to explicitly recognize the broader relevance of mobility to social life and tend to neglect both the interrelations between these structural factors and the individual agency.⁵

The recurring image of the half sinking boat tells a story of strikingly alarming numbers of migrants recorded dead. In 2016 alone, 5098 migrants lost their lives in the Mediterranean.⁶ Crossing the Sahara to reach Libya for the purpose of onward migration across the Mediterranean to Italy is what in Gambia is called “The Back Way”. I cannot help wondering why so many young Gambians choose to endure such a perilous journey. Why is it that despite these stories and facts about migration through the Back Way, there is another migration story that seem to be a stronger influence? Chimamanda Ngozi talks about the ‘Danger of a single story’ in her Technology Entertainment Design (TED) – talk held in 2009, where she emphasizes on how the stories we are told shape our perceptions of the world and how one story can steer what we dream for.⁷ The choice to aspire to migration and sticking to a single (success) one-sided story of Europe plays a central part in this study.

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⁴ Easthope H, *Fixed Identities in a Mobile World? The Relationship Between Mobility, Place and identity* In *Migration and Culture* (p. 61-7) International Migration Institute, University of Oxford2009: 61

⁵ Ibid: 61


⁷ TED talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story
AIM

The aim of this study is to describe and analyze what constitutes a migration culture in The Gambia and how it is expressed in a collective social hope embedded in migration expectations. With a focus on individual agency in migration trajectories, I examine the thoughts, opinions and coherence of a migratory project from Gambia to Europe. Through interviews with migrants in transit, aspiring migrants, non-migrants as well as the diaspora, I investigate how the constituent elements in a migration culture in Gambia maintain a certain story about Europe. I will do so by answering the following questions:

- How is ‘the Story of Europe’ present in everyday life in The Gambia and what effects does it have on social hope and expectations to migration as well as the diaspora today?
- What does a migratory project from The Gambia to Europe do to the individual in terms of hope, dreams and individual agency?
- How does migrants in transit justify and explain their trajectories and what underlying elements influence their navigation and decisions not to return?

ANALYTICAL APPROACH AND THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

I will in this section break down the theoretical concepts and analytical framework that I have chosen to use in this study. I will also explain the most central terms that are used for a better understanding of my analysis.

HOPE

To understand the aspirations within a young individual deciding to undertake an illegal migration trajectory, I argue a fundamental theoretical concept to tackle this is the concept of hope. In order to recognize the prevailing ambitions that steer the individual’s mindset,

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decisions and opinions about a migratory project, one need to understand their current life situation, social structures and how a shared hope becomes a strong force when looking at migration. In the recent study, *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, Nauja and Thorsen write that hope is grounded within the realm of the thinkable and imaginable and hence has a strong collective and normative dimension. Based on previous anthropological research Kleist writes that, it may inspire action, make people cope with suffering and difficult life situations, or lead to resignation and passivity (c.f. Cole and Durham 2008; Sarro 2015; Zigon 2009; Crapanzano 2003) Using hope as an analytical framework thus implies examining both potentiality and uncertainty. The focus on potentiality means analyzing social imaginaries of the good life or ‘sparks’ of faith or confidence, however frail. Uncertainty implies examining precarious or unpredictable life conditions and how the hoping subject deals with them. Kleist writes that the situated nature of hope thus accentuates attention to its collective and social dimensions and how they are related to social imaginaries and collective visions of the good and meaningful life add future within particular societies and groups. She refers to what Ghassan Hage (2003) calls *social hope*.  

**Culture of Migration**  
Inequality may inspire migration, especially in parts of Africa with a well-developed culture of migration, where migration is often seen as one of the few possible ways to change one’s situation for the better. Cohen, and Jónsson, write that a migration culture is a considerable intensification, in certain settings, of dispositions and predilections that favor migration as a solution to social stasis, unemployment and relative deprivation.
To understand and determine to what extent young Gambians who choose to migrate are affected by the ambient migrant atmosphere and how deeply rooted the effects and influences from Gambians who already migrated to Europe are, it is necessary to identify the migration culture and how it materializes and influences the decisions of young Gambians who sets off on their migrant journey. The culture of migration framework set by, Wiliam Kandel and Douglas S. Massey (2002) is a complement to examining economic factors and network ties to migration.\(^\text{15}\) They use the theory in their study of Mexican migration, stating how migration-supporting values are spread between people and across generations in Mexico, and how they subsequently influence individual behavior to perpetuate out-migration to the US.\(^\text{16}\) Drawing on previous research specifically of Mexican migration to the U.S, Kandel and Massey identify the culture of migration as a key link in the broader social process known as the ‘cumulative causation’ of migration.\(^\text{17}\)

However, culture is dynamic and the migration aspirations of young people today are very much products of our times and not just a replica of the ideas and values of previous generations.\(^\text{18}\) In this thesis I use the culture of migration theory to mainly understand in what forms it exists in a collective perception in everyday life and how it impacts on a more individual level. This has also been done in more recent studies, which favor the term ‘culture of migration’ as a more open” orienting research toward the meanings of migration for migrants themselves”.\(^\text{19}\) The open orienting research approach will help me reveal crucial influences from the migration culture which orientate the directions and decision-making by young Gambians when migrating. Therefore, when I use the term culture of migration, it is to

\(^{15}\) Ali, S: ‘Go west Young Man; the culture of Migration among Muslims in Hyderabad, India’ Journal of ethnic and Migrations studies vol. 33, No 1 2007: 38


\(^{17}\) Ibid: 23

Cohen R, and Jónsson G: Migration and Culture International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, UK 2011: xxv

understand the underlying contexts of an individual and his surroundings and how it connects to personal agency, reason and decision-making towards a migratory trajectory. I will use culture of migration to better understand the influences in connection to personal life stories and not necessarily inter-generational trends.

**LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWS AS ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

I found it essential to use the methodology of *life history interview or life-story method* when proceeding with my interviews as well as in the interpretation and analyzing process of this study. When using this approach, I do not mean a chronological description of their lives from birth until present time, however I try to distinguish moments of my participants lives that Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002) defines as *vital conjunctures*. Which is a socially constructed zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives. It is a temporary configuration of possible change, a duration of uncertainty and potential.\(^\text{20}\)

Bjarnesen, suggests an adaption of the life history as a method, and by joining four analytical concepts into an overall methodological framework, (mobility, hope, vital conjunctures and emplacement) he analyses what he calls the *mobile life* story as a guidance to exploring the subjective experiences of migrants at various stages of a migrant trajectory.\(^\text{21}\) He refers to studies which suggest a more holistic approach in migration studies, captured in the concept of *mobile livelihoods*, which considers not only the entire migration spectrum of aspiration-preparation-realization-return but also the experiences and influences of those who stay behind when a migrant departs.\(^\text{22}\) This is in line with my own approach where I unfold the layers of a migration culture and its constituting elements. Therefore, I will use the life history research combining Johnson-Hanks’ approach on life histories with a focus on the *vital*

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\(^{22}\) Ibid:120
**Theory sum-up**

Analyzing the notion of *hope* and its influence on important decision making and reasoning in connection to migrant and non-migrant trajectories enables me to distinguish between which *vital conjunctures* are a result of the influence of culture of migration. The life story interview reveals a deeper understanding of who these individuals are and in what context they make their decisions. The *mobile life story* concept further illuminates not only the retrospective as inherent in the life history interview, but also the prospective; the potentiality of the present, projected into the future. In other words the past is as important as the permanent or current situation, as well as the potential in a migration trajectory in the future.

When looking at *culture of migration* and its influences on people’s reasoning to a migratory project, I will place it in a narratively construction, as Boström, does with identity and life story-interviews. She writes that the “narrator picks out and devour the happenings, choice-situations and circumstances that she sees has had impact and meaning in her life (...) and by conjuring up world-images and connections the person constitutes sort of evidence for it, something substantial about oneself and her approach to the world.” This method allows me to understand the images and connections in a migration culture and how it constitutes materialistically, socially and individually. It also allows me to see what images are chosen when giving purpose to migration in opposition to what they give less significance to, for example hardship on the journey or not surviving.

**Material and method**

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23 Bjarnesen 2009: 120

Ethnology is influenced by a pathos for complexity, nuances and problematizing the every-day life and what appears to be well known, which makes all areas of human activity interesting.\textsuperscript{25} The material of this thesis consists of interviews and fieldwork observations.

I have interviewed Gambians who are geographically in different places and who all find themselves in different life trajectories, most of them connected to migration. In the following section a brief presentation of the participants of the study is presented. My conversations about migration, “The Back Way” and Europe stretches from interviews with repatriates who had attempted to travel to Europe but for various reasons returned to Gambia. I also interviewed young people, male and female in Gambia who are currently planning to go as well as some who do not plan to migrate but still have strong opinions and presumptions about of the notion of migration. I have been in cafés in Stockholm talking with Gambians who migrated to Europe as early as the 1960’s and ended up in Sweden and Norway and are today part of the Gambian diaspora in Europe some even with European citizenships. Lastly, I have interviewed two Gambians over Skype and WhatsApp. One who is in an asylum center in Germany where he is currently undergoing the process of applying for a permit residence, the other in Libya where he is trying to make the last money needed to pay the boat that will take him to Italy. I approached the different groups differently and had some recurring questions suitable for the category in question.

The choice to interview such a broad group of participants came with challenges as they were geographically spread out in different countries and had extremely different life-stories. However, by gathering the different participants opinions about migration to one or several entireties I produce a synthesis, which means gather different parts into a whole.\textsuperscript{26} When it comes to migration I consider the combination of different entireties are essential in order to see the connecting factors in between Gambia and Europe which gives me a deeper knowledge about the perception of migration in Gambia.

\textsuperscript{25} Boström 2005: 16

\textsuperscript{26} Öhlander, Magnus. ”Analys” I Kaijser, Lars & Öhlander Magnus (red) Etnologiskt fältarbete: Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2011: 273
This study is written in an auto-ethnographic style telling my own story traveling to Gambia and talking to people. Sometimes I include my own reflections that are connected to my personal encounters before the study where I place myself as part of the study. Auto-ethnography places the self within a social context and displays multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural.\(^{27}\)

**REPRESENTATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

In order to grasp the idea of Europe I chose not to limit the participants in the study to a certain age gender or position but rather interview as many as possible in reference to their personal life stories to gain a deeper understanding. Due to the fact that I did not limit the material I have divided it into four groups:

*Diaspora:* Interviews with four Gambians who migrated from The Gambia from 1970’s to late 1990’s They all came to Europe in different ways than the back way and their reflections on now vs. then and their view on The Back Way is in focus.

*Aspiring migrant:* Interview with Modou who was a spontaneous participant who contributed with his story as we spent a lot of time together. This gave me the opportunity to get repetitive talks and interviews with him during my 11 days in the field. These interviews would start of as a casual conversation where I discretely would start recording with his consent. I did not always record as it was inappropriate, then I took notes and recorded my own reflection after the conversation. I did not follow a specific list of questions but his life-story reveal a deeper insight every time we talked

*Non-Migrants:* Kalifa, Konteh, Mammadou, Fato, and Maimona. These are the interviews with the ones that have no intention going on the Back Way journey.

*Repatriates:* Interview with Felix and Soul. Both who had attempted the migration to Europe. Felix migrated from Gambia in 2005 and stayed in Libya for 6 years before he returns to

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Gambia in 2011, after the civil war broke out in Libya. Soul left Gambia in 2015 and return a year later. Both interviews were about their migration trajectories.

Illegal migrants: Interviews with Lasana and Lamin who today are in between borders on their way to Europe. One is in transition in Gambia, the other in Libya waiting to have the last 100 euro to cross from Libya to Italy illegally.

Reflexivity

Farahani writes about the dual position of researchers as either insiders, outsiders or even both and what effect it can have on the method and outcome of the study. When reflecting on my position as a half Gambian and half Norwegian, in regard to the field I am studying and the people I am interviewing, I would not call myself a complete outsider or a complete insider. As a half Gambian who since childhood have travelled to Gambia and to the village where I carried out the fieldwork for this study, I can easily navigate and fit in the local ways of ‘being’. Practically this gave me an easy access to the research-material. However, in terms of their life situation in comparison to mine, I am a complete outsider as a representative of the west, of Europe, and all the privileges that follows. Nevertheless, at times I felt that a common ground on the cultural discourse of migration was somehow expected of me, perhaps because I am half Gambian. Therefore, my questioning on the subject, illegal migration as Farahani would say, interrupted and surprised my informants at times, and broke the flow of our dialogue which created a division between us. It was contradictory for me to put on my objective research mask and bluntly ask “why do you want to travel to Europe?” something I often felt they assumed I knew. Inspired by Abu-Lughod, Boström writes about a problematic scenario where she calls people with mixed cultural or national identity “halfies”. In the position as a halfie it triggers reflections regarding the agonizing research position. The

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29 Boström 2005: 18
multiple ground can make it difficult to establish an unproblematic “research-I” differing from the others - while at the same time it includes a responsibility towards different audiences.\(^{30}\)

I had no problem differing from my informants, but the juggling between my subjective approach and objective relation to them was a constant challenge. When wanting to understand why they chose illegal routes risking their lives to come to Europe it was inevitable to not notice what Pripp, calls the third present. He writes that certain groups in society receive more attention than others from authorities, researchers, debates and media. The more images of information that are being produced about these marked groups the more they have to deal with these characters which are attributed to them.\(^{31}\) In this study the third present was the image of my informants as illegal immigrants or aspiring illegal immigrants. When speaking to Gambians in asylum centers, persons in Libya all whom all had the official title of illegal immigrant it was challenging to question their ambitions without seeming to display their illegal status. This resulted in answers which seemed more of a defending explanation of why they had left The Gambia as if in an asylum seeker vs. authority’s interrogation context. On the other hand, this could be something I was perhaps more concerned about, than needed, something I will never know for certain. Nonetheless, this sort of reflexive thinking affirms both mine and the participants’ positionality in terms of the global mobility hierarchy where I am on the very top, and my informants at the bottom.

The practical insider feeling I initially considered as a strength in terms of my easy access, was profoundly challenged throughout the research and the analyzing-part of the study. My prerequisite fund of knowledge was a, as Boström would say, a tool for interpretation but not an interpretative prerogative. I have the key to the field I am studying and can quickly get in, but once I am in, I am a mere outsider with a strong compassion and empathy for their situation which only confirms my distinctive outsider position.

\(^{30}\) Boström 2005: 18

CULTURE OF MIGRATION

In this chapter I investigate how the participants of the study explain why they think migration to Europe is desirable. I disclose tangible effects such as remittances, materialistic evidence, housebuilding and diasporic behavior which can all be seen as constituting elements of a migration culture. The first section is about the diaspora and their own reflection in regard to what is expected from them on return, and how migrants who return to The Gambia portray certain images of Europe. The second section moves on to everyday talk about what kind of life improvements Europe can bring.

DIASPORA

I'm on the plane on my way to The Gambia. Next to me a Gambian young man living in Germany is sitting and within minutes we are in conversation that last throughout the 6-hour flight. This became my first unplanned interview. Throughout our conversation I could not help to take notes as he unknowingly presented one of the key topics that would define my study; The diaspora's contribution to the story of Europe and the tangible effects of the migration culture. He was talking about what is expected from him on his return.

You know, when I go back home, I don't tell anybody that I am coming. Then they will all go to my house and expect something. And for some reason just because you come from Europe they think you are rich.... ‘Phone, phone please I need a phone’. Like phones are hanging on trees in Europe. (…) When I go I usually do something for everybody to make it cheaper for me. Instead of giving each and every one money I usually pay for a whole day at the beach and bring everybody... yeah, they really like that.

The story of Europe is described before landing in The Gambia from a diasporic perspective. Dawda has found a way to escape the remittance demand and still do something that lives up what is expected from him on return. This example demonstrates what Ali propose in his research on migration culture, a working conceptualism where the culture of migration is the
ideas practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migrations and migrants. The ideas and practices being the material and financial expectations which are locally maintained. Moreover, the way Dawda explains his way of spending money while he is in Gambia can be connected to what Ali describes as an act of social return. While they are not ‘useful’ investments in the way that investing in stocks or property or business will give a financial return, they do give a social return, i.e. there is a return upon the investor's status. As follows, one can say that the social hope is partly being driven by the diaspora’s obligatory feelings of social return. The expectations from the diaspora can also be traced in Sal’s explanation of what’s expected from him when he returns to Gambia:

Well, the first thing they think is that I’m a rich man. Number one. And then of course the youths want to go to follow the same footsteps. Even though they don’t know how hard and difficult it is in Europe. (…)Because they see that you are not looking like them you are not dressing like them. And of course, some come here with gold chains and big cars, when they are in the streets selling drugs, or washing in the restaurant over there. (In Europe) So the pictures and how we behave there contributes a lot to the illegal migrations you know.

Not only does he describe what is expected from him as a returning migrant, but also, he expresses frustration regarding how some Gambians pretend to be wealthier than they really are in Europe. Frustration in regard to diasporic actions when going to Africa was expressed by Ansu as well who migrated to Sweden in the early 1990’s and Mammadou who migrated in the beginning of the 1970’s says:

Ansu: People that go from here to Africa, show clothes, phones and good cars, and they think it's like, in Europe it's a tree! A Tree a tree that have the money. It's not like that! Here it’s very difficult!

32 Ali 2007: 3

33 Ibid: 45
Mammadou: *We the ones that are here.* (In Europe) *Not all of us, but lot of us.* Make the ones that are there to (want to) come here. Me, I met one guy he is living here. He got no good job. But he is working. He can just pay rent and get food. When he goes to Africa, his own country, gold chains! Leather skin! Beautiful shoes! Tie! Look like a king! And then here is cleaning the old people in hospitals. And then the people think. Wow... me, I want to go to Europe.

Materialistic things like clothing and cars become symbols with a strong message, meanwhile the ‘very difficult’ life in Europe is hidden. They emphasize on the problem of what people see rather than what they hear and how some people tend to show off their new wealth in a way that creates a untrue image of migration to Europe.

It seems that two social mechanisms interplay with one another, both being strongly rooted in imaginaries of expectancy of how things are in preference to the actual truth. When I say actual truth, I mean that it is not always unquestionable that the returning migrant can afford to give out the amounts of money expected from him. This mechanism can be argued to be a part of the constituting elements maintaining a migration culture causing a (negative) synergy which controls the diasporic actions in terms of obligational social return and as a consequence enforce the perception that you are immediately rich when you come from Europe. This act reproduces the social hope in migration.

Finally, I interpret this behavior as an attempt to achieve one's status which can be defined as another constitutive element in the migration culture. Ali writes that the definition of status has been radically altered by the effects and social meaning of migrant remittances, to the point where being a migrant in and of itself has become a high-status identity he calls a ‘migrant-hero’. 34 One can say that by having gold chains, materialistic things and expensive cars imply a strive for a high-status identity or a ‘migrant-hero’ status. I will elaborate further on how this sort of diasporic behavior and the interplay between social hope and expectations, and social return and ‘migrant-hero’ affects the aspiring migrant’s decision making and reasoning in terms of individual agency and migration in chapter two, “Hope”.

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34 Ali 2007: 54
HOUSEBUILDING AND REMITTANCE

Maimona and Fatou are both women in their mid-30’ies. Fatou has recently married to a Gambian who lives in Germany. If she could decide herself, she would want to move to Germany to live with her husband but she does not have the necessary papers. Maimona has two children and lives in The Gambia with her husband. She too says that if she had the chance to go to Europe she would go tomorrow. Her brother lives in Spain and she knows that life is better there. When I talk to the young women about migration and Europe it was clear that there are certain achievements in life which become easier when you go to Europe.

Maimona: *Nice house, nice car Nice house... that's why many people are going back way because money is too powerful.*

Fatou: *If I go to back way now, I succeed, I buy compound I build house, I do many things.*

Maimona will also say: *'ok I will also go because I used to go with Fatou back here, so me too I will go to backway.' She buys a compound. She takes her mother Mecca, she takes her father Mecca, me too I will go. Because we go together here. See? Now Fatou go, she does many things here. That's why people are going to backway.*

Modou also talked about house building and making changes giving me an example demonstrating why migration is encouraged:

*For example, I am moving (around) with Kalifa. Kalifa is my friend. I’m working but Kalifa goes to Europe. So, when Kalifa comes back, he will make things change here. I’m 100 % sure of that he will make changes in his home. So that’s why some of my friend go to Europe. He comes and builds houses and makes changes so now say I have to do this too, I have to try. Now when my boy tried, I also should do this, that’s how it's encouraged you know?*

Graw & Schielke emphasize on what the prominent image of migration is today from the country of migration in comparison to the image of the half sinking boats that I mentioned in
the introduction. They write that the houses are most often the most immediate and convincing aspect of migration they see. In this regard houses, not boats have become the symbol of migration in the so-called sending countries.\textsuperscript{35} Graw & Schielke write that, “they (the houses) tell stories of success that are compelling not only for the power of the path they open up, but also because of the increasingly difficulty of other paths”.\textsuperscript{36} What can also be interpreted by Fatou’s explanation is how the close relations between people bring the European success story closer to their own reality when someone goes. “Vital conjunctures as well as life trajectories should not be understood only with the perspective on individuals but also with regard to the entanglements within the web of kinship (...) and maybe even the different interacting vital conjunctures of different people.”\textsuperscript{37} This was also expressed by Konteh and Basiro, two non-migrants who shared their views on migration during a group talk:

\begin{quote}
Konteh: You know what encourages people to go through backway? Is because you know many people have succeeded. In some time, you will see what they achieve. This will influence other to risk their lives. Even when they are hearing of thousands dying in the river, still they will go.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Basiro: They build very good houses, buy very good cars and they take their mothers to Mecca. You see the family, you say: Oh, somebody is behind these people, so I also want to change my life and my family.
\end{quote}

The domination of success is not a distant story but a good friend or a neighbor that can be seen as important realities in their lives. By conjuring up world-images and connections the person constitutes a sort of evidence for it, something substantial about oneself and her approach to the world\textsuperscript{38} The influence of Europe as a success story can be analyzed as the

\textsuperscript{35} Graw & Schielke 2012:8

\textsuperscript{36} Graw & Schielke 2012:8


\textsuperscript{38} Boström 2005: 24
world images that constitutes the evidence of a better life through migration. The materialistic evidence which is a result of remittances creates a successful story and shapes the view on immigration as positive. It also reinforces the promises that Europe can offer. To understand this within the framework of hope, Kleist writes that, “The situated nature of hope thus accentuates attention to its collective and social dimensions and how they are related to social imaginaries and collective visions of the good and meaningful life and future within particular societies and groups.” \(^{39}\) The good and meaningful life appears not necessarily to migrate but to have *somebody* in the family who does. Somebody who brings Europe closer to yourself through for example housebuilding.

I have in this chapter explored how a certain “Story of Europe” is present in everyday life in Gambia through the evidence like house building, good cars, financial improvements and sending your mother to Mecca. These are all central constitutes of a migration culture that materializes and becomes evidence of the fortunes Europe can bring. It answers the expectations of a social hope which are all parts of reinforcing the celebration of migration. However, this image of Europe puts a demand on the diaspora who tend to attain what Ali calls a ‘migrant-hero’ status by responding to the expectations, even when they cannot always afford it. The Diaspora have conflicting opinions about what these social expectations does in terms of the returning migrant and his behavior. How he shows a misleading image of what Europe does to your status achievements on return.

\(^{39}\) Kleist 2017:7
**HOPE**

In the previous chapter I explained how migration materializes in form of housebuilding, objects and in the migrant hero character, which all shapes the imaginary perception of Europe. In this chapter I will shift focus from the tangible evidence from the diaspora trail and move to the more abstract elements in a migration culture by focusing on hope and aspirations. The main informants are the non-migrants and aspiring migrants who share their thoughts and reasoning towards a migration project.

**YEARNING FOR EUROPE**

While I was in Gambia a family friend who had just become a taxi-driver drove me to all my destinations in regard to interviews, group talks, family visits etc. I had no intentions of interviewing him, but during my fieldwork he was always present and eventually he started talking about his own migratory project. I had no clue that he had one. Modou became one of the more in-depth interviews that over time got me a little closer to his foremost thoughts about his plans to migrate and why migration is such a compelling path for a young Gambian today. Using the life history method when interviewing and analyzing his story gave me the insight and depth needed to understand the migratory planning and aspirations in connection to his life conjunctions. I carried out a group interview with him and his friends Lamin and Kalifa and asked Modou why he wanted to go to Europe, and he answered:

*Here. When somebody comes from Europe....they respect him and they follow him while someone who doesn't go to Europe, that stay here, is not working just sitting like that? Naaaah it's quite different. Between the one who went to Europe and the one sitting here. For Example, if Kalifa goes to Europe and I'm sitting here. Kalifa comes back, he gives something to anybody. Like take this, take that, you know...? People are saying eh! Kalifa is a good man. They will forget about me. Because they will say, this man is not working. He is just sitting like that. Whilst you know things are hard. There is a lot of things like that you know. That is the problem. /.../ when people hear that you are having money people come closer to you. They come. And when that money is finished, they all run away.*
The connection between migration and achieving a more desired social status is even evident here. It seems like Europe is not necessarily about getting a new and better life somewhere else but about how one can improve one’s status at home. As mentioned in chapter one Ali writes that, one major reason for going abroad is the possibility of remaking oneself, which is tied to the possibility of making vastly more money which can alter a person’s status. The (culturally) rooted desire to migrate was enhanced not only by the promising life in Europe but how people will look at you as a returned migrant. When I asked about his thoughts of the uncertainty of a migratory journey as well as the hardship in Europe, in terms of asylum procedures, years of waiting, chances of being sent back and no rights to work, Modou’s answer was short:

*In this life, you have to suffer before you become successful. That’s my belief you know. You have to suffer to become successful. Anybody you see in this life who is successful doing things and is rich, you know he has suffered before. That’s how things are.*

Modou’s belief is that you have to suffer before you become successful. To understand the meaning of this within the concept of hope one can say that in a strong belief, there is hope. Hernández-Carretero writes about taking chances on emigration within the framework of hope and uncertainty. She writes that the interplay between hope and uncertainty affects migrants’ willingness to take chances, by which I mean to engage with the uncertain with a sense of positive anticipation. Modou directed my uncertainty about migration into a positive anticipation.

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40 Ali 2007: 45

Planning

Modou the aspiring migrant and Kalifa the non-migrant, were showing me pictures of their friend who left for The Back Way in 2015 and is now in Libya. The pictures of him show a well-dressed young man and they show it with a tone of enthusiasm narrating his story as a success-story despite the hardship he encountered on the way. Their friend has almost reached his destination and have lived in Libya for two years now waiting for the right time, and enough money to get on a boat to Italy. Their excitement is both contagious and devastating to me, but above all I sense the *spark of hope* in the friend’s migratory trajectory. When I question their friends migratory project they almost seem surprised “Why was I so scared of the Back Way?” Modou jokingly asked before telling me more about his friend who left:

*I always communicate with him. He is working there. He is not convincing me but he tells me you know, he goes to some places and sell stuff on the roadside. He went to the sea but they bring them back. The navy brought them back and they jailed them for three months. So, they released them now. He is free now. And he is still trying you know to go (to Italy). (...) He is my age mate. We all planned it together. But I didn’t have the money. The time he was going he came to my compound but he didn’t tell me that he is going to Back Way because he knew that I didn’t have the money. So, he tell me: I’m going to Brikama. I said ok I am waiting. Then he left. We were waiting till early in the morning and the mother called me. She asked me where her son is. I haven’t seen him since the morning. After 3 days, he called his mother from Mauritania. He struggled there. He didn’t have enough money and he suffered a lot. He still told me if you have money come to Mauritania, we go together. I could have stolen to go but that’s very bad so I didn’t do that. And he went on up to Libya now. He even works there! And he said: No backward, only forward. (laughs)*

Modou talks about himself in reference to his friend. They planned the trip together but he was left behind due to lack of money. When following his friend’s journey by being in communication with him through Facebook, he learns of the dangers on the way but most importantly he also seems to see the success and achievement of his friend. In this way, he builds up his as Hernández-Carretero would say, “confidence in or *hope on* -the expected end result of migration that they (he) garnered the determination to confront any intervening
This confidence was evident in Modou and he seemed to have a clear mission:

*This is what's on my mind. For me, really, I want to go now because I know right now I don't have that enough money to take flight and go to Europe you know. But I am 100% sure that I can try and get money that will take me to Libya, you know.*

Modou reveals both his limits (taking flight and travel legally) and his opportunities and how he can deal with his situation to improve his life. Uncertainty thus exists at two different but related temporal horizons or scales: emigrating may entail engaging with uncertainty in the short term, with the expectation that this will eventually allow one to reach a more stable state of socio economic certainty. Even though Modou has not migrated yet, migration is some sort of engagement with his uncertainty. One can say that in this consideration to migrate he finds himself in a vital conjuncture which according to Johnson-Hanks are “particularly critical durations when more than usual is in play, when the futures at stake are significant.” He ensures -with the assistance of hope- himself that he can indeed try to get the money that will take him to Libya, an available route for him. I sense freedom in his determination, and a man in the process of making life changing decisions.

Modou is a clear example of somebody finding himself in a vital conjuncture where he is deciding to start a migration trajectory. However, his friend left two years ago and he is still in Gambia. It makes me wonder for how long will Modou be an “aspiring or would-be migrant”? Will he one day actually migrate or is the manifestation of the plan-to- migrate subconsciously enough to his achievements and individual agency? When the hope is being prolonged he is in a stage where he feels like he is dealing with his uncertainty. Something I chose to call a *prolonging hope.*

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42 Hernández-Carretero 2017:115

43 Hernández-Carretero 2017:116

44 Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871
Ali writes that cultures of migration have to be accounted for when examining the decision-making process of migrants and would-be migrants. Potential migrants learn why going abroad is desirable before they actually go. I would stress that based on my observations this kind of decision-making process is a dominant part of a migration culture, and I argue that the notion of migration is not only when an individual leaves her home-country and crosses a border, in fact the aspiring migrant have already started migrating in the planning-phase at home. And through prolonging his hopes, striving to reach a higher status in the planning-phase of his individual migratory project, he is also practicing a migration culture.

In this chapter I have revealed the reasoning for a migration project rooting in the inner yearnings and aspirations of the individual agency and found that the concept of migration culture lies just as much in the detailed decision making and planning which can take years. While sustaining the planning period and decision-making the aspiring migrant also sustains a prolonged hope which makes him feel he is dealing with his uncertainty. I have also explained how the network of migrants and non-migrants and their respective vital conjunctures all play a part in the decision making of aspiring and non-migrants.

45 Johnson-Hanks 2002: 54
ON THE BACK WAY

The previous chapter was about aspiring migrants’ and non-migrants’ reflection on migration and decision making towards a migration trajectory and how one’s aspirations are affected by friends and close ones that have already migrated. This chapter focuses on the conjectures, turning points, motivations and interactions that steered the lives of the informants who had undergone a migrant trajectory and returned, and those who were still on the journey. I go in more depth studying the ways uncertainty interplays with ‘hope’ on a migratory project to Europe.

TRANSITION HOPE

I interviewed two persons who had undergone two different “failed” migrant trajectories as they had returned to The Gambia without having reached their desired destination, Europe. Felix left Gambia in 2005 and spent six years on the journey. His goal was to cross from Libya over the Mediterranean Sea to Italy, however during his journey on “the backway road” he acquired different jobs, learnt how to deal with dangerous situations and pass levels of accomplishments that he talked about in a sense of pride:

I don’t have experience. But I have to be strong headed to get something out of it. And I was employed and I was working almost 6 months in the company. And there I paid my boat to Italy. And I am sponsoring my family too. I’m doing both. Sponsoring my family, taking care of myself and saving for that boat too!

Although his story ended with a return to The Gambia due to the war that broke out in Libya, one can read a sense of success and a constant hopefulness in his lifestyle as a migrant that lasted for 6 years. It was clear to see that no matter what, he was not going to give up easy and return home despite the family (specially the mother) who called and wanted him to come back home. His job in Libya enabled him to support his family and can be interpreted as a temporary migration success story. Kleist refers to Ernst Bloch, perhaps the most well-known of the hope theorists as he calls for a “temporal orientation of philosophy from retrospection
to the future, approaching hope as an anticipatory consciousness towards the ‘not-yet-become’ and as embedded in the conditions of the present.”\textsuperscript{46} However, to state that hope is related to the future does not indicate when the ‘not-yet’ is imagined to take place.\textsuperscript{47} Here I argue that this occurs when they are in between the country they have left and their final destination. In the not-yet stage a new hope is generated something I chose to call transition hope.

When Felix is sending money to family back home in Gambia he is also living up to the social expectations of him as an immigrant explained in previous chapters. Hernández-Carretero writes about Senegalese migrants waiting in Europe and the notion that a migrant’s relatives back home ‘feed on the hope’ that he would one day improve the situation’ while away.\textsuperscript{48} When examining the informant’s stories about their migratory experiences none of them called home often and it was something they felt reluctant to do. Perhaps the expectations within a migration culture in terms of remittance laid upon their consciousness directly after departure. One can argue that while in transition his status achievements I explained in previous chapters, the strive for the ‘migrant-hero’ status were still in the making. By not calling often would leave the families in suspense, feeding on the hope. This is another example on how the mechanism between aspiring migrants and migrants plays a crucial part in the constituting of the migration culture. And most importantly it shows the power of imagination.

The strong impact of self-achievement and status connected to migration, was also evident in Soul’s story but in contrast to the temporary success that Felix encountered, Soul withstood on the contrary, a failed migration project. His journey ended on the border between Senegal and Mauritania where he was denied moving on due to lack of identity card. This was only a few weeks after his departure from Gambia, however his migratory journey lasted for one year after that. Instead of returning to Gambia immediately, he chose to live on

\textsuperscript{46} Kleist 2017: 07

\textsuperscript{47} Kleist 2017: 11

\textsuperscript{48} Hernández- Carretero 2017: 128
the streets of Dakar making small amounts of money on the city bus terminal. When I asked him why he didn't go back to Gambia he said:

*I used to think to myself. What am I doing here? How did I get myself into this? I was thinking of my classmates. /.../ But I said no. I cannot come. /.../ I feel too bad to myself. And I was thinking, when I come to Gambia, how will people look at me? /.../ I was so ashamed to come back.*

What migration had done to his status was the opposite as for Felix. Instead of achieving a temporary success, he was hindered which caused the feeling of shame and embarrassment. Behind the anguish of returning empty handed is the anxiety of facing others and their views, and if humiliating one’s relatives because of one’s failure.49 In comparison to Felix, who despite hardship on the journey was on a constant improvement, Soul seemed to have been stuck in a state of anxiety. What was he waiting for? Hernández-Carretero use hope to understand why migrants in transit chose to wait rather than return home. She refers to previous research on migration and hope and writes that “migrants’ hopeful waiting may be viewed as active engagement with their circumstances, involving a state of anticipation and the exercise of patience.” Refusing to give up, migrants’ display of endurance in terms of hardship conveys hope and agency in a challenging situation of uncertainty.50 Through the concept of hope one can get an understanding of why Soul’s choice to stay in Dakar somehow also kept him in the ‘not-yet-become’ phase explained earlier which kept him actively in an improvement of personal agency. He too seemed to hang on a transition hope that enabled him to wait out a situation, or decide on his next move. Not going back but staying still on a migration trajectory can be seen as a vital conjuncture, a “temporary configuration of possible change, a duration of uncertainty and potential.”51 By staying in Dakar he prolonged this state


50 Hernández-Carretero 2017: 128

51 Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871
of in between, where he also felt that his status was not ruined, something that would happen if he returned.

*I told my brother I am in Senegal. He said, I think you need to come back. I said no don’t tell me that. I don’t want to hear it. So, he told me. Ok I wanna send you some money for you to take care of yourself if you insist. /.../ it was too shameful for me to come back.*

In addition to this, his definition of failure was not so much about not getting to Europe, however it was to return to The Gambia which to him, meant to give up. He even agreed to receive financial help to stay in this vacuum. By staying in Dakar, he prolonged this state of in between where he also felt that his status was not broken, something that would happen if he returned.

Hope is not static but may change, be transformed, weakened or strengthened.\(^52\) While abroad, migrants do not need to worry about shame, they have no social obligations and no expenses. This allows them to engage in physically degrading jobs and endure social humiliation without this having any durable negative consequences for their social status at home.\(^53\) Souls’ *transition hope* for a better future had shifted to a hope in not to be seen as a failure and shame.

In the first section of this chapter I have gained an understanding of the navigation process in a migration trajectory. The extended period of waiting, suffering and shame on the journey emphasize the power of the collective imaginaries within the social hope in the communities they left behind and how they navigate to live up to these expectations. This can also lead to a migration failure where the migrant avoids the shame of return sustaining his transit in poor conditions. These stories from two different migrant repatriates demonstrate

\(^{52}\) Kleist 2017: 7

\(^{53}\) Bredsloup 2017: 114
the temporality and elasticity which defines a migratory trajectory and how it includes periods of waiting. In the waiting their hope is steered into a state I call transition hope.

VITAL CONJUNCTURES

The previous section was about two repatriates sharing their stories and how their return to The Gambia stirred conflicting feelings in terms of migration and status, success and failure. I will in this chapter elaborate on the feelings that arise from being on a migration trajectory. Using the concept of vital conjunctures and mobile livelihoods through the life interview analytical framework, I shed light on migratory aspirations in reference to their whole life-story. Both informants in this chapter were in transit during my interview with them. Lamin was in transit in The Gambia from Guinea hoping that in one way or the other he will end up in Europe, and Lasana in Libya waiting for the boat to take him to Italy.

Bjarnesen writes that when it comes to mobile livelihoods, using vital conjunctures and hope as the analytical framework, combined they open up the life history interview to include possible futures in a migrant biography. When I ask Lamin about his life, how he grew up and his family it is constantly being described in connection to migration. For example, when he talks about his friends who left:

“They (his friends) today live in Europe. Some in Italy and some in Spain. Because they have parents who help them, they have much contact more than me. The parents help them with papers and they transferred them in plane. And that day I followed them up to the airport. They take their plane... But that day I cried! Because I (would have) liked to be like that. Anytime I remember I can cry. My best friend left me.”

This moment can be understood as a vital conjunction where he started his personal planning and placing his hopes in life in the promise of Europe. Not only did they leave him behind but

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54 I chose to include Lamin in the study despite the fact that he was not migration from Gambia, because he was in transit in Gambia and had been there for a long period of time.

55 Bjarnesen 2009: 123
they became examples how one can improve your life. However, it was not until later in life he actually left Guinea to pursue his journey to Europe - another vital conjuncture. His decisions and strategies changed many times on the way:

*I get small money and I go to Liberia. I see many things there. I see people suffer. I don't have anything in this world but I have sense. In life I can suffer, but I see some people that suffer more than me. So, I ask myself oh god.... I lose some friends in Back-Way. They lose their life in Libya. They take the car together. Some people say the criminals attack them... I was going to go with them but something kept me in the house that day telling me: Don’t go! I just stayed like that in my house.*

Lamin’s vital conjunctures in life are characterized by his migration trajectory and the decisions he makes in terms of planning his next move to reach his destination. By tracing past and present emplacements in the lives of active or aspiring migrants, the mobile life story focuses the exploration of past and present moments of hopefulness, and projects them into possible futures.\(^{56}\) Not only does the story about Lamin describe how a migratory trajectory is complex and personal, but also that every moment he has encountered has been considered in terms of his possible future in successfully getting to Europe. The *transition hope* explained in earlier chapters is evident.

Bjarnesen writes that the underlying premise for the opening up of the conventional life history interview is that neither aspirations or trajectories remain stable and predictable over time- and neither do the retrospective accounts of past stages in the migratory project.\(^{57}\) Lamin has dealt with various situations and in his story I can trace several situations where he has had to make new decisions where some moves could potentially become vital conjunctures while others were smaller changes to his mobile livelihood that eventually brought him to The Gambia. His directions changed but his main goal was always, and is still the same; Europe. By understanding his migration trajectory through the theoretical concept of a *narrative construction means* that it is not understood as something essential - but

\(^{56}\) Bjarnesen 2009:127

\(^{57}\) Bjarnesen 2009: 120-121
something that's continuously becoming within the frame of language and the narrative constructions. Europe is what he constructs it to be as he tells his story.

Somebody who had come much closer to the Europe destination was Lasana. After my fieldwork in The Gambia I returned to Stockholm to continue working on this thesis and I received a call from an acquaintance who says:

> Hi, you wanted, to talk to these back-way guys! I have one boy now calling me he is our good friend. He wants to cross to Italy and he needs some money. I have told him that we are not into these boat crossings because it’s too dangerous! But he still wants to go. Maybe we can all chip in? Anyway, you can talk to him for your paper!59

The numbers of immigrant’s dead on the Mediterranean Sea, the headlines about blacks in Libya being sold on the market like slaves, the images of the half sinking boats all appeared clearly to me again. The adverse story of migration which somehow through my fieldwork, interviews, and conversations in The Gambia had faded and been replaced with heroic narratives and understandable reasons for pushing through. Now I was going to talk to somebody who had almost reached his destination and was very close to Europe. Social networks are pertinent in the much-practiced ‘migration-talk’60 and what I argue is one of the essential constitutions of a migration culture. The close relationships to someone in Europe that directly or indirectly becomes an advantage in one's network and set examples of the good life that can be attained by migration. To facilitate a person's journey, economic resources need to be calculated and social relations need to be activated within families and households.61 Now I was that key person in a migrant's’ network as I assumed, he hoped I

58 Boström 2005:24

59 This is not from a recorded scenario, and therefore not a literal citation, but it was written down directly after the conversation.

60 Kleist: 2017:10

would pay for the boat from Libya to Italy. A few minutes later I am calling the number given to me. When I ask for his name he says: “My name is Lasainabo, but they call me “Lasana.” I remember - It’s that Lasana! The friend who left Modou and Kalifa behind. The fiend who told his peers back home that there is, ‘no backward only forward’, the ‘spark of hope’ in chapter two that I describe as the catalyst of hope and ambition planted so deep in the aspiring migrant Modou. He speaks clearly and determined with a forceful assurance. ‘He just needs to cross. The sea is calm now and it’s going to be a calm period as Ramadan is approaching. Lasana left The Gambia in 2015 and has stayed in Libya for two years. His story is similar to Felix’s story in terms of migratory success and achievements along the journey:

*My mission in Europe is about helping my family /.../ so I have to go and work. First time mission (was to) work in Libya. Here I can work. I sent money to my people (in Gambia) here in Libya. But the place I’m working we have problem. So now I cannot stay in Libya, so I must move. /.../ I’m not afraid to die.*

Lasana is referring to his migration trajectory as a mission and by looking back argues that he needs to move forward. From a methodological point of view, a life history interview cannot simply fill in the blanks of a ready-made timeline but must explore which significant changes have characterized a person’s life and what the nature of these transformations were.62 Here it is clear that the changes he encountered in Libya, but also his family at home are parts of what characterizes his migrant trajectory. Bjarnesen writes that the life story method illuminates not only the retrospective as, inherent in the life history interview, but also the prospective: the potentiality of the present, projected into the future.63

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62 Bjarnesen 2009: 123
63 Bjarnesen 2009: 120
Because as the first son. Every time I come home I see my mom crying. So, me I feel like now I’m the first born I should go and make a change for my mom, cos I didn’t want my mom crying.

A mobile livelihood means that he considers the experiences and influences of those who stay behind when a migrant departs as well as it includes the broader socially and culturally embedded project of creating a meaningful life. Looking at Lasana's situation through the concept of mobile livelihood he looks at his situation in retrospective to his past.

He looks back at his life and hardship of his family and explains why he decided to migrate. As opposed to a migration history, the mobile life story explores the significant transformations that have characterized the migrant’s past and relates these defining moments to the broader migration history. The moments of uncertainty at home were also the episodes that characterizes his decision to go and also what motivates him to stick to his migratory mission.

Migration abroad is a mean to realize (at least) two overall goals: to take care of one's family and oneself and to be able to return with a status of respect. Lamin and Lasana were currently on a migration trajectory proved to be reluctant of coming back without having accomplished one’s goals. What they both had in common is that they were both first sons a position in the family with a certain responsibility to take action on the state of the family. They also shared a religious belief and life concepts that I in this chapter link to hope as an active stance which become a determining motivation when they are on their journey.

In this last section, I have elaborated on the feelings that arise from being on a migration trajectory. The migrants in transit are reflecting on why they left home which makes their determination to continue stronger, while going back is equal to failure. The life history

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64 Bjarnesen 2009: 120
65 Bjarnesen 2009:119
66 Kleist 2017: 183
concept has given me a broader understanding to how they reflect on their own life in retrospect to their planned journey.
CONCLUSION

PACKING

I am leaving Gambia tomorrow and I am all set to go back to Sweden. I have packed all my belongings and given away everything I don't need, or can get new of when I return. My aunty got all the medicines, my cousins kids got my own kids’ old clothes, and my cousin, all the cosmetics. I realized that my ‘giveaway-ritual’ that I always do when I leave Gambia without reflecting or being questioned is my own contribution to the misleading story or myth of Europe. Can I really afford to give away all my cosmetics and medicine as a European student? Not really. But I do it because it's expected of me. And I feel like I should. It's just the way it is... and what does all these things do? They tell the Story of Europe. 67

The aim of this study was to describe and analyze what constitutes a migration culture in Gambia and to examine how the story of Europe is evident in everyday life. I describe and analyze; seek the meaning of Europe and explore in what ways it has been extracted from a migration culture which influence the decisions of young Gambians who sets off or plan a migratory project to Europe.

THE STORY OF EUROPE

The expectations of what life can bring if you migrate to Europe or have close relatives who live in Europe is presented in two central ways. The first way, is through materialistic tangible evidence of migration. When Gambians living abroad improve the living conditions of their families back in Gambia through remittances and building houses it is automatically connected to Europe and a celebration of migration is sustained. This evidence can be extended to how the diaspora behaves and appears when they return to Gambia for vacation. They wear western clothes, get expensive cars and represent wealth in a way which makes more people want to migrate. They also tend to spend money in a matter where they feel like they should live up to the expectations upon them. This behavior can be explained as an act of social return

67 Notes from field diary: 17 April 2017
which might not be ‘useful’ however it is an investment in the migrant’s status achievement becoming a ‘migrant hero’ as well as living up to the social expectations to migration to Europe. My own evaluation of this act is that there is a mechanism between social expectations in The Gambia and social return from the diaspora which consequently enforce the perception that you are immediately rich when you come from Europe. This act reproduces the social hope in migration which encourage young people to plan a migration project themselves.

THE MIGRATORY PROJECT

The planning and dreaming about migration can be understood as the driving force of individual agency and plans for a better future. Aspiring migrants who are planning to migrate to Europe through The Back Way base their own planning on success stories from friends and acquaintances who is already on a migratory journey. By following their journeys, they build up confidence in the hopes and expected results of migration. I would stress that based on my observations this decision-making process which can take years is a dominant part of a migration culture. In this process, the aspiring migrant gets a sense that he is dealing with his uncertainty, something I call a prolonged hope.

The practice of a migration culture is not only when an individual takes his first step on his migration trajectory, but is in fact when an aspiring migrant starts planning his journey, which can take years. In this extensive planning, I also found inner reasoning and aspirations explaining why going to Europe is so desirable other than financial wealth. There was also a clear longing to achieve a higher social status something which seemed best accomplished through migration.

When being on a migration trajectory from The Gambia to Europe it is evident that the mastering of navigation and dealing with unpredictable encounters cause a feeling of success and achievement on the way even though the final destination has not been reached and may never be. The extended periods of waiting, and suffering on the journey directs their ambitions to a state of transition hope. However, while in transit there is time for reflection. The feelings towards the family they left behind and why they initiated the migration
trajectory in the first place becomes an important force keeping them to their mission. This can again be connected to what is expected from them.

The everyday influence of a migration culture in Gambia is complicated and nuanced as well as logic and clear. The materialistic evidences speak for themselves while the reasoning and choice to endeavor The Back Way is a difficult process at the same time as it is a way of dealing with one’s life. It can be considered challenging to capture the story of Europe and to understand how the migration culture is formed in a short study like this. Nevertheless, The Back Way is an attainable opportunity and just another way to strive for a better life.
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