



‘JE PENSAIS QU’IL ÉTAIT LA VIE EN ROSE’

The changeability of aspirations and
trajectories of West-African migrants
within Europe

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Elsa Kriesels

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Author: Elsa Kriesels
Student Number: S4155955
Supervisor: Dr. J. Schapendonk
Study: Master Human Geography
Specialisation: Globalization, Migration and Development
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“Je pensais qu’il était la vie en rose” (*I thought it was a bright life*¹) by Samba (40 years old, from Senegal) interview April 17th, 2016, Bergamo.

¹ All quotes from non-English speakers in this thesis are translated by me unless otherwise specified.

Preface

In April and May 2014, I was in Ghana for my final bachelor research, which was about the imaginations of Ghanaian youngsters about a migration to Europe. I spoke to lots of students, young people, but also adults, about the image they had about Europe and their potential migration aspiration. Lots of students at the university in Cape Coast told me they wanted to go to Europe to do their masters there or to work for a few years to ‘earn a lot of money’. They all seemed to believe that with a master certificate achieved in Europe, they could find a better job back home and that master educations in Europe were ‘soft and easy going’ and with ‘limited stress and pressure’, compared to education in Ghana. Other reactions of Ghanaian people when I talked to them about Europe were: ‘oh, so you have a lot of money?’ (tourist office worker) and ‘life in Europe is much better, because of the money’ (taxi driver). These overall positive images about life, work and study in Europe intrigued me.

Not only did I learn a lot from my bachelor research and experience in Ghana and was I urged to learn more about this topic, I also fell in love with the African culture, hospitality and people. Not surprisingly, were my eyes drawn to the research internship possibility in the framework of the research project of dr. J. Schapendonk about African migration towards the EU. This gave me the opportunity to build onto my obtained knowledge and to deal with this interesting target group again. Therefore, I would first of all like to express my thankfulness to my supervisor dr. J Schapendonk. I feel honoured to have been able to participate in the VENI-research project and I am thankful for all the support, motivation and understanding during my research and writing process.

Furthermore, I want to thank my research partner Iris Poelen, with whom I have done almost all fieldwork together. Walking together in the Bijlmer in Amsterdam, in the streets of Bergamo and approaching migrants together was far more fun, comfortable and achieving than when I would have had to do it all alone. Next to that, we had a great time together in our apartment in Bergamo and developed a friendship. Overall: together makes you stronger.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my friends, family and respondents. My friends for studying, writing and struggling with their theses next to me in the library; thanks for all your help, advice and distractions during the analysing and writing process. Thanks to my family for all the support and interest in my research. Thanks to all my respondents in the Netherlands and in Italy. Thank you for the sharing of your personal stories, your trust and hospitality. I am very happy to have getting to know all of you.

Nijmegen, March 2017

Abstract

Over the past few years, an increasing number of migrants is coming from West-Africa to Europe searching for a better or safer life. European countries are having more and more problems with the huge flows of migrants, not to mention the death tolls on sea and the growing public fear. Stricter border controls do not seem to stop migration, but only make the consequences worse. This thesis focuses on the ongoing mobility of West-African migrants within Europe in order to gain insights to contest these problems. Building on previous migration research, this study focuses on how the aspirations and trajectories of West-African migrants changed in different times and places during their travels within Europe. Research findings are based on four months ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands and Italy from February till May 2016. It becomes clear that a combination of different factors, created by the possibility to imagine different lives in other places, influenced by social networks, lead to the forming and reforming of aspirations. This thesis suggests to use an aspiration/ability model in combination with schemes regarding the positions and times of migration to see how changed aspirations influence mobility choices. This learns us that although aspirations to 'make it' in Europe are persistent, the 'where' and 'when' to fulfil these aspirations often change. However, when migrants do not have the ability to fulfil their aspirations, they stay in an involuntary immobility, compromise by having a transnational life or just wait for 'something to happen'.

Ces dernières années, de plus en plus de migrants en provenance d'Afrique de l'Ouest cherchent en Europe une meilleure vie ou une vie plus sûre. Les pays européens ont de plus en plus de problèmes avec ce flux énorme de migrants, sans parler des morts en mer et de l'angoisse publique. Les contrôles frontaliers plus stricts ne semblent pas arrêter la migration, mais ne font plutôt qu'empirer les choses. Cette thèse se concentre sur cette mobilité continue des migrants d'Afrique de l'Ouest en Europe afin d'obtenir des idées pour répondre à ces problèmes. Se basant sur de précédents travaux de recherche, cette étude décrit comment les aspirations et les trajets des migrants changent selon les variations de temps et de lieu pendant leurs voyages en Europe. Les conclusions sont basées sur des recherches ethnographiques de travail sur le terrain durant quatre mois aux Pays-Bas et en Italie de février à mai 2016. Il devient évident qu'une combinaison de facteurs différents, la possibilité de s'imaginer des vies différentes dans des lieux différents, souvent influencée par les réseaux sociaux, crée une formation et reformation d'aspirations. Cette thèse suggère d'utiliser un modèle d'aspiration/capacité combiné aux plans concernant les positions et temps de migration pour voir comment ces aspirations changeantes influencent les choix au niveau de mobilité qui nous aide à comprendre que, même si les aspirations de réussite en Europe sont persistantes, les 'où' et 'quand' des migrants, pour réaliser leurs aspirations changent souvent. Cependant, quand les migrants estiment qu'ils n'ont pas la possibilité de réaliser leurs aspirations, ils restent dans une immobilité involontaire, font soit le compromis d'une vie transnationale, soit attendent 'pour que quelque chose se passe'.

Table of Contents

List of boxes, figures and tables.....	6
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1. Societal relevance	8
1.2. Scientific relevance	10
1.3. Research objective and questions	11
1.4. Thesis outline	12
2. Theorizing migrants' aspirations and its influences.....	13
2.1. Mobility and migration theories	13
2.1.1. Ongoing mobility and changeable routes	14
2.2. Motivations and aspirations	15
2.2.1 The imagination	16
2.2.2. Social networks	17
2.2.3 Temporal and spatial dimensions.....	18
2.3. Ability	20
2.4. Conclusion	21
3. Methodology	23
3.1. Research strategy: Multi-sited ethnography	24
3.2. Qualitative research methods	25
3.3. Research setting and gaining access to respondents	27
3.4. Methodological reflections	30
3.4.1. Positionality of the researcher.....	32
3.4.2. Reflection on the collaboration.....	34
3.5. Data analysis	34
3.6. Conclusion	35

4. ‘A mind to go to Europe’: the forming of aspirations	36
4.1. Abstract aspirations.....	36
4.2. A chance, a destiny and a curious mind.....	42
4.3. A bright life.....	44
4.3.1. A European world hierarchy	45
4.3.2. The resistant dream of migrating to ‘the promising West’	46
4.4. Social networks.....	48
4.5. Conclusion	51
5. ‘A wish and a plan’: Changing aspirations and changing routes.....	53
5.1. The first steps	53
5.2. The next phase: changing aspirations	56
5.2.1. Changing imaginations	58
5.2.3. Dynamic social networks.....	59
5.2.4. Ability	61
5.3. Future aspirations: the wish to return.....	62
5.3.1. Ambiguous aspirations.....	64
5.4. Conclusion	66
6. Discussion and conclusion	67
6.1. Reflection and recommendations.....	68
References.....	70
Appendix: Overview of the respondents.....	75

List of boxes, figures and tables

Boxes

Box 1: A fieldwork day in the Bijlmer in Amsterdam, the Netherlands	23
Box 2: A fieldwork day in Bergamo, Italy	23

Figures

Figure 1: Migrants being rescued on the Mediterranean sea	7
Figure 2: Registered deaths in the Mediterranean Sea	9
Figure 3: Conceptual model	22
Figure 4: The routes of my respondents in Italy to and within Europe	39
Figure 5: The routes of my respondents in the Netherlands to and within Europe	40

Tables

Table 1: Number of registered first generation migrants living in Italy	27
Table 2: Inflow of registered immigrants in Italy	27
Table 3: Number of registered first generation migrants living in the Netherlands	28
Table 4: Inflow of registered immigrants in the Netherlands	28
Table 5: An overview of my respondents	29
Table 6: The journeys to and within Europe of my respondents in the Netherlands	41
Table 7: The journeys to and within Europe of my respondents in Italy	41

1. Introduction

Figure 1: Migrants being rescued on the Mediterranean sea



Source: *The International Cauldron* (<http://intca.org/2015/07/global-migration-crisis-part-two/>)

“Crise migratoire: l’hecatombe continue en Méditerranée” (*the bloodbath continues in the Mediterranean sea*) (*Le Monde*, April 22, 2016), “Honderden migranten omgekomen bij schipbreuk voor Libische kust” (*Hundreds of migrants have died in shipwreck off the Libyan coast*) (*De Volkskrant*, November 3, 2016), “Migrant death toll passes 5,000 after two boats capsized off Italy” (*The Guardian*, December 23, 2016). These headlines in European newspapers were not uncommon the last few years. In the early 21st century, Europe seems to be living through a maritime refugee crisis of historic proportions (The UN refugee Agency, 2015). Over the past few years, an increasing number of migrants have tried to make the dangerous journey by boat from North-Africa and the Middle East to Europe, hoping for a better and/or safer life. Hundreds of these people die before even reaching Europe. The countries where they travel to, are having more and more problems with the increasing flows of migrants and the end of the refugee crisis is nowhere in sight yet (UN Refugee Agency, 2015).

Since the 1960’s, a growing number of migrants from Africa is coming to Europe (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014). Last year, the majority of migrants were refugees that came from countries experiencing war, such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The others came from countries such as Somalia, Eritrea and Nigeria. For many years, the European continent has been overwhelmed with images of African migrants trying to enter ‘forte Europe’ (Salazar, 2010), causing many Europeans to assume that a majority of Africans wants to migrate to European ‘El Dorado’ (de Haas, 2008).

The general presumption outlined in the media is that millions of Africans are not fleeing extreme poverty or war, but are trying to enter Europe just searching for ‘a better life’. These so-called ‘gelukszoekers’ (*fortune hunters*) (*De Telegraaf*, June 18th, 2015), should directly be sent back to Africa, according to lots of European citizens. The European Union wants to stop migration from the African continent by stricter border controls, deportation and ‘deals’ concerning money, such as rewarding countries who are willing to cooperate or cutting of development aid (*Elsevier*, Octobre 19th, 2016). However, these statements are based on flawed assumptions about the causes of migration and sending people back or closing borders are not proper solutions for the migration crisis (Castles et al., 2014).

Furthermore, as social-cultural anthropologist Salazar claims in his articles (2010; 2011), the roots of migration and mobility lie in the imagination. ‘Perception’ and ‘imagining’ are new, emerging concepts to study forms of mobility. According to Salazar, we can understand the meanings behind contemporary migration phenomena by looking at these cultural images of mobility. People rarely travel to ‘unknown’ places anymore, but to places they already ‘know’ virtually because of the widespread images about them (Salazar, 2011, p. 577). Due to globalization and the following international migration flows, more and more people are exposed to the thought of emigrating. Especially people in developing countries say they wish or intend to migrate, which reflects some sort of imagining oneself as a migrant. In people’s mind, migration is not only a movement from A to B, but a packet of expected actions and consequences. The wish of people to migrate will often be based on ideas about a culturally defined ‘emigration object’ (Carling 2002, p. 15).

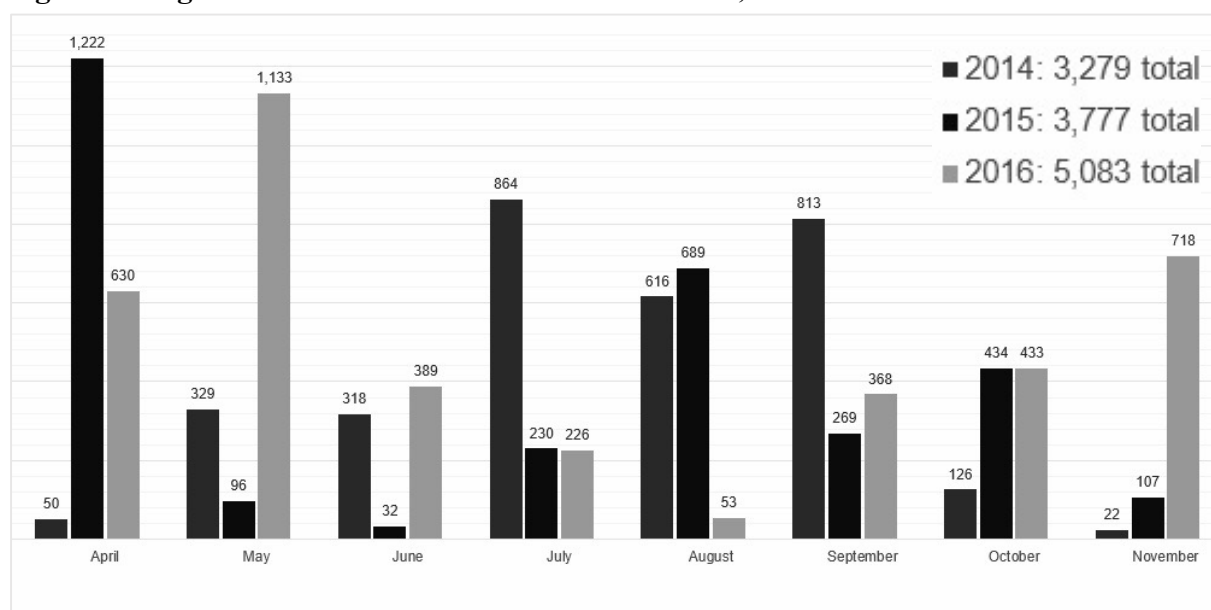
Globalization increased the awareness of opportunities of African people outside their continent and therefore people’s migration aspirations. People’s aspirations have been seen as one of the main drivers of migration (Carling 2002; Miller, 1976). However, most studies have been focused on migration in or from the place of origin, to or in the place of destination. Newer research on the other hand, has shown that migrants’ experience an ongoing mobility between different places. Traditional migration theories are insufficient to study these multiplicity of potential routes and migrants’ additional aspirations during their travels. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the aspirations of West-African migrants during their travels within Europe.

1.1. Societal relevance

The last couple of years, images of traditional boats overloaded with migrants trying to cross the European border have been dominating in the media. In a lot of European countries, there has been a growing public and political concern about irregular migration from Africa (Castles, et al., 2014; Kane & Leedy, 2013). These migrants are seen as a burden, because people think that they will stay in their country forever (although most migrants do not stay in the first country they arrive). This is seen as a danger, because citizens will then have to share some of their benefits with the migrants in their society. The coastal countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece have received the most international migrants and are having a lot of trouble with the rapidly growing number of migrants (Kane & Leedy, 2013). Moreover, due to the Dublin Convention that decides that migrants need to do their asylum requests in the first European country they enter.

This public fear of unwanted migrants (mostly associated with West-Africans) has led to an increase in land and maritime border controlling by EU countries. However, the controls have failed to restrain migration and only have led to migrants taking longer and more dangerous routes in order to reach Europe (Castles et al., 2014). In addition to the consequence that hundreds of people die each year during these journeys towards Europe (see figure 2), border controls seem to have an opposite effect: they cause people to settle permanently, because they have less possibilities to be mobile and also ensure that people do not simply return.

Figure 2: Registered deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, 2014 - 2016



Source: *Missing Migrants Project – International Organization for Migration (IOM)*
<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean>

This research on the aspirations of West-African migrants during their travels within Europe can provide more information about solutions for the above addressed problems, the fears of our societies and the future of migration policy, such as border regulations and asylum procedures. In November 2015, leaders from the EU and Africa discussed how to contest the causes of migration (Valetta Summit, 2015). The EU wants to invest substantially in development and poverty eradication in Africa, so that fleeing to Europe will not be necessary in long term. However, the problems are deep and structural and there is need for more research about this phenomenon.

The International Organisation for Migration predicts that the mass migration from Africa will definitely continue till 2050 (NOS.nl, November 11th, 2015). It is therefore important not only to invest in education, health care and food projects in Africa, but also to do research about the deeper causes and drivers of migration in order to contest the structural migration problems. Aspirations have since long been seen as main drivers of migration (Miller, 1976). Carling (2002) argues that the aspiration to migrate is a precondition for trying to migrate. Although Italy, Spain and Greece are the number one destination countries, previous studies (Schuster, 2005) and surveys (The UN refugee Agency, 2015) showed that ninety

percent of the migrants in a southern European country have the intention to travel onwards to northern Europe for better assistance and work opportunities. Recent research shows that destinations and positions of migrants change during their travels (Meeteren, Engbersen & van San, 2009; Schrooten, Salazar & Dias, 2015).

To tackle the problems around migration from West-Africa to Europe, we need to understand migration from Africa to and within Europe and especially why and under what conditions aspirations of migrants change in order to understand migrants' trajectories. This research will therefore focus on the changeability of migrants' aspirations during their trajectories within Europe, so that the EU can use these insights for (future) migration policies. This research is specifically important for the policymakers at European Commission DGs Migration and Home Affairs, who rule in the policy areas such as asylum, migration and border control (<http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/>).

1.2. Scientific relevance

Traditional migration studies have mainly been focused on fixed locations: migration in and from place A (place of origin), in and to place B (place of destination) and there has been less attention to the trajectory in between, the movement of migrants and transnational migration (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Traditional migration theories are therefore insufficient to study contemporary mobility processes (Schrooten et al., 2015). By focusing on migrants' ongoing mobility in between places, this research extends on traditional migration literature.

Next to that, this research contributes to previous research on migration and migrants' aspirations, by focusing on the aspirations of migrants *during* their travels. Due to consequences of globalization such as cheaper, faster and easier transport and communication in the world, people's ability and aspiration to migrate increased (Castles et al., 2014). People's aspirations to migrate and overcoming the barriers to migrate are preconditions to actually migrate (Carling, 2002). Nevertheless, aspirations can tend toward mobility, temporal mobility and to immobility (Ferro, 2006).

However, there is not much literature written and research done about the aspirations of migrants during their journeys. Most studies that are focused on migratory aspirations, are focused on the aspirations of migrants before they leave their home country (Carling, 2002; Miller, 1976; Ferro, 2006) or when settled in a country (Meeteren et al., 2009). Since lots of migrants experience an ongoing mobility consisting of a multiplicity of potential routes that are often unstable (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schrooten et al., 2015), destinations and positions can change along the way (Meeteren et al., 2009). This indicates that aspirations can also change over time and in different places.

By focusing on migrants' aspirations during mobility processes in different countries, this research will try to find an explanation for how, when and under what condition aspirations can change during their travels and how this influences migrants' trajectories. As a result, we will be able to better understand African migration to and within Europe. Moreover, seeing aspirations as something dynamic instead of something statically, this research contributes to previous literature and studies about migration, mobility and aspirations.

1.3. Research objective and questions

Building further on my bachelor research about imaginations and reasons of Ghanaian youngsters to migrate to Europe, my master research explores the rest of the story of West-African migrants. My bachelor research showed that lots of Ghanaian people have a very convincing and positive imagination about an emigration to Europe. With my master research, I hoped to find answers to questions such as: what happens when West-African migrants manage to cross the European border? Does it meet their expectations? Do their imaginations change? What is their next step? What are they hoping, expecting and aspiring to find in Europe?

My master research is situated in the VENI-research project of dr. Joris Schapendonk ‘Fortress Europe as a mobile space?’, which focuses on the mobility of West-African migrants within Europe, in which I was one of the research assistants. With a shared focus on the trajectories of West-African migrants within Europe, my specific research focus is on the changeability of migrants’ aspirations during their travels within Europe. For this research project, my master colleague Iris Poelen and I conducted fieldwork together over a period of four months in as well the Netherlands as Italy, from February 2016 until May 2016.

In this research, I have thus focused on the aspirations of West-African migrants during their mobility to and within Europe. The objective of this research is to gain insight in the role that aspirations of West-African migrants play in their mobility to and within Europe, in order to understand why and for what reasons West-African migrants move to and within Europe. The research question I am addressing in my thesis is:

How and why do aspirations of West-African migrants in Europe change and how does this changeability influence their mobility choices?

Which I answer using two sub questions:

- How are aspirations of West-African migrants to go to Europe being formed?

To be able to see if and how aspirations change, it is necessary to investigate how aspirations are being formed. Through this question, this research will examine the factors that contribute to the forming of an aspiration before migrating to Europe. Moreover, it is important to stress that there will not only be a focus on the economic dimensions of aspirations, but also on personal, familial, social and cultural dimensions of aspirations. Furthermore, I will take the concept of the imagination into account, since different studies show that the possibility of people to imagine future lives in other places influences the aspiration to migrate (Pajo, 2008; Pelican, 2013; Vigh, 2009). Additionally, social networks will be addressed, since these networks can bind migrants across space and time and therefore can influence migration aspirations and decisions by extending the imagined future (Crivello, 2014). It is essential to look at the forming of aspirations in order to distinguish the different factors that help reform or change migrants’ aspirations in a later stage of their journey towards or within Europe. The second question is then as follows:

- To what extent do aspirations of West-African migrants change once they are in Europe?

By answering this question, I will illustrate how and to what extent aspirations of West-African migrants (have) change(d) within Europe. It is important to take temporal and spatial dimensions in aspirations into account, because places (Crivello, 2014) and times (Cwerner, 2001) play an important role in constructing and constraining dreams and actions within migration. Secondly, social networks keep playing a role after migrating (Hamer, 2008) and it is important to stress that social networks are uncertain and dynamic (Pathriage & Collyer, 2011).

Finally, to explain how changed aspirations influence migrants' trajectories, it is important to take the ability of migrants into account. Even though the aspiration of a migrant might change when moving to another place, he might not have the ability to move, leading to involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002). The investigation of these questions will provide insights on the aspirations of West-African migrants during their travels to and within Europe, which can lead to an explanation of why and how aspirations change and how this influences their mobility choices.

1.4. Thesis outline

This thesis consists of five chapters after the introduction. In chapter two, the theoretical framework is presented, discussing mobility- and migration theories, the concepts of motivations, aspirations and imaginations, followed by the social network theory and the aspiration/ability model. In chapter three, the methodological framework is set out, in which the research strategy, methods and setting are explained, followed by the methodological reflections and data analysis. Chapter four and five are empirical chapters, in which the stories of the migrants are central. Chapter four describes how aspirations are being formed before migrating to Europe, acknowledging abstract aspirations and taking the importance of the concepts of imagination and social networks into account. In chapter five, the aspirations of West-African migrants within Europe are being discussed. The first part is about the aspirations just after arrival. In the second part their journeys, lives and aspirations develop and the last part discusses their future aspirations. Finally, chapter six discusses the main research findings and gives a conclusion by answering the main research question. Moreover, a section on research limitations, reflection and recommendations for further research and policy are presented.

2. Theorizing migrants' aspirations and its influences

Mobility is rooted in the history, daily life and experiences of people. Migration can be seen as one form of mobility, defined by the United Nations as 'a change of residence' (de Bruijn, 2001: 3). This however implies a certain length of stay and just one place, while there are people who move frequently, or between different places. Castles et al. (2014) see migration as a collective action that arises out of social, economic and/or political change with multiple motivations. A lot of theories on migration have been developed since the late nineteenth century, which differ in assumptions, thematic focus and analysis. Different theories have different views on migration and can therefore complement each other. Thereby, it is questionable if developing one theory for different forms of migration is useful, because motivations are often manifold.

2.1. Mobility and migration theories

Generally believed, migration is motivated by geographical differences in income, employment and opportunities (Castles et al., 2014). After Ravensteins 'laws of migration' (1885), Lee (1966) comes up with a set of factors that either repel or attract people to a place. These factors affect people in different ways. Push and pull models are one of the earliest contributions to migration studies, based on factors that push people out of places of origin and pull them into places of destination. This theory states that the migrant compares different opportunities and selects the best opportunity. A push factor is a reason for someone to be unsatisfied about his or her life situation. A pull factor is about an opportunity that attracts a person to a certain place. Although this seems to be an attractive model to analyse multiple motives and aspirations, it is unclear how these different motives combine together. These models can for example not explain return migration and do not take other influences during the journey of the migrant into account. Moreover, most migrants do not only come from the poorest countries or go to the richest countries or the country with the best opportunities, as suggested by push and pull models.

Newer theories, such as the migration system theory and migration transition theories see migration as an intrinsic part of broader processes of development, social transformation and globalization (Castles et al., 2014). The migration systems theory (Mabogunje, 1970), highlights the need to examine both ends of migration flows and studies all linkages between the places concerned. This theory argues that the role of flows of information and ideas shape migration systems. These flows of ideas and information are instrumental: they increase the ability of migrants, but also change people's aspirations. Feedback mechanisms to the place of origin, such as (social) remittances can increase the abilities and aspirations to migrate. Zelinsky (1971) stated that development processes are associated with increasing levels of migration. Transit theories conceptualize migration as a function of capabilities and aspirations to move that increase with development. However, this theory says that aspirations to migrate decrease beyond a certain level of development (Castles et al., 2014), while in reality this is not always the case.

Another point of criticism on classical migration theories, such as historical-structural approaches and functionalist theories, is the ruling out of human agency: the limited, but real ability of people to make independent choices (Castles et al., 2014). Van der Velde and van Houtum (2003) state that migrants take strategic, however not fully rational, decisions to move or stay, because they are not entirely informed about all alternatives and depend on social networks. They speak of a threshold of indifference that people need to pass before being mobile. This threshold separates the side of home from another side without ease or comfort. After crossing this first threshold, a second threshold comes up: the locational threshold, which is passed when a person decides to move. They then speak of a third threshold: the trajectory threshold, that someone has to pass after deciding to move. This threshold involves factors that could prevent their mobility or influence their destination.

Although it can be important to take these thresholds into account because people do need to pass certain thresholds when migrating, it is necessary to emphasize that a person does not necessarily decide on which route he wants to take after deciding to move, or feel at ease before deciding to move. So these thresholds are likely to be passed in a different sequence. That leads us to the next paragraph.

2.1.1. Ongoing mobility and changeable routes

Migration has traditionally been seen as a direct, purposeful and intentional process from one state of fixity (place of origin) to another (place of destination) in the social sciences (Cresswell, 2006). Social scientists and geographers assumed that people want to remain in the place they migrated to. However, not all groups fit this definition (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schrooten et al., 2015). When Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc (1992) introduced the concept of transnationalism, which is about the maintaining of social relationships in more than one geographical place, there was a new focus on the possibility of migrants to be attached to as well the place of destination as the place of origin at the same time. With the 'new mobilities paradigm', the importance of multiple mobilities is emphasized (Sheller & Urry, 2006), influenced by globalization processes that increase the ability of migrants to maintain social network ties over long distances. The social capital that derives from these social networks, together with financial capital, can affect people's capability and aspiration to migrate (Castles et al., 2014).

However, transnationalism does not involve different forms of mobility and the possibility of social networks between more than just the country of origin and the country of destination, while lots of migrants experience an ongoing mobility that consists of a multiplicity of potential routes. Different circumstances keep migrants on the move and sustain migration circuits. Mobility can be seen as a series of departures and arrivals (Schuster, 2005). Movements can range from short-term temporary movements to permanent migration or immobility (Ferro, 2006) and it is important to distinguish between what people originally imagine and what they actually end up doing.

Among other, the research of Collyer (2007), Schapendonk and Steel (2014), Schrooten et al. (2015) and Withaekx, Schrooten and Geldof (2015), shows this ongoing mobility. In the article of Schrooten et al. (2014) appears that a majority of Brazilian migrants passed through a lot of other locations before reaching their end destination in Belgium or the UK. The article

of Withaecx et al. (2015) shows the trajectories of Brazilian and Moroccan migrants in Belgium, also marked by an ongoing mobility. Finally, the research of Schapendonk and Steel (2014) shows the ongoing migration of Sudanese and Nigerians in Europe. In these cases, migration is not a movement from A to B, but an ongoing journey between different places. These routes are often unstable and destinations and positions can change. However, these studies did not take the changeability of aspirations after migrants' first periods and journeys within the EU into account, which can influence their (future) trajectories. The following paragraph will discuss the concepts of motivations and aspirations in relation to migration.

2.2. Motivations and aspirations

De Bruijn (2001) already stated that migration is more than just a movement from A to B in geographical space alone: it is a form of human behaviour influenced by different motives, desires, aspirations and commitments. This means that migrants could move for economic reasons, but at the same time flee political oppression or aspire to live closer to family. The concept of 'motivation' is a much used concept to explain migration. This concept is broader than the concept of aspirations and is about the reasons people have to leave a place or to go to a certain place. According to the self-determination theory (Xu and Wu, 2016, p. 6), motivations can be divided in an intrinsic and an extrinsic type. The intrinsic motivation is caused by an interest or enjoyment in the action (I do this, because I want to), while the extrinsic motivation is driven by pressures (I do this, because it will benefit me in the future). In migration studies, there has been a lot of attention to motivations for people to move to another place.

Aspirations on the other hand, refer to "future goals of individuals" (Xu and Wu, 2016, p. 5) and represent dreams, ambitions or desires. In 1976, Miller stated that the tendency to migrate is directly linked to economic aspirations. She defines this as the degree to which a person would exert oneself to improve his or her economic situation. The greater a person's economic aspirations, the greater the probability of migration. Anthropologist Bretell (2003) and geographer Halfacree (2004) criticise previous migration studies focused on economic aspects and state that the decision to migrate is being formed by social and cultural factors. Ferro (2006) examines the mobility process by looking at personal motivations, perceptions and aspirations and argues that a mixture of pressures from the social environment, market and immigration conditions and personal traits and attitudes influence aspirations to migrate. According to Crivello (2014), aspirations influence and represent people's orientations, values and actions and play an important function in their everyday lives. Xu and Wu (2016) state that strong motivations for a better life and high aspirations for economic and social upward mobility support a decision to migrate. Czaika and Vothknecht (2012) argue that aspirations can be a 'decisive motivational capability to avoid or escape socio-economic traps, such as poverty, unemployment or exclusion' (p. 20). Xu and Wu (2016) adduce the Wisconsin model in their research which pleas for social psychological factors and include educational and occupational aspirations (p. 5).

However, contemporary migration theories and push and pull models do not take the dynamic aspects of aspirations into account. Since migration trajectories are marked by an ongoing mobility influenced by globalising processes, routes are unstable and likely to change

during the migrants' journeys (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Furthermore, aspirations are likely to change with the migration experience itself (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012). Therefore, this thesis focuses on the dynamic aspects of aspirations and migration routes, which has not had much attention in previous research yet. This research uses migration theories that acknowledge and focus on the travels of migrants in between places, whereby a focus on the dynamic aspects of the concept of aspirations is central.

Meeteren et al.'s (2009) article about irregular migrants in Belgium, indicates that previous research showed that migrants come to Europe with different aspirations: some want to obtain a good position in the labour market, others want to acquire a legal status through marriage, regularization or asylum. The article makes a distinction in the individual aspirations of migrants. Migrants that come to Europe to make money and then return to their home country strive for future upward mobility in their home country and are called *investment migrants*. Migrants that aspire to obtain a legal residence status in Belgium are referred to as *legalization migrants*. *Settlement migrants* aspire to settle down in Belgium, inconsiderate of whether they will ever acquire a legal residence status or not.

This thesis includes not only economic aspirations, but also personal, familial, social and cultural dimensions of aspirations (Crivello, 2014; Ferro, 2006). Next to these different dimensions, different kinds of aspirations, such as the focus of migrants on careers, places or statuses are distinguished in this research. Furthermore, Czaika and Vothknecht (2012) state that it is important to take the capability to aspire into account. The capacity to aspire involves the ability to set goals, develop aspirations and achieve those goals. Many factors can affect the formation of people's aspirations from 'individual personality, socialization, education, to access to information and networks, and eventually the migration experience itself' (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012: 5). Moreover, based on a literary review this thesis takes three major factors into account that contribute to the (re)forming of aspirations, namely: the imagination, social networks and temporal and spatial dimensions of aspirations. The next paragraph will introduce the concept of the imagination.

2.2.1 The imagination

The possibility of people to imagine different lives and places are linked to the aspiration to migrate (Weiss, 2008). In 1991, Anderson already speaks of 'imagined communities' in which she points to people imagining themselves in other times and spaces. Appadurai (1996) also wrote about the imagination and how globally spread images of other lives and possibilities lead to people reflecting upon similarities and differences, fuelling migration. The imagination is, according to him, no longer merely a fantasy, but has become an organized field of social practices. Weiss (2008) criticizes the 'culture concept' of migration, because that entails assertions of 'timelessness', 'unity' and 'commitment' (p. 99). He states that the imagination, on the contrary, is a central, dynamic feature of social life and entails terms of instability, uncertainty and ambivalence and that aspirations and actions to migrate are not bound to specific forms, times and places. Since the imagination is supported by changes in consciousness, lived worlds are constructed through fantasies that need to be imagined before being realized. Globalization gives rise to the imagination as an unconscious activity. Weiss

(2008) calls imaginative practice a central and dynamic feature of social life in this world, captivated by a process of deterritorialization.

Salazar (2010) states that the imagination with regard to migration is connected to the recognition of alternative construction of future lives and possibilities in other places: as a route to success (Theo, 2003; Gardner, 1993). Imagined futures can be mobilizing forces (Crivello, 2014). Sanders (2001, p. 2) cites Clifford Geertz that states that images are as well models 'of' as models 'for' the reality. These models of alternative lives are seen as the only hope at success by (potential) migrants (Halfacree, 2004). Images of different places and different lives form and change when people take actions (to migrate). Since people have the possibility to imagine different places and lives and imaginations can change due to different influences, this is an important factor contributing to the forming and reforming of aspirations. The uncertain and unstable character of the imagination corresponds to the dynamic character of migrants' aspirations.

Different studies show that imaginations of non-Western people about (a migration to) Europe or the USA influence the aspirations of these people to migrate (Coe, 2012; Pelican; 2013; Riccio, 2001; Smith, 2006 and Vigh, 2009). These images and imaginations of a live in Europe seem to be overly positive (Prinz, 2005; Salazar, 2010; Smith, 2006; Vigh, 2009). The Western world is seen as a world full of opportunities on a good study, a good career and highly paid jobs and a world associated with a high level of development, infrastructure and toleration. It also appears that people imagine a kind of world hierarchy in which some countries are seen as better than others, with the own migrant's country at the bottom and the northwest-European countries and the USA on top (Coe, 2012; Pajo, 2008; Salazar, 2010; Vigh, 2009). This image of a world hierarchy has to do with a 'social upward mobility' (Prinz, 2005: 119), in which the country on top has the best possibilities on a good career and the highest degree of self-fulfilment, whereas in the country at the bottom people are destined to be poor and a failure. A migration to Europe is associated with a higher social status, victory and admiration (Prinz, 2005; Pajo, 2008).

These images influencing people's imagination about a better life somewhere else, are likely to influence an aspiration to migrate. Therefore, the imagination of different lives (careers, positions) and places of people, is an important factor that can contribute to the (re)forming of people's aspirations to migrate. Ferro (2006) states that attitudes towards migration can be achieved and influenced by images gained through mass media, information, experiences and connections with others. More studies show that a positive imagination about a migration to the West is influenced by different sources, of which stories of friends and family are an important one (Pajo, 2008; Prinz, 2005; Salazar, 2010; Smith, 2006). The next paragraph will therefore discuss the contribution of social networks to the imagination, influencing aspirations.

2.2.2. Social networks

Social networks consist of the social ties that migrants create and maintain with other migrants, friends and family. Flows of information, ideas, money and goods that derive from these transnational networks affect not only people's capability, but also their imagination about a migration to Europe. Social networks bind people across space and time and determine

migration decisions, by extending the imagined future and subsequently influence people's aspirations (Crivello, 2014). Friends or family that already are migrated to Europe, share overly positive stories with the people who stayed behind, which leads to a certain imagination which influences the aspiration of others to migrate (too) (Pajo, 2008; Salzar 2010; Smith, 2006). Migrants do not control their own journey completely; their journey is influenced by different people of social networks. So also *en route*, these social networks keep playing a role. In the research of Hamer (2008), it appears that migrants received different kinds of support and information from social networks during different stages of their migration trajectories.

Generally recognized, social networks of migrants lead to social capital that reduces the costs and risks of migration (Palloni et al., 2001). Recent criticism on social networks and social capital is that social networks are viewed as something static, consisting steady ties between persons. This suggests that migrants do not create new networks (Somerville, 2011). Schapendonk (2015) therefore argues, that networks and its qualitative character change and that we should also pay attention to the dynamics of social networks; its failures and disconnections.

Also according to Pathriage and Collyer (2011), social networks are an uncertain resource which migrants are aware of. Social networks are dynamic, can never be guaranteed and fluctuations in social networks can influence the success or failure of a migration project. Networks can involve opportunities, such as information about jobs, resources or support, but also constraints, such as non-truths and misinformation, which can open up new migration routes along the way (Somerville, 2011). Not only when they are in the country of origin, but also during the journey of the migrants these social networks can influence people's imagination about other places. These social networks can be in the same country or in other, distant countries and can (mis)inform migrants about their settlement choices or concerns. For example, when people hear about work opportunities in another country from a person who might not even be in that country. This can influence the imagination of the migrant and subsequently their aspiration to go to that place.

It is therefore important to take the dynamics of social networks of migrants into account when studying migrant's aspirations, since they can have a big influence on the (re)forming of people's imaginations and aspirations. The power of social networks depends on the implementation and timing of social connections (Schapendonk, 2015). Cwerner (2001) states that the decisions of a migrant are influenced by social networks and that their actions are caught in a multitude of temporal perceptions and evaluations. The next section will discuss the temporal and spatial dimensions of aspirations.

2.2.3 Temporal and spatial dimensions

Following on the previous section, the temporal and spatial dimensions of aspirations are of major importance to understand how aspirations work, (re)form and can change. As already stated, previous research and literature on migration and mobility lacks the dynamic aspects of aspirations. By focusing on the changeability of aspirations within migration studies, this research aims to fill this gap in the literature. To understand the changeability of aspirations, we need to pay attention to the temporal and spatial dimensions of aspirations and how they can be influenced in different times and places.

Crivello (2014) shows that places play an important role in constructing and constraining dreams and practices. Migration is an obvious phenomenon associated as a process developing in space, however it is as much related to time as it is with space (Cwerner, 2001). The study of time has mostly overlooked migration. Therefore, Cwerner focused at the relationship between migration and time and explores the idea that migration has crucial temporal dimensions and that time migrates with people. Time is characterised by a multiplicity of perspectives and belongs to the whole scale of social life. He suggests a scheme based on the assumption that migrants experience particular cultures of time, such as temporal perceptions. In this scheme, he first describes three sets of times connected to the symbolic levels of the migrants' adjustment to the host society. The next three terms are linked to the migrants' experiences that develop. The last terms are based on the long-term temporal prospect in the experiences of migrants. He argues that it is fundamental to study the temporal dimensions of migrants' actions to understand the forms of international migration in our contemporary, globalising world.

Contradictory experiences of migrants can often expose shifting and unclear temporal borders within our world and by studying the times of migration, we can get a more complex understanding of the social and cultural determination of temporal experiences (Cwerner, 2001). Aspirations do not necessarily close with migration, but might enlarge when experiences are lower than expected or when there is a rise in awareness of new or better opportunities. Czaika and Vothknecht, (2012) call this phenomenon a 'hedonic treadmill' (p. 6). Migration experiences can also lead to higher future aspirations, due to a comparison with a new peer group at a destination site. A lot of migrants think of Europe as a continent with unlimited opportunities and endless riches and wealth, but become disappointed when their image does not seem to be true upon arrival (Meeteren et al., 2009). And even when migration does have a positive impact on people's life, (future) aspirations can be more extensive or prominent than before.

Meeteren et al. (2009) as well as Cwerner (2001) show in their research that expectations of migrants about the duration of their stay may vary within time. Many migrants that initially had the intention to stay temporarily, end up settling down. So just as aspirations may change over time, migrants can switch to different status categories. There is not a strict hierarchy in aspirations with legalization on top, nor a fixed trajectory. Schuster (2005) also makes a distinction between different migration status categories, such as documented and undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, whereby migrants can switch to different categories within time. Her fieldwork shows that many of the migrants she spoke to had experienced two, three or even more different statuses and some of them even switched backwards and forwards.

The research of Schapendonk and Steel (2014) about sub-Saharan African migrants to Europe, and the research of Schrooten et al. (2015) about Brazilians in Belgium and the UK, also showed this. The movement of Brazilians ranged from staying some weeks or months to a few years in different countries in which their migrant status changed from 'settled' to 'on the move'. Even their legal status could change between different countries. These processes are mostly unintended and form along the way, because original intentions change during travelling. The movements of the Brazilian migrants were often unpredictable, unexpected and sometimes even unwanted. Also the movements from sub-Saharan Africans are often

fragmented undertakings (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Migrants have to deal with border controls, asylum procedures and Visa regimes within European countries before moving on. These migrants also might experience different statuses and phases of (im)mobility in their migration processes due to constraints and opportunities.

Aspirations of migrants can change in different times, but also in different places. Temporal and spatial dimensions are interconnected. Crivello (2014) focused on the time-spaces of migration aspirations of young Peruvian's and shows the way that past, present and future are interconnected. She states that aspirations are shaped by relationships in the past, present and future. She also argues that for impoverished and marginalized people, aspirations are produced within uncertainty and that it is about the consideration between what is known and what is imagined as expected and possible. It is also to imagine that migrants can have multiple, contradicting or vague aspirations, because they do not exactly know what they want yet, or that this depends on what they will find. Furthermore, aspirations can be as well a cause as a consequence of migration, because migrants seem to have higher aspirations after they have migrated (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012). Aspirations can overlap and change in different times and spaces and this is a key point when studying the dynamic of migrants' aspirations.

2.3. Ability

Aspirations of migrants can change within different times and places, whereby people might want to migrate to another place, wish to achieve a different goal or aspire another status. However, when people have an aspiration to migrate to another place, but not the ability to do so, they will stay where they are. This affects their journeys and might, in time, lead to new aspirations again. It is therefore important not only to look at what their aspirations are, but also at the ability of migrants to fulfil their aspirations. Carling (2002) presented the 'aspiration/ability model' on this subject, which implies that migration first involves a wish to migrate and secondly the realisation of this wish (p. 5). In this way he explains features of contemporary migration and non-migration that, according to him, remain unexplained by traditional migration theories. Thereby, he places the possibility of involuntary immobility at the centre of the migration process.

The aspiration to migrate can vary in degree. In this way, Carling (2002) makes a distinction between migrants (people who aspire to migrate and have the ability to migrate), involuntary non-migrants (people who aspire to migrate but lack the ability) and voluntary non-migrants (people who do not have the aspiration to migrate). Thereby, he speaks of several modes of migration (legal labour migration, political asylum, illegal entry etc.), which are associated with certain barriers to migrate: "aspiring to migrate is a precondition for trying to migrate and overcoming the barriers to migrate is a precondition to actually migrate" (p. 12).

Carling (2002) analyses the aspiration to migrate at two levels: the macro-level emigration environment (why a large number of people wish to migrate) and the micro-level (who wants to migrate and who wants to stay). At the micro level, aspirations to migrate differ in relation to aspects as gender, age, unemployment and educational background. At the macro level, the aspiration to migrate is affected by social and personal meanings and stereotypical images and expectations. He states that people wish to migrate because they think of themselves

as poor and they think poverty is bound to places (rather than to people). He also analyses the ability to migrate at two levels: the macro-level immigration interface (available modes of migration), in which the ability to migrate is affected by restrictive migration policies in destination countries and by the existence of diaspora and irregular migration networks in countries of origin. Secondly, there are the individual-level characteristics (ability of people to overcome barriers to migration).

Czaika and Vothknecht (2012) also wrote a paper about the relationship between aspirations and the ability to migrate, in which they combine the ‘capacity to aspire’ and the ‘capacity to realise’ (p. 4). They state that it is important to take a so-called ‘aspiration gap’ into account when studying migration. The aspiration gap is not only about the ability to set goals and give rise to an aspiration, but also about the knowledge of how to achieve those goals and aspirations. The capacity to realise an aspiration involves several economic, political, social and human capabilities.

The ability to migrate is necessary to actually migrate. However, it is possible that people with capabilities to aspire and realise a migration, will eventually not migrate when the right opportunities do not occur (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012). Moreover, it is possible that people driven by strong aspirations without the ability to fulfil them, work harder on their capabilities to overcome their ‘involuntary immobility’, but also that they adjust their aspirations downwards in order to prevent a persistent unhappiness because of disappointments or unfulfilled aspirations (p. 5). Czaika and Vothknecht state that the capacity to aspire and the capacity to realise an aspiration are reciprocally interdependent: aspirations can be as well a cause as a consequence of migration. Strong aspirations can lead to people improving their capabilities to realise their aspirations, or aspirations can be a consequence of high capabilities.

By focussing on the dynamic aspects of aspirations and how this influences migration routes, it is thus important to take the ability of people to migrate into account. It is likely that migrants who already have migrated to Europe do not have the ability to migrate to other European countries, while having the aspirations to migrate. Several studies show that migrants that are in a European country (for example Italy) have the intention to move on further (north), but stay because they are not able to move on (Schuster, 2005), or migrants that are arrived in their ‘destination’ country have still not realized their aspirations (Meeteren et al., 2009).

2.4. Conclusion

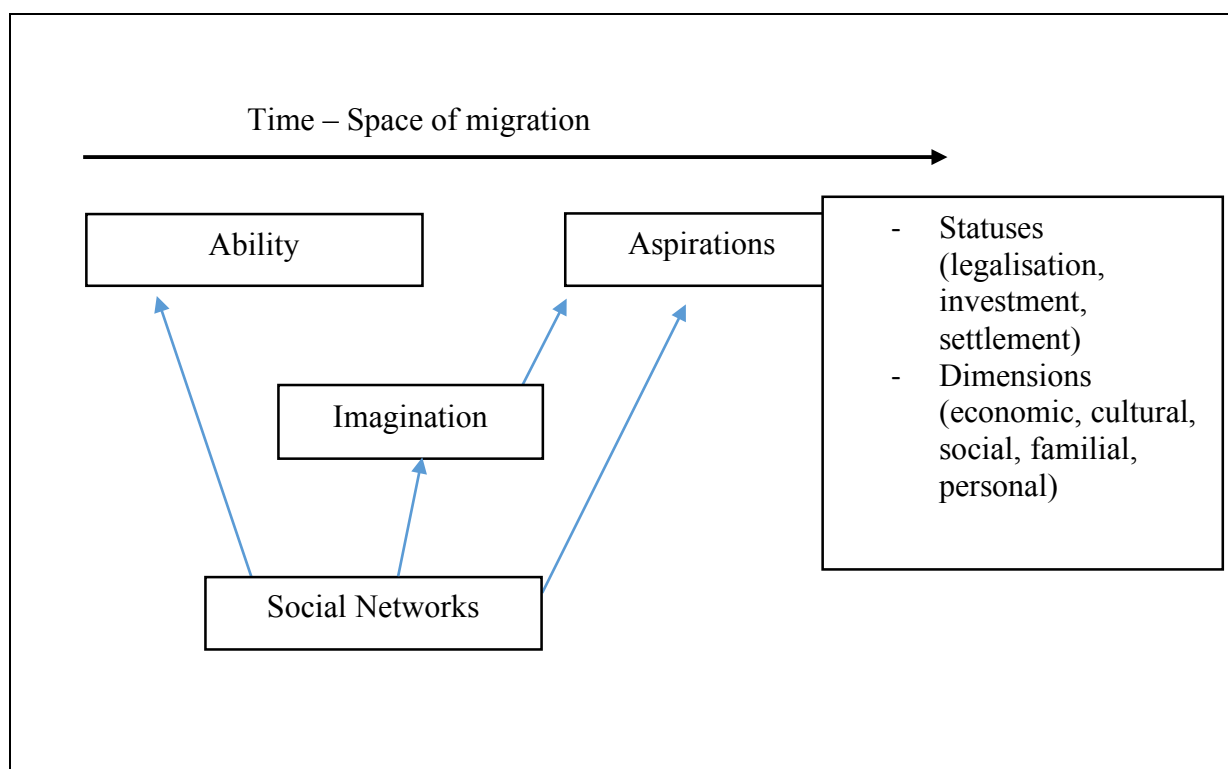
To conclude, I will see migration as an ongoing process consisting of a multiplicity of routes and concentrate on the travels of migrants in between places. Motivations and aspirations play a crucial role in migration. This thesis will however specifically focus on aspirations due to its dynamic character. Since the routes migrants are taking are often unstable and ongoing, aspirations are likely to change with their migration experiences itself.

Aspirations of migrants are about a future goal or wish in another place. Not to mention, this thesis does not only include economic motivations and aspirations, but also personal, familial, social and cultural aspects of aspirations. Next to these different dimensions, the typology of van Meeteren et al. (2009) stands central in this thesis. A distinction is made in the different categories migrants can switch between (investment, settlement and legalisation).

Additionally, the ability to realise this wish, for which I will refer to the ‘aspiration/ability’ model of Carling (2002), is fundamental in this thesis, because this determines migration trajectories. For it is likely that Carling’s (2002) ‘aspiration/ability’ model keeps playing a role in transit countries during their travels, people aspirations, ability and therefore routes can change in different places and times.

Furthermore, the concept of aspirations involves the different factors that contribute to the (re)forming of an aspiration. The possibility of people to imagine different lives and places, fuelled by social networks and temporal and spatial dimensions lay at the roots of the forming of an aspiration to migrate. The imagination leads to people believing in their own chances on a better life or better opportunities elsewhere (Smith, 2006). Social networks influence the imagination and involves as well support and resources, as misinformation and constraints (Pathriage & Collyer, 2011). Concerning the temporal dimension of aspirations, the scheme of Cwerner (2001) about different cultures of time is used. Below, a theoretical scheme of migration central to this thesis is provided (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Conceptual model



Source: authors' own creation

3. Methodology

Box 1: A fieldwork day in the Bijlmer in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

15 February 2016

On a cold Monday in the Netherlands, Iris and I went to Amsterdam Bijlmer and had decided to visit a migration organisation, which we heard about from our first respondent David, a 59-year-old man from Ghana. This organization helps migrants with their integration in the Netherlands. We decided it was better to show up than to send a letter. When we arrived, a host (man, ±50, from Ghana) wrote our name and telephone number down on a piece of paper and showed us to seats in the waiting room. He also gave us a cup of coffee and tea. He was very quiet and it felt like he did not want to talk more to us. He said the woman we could speak to would enter at 12:00 (we arrived at 11:45), so we waited for someone to come to us. Around 12:10, two Dutch women asked us why we were there and we again shortly explained our arrival. They then got the 'head' of the organization, a Dutch woman named Monica (pseudonym).

I found this woman very unfriendly. She told us she was very busy and that 'it doesn't work to just show up'. So we excused ourselves and explained why we came. She said she had no time to meet us this week and said we could not just interview people without gaining some sort of trust from them and without doing something in return. We agreed and explained that we would like to do some kind of volunteer work for the organization in return, in order to be able to meet people there, get a relationship with them and gain their trust. She reacted, still unfriendly, that she had no time, however she went to her office to see what she could do. When she came back, she said she had called their 'PR employee'. He would come for us to talk to us and show us around in the Bijlmer, but he would want something in return 'and not a cup of coffee or coupons, but money, so we just had to negotiate in an African way'. After this rather unfriendly and strange happening, thirty minutes later Peter, a 48-year old man from Nigeria, arrived. He took us to a room and we explained our research to him. He wanted to talk to us and asked us if we had some questions on paper. So we took our notebooks and started the, fully unexpected, interview. During the interview, he stood up two times to get two other people who walked by (Victoria: a woman of 30 years old from Nigeria; and a man of 28 years old from Italy with Nigerian parents) and kind of insisted them to sit down and to answer some of our questions. After we asked them a few questions in ten minutes, he took back the lead and sent them away and we continued our interview with Peter. It all happened very quickly, chaotic and unorganised, but we just decided to 'go with the flow'. Hereafter, he showed us around in the Bijlmer. We passed by some African shops and an African food market. In the end, he gave us his email address so we could send him an email for that maybe he could introduce us to other people who might be willing to talk to us.

Box 2: A fieldwork day in Bergamo, Italy

26 April 2016

One warm morning in Bergamo, we decided to go to the Nigerian association I found on Facebook. The organization should be located near the city centre of Bergamo. We took the bus and searched in the street for the right place. We found a communist centre behind a gate and went to look there, but it was closed. We saw that the opening times said that it would be open in the afternoon. We also asked a man in an African restaurant in this street if he knew something about the Nigerian association and he told us that he always saw 'a girl working there' and that maybe it would be open again in the afternoon. So we went back to centre of Bergamo.

At 14:00, we had planned an interview with Falilou, a Senegalese bookseller we met a few days earlier in the centre of Bergamo. He arrived, surprisingly, on time and we went to sit down in the agreed upon cafe. We explained our project again. When we asked him if we could write his answers down he was reluctant. He said that 'his life had not been difficult so that there was nothing to write down.' However, he knew somebody who did have a good story for us, because he came by boat and immediately, without asking, he tried to call him. Although this was of course not our intention, we felt he would not want us to write anything down so we decided just to talk with him in an open manner, which made him become looser during our conversation. He showed us some pictures of his home in Senegal and his family. Then he suddenly called his wife and told her about us, where after he gave Iris his phone to talk to his wife. They both seemed to enjoy this. After some more questions he asked us if we have boyfriends. When we said 'yes, in Holland'. He asked us if we did not want another boyfriend in Italy. When we tried to end this topic, he kept on going and we felt the interview was over for him, so we ended the conversation.

After the interview, we went to the Nigerian association again. This time the gate was open. We walked in the office of the communist organization and asked a man in English if he knew something about a Nigerian organization. He did not speak English, but when I repeated the word Nigerian he understood where we were coming for and called 'Jessica' and pointed us to another office. We walked to the office and a Nigerian woman of around 45 years old greeted us. She was immediately a very friendly, open and active woman. She told us to come in and sit down. We explained that we were students, what we were doing here and that we would love to do some kind of volunteer work for the organization in return. She was very enthusiastic and this was a very different reaction than the reaction of the Dutch woman of the migrant organization in the Bijlmer. Jessica said it was very important that people knew Nigerian migrant stories and she was eager to help us and very happy that we wanted to help her. We talked a bit with her about our research and her organization and then two Nigerian men walked in after each other to charge their phone in the office. Jessica demanded them to tell something about themselves to us and they did. Then she invited us to an event she was organising on Saturday the 7th of May, where more people from Nigeria would come to tell their stories. We told her we would love to join this event and would come back to the organization soon. Although the interview with Falilou was not what he had hoped, the contact with Jessica was more than we hoped for.

These anecdotes show two very chaotic fieldwork days in two different places, which was not uncommon during our research. In this chapter I will explain the methodological approach of this thesis, which is based on qualitative research and a multi-sited ethnography. This chapter will first give an explanation of the research strategy of a multi-sited ethnography. Then the methodological choices and the used research methods are explained, followed by an elaboration on the research setting and the unit of analyses. The last paragraph contains the reflection on my fieldwork, my positionality as a researcher and my collaboration with Iris Poelen, with whom I have done almost all fieldwork together. Therefore, I will often refer to 'we' or 'my fieldwork partner'.

3.1. Research strategy: Multi-sited ethnography

This research focuses on West-African migrants in general, but mainly on Ghanaian, Nigerian and Senegalese migrants, since most West-African migrants in Europe are from these countries (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016). I have done fieldwork in two places: the Netherlands (especially the Randstad) and Lombardy (especially Bergamo), Italy. Therefore, this research can be

presented as a two-sided ethnography. To fully grasp the subject of mobilities and understand the lives of migrants in this globalising world with transnational lives, we need to develop research strategies that enable us to move with our research subject.

Marcus (1995) presented next to single-sited ethnographic observation, multi-sited ethnography, which implies doing research at more than one place. Especially in migration studies, this can be a very valuable research method. Being at two different research sides enables the researcher to investigate the lifeworlds of migrants through connections among sites. Multi-sited ethnography includes the emerging global dimension in the world system and it brings more than one side into the same frame of study. Moreover, doing research at more than once place shifts the focus of attention to other domains. It maps a new object of study in which previous local narratives become qualified.

Doing research in both the Netherlands and Italy will give a more complex understanding of the lifeworlds of West-African migrants within Europe, because of the different histories and characteristics of these two countries. First of all, Italy is mostly one of the first possible countries migrants enter (next to Spain and Greece) and often seen as transit country, while the Netherlands will be more often seen as a settlement country. Many migrants arriving in Italy in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s had the intention to move further north to other wealthier European countries (Schuster, 2005). Migrants in Italy and the Netherlands will therefore have different and/or changed aspirations in these places.

Secondly, Italy and the Netherlands have very different migration policies, which can also impact the trajectories, ability and aspirations of migrants. The Netherlands have had a long history of migrants coming to its country and therefore a good regulated migration system, while Italy is a relatively new receiving country for immigrants (Caponio, 2008), with a new and less regulated migration system. The different (images of the) migration policies of Italy and the Netherlands can impact migrants' aspirations. Also, aspirations can change due to changed positions, statuses and positive or negative experiences of migrants within different countries and with the different asylum policies. This makes a two-sided ethnography very contributory to this research.

3.2. Qualitative research methods

In the book of Cresswell (2006) and the article of Schrooten et al. (2015) comes forward that mobility is not just a movement, but that meaning and experiences lived and produced by people in space are important. Bretell (2003) also states that migration is a social and cultural phenomenon that should be studied by listening to the stories of migrants themselves: to analyse how they tell their stories and to what meaning they give to their actions. Traditional quantitative research methodologies such as large-scale, representative sample surveys, will not be the best methods to do research about the lifeworlds of African migrants (Berriane & de Haas, 2012). Therefore, I use qualitative methods to gain insight in the role that aspirations of West-African migrants play in their mobility within Europe.

Qualitative methods can help understand intentions, social meanings (Berriane & de Haas, 2012), social phenomena and the meaning people bring to them (Bosch and Boeijs, 2010). To learn about their lifeworld and understand what their aspirations, dreams, hopes and

desires are, a research method focused on understanding and unravelling the story of the migrant is needed. To know the context and meaning behind someone's answers, it is important to listen to somebody's story in order to be better able to interpret someone's answers.

Therefore, the first and most important qualitative method I have used are semi-structured interviews. Using this method, the researcher can talk with people in a self-conscious, orderly and partially structured way, so he or she can listen carefully to somebody's story without interrupting (Clifford, French & Valentine, 2010). Since semi-structured interviews are conversational and informal in tone, participants are able to give an open response in their own words. Critiques on semi-structured interviews say that the physical location of the interview can affect discussion (Cragg, 2002). Also, when interviewing more than one person at the same time, it can lead to questions as: who says what and when? That is why it is important to think well about where, when and with how many persons you will do the interviews. However, it is not always possible or beneficial to create an 'ideal interview situation'. In the last paragraph I will elaborate on this and reflect on my own issues I experienced with the interviews.

It is very important to investigate the human agency of migrants, which requires participatory research to include different perspectives (Berriane & de Haas, 2012). Participant observation is considered a crucial method in ethnographic fieldwork (Malinowski, 1992). This method allows the researcher to observe people's actions as they are carried out in their real, daily situations. Furthermore, the researcher is able to have a close relationship with its respondents by being in their environment and participating in their daily activities (Gobo, 2008). So the second method I used is a form of participant observation. Not in the sense that I lived or worked with people all the time, but in the sense that I spend time being with people in order to get to know them and understand them. For example, I went almost every Sunday in February and March to the same international church in Tilburg, the Netherlands, where I could observe migrants' activities, get to know people and gain their trust.

International African migration has an undocumented and irregular nature and African migrants often have a vulnerable position, which can make it difficult to approach and interview migrants (Berriane & de Haas, 2012). This research also has to deal with challenges such as accessibility and trust. Participant observation can help to build sufficient levels of trust to gain access and to encourage respondents to speak freely, because you will get to know a respondent before asking them, possible personal or sensible questions. Of course, I assured participants that their information will remain confidential and secure they will remain anonymous, unless they desire otherwise.

A third method I used is small-talk. Small talk can be described as an everyday conversation or chit-chat. Since small talk is also very informal of tone, even more than (semi-structured) interviews, it is very useful in talking about sensitive subjects and when people do not have much time to talk (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Small talk enables the researcher to understand general truths in the lives of respondents. It could provide information that may be difficult to find out using other methods. Moreover, small talk can supply information without predetermined assumptions within interviews. Finally, small talk is an important part of participant observation and the introductory- and concluding phase of an interview. It strengthens the trust relationship and communication between the researcher and the respondent

before the interview starts and can give additional information after the ‘official interview’ has ended.

3.3. Research setting and gaining access to respondents

Since the 1960s, many countries in Africa have witnessed increasing levels of intercontinental emigration to Europe (Castles et al., 2014). Till the 1980s, Italy was generally perceived as a sending country, but new studies included the immigration of foreigners and made Italy also a receiving country. Senegalese, Ghanaians and Nigerians are the most numerous West-African nationalities living in Italy (Riccio, 2001; see also table 1).

Table 1: Number of registered first generation migrants living in Italy in 2015

Country of origin	Men	Women	Total
Burkina Faso	9 649	5 290	14 939
Cameroon	6 285	6 129	12 414
Côte d'Ivoire	14 468	10 894	25 362
Gambia	2 963	343	3 306
Ghana	30 243	20 171	50 414
Guinea-Conakry	2 988	1 502	4 490
Mali	5 668	577	6 245
Nigeria	35 440	35 718	71 158
Senegal	68 252	25 778	94 030
Sierra Leone	760	533	1 293
Other West-African countries			16 078

Source: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (www.istat.it)

Most West-African migrants live in northern Italy and especially in the regions Emilia Romagna and Lombardy, because of the highly developed industrial sector in the northern regions. Though most West-African immigrants are men (see also table 2), since the 1990s more women have been coming to Italy.

Table 2: Inflow of registered immigrants in Italy in 2014

Country of origin	Men	Women	Total
Gambia	5 814	18	5 832
Ghana	1 507	37	1 544
Mali	7 075	29	7 104
Nigeria	5 722	1 343	7 065
Senegal	3 219	46	3 265

Source: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (www.istat.it)

As well as Italy, The Netherlands are hosting a considerable number of Ghanaian and Nigerian migrants (see table 3 and table 4). The majority of West-African migrants lives in Amsterdam. Some legal, some illegal living and working in Amsterdam (Haimé, 2000). The Bijlmer in Amsterdam holds a major concentration of Ghanaian migrants (Mazzucato, 2008). Although

the percentage West-African men lays higher than West-African women, the difference is not as big as in Italy.

Table 3: Number of registered first generation migrants living in the Netherlands in 2015

Country of origin	Men	Women	Total
Burkina Faso	229	134	363
Cameroon	802	888	1 690
Côte d'Ivoire	658	504	1 162
Gambia	452	252	704
Ghana	6640	7102	13 742
Guinea-Conakry	1491	1020	2 511
Mali	86	79	165
Nigeria	3438	2863	6 301
Senegal	586	330	916
Sierra Leone	2647	1356	4 003
Other West-African countries			4 882

Source: Centraal Bureau Statistic (www.cbs.nl)

Table 4: Inflow of registered immigrants in the Netherlands in 2015

Country of origin	Men	Women	Total
Burkina Faso	7	8	15
Cameroon	63	44	107
Côte d'Ivoire	31	23	54
Gambia	54	37	91
Ghana	291	272	563
Guinea-Conakry	64	41	105
Mali	8	4	12
Nigeria	319	209	528
Senegal	36	22	58
Sierra Leone	61	45	106
Other West-African countries			189

Source: Centraal Bureau Statistic (www.cbs.nl)

This research has focused on adult migrants from West-Africa, men and women, with different ages, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The West-African migrants I have spoken with and/or interviewed, do not represent the whole ‘West-African community’ in the Netherlands and Italy, but their stories can give important insights into the aspirations of West-African migrants moving within Europe. My fieldwork partner Iris and I found our respondents and informants through snowball sampling and the site-approach. The majority of our respondents comes from Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, but also respondents from some other origins are included (see table 3.5.). A more comprehensive overview of my respondents is included in the appendix.

Table 5: An overview of my respondents

Country of birth	No. of respondents
Burkina Faso	1
Cameroon	1
Ghana	7
Gambia	1
Nigeria	11
Senegal	10
Sierra Leone	1

Snowball samplings involves the selecting of informants via your existing network and the networks of other respondents, friends, relatives and acquaintances, based on specific characteristics (Gobo, 2008, p. 104). For highly sensitive topics, such as behaviour of which subjects are ashamed or illegal, snowball sampling is the best sampling strategy. Via my contacts I met in Ghana during my bachelor research, I already gained my first two contacts. The first one was the father of a young man I met in Ghana, named David (59 years old) who lived in Amsterdam. He gave me his phone number and we made an appointment for our first interview. Secondly, the man who worked at the reception in the hotel where I stayed in Ghana gave me the phone number of a woman who lived in Lombardy, Italy, and when we were there, we also were able to meet her and talk to her.

Moreover, we contacted migrant organizations and visited churches and mosques to find our respondents. This so-called ‘site selection strategy’ can be used to find the research population at specific sites. Researches can go to these places directly to contact potential respondents (Dahinden & Efionayi-Mäder, 2009: 106-107). In the Netherlands, me and my study partner went to a few places regularly, to observe, get to know people and build trust levels. As already mentioned, we went to an international church in Tilburg almost every Sunday in February. We have done several interviews with people attending the church, after the service and in people’s homes.

Furthermore, we went to the Bijlmer in Amsterdam several days, where we tried to meet people via a migration organization, a Pentecostal church and on the market. By going regularly to places where a lot of West-African migrants gathered, we were hoping to be able to meet more respondents and to build a trust level. We conducted interviews in public spaces such as cafes, but also in people’s homes. Through the migrant organization we got in touch with pastor and gatekeeper Peter, a 48-year old man from Nigeria. He worked for the organization and was willing to show us around in the Bijlmer. Peter came to the Netherlands ten years ago, but still has no documents. He came with a Work Visa to a conference in Barcelona. After the conference ended and his Visa expired, he stayed in Europe and went straight to the Netherlands, where he now is staying and working illegally. He introduced us to several other respondents. Our other gatekeeper Tom, whom we with through snowball sampling, is from Ghana and lives in Amsterdam for many years now with his wife. He is a pastor of a Pentecostal church and introduced us to several West-African women in the Bijlmer.

The first few days in Italy our research strategy was just to walk in the centre of Bergamo and drink cappuccino in the cafes outside, to become familiar with the city of Bergamo and observe the people. We did not plan to already search for contacts or approach respondents, but when an African man approached us the second day of our fieldwork in Italy with African

books, we could not miss this opportunity. When we told him we did not speak Italian, however French, he immediately was very enthusiastic to talk to us. Abdou, a 29-year-old man from Senegal, became our first key informant in Italy. He has been living in Italy for one and a half years, but arrived in Europe in 2008. After living and working in France for several years, he went to Spain where he also worked and lived for a few years. Then he migrated to Italy. We have spoken to Abdou several times and he introduced us to more people from Senegal.

Then we decided to also visit an organization for Senegalese migrants, to not only meet Senegalese booksellers, and for Nigerian migrants in Bergamo in the hope that these organizations could help us with finding more respondents. Although the head of the Senegalese migrant organization we spoke to told us he could, or would, not help us personally, he advised us to go to the mosque the next day, because there would be a lot of Senegalese migrants. So we did and we met two men who were willing to do an interview with us. After three weeks doing research in Bergamo, we already had a lot of Senegalese contacts, but not yet many Nigerian contacts. Therefore, we stepped by an organization for Nigerian migrants in Bergamo we found through Facebook. Arriving there, we met our other gatekeeper and key informant Jessica, a 45-year old woman from Nigeria. Jessica came to Italy in 1993, where she ended up in prostitution. When she escaped from that, she came to Bergamo and after several years, started an organization for Nigerian migrants in Bergamo. We helped her with some issues for the organization and she introduced us to a lot of other people from Nigeria.

Moreover, we helped Jessica with the organization of an event for the 25th of June 2016. This event was meant to draw attention to the migration crisis and the boat refugees drowning in the sea in general, and specifically to give opportunities and support to the refugees staying in Bergamo. In the weeks proceeding the event we helped her writing letters and emails, creating flyers and posters and discussed about the location, facilities and organisation of the event. The last few weeks she had to do the work on her own, but the weekend of 25 June we returned to Bergamo to attend the event and helped her with organising that day. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of the expected people turned up. The ‘big artist’ who was supposed to perform that day, cancelled one day before. Due to the chaotic organisation and the last minute work of Jessica (spreading the flyers one day before the event), it was not as big as we hoped for. However, Jessica was happy at the end of the day and it is never for nothing.

Iris and I have done almost all interviews together, except for a few. In the Netherlands we have spoken together to thirteen people. Next to that, Iris has spoken to two more women from Nigeria and I have spoken to one other man from Ghana. In Italy, we have spoken together to eighteen persons. An overview of all respondents can be found in the appendix.

3.4. Methodological reflections

Not all research methods worked out as well as planned. First of all, I was planning to spend as much time in the Bijlmer as I could as a form of ‘participant observation’, instead of going back and forth for interviews, but during the fieldwork this worked out differently. For example, when Iris and I walked on the market in the Bijlmer where a lot of African people were and we tried to approach some of them, they seemed very reserved. They were very secretive in what

they told us and were not interested in talking to us again. Sometimes, because they thought they had no interesting story to tell us, other times they did not tell us why.

Later, we walked with our first respondent David over the same market. While walking over the market, David approached some Ghanaian people for us in his language. The people seemed open to talk to him, but we could not understand what he told them and when we heard him saying the words ‘research’, or ‘interview’ they did not want to participate. This confirmed our idea that it was not a good idea to use these words, because they scared people away. Moreover, it worked better when we got in touch with people through other people they trusted, so this way of snowball sampling (Gobo, 2008, p. 104) is what we did further on.

Secondly, I was planning to use Participatory Appraisal (P.A.) methods. These methods enable people to “share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and act” (Chambers, 1994). Through using P.A. methods, people can express and share knowledge and reach new understanding. The P.A. method I wanted to use is called mapping: maps made or drawn by the participants on paper. By ‘handing over the stick’ and let participants map their migration routes, one can be able to create understanding and awareness and clarify differences between people. Sometimes it is easier for respondents to ‘explain’ something in a different way than telling, so to show what they mean on paper.

However, this method did not benefit my research. Most of the respondents could just as easily tell us the routes and the countries they travelled to and in, making them drawing their routes on a map unnecessary. There was one person who could not speak English that well, so he could not well explain us his route. Therefore, I gave him the map and asked him if he then could draw his migration route or point to the countries he had been to. However, he could neither read the names on the map, nor the map itself. Thereby, he was very suspicious about what we would do with all his answers and did not want us to draw or write anything down on the map. Hereafter, I did not use this method again.

Furthermore, we planned to record the interviews as much as possible, so we could fully focus on the conversation and would not miss any details. However, in the field we did not do this much, because it felt like an obstacle to ask if we could record interviews. Only when we felt that the informant was really comfortable talking to us about his or her story, we dare to ask them if we could record it. If not, we just asked them if we could write down their answers or take notes. Sometimes this even felt like or was a problem: our first respondent David answered: “we will see if you can write it down” and two other respondents just said “no”. Also, we felt like people were more open and would tell us more when we did not record the interviews. Therefore, Iris and I decided that one of us would write everything down, while the other one would take the lead in asking questions and listen carefully to the stories. In total, we only recorded two interviews with respondents who were very open and comfortable with us.

Most interviews were held in English, the rest in French (of which one with a translator) and only one in Dutch. It was a disadvantage that we did not master the French language as well as the English and Dutch language, which made the interviews in French less in-depth than the other interviews. Though we could understand the general picture of the migrants’ story, we could not go as deep into their stories as in the other stories. All interviews are typed out in English.

3.4.1. Positionality of the researcher

It is very important to reflect at your own position as a researcher in the field. The researcher always has an influence on the research, which is called the 'Hawthorne' effect (Gobo, 2008: 125). This involves the presence of the researcher, his or her identity and position in the respondent's world, which almost always affects the behaviour of the people observed. This should however not be seen as a deficiency of observation, but as a substantial characteristic of it. There are several issues that came up during my fieldwork with regard to my position as a researcher, which are important to be reflected upon.

First of all, as a non-migrant (in the Netherlands), a native European with money, a passport and travelling privileges (in the Netherlands and in Italy), the relation between the researcher and the informant is already unequal, which can make you, but also the respondent, feel bad or sad. I cannot share the difficulties in their stories, their loss or their sorrow. So even though I, as a researcher, endeavoured to have an equal relationship with my respondents, this ideal can never be realized. However, listening to their stories might help them share their feelings and experiences and can give them a voice. It is therefore important to let the informant tell their own story in order to acknowledge them and create a more equal situation between me and them.

Furthermore, it is difficult to balance the role between friend and researcher. We have visited two men we met in the refugee camp Heumensoord in Nijmegen more often and have developed a friendship with them. In Italy though, there were some men that wanted more from us than we wanted from them (see also the introduction of this chapter). It was very easy to make contact with men, especially in the streets of Bergamo. They always gave us their phone number and we were always able to make an appointment with them. However, sometimes they kept calling and/or texting us with invitations to come and visit them for a whole weekend, while we did not feel comfortable about this and sometimes it even felt like 'stalking'. Also, some of the men mentioned they wanted to be our boyfriends, kept flirting and/or touching us or wanted to come to Holland with us. When we tried to end this topic during the interview, they kept on going, so sometimes we had to cut off the interview because they would not stop talking about this anymore. Sometimes we could finish the interview later another time, other times we decided not to meet these men again. By all means, we were very glad we were together and did not have to do these kinds of interviews alone, because being together gives you more power and security than being alone.

Due to these issues with annoying men, relationships with respondents could be broken because of our uncomfortable feelings. This can be a loss of a contact or possible (more) valuable information. However, we felt that feeling comfortable and having a more or less equally relationship based on friendship was more important.

The women as opposed to the men, were often very reserved and closed, sometimes even suspicious to us, as we were to the men. Making an appointment with them turned out to be rather difficult most times. At the market in the Bijlmer, most women did not want to speak with us. We assumed that having documents seemed to play a role in this. There was one woman from Nigeria with a German passport we met at the migrant organization in the Bijlmer who was very open to speak to us. The other women in the Netherlands who were willing to speak

to us, we all found through our gatekeeper Tom or via the church, when a certain level of trust was already built.

In Italy, we believed one woman pretended she did not speak French, while others told us she did. Our key informant Jessica, with an Italian passport, was also an exceptionally open woman who told us everything. There was another woman from Senegal who seemed very enthusiastic to meet with us when we met her in the streets and bought a book from her. However, she did not show up at appointments several times and after a twenty minute interview with very short answers, she almost forced us to buy two other books from her because we took time of her.

This issue of 'wanting something in return' also occurred in the Netherlands. At a certain moment during our interview with Peter, he started to speak about the compensation that Monica, the head of the migrant organisation, promised him, making us feel very uncomfortable again. He asked us what we were able to give him. We had decided before our fieldwork started, to not give a respondent money in return, only a small present after an interview or a cup of coffee or lunch during an interview, because giving a respondent money could affect the reliability of his or her story (Schapendonk, 2011). However, since Monica promised Peter herself we would give him something, we decided to give him twenty euros, but did not feel right about it. Happily, he was fine with this and showed us around the Bijlmer as well. Moreover, these were the only two cases in which respondents asked us for something in return.

I already mentioned that the physical location of the interview can affect discussion (Crang, 2002). When people invite you into their homes, they can feel more comfortable (because they are at home) and therefore more open talking to you. In the Netherlands, we did a lot of interviews at people's home and we felt comfortable doing this, mainly because we felt comfortable moving around in 'our own country'. In Italy on the other hand, we were a foreigner ourselves and were not acquainted with the Italian travel system and context. Also the Senegalese men in Italy could be more bothersome than Nigerian and Ghanaian men in the Netherlands. Therefore, we never agreed to spoke with those men in a private place and always interviewed them in a public space, such as a cafe.

Secondly, when interviewing more than one person at the same time, or when there are other people during the interview, it can be chaotic. For example, during the interview with Tom's wife, he himself was sitting close to us and sometimes interrupted his wife by giving his own answer, which of course influenced her answers. So although interviewing someone in their own home can feel more comfortable for the respondent, it can also be more distracting for them because of different influences in their home.

In Italy we also did an interview with two men at the same time, because one of them brought his friend. We were pleased to have found another respondent so easily, but the interview was rather chaotic and it was very difficult to keep their answers separated and balanced. Furthermore, we had some interviews with two persons at the same time during a lunch, which makes it very unofficial and chaotic. Therefore, I think it is best to do an interview with one person at the same time in a quiet place, where no other people can distract or interrupt him or her. However, this 'ideal situation' is not always possible and therefore you sometimes just have to accept a less ideal interview situation.

Finally, being a foreigner in Italy seemed to be benefit us. When we told people we met that we were not Italians, they seemed more open to us. First of all because we could speak

English and French, secondly just because we were a ‘foreigner’ as well and therefore had something with them ‘in common’. Lastly, we were most likely not working as a police agent or for another Italian service.

3.4.2. Reflection on the collaboration

As noted before, Iris and I have discovered the field, and conducted almost all interviews, together. The advantage of feeling more secure and comfortable together, gave us more opportunities and courage in the field. Following on the previous paragraph, gender had an influence on the relationship between us as researcher and the respondents. Going to places with only men was much easier when we were together. When we visited the mosque in Bergamo to meet Senegalese migrants, we found ourselves in a shabby neighbourhood with no women among us. A Moroccan man even warned us about the neighbourhood and told us we should not be there alone. Being there together to approach migrant men made this much easier for me than when I would have had to do this alone.

Furthermore, during several conversations or interviews, men could be annoying or ask us inappropriate questions that disrupted the interview. Although Iris kept feeling uncomfortable during these talks, while I got more used and less bothered during these moments, to keep doing the interviews with men together brought me more advantages than when I would have had to do it by myself. Not only the fact of feeling more secure together was an advantage. Although we had another research focus while doing the same interviews, the ability to complement each other’s questions in the interviews was of great advantage to gain more and deeper insights. Moreover, since we both did not fully master the French language and several interviews had to be done in French, we could understand more of the story of the migrants by both listening. Finally, since we did not record most interviews, one of us could concentrate on writing everything down as detailed as possible, while the other could attentively listen to the migrants’ story.

3.5. Data analysis

Qualitative research produces mostly large bodies of descriptive data which needs to be analysed using qualitative data collection and analysing techniques (Berriane & de Haas, 2012). Data collecting and analysing go hand in hand: while doing the interviews, the data needs to be interpreted and analysed at the same time (Gobo, 2008, p. 227). Secondly, when analysing data afterwards, subsequent interviews can be adjusted to this. During and after participant observations, small-talk and interviews, it is necessary to write everything down as soon as possible. In the beginning, we made a lot of use of the interview guide, but as the fieldwork proceeded, we memorized the key topics and structured the interviews as they took place, following the story of the migrant. We learned from interviews we had already done about common topics which we brought up in following interviews. We transcribed the interviews as literally as possible or typed the recorded interviews out as soon as possible the same day or the day after, in order to remember most details and contexts.

The conversations, observations and interviews resulted in a lot of written data, analysed using Atlas-ti. For analysing the data, a data coding process into different phases was used. First deconstruction by means of open coding, then construction through axial coding and finally confirmation by selective coding (Gobo, 2008, p. 227). This procedure allows a reflexive process in which sampling, collecting and analysing are iterated in which the focus becomes more narrow with every step. The open coding phase identified all subjects in the interviews related to the stories. The open codes correspond to the conceptual model of this thesis: 'imagination', 'aspiration', 'social networks', 'ability', 'personal reasons', 'economic reasons', 'social/familial reasons', 'cultural reasons' and 'political reasons'. In the next phase, the axial codes are given to concepts I found relevant for the research and wanted to explore further, such as 'positive/negative images', 'jobs', 'study' and 'status'. In the third phase, selective coding is used with regard to certain subjects, to see relations between core concepts and indicators. The concrete codes were linked to the concepts and the sub questions.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has given insight in the methodological choices I made, the methodological strategies used and how they worked out. It is important to state that as a researcher, one has to be very flexible during his or her fieldwork and not be surprised when a fieldwork day or a method turns out to be very different than planned or expected, especially with a research population of West-African migrants. Secondly, one clear field work site does not exist. It is important that the researcher moves within the field and constructs a good research field themselves. Through the site-approach and snowball sampling, I gained access to my respondents. Although doing fieldwork can demand a lot of energy from you, these four months have been a very valuable and interesting learning experience, in which I met a lot of interesting and great people. Listening to their stories really inspired me to write this thesis.

After the data collecting and analysing, the writing process of this thesis started. The empirical chapters are written using the codes and the relations between them, linked to the theory. This gave me useful insights to answer my sub questions and main question. The two empirical chapters will now be provided, where after the conclusion and discussion follow.

4. 'A mind to go to Europe': the forming of aspirations

In this chapter I will describe how aspirations of West-African migrants to go to Europe are being formed in the pre-departure phase. First of all, this chapter comes back to the concepts of motivations and aspirations in order to see how aspirations are being formed. Aspirations can be a way to explain motivations or motivations can lead to certain aspirations. A push factor such as political or religious conflicts, or a bad economic situation in the country of origin, can be a motive for someone to leave a country and at the same time a motivation to have a better life somewhere else (Castles et al., 2014). These motivations are intertwined with the subsequent aspirations. Someone who leaves a country because of its political instability, aspires a life in a place with political stability and someone who cannot find a (good) job in a place, aspires a good job in another place. However, how these different factors form a specific aspiration needs to be explained and the push and pull theory cannot do this. Although Lee (1966) already argues that migration is never completely rational and sometimes even more irrational than rational, the push and pull theory misses the dynamic aspects of migration and aspirations and it is unclear how certain factors and motives combine together.

Therefore, it is important to understand that certain factors are deeply intertwined and overlapping and that one factor can be part of a combination of factors leading to an aspiration to migrate. To understand and to try to find an explanation for how multiple motives or –factors help forming an aspiration, this chapter will try to answer the sub question: how are aspirations to go to Europe being formed? I will illustrate this by using personal life stories of West-African migrants. Describing migrant's life stories will gain insight into why and which factors have formed their aspiration to migrate to Europe and which factors (can) form an aspiration in general. In particular the stories of Maxwell, Abigail and Moustapha will be used as a guidance in this chapter, because these three migrants all had a different starting point, in sequence; 'an opportunity', 'no peace' and 'to find a job', and they all used a different trajectory. Maxwell, a 24-year old man, travelled from Nigeria to Italy overland in 2014, through the desert and by sea and is now waiting for documents. Abigail, a 31-year old woman, travelled more than ten years ago from Ghana by plane directly to Italy, everything being arranged by her father. Moustapha, a 45-year old man, travelled in 1997 from Senegal to France by plane with a Visa and has lived in Italy now for about fifteen years.

This chapter is structured by the conceptual model of chapter two (see figure 3) and explains the different factors that contribute to the forming of migrants' aspirations. Based on the conceptual model and the empirical data, this chapter identifies and discusses two crucial concepts that lead to the forming of an aspiration: the imagination and social networks.

4.1. Abstract aspirations

A first important analysis is that most of my respondents seemed to have abstract aspirations in the pre-departure phase; they did not have a fixed or clear plan to travel to a certain country or even to Europe and therefore not a concrete aspiration when they decided to migrate (see also Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). This led to different trajectories and their

aspirations being (re)formed in different places and times during their journey before even arriving in Europe (for an overview of the routes my respondents took to and within Europe, see figure 4 and 5 and table 6 and 7). Several of my Nigerian respondents who arrived recently came through the desert and did not have Europe as first destination in mind. At the Nigerian association for migrants in Bergamo run by Jessica, we met Maxwell (02/05/2017): a 24-year-old man who left Nigeria in September 2014 and has lived in Italy for a year now. He told us:

There is no peace in Nigeria, because of religion. The Christians and Muslims are not working together. They scare people away from the country, because of the Boko Haram issues. They came to the eastside. This is what made me leave Nigeria today.

Different factors influenced Maxwells' aspirations and journey towards Europe. He did not have a clear plan in the beginning; in first instance, he left Nigeria for Morocco because of political and religious problems. He ended up in Morocco, where he lived for a year and three months in Casablanca with a friend.

I decided to stay in Morocco to work and then to go back to my country. Unfortunately, the war was still going on when I was staying in Morocco. In Morocco, there is no problem, the only problem is that there is no job, but there is peace there. There is just not any work.

In Morocco his aspiration to live somewhere changed because of no work opportunities: another factor influencing his migration trajectory. This already shows the dynamic character of migration aspirations and the fact that they can easily change due to different influences. When he could not find a job in Morocco, Maxwell decided to move on to another country. In the north of Morocco in Nador, he tried to enter Europe, by using a boat to Spain: "but there is too much security there, so I decided to go to Libya. In Libya there is no peace, something as in Nigeria is happening today. So I didn't care about to live life there."

His route changed again and finally he ended up in Italy: "there is peace in Europe, that's the only thing". When speaking about 'peace', he seems to refer to a certain political stability in a country. In Nigeria there was 'no peace', just as in Libya, while in Morocco and Italy there is peace according to him. Political instability and the opportunity to find work are therefore important factors influencing his migration aspiration to live somewhere and therefore his trajectory. Now he is waiting in Italy for his documents in order to find a job and/or to move on.

At the same Nigerian association, we met Charles (36-year old) and John (26-year old) from Nigeria, who had a similar story to tell us. John travelled via the desert to Libya, where he worked for a few months, where after he ended up in Sicily, Italy, in June 2015. He told us that he did it was not his first intention to migrate to Italy: "Something happened, I didn't plan for Italy directly" (11/05/2017).

"Something happened, I didn't plan for Italy directly"

Charles left Nigeria in 2009 and gave several different reasons for wanting to leave Nigeria.

There are militants in Nigeria. Boko Haram is like another kind of group. People are kidnapping people [...] They wanted me to join them, but I refused. That was one of the reasons I left Nigeria. Another problem were problems at home. It is difficult for you to start up a shop and raise money; something is drawing you back, you are not progressing. And the economy is very poor. That's another thing (02/05/2017).

So Charles mentions several factors regarding political instability, personal problems and economic problems that influenced his motivation to leave Nigeria. All these factors together formed his aspiration to migrate. Though also for Charles, Italy was not his first plan, neither his final choice.

Crivello (2014) shows that places play an important role in constructing dreams and practices. Carling (2002) states that people develop an aspiration to migrate to another place, because they think poverty is bound to places instead of people. Not all of my respondents came via such a way and could point to one or more specific problem(s) for why they left their origin country. People that came by plane and for other reasons mostly had different factors forming their, however mostly still abstract, aspirations and migration routes. In these cases, their aspirations were often attached to a place: several of my respondents had a clearer destination in mind than Maxwell, John and Charles, while others only had the destination 'Europe' in their head. Daniel, a 40-year old man from Ghana, who has lived in the Netherlands since 2004, told us for example that "I had a mind to go to Europe. I just wanted to leave Ghana and come to Europe, but I can't say why" (26/03/2017). In the next section, I will introduce the theme of abstract aspirations linked to the concept of curiosity.

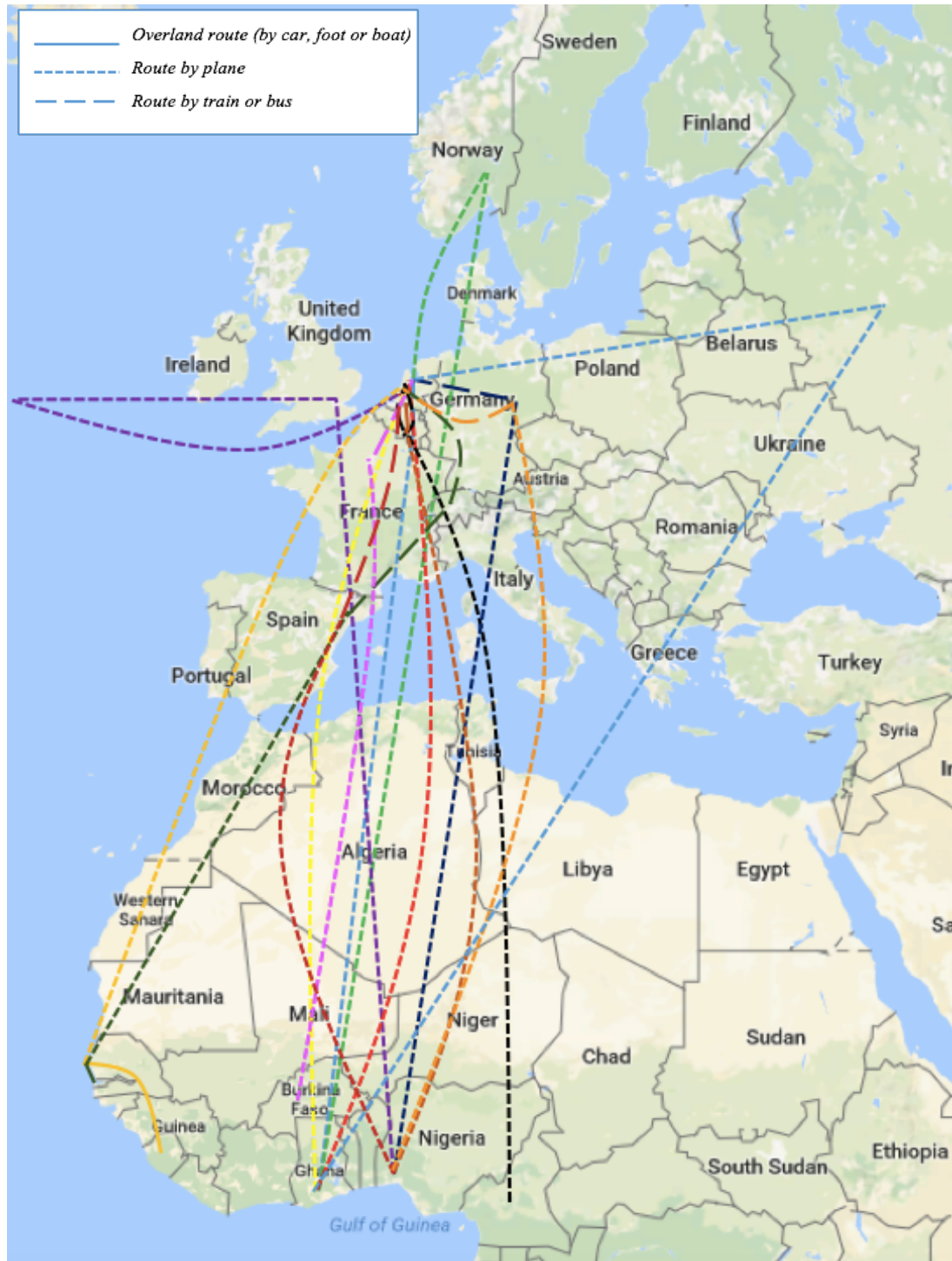
"I had a mind to go to Europe. I just wanted to leave Ghana and come to Europe, but I can't say why"

Figure 4: The routes of my respondents in Italy to and within Europe



Source: author's own creation

Figure 5: The routes of my respondents in the Netherlands to and within Europe



Source: author's own creation

Table 6: The journeys to and within Europe of my respondents in the Netherlands

Respondent	Origin Country	Journey to and within Europe
David	Ghana	Ghana – Moscow (transfer) – Amsterdam (by plane)
Victoria	Nigeria	Nigeria – Germany (by plane)
Peter	Nigeria	Nigeria – Spain – the Netherlands (by plane and train)
Pascal	Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso – France – the Netherlands (by plane and train)
Tony	Gambia	Gambia – Senegal – Spain – Switzerland – the Netherlands (by plane and train)
Esther	Nigeria	Nigeria – Belgium (transfer) - the Netherlands (by plane)
Joseph	Nigeria	Nigeria – Germany – Nigeria – Germany – the Netherlands (by plane and train)
Emmanuel	Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone – Senegal – the Netherlands (overland and by plane)
Patrick	Cameroon	Cameroon – Somalia – Belgium – the Netherlands – Belgium (overland, by plane and by train)
Beatrice	Ghana	Ghana – the Netherlands (by plane)
Sandra	Ghana	Ghana – the Netherlands (by plane)
Rose	Nigeria	Nigeria – the UK – Nigeria – Ghana – Nigeria – Ivory Coast – Nigeria - the US – the Netherlands (by plane)
Daniel	Ghana	Ghana – Norway – Finland – Ghana – Norway – the Netherlands (by plane)
Kwasi	Ghana	Ghana – Belgium – the Netherlands (by plane and by train)

Table 7: The journeys to and within Europe of my respondents in Italy

Respondent	Origin Country	Journey to and within Europe
Abdou	Senegal	Senegal - France – Spain – Italy (by plane and by train)
Amina	Senegal	Senegal - France – Italy (by plane and by train)
Mamadou	Senegal	Senegal – France – Italy (by plane and by train)
Moustapha	Senegal	Senegal - France – Norway – Italy (by plane and by train)
Samba	Senegal	Senegal - The UK – Spain – Italy (by plane)
Amadou	Senegal	Senegal - Italy
Abigail	Ghana	Ghana – Sweden (transfer) – Italy (by plane and by train)
George	Ghana	Ghana – Italy (by plane)
Massata	Senegal	Senegal – Belgium – Italy (by plane and by train)
Falilou	Senegal	Senegal – France – Italy (by plane and by train)
Mouralla	Senegal	Senegal - France – Italy (by plane and by train)
Oumar	Senegal	Senegal – Italy (by plane)
Charles	Nigeria	Nigeria – Benin – Niger – Libya - Italy – Switzerland – Italy (overland and by sea)

Maxwell	Nigeria	Nigeria – Niger – Algeria - Morocco – Algeria – Libya - Italy – Switzerland – Italy (overland and by sea)
Jessica	Nigeria	Nigeria - Switzerland – Italy (overland and by sea)
Solomon	Nigeria	Nigeria – Niger – Libya – Italy (overland and by sea)
John	Nigeria	Nigeria – Niger – Algeria – Libya – Italy (overland and by sea)
Victor	Nigeria	Nigeria – Italy (by plane)

4.2. A chance, a destiny and a curious mind

Various respondents said things to me that indicate that they had not had a specific motivation, nor a concrete aspiration to migrate. After Daniel got his 1st degree in the late 90's, he was working as a tax assistant in Ghana. “Then I had the chance to go to Sweden, to learn how taxation works in Europe. And in Ghana I had a white girlfriend and that's another thing: I saw the way you live” (26/03/2016). So as well a chance that he got to go to Europe as the image of the life of his ‘white girlfriend’ influenced his aspiration to go to Europe. Several of my respondents talked about being curious to see how other places are or lives could be. The notion of curiosity emerged regularly within interviews and is therefore an important concept to elaborate on. Jessica introduced us to Victor, a 29-year-old man from Nigeria who has lived in Italy since 2002. “I didn't have any problems or anything, I didn't really want to leave Nigeria, but when you already have a Visa.. (which he got via his mother who already lived in Italy), it's easy to go, so why not?” (23/05/2016). Victor tells us there was no concrete reason for him to migrate, but the fact that he did, just because it was ‘easy’ for him, points to a certain desire or curiosity to see what his life could be like when migrating to Europe.

30-year-old Senegalese bookseller Amina, who has lived in Italy for 16 years, approached us while we were drinking a cappuccino in the centre of Bergamo. She told us: “Je n'ai pas décidée de venir, c'est mon destin de venir en Italie” (*I did not chose to come, it is my destiny to come to Italy*) (16/04/2016).

“Je n'ai pas décidée de venir, c'est mon destin de venir en Italie”

However, she also told us that people move from Africa to Europe, because: “In Africa, there are not enough opportunities to work, there is no money, people suffer from undernutrition and diseases. People have no future in Africa”. So although she mentions several motivations for ‘African people’ to migrate, which points to the fact that she does see a migration to Europe as a possibility on a better future than when staying in Africa, for herself it was ‘her destiny’. She believes her migration was supposed to happen for her, determined by a higher power than her own ability to make choices in life.

We met Moustapha, a 45-year-old man from Senegal, in front of the mosque in Bergamo. He arrived in Europe in 1997 with a visitor's Visa. After having lived in France and Norway for a while, he came to Italy where he has lived for fifteen years now. Moustapha also gave us a very inspiring answer: “People always thing we leave our country voluntarily, but that is not true. We have many problems in Africa. Therefore, we leave our family and friends

behind” (17/04/2016). This points to the fact that he does not see his migration as a voluntary action, but as a form of forced mobility due to problems he was experiencing.

“People always think we leave our country voluntarily, but that is not true.”

For Abigail, a 31-year old woman from Ghana, whom we met in Varese in Italy, it was not her plan to go to Italy, but ‘her opportunity’. Her dad arranged her whole journey for her.

My dad decided it was better for me to travel, so he brought me here. I had no idea how it was to travel [...] it was my father’s plan; I couldn’t reject it, so I came. He arranged everything for me [...] Before I was happy, because I thought it would be a lot of help for my family, but when I was here.. I can’t really tell... maybe it’s the plan God had for me (18/04/2016).

Abigail seemed to have a rather abstract aspiration before migrating and it looks like her father gave her the incentive to migrate. Her aspiration is therefore triggered by another person than herself. She points as well to ‘her father’ as to ‘God’ as explanatory factors for her movement to Europe and in this way leaves neglected her own ability to act in life.

For Victoria, a 30-year-old woman from Nigeria living in the Bijlmer, it was her own desire and aspiration to migrate to Europe, she even had to ‘convince’ her father to go to Europe:

In Nigeria, you have no freedom because of the culture. I am from the Ibos tribe and the culture is very strictly; when you leave your parents, you have to get married. I came to study in Germany. I already found a study in Germany: Graphical Design. I am a born artist; I write short stories and songs. I wanted to become a popstar, but I didn’t want to tell this to my father. My brother told him and he thought I was going to be spoiled. I was excited to go to Europe, to live my life without restrictions (01/03/2016).

Here, we see that the intrinsic and extrinsic typology that Xu and Wu (2016, p. 6) use for motivations, could also be used for aspirations. By doing that, Abigail’s aspiration can be considered extrinsic, since it is driven by pressures and the idea that it will benefit her (and her family) in the future. Victoria has an intrinsic aspiration, because she wanted to go to Europe (for) herself and was very excited about migrating to Europe.

Whether it is ‘true’ or not that several migrants did not plan, chose or decide to leave their country or to come to Europe, it is important to reflect upon this. Talking about ‘opportunities, destinies or God’ as a reason for migration implies that they do not see themselves as ‘rational actors’, but that they see other people or powers as influences on their lives and choices. The fact that their aspirations to go somewhere seem very abstract and uncertain raises questions as: what does this mean? Is there really no plan inside their head? How can we understand and explain this? Which factors help forming such an abstract aspiration?

Although it sounds very unlikely that people risk their lives on the sea or leave everything behind just out of curiosity or a so-called opportunity or chance to go to Europe, it illustrates that although they did not really have (big) problems in their home country, they still

had a strong incentive or aspiration to leave their country or go to another country. A theory given by Czaika and Voltknecht (2012), is that aspirations can be both a cause as a consequence of migration. If people have the ability, or as my respondents called it: a ‘chance’ or ‘opportunity’ to migrate, this can influence their aspiration to migrate. Just as people who do have the aspiration to migrate, but not the ability to do so because of not enough opportunities, will eventually not migrate (Carling, 2002).

Secondly, the forming of these abstract or uncertain aspirations has to do with the fact that a mixture of different factors and influences form an aspiration. For Maxwell, the violence of the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram was not the only factor influencing his motivation to leave Nigeria. His desire to find work, which he could not find in Nigeria, was another important factor. This also applied to Solomon (26-years-old), Charles and John from Nigeria, who migrated via a similar path and with comparable motivations. When they could not find work in Morocco or Libya, they moved on to Europe.

Next to the fact that it is mostly a combination of different factors that form an aspiration, there are two important subjects that lead to the capacity to aspire a migration to Europe. These two subjects, also mentioned in the conceptual model of chapter two (see figure 3), seem to follow each other up and I will elaborate on them separately. To understand how these curious minds and uncertain plans to migrate emerge, we have to go a step back to the concept of the imagination, which I will introduce in the next section. The ability of people to imagine different places and lives (Weiss, 2008), can lead to people being curious about other lives in other places and therefore contribute to the forming of an aspiration to migrate.

4.3. A bright life

As already stated, people’s aspirations to migrate and their migration routes are often unclear and unfixed. The imagination is therefore a useful and appropriate concept, because it has to do with terms of instability and uncertainty (Weiss, 2008, p. 99). Human experience has a fluid and contradictory character, meaning that also people’s imagination is very instable and can easily change. Therefore, aspirations fuelled by someone’s imagination are most likely very uncertain and plausible to change too. In this paragraph, I will illustrate different examples of imaginations migrants had about (a migration to) Europe and I will analyse this concept by linking their stories to literature about the imagination.

Most of my respondents had a positive image about Europe before they came. They see Western countries as countries where everything is possible and without any problems. David, a 59-year-old man from Ghana whom we met in Amsterdam tells us that, just as himself before he came to Europe in 1989, African people think of Europe as “glass buildings everywhere, all people are rich, don’t work, money comes from heaven and there is no sickness” (10/02/2016). Samba, a 40-year old man from Senegal and a friend from Moustapha, told us: “Je pensais qu’il était la vie en rose (*I thought it was a bright life*) and that working and earning money was easy in Italy, but this was not true” (17/04/2016).

Abigail however, told us she had no image of Europe, because she never thought about migrating to Europe until her father gave her ‘the opportunity’. However, she also told us that she was happy when her father told her about his plan to let her migrate to Europe, because she

thought it would be a lot of help for her family, which still points to a, though maybe unconscious, but still ‘positive feeling’ about a migration to, and future life in, Europe.

These positive images about Europe or the ‘West’ come to the forth in several other studies about non-Western migrants (Prinz, 2005; Salazar, 2010; Smith, 2006; Vigh, 2009). Most images have to do with ‘work’, ‘education’ and ‘a high level of development’. The Western world is associated with good education, a good infrastructure and highly paid jobs; ‘a world full of opportunities’ or ‘a route to success’. As well in the literature as amongst my respondents, negative images about Europe before migrating mostly had to do with the people. Associations with the people were about ‘racism, sexual toleration and individualism’ (Prinz 2005). Victor, who came to Italy via a Visa via his mother, told us that he there was ‘racism and not much work’ in Italy before he came. When we asked him why he wanted to go then, he told us: “because I wanted to see for myself and I already had the Visa” (23/05/2016). So even negative images about Europe such as racism and the fact that it still could be hard to find work, cannot weigh up to the positive images, a ‘curious mind’ or an ‘opportunity’ for Europe.

Another observation which also comes to the forth in different studies is the fact that there is a mirrored relation between the country of origin and the country of destination. Prinz (2005) shows that positive characteristics of Europe match negative characteristics of a migrant’s home country. Migrants see the education system or economy in their own country as bad and this in Western countries as good or ‘better’ (Salazar 2010; Vigh, 2009). Disappointments in the economic and political situation, and the impossibility of a decent future in their origin country, make people aspire a migration to ‘the West’ to avoid failures (see also Pelican, 2013). Several of my respondents endorse this finding. Kwasi, a 50-year old man from Ghana, whom I met during the church service in Tilburg, told me that “I though Europe was a paradise, but it’s not. Everybody in Africa thinks Europe is better” (06/03/2016). Moustapha tells us that “everybody in the world learns that Europe and the USA are the only important parts of the world, superior to Africa” (17/04/2016). These statements point to what Prinz (2005, p. 135) calls stereotypes, prejudices and collective impressions about Europe, which migrants are not always aware of.

4.3.1. A European world hierarchy

What also emerged in previous studies (see Coe, 2012; Pajo, 2007; Salazar, 2010; Vigh, 2009), is that there not only seems to be a mirrored relation between the origin country and the destination country, but even a ‘world hierarchy’ in which one country is seen as ‘better’ than the other. Countries such as South-Africa, Morocco and Libya are seen as better than countries in West-Africa, but not as good as Europe or the United States. The countries on top of this world hierarchy have the best possibilities, while the countries at the bottom have the least. David said that the USA is generally seen as ‘the superpower’ by Africans (10/02/2016). Charles also has a world hierarchy in mind and therefore a different plan before his migration.

I was applying for a Visa to go to the UK, but they ate my plan. My plan was to go to the USA, but I couldn’t get a Visa. So that’s when I decided I wanted to go to Europe via an Arab land. Then I went via the routes to Italy, but I’m hoping to find myself in the UK someday, where everybody speaks English (02/05/2016).

Charles placed the USA at the top in the world hierarchy, followed by the UK. He was not the only one who preferred the USA and the UK over other European countries. So even within Europe there seems to be this kind of hierarchy. Countries in northern Europe such as Switzerland, Germany and the United Kingdom are mentioned by several respondents as 'better' than countries in Southern Europe, such as Italy and Spain. Also in Salazar's research (2010), the UK is seen as the most attractive destination country by Tanzanian migrants, followed by other west European countries. For lots of Nigerian and Ghanaian respondents this had to do with the language. Since English is the official language in their origin country, they preferred migrating to an English-speaking country as well. The crux is, that most migrants do find themselves in these south European countries (upon which I will come back to in the next chapter).

However, not all of my respondents could make a distinction between different European countries in their pre-departure phase. Daniel for example told us that at the time he was living in Ghana, he did not know the Netherlands. "I thought the Netherlands and Germany was the same country with the same people. I thought it was one big Europe. I had to come before I could identify the difference." In different other studies comes to the forth that Europe is often not seen as a conglomerate, but as a list of countries all associated with the same characteristics such as a high level of development, social security and political power. Most mentioned countries were the UK, Germany, France and Scandinavian countries, but sometimes also Australia, Canada and the US (Prinz, 2005). So potential migrants cannot always identify differences between European countries or place them within Europe, but only know the names of several countries (which do not even necessarily have to be within Europe) and associate them all with the same characteristics.

These imaginations do not only have to do with economic advantages or a safe place, but also with a 'social upward mobility', a concept introduced by Hoffman-Nowotny (Prinz, 2005, p. 119). This means that people also associate 'victory, respect and admiration' with a migration to Europe, next to political stability, a strong economy and a high level of development. By migrating to a country higher in the global hierarchy, people see their own social status grow (Pajo, 2008, p. 11). People classify countries in a world hierarchy, showing differences between countries in the world. This causes people to realise there are inequalities in living conditions and possibilities in the world, which contribute to the forming of an aspiration to migrate somewhere else (Prinz 2005).

But how do these, overall positive imaginations, about a migration to Europe emerge? And how is it possible that even when people know it is hard to find work in a European country, not everybody experiences only success or that there is a lot of racism, they still are curious, have an aspiration to go and see for themselves, with all the risks that come with it?

4.3.2. The resistant dream of migrating to 'the promising West'

How these images and imaginations arise has, according to Appadurai (1996), to do with the fact that people reflect on (in)equalities because of globally wide spread images of other lives and possibilities. Technological developments, airplanes, smartphones and laptops excite the imagination and show that the origin country evades progress. These images show the people

that their own country is underdevelopment, while more and better possibilities can be found elsewhere. Peter, a 48-year-old man from Nigeria who has lived in the Netherlands for ten years, told me that many used cars that came to Nigeria were from the Netherlands.

So I thought that when all vehicles come from the Netherlands, there must be a lot of money there. We all had this fantasy in Nigeria, that a car is only 20 euros in the Netherlands. There came ships from the Netherlands with all kinds of products and we said: “oh so this comes from the Netherlands, then we should go there” (15/02/2016).

Although Abigail’s journey was arranged by her father, she felt happy about her ‘opportunity’. Only two weeks before she left, her father told her he arranged her journey to Italy for her. She told us that she was happy when she heard she could go to Europe: “When you live in Ghana and you hear that you can go to Europe, it’s a great joy. I was happy” (08/06/2016). And although she said she never thought about a migration to Europe and therefore could not tell us how she saw a migration to Europe before coming, she thought it would be a great help to her family when she would migrate to Europe.

“When you live in Ghana and you hear that you can go to Europe, it’s a great joy. I was happy”

The fact that she did not think about Europe before she came, however felt happy about migrating to Europe, points to a certain prejudice about Europe, resulting from (un)conscious sources leading to a positive image about a migration to Europe. These sources can be mass media and social networks, but also stereotypes which are socio-culturally transmitted (Salazar 2010, p. 14). Prinz (2005) calls the collection of information a multi-causal process, where potential migrants do not need to be aware of or do not want to reveal.

A very influential source seems to be media; mainly television, but also radio, internet and newspapers. Media can increase feelings of disadvantage and give rise to higher aspirations, without a change in other factors as the push and pull models assume (Castles et al., 2014). Media can however also have negative messages, promoted by governments, European embassy’s or international organisations, trying to stop illegal migration (Pelican, 2013). Reports about illegal border crossings between Morocco and Spain or migrants drowning in the Mediterranean sea can show the negative sights and risks of migration, influencing a critical view on migrating to Europe. Salazar (2010) points to a new critical and more nuanced view under young people in Africa. In the 90’s, migrating to the West was seen as hip and trendy, but now people are realising life is not only a paradise in Europe. Next to media, returned migrants can also give a message to their fellow citizens.

A certain amount of my respondents also show me this critical view, such as Victor about ‘racism’ and ‘not much work opportunities’, and Maxwell who knew about the risk he was taking on sea. However, they still have crossed the threshold to migrate. This shows that although negative aspects of migrating lead to new critical views, the dream to migrate to the ‘promising West’ keeps existing, as Salazar (2010) also shows. Moreover, this has to do with the fact that when people hear negative stories of other migrants, they think that they themselves

have better chances on crossing the border or finding a job. They are confident about their own good chances in Europe and believe they have their future in their own hands (Smith, 2006).

Although many of my respondents did not exactly know where they wanted to live in Europe, several migrants had a plan in their head for how long they wanted to live in Europe. Even though Victoria had a big, but rather abstract aspiration about her migration to Europe (studying and becoming a popstar), later in the interview she tells us she had a more concrete plan: her aspiration to go to Europe was attached to a timeframe of five years: “In the beginning, I wanted to stay for five years, everybody does” (01/03/2016), but this changed during her migration within Europe (upon which I will come back to in chapter 5).

“In the beginning, I wanted to stay for five years, everybody does”

Pelican (2013) indicates a certain shift in ideas about a ‘successful migrant’. Whereas in the postcolonial time someone was seen as successful when he was permanently and totally integrating in the new society, now the term is associated with a continuous flow of remittances to show where a migrant belongs and that they have success. Migrating is seen as a temporary attempt to improve somebody’s life. This points to the fact that migrants aspire to improve their- and their family’s life in their home country, by earning money for some years in Europe and then returning back home.

More of my respondents had the plan to stay temporarily in Europe to earn money and then return home. Some had a concrete year in their head of when they wanted to return, others left this more open, but almost all of them overstayed their temporal plan during their migration within Europe. According to Crivello (2014), migration is about what is imagined as expected and possible. However, this not always works out as people had hoped or expected, which changes their aspirations again. In chapter five, I will come back to this subject. Next to media, social networks are one of the most important sources influencing people’s imagination and migration aspirations’ (Salazar, 2010; Smith, 2006; Pajo, 2008). In the last paragraph of this chapter, I will discuss this topic of social networks.

4.4. Social networks

Social networks seem to play a very important role in the lives of West-African migrants. Almost all of my respondents had at least a few friends or family living in a European country before migrating. In contrast to the overall vague and uncertain aspirations and migration plans of many respondents, some respondents had a very concrete plan in their head of *where* they were going to live in Europe in the future. This were mostly respondents who migrated for or with family. So next to social relations indirectly influencing an imagination and fuelling an aspiration to migrate (too), social relations can also be a more direct reason for someone to migrate. Emmanuel, a 21-year-old man from Sierra Leone, came specifically to the Netherlands because his mother already lived there. He could not live with his stepdad in Sierra Leone anymore, so decided to come live with his mother (16/03/2016). Family reunion is therefore another factor that can lead to somebody’s migration. Several women came to the Netherlands

for and/or with their husbands. Such as Esther, a Nigerian woman of 35 years, whom we met in the church in Tilburg: “My husband was living in the Netherlands, so that’s why I came too” (13/03/2016) and Beatrice, a 45-year-old woman from Ghana:

We met in Ghana. My husband was going to the USA, but that didn’t happen, so he came to Holland. My father worked with the British Airlines and he owned the travel agency in Ghana. He could give me free tickets. [...] I arrived in December 1996 by myself. I came to live with my husband (24/03/2016).

However, these contacts do not necessarily have to be close contacts, in most cases this were friends to friends, acquaintances or distant relatives. Also these contacts can be a crucial role in the choice for a specific country in Europe. Abigail tells us that she did not choose Italy herself, but her father’s choice to send her to Italy depended on his family who already lived there. Her father never gave her a clear explanation *why* he wanted her to move, just *that* he wanted her to move to Europe, because he thought it was better for her and the family. Since his relatives already lived there, he sent her to Italy to live with them.

In the beginning I was living with a certain lady I didn’t know. She was from Ivory Coast. She is a friend to a friend of my father. It is very complicated; I didn’t know her until I came. I stayed there for three months. Then I went to my uncle. I knew I was having an uncle, but I didn’t know exactly who he was (Abigail, 18/04/2016).

It appears that many migrants use their social networks to make a start in Europe; for information, support or just to have a first place to stay. Victoria’s choice to go to Germany depended on a study she wanted to do there, but at the same time also on her family who already lived there. She just wanted to go to ‘Europe’ and Germany was a convenient choice, because there she could stay with relatives (01/03/2016). When people have a first place to stay or a first helping hand in the new country, it is easier for them to start somewhere new.

Moreover, social networks are not only a reason for family reunification or a ‘helping hand’ in Europe, but a strong force that can influence the imagination and fuel the aspiration to migrate to Europe. By the telling of stories and the showing of images about Europe, people imagine what their life could be like in Europe. Victoria told us that her parents went to holiday in London sometime and that when they came back, they only told her ‘nice stories’. “People in Nigeria all like white people. I used to have a white doll when I was young and I wanted to see the white people for myself” (01/03/2016).

“I used to have a white doll when I was young and I wanted to see the white people for myself”

Jessica told us that she ended up in Nigeria ‘through a friend contact’:

I was doing well back home. And once earlier one of my friends came to Italy, so she used to send down her pictures. She was looking good, so good, dressed well you know. That’s how

she used to communicate once in a while and we were all happy for her. I said, “oh beautiful she is, wow, okay let me just go and see” (02/05/2016).

Although these imaginations are never the only factor forming an aspiration to migrate, the image of the ‘good and beautiful life’ of others seems to be a powerful device to fuel the aspiration to migrate (too). Several studies also write about these positive stories of experiences of friends and family or returned migrants from European countries as important sources of information on which imaginations are based (Salazar, 2010; Pajo, 2008). Smith (2006) states that there is a connection between stories and migration: between the telling of stories and the vision on the world. He states that migration is based on the transmission of ideas, stories told by other migrants, rumours of possibilities and the proud of returned migrants (p. 57). Also Crivello (2014) argues that social networks influence people’s perceptions and imaginations and therefore their actions and aspirations to migrate.

Two other examples are the stories of Amadou (a 36-year-old Senegalese bookseller in Bergamo) and Mamadou (34-year-old bookseller in Bergamo). Amadou has several cousins living in Europe. Before he migrated to Europe, he already had a lot of contacts there. One of these contacts told him there was work in Italy. So he came to Italy to work and to earn money in order to maintain his family back home (17/04/2016). Mamadou told us he got a call from a cousin in Italy who asked him to work with him in a company that produces car batteries and so he came (16/04/2016). Both men were triggered by the imagination of the possibility of work influenced by their social network. In their search to find work, only a rumour and a phone call about work in Europe convinced them to migrate to Europe.

Next to the stories of migrants via telling or telephone, internet is another big source of social networks influencing people’s imaginations. All of my respondents with whom I was friends on Facebook, posted pictures of themselves next to big buildings, expensive cars or in fancy clothes. Reactions on these pictures said they saw they were doing well and wished them good luck, while in reality, my respondents did not own a car, only had one suit and still lived in a refugee camp. Why do potential migrants hear overall positive stories from their friends, family or other contacts who have migrated to Europe? Why do migrants only send pictures in which they look very happy, or post pictures on Facebook in front of big buildings or next to an expensive car? My respondents answered this question themselves:

Many Nigerians want to go home, but have achieved nothing. I’m in Europe and have nothing. Then you are ashamed and cannot go back. Some clean toilets or houses. Also university graduates can’t find jobs and have to go back to school here and learn the language. Some are not even legal here and therefore cannot find a job (Victoria, 01/03/2016).

So due to the fact that many respondents were ashamed to go back to their origin country, because they had no job, not much money or were not even legal, they told their family they were doing very well. Sandra, a 27-year-old woman from Ghana, told us that she has not travelled back to Ghana for the 7 years she has lived in the Netherlands.

I planned to visit Ghana last year, but it didn’t work. I was a little bit sad, because I could not find a job. I wanted to find a job and then go to Ghana. [...] My plan is when I find a job, I go with my husband to Ghana (25/03/2016).

She did not want to go to Ghana before finding a job, because she could not look like a ‘failure’ to her friends and family in Ghana. Therefore, she only shared positive stories with their friends and family back home and withholds failures or disappointments. Salazar (2010) also states that friends and family in Europe keep telling only positive stories on the phone or through internet, while in reality they seemed to live miserable when somebody finally visited them. When Jessica arrived in Suisse, she saw her friend from Italy who kept sending her pictures to Nigeria.

I was so happy. And immediately when she saw me, she started crying. She was not the same that I saw in the pictures. She was looking frail and pitiful. So I said: “why are you looking like this? In the pictures you sent you were looking beautiful”. She said “Those picture is a picture she would talk to me about later”. I said “Why?” She said “No, later” (02/05/2016).

The stories they tell is that the system and the economy is very good, but not that they are living as third-class citizen themselves (see also Salazar, 2010). The migrants want to present themselves as successful and hide their economic and social problems for their family, which gives friends and family a more positive image than reality.

Pathriage and Collyer (2011) and Somerville (2011) state that social networks are an uncertain source, which can be a resource of support, but can also provide constraints such as non-truth and misinformation. By only telling positive stories about their migration to their friends and family and posting pictures on social media in which they look very happy or even rich, they maintain this vicious circle of flows of only positive stories. This will keep fuelling the imagination of other West-Africans and their aspirations to migrate to Europe (too).

4.5. Conclusion

As we have seen, it is first of all very important to acknowledge the fact that most migrants do not have a clear goal or a fixed plan before migrating to Europe, aside from the ones that migrated for family reunification. Their dreams, expectations and aspirations are mostly vague and uncertain due to the fact that some respondents did not have a clear ‘end destination’, while others did not have a clear ‘starting point’. Many migrants did not know where they would finally end up or which route they would take. Others had an aspiration to go ‘to Europe’, but could not tell us why, where exactly and how their aspiration to go to Europe was formed. Several respondents spoke about a chance, an opportunity or a curious mind. The notion of curiosity seems to play an important role in the aspirations of several migrants. This finding, together with the argument that other people or powers can stimulate where migrants go, points to the fact that migration is not a rational decision and that there are elements that are hard to understand for other people. They do not see themselves as rational actors.

Furthermore, the empiricism supports the theoretical model of chapter two (see figure 3) about the role that the imagination and social networks play in the forming of migrants’ aspirations. Next to the fact that aspirations are mostly vague and uncertain, there is mostly a combination of different factors that plays a role in the aspiration to migrate. Almost none of my respondents gave only one reason why he or she migrated. These different factors, such as work or study opportunities, political (in)stability or social reasons, contribute to the forming

of an aspiration within the mind of the migrant, created by the possibility of migrants to imagine different lives and places influenced by other people: social networks.

Furthermore, aspirations of West-African migrants already seem very open to change from the beginning of their journey, before even reaching Europe. The instable character of aspirations makes them prone to change. We already saw several aspirations of migrants changing before even reaching the border of Europe, which makes it most likely that they will change again in different times and places within Europe. On the one hand does this changeable character of aspirations seem to play an important role in migration decisions and routes, on the other hand, the dream to migrate to 'the promising West' persists. The next chapter will elaborate on the aspirations of West-African migrants within Europe, how they can be contradicting, multiple, reform and change within different times and places and how this influenced their migration choices and routes after the pre-departure phase.

5. ‘A wish and a plan’: Changing aspirations and changing routes

We have seen how the aspiration to migrate to Europe can be formed, which happens through a process consisting of multiple factors, such as political instability or a bad economic situation in the country of origin on the one hand, while work or study opportunities in the destination country on the other hand. Most of my respondents did not have a fixed plan or clear goal and their dreams and aspirations were therefore overly vague and uncertain. These abstract aspirations were generally formed through the possibility of people to imagine different lives in other places, fuelled by social networks. Before people go to Europe, most of them already have a certain imagination about places and how life is there. These imaginations of other futures in different places were mostly very positive. All of them had the hope, aspiration or expectation to have a better future somewhere else and they believe in their own chances and opportunities to ‘make it’ in Europe. When they arrive in Europe, these imaginations and social networks can change and therefore still seem to play an important role in the reforming of their aspirations.

This chapter will first describe what the aspirations of West-African migrants are just after arrival. Then I will show what migrants’ aspirations during their migration in Europe are, which can be several weeks, months or years, and after having lived in Europe for a longer period of time. By illustrating what the aspirations of West-African migrants are once they arrived in Europe and after having lived in Europe for a while or for a long time, I will shed light on how they develop, change and reform within different times and places, what lays behind this and how we can explain this. Moreover, we will see how this affects their migration trajectories, routes and journeys within Europe.

The distinctions in individual aspirations of Meeteren et al. (2009) are central in this chapter. Migrants that come to Europe with the plan to earn money and then return home are called *investment migrants*. Migrants who want a legal status are *legalization migrants* and migrants that aspire to settle down in Europe are *settlement migrants*. Next to these statuses, this chapter is structured around the ‘times of migration’ by Cwerner (2001). Cwerner suggests a scheme to study migration based on the premise that migrants experience particular cultures of time. He distinguishes three periods of times, of which the first period is about the adjustment of the migrant to the host society. In the second period, the migration experience develops and the third period is based on the long-term (temporal) prospect in the experience of the migrant. Furthermore, I will again use and continue with the stories of several migrants and in particular with the stories of Abigail, Maxwell and Moustapha. These three respondents have had different starting points and took different routes, but also have (had) very different trajectories within Europe and are finding themselves in different ‘times’ and ‘places’ within Europe now, while holding on to different aspirations.

5.1. The first steps

Generally looking at migrants’ aspirations, most of my respondents wanted, or still want to, study or work in Europe to earn money to make their dreams come true. Their aspirations can

still be abstract and diverse in the beginning, but in most cases have to do with maintaining their family back home, being able to start a family of their own, having a good career or rise in their social status. Victoria flew directly from Nigeria to Germany when she was eighteen years old with a student Visa, to study at a German university.

I came to study in Germany. I already found a study in Germany: Graphical Design. I am a born artist; I write short stories and songs. I wanted to become a popstar [...] I knew many friends and family in Europe. I stayed with them for a year when I arrived in Germany (01/03/2016).

Victoria had a big aspiration about her migration to Europe. In the first period of her migration, she wanted to study and become a popstar or an artist and she was very excited about her migration. When she tells this, it looks like she did not think about the (near) future. She wanted to live a life without restrictions' which was not possible in Nigeria because of the 'strict culture'. However, later in the interview she tells us that she had the plan to stay for five years in Germany to study, work and earn money for herself and her family and then return back to Nigeria. With this plan, Victoria can be labelled an *investment migrant*. Although her aspiration to become a popstar or an artist has been rather abstract, her plan to stay for five years and then return is more concrete.

For Maxwell, Italy was not the direct destination after leaving Nigeria, neither his first intention. His aspiration can therefore also be seen as abstract and extrinsic. He left previous places driven by pressures of 'no peace' and 'no work' (02/05/2016). His aspiration before migrating is still the same in this stage: he still aspires peace and work. He has no intention of returning to Nigeria in the near future, although he also has no intention to stay in Italy. For now, he wants documents to find a job and/or travel further. Therefore, he can be called a *legalization migrant*.

Abigail saw her migration as 'an opportunity'. She never had a long time to think about her migration, because she only knew about it two weeks before she came. Her father arranged everything for her and told her two weeks before the plane would leave that she was going to Europe. She told us she never thought about migrating to Europe before her father told her she was going. Therefore, she did not have a concrete aspiration nor a concrete plan in the first phase of her migration to Europe, which makes it difficult to place her within the typology of van Meeteren et al. (2009). However, although she told us it was not her own plan to migrate, but her father's plan, she felt positive about it in the beginning:

Up to now, I don't know why I'm here, but I like it this way. I fight for my own things, I fight for my own future. My father decided a good thing. Right now in Ghana, it is very difficult to find work (18/04/2016).

"Up to now, I don't know why I'm here"

In this first period of her migration, she needed to adjust herself to her new life and country, guided by her father. Since everything was arranged by her father, she immediately had an address to stay after arriving. However, this was not her own choice and she did not really know the persons she was staying with.

“Before I was happy, because I thought it would be a lot of help for my family, but when I was here.. I can’t really tell [...]. In the beginning it wasn’t bad, we are all human. It is difficult to live with someone you don’t know, who are not your parents, but relatives have a duty to take care of you. At times you feel that you cannot ask him anything, because he is giving you shelter and you are not paying or contributing, he is doing everything by himself (18/04/2016).

In this first period of time, migrants have to deal with the ‘other’ (Cwerner, 2001: 19): the new language, culture and people of their host country. Many respondents had difficulties with the language, the weather and the population of the host country (Kwasi, 06/03/2016; Peter, 15/02/2016).

Speaking Italian is not easy, when you do it people laugh at you. I went to a language school in Como. But I tried to speak it, when you are shy you can’t do anything in life, when you laugh at me you have to tell me what is the right word (Abigail, 18/04/2016).

It was not easy in the beginning, because I had to learn the language. After the language school for three months, my study started. After one year, I had my own home (Victoria, 01/03/2016).

Racism also came to the forth as a struggle for many respondents in their new lives in Europe. “Nobody cares for you here. If you speak English, no problem. They think you are looking like a cow, it doesn’t make sense. Italian people eat migrants’ money, they don’t care for immigrants” (Maxwell, 02/05/2016). Dealing with the ‘other’ and the new culture is prominent in the first stage of people’s aspiration. These issues play an important role in the confirming or reforming of migrants’ aspirations, on which I will come back to in the second stage of their migration.

Abigail came with a visitor’s Visa to Sweden, because the person that invited her lived in Sweden. The next day she travelled to Italy by train. So she did not have legal documents to stay in Italy. Therefore, she told us that she “couldn’t do anything” the first years in Italy.

I had some training, but just for one month. I did home care, taking care of people of old age for three weeks. Then I came back home. After six or seven months, I had another lady. I was living with her. By that time, I was three or four years in Italy. It is difficult to do it, but you have to do something to survive and send money to your parents. You work really long days. Then I took care for another man for a few months, but that person died and then I came home again (18/04/2016).

In this period of time, she was getting used to her new life in Italy and she became familiar with the troubles of work and documents. According to Cwerner (2001: 21), the issue of (il)legal statuses and documents affect lots of migrants in this first period of time. This came up in many interviews as well. This issue is almost always related to work. Mamadou, a 34-year-old bookseller from Senegal whom we met in Bergamo, told us: “in order to get papers, you have to work, but in order to work, you have to have papers” (16/04/2016). This contradictory statement shows that for many respondents to live somewhere depended, and still depend, on one of these two things: finding work or getting documents.

Cwerner (2001) states that when the element of documents is combined with the willingness to work long hours for an insecure job, a strong sense of alienation is developed whereby time appears to be seldom under control. These limitations lead to a disengagement of the future from the present, whereby the power of the migrant to plan decreases. Therefore, migrants constantly reconsider their objectives and aspirations, which are now controlled by external factors. This brings us to the next stage of migration.

5.2. The next phase: changing aspirations

In the next phase of people's migration, abstract aspirations can develop to more concrete aspirations. Factors such as racism, (the difficulty of) a new language and another culture can contribute to changing aspirations of where and for how long a person wants to live. When racist experiences or (more than expected) difficulty with the language are disappointing, migrants can reform their aspiration to other lives in other places. This section will still be about the period in which the migrant experience develops, in which different factors influence and contribute to the reforming and changing aspirations.

Moustapha arrived for, according to himself, 'economic reasons'. "In Senegal, there was no work, no perspective for the future. In Africa, there is war and conflicts. But I came here for economic reasons" (17/04/2016). In first instance, he was planning to work and earn money in France for a few years and then return to Senegal, for which he could be labelled as an *investment migrant*. In France he worked as an animator for kids in a holiday park for eight months. However, the difficulty to get a fixed contract to work in France, led to him travelling to another country in Europe. Finally, he ended up in Italy. In Moustapha's case we can see that he cannot only be labelled an *investment migrant* anymore, but also a *legalization migrant*. To be able to earn money to invest in his future, he needs a job and to have a job, he needs documents. Nevertheless, while his destination changed and his status might be adjusted, his aspiration to earn money stayed the same. He just tried to fulfil his aspiration in another place and through another way. Now, Moustapha still does not have documents, but he has found a job in Italy and therefore is not aspiring a legal status anymore, which made him change back from *legalization migrant* to *investment migrant*.

Moustapha's story corresponds to Abdou's story. Abdou's choices to live somewhere largely depended on work opportunities. Abdou has been in Europe since 2008 and spent most of his time living in France. Although he told us that the most important thing for him in life is to have a family and to find a wife with a good heart, his migration trajectory and choices of where to live mostly have depended on where there are work opportunities. In the first stage of his migration, he worked in a bar in France, but did not have a fixed contract. He stayed there for several years and then went by train to Barcelona, because there was not enough work in France. There he lived with a friend for two months and worked in a factory and in a bar. He did not like Barcelona, there was too much crisis and not enough work, so he returned to France. He only worked for a maximum of six months in a row. Thereafter, he came to Italy, where he has been living now since one and a half year, while selling books for a living. In the beginning, he could be labelled as a *legalization migrant*, because he wanted documents in order to work. Now he does have a document for five years, so he cannot be labelled a *legalization migrant*.

anymore. Since he is not sure where and for how long he wants to live in Europe, but knows that he wants to earn money to be able to start a family in the future, he can be called an *investment migrant*.

Charles has been living in Italy for almost three years and has documents for one year. He is going to school in the hope to get a job afterwards. “I’m hoping that maybe after this school if I am able to, I will get work. If this is not possible, I will go out of the country to look for a job” (02/05/2016). In the beginning, he could be labelled as a *legalization migrant*, because he wanted documents in order to find work. Now that he has his document, he is looking for work in Italy. If he will not be able to find a job in Italy, he wants to go to another country in Europe. He told us though that he does not have the intention to return back to Nigeria. For these reasons, at this stage of his migration he can neither be called an *investment migrant* nor a *settlement migrant*, but can be found in between statuses. For these three respondents, the issues of documents and work led to a re-examination of their migration trajectory. Their aspirations to (obtain documents in order to) work is still complying, but the place of where they aspire to do this changed or is likely to change in the future.

Of course, also other influences such as personal circumstances or disappointments can play a role in the change of someone’s aspirations or choices to live somewhere. After having lived in Germany for ten years, Victoria migrated to the Netherlands. “I had somebody who was really close to me in Germany, but I lost him. So I became depressive and wanted to change something. That is why I left for the Netherlands” (15/02/2016). She met her new husband at a party in Denmark and he already lived in the Netherlands, so she came too. For some respondents, their aspiration or choice to live somewhere depends on various, unknown or impressionable factors. Emmanuel told us: “I love life here, I cannot complain. I find it, I would not say difficult, only the language struggle. Maybe there will be another reason or something will come up, but otherwise I want to continue here” (16/03/2016).

*“Maybe there will be another reason or something will come up,
but otherwise I want to continue here”*

So Emmanuel keeps a possible opportunity or ‘something to come up’ in mind, that could influence his migration trajectory. Emmanuel’s argument corresponds with Cwerner’s (2001) second period of time. In this phase, migrants are ‘always making up their mind’. He associates this period with terms of ‘indecision, confusion, incompleteness, underachievement and eternal expectation’ (p. 27) When they are in this ambivalent status seeing their future uncertain, they are often ‘waiting for something to happen’ (p. 28).

When something ‘comes up’, something unfortunate happens or a person cannot find a job or get documents, when, how and where to does he or she chose to move on? Which influences the rest of his/her migration trajectory and his/her changing aspirations about another life in another place? The next paragraph discusses the changing imaginations, social networks and statuses of migrants leading to migrants changing their aspirations to other lives in other places.

5.2.1. Changing imaginations

Chapter four discussed the world hierarchy that is dominating within the mind of migrants before migrating. Also after arriving in Europe, we can see that this world hierarchy seems to exist within the imagination. However, many migrants showed that their imaginations regarding this world hierarchy changed within Europe. Weiss (2008) also argued that the imagination is instable and uncertain and can therefore easily change due to of various influences. In this paragraph, we can see that the imagination of migrants has changed after arriving in Europe because of different experiences, media and contacts.

Moustapha had been living in France for eight months, but could not find a fixed working contract or documents there. He heard from people that life was better in Norway, so he decided to go to Norway. Chapter four stated that North-European countries are mostly higher in the world hierarchy than South-European countries. However, also this imagination seems to change in some cases and does not always correspond to the routes migrants take or the countries they (try to) settle. Arriving in Norway, Moustapha got disappointed, because it was as difficult there to find a job and get documents as in France. So his imagination about life in Europe changed and after only two months, he left for Italy after again having heard stories from other migrants that life in Italy was ‘easier’. Meeteren et al. (2009) also write about the fact that after arriving in another place, migrants can become disappointed when their image does not seem to be as expected.

Although (other) North-European countries might still be placed higher in the world hierarchy, regarding a high level of development, social security and political power, the image on the possibility on work or the easiness to obtain documents changes which influences the routes migrants take. Charles went to Switzerland after having lived for two years in a refugee camp in Italy with a friend he met there. His image about as well Italy as Switzerland changed after having lived there for a while.

My friend made me to know that Switzerland is better than here, but it is no better, if you don't have money, you can't do anything. The police are harsher than in this land (Italy). The police can't allow you to stay longer without documents (Charles, 02/05/2016).

He, as well as Maxwell and Solomon, decided to go to Switzerland after arriving in Italy. In the refugee camp in Italy, they heard from people who were deported from Switzerland that ‘it's a good country’. There, they stayed in another refugee camp for three months, before they got deported back to Italy. Very soon after Maxwell's arrival in Europe, his image about Italy changed.

When I got to Italy, it is no good. They keep somebody in the camp, try to secure life. There is peace in Europe, that's the only thing [...] When I got to Switzerland, it is a very good country. They give us respect to a migrant. In Switzerland, there is no racism at all (Maxwell, 02/05/2016).

“There is peace in Europe, that's the only thing”

Maxwell found 'peace' in Italy, but he could not work after arrival, because he was staying in a refugee camp. Therefore, he could not fulfil his aspiration to work. He imagined Italy as a country with political stability and full of work opportunities before arriving there, but became disappointed soon after arrival. Although Maxwell still finds Switzerland better than Italy, and thus places Switzerland higher in the world hierarchy than Italy, the positive image in their head seems more often to be rather bitter after arriving.

Charles' image about Switzerland changed after having lived there for three months, while Maxwell still has a positive image about Switzerland. Nevertheless, Maxwell now aspires to go to Germany, since he has been deported from Switzerland. When I asked him how he knew Switzerland was a good country before he went, he said:

M: Switzerland is a very good country, like Germany. The whole world has lifted Germany up.

In Germany, there is respect. Germany thrives on immigrants

R: How did you know this before you went there?

M: I watched TV in the camp in Switzerland and saw black people learning to work in Germany.

R: How did you know Switzerland was better before you went?

M: I knew the World Bank was there, human rights. I'm not happy to stay in Italy.

(02/05/2016).

When we asked Abigail where she wanted to live in the future, she responded: "Where I want to live in the future? I have no idea. Maybe in Germany. A friend says there's work in Germany. Here it is difficult, there are no work opportunities" (18/04/2016). Even when they do not have a concrete aspiration to move to another place (yet), the world hierarchy persists in their head, along with the hope on the opportunity to be able to once migrate to a country that is placed higher in the world hierarchy in their head. When we asked Victor if he wanted to live in another country in Europe, he said:

No, not necessarily, but if I would pick a country it would be the UK. I have heard that the UK is very good for migrants from people who have been there and from others. That it is easy to find work (23/05/2016).

So within countries, migrants' imaginations about other places change due to experiences, media and other people. Media seemed to influence Maxwell's imagination about life for migrants in Germany. Stories of other migrants about Switzerland influenced Charles' Maxwell's, Solomon's and Moustapha's aspiration and decision to go to Switzerland, Norway and Italy. That stories of other migrants seem to play a very important role in changing imaginations and changing routes becomes clear. This leads us to the next paragraph.

5.2.3. Dynamic social networks

As already made clear in chapter two and chapter four, social networks play an important role in people's imaginations and therefore aspirations. Flows of information and ideas derive from social networks and influence people's imaginations about certain places (Castles et al., 2014). Also after arriving in Europe, social networks play a significant role in the changing of migrants' aspirations. Social networks can enlarge someone's imagined future (Crivello, 2014) and migrant's decisions can be influenced by temporal perceptions and evaluations of social

networks (Cwerner, 2001). Social networks can also be a great support to migrants in the way that they can inform people about work opportunities in other countries or offer them a place to stay, which we have seen in the previous paragraph's.

As Somerville (2011) argues, social networks can involve opportunities, resources and support. Several of my respondents decided to go to a certain place, because they already knew somebody living there. This could be a close friend or relative, but also a distant acquaintance. When Abdou could not find another job in France, he left for Spain, where he could live with a friend. He wanted to try to find work in another country in Europe and since he knew somebody living in Spain, he chose to go to Spain. Moustapha told us he never planned or thought about coming to Italy in first instance, but he knew other migrants living in Italy who told him that working and getting documents was much easier there, so after disappointments and difficulties with jobs and documents in other European countries, he decided to go to Italy based on a certain image composed by his social network. Now he has been living in Italy for fifteen years, has worked in a textile company and momentarily works as a salesmen for a pharmaceutical company.

Already existing social networks, but also new social networks play a role. We should therefore pay attention to the dynamic character of social networks, leading to network failures, disconnections and new social connections (Schapendonk, 2015). Schapendonk (2015) and Pathriage and Collyer (2011) argue that we should see social networks as dynamic instead of static and that fluctuations in social networks can not only give migrants support, but also guide migrants to wrong places and influence the success or failure of a migration project.

Maxwell, Charles and Solomon all went to Switzerland after arriving in Italy. Maxwell and Solomon only after a few months, while Charles went after two years staying in a refugee camp in Italy. In this camp in Italy, they met new people who told them that Switzerland was 'a good country'. These new social connections influenced their aspirations to go to Switzerland instead of staying in Italy. However, they were all deported back to Italy and Switzerland did not turn out to be such a 'good country' as they expected. This corresponds to Somerville's (2011) argument that social networks can involve constraints such as non-truths and misinformation (Switzerland was not such a 'good country'), leading to new migration routes along the way.

Also Daniel's, Kwasi's and Moustapha's trajectory were influenced by new social ties. Moustapha met people in France who told him it was easier to that life and finding a job was better and easier in Norway. Arriving in Norway though, this did not seem to be true, and after two months, he left for Italy. Daniel migrated to Sweden in the late 90's to do a course about taxation. After having lived in several countries in Scandinavia for a while, he met another Ghanaian man who told him to go to the Netherlands, because there was a large Ghanaian community there. He did not know the Netherlands before going there, but this man influenced his decision to move there and changed his migration trajectory. Kwasi migrated to Belgium in 2008. There he met a woman whom he married and obtained a Belgium passport. She told him to go to the Netherlands, because this was a good and tolerant country. Even though he broke up with her after a while, he moved to the Netherlands after one and a half year and has been living there ever since. So we see that new social ties can create new routes along the way and can influence imaginations, decisions and aspirations of migrants to go to another European

country. It is therefore crucial to take the dynamic character of social networks into account, since they can play a significant role in the changing of aspirations and migration routes.

5.2.4. Ability

Fulfilling their aspirations however, such as migrating to another place or country in Europe, is not always easy for the migrants and does not always work out the way they hoped or wanted. Carling (2002) uses his aspiration/ability model only for migration in the pre-departure phase, but his model can also be applied after migration. His model implies that migration first involves an aspiration and then the realisation of this aspiration. However, people who have the aspiration to migrate or move to another place, do not always have the ability to do so, and the other way around. This is important to keep in mind when studying migration trajectories.

Schuster (2005) showed in his research that many migrants in a certain European country have the intention to move to another European country, but not the ability to do so and therefore stay where they are. This research also perceived this. Having documents is herein a very important influence on people's ability to meet their aspirations. Both Abigail and Victoria came to Europe with a Visa and immediately had a place to stay with family. They both told us that it was not easy in the beginning, because of the language and getting used to the new situation, but they could study and work (illegally). Not all of my respondents came with a Visa to Europe. Either way, they all start without a residence permit and (not) having documents has a big influence on people's ability and therefore people's aspirations to work, study or travel. Although Abigail's aspiration was very abstract when she just arrived in Italy, now she tells us she has the aspiration to get married, have kids and a career in Europe. To achieve this, she needs documents. At the moment, she has a permit for five years, but she aspires an Italian passport. Therefore, she can now be called as well *legalization migrant* as *settlement migrant*. Abigail has had several 'illegal' jobs in Italy, before she got her documents and could study.

The first years I was working without documents; illegally. Later when I got the document, my boss registered for me. When I lost my job, I decided to do this course. It is the only way to have a permanent permit (18/04/2016).

Other respondents stayed or are still staying in a refugee camp in Europe. Most respondents from Nigeria we met in Italy were staying, or had stayed, in a refugee camp. Solomon describes the camp as: "It's like a prison without gates. It's like you're in a prison and the gate is open, but you don't have the strength to walk out" (03/05/2016).

"It's like a prison without gates. It's like you're in prison and the gate is open, but you don't have the strength to walk out"

The stress of waiting and uncertainty, and the fact that they cannot work or do anything else, has a big influence on people's aspirations and the ability to realise them. Peter has been living in Amsterdam illegally and cannot find a well-paid job, because he has no documents. Maxwell has been living in the refugee camp since January 2016. "When you have no papers, there's no

work. Me, I have no papers, so no work. Even today, if I will get my documents, I will leave Italy” (02/05/2016). For Maxwell, documents play a major role in his ability to fulfil his aspirations to migrate to another place. The moment he will receive papers, he wants to leave Italy for another country in Europe. Several migrants that wished to migrate to a European country higher in their imagined world hierarchy, were still staying in a (southern) European country low in the world hierarchy, because they did not have the ability to move further on.

Beatrice tells us that her dream job is to work with children. However, she cannot find such a job because it will take her ‘eight years to get a permit’. These migrants can all be called *legalization migrants*, because they aspire to have documents in order to fulfil their wishes to work or migrate to another country. In this way, their ability to realise their aspiration to work or to move to another place or country is affected by restrictive migration policies such as a refugee camp and the difficulty to obtain documents.

Some migrants do have documents, but still have not fulfilled their aspiration because they are not able to find a good, well-paid or satisfying job in the country they are living in. Victoria for example, lives in the Netherlands, but has a Germany passport. She told us she desires a creative job, such as writing short stories, singing or making wedding cakes, but cannot find this. According to her, this is because of racism: “Light people get easier access to papers and jobs than Africans, this is racism. [...] I don’t want to do a job in cleaning or something, it will hurt my dignity” (01/03/2016). Racism can therefore be another factor restricting someone’s ability to fulfil their aspirations.

Factors such as the difficulty to obtain documents, a refugee camp or racism can all influence someone’s ability to fulfil their aspirations and therefore their migration trajectories. Although people aspire to move to another place, when they do not have the ability to do so, they will stay where they are. This leads to forced or involuntary immobility (Carling 2002). It is therefore important to not only study migrants’ aspirations, but also their ability when doing research about migration trajectories. Among my respondents, aspirations were not only about moving on to another place in Europe, but frequently had to do with returning home. However, many respondents (felt like) they were not able to return. The last paragraph will discuss their future aspirations and how this affects their migration trajectories.

5.3. Future aspirations: the wish to return

Almost all respondents we have spoken to, had a wish of eventually returning to their origin country. However, not all of them had a clear idea about when and how they wanted to return. When we asked John, who does have a wife and three kids living in Nigeria, if he wanted to stay in Italy for the rest of his life he answered without hesitating: “No, no, no, no. I came from somewhere and I wish to return to Nigeria someday. It depends on how the political crisis ends. If it ends today, I will go back” (11/05/2016). Several migrants had the plan to migrate temporarily to Europe, such as Kwasi and Victoria, whom we could both call *investment migrants*.

I wanted to stay for five years, everybody does. Then you see your mates and it’s a competition. You can’t find work. I am planning to go home forever. Many Nigerians want to go home, but have achieved nothing. I’m in Europe and have nothing. Then you are ashamed and you cannot

go back. [...] I'm saving money to come home. If I have money, I would go back immediately (Victoria, 01/03/2016).

Most respondents who had this plan to stay for only five or ten years in Europe and then return, have passed this period and are still living in Europe, while having the wish to return home. The image for the people back home and being afraid to fail endures. This results in a prolonging of their stay, while actually wishing to return. Interesting is, that most respondents also have an idea, wish or aspiration about what they want to do when they have returned home, what in many cases had to do with starting up their own business in agriculture. Victoria tells us:

If I get 15000 euros now, I would go back. I won't ask my parents to sell their property to live there. You need money to start something. I want to do farming, grow things. I expect that Nigeria will become divided into two countries; the north and the south will split. I will then grow the things in the south that we otherwise would have to import from the north (01/03/2016).

"If I get 15000 euros now, I would go back"

Also Senegalese migrants Amadou, Mamadou and Falilou who are living in Italy, had the fantasy to go back to Senegal in the future to work in agriculture (Amadou, 17/04/2016; Mamadou, 16/04/2016). Falilou, a 45-year-old man, says: "In the future, I want to go back, but the problem is that there is a lot of fruit, but no water. When there is water, I can go back" (26/04/2016). Therefore, he wants to earn money in Italy to be able to invest in a machine to generate water. They can therefore also all be labelled as *investment migrants*.

Not all of them had this wish though. Maxwell, Charles and Solomon, who are all from Nigeria and have been living in Italy for a shorter period of time than my other respondents, wanted to stay in Europe. When we asked Maxwell if he did not want to return to Nigeria someday, like most other migrants we spoke, he said: "No. The people who say 'I went to Europe', they will come back here" (02/05/2016).

When they go back to Africa, people will be jealous of them and snap their things. So they will spend little time in Africa and then they will want to go to Europe again. I want to live in Europe. It's been a long time that I left Africa. It is not easy to live in Africa. There is lack of light and water (Charles, 02/05/2016).

Nevertheless, Charles wants to live in another country than Italy. He cannot be called an *investment migrants*, because he does not want to return to Nigeria. He already has his documents, so he is also not a *legalization migrant*. Although he does not know yet where in Europe he wants to settle, since he wants to make a life in Europe, a *settlement migrant* fits him best. When we asked Maxwell if he wanted to stay in Italy, he answered:

In Italy? No, no, no, no. Here it's fucked up. I want to go to another part of Europe. I want to stay in Europe. If I have documents, I am going to look for work in another European country.

Anywhere where the wind blows me. Central Europe is better. Italy is in the south: this is like central Africa (02/05/2016).

The fact that Maxwell, Charles and Solomon all told us that they did not want to return to Nigeria, can have to do with the fact that all three of them did not have an entire family back home, or much contact with family and/or friends back in their home country. “My brothers are there, some friends, but I’m not communicating with them so much” (Charles, 02/05/2016). Or with the fact that they have not lived in Europe for a long time compared to my other respondents; from a few months till a few years. Also striking is that all of them had a very abstract aspiration before coming to Europe and did not have the plan to go to Europe in first instance. They have never been *investment migrants*, but all started as *legalization migrant* or *settlement migrant*, while many other of my respondents started as *investment migrant* and changed from positions during their stay in Europe.

Although Charles tells us he does not want to return to Africa, interesting is that he does want to stay in contact with his origin country. “I’m intended to do work, any kind of job that I will be introduced to. My plan is to make money and ship goods to Africa. To have an intermediating business” (02/05/2016). Cwerner (2001) writes about these links with the country of origin. The last sets of times of migration point to the multilateral links between origin countries and destination countries, which creates a social basis of diasporic practices (p. 28). Diasporas and diasporic practices restore the familiar times that were uprooted by migration (p. 29).

5.3.1. Ambiguous aspirations

Several respondents were not sure if and for how long they wanted to stay in a European country and when and how they wanted to return to their country of origin. So even the abstract aspirations seem to continue in some cases. However, most aspirations depended on different factors and possible opportunities, such as: ‘if this happens, I will go there or do that, but if this happens, I will do that’. These factors have to do with opportunities and restrictions, such as obtaining documents, getting a job or earning money.

Cwerner (2001) explains this phenomenon and describes this last period of migration as the ‘discontinuous and heterogeneous times of adventure, of uncertainty’ (29-30). Although migrants originally expected to eventually return home, many of them fall in their migration experience leading them to overthink their former obligations with time. Then, immigration can become a way of life, of never settling and never considering a definitive return. Victor for example told us that:

I want to stay in Italy anyway as long as my project is not finished. I will stay, at least ten to twenty years. I have lived here now for so long, so I don’t really want to go back to Nigeria” (23/05/2016).

In first instance, he tells us he want to stay until his project is finished, then he says at least ten to twenty years and then he says he does not ‘really’ want to go back to Nigeria at all. So he gives us three different answers, which makes his future aspiration very uncertain. Peter told

us: “If I had a plan, I would go to the USA, but I wish to go back to Nigeria. Life is better in Nigeria, it is warm there” (15/02/2016).

“If I had a plan, I would go to the USA, but I wish to go back to Nigeria”

His answer points to the fact that the plan in his head is different than the wish in his heart, which makes it difficult for him to make choices in their migration trajectories. Also Jessica has a dream of returning. “Yeah, I would love to go back home, but I can’t. How can I? I have grandchildren coming. I’m part of this country. I still wish you know, that I will go back home one day” (02/05/2016).

Though Beatrice told us her dream was to find a job to work with children in Amsterdam, she at the same time tells us that “if things are better, I may go back to Ghana one day” (24/03/2016). With ‘better’ she means when she has more money. Many migrants told us this. Though Victoria is pretty settled in the Netherlands where she is living with her husband, she still has other aspirations. On the one hand, she aspires to find a satisfying job and she is hoping to have children in the near future, on the other hand she wishes to return to Nigeria where she wants to raise her children. “I want children now, but I want to raise my children in Nigeria” (01/03/2016).

Cwerner (2001) states that the ambivalence of the last period of migration often scatters to open a field of conscious temporal experimentation (p. 29). Lots of respondents are ambiguous about their life and stay in Italy, the Netherlands or Europe. Also Abdou gave us mixed answers of his future aspirations. He wants to move to France again within two years, because he liked France better. However, after talking to us, he also wanted to go to Holland and said he was trying to find a Dutch wife. Finding a wife is his first, most important priority in life. He wants to live in Europe with her. Thereafter, he also would like to go to Sweden and London. Later he told us that: “once I have earned money, I want to go back to Senegal. To start a business, for example a bakery. In Senegal you can make good money with a bakery” (26/05/2016).

Many respondents feel that they are not able to return home, because they do not have ‘enough money’ to return to make a new start in their country of origin. Also with regard to their future aspirations, we should use the aspiration/ability model of Carling (2002) which makes us see that many migrants are not able to return home to their home country, leading to them involuntarily staying in Europe. Other respondents did have the money to return to their country of origin once in a while, while they kept living in Europe to work. This corresponds with the research of Sinatti (2008), in which most Senegalese migrants in her research view successful return as permanent return and not as transnational return. They have a desire to resettle in their home country permanently, however with the urge to earn money and maintain their family. Since (they feel like) this is not possible in their home country, they compromise by having a transnational life: returning once in a while, while staying for (economic) benefits. Moreover, the wish to eventually return home for good persists.

Bolognani (2016) argues that we cannot simply describe migrants as *homo economicus* rational people who save up money to eventually return home and moreover, that this cannot

explain the fact that most trajectories are open-ended, dynamic and chaotic. She argues that researchers should not focus on this ‘myth of return’, but on the potential of migrants to imagine possible futures for themselves. People can dream and fantasise about new identities and horizons for themselves in the future. Wishes or fantasies to return are therefore not necessarily a symptom of failure or disengagement in the host society, but a replacement of a feeling to deal with loss or disappointments.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter showed that aspirations can still be very abstract, multiple and diverse just after arrival, though in few cases concrete and in several cases also very persistent. As already stated, some migrants have the plan to stay for five or ten years in a certain country and then return, some have a particular place in mind, while others have a very abstract and open aspiration. If we use Cwerner’s (2001) scheme of time and Meeteren et al.’s (2009) typology of statuses in the destination country, we can explain and understand the lifeworlds of migrants and their associated aspirations, which seem to change in different times and places of their migration trajectories. Migrants can aspire a legal status or aspire to settle down in a European country, which makes them subsequently *legalization migrants* or *settlement migrants*. They are called *investment migrants* when they want to make money in Europe and then return back to their home country. These statuses can overlap and change forth and back in different places and moreover in different times of migration, which we can explain using Cwerner’s (2001) scheme of time. Their aspirations reform, develop and change in different times and places due to new experiences, adjusted images and dynamic networks. These factors influence their imagination about other lives in other places leading to changed aspirations, however not necessarily to changed routes. Furthermore, these changed aspirations are mostly adjusted to other times or other places than that they change in itself. In several cases, aspirations seem rather persistent.

To see how changed aspirations influence mobility choices, we should take the ability to fulfil migrants’ aspirations into account. For this, this thesis used Carling’s (2002) aspiration/ability model. Studying the ability of migrants within Europe showed that a refugee camp or no documents are important factors restricting migrants’ ability to realise their aspirations. Many respondents said they wanted to move on to another European country and/or return to their home country in the future. However, when and how exactly was in most cases still uncertain, due to a lack of ability. Several migrants that had planned to go back after several years, needed to adjust their plans since their aspiration had not been realised yet. This again leads to abstract or ambiguous future aspirations. Some migrants settle for a transnational life by returning home once in a while and at the same time staying in Europe to earn money, while actually wishing to return home.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis built on previous migration theories by focusing on the ongoing mobility of West-African migrants within Europe. Since the trajectories of migrants seem to be ongoing and unstable, migrants' aspirations are likely to change with the migration experience. Therefore, this research aimed to gain insight in the role that aspirations of West-African migrants play in their mobility within Europe and the following research question has been central to this thesis:

How and why do aspirations of West-African migrants in Europe change and how does this changeability influence their mobility choices?

To answer this question, I used two sub questions which I answered in chapter four and five. Chapter four showed how the aspirations of West-African to go to Europe are formed. A first crucial acknowledgment is that aspirations can be very abstract and uncertain and that most migrants did not have a fixed plan in their heads. In depth investigation gave several insights. First of all, the notion of curiosity needs to be acknowledged as an important influence in migrants' minds. It points to the fact that many migrants do not see themselves as rational actors and that there are other powers that, according to them, decide their journeys. A combination of factors created by the possibility to imagine different lives in other places, influenced by social networks, lead to the forming of aspirations. Although several respondents seemed to know the risks and the failures of others in Europe, they believe in their own chances to have better chances and a better possibility on having a good life in Europe.

Chapter five elaborated on the question to what extent the aspirations of West-African migrants changed within Europe. The same factors that lead to the forming of an aspiration seem to play a role in the reforming and changing of migrants' aspirations within Europe. Changing imaginations due to experiences and new social ties can lead to other, reformed or adjusted aspirations. However, not necessarily to another dream or wish, as well as to the plan fulfil their aspirations in another place or in another time. The aspiration to be successful mostly stays the same, but the 'where' and 'when' often seems to change. Therefore, aspirations are as well changeable with regard to *times* and *places* as persistent with regard to *what* the migrant aspires. Migrants that planned to stay temporarily, readjust their plan because their aspiration is not yet fulfilled. Migrants that planned to earn a lot of money in one country, reform their aspiration to earn a lot of money in another country. Moreover, changed routes can also lead to changed aspirations, which means that aspirations and trajectories are reciprocal. Finally, many migrants had developed ambiguous future aspirations that depended on what will happen in the future. In this way, abstract aspirations continue or concrete aspirations can change to abstract and ambiguous aspirations again.

By using the typology of van Meeteren et al. (2009) to describe migrants' statuses of *legalization*, *settlement* and *investment* and Cwerners (2001) scheme of time in the destination country, we can better understand and describe the lives and aspirations of West-African migrants within Europe. Coming back to the central question, we learned that aspirations of West-African migrants change due to experiences and (new) social ties influencing the

imagination about other lives in other places. However, using only these scheme's will not explain how changed aspirations influence migrant's trajectories within Europe. Therefore, we need to focus on the ability as well. Not only before migrating to Europe, but also after migrating.

This thesis suggests therefore to use the aspiration/ability model of Carling (2002) in combination with the schemes of van Meeteren et al. (2009) and Cwerner (2001) after migrating to Europe when studying migrants' aspirations. Focussing on these scheme's in combination with the ability of migrants within Europe, shows us that although aspirations to be successful and to 'make it' in Europe seem to be very persistent, the 'where' and 'when' of these aspirations are rather changeable. How changed aspirations, mostly regarding times and places, influence migrants' mobility choices and trajectories depends on the ability of migrants. When migrants (feel like they) do not have the ability to fulfil their aspirations by moving to another place or by adjusting their plan to another time frame, they will stay where they are, leading to involuntary immobility, or settle for a transnational life.

6.1. Reflection and recommendations

In this section, I will briefly reflect on some limitations of this research and point to several recommendations for further research and policy. First of all, since this research is conducted in only two countries (Italy and the Netherlands), we do not know the whole picture of migrants' mobility within Europe. For most Nigerian respondents and for several Senegalese respondents, Italy was the first European country they entered and many Nigerian and Ghanaian respondents we spoke to in the Netherlands, came with a direct flight. Therefore, a longitudinal study where the researcher will be able to visit more countries and follow the trajectories of migrants more closely is recommended for further research.

Secondly, since Iris and I used the site approach and especially the snowball method to come in contact with migrants, we gained access to a particular selection of migrants. This led to us having spoken to only two migrants from Ghana in Italy, while the rest of our respondents in Italy came from Senegal and Nigeria. Next to that, 75% of our respondents were men and only 25% were women, of which most women migrated to Europe with or after their husbands. Therefore, a wider and more diverse research population is needed in order to fully understand the aspirations of West-African migrants in Europe.

Finally, in several interviews with migrants, the respondents were looking back at their migration trajectory from a long time ago and were talking about aspirations from the past in other times and in other places. Since aspirations are defined as future goals (Xu and Wu, 2016), it is important to keep doing research and interviews with newly arrived migrants with fresh aspirations, so that aspirations from the past, the present and the future are included.

Mobility has existed since the beginning of mankind and will probably always exist in the time of men. However, along with migration phenomena also problems occur. In the European refugee crisis of the 21st century, many West-African migrants drown on the sea and suffer in their lives within Europe. These migrants are often not able to fulfil their aspirations or wish to return to their country and feel forced to settle permanently. A lack of information, misinformation or stories of friends and families keep fuelling the imagination and the curious

minds of West-Africans to migrate to Europe. Border controls and other regulations of the EU will not prevent migrants from coming to Europe. Therefore, I plea that the European border policy needs to be reviewed. First of all, the Dublin convention that requires migrants to apply for asylum in the first country they enter needs to be revised, to relieve pressure on the coastal countries which are dealing with too many migrants now. Furthermore, the EU should accept that migration is a part of humanity and should create more possibilities for migrants to enter Europe legally. This will lead to migrants being able to move on and return more easily to their country of origin, alleviating many problems.

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Appendix: Overview of the respondents

NR.	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Country of origin	Place of destination	Sampling method
NL01	David	M	59	Ghana	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Personal network
NL02	Victoria	F	30	Nigeria	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Gatekeeper Peter
NL03	Peter	M	48	Nigeria	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Migrant organization
NL04	Pascal	M	31	Burkina Faso	Nijmegen, the Netherlands	Personal network
NL05	Tony	M	23	Gambia	Rotterdam, the Netherlands	Personal network
NL06	Esther	F	35	Nigeria	Tilburg, the Netherlands	Site-approach (church)
NL07	Joseph	M	46	Nigeria	Tilburg, the Netherlands	Site-approach (church)
NL08	Emmanuel	M	21	Sierra Leone	Tilburg, the Netherlands	Site-approach (church)
NL09	Patrick	M	24	Cameroon	Nijmegen, the Netherlands	Personal network
NL10	Beatrice	F	45	Ghana	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Gatekeeper Tom
NL11	Sandra	F	27	Ghana	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Gatekeeper Tom
NL12	Rose	F	30	Nigeria	Amsterdam, the Netherlands	Gatekeeper Tom
NL13	Daniel	M	40	Ghana	Nijmegen, the Netherlands	Personal network
NL14	Kwasi	M	50	Ghana	Tilburg, the Netherlands	Site-approach (church)

IT01	Abdou	M	29	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT02	Amina	F	30	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT03	Mamadou	M	34	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT04	Moustapha	M	45	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT05	Samba	M	40	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT06	Amadou	M	36	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT07	Abigail	F	31	Ghana	Varese, Italy	Personal network
IT08	George	M	30	Ghana	Varese, Italy	Personal network
IT09	Massata	M	30	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Gatekeeper Abdou
IT10	Falilou	M	45	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Site-approach
IT11	Mouralla	M	35	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Gatekeeper Abdou
IT12	Oumar	M	25	Senegal	Bergamo, Italy	Personal network
IT13	Charles	M	36	Nigeria	Bergamo, Italy	Gatekeeper Jessica
IT14	Maxwell	M	24	Nigeria	Bergamo, Italy	Gatekeeper Jessica
IT15	Jessica	F	48	Nigeria	Bergamo, Italy	Migrant Organization
IT16	Solomon	M	26	Nigeria	Bergamo, Italy	Gatekeeper Jessica
IT17	John	M	35	Nigeria	Bergamo, Italy	Migrant Organization
IT18	Victor	M	29	Nigeria	Bergamo, Italy	Gatekeeper Jessica