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Reflections on Migration Dynamics in Northern Ghana from the 'Crossroads Perspective'

Stephen Adaawen

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Partners of the Network:

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Stephen Adaawen[1]

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1. The 'Crossroads Perspective'

The 'Crossroads Perspective' evolved with the inception of the 'Crossroads Asia' competence network in 2011. The network sought – in the wake of criticisms and calls to rethink conventional area studies – to probe long-term conceptions of Central and South Asia as spatial enclosures or 'containers' within the scientific field of 'Area Studies'. The observed complex and increasing flows of people, ideas and goods along Asia's crossroads, in the view of the network, meant there was no sufficient justification for the "division of the world into territorially fixed 'areas' defined by certain character traits found on the 'inside', but instead demands concepts of 'area' that take these dynamisms into account" (Hornidge and Mielke, 2015: 13). Therefore, the aim of the network is to look at the localised functional connections which abound along Asian crossroads, that transcend spatial boundaries and for which mobility is being used as a lens to critically engage the three thematic areas of focus (conflict, migration and development). With mobility as a lens, the conviction is that it will allow for causal connections to be established between the three thematic areas of focus.

Drawing on the concept of 'figurations' (Elias, 1970), the crossroads network recognises human action and interactions, the concomitant role of people in the social construction of space as well as the complex interdependences of multiple spatialities such as scales, places, networks, territory and mobilities (Leitner *et al.,* 2007; Jessop *et al.,* 2008). 'Figurations', as advanced by Elias (1970), emphasise that people are not independent of each other or carry out actions in isolation. The argument is that underlying all intended interactions of human beings is their unintended interdependence (Elias, 1969, cited in Newton 2002: 196). In order to grasp the intricacies of social phenomena and outcomes, the focus should therefore be much more on the interdependencies and networks that evolve in contrast to the decisions and actions of individual actors (Newton, 2002). Hence, 'figurations' in this sense can therefore be seen as the changing patterns and outcomes of human interactions and the networks that develop through these interactions.

The use of 'figurations' as a conceptual guide within the context of 'Crossroads Asia' is informed by the conviction that a change that occurs in one location within a figuration affects the entire ensemble or network. In cognisance of this, the concept is envisioned to bring into perspective the communicative construction of social reality, which is integral in the social construction of geographical spaces and in mobility processes; and also as a basis for reflection in relation to the 'positionality' of researchers within the 'Crossroads Asia' network. The 'Crossroad Perspective' is, therefore, composed of three main components or pillars. These pillars include the development of: a conceptual framework, a methodological toolbox and aspects on the reflection of 'positionality' in the process of knowledge generation (Hornidge and Mielke, 2015).

With regard to the conceptual aspect, the focus is on the figurative construction of space. The network conceives of 'Crossroads Asia' as a sphere replete with actions and marked by complex and dynamic figurations. These figurations reflect not only in the (im-) mobilities of people, goods, symbols and ideas, but also characterised by reciprocal human interactions across spatial, cultural and socially constructed boundaries. The conviction is that alongside these complex processes of human interactions and various forms of mobilities, different types of borders and boundaries are also negotiated. At the conceptual level, therefore, the network is concerned with the critical and extensive analysis of social and physical (im-) mobilities as well as the dynamic and interactive negotiation of political, socio-cultural and ethnic boundaries in the process of boundary drawing and weakening (figurative construction of space) (Hornidge and Mielke, 2015).

The development of a methodological toolbox as the second component of the 'Crossroads Perspective' is underlined by the methodological approach of 'follow the figuration'. With this

approach, the aim is to map and capture mobility patterns from which translocal figurations within 'Crossroads Asia', as well as figurations that extend to neighbouring and distant areas can be discerned. The approach thus involves following the flows of people, goods, ideas, symbols, and studying the underlying structures that influence and shape them in order to understand mobility patterns.

With the third component, on the other hand, the 'Crossroads Perspective' is concerned with the 'positionality' or power relations inherently embedded in the process of knowledge generation. This component entails a critical reflection on: global and national knowledge generation structures, how the different disciplinary backgrounds, as well as existing hegemonic western theories and methods shape and influence researchers, and how they deal with research objects and subjects. 'Positionality' as part of 'Crossroads Asia' will probe issues and processes related to boundary strengthening and weakening. It also draws attention to the need for scrutiny and a conscious reflection on the communicative construction of geographic, social and disciplinary boundaries, and the influences of researchers on their work.

The conviction is that reflexivity and reappraisal of conventional 'Area Studies' with regard to 'positionality' will place "under scrutiny many prominent existing boundary settings and common process of boundary enacting" (Mielke and Hornidge, 2014: 25). A critical reflexivity or taking cognisance of the inherent power relations and situatedness of knowledge, and existing disciplinary boundaries will not only tackle bias and generalisation in the course of knowledge generation, but will also facilitate a stronger and harmonious relationship between 'area studies' and other 'systematic' disciplines (Political Science, Sociology, History and Geography).

The conceptual and methodological synthesis of these three components or pillars will contribute to the development of 'Crossroads Studies' as an interdisciplinary research programme. The aim is to incorporate the 'Crossroads Perspective' with its emphasis on the multiplicity and relationality of spaces/spatial realities, and its insistence on the importance of reflection for knowledge generation in different 'areas' of the world. The development of 'Crossroads Studies' as a paradigm for interdisciplinary research and teaching, as envisioned by the competence network, is not to abandon 'area studies' but to stress the need to focus on the "dynamic and (im-) mobile element that determines the social and communicative construction of spatial realities and to underline how the (re-) negotiation processes of physical, social, and thus also epistemological spaces has to stand at the centre of area studies research and teaching in the twenty-first century" (Hornidge and Mielke, 2015: 17).

Against this background, the paper will draw on the three components of the 'Crossroads Perspective' to analyse mobility patterns in Northern Ghana while reflecting also on my 'positionality' as researcher from the area. In drawing on the components of the 'Crossroads Perspective' to critically analyse mobility patterns and processes of negotiating social boundaries and construction of space within the context of Northern Ghana, this paper will be guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways have colonial and post-colonial governmental structures and other historical actors influenced and shaped migratory patterns in Northern Ghana?
2. What are the mechanisms for negotiating social boundaries (contesting power and social hierarchies) and constructing social spaces in Northern Ghana?
3. How has the flow of ideas, knowledge and objects facilitated social transformation in rural communities of the area?

An engagement with these questions in another area of the world will give impetus to the potential of new insights emanating from the analysis of migration dynamics in Northern Ghana through the use of the 'Crossroads Perspective'. In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, the

first section of this paper will entail a background of the study area, the context of the research and its main sources of data. This will be followed by an overview of north-south migration in Ghana, with specific emphasis on the historical antecedents and actors that have contributed in shaping migratory movements in the country. The third section discusses migration as a means of negotiating social boundaries and the construction of spaces. In the fourth section, the paper will dwell on the question of mobility and social transformation by elaborating how ideas, perceptions and new understandings of social reality have been transferred and reterritorialized to become an integral part of the social organisation of the study area. The issues of 'positionality' related to the framework within which the initial PhD research was done and challenges during fieldwork will be discussed in the fifth section. This section will also reflect on my disciplinary background and person as a researcher from the study area and how this may have impacted the research process. Finally, the last section will entail a discussion and conclusion in relation to the 'Crossroads perspective' and its potential as an effective conceptual approach for 'post-area studies'.

2. Researching North-South Migration in Ghana

The data for this paper is based on some aspects of the author's PhD research on climate change, migration and social transformation in Northern Ghana. This research was conducted within the framework of the large-scale West African Science Service Center on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL) research project and with funding from the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). As a result, the main aim of the paper was to look at the underlying factors that were influencing mobility patterns in face of ongoing climatic and environmental changes in Northern Ghana. As part of the research, primary data was collected through in-depth, oral/life histories and focus group interviews, participant observation and household surveys in the Bongo District of north-eastern Ghana. In addition, secondary data mainly from published works, government institutions and non-governmental organisations were also collected during the research.

For the data collection, household heads and members were interviewed to elicit information ranging from: motivations for out-migration or in-migration, their perceptions about climate and environmental change impacts on agriculture, as well as effects of both out-migration and in-migration on the household and socio-demographic transformation in the study area. While the information collected consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data, the paper will rely mainly on qualitative interviews to delve into people's opinions and to highlight the underlying social, historical and spatial factors that interact in complex ways to influence and shape the flows of people, goods, ideas and social transformation in the study area.

The study area of Bongo District was chosen for the research as one of the three research sites that were identified across Ghana, Burkina Faso and Benin within the framework of WASCAL for the first phase. Administratively, Bongo is one of the 13 districts of the Upper East Region (UER) of Ghana. The Bongo area falls within the semi-arid Savannah Ecological Zone with the southern fringes bounded by Guinea Savannah which grades into Sudan Savannah along the Gambaga escarpment towards the northern-most part of the region (Blench, 2006). The district is located between latitude 10.50°N to11.09°N and longitude 0.45°W, and with a total land surface area of 459.5 km^2. Due to its location, the Bongo area is characterised by a wet and dry season with annual rainfall ranging between 600mm and 1400mm per annum (DCPU, 2010; Faulkner *et al.,* 2008). As a result, much of the farming is done during the wet season when there is rainfall activity to support the agriculture in the area (Blench, 2006; Friesen, 2002). Figure 1 is a map of the research area showing the research sites in the Bongo District of the UER of Ghana.
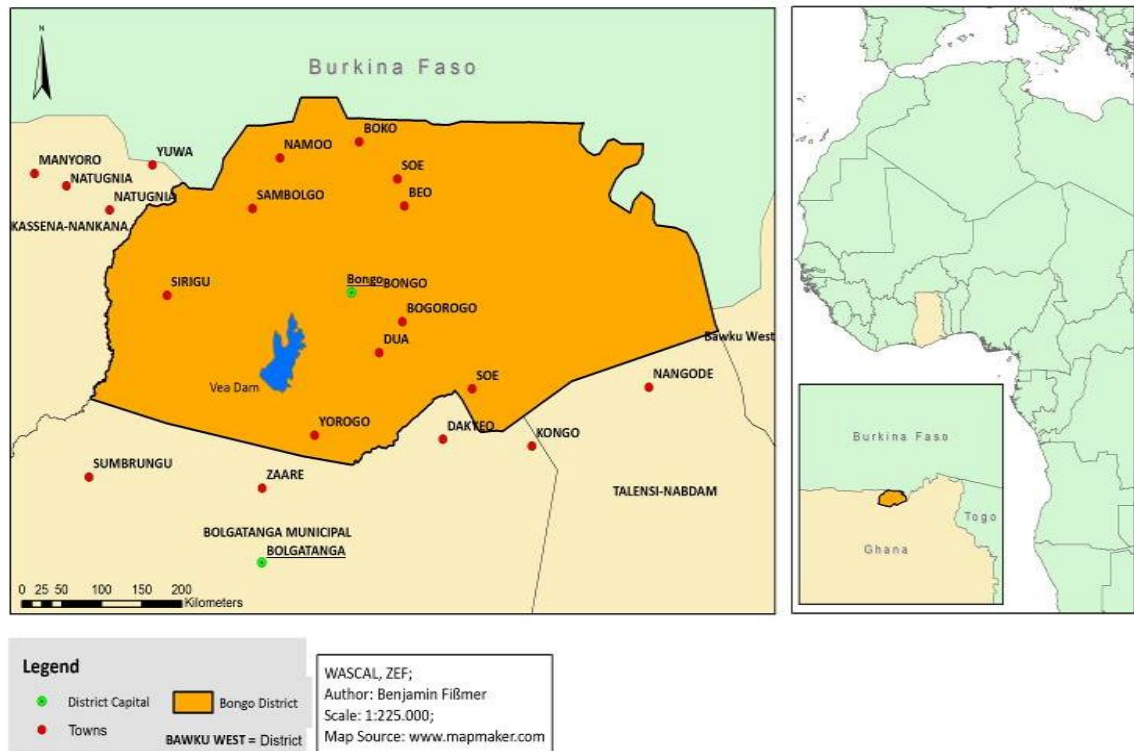
Fig. 1: Map of Bongo District showing the research sites (UER)

With a predominantly rural population, the Bongo District is one of the poorest and most densely populated districts in the UER with an estimated population of 84,545 people as of 2010 (GSS, 2007; GSS, 2013a). The majority of the people are employed in the agricultural sector (70.5%), while several others are also engaged in formal and informal economic activities. The system of farming is basically compound farming, which is labour intensive. Hence, farming is highly dependent on household labour. But the social networks through affinal relationships, communal solidarity and the extended family system also serve as a pool of labour for household farming activities.

The social organisation of the people highlights the translocal social networks, interactions and closely-knit interrelationships upon which the society thrives in the area. Historically an acephalous society, the Bonaba (Chief) and *tendaamba*[2] alongside formal local government structures politically administrate the district. In terms of the social organisation, the Bongo District is a patriarchal society that practices the extended family system. The extended family system serves as a social safety net where members identify and lend support to each other in times of farming, marriage and adversity. This support is normally manifested in the reciprocity and social solidarity that members offer each other. These kinds of cooperation are also couched in affinal relationships between families. Marriages serve as a platform for alliances and cooperation between two or more families, sections or even villages. Polygyny is a very common and accepted form of marriage in most of the societies in Northern Ghana. It is thus normal and common for a man to have more than one wife. Aside the prestige that is sometimes associated with the number of wives a household head or man may have, the many wives and children also serve as a potent source of labour during the weeding and harvesting period of the farming season. Hence, household sizes are often larger in the area.

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[2] Land owner or custodian of the land in most communities of Northern Ghana

Over the years, the Bongo area and much of Northern Ghana have been characterised by population movements since precolonial times (Plange, 1979a). The effects of rainfall variability, food insecurity and high poverty levels have been variously enumerated as principal factors precipitating movements in Northern Ghana (Cleveland, 1991; Schraven, 2010, Van der Geest, 2011, Rademacher-Schulz, Schraven and Mahama, 2014). However, the nature and pattern of movements in the area can be better appreciated by critically examining underlying factors that interact to influence, sustain and shape human mobility patterns over the years. An overview of migratory patterns in Northern Ghana will thus highlight the evolution of the north-south migration pattern in Ghana.

3. Overview of North-South Migration in Ghana

Historically, the movement of people from the Bongo area and other parts of Northern Ghana to Ashanti and the forest areas of Southern Ghana had been ongoing since precolonial times. Population movements were, at the time, in part dictated by the search for fertile land, flight from internecine warfare, slave raids and for trade. In particular, Northern Ghana's strategic middle geographic location enhanced its control of the prosperous *Kumasi-Kong-Djenne* trans-caravan trade route (Dickson, 1968). The control of the flourishing Kola nut trade and the collection of caravan tolls on cattle being sent to the south of the country at the time boosted the relative commercial status of Salaga as a town in Northern Ghana.

The resultant booming economy attracted people and merchants from Western Sudan and Northern Nigeria to come and trade in this historical commercial town of Salaga, and beyond to the forest areas in the south to trade in kola nuts, Shea butter, livestock, and return with salt and fish (Ibid.). The cultural contact with these people passing through the area is believed to have had unintended impact by stimulating the desire to also migrate towards the south of the country. This was particularly reflected in the claims of people interviewed in the Bongo area. The conviction amongst people in the area is that the activities of especially Mossi migrants or merchants from Burkina Faso passing through the area, to trade at the historical commercial town of Salaga in the Northern Region, and also in the big town of Kumasi in Ashanti triggered the desire to also move to the south. An informant recounted during the research that:

> "[…] I know migration, very well here in Bongo. We used to sit here and donkeys, a lot of them come from Burkina Faso; it was Upper Volta at the time. The Mossis will come here; in fact they needed kola and salt. But they were bringing us date palm. The Mossis call it *'gabire'*. When they bring it here, then they continue down south. They come back again on the same donkeys with salt when they are going up in front of my house here; right here. They use to come in cycles, go and come;,that is how they were migrating – that is the Mossis. So formally, it is the Mossi who taught us how to go to Kumasi (*southern Ghana*). Kumasi was the next brisk business town. It is the Mossi migration that taught Bongo or for that matter the people of the Upper East Region how to move down to Kumasi. And now we are moving out too. I saw it because the Mossis are; I mean we even look at them as our ancestors. So it is the Mossi migration that made our people to follow" (Uncle Abu, Retired Civil Servant, Bongo-Central, Age: 60 years, 16.10.2012).

For most people therefore, the persistent migration to the south of the country was influenced and shaped by Mossi traders and merchants transiting through the area to the south of the country. That is to say, Mossi merchants constantly passing through the Bongo area transmitted the idea of migrating to the south of the country to people. This transit often involved camping for longer periods in the area. In this regard, the cultural contact and interaction with the transiting Mossi and other migrant traders is believed to have stimulated the urge to also travel to the south of the country. Moreover, the prospect of getting exotic commodities like kola nuts and salt which were

valuable items at the time had also stimulated the interest of locals to also sojourn to the south of the county to get these items themselves. These historical actors and economic activities have been crucial in partly shaping the north-south migration pattern in Ghana. Nevertheless, the contribution of colonial and post-colonial governmental structures in exploiting the flows and enticing people to also move to the south of the country, and also by forcibly recruiting them to work in the plantations and mines, cannot be overlooked.

Although the trans-caravan trade had already set in motion the flows of goods, people and ideas, the southward movement of people to the forest areas of the country before colonialism was neither daring nor very pronounced. Unlike hidden and restricted mobilities within the then USSR Central Asia, for example, where movement was controlled and managed at a certain point in time (Van Assche and Hornidge, 2014), the limited mobility in the case of Northern Ghana could be traced to the dangers that were involved in undertaking such a venture. This was the case because of the activities of slave raiders and recurrent conflicts between some of the northern states and Ashanti that had made any journey to the south a precarious one. The risk involved in moving accounted for the restriction in the large-scale movement of persons.

While population movements were generally part of the social organisation of the area, and indeed for the most of the West African Sahel (Cleveland, 1991; Rain, 1999), the migration of people especially to the south of the Ghana was aggravated with the arrival of the colonialists. The incursion of colonialists and missionaries, and the subsequent 'pacification' of the then Northern Territories (Northern Ghana and Southern Burkina Faso) became the tipping point for what has eventually become the sustained labour migration to Southern Ghana. This incursion was complemented by a boom in the mining sector, following a stall in gold production in South Africa due to the Boer wars. A consequence of this was an insatiable demand for labour in the mines and plantations along the coast of the country (Lentz and Erlmann, 1989).

In view of these culminating events, the Northern Territories at the time were identified and developed as labour recruitment centres to feed the mining and plantation industries concentrated in the south of the country by the colonial government. This was done by way of deliberately dislodging indigenous self-sufficient peasant communities and livelihoods as a way of precipitating temporal migration from agrarian societies in the north to work in the south of the country (Plange, 1979b; Cleveland, 1991). These colonial capitalist predatory inducements ensured the constant provision of cheap and hardworking labour for their economic establishments in the south (Songsore, 2011).

Dickson (1968: 690) in reflecting much earlier about the labour migration situation in northern Ghana, for instance, notes that "young men in northern Ghana were more attracted to the gold mines and cacao farms in Ashanti and southern Ghana than to the cotton farms. Paradoxically, it was the Government (*colonial administration*), which while seeking to encourage commercial agriculture in northern Ghana also tempted the young men to go south. This began in 1906 after a carefully selected group of young men from all over northern Ghana were taken on a conducted tour of the gold mines, where they were highly impressed by the decent and higher standards of living enjoyed by the mining employees." A consequence of this was the subsequent abandoning of farms and unprecedented migration of economically active peasants from rural communities to the south and coastal areas to work in the mines. Aside from the selective male labour recruitment which induced men to travel to the south to participate in the wage labour economy, many others were forcibly conscripted into the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) to fight for the British (Killingray, 1982).

The concentration of colonial governmental and economic activities, construction of schools and other infrastructure along the natural resource-endowed forest and coastal belt in the south meant that Northern Ghana was neglected in the development agenda. These conscious political and social

intrusions eventually set in motion a trend of unequal regional development between the north and south of Ghana (Songsore, 2011). An informant in sharing his view on the topic argues that:

> "[…] it is all from historical precedence. At the time that the Whites *(colonialists)* were here, they were considering us as the strong people to do their work and other things. So education got here very late. Health facilities and other social amenities were not around. So for you to be able to experience or see certain things and to enjoy these facilities, you had to travel down-south" (Male Participant, Focus Group Interview, Gowrie-Kunkua, 14.08.2012).

Meanwhile, post-independence governmental economic policies and social interventions have also lagged greatly in bridging the north-south developmental and poverty gap in the country (Ibid.). The introduction of economic reforms as part of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment policies (SAPs) had relative impacts on the different sectors of the economy (Grant, 2001). The general effect of these economic policies on the agricultural sector included the crumbling of the tomato and meat production sector in the UER and other parts of Northern Ghana (Awo, 2010). This partly contributed to dislodging a majority of the farmers who were involved in tomato farming and cattle rearing in the area (Laube *et al.,* 2012). The seeming lag in efforts to bridge the north-south developmental gap and high levels of unemployment further worsened the poverty situation in the area. In the wake of declining agricultural productivity due to the effects of ongoing climatic and environmental changes, people became trapped in uncertainties and with concerns as to when the next meal was going to come.

These conditions, coupled with the conglomeration of foreign companies and manufacturing industries in the south and along the coast, as well as improvement in communication and road transportation provided the impetus for people to migrate to engage in the waged labour economy (Fortes, 1971). The out-migration of people in the area is dominated by mostly youth of both sexes. Although people move to different parts of the country, Kumasi and Accra are mostly popular destinations (see Fig 2.). The movement was mainly temporal seasonal migration to the south. However, people in recent times tend to stay longer or permanently in most of their destinations. In all these movements, migrants who even get settled in places of destination normally do not lose touch with relations back at home and occasionally return on visits. The constant interactions and communication often consolidates this connection and broadens 'translocal' migrant networks (Meier, 2003). The new ideas and information that constantly trickle from these migrants, coupled with the demand for cheap labour in the capitalist economy of the south and declining agricultural productivity, have served to sustain the out-migration of persons in the area (Schraven, 2010). Also, the migrant networks and hometown associations that have evolved at the various places of destination tend to provide a potent safety net for migrants in Southern Ghana.
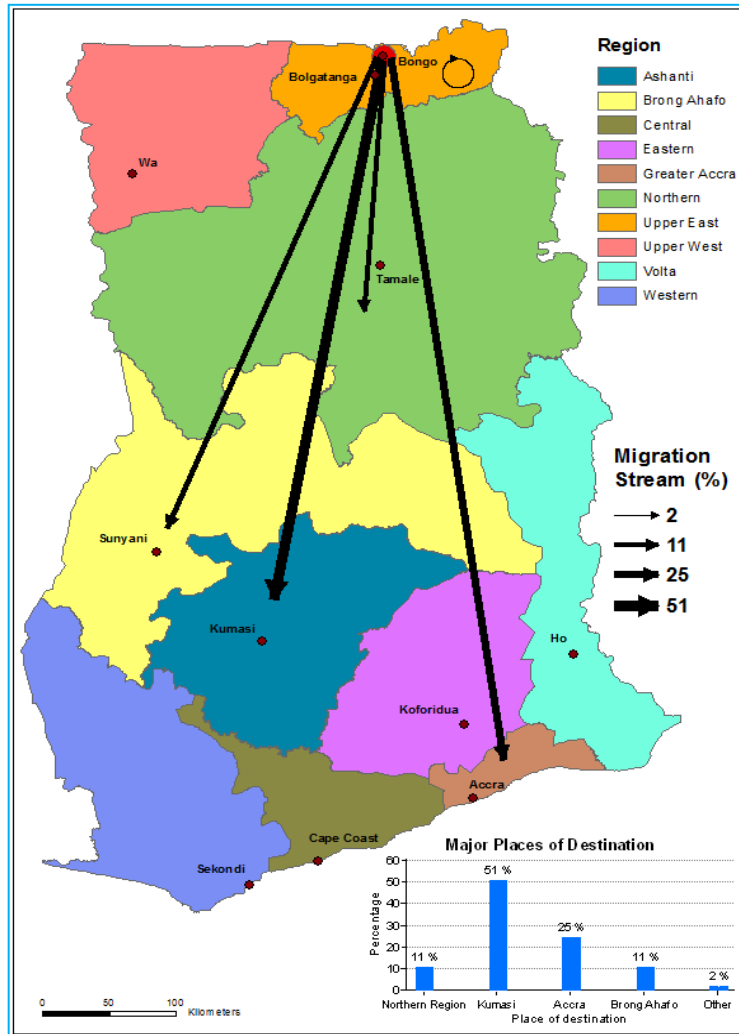
Fig. 2: Major Places of Destination for Migrants from the Bongo Area

Source: Composed with field survey data (2012/2013)

An important observation of migration dynamics in contemporary times in the case of Northern Ghana, however, points to the relationality and complex interaction of socio-cultural and economic factors in the persistent out-migration of people. People's resolve to diversify or maximise their sources of income coupled with the structural demand for cheap labour to do low skilled jobs in the south of the country contribute to the drive for people to migrate. But also of significance in stimulating the desire to move are: the flight from perceived marginalisation or some sort of socio-cultural pressure and the appropriation of migration to the south as an integral part of the socialisation process in the area. This is especially the case with young migrants who feel they are discriminated against by existing socio-cultural norms and values prevailing in the area, which tend to favour elders. In this sense, migration provides the opportunity for negotiating and reordering hierarchical or power configurations as well as reconstructing social spaces. The following section below will discuss processes of social mobility and boundary negotiation, and the construction of social spaces in the study area.

4. Migration: Social Mobility and Boundary Crossing

People often also cross social, physio-spatial and epistemic boundaries. Although these mobilities may appear distinct, they are noted to interact and affect each other (Van Assche and Hornidge, 2015). The crossing of boundaries, with specific emphasis on physical-spatial mobility, often also has implications for social mobility in rural communities and the potential for crossing social boundaries (in this case: recognition in society or upward change of status in the family power hierarchy). Research has shown that in many cases geographic mobility could lead to social mobility (increased social mobility for family members left behind or the migrant (status) after his/her return; or a low level/decrease of social mobility in the place of destination as migrant worker, refugee or asylum seeker), expansion of social networks and breaking the 'chain' of deprivation and marginalisation for migrants (Benz, 2013; Allf, 2014).

For migration in Northern Ghana, the forced labour recruitment that was hitherto initiated by the colonial powers has been 'appropriated' as part of the socialisation process in the study area. As in many typical traditional African societies, being a young person in northern Ghana often implies that your views are not considered very much in major decisions concerning the family. This marginalisation at the household or family level also comes with being subservient and obedient to elders. What this invariably implies is that, in spite of the labour that an individual may offer, one normally does not have financial independence as a young person. In all contexts within Northern Ghana, a young person according to Grindal (2003: 51) is "subservient to the wishes and demands of one's elders. This is especially true economically; the young man has no financial independence because the product of the labour belongs to his father or father's brother. In return, the father provides for the son's needs, approves of a wife and arranges the bride price, and otherwise protects the son ritually under his auspices as a shrine owner." Undoubtedly situations such as these often breed tension between youths who are disgruntled and oppose authority with implications for social order and unity in the family. This status quo is informed by the socially accepted perception that the elders (especially old people in the community) are repositories of wisdom and experience and hence command reverence due to the power they wield. However, economic empowerment through migration or high educational attainment, marital status and age can serve as a means for young people to negotiate these socially constructed boundaries within the family or societal setup.

Thus, those who crave independence and see migration as the leeway but do not have the financial means are often confronted with two mobility scenarios. Firstly, one may clandestinely leave in the night by stealing a fowl, goat or any animal in the house to sell in order to finance the journey. In other instances, one can decide to steal money from the parents or better still borrow from friends or other relations to embark on the journey. These unconventional strategies often adopted to leave for the south of the country are common occurrences that have over time become normal and 'silently' acknowledged in the various communities. Also, existing migrant networks serve to facilitate these movements by providing safety nets for new arrivals in the places of destination.

So for youths in the district who so much wish to enjoy some freedom and independence, migration is often an option and choice. This sort of movement reflects similar patterns observed in the case of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, as part of a research conducted within the frame of the Crossroads Asia Project. In the case of young Uzbek males in post-soviet Osh, for example, Ismailbekova (2012: 18) reveals that migration is seen as some form of "post-traumatic strategy of conflict." While families in this case seem to facilitate emigration from Kyrgyzstan, young men in Northern Ghana, on the other hand, conceive of migration as a means to contest or challenge perceived marginalisation within the social set up. In line with the motivation to improve their social status, many youths often move to the urban centres in the south of the country to wean themselves of discrimination and control from elders, as well as to experience big town life and enjoy things that come with being modern (like going to discothèques, owning a television set, bicycle or motorbike, fridge and latest fashions) but that abound only in the city.

Although dissent or conflict in protest of domination of any sort may influence people, especially youth, to migrate, the building of a room and the subsequent remittance to maintain it may serve as a silent arbitration of the conflict. The construction of a room or building structure in the paternal family house during the sojourn in most societies of Northern Ghana signifies one's commitment to the entire house or lineage, and ensures recognition in the family and community. This building or room within the family compound "secures one's power in the clan and assures one's hierarchical status in the line of generations" (Cassiman, 2008: 22). Aside from the prestige that comes with migration experience to Southern Ghana, the ability to build a room with aluminium roofing sheets does not only reduce a family's struggle with the leaks that often come with the thatch roofing and deterioration in the wet season, but also reflects one's own success as a migrant. The rectangular-styled rooms which have gradually taken over the circular-shaped mud structures are also a physical manifestation of one's partaking in the 'modern' urban environments in the south and the connection the migrant still has with the home community. Normally, the occasional visits and remittances, from those who stay longer or permanently in the places of destination, are enough to sustain the relationship or sense of belonging to the family or home community. These efforts are often reinforced by the expectations of relations left behind who expect migrants to help or send money when the need arises, or host any family who arrives in the city from the community.

A 'successful' return to the home community with cash and material possessions demonstrates that a migrant has conquered the hardship in the south and as such is experienced and psychologically matured as a member of the society. In particular, male migrants, who may have had the experience of living in the south of the country, are mostly perceived to be psychologically stable and economically better-off as a potential spouse. The conviction is that "the young man who successfully travelled, survived, and conquered 'the bush' of the city, will now have a better position in the village and be more desirable as a spousal candidate. The ultimate goal of the migrant is to become a self-made 'big man', an achievement that was originally restricted to the aristocracy, but that since colonial trade and the expanded opportunities of accumulation, has come within reach of every ordinary man" (Cassiman, 2008: 18).

Whereas the desire to accumulate enough money and resources to come back and marry may serve as a motivating factor in the migration of young men to the south (Sow *et al.,* 2014), the situation is not peculiar to only male youth but also females in the area. In resonance with similar observations of male domination in terms of out-migration in Kyrgyzstan and the culminating constraint it had on physical-spatial mobility of females (Ismailbekova, 2013), out-migration was a preserve of males in Northern Ghana. Gendered perceptions and roles of females in patriarchal societies in the area resigned them to taking care of the family and household in the absence of the male spouses and providing essential household labour. Immobility for females thus emanated from these perceived socially constructed responsibilities that seemed to be of much importance at the time. Any female who ventured at all to migrate and was living independently of their husbands in the south of the country at the time, was likely to be branded as a prostitute and treated as such (Grier, 1992).

 But in contemporary times, unfavourable socio-economic conditions, changing social constructions of gendered roles within the society and the urge for economic empowerment amongst females have seen an increasing number of females in the Bongo area and most parts of Northern Ghana also getting involved in the exodus. The aim is often to accumulate money to support the household and acquire utensils, clothing and other crockery in preparation for marriage. The acquisition of these items and transformation in physical appearance are perceived to make them appealing and good targets for male suitors in the community. The cultural significance of the acquisition of these items in tandem with the quest for economic empowerment via waged labour seems to give legitimacy to female migration, which explains the impetus it has gained in recent times in the study area.

Out-migrating to experience life in Southern Ghana and perhaps work to accrue money has become a *rite de passage* and a springboard for social mobility in terms of economic empowerment and moving up the social hierarchy or gaining community recognition. It provided the means to

experience all the things associated with 'modernity' like non-farm jobs, mobile phones, bicycles, new dressing, relative wealth and money that have trickled via globalisation processes and various actors into the rural communities.

> "[…] another thing is also that people are becoming more aware of wealthy living and modern things. They want to wear jeans, colourful dresses and have white-collar jobs. But those things you cannot get them in Bongo here. So they will want to travel to the south. And you know when people get to travel down-south or out of the country, they tend to adopt different lifestyles that are strange or new to Bongo and its environs. They come back with new clothing. They dress up looking more like foreigners with big clothing and chains around the neck. Some of them even wear skinny jeans and their walking changes. So other friends who want to get those things, you see they will also move to the south in order to also get them." (Atogiba, Medical Nurse-Age: 30 years, Bongo, 15.11.2012)

In her study of the Kasena, Ann Cassiman (2008) observes that a young man's return after his experience of the modern world in the south is often reflected in his physical appearance. A manifestation of being part of this experience of 'modernity' is often shown in his new foreign shoes, clothes and jeans. Male migrants in particular show off their success and accumulation by buying drinks for their peers. The new dresses, western gadgets and display of one's accumulation through generous payment for drinks has become part of the social imaginaries that influence and shape expectations among potential migrants, to travel out in order to be able to also accumulate and do same. Migration in this regard does not only facilitate the crossing of physical-spatial and social boundaries, but also facilitates social mobility (Van Assche and Hornidge, 2014; Alff, 2014). This is in view of the fact that migrating to stay and work in the informal wage economy in the south of the country present people with the possibility to free themselves from the 'shackles' of economic hardship and poverty. The economic empowerment also gives them that opportunity, except for age, to be heard and accorded the respect and prestige that is often the preserve of elders in the communities. It signifies the agency of people and the inherent potential to strive in the light of diverse constraints to wellbeing.

Migration to the south may seem to offer migrants the freedom from social control; however, some of them are often faced with challenges in their various places of destination with many coming back without any money or material possessions. Some acquire behaviours considered as 'alien' and unacceptable in the communities of origin. A migrant returning without any money, foodstuffs, clothes or gifts for the family is perceived as a failure in the community. Normally, people's expectation of a migrant in most rural communities of Northern Ghana is that "presents are to be brought home too: a piece of wax printed cloth for the mother; shoes, a bag or clothes for the wife, western commodities for friends and relatives and foodstuffs from the southern regions to be shared with those who remained at home. Coming home empty-handed or broke is considered blameworthy and indicates one is a failure in the eyes of those who remained behind" (Cassiman, 2008: 18). Migrants who sometimes feel they are failures practically refuse to return when they hear that their contemporaries who stayed back home are doing far better than them.

But for those who muster the courage to return, they often become 'objects' of mockery and gossip in the village. The psychological effect of this feeling of failure due to the public ridicule is enormous. Some migrants are able to endure the public ridicule and laugh it off. Others also resort to excessive alcohol intake or leading secluded lives where they avoid places of potential public gossip or ridicule such as community meetings or social gatherings. With persons who have such anxieties of being branded a failure by society and as a result stay longer or permanently at their places of destination, the only window of opportunity for return to the home community is only when they are seriously sick and almost dying. For others, they eventually return when they die and their *degro* (dirt) from the grave in the south is brought back for rituals and reburial at home.

Some of the migrant females are also often the objects of sexual abuse by male counterparts in the south of the country. In order to cope with economic hardship in the cities, some end up engaging in commercial sex to make a living. Others, on the other hand, engage in sexual relationships with wealthy men (mostly married) known as 'sugar daddies' in the urban centres to earn a living (Meier, 2003). The promiscuous lifestyles of some of the migrants often expose them to strange diseases and pregnancies, sometimes without even knowing the men responsible.. The exposure to these socio-economic conditions, as well as to sexual and reproductive health risks of young migrants also have implications for the welfare of parents and households who send their children to southern Ghana to work as some form of investment (Kwankye, 2012). The majority of young women who cannot bear the burden of taking care of their children leave them under the care of aging grandparents or relatives and then go back to the south to engage in menial jobs.

Notwithstanding these challenges that also come with out-migration, the craving to migrate is even more intense if there is the perception that one is under some form of witchcraft attack. A widely held view by people is that there is good and bad witchcraft. However, people explain that witchcraft is dangerous and can be used to stifle one's efforts at progress in life or even to kill. Indeed, most of my interlocutors were a bit hesitant in discussing the issue of witchcraft during interviews due to this raging fear. But for those who opened up on the topic, they acknowledged that being a family relative is not enough to escape any potential witchcraft attack out of jealousy or hatred. In this sense, people who fear or feel that their problems in life or adversities are due to some form of attack from witchcraft, will normally flee elsewhere. They migrate far away from the community, preferably to Southern Ghana.

> "[…] there are also smaller issues that cause people to move but not mostly seen and which is these witchcrafts. I know one, two or three people that say: oh because my house witches chased me away. They say if I stay in the house I may not survive and many stories. Some of these people are still living in southern Ghana. They have to; because if you are running away from something, may be what will make you return is when you think the one that targets you is no more and that is why you will return. If only the person you think is targeting to kill you is still alive, how can you come back and die?" (Mike, accounts clerk, Age: 29 years, Bongo-Adaboribisi, 10.10.2012).

The long or permanent stays of migrants in their places of destination in the south are often legitimised by these purported fears and the need to stay away to avoid these kinds of calamities. Although the existence of witchcraft cannot be scientifically proven, its prevalence in Northern Ghana is perhaps exemplified by the actions of Dagara farmers who sometimes acquire special cults to protect their farms from witchcraft attacks or certain persons who may spiritually remove their crop stalks on to another's farm plot (Lobnibe, 2008). These beliefs and associated actions highlight the underlying figurations in the construction of social reality that have become part of socio-cultural worldview of many rural African societies. But some credence to these beliefs is perhaps crystallized in this account as recalled by one of my informants in the study area.

> "Sometimes I believe because these spiritual issues, they exist. Just last week Thursday or so, there was a case like that at the chief's palace. One man from Dua; the victim was even the junior brother. He had to confess that it was really true he wanted to kill him and I was there to hear. The case involved somebody and the younger brother. The younger brother happens to be a watchman and the elder brother is a farmer. So it was like the elder brother bewitched the younger brother. He was plagued with ailments, heart problems, and from hospital to hospital, and suffering all over. The younger brother went to consult a native doctor who was more powerful and he was able to pinpoint the senior brother as the cause of all his suffering. So he reported the senior brother to the chief and was summoned to the palace. When they asked the senior brother, he confessed that he was responsible and that he had given his soul to a tree. In order to reverse the spell they will have to make a sacrifice.

He actually said it there. So you see; they went and did the sacrifice. They wanted to beat him, and chief said no they should allow him to go and instead of beating him, they should sacrifice for that thing to end. But according to him, he had already destroyed the liver, and a whole lot. These are all spiritual, so if it happened that this younger brother was able to consult the native doctor before this revelation on that day, you will see that he would have escaped knowing very well that if I should stay somebody will kill me. So these are some of the issues." (Mike, accounts clerk, Age: 29 years, Bongo-Adaborobisi, 10.10.2012).

The foregoing discussion points to the ensuing similarities in cultural understandings and the varying factors driving movement in most rural communities. It also brings into focus the different socially constructed realities that seem to shape and influence movement in the area and the shared understandings of social reality that evolve and act in tandem to dictate mobility processes. The construction of new identities, the networks that ensue, coupled with the conflicting expectations between migrants and people left behind, and the unconventional strategies employed to embark on a journey points to the 'figurations' and interactions underlying migration processes between the north and south of the country. The mobility dynamics observed in the Bongo area are reminiscent of similar unconventional strategies used to cope with conflict and insecurity amongst Uzbeks in the Osh Region of Kyrgyzstan. These strategies in the Uzbeks case which are seen to be contrary to the normal situation involves: the free giving away of daughters for marriage without the normal cooking of rice, beef and mutton or payment of the dowry from the daughter, as well as the conscious family push of young males to emigrate for economic and safety reasons (Ismailbekova, 2012).

The unconventional strategies employed to leave at night and the societal expectation that requires one to help a kin in the south have over the years been silently acknowledged and become part of the cultural values of societies. The unintended outcomes of interactions at the local level and the subsequent conceptualisation of migration to southern Ghana as a *rite de passage* in the various communities have facilitated the transfer of ideas, different understandings of 'modernity' and a space to contest local power hegemonies in terms of marginalisation from elders.

While an improvement in road transportation, mobile telephony, internet and television may have drawn these rural areas into the world's globalisation loop, the sustained flows of people, goods and ideas have significantly contributed to social transformation in these communities. Social transformation in this context refers to the "fundamental change in the way society is organised that goes beyond the continual processes of social change that are always at work" (Castles and Miller, 2009: 54). It encompasses the extent to which migration has influenced the perceptions, understanding, values and customs of the people. The next section examines the infiltration of certain socio-cultural practices, perceptions and ideas, and the culminating changes in societies of Northern Ghana.

5. Mobility and Social Transformation in Northern Ghana

The role of migrant remittances in contributing to the improvement of household welfare in the face of endemic poverty and food insecurity in Northern Ghana has been widely acknowledged (Pickbourn, 2011; Adaawen and Boabang, 2013). In addition to cash remittances, migrants often also come back with what is known as 'social remittances'. According to Levitt (1998), social remittances encompass the ideas, different behaviours, identities and social capital that normally flow from receiving to source communities. The new lifestyles, way of dressing, tastes and perception of things migrants imbibe at the places of destination influences the social fabric and as such migration in the communities.

General social change, normally facilitated by education, religious beliefs and institutional interventions cannot be absolved of facilitating social transformation in the area. But it is important to also recognise the role of migrants as actors or mediators in facilitating these changes in the communities of origin. Although the influential role of mobilities of all forms in modifying the social organisation of people in many significant ways cannot be discounted, the transfer of perceived modern ways of performing funerals and their varying spatial conceptions via the different human actions and interactions will be considered for a thorough discussion on the role of migration and transformation.

In typical traditional African and Ghanaian societies, the significance of funerals lies in the fact that they are performed for deceased family members to transit to the ancestral or spiritual world, hence they are an important aspect of social life in many communities across the country. But the funeral rites vary from one society to the other. A typical traditional funeral in the Bongo society and most rural communities in Northern Ghana involves a series of complex and solemn traditional customary rites (Smith, 1987). The expenditure on the items involved is often relatively smaller as compared to the 'lavish' funerals especially amongst the Ashanti of Southern Ghana. A typical feature in estimating the cost of a funeral in Ashanti, according to Arhin (1994: 317), involves providing "a meal – rice, yams, sandwiches, beef, mutton and chicken in soup or fried – for friends who have come a long way to attend the funeral or stay overnight." The ability to perform a lavish funeral often comes with social prestige, recognition and, sometimes, financial profits through the donations that people often make in most of these societies.

But the infiltration and reterritorialization of new modern ways of performing funerals akin to the expensive funeral activities in the south of the country has been a financial burden to the people in the study area. Although general economic hardship may partly explain the financial limitations, the research reveals that expensive or 'lavish' funerals that were more associated with the southern Akan societies have been transmitted through migration to the Bongo area and parts of Northern Ghana. The uncommon practice of printing obituaries and purchasing coffins, accompanied by the customised printing of black and red funeral cloths and T-shirts, and packaging of food in take-away packs for people have now become the order of the day in most parts of the Bongo area.

> "[…] funeral performance has changed. Even traditional funeral, when you go there you see modern things taking place. You now see obituaries, take-away packs, preparation of food to serve people; you see funeral announcement posters and other things about the funeral. Then you even have record dance playing loud music for people to dance. Those days, it was just the wake keeping night. They will come and the ceremony is solemn and quiet. It will get to a point they will do their rites and then start the local drumming. The following day they will do their war dance if the deceased is an elderly person. Afterwards, they take the person to the burial grounds and come back. There is no eating, especially, if it is a burial funeral. If it is not even a burial funeral the eating will be inside and it would be served to only people who have come from afar, mostly in-laws. It was a sign of service but there was not much food there at that time. There was no record dance and announcements on radio and televisions. Those things were not there but they are now part of our funerals." (Asati, male pharmacist-Age: 27years, Bongo-Nayire, 26.07.2012)

Ironically, funerals in the southern parts of the country have been commercialised such that financial donations have become an important source of generating revenue for the deceased family (Arhin, 1994). However people in the study area explain that this new trend of 'lavish' funerals that has been imported from the Akans in the south serves as a financial drain to most families. Although giving a 'befitting' funeral in terms of a 'lavish' and modern one is often seen as an honour to the deceased family member, people in the face of declining agricultural productivity, food scarcity and poverty in

the communities have reconceptualised the funerals in the localities as 'feeding spaces' and occasions for excessive alcohol intake.

The funeral house or ceremony has become a 'feeding space' instead of a 'mourning space'. Funerals have become social spaces where people grab the opportunity to feast, drink and take home as much food as they can to compensate for food shortages in the household. The record dance that they often play at the funeral houses in the night does not only provide the platform to enjoy western music but also has become a means for the return migrants to showcase their association with the outside world through the new modern dance moves and clothes. The funeral grounds were often also considered as 'marriage markets' where potential spouses could identify their partners, as well as places of gossip and solidarity in the society. But the record dance normally blurting out western music during funerals, especially in the night, is perceived to be a contributory factor to the rise of 'immorality' in terms of sexual activities, reckless alcoholic intake and fighting amongst the youth in the area.

This new trend has not only exacerbated the moral decadence in the area, but has put pressure on poor families. A consequence of this is the piling up of unperformed funerals for as long as more than ten years in many of the communities. Nonetheless, people attribute the non-performance and piling up of funerals to mainly unresolved family disputes, poverty and general economic hardship in the area. Many other people, however, did not mince words about the fact that the lavish funerals were alien in the area. Although Christianity and social change may have contributed to this recent trend, people are of the opinion that the perceived modern ways of performing funerals, which were peculiar to southern societies, has been transferred to the area through migration. This has gradually seen the incursion of elements of expensive funerals in the study area.

The role of migrants as mediators in the transfer of new ideas into the area has seen the transformation of certain socio-cultural practices and beliefs. But it is at the same time shown that the adaption or importation of certain ways of doing things, for example funerals, seem to put a financial burden on families. For those who strive to commit meagre family resources into performing lavish funerals without significant returns in terms of financial contributions from mourners, they are often trapped in huge financial debts – a situation that tends to exacerbate the appalling poverty and food insecurity in the area.

At the community level, the changing perceptions and infiltration of certain social practices also tend to threaten the harmony in the society. This is in cognisance of the fact that some of the lifestyles that migrants exhibit upon return to their communities sometimes do not conform to normative patterns of social behaviour in the area. An opinion that was shared by many people during the research was that some migrants come back and resort to alcoholism. Many others engage in stealing livestock and do not respect elders. For those who come back as 'born-again' Christians, they tend to disregard socio-cultural practices and beliefs. Compounding these changes are negative sentiments about the activities of Ashanti traders from the south who also migrate into the area.

The activities of the relatively few Ashanti in-migrants who come to trade and preach the gospel have been scrutinised as a threat to intra-communal relations. Ashanti migrant traders have been subjected to accusations of selling fake products, extorting monies back to the south and converting locals to Christianity. Their sale of the strong local alcoholic beverage (*akpeteshie*) in most of the rural communities has also been pinpointed as contributing to the seeming moral decadence. In spite of these accusations their trading activities and skills transfer are important in stimulating economic activities and providing the 'urban' spark in most of the communities. The interactions and sharing of ideas with some of the locals sometimes also precipitates the urge to travel to the south to buy items, and to then come back and trade. The economic empowerment that often comes with engaging in trading activities has been instrumental in facilitating social mobility and boundary crossing.

6. Positioning Myself in the Analysis of Migration Dynamics in Northern Ghana

The third component of the 'Crossroads Perspective' stresses a critical reflection on 'positionality' in relation to the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The manner in which the research subjects' views are interpreted and a researcher's subjective perceptions of these subjects all translate into some form of power. Normally, a researcher's 'positionality' in terms of their disciplinary background, framework within which the research is being conducted, the researcher's status, cultural beliefs, race, sex and personal history also influence the interpretation and appreciation of research findings (Lincoln, 1995). This is because in the process of knowledge generation researchers are "differently positioned subjects with different biographies, we are not dematerialised, disembodied entities" (England, 1994: 85). It is thus sometimes very difficult to detach one's subjectivity from the professional self. Recognising this challenge and taking the necessary steps at detaching yourself, despite the difficulty, is crucial to the success and credibility of the research and the knowledge being produced.

In focusing on my person as a researcher, therefore, my disciplinary background (Geography) and the framework (WASCAL) of the PhD research, from which this paper is based, had shaped the initial focus on climate change impact on agricultural livelihoods and poverty as primary causes for migration. This focus was, in part, informed by long-term views of climatic and environmental change as precursors for the southward movement of people from the north of Ghana. But recent and differing positions between environmental 'maximalists' and 'minimalists' on the environmental change – migration nexus (Suhrke, 1994), and the fact that the movement of people to the south of the country had been ongoing since precolonial times, meant there was more to the exodus than just climate change and declining agricultural productivity.

Admittedly, my own experiences of migratory patterns, climate variability and agriculture adversity as a person from the study area also influenced my reservations towards the climate change – migration narrative. With a disciplinary background in geography, therefore, my aim was to find and map out factors other than environmental precursors that were dictating migration. This resolve may have influenced the emphasis on 'travelling models' and 'cultures of migration' as concepts for analysis. These concepts basically highlighted the role of the various actors as 'mediators' in transferring migration as a 'travelling idea' and its evolution as part of the way of life in the study area. This may have contributed to a selective observation of some social phenomena and the discounting of climate change events as primary forces in influencing movement within the context of Northern Ghana. In effect, the analysis of the research did not explicitly highlight very much the underlying interdependencies of the different actors in shaping mobility processes and the communicative construction of social reality, space and negotiating social boundaries.

Aside from my position as a young male researcher, my status in a patriarchal rural society such as in Northern Ghana also meant that I wielded enormous power. In this regard, the influence of my 'position' as a male having been socialised in a society such as this in the research process cannot be entirely denied. In as much as the issue of power was manifested in different ways throughout the research period, the effort was often made to diffuse that perception of exploitative power by introducing myself as one of them. Whereas my coming from the study region may raise issues of 'positionality', the introduction as one of them often facilitated acceptance and the opening up of informants to divulge the much needed information for the research.

Another issue that may have influenced the research and hence the findings is the problem related to 'sampling by convenient replacement technique' (Bernard, 2002: 243), where a house or person was arbitrarily selected as a stand-in for an interview in the case where the interviewee was unavailable. This was often done as a result of the absence of people who were either working on the farm or did not want to partake due to 'researcher fatigue'. Many of the informants often

registered their displeasure at the fact that many researchers came to interview them without offering any help to them. In these instances of absence or 'researcher fatigue', I sometimes used my own discretion to select a house or interviewer to make up for the loss and as such may have influenced the quality of the research.

Taking into account that the researcher's position can influence the research; there is the need to constantly assess one's influence on the findings of the research. Critical reflexivity is thus very important in order to deal with the issues of power and 'positionality' that may influence the kind knowledge that is being churned out from the research process. Reflexivity is conceived as a "self-critical, sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994: 82). In other words, reflexivity is a "conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself" (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 183). Critical reflexivity thus allows scholars to do a self-introspection of the possible socio-cultural beliefs and historical forces that may influence our interpretation of the research.

In relation to this, a critical assessment of my own influence relative to my knowledge of the issues relating to migration, climate variability and agriculture as coming from the study region was done in order not to impede the research process. I tried as much as possible to detach myself by not letting my personal assumptions and beliefs predispose me into doing selective observation of the issues. Although there were instances where some of the accounts of people and their life situations looked sympathetic during the field work, I was able to guard myself not to be overwhelmed with personal feelings in order not to jeopardise the interview sessions and hence my interpretations and quality of the research. In addition to these efforts, 'member checks' in terms of getting back to respondents through phone contact and discussing with some colleagues who also carried out their research in the same area for clarification on issues related to the research were also done to ensure 'dependability', 'confirmability' and 'authenticity' of the research findings (Seale, 1999; Janesick, 2000).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has sought to reflect on migration dynamics and flows in Northern Ghana. The constant flows of people, goods, symbols and new ideas from the south and other parts of the country can be seen to have contributed to social transformation and also provided the basis for social mobility and the negotiation of social boundaries in rural communities. In particular, the integration of new symbols of what is considered as success and social practices transferred from the south as much more institutionalised socio-cultural practices in most communities of Northern Ghana signifies the changing collective identities and social imaginaries of people. It also shows how – through mobility processes – different social realities and symbols transcend social, cultural and physio-spatial boundaries (in this case from Southern to Northern Ghana). This brings into question widespread perceptions of rural communities in Northern Ghana as areas which are spatially inaccessible, culturally homogenous, and conservative to change.

In recent times, there are suggestions of an increasing shift in emphasis towards higher educational attainment as crucial to social mobility and economic empowerment, in the face of general economic hardship and waning economic prospects of labour migration to the south of the country (Laube, 2015). Despite these recent observations, out-migration to the south and other parts of the country is still persistent. The phenomenon has become part of the socialisation process of rural communities over the years. Its significance and persistence over time in the area is due to the fact that the social remittances, cash and material possessions normally acquired during migration still provide young

people some leverage for negotiating power hegemonies and the associated discrimination within the family and societal setup.

In relating the discussion to the 'Crossroads Perspective', the concept has further enhanced the initial guiding premise of the PhD research and widespread calls for a critical engagement of human mobility in Northern Ghana that transcends the linear cause-effect environmental change-migration rhetoric. The initial conceptual guides of 'travelling models' (Rottenburg, 1996; Behrings *et al.,* 2014) and 'cultures of migration' (Cohen, 2004; Hahn and Klute, 2007) have helped in appreciating the role of different actors ('mediators') in 'translating' migration as a travelling idea and in facilitating community development and social transformation in Northern Ghana. However, by drawing on the 'Crossroads Perspective' for this paper, the concept has brought another dimension to the debate by highlighting the interactions and interdependencies of the various actors, and the migration dynamics that shape multiple spatialities.

The changing considerations of funerals as spaces to showcase one's association with modernity, and also as 'feeding spaces' in the wake of food scarcity in the study area, for example, illustrates the figurative construction of space in the area. This is in view of the fact that the (re) conceptualisation of funerals as spaces to feed, enjoy and mourn at the same time emanates from the different perceptions of social reality. These different perceptions and constructions result from the communicative actions and interactions of people with different social backgrounds and perspectives within the same space (funeral grounds). These varying conceptions of space are in turn influenced by happenings and increasing commercialisation of funerals in most communities of Southern Ghana, which have been picked up and transferred through the activities of migrants (de Witte, 2003). The contention therefore is that the figurative construction of space and social reality are relevant to the critical understanding of mobility patterns and ongoing transformation processes within the context of Northern Ghana.

Furthermore, the application of the 'Crossroads Perspective' has also shown that the shared construction of social reality, such as the perceived danger of witchcraft, and that of migration as crucial to social mobility interact to shape people's worldview and to precipitate movements. More importantly, by drawing on the methodological approach of 'follow the figurations', the concept has enhanced the recognition of the 'figurative' interactions of historical antecedents like Mossi traders and local people, the role of formal political structures (colonial and post-colonial governments) and socio-cultural demands in sustaining the north-south migration pattern in Ghana. By analytically tracing and charting the different precursors as being co-implicated in shaping the north-south migration in Ghana, the analysis further strengthens the need for a holistic approach to tackling the effects of the exodus as reflected in the continuous loss of active labour, endemic poverty, high urban unemployment rates, and slums in the north and south of the country respectively.

Although the 'Crossroads Perspective' may have further brought another dimension in understanding mobility patterns in Northern Ghana, the challenges related to comparative studies in other areas of the world, as enumerated by Anderson (1978, cited in Mielke and Hornidge, 2014), are still evident. The cultural and political differences and experiences between areas along 'Crossroads Asia' and Northern Ghana, for instance, have made comparative insights from these areas difficult. For example, issues related to authoritative governmental structures and conflict that may have triggered the flight of people in Tajikistan or Afghanistan (see Schetter, 2012; Ismailbekova, 2012) cannot be applied to the flight of people from perceived fear of witchcraft and socio-cultural demands or expectations within the context of migration in Northern Ghana. This notwithstanding, the concept's approach in considering 'figurations' and flows of different types of goods, ideas, material objects and people, have allowed for a holistic analysis of the relationality and interdependencies of various actors that interact to shape mobilities and social transformation in Northern Ghana. This recognition makes for the Crossroads Perspective's promise as an effective conceptual approach in 'post-area studies'.

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Information on the competence network Crossroads Asia

The competence network Crossroads Asia derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in Crossroads Asia. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in Crossroads Asia. Mobility is the other key concept for studying Crossroads Asia, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group "Conflict" will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group "Migration" aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the "Development"-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network understands itself as a mediator between the academic study of Crossroads Asia and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on Crossroads Asia is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

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