Homo migrans and the question of cause

Few topics dealt with in the social, political and economic sciences have received as much academic and public attention in recent years as the topic of migration. Research centres and networks, conferences, journals, books, research and policy reports, news features, documentaries, as well as artistic projects dealing with the topic of migration, have multiplied with great speed and, given corresponding processes on the ground, this is unlikely to change soon. Already due to its sheer size, to characterize in a few lines a field as vast, complex and multidisciplinary as this is thus problematic, and bound to provoke the criticism that it is selective or biased in some way. In this regard, this text is not written against specific empirical or theoretical works contributing in different ways to the analysis of contemporary migrations, but responding to certain tendencies within that field which, without completely homogenizing it, seem nevertheless to dominate the discourse on migration today in important ways.¹

One of these tendencies is the priority granted to economic and policy related aspects of migration. The problem with this is, in my view, less a simple lack of attention to or empathy for individual situations and testimonies but, rather, that the concrete ways in which migration is experienced seem to have no, or at least very few, consequences for the analysis and theory of migration processes as such. In other words, what can be observed is less a lack of individual accounts as such than their reduction to either something calling for humanitarian action or what
in journalistic parlour is referred to as of ‘human interest’, that is, a category with considerable journalistic appeal but with little or no consequence for the general understanding and theorization of migration as such.

Another problematic tendency in the writing about migration seems to be what one could call the normalization or naturalization of migration, that is, the tendency to describe and characterize migration, by reference to either historical precedent or the wide range of migration processes in a multitude of sociogeographic contexts today, as that which is the norm in human behaviour, not its exception. In its most explicit form, this tendency to describe migration as a typical rather than exceptional trait of human nature seems to result in an argument which can perhaps best be described as viewing the human being not as sedentary but as a kind of ‘homo migrans’. In terms of its epistemological direction, the homo migrans argument can take on different guises, defining migration either almost biologically as an expression of mobility characterizing human beings from prehistoric times or, more historically, as a human practice that has occurred on so many occasions and in so many contexts that it should be considered a normal state of affairs. With archaeological and historical evidence apparently on its side, at first sight the argument appears convincing. What is more, by pointing out the ‘normality’ of migration, the homo migrans argument provides an important argument against xenophobia, racism, and other forms of exclusion migrants and refugees are regularly exposed to, and the argument is often employed in this way. However, even if politically useful, the argument is also highly problematic, both epistemologically and politically.

The epistemological problem of such a homo migrans argument lies primarily in the fact that it tends to gloss over important differences between, on the one hand, the seasonal and predominantly circular character of migration among hunter-gatherers and pastoralists, among whom migration functions as a way of responding to and dealing with the ecological and climatic conditions in a particular geographic setting, and, on the other hand, modern day labour migration as a response to conditions which are, in essence, not geographical or ecological but political and economic. What is politically problematic about this is that the equation or likening of historical forms of subsistence-oriented seasonal migrations or transhumance with labour migration or the displacement of refugees leads to the representation of processes as normal and part of human nature which are really political in nature. This important differentiation is of course not a new insight but has informed Marxist and world-system theory-oriented analyses of migration for many decades. Drawing on his work on migration in West Africa in the 1970s, Samir Amin, for instance, has
argued that even if migrations have occurred throughout history, modern migration should not be conflated with earlier displacements or movements of people because of its intrinsic link to a globalizing capitalist economy. Amin insists, thus, on the need “to distinguish between the movements of people and labour migration” (Amin 1995: 29). In other words, the consideration of migration as a normal or natural trait of human behaviour depoliticizes the phenomenon of migration and, as a result, the question why an increasing number of people engage in (not just) transnational migration needs no longer to be asked.

However, Amin’s position also implies a very critical question about the significance of the study of migratory expectations and subjectivities. According to him, questions concerning the personal motivations of migrants, their cultural patterning or individual psychology are structured, if not determined, by the political economic processes in question from the outset and therefore of little theoretical relevance for the understanding of what migration is (Amin 1995: 30). Amin is very categorical on this point. “Individual motivations”, he writes “are well known. Their ‘revelation’ by a sociological investigation is mere empty talk” (Amin 1995: 32). Amin argues that the motives and motivations given by migrants and their communities have to be seen as rationalizations of the conditions they are faced with but not as what causes migration in the first place. Surprisingly, the point Amin makes here is rarely addressed in studies arguing for the importance of studying migration from within and taking cultural and individual motivations and experiences into account, and perhaps already represented a dissident point of view when he first expressed it in the 1970s (Potts 2010: 41). While agreeing with Amin that migration processes must be considered in relation to the structuring effects of economic production and the underlying political economy at play, this chapter argues that it may nevertheless be crucial to pay attention to the ways in which migration is conceived of and experienced by the individual in order to understand the actual working of the conditions in question beyond their importance as abstract economic parameters. Focusing on the motivations and ideas underlying the migratory projects of young Mandinka-speaking migrants from Senegal and Gambia, this chapter thus explores the ways in which globalizing socioeconomic conditions translate into individual aspirations. In this regard, the chapter considers individual perceptions and aspirations as an important form of social commentary on the conditions shaping the realities of contemporary postcolonial lifeworlds. The chapter first presents a brief historical sketch of migration from Africa toward Spain, before turning to a consideration of its underlying motives and the question of cause.
Beginnings

The history of undocumented African-European migration via the Strait of Gibraltar and, subsequently, by boat crossings to the Canary Islands, can be traced back to the capsizing of a small boat just off the coast of Los Lances, a beach close to Spain’s southernmost town of Tarifa, in November 1988. Of the 23 people who had been on board the vessel only five survived. Eleven bodies resurfaced and were washed onto the shore during the next few days. The bodies of the remaining seven passengers were never recovered. While the small blue vessel that capsized at Los Lances was probably not the first boat used to cross from Morocco to Spain, it was the first attempt of, in this case Moroccan, migrants to reach Spain which, due to the shocking death toll, interviews with some of the survivors, and pictures taken and published of at least one of the corpses, received major public attention, and has become the publicly remembered beginning of a process which still continues, albeit with changing routes, today. In this context, it is also important to remember that the first African migrants coming to Spain did not arrive via the Strait of Gibraltar but had come overland from France. Entry by boat became predominant only once it became clear that there were plenty of labour opportunities in Spain while, at the same time, French visa and immigration policies became more and more restrictive.3

During the early nineties most of the arrivals were from Morocco itself. From the mid 1990s onwards Moroccan migrants were increasingly joined by sub-Saharan migrants, mostly from West Africa. In order to embark upon the short but dangerous crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar, most migrants had first to travel overland through Mali, Niger, and Algeria in order to reach Morocco. The reason for this particularly long and often arduous journey overland was and continues to be twofold. On the one hand, due to the military conflict between the Polisario movement and the Moroccan state in the region of Western Sahara, including a system of fortified walls more than 2,500 kilometres long built by Morocco, the coastal route to Morocco through Mauritania has in practice been blocked. On the other hand, flying into Morocco, although possible with Moroccan tourist visas which are reportedly obtained more easily than visas to European countries, is perceived by many as being too great a financial risk because many migrants are denied entry even with a valid tourist visa and thus forced to return directly to their home countries, negating almost at once their own as well as their relatives’ financial efforts in obtaining visas and airfares.

The financial risks of the inland route are no lower, however. The costs involved in crossing the Nigerien-Algerian and the Algerian-Moroccan borders are high, often involving arrest and expulsion to Niger and Mali by Algerian and Moroccan
border controls – whereby migrants are often stripped of their valuables before being expelled. Many sub-Saharan migrants arrive in Morocco with few or no financial means. In consequence, they are unable to pay to cross to Spain by boat and are virtually stranded in Morocco. While many found themselves in one of Morocco’s major cities and urban agglomerations such as Tangier and Casablanca, others tended to stay on the Moroccan Mediterranean coast in improvised, make-shift camps, avoiding the inevitable costs of lodging in the cities, in some cases saving whatever is left from their travel budgets and waiting for a perhaps cheaper chance to cross, in some cases simply trying to hold on.

Given the precariousness of this state of suspension in a kind of permanent transit, in 2005 an increasing number of migrants started to avoid the sea passage and to enter European territory directly by crossing the fenced, barbed-wired and guarded borders of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The eventual series of attempts by especially sub-Saharan migrants to climb over the fences of the Spanish enclaves in the autumn of 2005 involved several deaths and many injuries, and received major media attention. These events propelled the issue of African-European migration into the public arena in a hitherto unprecedented way. On the level of public debate reactions to these events were mixed, invoking concerns about the precariousness of the situation of African migrants as well as about Europe being threatened by an uncontrolled influx of migrants, potentially destabilizing social and public security. The practical reactions and measures taken on the political level were more of one mind, emphasizing the necessity of effective border control. As the most immediate result of this tightening of security efforts, the fences around the Spanish enclaves were fortified, making further crossings impossible. At the same time, negotiations with the Moroccan authorities had to secure tighter controls at the Moroccan-Algerian border.

While the crossing of the fences of the Spanish enclaves seems to have been effectively stopped, the same does not hold for (West-) African-European migration in general. As a matter of fact, the most immediate result of these policies was that the points of embarkation and arrival moved further south. With the routes through and from Morocco increasingly blocked, an increasing number of open but much larger fishing boats started to depart from Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia and even Guinea-Bissau, directed now not towards continental Spain but towards the Canary Islands. The Canary Islands were not an entirely new destination for migrants attempting to get to Europe. Smaller boats, similar to those used for crossing the Mediterranean and referred to as pateras in the Spanish media, had been used earlier in order to cross from Morocco and Spanish Sahara to the Canary Islands.
These smaller boats, however, were not suitable to make the longer crossings from Mauritania and Senegal. Larger fishing vessels, however, were suitable. This passage was first tried in 2004 by an experienced Senegalese fisherman originally from Saint Louis upon the request and purchase of his vessel and services by a Malian organizing clandestine travel to Europe (Sall and Morand 2008: 38). Since 2006, larger pirogues or cayucos (as this type of boat is referred to in the Spanish press) have been used for passages of 1,000 kilometres and more. As a result of this change in means of transport, the number of African migrants arriving in the Canaries leaped from 4,700 in 2005 to more than 31,000 in 2006.4

All these developments have been followed up extensively in the media and have formed the topic of numerous reports by government and non-governmental agencies. And yet, culturally and historically sensitive descriptions and analyses of its economic, political, and sociocultural causes are less readily available, not to speak of detailed accounts of the cultural and personal motives and trajectories behind the official statistics. This is not meant as a general critique of the way these developments have been covered by the media. As a matter of fact, journalists and film-makers have been among the first actually to look at the individual stories behind the news, including detailed documentation of the conditions many migrants endure on their travels and the ambivalent ways European states have reacted to their arrival in Europe.5 It is rather that the perhaps inevitable reduction of these events to numbers of arrivals and deaths in the daily news seems at least partly to obliterate the descriptions of the conditions and dynamics aimed at in longer formats of journalistic writing and film making. In a similar way, the use of quantitative rather than qualitative approaches to the understanding of human realities on the one hand, and approaches that answer perhaps too promptly to government and administration-induced interests concerning issues such as integration and public security, on the other, has had a problematic impact on the way current African-European migration has been dealt with in certain branches of the social, political and economic sciences. The quantitative and policy-oriented approaches seem to stand in the way of more complex and nuanced accounts and analyses of the ways in which these processes are experienced by the protagonists themselves. As the editors of this volume remark in their introduction, it is only recently that the social sciences and especially social and cultural anthropology have developed an increased attention to the more personal and cultural dimensions of these processes, including the ways migration and migratory experiences are perceived of and voiced in local settings and the embeddedness in and relation of these experiences and local conceptualizations and practices to the wider field of a globalizing political economy.6
On the Cause of Migration

Drawing on ethnographic research in Senegal and Gambia between 2002 and 2005 and ongoing research with Senegalese migrants in Spain (since 2006), this chapter aims at contributing to this growing body of literature through a culturally and historically sensitive analysis of the reasons and motives underlying the migration of Mandinka-speaking young men (originally) from the region of Yacine and the neighbouring area of Pakao in the Casamance region of Southern Senegal. The analysis of the imagination, practice, cultural dynamics and impact of migration outlined in this chapter was first developed in the context of the research I conducted in Senegal and Gambia, which mainly focused on the cultural logic and existential significance of divinatory practices such as geomancy and cowrie divination—practices frequently employed for coming to terms with and facilitating migration projects as well as confronting problems caused by the absence of sons and husbands due to migration. These attempts to understand the motives underlying the current dynamics of migration in Senegal and Gambia are reconsidered through conversations with Senegalese migrants in Spain during which these earlier ideas were explicitly addressed and discussed. This has resulted in an increasingly dialogical and retrospective mode of analysis, moving back and forth between different settings, voices and theoretical perspectives.

Questions

During the research on the personal significance and cultural logic of divination which I conducted in Senegal and Gambia from 2002 to 2005, I was struck by the fact that many of the consultations I had the chance to witness centred round the question of ‘the path of travel’ or simply ‘the path’, as migration was referred to by diviners and their clients. By 2002 and 2003, the more dramatic scenes at Ceuta, Melilla, and the Canary Islands had not yet emerged and the issue of African-European migration had not been mediatized to the extent that would push it to the forefront of public debate and awareness by 2005 and 2006. Initially, I had therefore not been aware of the extent to which the idea and practice of migration had started to capture especially young people’s minds, increasingly shaping their personal perception of their lives and economic possibilities. Of course I had heard people inquiring about the possibility of obtaining invitations and visas for travelling to Europe, and in fact already on my first trip to Senegal in 2001 at least two young men had mentioned to me their wish to travel to and look for work in Europe. However, it was only during my apprenticeship with several diviners, and
in the consultations I witnessed and the subsequent conversations I had with them and their clients that I became fully conscious of the acuteness of the role that the issue of migration had started to play in Senegalese and Gambian society, extending far beyond the ethnic and religious groups international migration had until then been associated with in the Senegalese context, such as the Soninke from the upper Senegal valley and the Mouride brotherhood.\footnote{What was especially striking to me – and this point has been confirmed to me during many later conversations with Senegalese migrants in Spain – was that the degree to which migration is considered a feasible option was not easily linked to categories such as ‘youth’ or activity in the informal sector. From what people told me it became clear that the appeal of the idea of migration was not limited to people without employment, or to a clearly definable condition of poverty, or to a particular age group. While statistically men under 30 years old with little or irregular income probably do constitute the majority of those who will actually leave and try to get to Europe, many middle-aged men (older than thirty) and even people with salaried work told me they were considering migrating to Europe if possible, and some of them did. As a matter of fact, the distinction between unemployment and employment loses much of its immediate heuristic value as a means of sociological distinction when the percentage of those having regular salaried work is, as in the case of Senegal, comparable to the average rates of (youth) unemployment in most Western European countries, causing an almost complete reversal in income stability if one compares sub-Saharan and western European household economies.} A similar problem exists in relation to the category of ‘youth’ if associated with a specific age group, such as, for instance, in the definition used by UNESCO defining a youth as a person of 18 to 24 years of age, or definitions associating youth with unmarried marital status. In fact, many of the ‘young’ migrants are actually older than 24. At the same time, even if they are younger than 24 at the time of departure, they may nevertheless already be married and have children, enjoying a much more adult status in their communities than unmarried individuals.

In this regard it was not so much the fact that migration had become an important option for individual economic praxis in Senegalese society that I felt needed to be addressed, but the question of what precisely constituted and constitutes the rather generalized appeal of the idea of migration as perhaps the only remaining option, obliterating any other. This question is all the more relevant as Senegal is considered to be one of the more stable political and economic countries of the region, ruling factors such as military conflicts, civil unrest, or major food shortages out of the list of factors causing people to move. Although there had been a military conflict
in the Western parts of the Casamance region for some time and teenagers told me that especially in the bigger towns and cities such as Serekunda, Kaolack, Thiès and Dakar you eat, but you never eat until you are full, people would generally not consider themselves refugees or starving. Still, the main motive for migration in Senegal and Gambia is clearly economic, most people’s economic situation being chronically tenuous and money being the one element dominating any conversation on the topic of migration. At the same time, there seemed and seem to be other factors and rationalities at play as well. Rationalities that transcend simple economic reasoning but refer directly to the way one sees oneself, oneself and others, oneself and the world.

**Globalization as absence**

One of the possibilities in thinking about current migration processes is to consider migration as one of the major outcomes and functions of globalization, pragmatically defined as an increasing movement of goods, ideas, capital, and people world wide. The one element uniting the different aspects of this pragmatic definition is a generalized increase in mobility. This concerns the mobility of material objects, especially through trade, of immaterial elements such as ideas and images, and of people. Several related but distinct aspects are worth mentioning with regard to the globalization-as-increased-mobility-formula that disturb clear-cut distinctions such as between push and pull factors, cause and effect, agency and structure.

It is clear in the above and other definitions of globalization that mobility and movement are not just seen as the outcome or effect of globalization processes but are, simultaneously, constitutive of the processes they are described as being part of. Blurring the distinction between effect and cause, it becomes clear that, in the same way as globalization and mobility, the process of migration, as one of the most visible ways in which mobility seems to manifest itself, is also not just caused by globalization but very much part of it. The significance of this becomes even clearer if we include another relationship, both facilitating and hampering current analyses of migration processes, in the analysis: that between agency and structure. Depending upon which dimension one chooses to focus on, one’s analysis will arrive at different conclusions. Echoing with the critique of studying subjective motives for migration by Amin, approaches emphasizing the agency of migrants and other sociocultural actors in current social, cultural, and economic practices are, in this regard, increasingly criticized for confusing issues of cultural difference with what
are actually issues of economic and political inequality. At the same time, however, it should not be overlooked that approaches emphasizing agency, cultural creativity and people’s capacity to resist have been developed precisely as a reaction to approaches that, by closing in on questions of economic dispossession and constraint, seemed to victimize people to an extent that often appears in contradiction to the ways people see themselves and conceive of their own actions.

Things become even more complex when one considers the fact that – quite in contrast to the emphasis on mobility and movement characterizing most conceptualizations concerning the nature of globalization, and despite factually increasing volumes of national, international and intercontinental transport – what the majority of people in Senegal, Gambia, and elsewhere are confronted with and experience is not mobility but immobility. They face the difficulty of affording even rudimentary means of transport, often increased by a lack of or deteriorating transportation infrastructure, and the virtual impossibility of obtaining visas for travel to Europe or the US. As a result, globalization is by many people primarily experienced in its absence, in the form of the non-arrival of change, unfulfilled promises and aspirations rather than in an actual increase of mobility or flux of goods. As I have argued elsewhere (Graw, forthcoming), the various forms in which globalization manifests itself as absence – for example in the trade with fake commodities or second hand clothes – reveal the effects of abjection and annihilation which directly impact upon the ways in which personal and local realities are perceived. Not only do these experiences add considerably to the idea that migration is perhaps the only way of realizing the future one hopes for. They also affect the imagination and practice of migration more generally.

The precise impact of these processes of annihilation and abjection and their significance for understanding current processes of migration is not easy to define. It may even be disguised by self-designations used by migrants themselves, such as the description of migration as ‘aventure’ (adventure) in Francophone contexts, or ‘hustling’ in Anglophone settings – terms that emphasize the ability and decisiveness to act, the will to take risks and to realize oneself, rather than expressing the underlying conditions, vulnerabilities or afflictions. In contrast to these self-designations as adventurers and hustlers, the diviners I worked with insisted that in order to identify and understand the nature and cause of their clients’ wishes, difficulties and aspirations – concerns and longings which are usually not revealed to them by their clients beforehand but which it is the diviner’s task to identify through the divinatory procedure – they had to look for what they referred to as
‘niitooroo’, literally, the ‘injury of the soul,’ that is, the underlying affliction forming the basis of a person’s longings and intentions (Graw 2006). The question that arises here is that of the cultural reality, emotional substance and personal significance of what appears to be possible to be addressed only in the interstitial cultural space opened up by the divinatory encounter. Drawing on a conversation with one of my Senegalese interlocutors in Spain, I will in what follows address the questions where, outside the divinatory encounter, experiences of annihilation express themselves and become manifest and how the experience of absence is mediated and transformed into migratory projects.

**Absence and nothingness**

Roquetas de Mar, 5 May 2008. Having socialized for a few hours and having had lunch with the other inhabitants with whom A. shared a flat in the neighbourhood of Doscientas Viviendas, one of the neighbourhoods with the highest percentage of North African and sub-Saharan migrants in Roquetas de Mar, a small town 20 kilometres south-west of Almería, A. and I decided to go out for a walk and perhaps have a coffee somewhere outside. At around half past three in the afternoon, it is still hot in the streets but not uncomfortable. Still a little tired from lunch, however, we decide not to continue down to the corniche but first to have a coffee and to continue to the seaside later in the afternoon. At this time of the day, the café is not very busy and we find a table right in one of the large windows facing the street. When the waitress brings our coffees, we start reminiscing about how, after dinner, back in his uncle’s village in the Casamance, we often used to have *attaya*, the strong and sweet Mauritanian style tea popular in all of Senegal and Gambia, finishing the day by sitting together, waiting for the tea to be ready, listening to the last sounds coming out of the neighbouring compounds, engulfed in the tremendous dark of a night untainted by electric light. As things go, reminiscing about one thing brings up other memories, of other friends, family members, et cetera. Pausing for a moment, lost in the comfort of memories of what one has known best, he says that sometimes he wonders why on earth he had wanted to come to Spain in the first place. If he had known how difficult things were and how different from what he had expected, he would never have come.

‘What did you expect to find?,’ I asked.

Without giving me a direct answer, he asked if I remembered what I had asked him when, still in Senegal, we once talked about his wish to go to Spain and join
his relatives there. Answering his question himself, he said, ‘You asked me why I did not use the money I would need for the trip to Spain to start something at home.’ Pausing again he continued, ‘You know, what surprised me most is that I couldn’t find work. When I got to Zaragoza, you know, where I stayed with my mother’s niece and her husband, I stayed there for months and there was no work at all. I had to ask my relatives for money if I wanted to catch a bus or go and drink coffee when I had thought I would start working immediately, taking whatever chance opened up, earning money and start sending money home for my wife and my mother. Like that...’, the last phrase being accompanied by an energetic and slightly resigned finger snapping. ‘You know,’ he continued, ‘once I have made enough money here, I will go home and invest my money in Senegal. Perhaps I will throw myself into agriculture, buy a tractor perhaps. Something like that.’

The question why the possibilities of doing something at home are often not even explored and why the idea of migration often seems to shut out any other thoughts still hanging in the air, I told him that I had often been asked by friends working for development agencies about what to them appeared to be a rather passive and uninterested attitude towards the agricultural and health projects they were offering and pursuing – for instance, growing vegetables to provide a more varied diet for the people and their children.

‘What did you tell them?’

I answered that my standard answer had been that people were not disinterested in these things in general, but that growing more tomatoes or other vegetables in their backdoor garden would not allow them to buy a new zinc roof for their house, not to speak of a car or a house in town. It was just not what people were looking for. Now, pausing for a moment myself, I added that I thought the fact that especially young people would often no longer consider local economic options but instead focus directly on migration might have to do with other things as well. ‘For instance?’, he asked. ‘A certain degree of frustration because of having to buy Chinese or Korean copies of certain electronic products, for instance’, I suggested, referring at the same time to similar facts like being forced to buy imported second hand rather than new clothing, the growing frustrations when seeing returning migrants coming home with money, TV-sets, and gifts, and the increasing feeling of pressure to achieve the same.

‘Do you know what they call dealing with second hand clothing in Wolof?’, he asked. ‘Fuuuk diaye. Right? Selling stuff from which you first have to shake the dust off.’ ‘Yeah. Do you know what we call something like a second hand shirt or other cheap stuff in Mandinka.’ ‘No.’
‘Feng kati baloo. A thing without body. And do you know what some parents say to their sons when they don’t work or when their work doesn’t pay off? I manke fenti. You are nothing.’

The question of cause

I had sometimes wondered about the extent to which the economic logics of remittances and new levels of gift-giving introduced by migrants actually shaped people’s perception of their own situation. I was now shocked at the degree to which, according to what I was told, these effects had actually penetrated not just individual minds but the social tissue of kinship groups, families and, one may add, society at large. Perhaps pointing in a similar direction, it has been argued that part of the reason for migration in the Senegalese context has to be looked for in the relations of competition existing between co-wives in polygamous households and the corresponding obligations of their sons towards them (Bouilly 2008: 20-21). In terms of analysis, part of the problem here results perhaps from the fact that the same social relations that explicitly or implicitly exert pressure upon the individual are the same relations upon which the individual socially, emotionally, and in most cases also economically depends upon, a situation triggering different reactions in different individuals.

My interlocutors have unanimously described their obligations towards their relatives and their wish to help their families as an important reason for having come to Spain, emphasizing social relations and the resulting obligations as positive motivational elements. In a different vein, the Senegalese psychologist Mamadou Mbojdi cites a young migrant repatriated from the Canary Islands to Senegal who, in contrast to my interlocutors, mentions escape from social obligations and control as part of what motivated him to migrate (Mbojdi 2008: 310). Even if this statement may be exceptional, it shows that personal reasons and motivations may not be identical with structural settings, and thus need to be taken into account in order to understand the current dynamics of migration in Africa as well as elsewhere. This holds true even if, as Amin has argued, these motives can be read as rationalizations of decisions which are not self-determined but become necessary due to political economic conditions. In fact, part of the tension that seems to exist between structural and more agency-oriented approaches towards migration may have to do with a somehow restricted understanding of the notion of cause.

The term ‘cause’ cannot just be used to describe that which causes a situation or the movement of an object mechanically, but also that which an individual or a
group of people envisages and intends to defend as their ‘cause’, allowing for describing, for instance, the idea of social justice as the cause of voluntary social work or the idea of equality as the cause of socialism. In order fully to appreciate the significance of the semantics of the term cause for the theorization of migration it is important to remember that these different usages of the term ‘cause’ are not coincidental but reflective of attempts to come to terms with the nature of being and causality in philosophy that go back to Aristotle’s famous reflections in the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*, where he distinguishes between four types of cause necessary in order to understand the nature of an object or action: (1) the efficient cause as the force or instrument by which a thing as produced; (2) the formal cause constituting the specific form or shape of an object or action; (3) the material cause encompassing the elements or matter from which an object is produced; and (4) the final cause as the end or purpose for which something is produced or done.

It is clear that our most common understanding of a cause is identical to the first category, that is, the efficient cause. In regard to the tension between structural and agency-oriented approaches toward migration that interests us here, it could be argued that the contradiction between these approaches seems to arise precisely from the disagreement on the question of what forms the efficient cause of migration as that what makes a person move and leave his or her familiar geographic and social surroundings. In such a view, structural approaches would thus be seen as approaches which identify the economic conditions as efficient cause, while agency-oriented approaches would appear to be viewing the subject itself as the efficient cause of his or her decisions and actions. However, agency-oriented authors are unlikely to ignore the importance of structural conditions as efficient cause of migration. Instead, they would argue that while conditions are of course crucial for understanding migration, migration cannot be reduced to a simple reaction to economic conditions but involves many more aspects, including prior or existing historical and cultural experiences of migration, culturally specific understandings of selfhood and agency, notions and patterns of intrafamiliar and intergenerational solidarity, social competition within and among social groups and many other aspects, all of which are important in order to understand migration as a social praxis, and in order adequately to describe the way social actors themselves perceive their own decisions and actions. In a similar vein, authors more concerned with the structural causes of migration are likely to respond, as Amin does so eloquently, that they are not ignorant of personal and social motives for migration but that these motives do not cause the processes in question but are, in fact, caused by the politico-economic conditions, not vice versa.
While these clarifications may bring structural and agency-oriented approaches closer together, the basic tension seems to remain and the respective accounts and analyses are likely to be perceived as insufficient by either side. How can this dilemma be resolved? Drawing on the ways migration is experienced and conceived of by my interlocutors, I would argue that what causes the tension between structural and agency-oriented approaches is perhaps not just a disagreement on the question of what constitutes the efficient cause of migration but also a tendency not to distinguish between the efficient and the final cause of migration, that is, between that which produces migration and that for which migration is pursued.

Migration and finality

Within the order of causes given by Aristotle, the fourth or final cause is traditionally held to be ‘first in dignity’ (Enriques and de Santinella 1932: 235). The main reason for this is that Aristotle bases his reflections on causality on examples concerning the meaning of the production of human artefacts and human action more generally, actions which regularly acquire their meaning through what Aristotle refers to as the to on eneka, that for which a thing is done, or telos, that is, their end, purpose, or function. One of the famous examples of the significance of the final cause concerns the meaning of walking, or rather going for a walk or stroll:

Cause means ... the same as “end”; i.e. the final cause; e.g. as the “end” of walking is health. For why does man walk? “To be healthy,” we say, and by saying this we consider that we have supplied the cause. (Aristotle, Metaphysics V, 2, 3)\textsuperscript{13}

In other words, the reason for considering the final cause to be the first in dignity is that without understanding the end or telos of a person’s action, this action may appear strange and without meaning. Once we understand the end for which something is done, we understand its sense, and by doing so recognize that the person as acting for a reason, for or towards an end that can be grasped and understood.

What, then, is the telos of migration in the Senegalese case? Asked for what reason someone would leave Senegal and try to go to Europe, the most common answer by my interlocutors in Senegal and in Spain was and continues to be ‘in order to earn money’. Money (Mandinka koddoo) is given as the main reason or cause (sabuu), referring, in essence, to the wish to earn money and gain access to the economic
and social possibilities it is associated with, from supporting one’s family to being able to afford to marry, to start a small business, to build a house, etc. In this regard, the reason for migration is clearly economic, or at least finds its starting point in an economic situation and the way in which this situation is experienced. If one looks more closely at what is being said here, however, one sees that the end or purpose of going to Europe is not simply money as a material gain but overcoming the experience of lack of money and the social impasse which insufficient economic means implies for the person or family concerned. While this may seem rather obvious, it is important to keep this nuance in mind in order to understand the difference between the efficient cause of migration, be it perceived in the socioeconomic conditions or in the person’s own decision and decidedness to leave, and its final cause, that is, its finality and underlying reason or motivation. In other words, what the distinction between efficient and final cause allows us to see is that even if migration may primarily need to be viewed as caused by economic conditions and the political economy producing these conditions, the conditions constituting migration’s efficient cause do not form the sole element that needs to be taken into account. Instead, analyses of migration need to be complemented by a consideration of the final causes of migration, that is, the reasons which turn migration into a logical and dignified response to the conditions encountered. It is only in such a more nuanced perspective that it becomes clear that the final cause of migration is not simply socioeconomic conditions as such but the wish and decidedness to overcome them. And it is from such a more nuanced understanding of migratory causalities that one is able to start to develop modes of understanding migration that are not solely external but which resonate with the aspirations and motives expressed by its protagonists.

In this context it may be worth noting that the differentiations offered by an Aristotelian understanding of cause are useful not only in relation to the question of the *causa finalis* of migration. While different modalities and focuses of migration research are often described as competing, many of them could be considered under the rubric of one of the two other forms of causality described by Aristotle. The increasing interest in the sociocultural patterning and specificity of migration as a social practice in different locales and among different social, ethnic, and national groups, for instance, could be perceived as representing an interest which in its epistemological direction comes very close to the question of the *causa formalis* or formal cause in the terminology derived from Aristotle. In a similar way, studies describing the way migration is actually carried out, that is, by the use of what means and under what kind of conditions, could be described as investigating the *causa materialis* or material cause of migration. The challenge which this complex understanding of
causality poses for the understanding of migration, and in fact any other practice, is the fact that for Aristotle all forms of cause may be relevant to understanding a given object or phenomenon. However, without the inclusion of the *causa finalis*, it is difficult to arrive at an understanding of migration that is existentially sensitive, and it is from here also that the terms and notions migrants employ in describing their undertakings start to make sense and start to lose their seemingly arbitrary character.

The use of notions such as ‘travel’ in Mandinka (*tamoo*) or ‘adventuring’ in West African French for referring to migration, in terms both of the actual journey and the later moves between different towns, cities and places of work, is precisely an expression of the insistence on the dignity of migration as an attempt to counter marginalizing economic conditions, not a sign of naïveté concerning the impact of these conditions or their political economic causes. In other words, the insistence on agency on the part of the migratory subject is not simply an expression of what within a political economical analysis may be understood as false consciousness. Instead, insistence on agency and self-determination is the expression of existential claims in the face of conditions that may indeed sometimes leave little choice. If all other ways appear blocked or dead-ended, migration becomes a promise, offering a way out, and simultaneously an expression of the claim to economic participation and well-being. And it is in this regard also, that is, as a claim to participation, access, and recognition, that the nature of the processes of migration we witness worldwide is not just factual, economic, or cultural, but also deeply political. Also in this regard, the question of cause cannot be avoided.

References


Notes
1 Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the international workshop ‘Migration at home: Migratory Imaginations and Imaginary Cosmopolitanisms in Africa and beyond’, organized by Knut Graw and Samuli Schielke at the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin, 11-13 March 2009, and the lecture series Africa and Beyond: Translocal Perspectives, organized by Achim von Oppen at the University of Bayreuth and the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, 28 January 2010.
2 For a similarly critical argument emphasizing the importance of the study of internal migrations in comparison to views presenting migration primarily in terms of outward, international migration see Bakewell and De Haas 2007.
3 It is unclear in which year precisely boats were used for the first time or started to be used regularly for crossing to Europe. However, it was during the mid-1980s that North African workers started to be employed in the growing economy of glasshouse agriculture in the
region of Almería in southern Spain (Martínez Veiga 2001: 41). At the same time, immigration controls in France and Gibraltar were tightened, making regular entry into Spain more and more difficult and triggering clandestine crossings of the Strait of Gibraltar with the use of small boats or pateras in the first half of the 1990s (Suárez-Navaz 2004: 172-174). In this regard, the tragedy at Los Lances in 1988 was probably not coincidental.


For analyses of different aspects of these practices see Graw 2005a and b, 2006, 2009a and b. For the relationship between divination and migration see Graw, forthcoming.

Taama siloo or taamoo in Mandinka, yoonu tukki or yoon in Wolof. For a more encompassing discussion of this notion see Graw (under review).

For early accounts of the importance of migration in Soninke communities see, for instance, Adam 1977, and Dia and Colin-Noguès 1982; for early accounts of the developing transnational trade networks of the Mouridiyya see Diop 1990, Ebin 1990 and Schmidt di Friedberg 1994.

The last available rate for salaried employment in Senegal having been 17.4 % in 2005 as indicated by the Africa Brief of the 2010/2011 Global Wage Report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

For one of the most trenchent critiques of agency-oriented approaches in the social sciences see Ferguson 2007. For a similar insistence on the analysis of global inequalities in the field of political philosophy see, for instance, Žižek 2005 and 2008.

For an interesting discussion of the notion of adventure see also Sarró 2007.