



**Good for parents but bad for wives:  
Migration as a contested model  
of success in contemporary Ghana**

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## Abstract

This paper contributes to the literature that critiques the New Economics of Labour Migrations' perspectives on the motivations for migration. It uses both a gender and generation lens to explore the multiple meanings that parents and wives make of the migration of Ghanaian young men to Libya and beyond. The paper draws on a range of qualitative methods – interviews, focus group discussions, river of life approaches and ethnography – conducted in three phases (April 2018, July/August 2018 and January 2019) of research to make its arguments. It argues that parents share a view of migration which is more in line with the New Economics of Labour Migration perspective. This view is exemplified in the traditional Akan conception of an *Opanyin*, a successful adult (Miescher, 2005), which focuses on economic success (taking good care of one's family, providing one's family with a home). Wives, however, hold an alternative view, one that the New Economics of Labour Migration perspective fails to capture. For wives, their conception of a successful male adult is informed by the changing socio-cultural context and focuses on affective ties (physical proximity, day to day care and sexual ties). Thus, while parents are generally supportive of young male migration, wives generally disapprove of migration.

## Executive Summary

Since the early 1980s, proponents of the New Economics of Labour Migration theory have offered an optimistic view on the relationship between migration and development. Contrary to other perspectives, this theory suggests that household members come together to make the decision to send a family member off as a migrant. In recognition of the potential benefits of being a household receiving remittances from a migrant, household members will help to finance the migration of their relative. This theory has been critiqued not least by feminist migration scholars who question the extent to which household members make these decisions about migration in a unitary fashion. Such scholars argue that households comprise individuals with varying desires and wants that rarely coalesce around a common goal.

In keeping with this critical perspective on the NELM theory, this paper seeks to interrogate perspectives on Ghanaian male labour migration to Libya. It uses both a gender and generational lens to interrogate parents and wives' perspectives on the migration of sons and partners respectively. Data for the paper comes from a range of qualitative sources including interviews with a wide range of respondents (opinion leaders, returnees from Libya, left behind partners and same sex matched pairs of parents and children in different kinds of households), focus group discussions with adult/young males and females, river of life approaches with young people and adults as well as ethnography in a town in the central part of Ghana well known for its male labour migration stream to Libya.

Migration to Libya began in earnest in the 1980s due to a range of factors key among which included the fact that oil rich Libya was relatively well off vis a vis the other countries in the sub-region, that Muammar al-Gaddafi, a Pan Africanist welcomed non Libyans into his homeland and that finally, Libya served as a good stepping stone for onward migration to Europe. In addition to these classic pull factors, a major push factor for young Ghanaian men was the dire economic straits of Ghana at the time. In the early 1980s, Ghana was faced with both a famine and the expulsion of roughly 1 million Ghanaians from Nigeria. Unable to go back to Nigeria and dissatisfied with conditions in Ghana, these young people were itching to find an alternative destination country and Libya was it.

The migrant stream is predominantly male. This is largely because while walking through the desert to Libya is tedious enough for men, women find themselves in a more vulnerable position given the requests for sexual favours that they are likely to encounter at border posts. Secondly, when women arrived in Libya, there were very few job opportunities available to them. While the men could work largely in construction stereotypically considered men's work, there was no equivalent stereotypically female job for women. The perception then was that women who made it to Libya worked as commercial sex workers to make a living, a tag that served to stigmatise them and negatively impacted on their marriage prospects back at home.

Migrants to Libya have had a visible impact on the community. Decent brick houses belonging to migrants in Libya or returnees from Libya are dotted across the community. An inn that serves as the meeting grounds for young people intent on migrating is named Tripoli Inn in recognition of the dream destination of migrants. Weekly trips continue to be organized for those intent on migrating to Libya even as stories that come out of Libya are not always

positive. Indeed, it is appropriate to say that currently, migrating to Libya has become a rite of passage for young men. In spite of the potential risk, young men try their luck in pursuing a future in Libya. We find, however, that household members' perspectives on young men's decision to migrate varies quite widely.

For parents, the migration of sons is a good thing largely because it brings economic benefits. Libya offers an opportunity for the not so well educated to make a decent living in Libya and to be able to remit enough to relatives back home so that a house can be built for them and they can drive flashy cars upon their return. In addition to the material benefits of migrating to Libya, the arduous journey through the desert served to toughen up and re-orient young men who were idling about in their home community. These men were much more likely to attain the status of an *Opanyin*, a dignified adult in an Akan community if they migrated.

For wives, on the other hand, the migration of partners costs them socially in a number of ways. First and foremost, for a population that is predominantly Christian and professing Christianity of the Charismatic kind, migration is problematic because it makes co-residence, fundamental to Christian marriages impossible. Lack of co-residence, often for years at a time, also makes sexual intimacy difficult and in spite of the presence of a range of technologies such as Skype and WhatsApp, wives are vividly aware of the limits of such tools. Third, wives worried about the lack of affective ties between their partners and their children. Finally, wives were unhappy about migration because of the ways in which the legal regimes of other countries constrained opportunities for young migrants and led many of them to enter into marriages simply to attain legal status in their countries of destination. The moral dimensions of such arrangements were not lost on wives.

Given the wide variation in perspectives on young men's migration dreams, this paper reinforces the feminist critique of the unitary conception of households and highlights the importance of both age and gender in determining one's perspectives on migration. Secondly, it points to the importance of focusing on both the social and economic implications of migration and recognizing that while migration may have economic benefits, this comes at a social cost.

## Introduction

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory propounded in the 1980s by scholars such as Stark and Bloom (1985), Katz and Stark (1986) as well as Stark and Taylor (1989) suggests that people migrate as a result of perceived economic benefits in the host region as well as lack of opportunities in the source region (Mahler, 2001; de Haas and Fokkema, 2010; Setrana and Tonah, 2014; Boyles, 2015). According to this school of thought, with migration, incomes generated and remittances sent home are used to improve living standards or invested in buildings, education and the establishment of businesses (Pickbourn, 2011; Kleist, 2017; Teye et al., 2017). This literature suggests that overall, migration has positive outcomes and by extension is a decision that all members of a household will support. This is perhaps especially so with respect to the migration of young Africans given that theirs is a continent filled with the majority of countries that rank poorest on the human development indices generated by the United Nations Development Programme. Adepoju (2009, p. 10-11) writing very much from a New Economics of Labour Migration perspective links the migration decisions of young Africans to the socio-economic conditions on the continent in the following words:

Africa's disillusioned, unemployed youth faces difficult choices between being apprenticed to trade, farming, or going to school, only to join, at the end of it, the queue of job-seekers roaming the streets, seeking unsuccessfully for months or even lowly-paid jobs. For most, migration in pursuit of higher education or wage employment is urban-centred, although that may be preparatory to migrating abroad....Since the late 1980s, when the region experienced negative economic growth and a deteriorating well-being of its people, such migration has been strictly for survival; as the effects of economic restructuring bite harder, migration has become a coping mechanism of a last resort.

There are, however, other schools of thought which question the rationale underpinning such an analysis. Key among these is the feminist school of thought. Feminist scholars (Chant and Radcliffe, 1992; Rodenburg, 1997; Lawson, 1998; Nawyn, 2010) have pointed out the gendered nature of household dynamics underpinning migration. A feminist analysis forces us to question the extent to which migration is seen as a "coping mechanism of a last resort" by all the members of a household. A key lacuna in this literature remains a generational perspective on the household dynamics underpinning migration. While a gender analysis speaks to the fact that women and men in a household are not likely to share the same perspectives on migration, such analysis rarely seeks to interrogate the extent to which adult men and women share similar perspectives with the younger people of the same sex in their households. This paper seeks to contribute to the large body of scholarship on migration decisions by using both a gendered and generational perspective to demonstrate the ambivalence among relatives in a society where migration to Libya has become one of the more important rites of passage for male youth with limited education. We argue that the idea that economic prospects shape the decision-making process of patriarchs and by extension migrants in a household is simplistic and does not capture the full range of perspectives on the matter. Indeed, while mothers and fathers may think in economic terms, wives focus instead on the affective implications of migration. Thus, while the former might be more supportive of migration, albeit with caveats, the latter are less likely to look

favourably upon migration. The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we outline the research material that serves as the basis for the findings. We then proceed to provide an explanation for the pervasiveness of chain migration to Libya in this research site. The next two sections of the paper offer insight into the differing gendered and generational rationales for supporting or not supporting the migration decisions of young men. We conclude with an exploration of the ways in which these findings illustrate both the extent and limits of the economic deterministic literature that underpins the NELM literature.

## The Research Site

The material for this paper draws on three phases of research (April 2018, July/August 2018 and January 2019) in Ahabanase<sup>1</sup>, a town in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana, long noted for migration to Libya. Ahabanase, our research site, is the capital of one of the districts in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. A third of the population of this district live in the town of Ahabanase. Although this is a town with a range of commercial activities, the majority of the population earn their livelihoods as farmers and/or traders. Formal sector jobs as in the banking or teaching sector require education which the majority of the inhabitants do not have. Only 7.1% of the males and 4.5% of the females in the entire district have completed secondary school.<sup>2</sup> Citizens of this town grow a range of crops including maize and yam as well as cash crops such as watermelon and increasingly cashew. Indeed, this town is one of Ghana's major producers of cashew and there are many cashew depots dotted along the main thoroughfare in this town. Adult female participants in the focus group discussions we held estimated that one could harvest a bag of cashews every day for roughly three to four months on an acre of farmland. This sold for 400 Ghana cedis, which is roughly \$80. As such, in one season, at an estimate of a harvest of a bag a day for 100 days, farmers could earn the equivalent of \$8000 which is roughly 4 times the GDP per capita which stood at \$2046.11.<sup>3</sup> Although farm sizes are an average of 1.8 hectares (roughly 4 acres) per family, to reap the amounts of money suggested by the focus group participants requires initial investments in labour and a range of inputs including fertilizers, pesticides and the appropriate seedlings. In addition, cashew takes a number of years to begin to yield a harvest. Another major income earner in this town, for a short period of time was two Ponzi schemes that promised interest rates of 50% of one's investment every two months. Citizens and migrants alike invested in these two schemes until they went bust in 2016 leading to a lot of distress in many families including a few suicides in cases where women had invested the monies husbands had sent for building purposes without the husbands' knowledge.

Participants in this study included 4 opinion leaders, 10 returnees from Libya, 11 left behind partners, as well as 16 same sex matched pairs of parents and children in households with both internal and international migrants (6), only international migrants (4), only internal migrants (4) and no migrants (2). In addition, we held one focus group discussion with adult males, adult females, and young females as well as two with young males and conducted river of life interviews with ten young people and ten adults. Finally, we spent a total of six weeks undertaking an ethnographic study of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym

<sup>2</sup> Information retrieved from <http://www.ghanadistricts.com>

<sup>3</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

Both the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in the local languages of the migrants, recorded electronically, translated and then transcribed prior to analysis. The analysis for this report is based on a systematic thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) of all the focus group discussions as well as the youth and adult interviews.

## **Ghanaian Youth Migration to Libya**

Migration of both the internal and international kind is not a recent phenomenon in Ghana. As the 64-year-old chief Imam we interviewed pointed out with respect to internal migration:

Migration has long been part of our history. Our forefathers traded with those from the northern part for a long time even before we were born. So, it was acceptable. Our forefathers went to the North. They used to trade with them. My grandfather for instance used to trade in kola nuts. (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018)

Statistics on the exact numbers of Ghanaians abroad are difficult to come by because of the lack of a comprehensive national database that captures the migratory patterns of its citizens. Nonetheless, estimates from the early 2000s based on visa statistics from foreign embassies in Ghana and census data in a few countries estimated that 461,549 Ghanaians were resident in Europe and North America (Twum-Baah, 2005, p. 65). More recent estimates are that 1.5 million of the population of 25 million are resident outside the borders of Ghana (Quartey, 2009). The majority of Ghanaians outside of the country live in other countries on the African continent with the neighbouring English-speaking country of Nigeria a longstanding destination despite an expulsion of almost one million Ghanaians from Nigeria in the early 1980s. Although sending communities are as diverse as destination communities, there are a number of chain migration patterns in Ghana, where people from a particular sending community migrate to specific destination communities. One such pattern emerged in the 1980s where young people migrated mostly irregularly to Libya from a number of communities in the part of Ghana where Ahabanase is located. Migration is such a pervasive part of life in this community that Nana, a young male interviewee noted, “As you know people usually say people in Ahabanase like migrating to Libya.” (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018). Ohene also intimated that 6 out of 10 of his friends always say, “I want to travel abroad, I want to travel abroad.” (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018).

Unlike other international migratory streams in Ghana that comprise both males and females or internal migratory streams, particularly that from Northern to Southern Ghana (Darkwah et al., 2016) which comprise primarily females, the migrant stream from sending communities in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana to Libya is predominantly male.<sup>4</sup> As Mamaa, a mother of an international migrant explained, “In this area, only the boys migrate internationally. You don’t see a lot of the girls migrating internationally. They only go as far as Kumasi in search of jobs.” (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018). A number of reasons account for this. First, the job opportunities available to Ghanaians in Libya are primarily in the construction industry as masons, a job that is perceived globally as a male job. Thus, Baba a father who had two sons who had migrated to Libya when asked about his perspective on his daughter travelling asked, “What would she be doing there?” (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). Similarly, Awura one of the young females from a non-

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<sup>4</sup> In the last couple of years, women have begun to migrate to the Middle East to work as domestic workers or South Africa to work as hairdressers.

migrant family opined, it's possible for a female to migrate but it's very difficult. What kind of work is there for females to do? It will be better if you have a family relation who is inviting you there. But to go on your own as a female is difficult." (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). Respondents were of the opinion that in the absence of jobs as masons, women resorted to commercial sex work. As Siaw, a key informant put it, "they just went there to lead promiscuous lives." (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018). This sentiment was so pervasive that young men in the town talked about not being interested in marrying female returnees.

A second reason why this particular stream was predominantly male was the fact that the journey through the desert to Libya was dangerous for a variety of reasons and that women were perceived to be ill-equipped to face the perils of this journey. Ohenewaa who was disinclined to travel to Libya even though her husband lived there explained the low numbers of female migrants in the following words:

The boys go because I think they are relatively braver than the girls. Tell a boy that he will die if he embarks on a journey and he will tell you he has to see with his eyes before he believes you. But say the same thing to a girl and she would agree and stay behind. So, the boys are the ones who go. (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018)

The perils of undertaking the journey to Libya by road included running out of water and food or facing armed robbers. For women, there was also the additional fact that they were susceptible to facing sexual abuse from the range of male authority figures these trekkers were likely to encounter both on the journey to and in Libya. Asamoah, one of our key informants who had never made the trip himself but was close friends with the initial batch of young men who migrated to Libya in 1984 noted, "When they used the Mali route the females were not going through that experience. It was after they started using the Niger route that the policemen started that. On the desert, there are cases of armed robbers raping the women too." (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018). In the FGD held with adult males, a similar point was made. One of the men, Ahenkorah, explained why travelling with women was problematic in the following words:

Even if the woman doesn't want to do that [engage in sexual activity], they are sometimes forced to do so. When persuasion fails, force must be applied. It's very risky. If the woman doesn't give in to the sexual requests made out there both of you may lose your lives because they will say you're the one advising her to decline. (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018).

Another male in this same focus group discussion talked about how sexual favours could be demanded from the women at gunpoint. Thus, it is that the migratory stream from central Ghana to Libya is primarily male.

Besides being predominantly male, the sending communities for this particular migratory stream comes from a few communities in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. Estimates are that 80% of Ghanaians living in Libya come from this region (Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar, 2013, p. 66). Lydia, an adult female participant in a focus group discussion affirmed the central role this particular community of Ahabanase plays in migration to Libya in the following words, "When we were young, Ahabanase was referred to as Libya airport. Even those from Accra who wanted to migrate to Libya came here." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). Sarah opined, "It's still the same today. There are no households where there are no migrants from Libya." (19<sup>th</sup> April,

2018). Although the latter is an exaggeration given that we did in fact find households with neither internal or international migrants, the palpable influence of Libyan migrants is felt in this town in terms of the references to Libya in this community, one prominent location being a small bar located on one of the main thoroughfares in the city known as Tripoli Inn, a bar which served as a central point of convergence for individuals interested in migrating to Libya. Scholars point to two factors for this pattern of migration from this town of Ahabanase to Libya.

One explanation offered by Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar (2013) attributes the destination point of Libya to the shared Pan-Africanist interests of Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah and long serving president of Libya, Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi. Gaddafi would drive to Ghana showing off his incredible wealth, thus conjuring up images of his home country as a source of wealth. Gaddafi's interest in Pan-Africanism was spawned in part by the sanctions imposed on him by the West for sponsoring terrorism and the general lack of support from his Arab neighbours. With a booming economy thanks to the 1973 oil crisis which meant that the economy needed many low waged workers in particular, Gaddafi's Libya was welcoming of African migrants until his demise.

A second explanation is linked to the forced return of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1983, a year when Ghana was already ravaged by famine (Kleist, 2017) and reeling from the near economic collapse of the state that led to Ghana turning to the World Bank for the first of a series of structural adjustment loans. These returnees were not interested in staying at home, a place of far more economic insecurity than Nigeria and were thus looking for alternative migrant destinations. Libya seemed a good place because one did not require a passport or airfare to get there if one chose to trek through the desert to arrive there. As an individual interviewed by Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar (2013, p. 65) explained:

The early 1980s, especially, the years 1982 and 1984 were the worst period in our entire existence as a nation-state. All essential commodities including food were lacking, money was in short circulation and employers were not recruiting. We queued to buy uncooked kenkey [a maize staple] and others took to eating root tubers and many died from eating poisonous tubers. Nothing was functioning in Ghana. The only option available was to migrate and at that time the favoured European destination was the UK because of our colonial ties; Germany and Italy also had friendly immigration policies. However, obtaining a Ghanaian passport was a luxury few could afford. Many of us emigrated to Libya as the second-best option because we could neither obtain a Ghanaian passport nor afford the air fares to European destinations.

Although these two factors serve as the classic push-pull factors for migration, it is also clear in the case of this community that the success of early migrants and their support for the migration of other young people in their community had a lot to do with creating this pattern of chain migration. In this town in the Brong Ahafo Region, Tripoli Inn is central to the migration process. Intending migrants congregate there for information and advice about their prospective journey as well as support of all kinds from those Bob-Milliar and Bob-Milliar (2013, p. 70) call battle-scarred desert veterans. One of the creators of the service explains the evolution of the service in this manner:

In 1987 we went to Libya. We faced a lot of problems on the way. Some of our friends lost their lives. And so, when we returned in the early 1990's, we realized that most people died because they didn't have any kind of information about the proper route to the place and also what to expect on the way. For instance, a fresh migrant may not be able to know which route to take in order to avoid armed robbers on the way. An experienced one will be able to find his way around it because he is privy to the ins and outs of the route. Therefore, when we returned a relative of mine, currently deceased, decided to be a middleman to those young men who had ambitions of migrating to Libya. What he did was that he joined the bus taking migrants to Libya. Because he had been there before, he knew how to confront any challenges faced on the way. He would stay for a while in Libya and later return to take the next batch of migrants. In a year, for instance, he could move in and out of Libya three times. That was the purpose for this place. Those who successfully made the trip to Libya with his help later called other relatives and friends to spread the good news. So, we had a lot of people coming here for assistance. After some time, he realized that he could not do it alone. This is because over time we had a lot of people coming for assistance and so a week after a trip to Libya, he will be signalled that there are other people waiting here to be taken to Libya. He therefore devised a plan. He brought on board returnees from Libya who were looking forward to going back to Libya but had little funds to be able to meet the financial demands. The arrangement was that the prospective migrants would contribute to the migration expenses of the returnee who will then lead the group to Libya. Because the returnee had already been to Libya, he would therefore play the role which was being played by my relative.... I can say that we've helped thousands of people migrate to Libya. Therefore, many people have now become experienced and can go on their own so we stopped operating. For about four years now, we haven't been operating. (Aboagye, Key informant, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018).

In addition to these support services enumerated above, others identified this bar as crucial to helping with paperwork of all sorts – vaccination cards, passports – as well as information on the basic requirements needed for the journey including what kind of shoes to buy and what kinds of snacks to carry. Although this particular service is no longer available, there are other individuals providing similar services. A returnee described the existing service in the following words:

There is someone known as the “pusherman”. He is in charge of everything from here to Libya. He is more of an agent. He pays the bus fares on your behalf. In case there are other small, small payments to be done, he is in charge. He does this at a fee. (2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2018)

Kleist (2017) and Lucht (2011) refer to these as connection men. These migration brokers currently help to facilitate the migration process to Libya.

Migration to Libya has not abated. Even with the media reports and first-person accounts of the horrors of living in present day Libya, citizens of Ahabanase continue to migrate to Libya in large numbers. In fact, we were told that every Tuesday morning, a bus departs Ahabanase with individuals headed to Libya. As Mansah, a female adult in the focus group discussions told us, “At first two to three 207 Benz buses could carry people from Ahabanase every

Tuesday [the market day]. They were going every week. There were even shortages of gari<sup>5</sup> in the market.... Yes, they went with gari.” (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

In response to our queries about why young men continued to migrate in spite of both the perils of the journey and in recent times, the political instability in Libya, our interviewees responded “All die be die” (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018) or “What will be will be” (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018) suggesting that the fear of death should not prevent one from making decisions. As another migrant, Kofi, told his mother prior to his departure, “If I die, it’s a man that is bound to die.” (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018) Another common refrain we heard was “be ye lucky.” (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018) Be ye lucky as said by young people in this town of their fate in the desert is much the same language that young footballers use in describing their prospects of making a fortune in Europe as footballers (Esson, 2015c). The idea of fate or luck on the journey through the desert was a very pervasive trope in the discussions we held with young men in particular in this town and respondents offered us stories highlighting this idea of fate or destiny. Yaa, a mother with three sons who had gone first to Libya and now resided in Italy described how one of her sons had survived when the boat he was in capsized en route to Italy in the following words:

I was told my son almost drowned in the sea. All those who left with him from this place at the time drowned except my son. I even had to go and give thanks at the Presbyterian Church. I wasn’t the one who told him to go on a fast. He did it on his own and it helped him. He told me he found a pole to hold on to but for a while he wanted to give up and die because he had grown weary from the experience. There were two of them but the other gave up and died. Just when he almost let go, he saw a rescue ship and they rescued him. He had swallowed a lot of water and so they treated him and allowed him to stay. (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

Another 51year old mother of an international migrant, Obaa Yaa, concurred, “We are different people, we all have different destinies.” (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). And in fact, said Chifforobe returnee not intending to migrate yet again, “Some are destined to migrate.” (2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2018) Religious faith, particularly the Charismatic Christian version now prevalent in Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004; Gifford, 2004) plays a role in this sense of having a specific destiny and relying on God to enable one to manifest one’s unique destiny. As at the last census in 2010, as many as 28.3% of Ghanaians are now adherents of this version of Christianity (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013, p. 40). With almost a third of Ghanaians adhering to this belief system, we often heard sentiments such as that offered by Mensah, a young man in one of the focus group discussions as follows:

My faith tells me that God likes migration. This is seen in the life of Abraham who was directed by God to move from where he was to another place. This means that God blesses anyone who chooses to migrate. It all depends on the reason for migration. It also depends on the deity you commit yourself to. Some committed their lives to smaller gods. Others committed their lives to God. Those who put their lives in the hands of smaller gods experienced negative consequences. Though some are

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<sup>5</sup> Gari is originally a Hausa word and refers in the Ghanaian context to cassava flour, a basic fast food.

successful, if you fail to do what the spirit asks in return, you may end up failing. But I believe if you commit your life to God you will be successful. (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Many of the migrants and family members of migrants interviewed talked about the religious practices the migrant individual had engaged in prior to the sojourn to Libya or onwards to Europe. Fasting, months at prayer camps and so on were common themes. Given this firm belief in the uniqueness of each person's destiny, migration among this population had in effect become a rite of passage (Thorsen, 2006, p. 99) for young men in this town, one that each young man had to undergo regardless of the risk. As already alluded to, young men's decisions to migrate was by no means a decision that was supported by all members of their households. In the ensuing sections, we analyse the rationale for support or otherwise of this decision from the perspective of parents and wives.

## **Reasons for inter-generational support for migration**

This section provides an account of inter-generational support for migration, focusing on parents', but especially mothers' support for migration. As evident in the ensuing discussions, the overwhelming reason for supporting migration is economic. Although some parents offer a social perspective on the importance of migration, it is ultimately because the social offers a route to economic success. And while the increasing instability in Libya post-Gaddafi has led a few parents to query their sons' migration decisions, the discomfort is not with migration per se, but with the destination choices of their sons.

### **Acquiring Economic Success**

As already intimated, the new economics of labour migration literature suggests that overall, migration has positive outcomes. In the case of the sending communities to Libya, indeed as Kleist (2017) has noted in the context of Ghana and Veronese et al. (2019) for West African migrants, there is a clear sense that migration is beneficial. The most visible sign of the progress of migrant households is the mansions that family members are able to construct and the flashy cars migrants drive upon return. Adjei, one young man in a focus group discussion we held described the difference between migrant and non-migrant households in the following words, "The differences are the kind of buildings and the things you find in the house. Houses of migrants' households are usually big and nice. Those of non-migrant households are only filled with farm gear." (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018)

Although in general, respondents were of the belief that migration was beneficial, they offered a caveat; non-migrant households with well-educated or gainfully employed individuals could match the migrant households in terms of their financial success. Interviewees then proceeded to provide us with examples alluding to the fact that not all migrant households were necessarily better off than non-migrant households. Opokua, a mother whose only son had migrated internationally said:

I can't say one is better or worse than the other because there are some people who haven't migrated anywhere but have acquired a lot of properties here. There are others who have also migrated but don't even have a single room. I have an uncle who has never travelled abroad but he has more than a returnee. (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Boateng, a young man in the focus group discussions we held shared a similar perspective in

the following words, “There are some non-[international] migrants who have acquired big properties.... In that sense I can say there are a lot of internal migrants who have been able to gain a lot. The owner of this hotel is a judge. He hasn’t migrated abroad but he has been able to build this place.” (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Other interviewees provided a sense of the context within which non-migrant households could fare better than migrant households. Ayewa, one of the few individuals in our sample who had post-secondary education but no job pointed out that, “What I see is that if the members of a non-migrant family are gainfully employed, it is the same as those with some family members abroad.” (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018) And, in the focus group discussion with adult males, Addo also opined, “The emergence of cashew farming has somewhat made it possible for non-migrants to also build big houses. In my opinion I think the cashew houses will be more than the borga<sup>6</sup> houses in the next three years.” (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Given the potential to make a decent living if gainfully employed, Owusua, a young female with brothers who had migrated internationally suggested that supporting a migrant’s decision to migrate was dependent on the person’s age and what they did for a living. If the person was a professional who had his or her own job, she said, “In that case I will not advise the person to leave the job behind and migrate.” (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

However, given that not all members of households were gainfully employed, the majority of interviewees, particularly parents, were supportive of young men’s decisions to migrate. Ansah, a young man pointed out to us that:

Brong Ahafo is a farming area but when it comes to migration to Libya, Ahabanase is noted for that. Therefore, all families support their children to migrate to other places. This is because apart from farming, there is nothing here. People are not so educated too that is why they migrate to Libya in search of greener pastures. No family will go against a member’s decision to migrate. (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018)

And Dansoa, a mother noted, “There are no jobs here in Ahabanase. There are no substantive jobs here so when he told us he was leaving, there was nothing we could say.” (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) By a substantive job, this mother was referring to paid employment. She adds, “Do you think the youth of these days want to farm? He was just roaming around. He was very strong but he would rather follow someone else to do menial jobs or go to their farms than to follow us to our farm.” (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

This point has been confirmed by scholars such as Acquah and Ashong (2013) who note that increasingly, young rural Africans are uninterested in subsistence farming and seek to have income sources more typical of urbanites, such as jobs in the trading and service industry for the poorly educated and for the educated, paid employment preferably in the formal sector. The lack of economic opportunities, especially formal sector jobs, in this part of the country are real. Kesewa, another mother we interviewed says “I have a daughter who finished nursing training two years ago but still does not have a job.” (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018). Serwaa, another mother also shared a similar story about her son. He had attended technical school

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<sup>6</sup> A reference to Hamburg where many Ghanaian migrants to Germany in the 1980s settled and a term now used in reference to international migrants.

but went for months without finding a job. Anima, yet another mother with sons abroad explained, “He had finished secondary school. There were some who had finished polytechnic and nursing training. So, they leave because there are no opportunities here.” (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018). And Odei, an adult male participant in the focus group discussion shared his personal frustrations with seeking consistent employment in his hometown in the following words:

I am a carpenter. I don't get jobs to do on a daily basis. If I were to be getting appointments every now and then, there wouldn't have been any need to migrate. After learning a trade if you could be engaged daily by the customers, I think it's better than government work because in a day you can make GHS200.00. A government worker is not paid that amount daily. It's because our work isn't regular and so it's not profitable.... Also, as a carpenter, customers may not engage your services everyday but elsewhere as a migrant, you will be paid every day for the work you do. It's also easy to know how much you're making at the end of the month since the income is fixed. (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Jobs in Ghana were particularly hard to come by for the unskilled. Ataa, a young woman explained why her brothers had migrated abroad in the following words:

With respect to the elder one, due to his age I would say he had delayed a bit in terms of life's aspirations. This is because he didn't continue his education after secondary school and he also didn't learn any trade so it was difficult finding a job. He therefore had to travel somewhere else to look for a job. (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Takiwaa, another mother with children who were both internal and international migrants shared her opinion on this matter as follows, “As you are aware, there are no jobs in the country, so he decided to leave because there were no jobs.” (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

Unlike Ghana where jobs were hard to come by, Libya was teeming with job opportunities. Addai, a young man in one of the focus group discussions described this in the following words:

I had a call from a friend in Libya who told me he and another friend of his are currently working on 10 different buildings. Do you think he will have any reason to stay in the house and not go to work? The job is available and so he will go. Why will I not also join him when there is nothing for me to do here in Ghana? (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018)

And the earning potential in Libya was far better than that in Ghana. Opoku, another young man in the focus group discussions made the comparison in the following manner:

As I said, I am 38 years old. I spent 2 and a half years in Libya. The rest of my years I spent in Ghana. I couldn't acquire anything in the years spent in Ghana but the two years I spent in Libya helped me to build the house that I'm in currently. I've been in Ghana for the past two years but I don't even have GHS1000 [roughly \$200] to show for it. Over there I was making GHS3000 [roughly \$600] every month. Therefore, I've seen that the benefit derived from my migration to Libya was good. In view of this, I look forward to enjoying more benefits when I migrate again. (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

The poor economic opportunities in Ghana vis a vis those in Libya made it difficult for parents

to protest when their children expressed an interest in migration. Kyeraa, a mother, shared her personal experience regarding her son's decision to migrate by saying, "I told him not to go but you know the nature of the youth, he reminded me of the state in which we were. We were going through hardships. So, we had to support him with the little we had." (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) And another mother, Dakoa, asked, "Well if you don't have money and your child says he or she is leaving in search of money can you prevent him or her from going?" (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

Being able to make a living in Libya was important in a number of ways. First, it prevented family discord as explained to us by Abena, one of the young female interviewees in the following words:

Non-migrant households are usually not peaceful. Due to the lack of money, family members fight over little things. From renovations of the family house to other things that are likely to bring disunity among members, migrant relatives are able to resolve that because of the money they have. So, there are differences between non-migrant families and migrant families. (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018)

Besides the fact that they made a living in Libya which prevented family discord as alluded to above, a community leader, Asare, also pointed out an additional benefit of seeking employment in Libya. In his words:

Furthermore, most of these young men returned with skills in masonry, carpentry and so on. This made the place lucrative because people thought of the fact that they could learn a trade in Libya which would provide a source of living when they eventually returned to Ghana. (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018)

And a final advantage of earning a living in Libya, as respondents pointed out, was the fact that being outside of Ghana allowed migrants to limit their social activities and the quite expensive costs that come with it. One young man in the focus group discussions, Donkor, put it this way, "The migrants are able to save their monies because they don't have the responsibility of going for funerals, weddings and other functions which may cause them to spend money." (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018). Obeng, an adult male with relatives who were both internal and international migrants put it more elaborately as follows:

There are so many things we do here which is just not right. One is the way we conduct our funeral rites. Every week you go for a funeral. Whenever you attend these funerals you have to pay money. And so, if it is GHS5.00 you pay every day you can imagine how much you would have spent in two years. Migrants, on the other hand, don't have to pay all that, so they are able to save their money. If it is not a close family member's funeral where migrants may have to support, they are not obliged to pay anything. The point is even if you don't pay anything at these funerals the time spent to attend could have been used for other productive businesses. We are not very punctual and that's another problem. (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

And in the focus group discussion with adult males, Boafo opined similarly:

You're not even able to save your money when you're here. But when you go you can save your money.... It's because you're not home to be bothered with the problems in

the house. In view of this you're able to save your money. Before you return you would have had something huge.... As you can see, we are in a hurry to leave for the funeral grounds. We are going for a funeral. Every week there is a funeral. People die very frequently in this area. This affects the income of workers because you can't pick your machete and go to the farm when there is a funeral being organized. As a member of this community, you're also expected to be present. Migrants, however, are able to save their money since they don't have that responsibility. So, migration is a good thing. (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Given all the reasons outlined above, not only did we find that parents were generally supportive of their sons' decision to migrate, we found that in some cases, these parents either saved for and suggested the idea of migration to their sons or in the case of fathers had themselves contemplated migration. Thus, Boakye, a young man we interviewed who was getting his documents including passport and vaccination cards ready for travel said, "It was actually my mother who came up with the idea of me migrating after I completed secondary school. So, she had saved money for that." (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018). And, Gyan, an adult male we spoke to in a non-migrant household shared with us that, "I've been a catechist for 25 years but although I've bought a plot of land, I've not been able to buy any blocks for the building. However, others migrated and returned to build houses. So, my plan was to also migrate so that one day I could return and also build a house." (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018).

In fact, interviewees were of the opinion that given the economic circumstances most families faced, opposition to migration was near impossible. As Amoakowaa, one mother said:

No. You can only do that if you have some form of support for your child. If you have a farm or you are engaged in a trade, that's when you can tell him to stay. But at the time I was facing financial problems and so when he told me about his decision to migrate, I agreed and asked him to go. (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

### **Beyond economic success: Becoming an *Opanyin***

Financial security is not the only reason parents offer up for supporting the migration decisions of sons. Indeed, this overly economic perspective of the aspirations of young people is increasingly being questioned. While some scholars have argued that young Africans are basically stuck, unable to attain social adulthood referring to them as a case of "aspiration failure" (Ray 2006, p. 409), "managing" (Langevang, 2008) or caught in a situation of "waithood" (Honwana, 2014), other scholars like Laube (2016) and Johnson (2018) suggest that economic success is not the only route to social adulthood in Africa. Other forms of success are equally viable routes to attaining social adulthood. Laube (2016) for example in describing young Ghanaians from Northern Ghana notes how they had a cultural schema of success that extended beyond economic aspirations and focused instead on success in three other domains of life: personality, marital life and reproduction and networks of reciprocity within both one's extended family and the community at large. While economic success was important, it was not the only marker of success. As one of his interviewees put it:

It is not important how much money someone is able to get. It is how you spend it. If you do not help people, help your community, if you do not attend and contribute to people's funerals, nobody is going to respect you. Your family is going to be ashamed when they bury you, because nobody will come to your funeral.

For these northern Ghanaian men then, it was entirely possible to experience aspirational failure and yet be successful. In recognition of the heavy emphasis on the crisis of youthful masculinity (Weiss, 2004, p. 11), Johnson (2018) also offers a perspective that explains how young women attain social adulthood in Africa. For young women in Malawi, she argues, adult femininity is cultivated through waithood, in this case through marital delay. In this context, waithood is not a social problem, but rather a solution to a potentially long-term problem of going into a marriage without being adequately equipped and prepared for it because of the lack of secondary and/or tertiary education and the better economic prospects it provides.

Laube (2016) and Johnson (2018) suggest the importance of social markers of adulthood, a theme that was also evident in some parents' support for the migration decisions of their sons. For some of these parents, a son's migration was supported because it would force them to mature and thus become more able to recognize and take on the responsibility required of them as males in Akan society. Oseiwa, a mother of three sons who had willingly sent the first one off to Libya offered the rationale for her decision as follows:

He led a wayward life here in Ahabanase. And so, we thought if he migrates to a place where he doesn't see his parents, he will find the need to look for a job. By so doing we reasoned he will return to buy a taxi or a motor king (tuk tuk) that will be a source of income for him. We were thinking along the lines that in life it's sometimes difficult to convince someone through mere advice, but when they are faced with some challenges then they learn the hard way. We thought if he becomes successful after challenging experiences as a migrant, it will be better. Unfortunately, we don't know if it's been successful or not because he hasn't returned. (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Ohemaa, another mother of a migrant affirms this view when she points out that:

Here in Ahabanase when you take your child to school, they don't go. At a stage in their lives the young men start stealing, some start smoking weed/marijuana and engage in all form of social vices. That is why in Ahabanase people like the whole idea of migration because [otherwise] the sons grow up to become a burden on their parents. There are always reports and complaints from so many people and so if the parent has some small savings somewhere the other option is to support these children to migrate. As a migrant he cannot be a delinquent. Do you think one can act irresponsibly and just do anything at all in Libya, an Islamic country? Furthermore, look at the suffering they go through on the journey to Libya and then on the sea to Italy, do you think when they get there, they waste their lives by not being serious and engaging in all forms of vices? When they get there, they do away with all the bad behaviours. In that sense migration helps the parents because it takes away the pressure and all the burdens they face here when their children are here. (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018)

Similarly, Takyi, a young man explained in general terms that:

The main motivation for supporting somebody is not for them to repay. Let's say the person says he or she will not go to school. He or she does not also want to farm but rather engage in all forms of wayward living. In this case it's with joy that the family contributes towards such people's migration. This is because such ones become a burden to their families and so their absence relieves the family of such burdens. (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018)

Kwao, another young man shared, "My elder brother had been harbouring the idea of migrating for a long time even before he migrated. He had always wanted to migrate. I wanted to go to school. But he didn't really go to school. He took to drinking and roaming aimlessly with friends and so he decided to migrate." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) Leading a wayward life was in direct opposition to what average Akans expected of young men. For Akan parents, the goal of raising a son was to watch him grow up, mature and acquire the traits of what is considered an '*Opanyin*' in Ghanaian society, a respectable adult. Such an adult worked hard, made a living, built a house for his wife and children and took good care of them (Miescher, 2005).

Although many of the parents as alluded to above focused on the idea of an *Opanyin* as one who could take good care of their families as evident primarily in the acquisition of houses for them, it is important to note that the definition of an *Opanyin* was not purely economic. There was a social dimension as well, one that focused on the pursuit of success, reflected in the idea of working hard. In other words, it was not so much that an adult had to acquire economic success. If that was achieved, that was worthy of praise. However, what was key was to be seen as pursuing success, which is to say a respectable adult male in Akan society had to be seen to be working towards the goal of success. Being a drug user or an alcoholic, what parents referred to here as being wayward was not acceptable because it was clear evidence that one had given up the pursuit of success.

## **Inter-generational limits to a desire for migration**

The death of Gaddafi in 2011 and the ensuing instability in Libya has given some parents cause to pause and ponder the overall benefits of migration for either attaining or pursuing economic success given the potential for harm. Interviewees were well aware of these potential hardships because they heard it through various forms of media. One mother, Afriyie, said:

Anytime I hear any news about Libya I get scared. When I hear Libyan youth are engaged in violent clashes or when I hear about the migrants dying in their quest to cross the ocean to Europe, I get scared to be honest. I become sad. There was once I flipped the channel to Adom [Ghanaian TV channel] and saw pictures of the dead bodies. I saw a lot of boys. I couldn't sleep that night. I became very sad. (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Besides the media, some NGOs concerned about the large numbers of irregular migrants from this part of the country had set about educating them about the instability in Libya and the perils of migrating. One interviewee pointed out that he had been on a one week long course organized by one such NGO where they were shown movies about the perils of migrating.

These perils of the journey to Libya also dissuaded some parents from being supportive of migration. And citizens of Ahabanase did not need the media or NGOs to tell them this. There were many returnees with harrowing ordeals who shared this quite easily with the

researchers. Asante, a young man in one of the focus group discussions we held shared his personal experiences on the journey in the following words:

I personally embarked on a journey in 2008. We were on our way to Libya. We went by road through Algeria. On the way, we were attacked by armed robbers. We had to separate. All my friends went missing. It was only by God's grace that I'm here. From that experience I decided not to migrate to a foreign land to serve anyone. I will serve myself. I will not even allow anyone to go because of what I've seen. (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Akoto, a young man who participated in one of the focus group discussions said, "One may die. On our way we see several human skeletons. They belong to our brothers who migrated early on. One can even fall off the truck. Some may face accidents. We know a lot of people who were faced with several mishaps on the way." (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018). Similarly, Gyamfi, an adult male we interviewed said "We were arrested in Algeria (Algiers) for a year. So, what they did was to burn our bodies with a hot iron.... We went through the illegal route and so it was a form of punishment for what we did. Others were killed right in front of us." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) A third man told us that he had been imprisoned for 2 years.

In the focus group discussions, we held with the female adults, Tutuwaa surmised, "Bonos [People from the Brong Ahafo Region] have really benefited from Libya migration but it has also killed a lot of people." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) Another continued, "There are also cases of people not being able to inform the family members of the dead ones. Most families don't know their relatives are dead." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) In the focus group discussion with adult males, Appiah told us, "Now the place is very risky because of the war. When Gaddafi was alive the place was very peaceful. Now they don't even have a president." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). One young woman talked about her brother being beaten and his luggage with all its contents confiscated while he was in Libya. Sometimes, they were also arrested and only let go when they had been paid off. Unhappy with the conditions there, the brother had returned home to Ahabanase. Such people often returned with only the shirt on their backs so to speak leading one young male, Otchere, to conclude, "Due to the war and the instability in Libya they come home with nothing. And so those of us here are even better than them." (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018). And Oppong, a father explained why his house had no migrants in the following words:

My second male child expressed interest but I didn't allow him to go. Given the situation in Libya now, it may not be prudent for him to migrate. You don't know what will happen on the journey. Libya is the country most people from Ahabanase go to but currently the place is dangerous. There is so much instability in the country. So, I asked him to learn a trade. That's what he is doing now. (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018).

A number of parents we spoke to had literally lost children to migration, not having heard from them once they left and as such were not interested in having other children of theirs migrate. As one mother, Tenewaa, shared, "I will not allow them to go. The first one hasn't returned and another one wants to go?" (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). Maame Sika, another adult female, said of others, "Some have family members who have travelled for over 10 years but do not hear from them. In that case they are always grieving." (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018). And Ahema, another young woman pointed out, "I think the non-migrant families are better off. There are some who travel and will not call. Their families will not hear from them and so whether he is dead or alive they don't know." (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018).

Participants did not only tell us about their worries about family members in Libya, we observed it first-hand. In one family we visited, the oldest brother had migrated a decade and a half ago and had not been heard from again. As soon as we entered the compound and informed the family that we were interested in interviewing them as a migrant family, the patriarch in his late 60's disappeared into the room and came back with his long-lost son's voter's identity card requesting that we help them find him. In another interview, the mother of a long-lost son shed tears and the interview had to be cancelled and only rescheduled upon her request. Adoma, one other mother who no longer heard from her son who had migrated responded:

Anywhere in the world. I will not allow. We are all staying here.... I will [only] allow the person to go to America if someone else is taking him or her along...It's because of what I've experienced. My son is nowhere to be found and he wants to go? You don't chase the flock to graze when the ones you sent out early on haven't returned. (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018).

In this mother's comments, it becomes clear that she is disapproving not of migration in general, but of migration to a specific destination, Libya, because of its instability. Her perspective reinforces the point already made that parents were generally supportive of sons' decisions to migrate either because it allowed them to attain economic success or at the very least, pursue economic success. Wives, on the other hand, were largely unsupportive of young men's decisions to migrate. Their rationale was markedly different from that of parents as elaborated in the following section.

## **Intra-generational and Gendered Disapproval of Migration**

As described above, parents generally approve of migration even though the instability in Libya may cause a few to contest their sons' decision to migrate there. A few sons, however, refrained from telling their parents about the decision to migrate for fear that they would face opposition. Unlike parents, however, wives were generally not being told because their opinions simply did not matter given the dynamics of the conjugal relationship in which they found themselves. One of the local political authority figures in the community, known as an assemblyman notes how in the first place wives may not necessarily be told about a partner's decision to migrate. As he puts it:

When we talk about decisions in a marital union, the man discusses whatever decision is to be taken with his wife. But this is not common though. My observation is that some of the men do not involve their wives in taking decisions. So, there are some wives who complain about that. Not all men do that. I involve my wife in every decision I make. There are, however, some times that I inform her only after I have already embarked on a particular action. (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018)

Not all men shared this view. Agyeman, a young man who participated in one of the focus group discussions said, "I will tell my wife because I have married her. Even the Bible says a man will leave to cleave to his wife." (30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018). And in fact, in the case of Ohenewaa, her husband had confided in her and not his parents about his plans to migrate. The real issue

was not whether wives were told or not but whether it mattered what the wives thought. Here, it becomes clear that in a fair number of cases, the wives' views counted for little.

Ama, for example said, "He is the head of the household and so even if you tell him not to travel, he will do what he wants." (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018). Ohenewaa, whose husband had left when she was pregnant with their first child shared her personal experience of trying without success to dissuade her husband from migrating in the following words, "I told him not to go but he told me to leave him alone and that he will go." (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018) Asantewaa faced a similar situation where her boyfriend at the time paid no heed to her advice to stay put in Ghana. She says, "We were dating before he travelled abroad. I told him not to migrate but I later found out after I returned from school that he had migrated." She nonetheless went ahead and got married to him and describes her marriage as a "mobile phone marriage." (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018)

Young married women whose partners lived in Ghana were also quite sure that they could do very little if their partners chose to migrate. One such interviewee, Kyerewaa, when asked what she would tell her husband if he planned on migrating retorted, "He doesn't listen to me." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) And another Korama, said, "As a woman I can't do much. That's why I have my own job; I will live off what I make from here. I can't prevent him from going." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Adwoa, another partner left behind, highlights the powerlessness of wives in this regard when she says, "There is nothing you can say. All you have to do is to support him with prayers so that he will be successful. She adds:

His brothers were the ones arranging for him to go. As a wife I also sent him money anytime he requested for money in Kumasi. As you know the business was not his and so if there's an opportunity for him to migrate in order make something for himself, then I needed to support him. (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018)

The eleven partners we interviewed were overwhelmingly uncomfortable with the idea of their spouses migrating. Two of them had courted the men and married them after they had migrated and therefore can be counted as supportive of migration. The rest were dating the men prior to their departure. Two of them had objected vehemently but to no avail. Two others had been supportive outright. Five, had supported the idea but on a short-term basis only. In their minds, the partners were either going to go to Libya for a short while and return to them or were going to strive to go off to Europe and come back for the wives and children to join them in Europe. All five had discovered, nonetheless, that the short-term plan they had with their partners had become long term, lasting two to three decades in some cases.

Beginning with the work of authors such as Ravenstein (1889), scholars of migration have focused for far too long on the economic dimensions of migration to the neglect of its other components. And in our sample, the importance of the economic could not be underestimated as evident in the perspective of parents. Indeed, in the case of one couple as well, their marital relationship seemed purely economic. Ohenewaa's husband had first migrated to Libya shortly after she was pregnant with their first child. He had returned during the period of initial unrest in Libya but had gone again with plans to build a house on the plot of land he had bought before returning home for good to continue his job as a mechanic.

Ohenewaa and her husband only spoke once a month when he called to confirm that he had sent the monthly remittance of 200 Ghana cedis (roughly 40 dollars). She only called him when he did not call about the monthly remittance. So long as he sent the money, Ohenewaa was happy with the arrangement. Ohenewaa, however, was the outlier in this sample. She seemed content with the economic justification for her husband migrating. Others, however, suggest that the economic motive had not been met. Akosua, a partner left behind noted, "There are some rich people who have never migrated before. Some have mansions but look at me even as a partner to a migrant I only live in a single room. I can't compare my single room with their mansions." (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018)

Overall, however, the other partners left behind offered arguments that demonstrated the limits to the economic motive in discussions on migration. These interviewees seem in accord with the increasing recognition of the importance of weighting non-economic factors as equally as economic factors in discussions about migration. Mai and King (2009, p. 297) put this perspective rather eloquently when they note that:

we need to recognize that migrations are rarely exclusively motivated by economic or political considerations, and that the full relevance of the decision to migrate and to continue living and working abroad can only be understood by bringing into the analytical equation the affective, the sexual and emotional dimensions.

The partners left behind affirmed this position as well. Akua whose husband has been away for more than half of their 30year marriage is not in favour of long-term migration. She believes that married couples are supposed to live together in the same space and draws on religious texts to buttress her view. In her words, "Even the Bible says it's not good for one to live alone. And so, I believe it's better to live together at the same place. That's why I agreed to his decision to migrate. He told me it was only for a short time." (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018). Ama, whose husband has been away for 20 of the 28 years they have been married shares similarly as follows:

Even the Bible says women will leave their parents and cleave to their husband therefore to be married and not see your husband for 20 years is not good. The second born was only 3 days old when he left. The older one was only 4 years old and so he doesn't know his father. What's the point of all the riches? In my opinion it would have been better if he were here even if we lived on 10 pesewas a day [2 cents a day]. There is hardship in Ghana but we live in peace. It's better to come home from work to meet your husband and your children. I have really gone through a lot of hardships. My husband's migration has even affected my physical wellbeing and so it's not a good thing. (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018)

Akua and Ama's views are interesting considering that multi-local residential patterns among Ghanaian couples is quite common (Coe, 2011). These views are a clear departure from traditional Ghanaian norms (Fortes, 1950) and perhaps a reflection of the increasing pervasiveness of Christian beliefs about marriages (Gifford, 1994) that call for neolocal residence patterns. Soothill (2007) argues that the proponents of Charismatic Christianity in Ghana favour such residence patterns. She discusses the ways in which some of these pastors have interpreted the Biblical verse "Adam, where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) as an indictment on Adam. Eve would not have eaten the apple in the Garden of Eden if Adam had been by her

side. She also quotes Mensah Otabil, founder of one of the oldest and largest Charismatic Churches in Ghana, the International Central Gospel Church who in one of his Living Word Ministries Sermons on Marriage admonished his listeners in the following words:

Husbands, dwell with your wife: to live with, remain with, reside with, to be together. You must live with them and that literally means, when you marry you don't live apart from each other. You don't live in Germany and your wife lives in Ghana. Sometimes I've seen people marry and immediately they marry they have plan [sic] that the husband should travel to go and seek for greener pastures and soon the wife will join, but what they forget was that the American Embassy was not part of their marriage, and the British Consulate was not the reverend minister who officiated their marriage!...Women, tell the men, dwell with us.

(Soothill, 2007, p. 187)

The religious admonition to dwell in the same space allows for forms of intimacy that partners left behind were quick to highlight as being strained in a migrant household. One such form of intimacy that these women emphasized was companionship and support with the day to day care of children. "I wish their father were here to help raise the children. As a lone parent taking care of the children, it is difficult," says Afua. (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018). Here again, Afua speaks to the changing Ghanaian context where unlike the past, extended family support for child rearing is on the decline (Imoh, 2012; Manful and Cudjoe, 2018).

Asantewaa also opines, "I wish my husband and I lived in the same place. I wish I could meet him anytime I return from work. I wish we could talk physically and see him play with his children. Unfortunately, that's not what it is and so I view our marriage as quite poor." Ohenewaa, yet another partner left behind also described the poor contact her husband had with his children in her narrative below:

He doesn't call during the day. He says they don't close from work very early so he usually calls in the night. By that time the children will be asleep. On Fridays he calls during the daytime but the children will be in school.... I think the only day he doesn't work is on Fridays and so that's when he calls during the daytime but the children will be in school by then so he is unable to talk to them. (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018)

A young man echoed similar sentiments when he made the point that, "There are some who leave partners and children behind. Although they provide for them, the kind of love and the bonding needed does not exist because they live far away. The children only see their father during the Christmas season." (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

The three quotes above offer insight into yet another reason for not being in favour of migration; the lack of affective ties that such a situation creates. While it cannot be said that male ties to children are a new phenomenon in Ghanaian society, very little scholarly research exists to provide support for the importance placed on this. This work therefore contributes to establishing the importance of affective ties between parents and children in Ghana thus contributing to the emerging body of work on the subject in the African context (Cole and Groes-Green, 2016).

A third reason for objecting to migration focuses on the difficulties with fulfilling sexual needs when one partner is a migrant. Akua says:

In my opinion it's better to have your partner with you. Even if it's GHS1 he gives you every day, it's better than one whose husband sends her GHS100 every month from abroad. At least you can see him every day and he can also satisfy you sexually. It's very important because our body has its needs and sex is one of them. (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018)

Adiku (2017) has demonstrated how couples separated by distance rely on technology to satisfy sexual desires. In her study of 30 middle class Ghanaians, seven used technology to engage in what they called virtual sex. Technology cannot always bridge the distance though and as Adiku (2017) discovered, six of the fifteen men she interviewed engaged in extra-marital affairs. While women are much more likely to face public opprobrium for engaging in extra-marital affairs, they are not immune to sexual desire and need. Akua tells the story of a woman in Ahabanase who engaged in an extra-marital affair in her husband's absence and justified it with the phrase, "Yes my husband sends me money but have you ever heard that he sent me his penis?" (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018)

Akua goes on to highlight the importance of incorporating both the affective/emotional and the economic into discussions about the decision to migrate just as Mai and King (2009) have argued when she adds, "Your husband can build a mansion for you but if he's not here you'll go and have sex with someone living in a single room house."

Similarly, without elaborating much, Yaa concludes "I believe it's better to live with your partner at the same place. Even if he is a common labourer but provides for the family no matter how little it is, it's better. Migrant marriages aren't the best." (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018) "God created everything in pairs", says yet another, Maame. (21<sup>st</sup> April, 2018) And one other partner left behind, Ama, frustrated by our questions about the extent to which technology mediated distance and created what Licoppe (2004) has described as "absent presence" retorted, "I don't care about the fact that he calls me. All I want is for him to be physically here. I cannot say I'm happy about the fact that he has migrated. He doesn't come home and he hasn't also arranged for me to go there." (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018). Women whose partners were contemplating migration shared these frustrations as well. One young woman in a non-migrant household said wistfully to us, "It will not be the same as a face to face conversation. When you call, you only hear his voice and that's all. I will miss him." (22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2018) In these statements, the social is privileged over the economic. Adiku (2017) has highlighted the ways in which technology helped to decrease the geographical distance between migrant couples. She shares the story of newly married Fiifi who describes his use of technology to mediate the distance between himself and his partner in the following words:

We are in constant communication, the only time we are not talking is when we are probably busy doing something or we are in a place where you can't get the chance to talk or we are asleep. Apart from that when I get home, I have to be on Skype to talk to her so I don't even get the time to talk to my family.

(Adiku, 2017, p. 175 and 176)

For Ama who had been married for nearly three decades and spent more than two-thirds of it apart from her husband, these notions of absent presence (Licoppe, 2004) or co-presence (Madianou, 2016) meant little. Ama simply did not buy Ben-Ze'ev's (2004) view that "the internet enables a constant flow of communication that can become profound and intimate. Love becomes intense and the participants feel close to each other" (p. 54). Physical presence

trumped all of it so far as she was concerned. And perhaps what this points to is the limits to how long technology can sustain a relationship in which physical contact is absent.

Besides their frustrations with the lack of sexual intimacy in their relationships, other partners left behind alluded to the ways in which migration can lead to behaviours that are either outside or on the margins of the law (Piot and Pommerolle 2006). To ease access to citizenship in the country of emigration, immigrants find themselves contracting fake marriages with citizens, a procedure Adwoa refers to as “*nkrataa aware*”, to wit marriage for papers. Such individuals are often legally married to partners in other jurisdictions. Beyond the moral dilemma such a situation presents, contracting the fake marriages may require cutting off ties to the previous partner for technical reasons. Adwoa raises these concerns when she says, “As they say there is what they call “*nkrataa aware*” and so he had told them he didn’t have a wife. That meant he couldn’t send me anything. That’s why I said migration is not good because if you’re not a Christian you may lie about certain things.” (1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018)

Given all of these issues of lack of companionship and sexual intimacy as well as moral dilemmas, Ama is so adamant about the ill-effects of migration on married couples that she says, “So even before my children get married we will come to a consensus that if they have plans to migrate then they won’t get married. They will only get married if they don’t have any plans of migrating. I will not let someone’s daughter go through what I have been through.” (31<sup>st</sup> July, 2018)

Being a married woman with an absentee husband may be difficult but they are not alone. Others while dating have had children with men who have now migrated and find themselves in the equally frustrating state of being in limbo. They would probably have gone on to get married if both parties had stayed in Ghana. However, the man migrates and leaves the woman in limbo, not completely committed to the man by way of a ceremony and yet tethered to him because they share a child together and family members assume they are together. One mother of a migrant concerned about her ‘daughter-in-law’ said to us of her son, “it’s always my prayer that he makes money so that he can come and marry his son’s mother.” (20<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

Overall, among our young female participants, both those in migrant marriages and those who observe migrant marriages from afar, the overwhelming sentiment was that this was not an ideal situation. In fact, there seemed to be a growing rejection of this practice in this community with quite high levels of youthful male migrants. As one young male interviewee said, “I remember that as a child, women used to pray for “*borga aware*” [migrant marriages] but women don’t like it now.” (19<sup>th</sup> April, 2018)

## Conclusions

Young people want to be financially independent, have good jobs or their own business, and have a nice cement 4-block house, good clothing and their own means of transport. They aspire to have small families and to afford good education for their children. These aspirations are largely in line with the models of modernity that are promoted in Ghanaian schoolbooks, churches and mass media.

(Laube, 2016, p. 22)

As highlighted in the quote above, young men in Ghana strive against all odds to make ends meet and to provide a decent living for their families. In the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana where this research was undertaken, a constellation of factors has created a situation where migration to Libya is almost considered a rite of passage for young men, ushering them into respectable adulthood. Migration thus enables young men as the New Economics of Labour Migration literature suggests to make money for themselves and their households. This paper has explored what this means for intra-household relations. It explores in particular the perspectives of parents and partners left behind on migration. We find that overwhelmingly, parents are in support of young men migrating. The primary reason for support of this practice was the economic incentives that migration afforded; given the poor training in some cases as well as poor employment prospects in the region, migration allowed each young man to become a respectable adult man in his community, an *Opanyin*. Even if young people could not attain economic success by migrating, migrating could allow them to pursue economic success, rather than being wayward, a sign of unrespectable adulthood. Although the perils of the journey as well as the growing instability in Libya post 2011 served as a damper on the spirits of some parents with respect to migration, these views did not outweigh the more optimistic perspective on the phenomenon and the sense that one's success or otherwise in the land of sojourn was largely a matter of luck. Partners left behind, on the other hand, were generally less sanguine about the benefits of migration. For them, social reasons, key among them, affective ties between parents and children as well as between spouses trumped the economic reasons for migration that parents so easily offered up in support of the practice.

This inter/intra-generational and gendered analysis of perspectives on migration suggests that migration is a contested model of success in contemporary times. While parents aspire for their sons to migrate either to attain economic success or at the very least to engender a recognition of the need to pursue economic success, wives largely disapprove of migration because it breaks the affective ties between parents and children on one hand and spouses on the other. Although parents focus on economic indicators as a sign of respectable adulthood, the socio-cultural changes (Charismatic Christianity, declines in kin fosterage) in contemporary Ghana have led wives to focus more on social indicators as a sign of respectable adulthood. Migration thus seems to offer an opportunity to attain respectable adulthood but only from the perspective of parents. Drawing in the often muted voices of wives shows an alternative conception of adulthood, one built on a recognition of the importance of affective ties and a perspective that the New Economics of Labour Migration literature with its economic deterministic perspective ignores. These findings suggest that scholars working from the New Economics of Labour Migration perspective need to expand their conceptualization of migrant success from its narrow focus on the material to incorporate the

affective as well. After all, as scholars working elsewhere in Africa have suggested (Hunter 2002; Cole 2009), the material is intertwined with, not separated from the affective.

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