

Narrative Maps

Perspectives on Migration from Africa

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opportunities

for a fair narrative on migration



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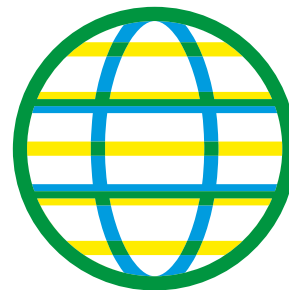
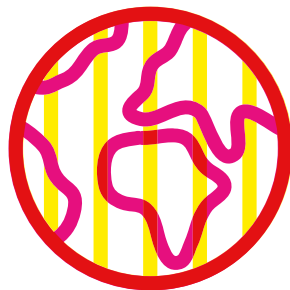
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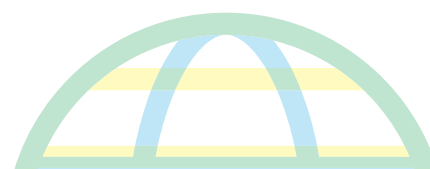
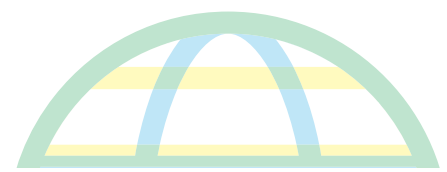
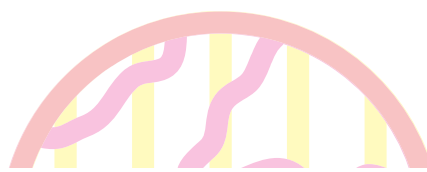
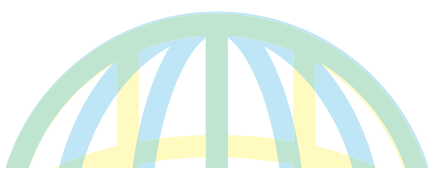


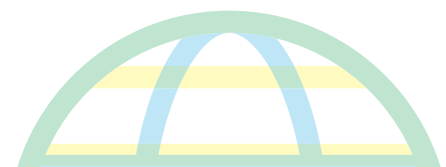
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Abstract

One of the key concepts of the OPPORTUNITIES project is the distinction between narratives on migration and narratives of migration. The former discuss migration from an observer's perspective, for instance from the point of view of journalism, migration studies, or migration policies. In order to create a more balanced view of migration, the OPPORTUNITIES project programmatically includes what we call narratives of migration. This move towards strategic multiperspectivity in migration discourses involves, on the one hand, an inclusion of neglected media and genres. These are narrative resources which capture and portray first-hand experience of migration and the lived experience of migrants and refugees. The paper explores how the topic of migration has been dealt with in proverbs and songs from Senegalese poets and artists since the 1980s. While the songs by Senegalese artists in the 1980s seem to praise and celebrate migration, increasing criticism of young people that continue to undertake the increasingly dangerous journey to Europe has characterized some songs from the 2000s onwards. The paper also discusses ways that migration negotiated in Ghana and Senegal using novel and a travelogue as case studies. The multiple perspectives towards migration in the two texts make apparent the need to include different media and genres as well as the perspectives of migrants in migration discourses.

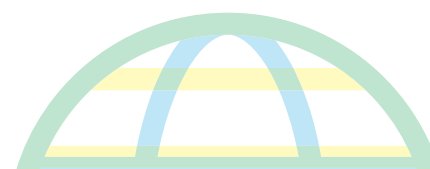


1. Introduction

One of the key concepts of the OPPORTUNITIES project is the distinction between narratives on migration and narratives of migration (see Gebauer 2022). The former discuss migration from an observer's perspective, for instance from the point of view of journalism, migration studies, or migration policies, but also the views of the broader public and private individuals who have strong attitudes towards migration without being migrants themselves. Such narratives on migration are thus based on academic or journalistic research, data sets, party programs, political or economic worldviews and personal beliefs shaped by media reports or opinions proliferated on social media. They all inform the national conversation on migration in the respective country, contributing to the "national narrative" (Brand 2010), or a transnational European discourse on migration and migration policies.

Another aspect that all these narratives, diverse as they may seem, have in common, however, is that they produce, share and evaluate knowledge about migration without either personal experience or direct exchanges with refugees and migrants themselves.¹ Narratives on migration, in this sense, speak *about* the other without speaking *with* others. Relying on such narratives alone necessarily creates an incomplete picture, a national history which marginalizes or even excludes the migrant experience. At worst, such discursive strategies contribute to othering, producing stereotypical and even xenophobic representations of refugees and migrants as inferior or dangerous outgroups, distorted representations which routinely reframe humanitarian crises as security threats and criminalize migrants and refugees. At best, narratives on migration yield well-meaning, but one-sided images based on a European understanding of what it means to leave one's home and venture abroad.

In order to create a more balanced view of migration, the OPPORTUNITIES project programmatically includes what we call narratives of migration. This move towards strategic multiperspectivity in migration discourses involves, on the one hand, an inclusion of neglected media and genres, from proverbs and songs to poems and novels: narrative resources which capture and portray first-hand experience of migration and the lived experience of migrants and refugees. On the other hand, strategic multiperspectivity requires a critical rethinking of the mental maps created through dominant master narratives on migration and to challenge them with more diverse stories of the migrant experience.



2. The Narrative Map: Towards Strategic Multiperspectivity

Maps are indispensable cognitive resources. They help us organize knowledge about the world, they facilitate orientation in the world, and they offer us representations of the world, reducing complexity in an attempt to increase readability. This service, however, comes at a price – like all forms of reductionism, the map necessarily introduces its own distortions. A three-dimensional sphere must be visualized on a two-dimensional plane, selection processes decide which part of the world takes center stage, moving others to fringe positions. Such distortion is indeed inevitable, as the amount of information which can be displayed is limited. For this reason, we use different kinds of maps focusing, for instance, on geography, climate, infrastructure, demography, or politics.

Maps don't simply tell us how to get from A to B, but they, to a certain extent, also allow us to create mental representations of A and B. Maps have therefore long been considered as cognitive tools which help us come to terms with the unknown, the *terra incognita*. The map thus serves as a key metaphor for knowledge production and knowledge acquisition, anthropologist Diane E. Austin (1998, 21) explains:

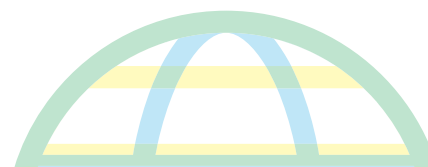
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A cognitive map is developed through repeated encounters with landmarks at many levels and develops according to experience rather than in any strictly linear fashion. Though landmarks have traditionally been conceived as physical objects, conceptual objects such as notions of ethnic groups and nationality also develop as landmarks in the map. Thus, the idea of a cognitive map extends beyond the physical environment. Cognitive maps include physical attributes of a place, stories about it, and information about how to behave in it.

This classical understanding of a cognitive map as a mental representation of landmarks, is still rooted in the relationship between physical environments and mental representations, or geography and memory. As Marie-Laure Ryan (2003) has demonstrated, the world-making potential of map-making also informs the aesthetic experience: when asked to draw map-like representations of fictional spaces, readers produce idiosyncratic versions, substantiating claims by cognitive narratologists (cf. Herman 2002) that storyworlds as mental representations can't be reduced to textual cues. Taking things one step further, Mikkonen (2007, 294) investigates the narrative potential of maps as sources of stories about the routes and itineraries they imply.

In their function as potential narrative programs the map and the itinerary suggest further affinities between travel and narrative. In this analogy, the map indicates both the route followed and the trace that is interpreted as a story. Often the map, in its graphic form, also outlines possibilities of choice, possible lines of travel that are not chosen. The map, therefore, is not only a model of a reference world, affirming the referential pact of travel writing, but may presuppose a narrative.

The "Narrative is Travel" metaphor investigated by Mikkonen, this article holds, can also be reversed: "Travel is Narrative" highlights the fact that migration is also a storytelling machine producing all sorts of narratives. In fact, most peoples' ideas about other countries and cultures will be based less on first-hand experience than on storied representations, i.e. the narratives on and of migration we encounter



in news programs, newspapers, films, books, or conversational storytelling. Storytelling depends on narrative interest, of course; thus it is not surprising that the majority of Europeans have only very crude mental maps of Africa which are usually defined by sub-Saharan Africa (people often don't think of Egypt, with its pyramids and pharaohs, as an *African* country) and negative images of starving children, severe drought, and military coups. The African other is further reduced to images of migrants in boats on the Mediterranean – an easy target for right-wing parties in Europe emphasizing the illegal nature of trafficking as a business in order to reframe humanitarian catastrophes as crimes and security threats, and to justify illegal pushbacks. The mental map of Africa thus becomes a mental map of fortress Europe under attack.

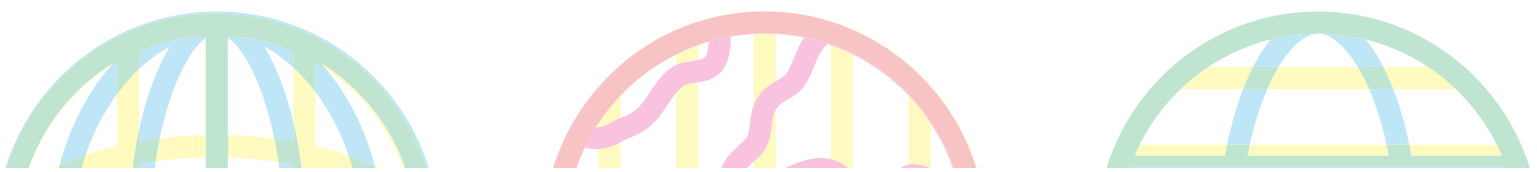
African maps of Europe, in contrast, are often based on somewhat naïve narratives of hope and expectation told through the exemplary success stories of those who managed to start a new life in the Global North. Such stories are reinforced through the economic influence of the African diaspora, a significant source of income for many African countries. The narrative framing of migration in terms of self-improvement and economic success constrain what narratologists call tellability, i.e. the kinds of stories which can be told about the migrant experience. Faced with the option of upsetting their families at home with stories of racism and failure, for instance, migrants will often draw on the narrative repertoire established through decades of previous accounts, even though such accounts will not yield a reliable, coherent or comprehensive representation of lived experience. Fueling narratives of hope and expectation, the diasporic narrative also tends to ignore or omit the in-between stages of transit, where expectations and hope often turn into disappointment and trauma. The result is a gap in the narrative – those aspiring to migrate don't want to hear it, those who survived the ordeal don't want to be reminded of it.

Against this background, our focus on maps and mapping has two related goals. On the one hand, by listening to stories of the migrant experience we can help European audiences create more complex mental maps of Africa, maps that in the absence of first-hand knowledge at least draw on the narratives of migrants speaking of lived experience. On the other hand, by tracing stories of transit as well as of hope and arrival, our research contributes to a more complete “life cycle” of migration, a narrative program based on multiperspectivity and polyphony rather than one-dimensional reductionism or the endless perpetuation of a few dominant master narratives. In Mikkonen's terms, such a more varied narrative program invites people not only to challenge mental maps based on stereotypes and preconceptions, but also invites them to try out alternative routes and itineraries, different kinds of stories that allow you to map unknown territory.

2.1 Narrative Maps of Migration: A Senegalese Perspective

“*Gór dëkull fennë*” is a proverb in Senegal referring to a man that decides to leave his homeland. The positive connotation behind migration in Senegalese society is implied in this Senegalese proverb, which can be loosely translated as “A man's home can be anywhere”. In other words, home is not limited to one place. More concretely – a man must be willing to live somewhere else. The proverb also reveals the traditional expectation in Senegalese society that men are supposed to be providers of the family. The positive attitude towards mobility in Senegal can be fathomed even more when one considers the centuries before colonial occupation. During this period Senegal was divided into kingdoms, some of which were larger than Europe. Numerous Senegalese songs and literary texts by Senegalese and Ghanaian writers see migration as a natural reaction to adverse circumstances in the homeland. These texts will be discussed later.

During the colonial period France officially imposed its culture as the standard which Senegalese people ought to look up. On the one hand, the ruling class in France provided the role model which the



colonized aspired to be. Cheikh Hamidou Kane summarizes this asymmetrical cultural encounter in his novel *L'aventure ambiguë* in 1961. Kane refers to France's colonial project as the "art of winning without being right." On the other hand, young Senegalese men and women, who subsequently became the country's elite, were educated in France. It should be noted that France was not only attractive to students, but also to illiterate people who were recruited as workers and were able to significantly improve their socioeconomic status. Ousmane Sembène writes about the experiences of this social group in his first novel *Le docker noir* in 1956.

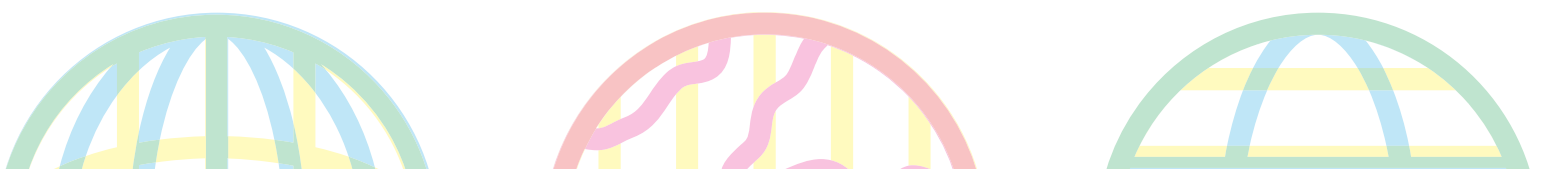
Migration became a social issue in Senegal in the 1980s and found its way in songs that talk about reasons for migration, the meaning, and the consequences of migration. These song texts reflect on the social discourses on migration and show how the socioeconomic situation in Senegal has changed since the 1980s. In the song *Walyane* (Engl. transl.: migrating) (1984 and 1986), Xalam addresses the issue of migration, focussing on the "compulsion that motivates any emigration movement." Tellingly, Xalam is Senegal's first modern music group that moved to France and experienced an international breakthrough. The song *Walyane* is not just about the plight of those who take on the "rocky road" of becoming an emigrant but it is also about the recognition and solidarity that migrants deserve.

While the musicians of Xalam convey the experiences of emigrants, in *Immigrés* (1984) Youssou N'dour reflects on migration as a social phenomenon and sings about encounters with his compatriots during his travels. He pays tribute to those who have made the decision to migrate and honours their achievements such as supporting their families back home – the same can be said about the song *Immigré* by Nominka bi (1993). In this sense, he assertively refers to 'the return' as the conclusion of the migration enterprise. The same can also be said about Diogal Sakho's (2003) message in his song *Samba Alla*.

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In *Samba le berger* (2001), Wasis Diop focuses on the discrimination faced by migrants in African transit countries. The singer associates these migrants with African soldiers who fought on the side of France in the two world wars. Against this backdrop, Diop suggests that France's motto "liberty, equality and fraternity" does not apply to migrants. He is referring to the deportation practice, among others. Abou Guité Seck (2004) also formulates a similar criticism in *Modou-Modou*, a colloquial term for Senegalese traders abroad. He notes that Europeans can travel to African countries with comparably much ease. The countless tragedies in recent years have inspired other musicians to write songs that are critical of migration. In the song *Émigration*, Omar Pène (2006) calls for a policy that offers young people a perspective in their own country. He warns of the dangers of "illegal migration." Carlou D and Maabo (2018) address the youth even more directly in their joint project, *Gém naa tekki fii*. They call on Senegalese youth to stay in the country and work on building an independent nation.

In recent years migration has increasingly become a site of aggravation. The discussion in this section has shown that songs released before the turn of the millennium mainly deal with the motives behind migration and hardships faced by migrants. However, since the turn of the millennium the hurdles and dangers of migration have become important in the song texts by Pène, Carlou D and Maabo (2018). This shift from praising the enterprise of migration to critiquing it is partly due to the deteriorating state of the economy in countries like Senegal. In this context it is worth mentioning that many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have a social welfare system or unemployment benefits. For many the (extended) family remains the only source of financial support. The shift in the lyrics of the songs can also be attributed to the threat posed by the introduction of visa restrictions on Senegalese citizens that were introduced by many European countries like France and Germany in the 1980s.²



2.2 Mapping Migrant Narratives: Stories of Senegalese and Ghanaian Migrants

How migration is negotiated in the Senegalese and Ghanaian contexts can be illustrated using two written texts as case studies – a novel and a travelogue. *Die Piroge* (original French title: *La Pirogue*) is a novel by Abasse Ndione that tells the story of a passage from Senegal to the Canary Islands. *Der Traum vom Leben* (2011) is a travelogue by German journalist, Klaus Brinkbäumer. It is an account of the journey that Brinkbäumer takes with Ghanaian migrant, John Ampan, in order to recreate Ampan's experiences on his journey to the Canary Islands. The two books provide an opportunity to grasp the prevailing attitudes toward migration in the countries in question.

In his novel *Die Piroge* (2008), Abasse Ndione focusses on the idea of group migration that arises in Yassara, a rural community:

Due to this year's groundnut blight, the livelihood of peasants, who had already been living in abject poverty, was now under threat. Only through remittances by their relatives that were now living in Europe could this precarious situation be rectified. (*Die Piroge*, 10, translation by authors)³

This intervention by relatives living in Europe hints at the image of Europe as 'the savior' that can rescue Africans from their plight. This image is also reflected in the villagers' decision to undertake the dangerous journey from Europe to Africa. "Very soon they had started to work in the huge farms [...]. Garnering better jobs, much less strenuous than the hard field work they were used to, very well paid, one thousand two hundred euros – eight hundred thousand CFA-Franc per month – a real fortune!" (*Die Piroge*, 60, translation by authors) John recounts how such images are created in *Der Traum vom Leben*:

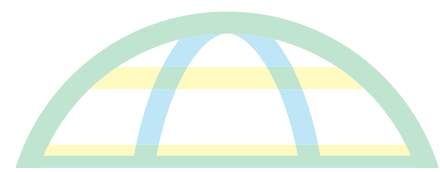
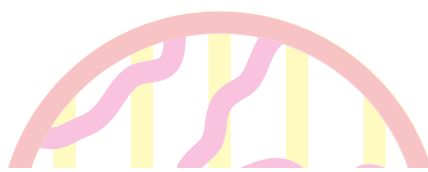
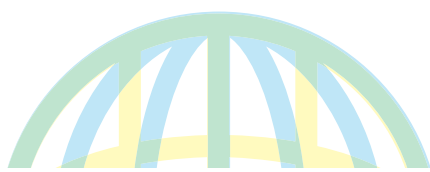
He had heard about the splendor of Europe from Hamburger. There was work for everyone there. It was clean. People smiled at you. They greeted you. Nobody murdered and stole. Nobody locked you up for no reason. It was a long journey. It was supposed to be cold there in the north but it was paradise. That's what everyone who came back said. (c 88, translation by authors)

Such statements solidify this image of Europe as 'savior'. While tourists can easily come to Africa with little to no entry restrictions many Africans cannot afford to travel to Europe or can only do so under strict entry restrictions. A German nun explains this to the journalist using the example of women and prostitutes that she helps in her organization:

They see that their German clients in Africa aren't very smart, yet they can still afford to go on world trips. So, they do everything they can to get to the countries where these stupid, rich clients are from. (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 116, translation by authors)

With this in mind, John, a Ghanaian tells his (German) compatriots that the mere fact that he is in the company of white people is a sign to many that he has made it. (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 84) The hope of fulfilling one's dreams in Europe can be seen in the investments made by families. For example, the mother of Mor, a student, "sold her jewelry and the property that his father had left behind as an inheritance. She paid a trafficker three million (around 4,500 Euros) for a Schengen visa for her son" (*Die Piroge*, 30, translation by authors). John sums up this image of Europe in the minds of African migrants in one sentence: "We have to flee to Europe if we want to live." (48, translation by authors) It can be argued that the villagers of the rural community of Yassara share this opinion too:

Each of the four villages of the community should select ten young people in a fair procedure. They should benefit from this process. Working in Europe would make it possible for them to



take care of their relatives back home. The Imam of the large mosque had explained all this by telephone to the president of the association of the diasporic village community that lived in Italy. (10f., translation by authors)

This example reveals that of the people of Yassara believe that Europe is the solution to their problems. The participation of their relatives living in Europe confirms the image of Europe as 'savior'. The relatives manage to pool together the sixteen million francs (about € 25,000) needed for forty young people to travel to Europe. The money is sent to the Imam. What was previously a private matter has now become a public issue involving entire villages. The same can be said about the crisis caused by European factory ships that engage in overfishing in African coastal waters:

Less than ten years ago, fishing a short distance away from the coast was enough to fill all the boxes in a boat after a week at sea. Now, after twenty-one days at sea, fishermen were catching less than they did then – at a distance of more than five hundred kilometres [...]. Yet the fish caught now were smaller and could barely fill half the boxes. (*Die Piroge*, 12, translation by authors)

Such regions are doomed to lose their young workforce: "If the ten *mool* (fishermen) left are still working here, it is only because they have not yet collected enough money for the journey to Europe" (13, translation by authors). The fact that migration seems to be the only future prospect is further exemplified by the fate of two women. Despite the secrecy surrounding a planned passage to Europe Arame, a mother, reaches out to the organizers of the passage asking them to take her eldest and only son:

Arame pleaded with them narrating the misery of her life. She was divorced, a mother of six children, abandoned by this good-for-nothing father who didn't care about them. Her the oldest child – Talla – was a boy. She had no brother and no relatives to support her. Every day was a struggle for survival. Selling roasted peanuts at the school entrance every morning brought in just enough to feed them. To cater to the rest of their needs, they scraped by on what little her two daughters earned. Her daughters were eight and ten years old and were working as domestic servants. But now – thank God! – her once little son had become a man. If only he managed make it to Europe, their precarious situation would change. [...] He would buy her a beautiful multi-story house. (*Die Piroge*, 33, translation by authors)

That Talla is only fifteen years old is a fact that she only discloses at the end of the book. Similar to Arame's faith in Europe is Daba's belief that Europe is her only source of salvation. Daba is a widow. Not only is she willing to leave her children behind, she is also ready to put her life on the line as her conversation with her friend Kiné suggests:

"I'm going with them."

"What are you saying?"

"Baye Laye and Kaaba won't leave me here, I'm going with them tonight aboard their pirogue."
[...]

"But you are a woman, Daba."

"So what if I am a woman? Women emigrate too! You've seen them on TV, sometimes with their babies in the pirogues. Baye Laye and Kaaba won't leave me here."

"I guess there's no point in trying to convince you not to go, you seem determined."

"More than determined. *Barça walla Barsakh!*" (*Die Piroge*, 26f., translation by authors)

"*Barça walla Barsakh!*" – "reach Barcelona or die" – is indeed the motto of those in Senegal that are willing to migrate. This sentence sums up people's loss of faith in the possibilities that their country has to offer. However, this world view is shattered by what they experience on the way to Europe. In *Die Piroge*, Kaaba, the second helmsman, is caught by a wave during a storm and thrown into the raging



Atlantic (*Die Piroge* 65). After the storm, the survivors see part of the pirogue that they had overtaken a few hours earlier floating in the ocean (71). It had been clear to everyone at the beginning of the journey that the eighty-five passengers on the boat had no chance of survival. The situation was no different for those who travelled by land. The dramatic scenes that went around the world in 2005 are unforgettable:

The storm of the Spanish border September 29th is to refugees what September 11th is to the rest of the world or to the Western world. September 29th, 2005 has become symbolic, a cipher for 700 African refugees who climbed up the barbed wire fences of Ceuta. Thousands had been in Melilla the weeks before. At least 14 lost their lives (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 27, translation by authors).

Recounting this experience are two Ghanaians, Hassan Adam and J. O. Awuah, who were pushed down by Spanish police “and saw three Africans shot by Moroccans in uniform. They were arrested, they had to hand over their money and cell phones. Then they were deported and abandoned. They made their way here (to ‘The Valley’)” (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 230, translation by authors). It is worth taking a closer look at this place – ‘the Valley’. On the one hand, it shows the precarious conditions of refugees in African transit countries. On the other hand, it is a world that they have literally created:

‘The Valley’ is five kilometers off Maghnia. It is a canyon with rock walls about 20 meters high. 160 people live there, most of them from Ghana and the others from Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Congo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. They live in huts made of cardboard. The cardboard is nailed against wooden slats, a piece of corrugated iron is placed on top and those who have newspapers stick them against the walls from the inside. That is how they have been living. For years. A hut is ten by five meters. Ten, sometimes 20 people sleep in one hut. Of course, they light a fire for warmth in their huts because it's cold in the Algerian mountains, [...] again and again it is common that a hut burns down to the ground. (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 228, translation by authors)

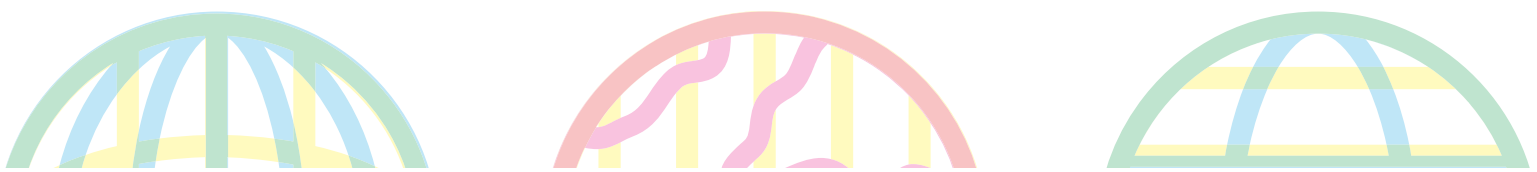
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The conditions in transit are worse than those at home. By the time they reach ‘The Valley’ the refugees have lost all their savings and valuable possessions to smugglers and middlemen. In addition to this, they have to cope with physical attacks from other refugees. It is for this reason that guards at the entrance have been placed at the entrance of ‘The Valley’ – “eight men and four dogs” (229, translation by authors).

In this precarious situation, the refugees also face racial discrimination practiced by Arabs, which makes it difficult to stay in the transit countries (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 196, 212ff., translation by authors). A more serious threat to the community of ‘The Valley’ is posed by power exercised by the state (especially by the police and border security). For example, the president of ‘The Valley’ laments about the inhumane treatment of refugees at the border and points out the role that European states play in fostering this humanitarian tragedy – they make payments to countries in the Maghreb so that refugees are prevented from crossing the Mediterranean:

How can anyone arrest a person and abandon him in the Sahara, just like that? How can anyone do that? Arrest them, take them away, abandon them and let them die. That's what the Moroccans are doing, that's what the Algerians are doing, and you Europeans are paying for it! How can anyone decide to do something like that? (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 231, translation by authors)

Even more frustrating is idea that it is easier for goods in Ceuta to cross the border with than it is for a black person to do the same: “When a black person wants to cross the border [...] suddenly the law and the European continent are in danger.” (261, translation by authors) In light of the experiences of many Sub-Saharan Africans in North Africa, Kunle, describes his ordeal. He is a Nigerian man who was



abandoned by Algerian police officers in the Sahara and forced to walk through the desert for three days: "Humiliating. No one I know would go a second time because no one expected this journey to be like this" (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 174, translation by authors). In contrast, the Ghanaian president of 'The Valley' says, "We're sitting here because we can't travel home. It would be failure, defeat. It can't be done. If you come home empty-handed, you have to set out again until you succeed. So why go home at all?" (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 230, translation by authors)

In European transit countries, the experiences of refugees are no different. One only has to recall the numerous reports about Italy's refusal to rescue refugee boats stranded at sea. The mayor of Lampedusa famously described this as a policy of "sacrificing human lives in order to restrict migration flows" (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 88, translation by authors). This attitude is reflected in the week-long controversy involving Sea-Watch and Matteo Salvini. A report by a psychologist in a deportation camp in Ceuta describes the mental states of refugees after staying in these countries in an odyssey that often lasts several years:

There are mainly two kinds of problems here. First, the consequences of torture, war and flight i.e., post-traumatic stress syndrome. Second, adapting to the camp here. It is a cultural shock to arrive here after two, three or four years. People have to learn that their dreams are now shattered; they are not allowed to work and that they might be deported very soon. They become nervous and sleepless because they learn that they haven't found and will never find the paradise they are looking for. (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 264, translation by authors)

In destination countries like Germany emigrants discover that the 'El Dorado' does not exist. The Ghanaian writer Amma Darko describes this experience in his novel *Faceless* (1991) in which the main character is forced into prostitution. Disillusionment is also experienced by those who arrive at the airport and are directly placed in deportation camps such as Peter. He only knows Frankfurt airport and the deportation camp (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 269). Some refugees are allowed to stay for a while in the destination country because they have to undergo the asylum application procedure. During this period, they are not allowed to work. Moreover, they face racism and societal rejection. These are ever present topics in public and political discourses and are often stoked up by certain political parties in destination countries.

Symptomatic of these discourses is the story of Opoku Agyema, a Ghanaian student who wanted to continue studying in Germany after graduation but did not yet have the necessary amount of money on his bank account to warrant the legal right to stay in Germany as a foreign student:

They handcuffed me and took me to the court near St. Joseph's Church the next morning. The judge talked for five minutes. There were no interpreters, no lawyer. Then he announced his decision. I became an illegal person. By the way, after me there was a guy who said his name was 'Bild Deutschland.' A very young guy. I thought that was funny but the judge didn't think so, he yelled and screamed. They took me to Büren, to prison, and I was locked up there for three months. Why? What is my crime, I am a student, I have never stolen in my life. What is illegal about me? (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 58f., translation by authors)

Heribert Prantl calls out this unfair practice of the criminalization of migration that characterizes policies of EU countries:

First the West ruins the economies of developing countries, and then when people, flee their desolate homelands and make their way to Europe because they don't want to die or are simply looking for a better life, they are ridiculed as 'economic refugees' and treated like criminals. (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* 19.10.2013, translation by authors)



Accordingly, Opoku Agyema's verdict about Europe in general and Germany in particular is as follows: "The world is out of control and you Europeans want to buy time, to preserve your lives as they are for as long as possible. Germany? Never again. Let the Germans have their damned beautiful country all to themselves" (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 60, translation by authors). Despite his trauma Peter wants to try again, this time in Sweden "but it's difficult, and I hadn't thought that it's even more difficult when it's on record that you've already been deported once" (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 59, translation by authors). Similar comments are made by residents of 'The Valley' some of whom have tried to disembark to Europe three times. Peter has also made a new attempt to move to Spain after his failed trip to Germany. He still awaits the decision by the authorities. One explanation for the persistence of refugees is known to be the legends told in Africa about the endless opportunities in Europe. For example, Mohammed Bachar who is in Niger, a transit country, notes that:

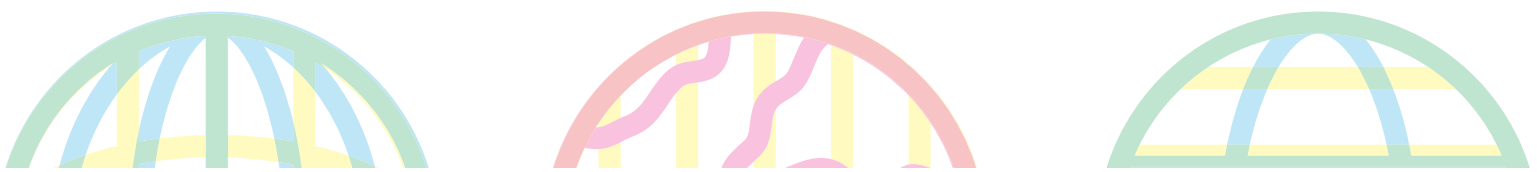
The refugees' experiences in a foreign country are never similar to their expectations prior to embarking on the journey; the jobs are worse, no one is welcome, the police chase refugees. For months refugees are stuck in the mountains, just waiting. But at home new people keep hearing new heroic stories of those who have arrived and because of that far too many still believe in the story of Europe as paradise (*Der Traum vom Leben* 163f., translation by authors)

An even simpler explanation for the persistence of refugees to embark on the dangerous journey to Europe is provided by Peter: "You can't feed your own children. If you then see a country that is better for you than your own then, as a father, you have a duty to go there." (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 268, translation by authors) In other words, Peter's remark suggests that there is no need for legends, instead precarious situations are the 'push' factors responsible for migration. This is demonstrated by the story of Mor, a Senegalese student, whose mother sold her property and jewellery to enable him to travel to Europe. However, the man who was supposed to give him the coveted Schengen visa disappeared with the money. This by no means tarnished his dream of migrating to Europe. On the contrary, his desire to travel to Europe became stronger after learning that a fellow student, Badara Djité, who lived next door, had been lucky enough to get the coveted visa. Djité was now living in France. The money he earned enabled him to tear down his house back home and erect a two-storey building that towered over the old shack.

From then on Mor only spoke of going to Europe like Badara, who was neither smarter nor more capable than he was [...]. His desire to leave had become so overpowering that he was on the verge of losing his mind. He became withdrawn, spoke to no one and did not even leave his room" (*Die Piroge*, 30, translation by authors). Thus, Mor did not waver from taking the life-threatening journey on a boat. Reverend David Ugolor brings this core problem – migration and economic precarity – to the attention of a German journalist:

Cows in Europe get more money than people in Africa. The subsidies for your agricultural sectors are bleeding us dry. Did you know that we lose 25 billion dollars in export revenues every year because of your subsidies? Your development aid is a joke in comparison to your subsidies. And your immigration policy is killing us because you are 'fishing' doctors and computer experts out of Africa with a visa strategy that rejects everyone else. You are getting oil and gold and gas from Africa. Europe and America are only interested in maximizing profit, nothing else. (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 116, translation by authors)

Against this backdrop, former German president and economist, Horst Köhler, remarks: "Europe is fishing Africa's coasts empty and coldly refers its critics to the treaties it has signed with African governments" (*Die Piroge*, 86, translation by authors).



2.3 Narrative Maps of Migration: Mapping the Territory

As mentioned at the beginning of this article our focus on maps and mapping has two related goals: helping European audiences create more complex mental maps of Africa and creating a complete “life cycle” of migration – a narrative program based on multiperspectivity and polyphony rather than a few one-dimensional master narratives. In other words, a more varied narrative program inviting us to not only challenge mental maps based on stereotypes and preconceptions, but also inviting us to try out alternative routes and itineraries, different kinds of stories allowing us to map unknown territory. The discussion in this section is a reflection on the territory mapped by the stories about migration that have been discussed in section 2.2. Specifically, the focus is on how mental maps about Europe change or whether they remain static at different points in the itinerary of migration. In a further step, we also discuss the effects of these changing or static mental maps within the broader context of stories of migration in the Sub-Saharan African context.

Within the context of stories of migration in the Senegalese context, and judging from some cultural products such as proverbs and songs, it can be argued that the general attitude towards migration or human mobility is primarily positive. The proverb “*Gór dëkull fennë*” (Engl. translation: “A man’s home can be anywhere”) mentioned in section 2.1 is one of many proverbs which emphasizes the necessity of human mobility in Senegalese cultures. At this point it is important to distinguish between the terms mobility and migration. As Schapendonk (*Finding Ways*, 4) argues the concept of migration implies stasis and linearity which Schapendonk dismisses as a myth. Favell (*Eurostars and Eurocities*, 10) has also argued that the myth of migration assumes that “all legally welcome ‘immigrants’ must be on some kind of track to full migration: to inclusion, incorporation, permanent settlement, and one day become a citizen among others.” Unlike migration the term mobility proceeds on the central premise that human “trajectories evolve in expected and unexpected ways” (Schapendonk *Finding Ways*, 4). The trajectories of African “movers” and “wayfarers” in Europe (see Schapendonk, 4) cannot be reduced or limited to specific places and time. Taking the idea of mobility into consideration, it seems plausible to argue that “*Gór dëkull fennë*” is an expression that foregrounds an openness to idea of human mobility within the Senegalese cultural context.

That migration, inspite of its implications of linearity and stasis, is a topic embraced in Senegalese cultures can be seen in other cultural products such as songs by various (contemporary) Senegalese artists. As the discussion in section 2.1 shows songs in the 1980s by artists such as Xalam (1984) and Youssou N’dour (1984) speak highly of migrants that have embarked on the journey from Africa to Europe. The songs’ lyrics praise the resilience and honour the accomplishments of African emigrants such as supporting families back home. This is an example of how these songs arguably mirror a larger narrative *on* migration in the Senegalese context that is to say, migrating to Europe yields economic gain for the individual and society. It can be argued that these songs play a role in creating a mental map of Europe or a narrative *on* migration (see Gebauer and Sommer “Beyond Vicarious Storytelling”, 6) in which Europe is portrayed as a place of greener pastures for African migrants.

But it would be simplistic to claim that songs by Senegalese artists primarily reinforce narrative of migration. As discussed in section 2.1 songs from the 2000s onwards such as *Samba le berger* by Wasis Diop (2001), *Modou-Modu* by Abou Guité Seck (2004), *Immigré* by Ñominka bi (1993) and *Émigration* by Omar Pène (2006) challenge the positive connotation associated with migration to Europe in Senegalese culture. They do so by critiquing the precarious conditions that young Senegalese migrants are subjected to in Europe especially while in transit. The songs analogously highlight the diasporic idea of a “return” to the homeland – Africa. ‘Home’, as the lyrics in Youssou N’dour’s song *Immigrés* say, ought to be the final destination of the African emigrant. This is also reiterated in Diogal Sakho’s song *Samba Alla* (2003). It can be argued that a focus on the ‘return’ to the homeland – Senegal



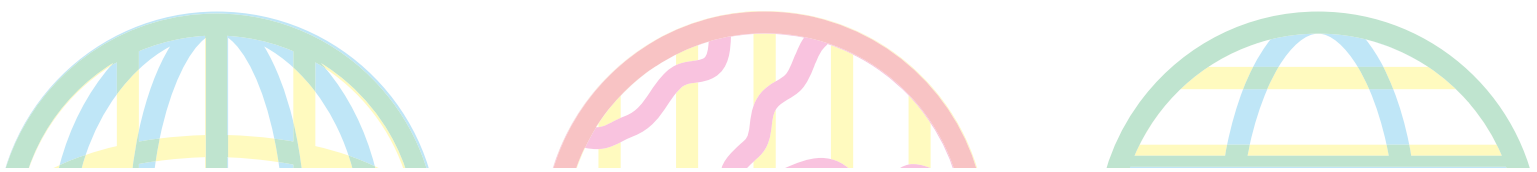
-- questions the implication in the Senegalese proverb “*Gór dëkull fennë*” that a home – for an African migrant – can indeed be anywhere. Here it is clear that the songs advocate for Africa, not Europe, as ‘home’.

The precarity of African migrants while in transit is also decried by written non-fictional and fictional texts about Senegalese and Ghanaian migrants that are introduced in section 2.2. At this point it is important to define the term transit and demarcate its usage in the scope of oral and written texts discussed in section 2.2. In literature on migration transit is a “blurred concept” (Düvell, *Transit Migration*, 416) and a contentious term that lacks an authoritative definition. According to Missbach (*Troubled Transit*, 13) a lack of consensus in definition of the term “has diminished the term’s applicability as a tool for analysis.” Nonetheless most scholars in migration studies agree that transit is a politicized concept imbued with Eurocentric connotations of illegality (See Missbach, 12) or as Düvell (418) has suggested transit is often used as a “code for illegal immigration” in political discourses in Europe. In an attempt to find a working definition for the concept, Missbach argues that transit cannot be defined according to a temporal limitation given that “final integration or settlement might not be the *ne plus ultra* given the cheaper options for mobility that allow people nowadays to live transnational lives and to be at home in several places almost simultaneously” (16). Defining transit according to a spatial limitation is also problematic because it is not always clear to migrants which destination country will become the final host country (see Missbach, 16). And finally given that transit migration can become a state of “permanent temporariness” defining the concept of transit according to fixed outcomes can prove problematic because there are not always foreseeable outcomes in the process of migration (see Missbach, 18).

For our purposes there seems to be a clear destination of the protagonists in the written texts analyzed in section 2.2 – Europe. These young migrants from different African countries have expectations – being able to live and work in Europe in order to fend for their families back home. But as the discussion about transit has shown, it is not surprising that the expectations and hopes of many of these migrants are shattered while in so-called ‘transit countries’. For these migrants transit is a state of limbo which literally means ‘on the border to hell’. As Missbach (7) argues the term ‘limbo’ can also be understood as “the suspension from the juridical-political existence of a person through the person’s exclusion from mainstream society” (see also Oelgemoller, 419). Disillusionment of migrants in the stories discussed in section 2.2 arises due to the conditions in refugee camps, by the inhumane treatment by border control police and even discrimination by fellow refugees.

But do these conditions hamper the migrant’s resilience to continue the journey that is, do they suddenly call it quits and return home? No. The refugee camp referred to as ‘The Valley’ in the travelogue *Der Traum vom Leben* (2011) is a microcosm – a setting – in which we learn that disillusionment of refugees is not tantamount to giving up the dream of reaching Europe. One of the main reasons is the ‘burden of migration’ that is to say, the burden of hopes and expectations carried by migrants who desire a better life. Migration then becomes a burden for migrants are the primary bearers of these false hopes and unforeseeable expectations, most times, of families and entire communities that have sponsored their journey to Europe. Going back home ‘empty-handed’ is not an option for many. The president of ‘The Valley’ is quoted as saying, “We are sitting here because we can’t travel home. It would be failure, defeat. It can’t be done.” (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 230, translation by authors) It is no wonder, therefore, that migrants such as Peter (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 59) have tried apply for asylum and have been deported. Peter and others like him have not yet given up hope. It can be argued that while in transit the resilience of refugees to take on the journey is enmeshed with the burden of being the bearers of hope of a better life.

Der Traum vom Leben is an example of what Gebauer and Sommer (6) refer to as vicarious storytelling, more specifically, ambassadorial storytelling (13). Vicarious storytelling is “the strategic use of migrants’



stories for humanitarian purposes.” It mainly involves narratives in which “somebody is speaking for someone else” (10).⁴ Ambassadorial storytelling is a specific form of vicarious storytelling which “draws on migrant life stories in order to call for humanitarian, social, or political action” (12). *Der Traum vom Leben* is written by a German journalist who, together with Peter, a Ghanaian migrant, attempts to re-trace Peter’s long journey to Europe. Not only do readers gain insights into the precarious situation of refugee camps such as ‘The Valley’ readers are implicitly called upon to empathize with Peter and other migrants by highlighting some reasons for their often unfathomable resilience. For instance, the scene in which the President of ‘The Valley’ is quoted as saying that going back home is not an option (*Der Traum vom Leben*, 230) despite the precarious situation in the refugee camp. This is an example of how ambassadorial storytelling can evoke readers’ empathy. The ‘burden of migration’ carried by young African migrants is a ‘new’ perspective to migration that readers in Europe have seldom heard about. Vicarious storytelling can open up new perspectives (see Gebauer and Sommer, 11) and perhaps new narratives on migration within the European context.

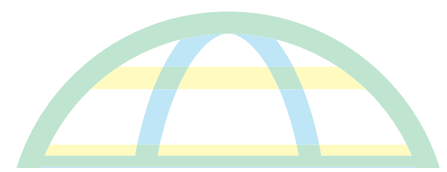
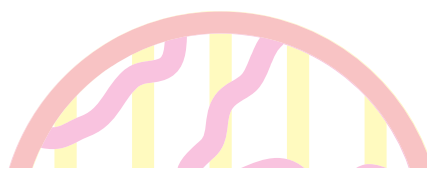
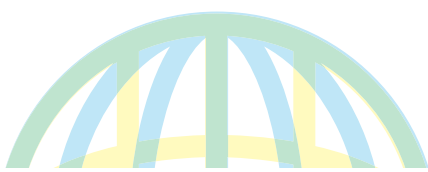
Vicarious storytelling also adds several levels of complexity to the often one-sided (populist) narratives on migration in Europe’s mainstream media. In *Der Traum vom Leben*, stories of the ‘burden of migration’ faced by young migrants in transit exist alongside heroic stories of those that have made it to Europe. Indeed in most cases these stories of transit can be overshadowed by heroic stories. Precisely, it can be argued that migration stories about precarity are left out in favor of stories about successful arrival and settling in to Europe. Mohammed Bachar, a young migrant in Niger, a transit country is quoted as saying: “[At] home people keep hearing new heroic stories of those who have arrived and because of that far too many still believe in the story of Europe as paradise.” (*Der Traum vom Leben* 163f., translation by authors) An immediate question that arises about the itinerary of migration is why the heroic story of arrival is more prominent than the story of precarity. A possible answer to this question can be that the heroic story easily fits into already existing narrative templates about migration and mobility in a country of origin. If cultural products such as proverbs and songs speak highly of migration and mobility chances are that stories about migrants that ‘beat all odds’ to arrive and settle in Europe will be widely consumed since they match familiar templates. The consumption of these heroic stories certainly goes hand-in-hand with and is solidified by other push factors for migration such as economic, social and political strife. It should be noted that heroic stories of migration do not exist in isolation but they do so alongside stories of precarity in transit.

The texts presented in section 2.2 can help us reflect on whether the dominant mental map of Europe as a place of greener pastures changes or remains static in the trajectories of African migrants. In the novel (*Die Pirogue*) by Ghanaian writer Abasse Ndione the rural community of Yassara is represented as a society in which the mental map of Europe as a place of salvation (from poverty) prevails. The remittances sent to Yassara by emigrants living in Europe in order to rectify the groundnut blight can be described as catalyzers that help to strengthen the already predominant narrative of ‘Europe as savior’. It appears that proponents of this narrative, such as Arame, Daba and the diaspora community of Yassara living in Europe, see the journey to Europe by able-bodied young Africans as the only remedy to the biting poverty facing their families and the environmental hazards facing their village. Arame is ready to give up all her savings in order for her fifteen year-old son Talla to embark on the life-threatening journey to Europe. Daba, a young widow, is willing to leave her children behind and embark on the journey to Europe via a pirogue. Both women’s social circumstances are shaped by precarious economic circumstances. This is coupled by the absence of a social welfare system that can cushion their plight and poor governance. These precarious economic and political conditions are not only important ‘push’ factors for migration to Europe they also arguably solidify the narrative of Europe as savior. Therefore, while still in their country of origin, many prospective migrants will have hopeful expectations about Europe. Daba’s (*Die Pirogue*) radical motto – “*Barça walla Barsakh!*” (Engl. Translation: “Reach Barcelona or die!”) – exemplifies the expectation of reaching Europe. Certainly the



risk of death is implied in this statement, but at this point it seems that Daba finds the risk of the journey to Europe worthwhile.

To sum up, the 'narrative map' of migration that is, the stories told by migrants on their itineraries, can be said to be cyclical and polyphonous. The point of departure appears to be culturally informed by narrative templates such as proverbs, which highlight a society's inclination to mobility and migration. The mental map of Europe as the place of greener pastures fits well into this template, also given the push factors that catalyze the urgency for young people to go to Europe in search of a brighter future. However, there are counter-narratives to the stories about Europe as the place of 'paradise.' These counter-narratives have their validity in lived experiences and first-hand accounts by migrants in transit. Transit is mainly characterized by stories of precarity. However, these stories of precarity tend to be overshadowed, even left out, in favor of heroic stories of arrival. These heroic stories make it back to the home country and freshly inspire a new set of prospective young migrants that (desire to) embark on the risky journey to Europe.



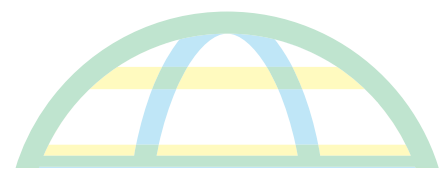
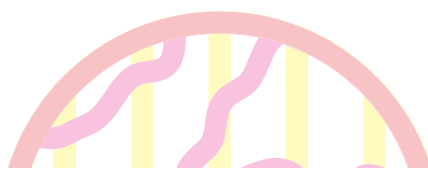
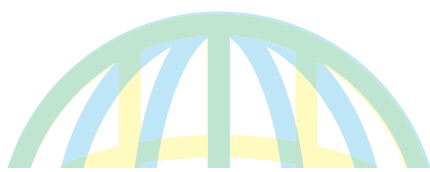
3. Conclusion

The discussion in this paper makes apparent the need for reshaping Europe-Africa relations. Despite the negative experiences by migrants in transit and host countries, many nonetheless stick to their plans of living and working in Europe. This is because, on the one hand, they see no future prospects in their own countries. On the other, they are aware that some of their fellow migrants have succeeded in settling in Europe. Given Europe's role aggravating of economic crises facing many African countries (such as 'dumping' through agricultural subsidies, overfishing in African waters, and the exploitation of Africa's natural resources), a new migration policy on migration means turning away from an approach to migration that discriminates African countries to a new one that considers African migrants (skilled) workers who will make a positive contribution to the welfare system rather than, as populist discourse often purports, deplete it. This new approach is characterized by a change in perspective that prioritizes migrants' concerns and their potential. Migrants are not only an economic pillar in the countries of origin, but also in the host countries, where demography and labor shortages call for immigration as the logical solution. This also means taking the African diaspora seriously as a social asset and as mediator between the two worlds, given that members of the diaspora have long played this role. Migrants are in a better position to find solutions and engage in discussions with policy makers in Europe about the causes of migration flows to Europe.



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Endnotes

¹ With respect to the United States, Groody (2018, 78) identifies six of the “most vocal players in the immigration debate”, i.e. vigilante organizations, federal enforcement officials, congressional leaders, corporations, church leaders, and human rights advocates. Immigrants themselves are not considered as an independent group in these debates. It should be noted that while the stakeholders themselves may vary among countries, the exclusion of the migrant perspective seems to be typical even in those countries with a large number of diasporic communities, like Germany.

² See also other destination countries in the policy report by Aly Tandian (“Carnet de route”).

³ For further reading on how crises in agriculture, among other things, foster migration in Senegal see policy report by Aly Tandian (“Carnets de route”).

⁴ Within the context of the stories discussed in section 2.2 the most important contribution of the concept of vicarious storytelling is that it fosters the idea of perspective-taking by European audiences (cf. Gebauer and Sommer, 10). However, the concept of vicarious storytelling opens up room for further discussion about limitations of telling a story on behalf of someone else. This can be seen as contentious and may raise concerns in cases where, for example, a White journalist, as in the case of the travelogue *Traum vom Leben* “walks in the shoes of” and “speaks on behalf of” an African immigrant. The discussion about what ‘genuine’ allyship – a term that is increasingly used in critical race theory (CRT) – entails is crucial here. Primarily associated with feminist discourse, the term ally refers to “people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society’s patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns” (Bishop, 176). Different forms of (vicarious) storytelling are almost by default subject to power structures that are present in society and culture. Broadening this concept to include a systematic analysis of the ways that power structures (race, gender, class) are dismantled by vicarious narratives can yield new insights for different disciplines and fields in which discourses of migration play a central role.





opportunities

for a fair narrative on migration