



**Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung  
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**Workshop**

**Those Who Stay: how out-migration affects West African societies**

**Sixth Conference of the  
Research Group “Integration and Conflict along the Upper Guinea Coast”  
at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology**

**12–13 April 2018**

**Venue:** Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany

Most current discourses on international migration in the so-called Global North – be it in state or alehouse politics, within academia, or among NGO activists – focuses on the (mostly) negative social, economic, political and demographic consequences that are assumed to be the overall outcomes of South-North migration on the Global North. Such feared consequences include ghettoization, the erosion of the welfare state, increased social inequality, religious extremism and terrorism. Models and measures of integration are being developed to prevent such negative effects, and prohibitive legal provisions sought to discourage immigration. No matter which political agenda those participating in the migration discourse and practice follow, and whether they welcome or reject immigration, most debates focus on the (assumed) effects of South-North migration on the societies of the Global North and largely ignore the social, cultural, political and economic consequences of out-migration on the sending societies, as well as the voices of those affected by them there. Where such effects and voices are mentioned, speculation rather than empirical knowledge tends to dominate, not least due to the fact that empirical data is scarce and lacks in-depth analysis.

African migration, in particular, is portrayed as the result of poverty and conflicts, the absence of good governance and stable statehood in the countries where it begins, and of desperate measures taken by those dispossessed by a world-system characterized by the uneven distribution of resources and wealth. This concentration on those seeking a better life in North America and Europe also ignores the fact that the majority of migration today takes place within the region both within and across national boundaries. This is also the case where West Africa is concerned, a region characterized by a long history of both regional and global migration.

In organizing this conference, we aim to change current perspectives on migration, and redress that absence of empirical data and analysis. Taking the example of West Africa, we want to shift the focus to the effects of out-migration on the societies and people who remain in their societies of origin. We are aware of the volatility of current and historical contexts of migration. Migration flows are influenced by a diverse set of variables – e.g. economic pulling and pushing factors, political turmoil – that are subject to (sometimes sudden and unpredictable) change, as recent years have demonstrated. We will analyse different dimensions of life that are affected by the dynamics of out-migration.

Transnational networks and the interaction of diaspora communities with those ‘back home’ affect West African realities at various levels – for example as the result of remittances sent to families in need. How do such remittances influence social hierarchies and dependencies at the level of families and households? Out-migration has immediate effects on families and communities who are left behind. Children who leave cannot look after their ageing parents; parents who leave often leave their children behind, who then grow up with relatives back home, while their parents work and live elsewhere, and often in faraway places. We will investigate whether, and how, generational ties, social hierarchies and support systems related to them are subject to change due to out-migration and changed patterns of social interaction and socio-economic dependencies.

Remittances are also transferred in support of specific political leaders and parties and have effects on politics, policies and concepts and practices of civil society. How is the diaspora’s involvement in national politics perceived? How have governments accommodated diaspora’s financial and economic influences? What are regional blocks’, like ECOWAS’s, priorities in regulating intra-regional migration? How is out-migration viewed in terms of development at ‘home’? Are remittances perceived as a (legitimate) tool for development by those who stay, an (unwanted) strategy to generate dependencies, a left-over of colonialism, a symbol of North-South inequality? We will explore what role migration plays in building capacity and enhancing West Africa’s stock of human capital. Do migrants become a source of influence by providing intellectual, social and financial capital that helps inspire entrepreneurship at home or are they more likely to discourage such possibilities by dominating choices of what is seen as possible and as impossible?

At the level of concepts and imaginations we will examine how experiences of migration are communicated by those who have left to those who remain and how these narratives influence local concepts and images of ‘here’ and ‘there’. We will explore how concepts of ‘here’ and ‘there’ relate to ‘real’ experiences thereof and to decision-making in terms of migration. How do those who stay imagine the lives of those who have left, and on what forms of information and social interactions do they base their concepts and imaginations? Transnational interaction impacts on the concepts of life-styles incorporated and communicated by those abroad. They affect perceptions and conceptualizations of social relations and social organization, hierarchies related to gender and generation, mutual support systems, consumption and spending practices both at the level of households, and on communities and the state.

We will also discuss whether, and how, various types of migration are viewed differently by those who stay. How do West Africans categorize and evaluate migrants in terms of their reasons for migration, e.g. those who migrate for economic or educational reasons versus those who flee persecution or discrimination (by the state, community, family ...)? How, for example, are women who migrate to Europe to apply for asylum to escape FGM, or men who claim persecution on the basis of their homosexuality perceived in their country of origin?

The perils of migration are now very well known, especially in the case of migration to Europe. We will explore what local discourses exist about the hazardous travel routes (across the Sahara and the Mediterranean) and (how) they impact what people think about migration and migrants. We will address the question of whether, and to what extent, knowledge of the dangers involved in migration influences people’s choices, concepts and actions.

Other issues to look into relate to the question of how out-migration (of mostly young people) influences youth culture among West Africans in West Africa, whether youth culture makes reference to the experience of migration and (imagined and narrated) life abroad and how it influences young people’s aspirations and actions.

We welcome abstracts of about 300 words to be sent to [knoerr@eth.mpg.de](mailto:knoerr@eth.mpg.de) by **31 August 2017**. We expect all speakers to participate in the complete program of our conference and to submit their (revised) paper to us within 4 months after the conference for publication purposes. Travelling expenses of speakers will be covered by our institute.