Creating space for fishermen’s livelihoods: Anlo-Ewe beach seine fishermen’s negotiations for livelihood space within multiple governance structures in Ghana
Kraan, M.L.

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Migration

Introduction

The previous two chapters outlined the livelihood space of the Anlo-Ewe beach seine fishermen. As we saw, the livelihood space of the Anlo-Ewe fishermen is geographically much larger than their home area in the Volta Region. Anlo-Ewe fishermen can be found in many West African countries and all along the Ghanaian coast. This chapter will explain how this mobility of the Ghanaian fishermen, and in particular of the Anlo-Ewe, should be understood and it will also investigate some possible implications of this mobility for the livelihood space of the migrant fishermen and for fisheries governance.

The high mobility of fishermen has been recognised as a remarkable feature of the West African artisanal fisheries arena (Haakonsen & Diaw 1991, Chauveau et al. 2000). Ghanaians, an influential group in West African fisheries, play a significant part in this mobility (Lawson & Robinson 1983: 279). ‘Ghana is the region’s major ‘exporter’ of fishermen who can be found regularly in at least a dozen countries’ (Haakonsen 1991: 3). The Ghanaians are not the only mobile fishing group active in West Africa. The Senegalese are also very mobile (Samba 2006). As a result, the region has in effect been divided into three zones (Chauveau et al. 2000). The Senegalese are found predominantly in the waters of their neighbouring countries, in Mauritania and Guinea (Samba 2006), but have in fact migrated as far away as Ivory Coast (Odotei 2002b). The Ghanaians are mainly active in the area between Sierra Leone and Nigeria. A third zone of migration can be found in the south, from Angola to Gabon, although this zone has not become dominated by any particular group (Chauveau 1991: 14). Figure 5.1 shows the migratory flows depicted on a map of West Africa.

The Ghanaian fishermen, when subdivided into ethnic-technical groups, have migrated to different places (Odotei 1995). Using their hook and line technique the Ga are based mainly in harbours (in Ghana mostly from Tema) and have therefore migrated to

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1 Name of a canoe of migrant Anlo-Ewe fishermen in Togo.
other harbours in Ivory Coast or Liberia from which they engage in fishing (see for Côte d’Ivoire: Delaunay 1992: 96, Delaunay 2000, Odotei 2002b: 5; for Liberia: Haakonsen 1992: 82). The Fante are the most mobile fishing group making mainly use of the purse seine technique. They move seasonally during the sardinella season from July to September as well as also for longer periods of time (Odotei 1995, Overà 2001). The Fante keep moving around, even after they have migrated permanently to other locations like the west of Ghana. They can be found in Gambia (Everett 1991: 75, Scheeres: personal communication), Guinea (Solie 2006), Sierra Leone (Wagner 1991), Liberia (Haakonsen 1991) and also in Ivory Coast (Odotei 2002b, observation of my research assistant
John2) and Benin (Overà 2001). Their greater mobility has been described as a ‘search of profitability and gain’ (Delaunay 1991: 161).

The Anlo-Ewe fishermen use their beach seine technique everywhere they go (Mansvelt Beck & Sterkenburg 1976: 14; Akyeampong 2001); in Côte d’Ivoire (observation John in 2004, Delaunay 1992: 98, Odotei 2002), Liberia (Haakonsen 1992: 82), Togo and Benin (Cyriague 2006, Atti-Mama 1991: 243, Odotei 2003 and own observation in 2004) and Nigeria (Ijff 1991: 255). Using this technique makes the Ewe a much more sedentary migrant group than the other Ghanaian fisher groups: ‘the Ewe units using beach seines are characterised by their permanence (…) in a limited area’ (Delaunay 1991: 161). There are two reasons for this. First of all a beach seine is operated by a fairly large group of men as the net is large. If a net owner migrates he needs to take this whole group along, which makes it a costly venture. It takes more time to earn these costs back. Secondly, beach seining is strongly connected to the land. However, gaining access to land is more difficult than accessing the sea. These two factors together explain why the migration of beach seine companies will always have a more permanent nature.

![Canoe of migrant Ghanaian fishermen in Togo](image)

Ghanaians are predominantly found in areas from Côte d’Ivoire to Benin. Sixty to seventy percent of the fishers in Togo and 55 percent of the fishers in Benin are Ghanaian (Cyriague 2006: 10, Atti-Mama 1991: 243). In Côte d’Ivoire the marine fisheries are largely dominated by foreign fishermen, most of them (90 percent) coming from Ghana (Odotei 2002: 5, Delaunay 1991: 157). However, Ghanaian fishermen also play an important role in other countries as well. The Ghanaians have an important share in the fish supply of Nigeria. The Ghanaians land most of the sea fish in Lagos State in

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2 My research assistant John conducted a survey [N=66] for me among Anlo-Ewe beach seine fishermen in Ivory Coast in 2004 in the villages Mondoukou, Bassam Beach (12 fishing companies) Azoreti, and along the whole coastal stretch of Jacque-ville (40 fishing companies) all nearby Abidjan (33 fishing companies). This survey is not included in the overview in Chapter 2, as the research material is not used in this thesis.
particular. (IJff 1991: 264). In Liberia – before the war in 1990 – Ghanaian fishermen, mainly Fante, made a very important contribution to the Liberian catches and accounted for 93 percent of artisanal catches, 76 percent of total domestic catch and 44 percent of the total marine fish supply in the country! (Haakonsen 1992: 84). In Sierra Leone a local fishery was developed, but the arrival of the Ghanaian fishermen (Fanti) had a major impact on the development of the sector (Hendrix 1986: 73). They were however forced out of the country in the 1960s by the Sierra Leone government (Ibid.: 75).

Previous research on fisher migration

The migratory nature of the West African fisheries has been recognised in a substantial body of research work (see Marquette’s 1998 reference list of 520 references), most of which was written after the FAO put the topic of migration on the agenda for the first time in the 1980s. When the FAO started their Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries (IDAF) programme, it soon became clear that fishery communities were not as homogeneous as imagined. Many villages along the coast in West Africa harboured ‘fishing immigrants’, which had implications for the FAO programme. A meeting was held on the issue which resulted in a report that was a compilation of the existing knowledge on fisher migration in the region (Haakonsen & Diaw 1991).

Randall (2005) made a demographic migration typology in terms of scale and time pattern, based on all these and other papers and books written on fisher migrations in the West Africa region (Table 5.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td>One to several weeks not necessarily set seasons. Usually just men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Generally following fish movements or production patterns. Fairly regular pattern each year. Some populations men only, others include women and possibly children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Longer term circular migration</td>
<td>One or more years. Usually described as contracts with companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent migration</td>
<td>Often not intentional but an outcome of longer-term circular migration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Generally follow fish movements or market opportunities. Some populations men only, others include women and possibly children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long-term contractual migration</td>
<td>Contracts can be between one and eight years. Usually men alone or groups of men. Sometimes women go separately and join them in the destination area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent migration</td>
<td>Not clear whether these were always intended to be permanent. History of long-term migrant communities in many countries. A lot of fishermen have been born there – unclear about when groups cease to be migrant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Randall 2005: 11.

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3 Randall has a reference list of eight pages. Most of the work performed later than 2000 is either on AIDS in fisher communities or on Senegal.
Making such categorisations of fisher migrations has proven to be tricky and Randall also needed to add three complicating factors. First of all there are differences between sub-groups (often ethnic sub-groups), secondly there are combined strategies (permanent migrants who make short-term movements) and thirdly it is difficult to prove permanence as has been shown in an article on population mobility in Africa; ‘very few people leave with the intention of leaving for good but in practice, however, many will never return (Van Dijk et al. 2001: 12). This also complicates the defining of a migrant – are fishermen, for example, still migrants if they are born in the migrant locality (Randall 2005: 11)?

Another way of understanding fisher migrations is to look at the reasons for leaving ‘home’ (push) and the reasons for going to the new destination (pull). This has received ample attention in the literature whereby the mobility of fishermen in West Africa has been explained in two ways: marine biologically and socio-economically. In Table 5.2, I present a synthesis of the existing literature, whereby I make some differentiation between the start and the continuation of the migrations. This is done in order to provide a rough indication of the factors recognised as having started the migrations and which still play a role and factors that have contributed to its continuation. In the following sections I will discuss the factors in more detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2 Synthesis of explanatory factors stimulating fisher migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biological factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upwelling – follow the fish (pull)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over fishing of the home shores (and/or lagoons) (push)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile fish species (pull)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal erosion (push)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population pressure: land scarcity (push)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start of the migrations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuation of the migrations</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Start of the migrations**
A first biological explanation of fisher migration is the occurrence of upwelling in Ghana and Senegal’s coastal waters (Koranteng 2000). Upwelling is cold nutrient water that mixes with surface water, which attracts large schools of sardinella resulting in an abundance of fish, boosting the development of coastal fishing. Secondly, mobile fish species induced the fishermen to follow the fish, bringing them to areas where the local fishermen were not active at sea but mostly only operated in the in-between areas of estuarine and lagoon systems. The experienced Senegalese and Ghanaian fishers filled in the vacuum. These early fisher migrants (mostly Fanti at first) made use of the already existing migration networks of people connected to the merchant economy, like shopkeepers, boatmen, transporters and workers (Chauveau 1991: 21). Chauveau points out that ‘the oldest documented migration spheres also correspond to those zones early involved in ‘petty commodity production’ as the dominant economic form’ (Ibid.). This
connection strengthened the position of migrant fishermen in terms of safety, access to credit and markets for their fish but was also valuable for the other migrants: ‘réciproquement, des commerçants ont pu améliorer leur position sociale, tant dans leur pays ou région d’origine que dans le pays d’accueil, en associant des pêcheurs à leurs activités’ (Chauveau et al. 2000: 52).

The arrival of the Europeans (1482 the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and British in the seventeenth century) stimulated both the fishing economy and the mobility of fishermen. The slaves, soon the main item of trade, were fed fish, but catches were also stimulated by the growth of coastal towns due to migration to the coast. In addition, the fishermen were actively involved in loading and off-loading ships, necessitated by the absence of harbours (Odotei 2002a: 32-33). ‘Canoes and surf-boats formed the essential link between shore and ship, and canoe-men – mostly freemen from Elmina – were held in high esteem’ (Van Dantzig 1980: 82), most probably due to their skills in dealing with the rough surf. These ‘freemen from Elmina’ and their Ghanaian canoes did not only do this work in Ghana but were taken along the Slave Coast (Togo, Benin) by the Europeans (Akyeampong 2001: 37, Van Dantzig 1980: 19). The name Mina of a coastal ethnic group in Anexo (Togo) still echoes their Elmina origin (Jul Larsen 1994).

Continuation of the migrations
The upwelling effect in the ocean and the mobility of fish species form the basis of the fisher migrations in the West African region. The fishermen continue to make use of existing networks and continue to use and create institutions. These social and economic networks are extensive and often ethnically defined (Overà 2001: 5). Most of the fishermen migrate to places where they already know someone (Bortei-Doku Areyetey 2000: 37) In my research I also found that all the fishermen who I asked why they had moved from their hometown to come fishing at a particular migration destination, replied that they had heard from people that they knew of abundant catches at that locality. The relationships in these networks are well-maintained. In general, Ghanaians return home regularly, to visit family and friends and to attend special happenings (funerals, festivals) thus maintaining their identity. However, this does depend greatly on the financial possibilities, as clearly shown by the answer given by a 38 year old Ghanaian Anlo-Ewe
beach seine fisherman who told in Togo when I asked him if he had been back to Ghana during the last year that they were in Togo:

Kweku: ‘Yes, we all went to a funeral, by car.’
MK: Did you return for last year’s Easter?
Kweku: ‘No, we celebrated it here, we didn’t go. We had then just arrived and did not have a lot of work so we stayed.’ (interview 13, 28-1-2004)

Nevertheless, there are more factors which explain the continuation of fishermen mobility in recent times, such as over-fished home shores (too many fishermen catching lesser amounts of fish) and population pressure in relation with poverty of soils; ‘pushing’ more people away (Jorion 1988, Nukunya 1989, 1991). This explanation is especially true in relation to the migration of the Anlo-Ewe fishers given that the population pressure in their home areas together with the erosion of beaches resulted in less fishing space (Akyeampong 2001: 138) (see Chapter 8).

Another factor for explaining fisher migration has been the possibility to earn more money elsewhere. Especially after the crises in the beginning of the 1980s, a lot of Ghanaians were attracted to earning money in a currency other than the Ghanaian cedi. In their neighbouring countries, Ghanaians could earn the much stronger CFA (Bortei-Doku Aryeetey 2000). Related to this is the fact that the local ‘fish-mammies’ in Benin and Togo give loans to acquire fishing equipment due to both (loans and equipment) being difficult to obtain in Ghana (Odotei 1995, 2003), or to obtain inputs at a cheaper rate – such as petrol in Nigeria (Klein 1999 in Overå 2001: 2).

Some explanations for Ghana’s out-migration in general – of which the above-mentioned CFA attraction is one – can also explain fisher migration (Bortei-Doku Aryeetey 2000). One of them is the possibility to save money away from home. On migration the social obligations towards family and friends are felt less strongly, giving migrants the opportunity to save some money (Delauney 1991). The saved money is, however, often invested in family-projects, like a house (Odotei 2002b: 12). A 38 year old fisherman I met in Akosua Village was fishing with a company in Abidjan (he was in Akosua to visit some family and friends). He told me, when I asked him what his plans were for the future, that he was building his own house in a new neighbourhood of Woe. So far he had fished in Abidjan for fifteen years with three contracts of five years, and had earned 1,850,000 CFA (2,800 euros), which is a considerable amount of money (interview 29, 22-4-2004). The fact that he was the one who paid for the newly built family house in the home area adds greatly to the respect to be received when coming back.

Investing earned money back at ‘home’ has been observed in other migration studies such as Eades’ observations of Yoruba migrants, who were successful traders in the Gold Coast and who built houses in their poor rural home area (Eades 1993 cited in Andersson 2002: 63) and by Andersson in Zimbabwe. Andersson explains it as reflecting a strong sense of belonging and it should be understood in relation to their socio-cultural disposition (Andersson 2002: 62-64) which is nicely reflected in the title of his book: ‘Going places, Staying home’.

Finally it is said that having been abroad strongly enhances your male status in Ghana (Odotei 2002b; see Adhuri & Visser 2007: 139 for the same effect under Indonesian migrant fishermen). As Dr Dovlo, an Anlo-Ewe professor, originating from a fisher community, explained to me:
‘As a child I remember how the family fishing company returned from migration, in trucks – all of them wearing their new company uniform. We welcome them as heroes! Women ran outside, happy as they were to see their men and sons again. I, as a schoolboy, felt jealous, seeing my age-old nephews returning as men. They then also started treating me as boy instead as someone of the same age. Migration made a man out of a boy.’ (interview 52, 12-6-2004)

In addition, during my research a lot of fisher migrants stated, when asked about their reasons to migrate, that they like to travel, to go to other places. The migration of fishermen has therefore become a tradition, it is a possibility and an opportunity and going or not will depend on a range of factors. The social position of the fisherman (as father or son as boat owner or crew member) will influence the decision, as well as the economic and social situation in the hometown, in Ghana and in the country of destination (because it influences the gains and possible losses).

Livelihood space

Ghanaian fishermen have been able to expand their livelihood space by migrating to other places. As we saw from discussing some push factors, such as coastal erosion, population pressure or overfished home shores, in some cases this was necessary. From the pull factors we understand that the expansion of the livelihood space was also positively triggered given that the fishermen saw opportunities which they pursued (see also Overà 2001: 2, 12). Livelihood space refers to three elements: spatial, economic and social/cultural (see Chapter 3). The first being space where one can work (fish and market), live and make use of facilities and services. The second refers to the niche creation and the third to the fact that one also needs to find space to position oneself, somewhere where one is accepted. The first two elements of livelihood space are recognisable in the above discussion of reasons why Ghanaian fishermen have migrated. The fishermen were able to fill in a niche, a means to exploit an unexploited resource, and were often not competitors to local inhabitants given that, in many countries, locals did not fish at sea or not in large numbers.5

The third element, of being accepted, is also relevant. In general, literature suggests that migrant fishermen have generally been welcomed by local communities, and the fishermen managed to maintain good or at least neutral relationships with them (Odotei 2002b: 33). They have an important impact on the economic life of the local communities. Often they generate employment for many (in fishing material, ice, fish trade, fish processing, fuel and related services) and they have an important share of the domestic catch, thereby supplying fish for the local consumers. The Director of Agriculture of Jomorro District in Half Assini explained why the migrant fishermen, both Ewe and Fanti, are valuable for the local population:

‘Ok, there are positive effects. Here they don’t know how to fish so the migrants can come to do it. Thereto they pay royalties to the Chief which is used for development programs. Then also they sell their fish to the local women who then also sell it. If they would not stay here, they would come here from – say Mankessim – to fish here and then sell it there. Then Mankessim takes the catch. Now they also profit here from it.’ (interview 80, 20-10-2005)

4 Fishermen fishing in a company can, for the occasion, all decide to have their clothes made out of the same cloth (print). That is more often the case in Ghana when certain groups wish to show how they belong together, for instance members of a welfare organisation can wear the same clothes at a funeral. Apparently the same happened in the past when a company returned home.

5 Ghanaian fishermen have also been migrating within Ghana and there too they were able to find space – in the last section of this chapter we will explain why.
The migrant fishermen invested considerably in for instance gear, boats and ovens and the fish that they catch represents a considerable import substitution value. In some countries it was the Ghanaians who taught the locals to fish at sea (Togo, Benin) or improved fishing skills of locals (Sierra Leone). Furthermore, Ghanaians have had a strong technical influence on the fishing sector in West Africa, they have taught many West Africans fishing with their techniques and equipment and nowadays the Ghanaian canoe is used in many countries in West Africa.

However, migrant fishermen have also been confronted with constraints, such as competition for resources with, for instance, industrial fleets (Overå 2001: 3), as well as political conflicts, such as the expulsion of one million Ghanaians from Nigeria in the early 1980s, and the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s (Ibid.) and more recently in Côte d’Ivoire. Fisher migrants have also been directly addressed, being blamed for not investing the money they earn locally and for illegally transferring money to their home countries (Nguinguiri 1991: 290-291). At times, Ghanaian migrants have been envisioned as an uncontrollable and suspect population, for instance by making reference to the use of magic (Delauney 1991: 161 – see also Chapter 8). In Liberia the Ghanaians were accused of having kidnapped local children for ritual purposes (Haakonsen 1992: 78). A similar accusation was made in Côte d’Ivoire (de Surgy 1969 in Haakonsen 1992: 78). There have also been violent conflicts between the Ghanaian migrants and locals, as in Sassandra, Côte d’Ivoire (Overå 2001: 26). Such confrontations, with varying degrees of violence, between migrant fishermen and locals (possibly also fishermen) also occur within Ghana (see Chapter 8). These negative confrontations affecting migrant fishermen show that the position of migrants is always subject to negotiation and points to the fact that migrant fishermen are not only active in niche creation but also in niche protection and maintenance (see Chapters 4 and 8).

Do these explanations suffice?

The above classification of fisher migration in West Africa in terms of the geo-administrative level and duration (see Randall 2005) and the range of explanatory factors – historical grounding in bio-environmental and socio-economic conditions that facilitated the migration of the fishermen factors – is not sufficient. It is limited as Tacoli has argued that traditional approaches to migration, focusing on push and pull factors explain the direction of the movement but fail to account for the composition and type of movement, which are determined by culturally-specific and socially-specific factors (Tacoli 2002: 19). Focussing on the movement instead of also on the type and composition prompts the question of why Ghanaian fishermen move to Benin to fish whereas Beninese fishermen migrate to Congo (Nguinguiri 1991: 285). As we will see, the answer partly has to do with which group moves and which technique is used.

Fisher migration as translocal networks

Such different perspective should be built on the basis of three points. First of all, the mobility of fishermen should not be seen in isolation from wider social economic devel-

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6 In the 1970s and 1980s, millions of Ghanaians migrated to Nigeria attracted by the booming oil industry in Nigeria and by the idea of being able to run away from Ghana’s struggling economy (due to declining cocoa and mineral exports) (Smith 2007: 9). When the world oil prices collapsed and Nigeria’s economy with it – over-reliant as it was on the oil business – the Nigerian government decided to expel all migrants from Nigeria in 1983 and 1985 (Adepoju 2005).
opments. Mobility in Africa is the rule rather than the exception. Secondly, I would like
to move beyond the unidirectional push and pull factors and make use of the ‘conti-
nuous flow’ thinking as used in the transnational approach to migration. Thirdly, it is
important to link fisher migration to the fishing activity and see it as a livelihood
strategy. Making the fishing activity central when studying the migration of fishermen,
implies a revaluation of certain concepts, such as territory, borders and space.

Figure 5.4 A canoe leaving for migration to
Ivory Coast

Mobility is normal in Africa
The book Mobile Africa argues that ‘mobility is the normal state’ in Africa (De Bruijn
et al. 2001: 64). West Africans are no exception given that one third of the individuals
in West Africa no longer live in their village of birth (ref. De Haan in Black 2004 in
Randall 2005: 3). From the colonial period onwards, a start was made to collecting data
on migration. However, oral history and anthropological studies have revealed that
‘movement for trade, war and for a range of production systems is an ancient and
fundamental aspect of West African life’ (ref. Cordell et al. 1996, Chapman & Rothero
1983 in Randall 2005: 4). The slave trade is a very well-known ‘movement’ that has
shaped and influenced West African societies and ‘in complex ways also shaped how
localistic (tribal, village) identities interplay with national identities’ (Grillo & Mazzu-
cato 2008: 191). Later on, new migration flows started in the colonial period as the
result of ‘forced migration to work on colonial projects and semi-forced migration as a
consequence of the imposition of taxes to be paid in cash’ (Randall 2005: 4). The
African coastal regions are no exception; ‘the African Atlantic coastline has always
been subjected to continuous population movements’ (Chauveau 1991: 13).
In Ghana alone, many people are used to being part of multiple-location-households. Internal migration is as high as fifty percent in Ghana (Randall 2005: 3). Migration is often an integral part of households’ livelihood strategies (see for example Van der Geest 2004 on internal migration from North West Ghana to the south; Arhinfull 2001, Smith 2007 and Kabki 2007 on the social and economic effects of international migration to the Netherlands for Accra and rural Ashanti areas). Children often grow up in different locations to where their parents live and in 1998 fifteen percent of school-children lived somewhere else (Hashim 2005, Van Dijk et al. 2001: 13). It has been estimated that at least a million out of twenty million Ghanaians live abroad. Reliable data is, however, difficult to obtain because most of the migrants leave Ghana through informal channels (Smith 2007: 11). Smith, who studied the influence of transnational networks on the economy of Accra, describes five main periods following Ghana’s independence in 1957 and the influence of the political-economic situation in Ghana on international out-migration. At first, in Nkrumah’s time, Ghana was a migrant-receiving country with a booming economy (mainly in the cocoa sector). However, in the mid-1960s the economy began to decline, leading to the first out-migration of (skilled) Ghanaians. One of the countries the Ghanaians migrated to en masse was Nigeria (2.5 million in 1982), after oil was found there. Most of them were expelled in the 1980s when the oil price declined and there was less work. This came at a bad time for Ghana, which was hit by severe droughts in 1983 resulting in general crop failure and food shortages. At that time, President Rawlings turned to the World Bank and IMF for financial support. The consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programme hit hard on the Ghanaian economy and society. Many more Ghanaians migrated in these years, and the support they provided for the families they left behind was essential and at the same time led to more people seeking better lives abroad. President Kufuor rose to power in 2000 and requested more assistance via the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative which gave the government the opportunity to implement a reform agenda reviving welfare provisions, such as a healthcare scheme. The Ghanaian government started to recognise the positive effects on the Ghanaian economy of Ghanaian migrants abroad and tried to ease their connection to Ghana by changing some policies, for example by implementing the Ghana Dual Citizen Regulation Act, organising a Homecoming Summit in 2001 and a National Conference on Migration in 2004 (Smith 2007: 6-11).

In policy and research, however, mobility has long been seen as a rupture, an anomaly to ‘normal’ sedentary society which needs explanation (see also De Haan 2002: 2,4). It ‘has always been regarded as a special and temporary phenomenon’ (De Bruijn et al. 2001: 6,4). ‘[T]he natural state of people and the world was conceived of in terms of stability and coherence’ (Ibid.). Mobile people – ‘nomads and pastoralists (such as Berbers and Bedouins), hunter-gatherers, gypsies, vagrants, homeless people, itinerants, runaway slaves, and serfs – have always been a thorn in the side of states’ (Scott 1998: 1). Scott explains in his book how and why states have always worked on simplifying the social and natural world, both have been ‘refashioned by state maps of legibility’ (Ibid.: 3). Getting mobile people sedentarised was one way to achieve simplification.

Usually, migration is defined in terms of crossing a political or administrative boundary (Bilsborrow & United Nations Secretariat 1993 cited in Van Dijk et al. 2001: 10). Crossing borders might seem clear in the case of state borders, but at the sub-state level things become more complicated. For instance, district boundaries crossings are less well documented since these movements are less relevant to the state administration.
Migration research was influenced for a long time by the bipolar models of scientists, such as rural-urban, internal-international, modern-traditional, change-continuity. This made certain borders (such as state borders) important in their thinking and worthwhile examining. The question is, however, why moving from the Volta Region to the Central Region in Ghana is not so interesting as a migration phenomenon, whereas crossing between Ghana and Togo is, even though that means that one stays within the community of fellow Ewe but nevertheless becomes an international migrant? (see also Van Dijk et al. 2001: 11). Rural-urban migration and trans-continental migration have been the focus of special political interest. Fisher migration does not usually fit these categories and has therefore not received a lot of attention in national sample surveys or in more general demographic African migration literature. The only way fisher migrants can be identified as a special group is through regional, occupational or ethnically focussed studies (Randall 2005: 8), which explains why no major demographic research has yet been undertaken on fisher migration. This is indeed reinforced by the fact that fisher communities in general are marginal, and have therefore been studied less intensively in social science research (Visser 2004: 24).

However, there are more reasons for the lack of attention for fisher migration in demographic research. Fisher migrants resemble pastoral nomads in some ways, and these are also ignored in most demographic studies and, if mentioned at all, are seen as a problem which complicates the collection of data. They cross internal and international borders as part of their production system.

Fisher migrations can also resemble labour migrations in instances in which fishermen migrate because of better markets or favourable exchange rates and in the case of business-oriented fishermen as opposed to those fishing for subsistence or for petty trading (Randall 2005: 7). Nevertheless, the categorisation of fisher migrants as labour migrants does not always fit. It should be remembered that, although economic factors play a significant role in the formation of migration practices, they do not determine them. Economic decision-making is socio-culturally embedded (Granovetter 1985 cited in Andersson 2002: 48). Andersson said the following on Buheran migrants in Zimbabwe: ‘rather than being simply economically motivated, individual migrants’ participation in these networks is understood as an expression of a socio-cultural pattern in which rural identification and kinship ideology are of major importance’ (Andersson 2002: 11).

Previous classifications of mobility and migration do not tie in with real life situations. There is, for example much coherence between the various places involved and this makes it difficult to maintain, for instance, the rural-urban dichotomy. In addition, the picture of migration and mobility is not linear; ‘[t]here is a whole pattern of rural-urban linkages characterised by, for instance, return migration, circular movements and differentiation within the “migration flows”’(De Bruijn et al. 2001: 3). The mobility of many people in Africa has been much more adequately described as multi-spatial livelihoods (Owuor 2006), multi-local livelihoods (Post & Baud 2002: 14), travelling cultures, translocal livelihoods (Andersson 2002) and mobility of forms (De Bruijn et al. 2001: 3). Research starts to recognise that ‘[m]any forms of mobility are part of life

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7 De Haan has called this overemphasis on international migration (from developing countries to industrial countries: ‘immigration paranoia’, which might be part of the explanation for the overt attention to this type of mobility. ‘Most migration, in fact, takes place within regions of the developing world (…)’) (De Haan 2008: 57).
and of making a livelihood’ (De Bruijn et al. 2001: 2; for fisher groups: Adhuri & Visser 2007: 120, Butcher 2004: 7, 10, 21).

Box 5.1: Mobility as a livelihood strategy

In 2004 I spent some time in Togo looking for Ghanaian Anlo-Ewe beach seine fishermen, and met a forty year old Ghanaian Anlo-Ewe man on the beach in Kpeme. His name was Kwame. He told us he earned a lot of money by collecting stones and shells along the beach and seashore and that he has now managed to set up a store. He also fished with hook and line. I asked him when he was last in Togo. Kwame: ‘For twenty years now. I have been travelling you know; to Ivory Coast, Liberia’. ‘Why did you go to those countries?’, I asked him. Kwame: ‘I went to Liberia looking for a job on a fishing trawler. I worked as a mason, went to the port and tried to find a job, but I was not successful’. ‘And Ivory Coast?’, I asked him. Kwame: ‘We took the net from Sarakawa (Lomé) to Abidjan to fish for two years before coming back. When we came back, I had 600,000 CFA and I got the roof we sit under at the moment’. We were sitting outside on his compound, under a corrugated roof. He continued: ‘It was a good season, we painted the canoe and all wore the same uniform. We shared the money at the net owners home. It was a good season. If there is no season, you only get small money. When the season is there, you can make millions of money a day!’

Translocal perspective

The concept of transnationalism emerged as an alternative to the dominant approach in migration studies in the 1970s and 1980s which narrowly conceptualised the migrant as a labour migrant and moved away from conceiving migration in terms of one or a few discrete moves. Transnationalism is a ‘continuous flow of people, goods, money and ideas that transgress national boundaries and thereby connect different physical, social, economic and political spaces’ (Mazzucato et al. 2004: 131).

Transnational research at first emphasised new forms of human mobility. However, there has been criticism of the use of transnationalism as referring to a new phenomenon. Since then a more historical perspective has been adopted whereby ‘transnationalism is used to investigate whether indeed new dynamics are set in place by these flows that somehow alter relationships between people and the way groups can lay claims to resources and whether and how new institutions are formed and whether and how nation states play a role in regulating people’s activities or defining their identities’ (Mazzucato et al. 2004: 132). Even though the approach may not be entirely new, the concept of transnationalism has produced novel ideas about space and units of analysis. Pries highlights the ‘greater disassociation of geographic and social spaces’ that have become apparent and describes what he calls the emergence of transnational social spaces (Pries 2001: 58). Thus also for older forms of human mobility – such as the migration of Ghanaian fishermen- transnationalism might prove to be useful.

The advantage of the transnational perspective, apart from the two above-mentioned improvements, is that it recognises that migration is not only about a flow of people and money, but also about a flow of ideas (norms, values, rules, knowledge⁹). It emphasises the institutions that migrants – operating in two or more countries – create and it ‘forces us out of the false assumption that sedentary lives are the natural state of society. Trans-

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⁸ 600,000 CFA equals 923 euros (1 euro being 650 CFA).
⁹ See for instance Odotei (2002b) who explains how via migration the Ghanaian fishermen learnt the Lagas fishing technology from Senegalese fishermen whom they met in Ivory Coast (p. 96).
nationalism studies focus on how people create livelihoods in a context of mobility rather than on why they move’ (Mazzucato et al. 2004: 136).

A similar perspective is used in the book ‘Les pêches piroguières en Afrique de l’Ouest’, a second major work on fisher migration in the region with a much more analytical body than the FAO publication of 1991 (Chauveau et al. 2000). In this book the migrations are seen as an integral part of life for each group and an institutional perspective is used ‘focusing on inter-community relations and modes of integration and conflict resolution between different communities, the social and economic organisation of fishing crews and their canoes alongside a consideration of issues of fluid identities’ (Randall 2005: 3).

Transnationalism not only improves migration research but also questions the social-science perceptions on the relationship between nationalism and identity; the idea of conceiving a nation and a national identity as one. In short, identity creation can transcend national boundaries (Mazzucato et al. 2004: 140). This debate has been fed by an anthropology criticising the notion of bounded cultural wholes, of which Anderson’s Imagined Communities (1983) was the start. It was further developed by Gupta and Ferguson questioning (in 1997) the so-called people-power-place paradigm that tended to tie specific cultural formations to a certain people inhabiting a particular locality (referred to in Mazzucato et al. 2004: 140). Attachment to a place should be understood as a specific historical condition which is the outcome of processes labelled by Appadurai (1995) as the ‘production of locality’. This production of locality is always historically grounded and thus contextual with this context being ecological, social and cosmological (Akyeampong 2001: 18). In addition, the ‘localness’ of a culture should be understood as the outcome of its interaction with a wider world, recognising that ‘cultural identities can produce connections over wide geographical distances’ (Mazzucato et al. 2004: 140). Finally, culture came to be seen not as ‘a primordial, genetic given, but rather as a performative aspect of agency and self-realisation’ (Ibid.).

Geurts (2002) writes what she feels is a counter-stream book on Anlo-Ewe culture and identity, recognising: ‘[E]ssentialising a cultural group is probably the greatest faux pas one can commit in anthropology these days’ (Geurts 2002: 16). ‘[P]resently it is more popular to focus on cultural and transnational flows, on the blurred boundaries between (and the internal diversity within) previously deemed homogeneous ‘cultures’ and on the pitfalls for searching for ‘essences’ that definitely identify (perhaps stereotype) a specific cultural group’ (Ibid.). While she recognises the importance of questioning assumptions about the uniformity of a group,10 she is worried about the ‘all too easy deconstruction of culture’ (Ibid.). Interestingly enough though in her research effort to ‘essentialise’ the Anlo-Ewe, she breaks with the people-power-place paradigm when she discovers the importance of mobility and decides to do her research not only in the village but also in Accra. ‘[G]radually I began to realise that this back and forth between the village and Accra, going from one relative’s house to another, attending to family obligations and reciprocating the visits of people who had travelled to see us in the village, was an integral part of being a person in Anlo ways’ (Ibid.: 31). ‘A network of Anlo speakers in and around Accra, then, became as significant to my research as were the people living in the homeland’ (Ibid.). She recognised what Rosenthal had called ‘Ewe personhood is a travel narrative’ (Rosenthal 1998: 27 in Geurts 2002: 32). Trans-

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10 Language and common traditions of origin are a central aspect of Anlo identity but still there is a great deal of intercultural variation; ‘the Anlo’ are not a monolithic homogeneous group (Geurts 2002: 24).
nationalism shows that group boundaries can transcend the local, something Geurts so nicely showed in her multi-locational research.

However, a point of critique emerges at this point as the study of transnationalism continues to lay emphasis on state borders. Although in the definitions the adjective national can be left out (leaving only ‘transnationalism implies a crossing or transcending of boundaries), the concept itself refers to the nation state. While the wish is to emphasise that the nation state and national borders are not crucially important and that relationships are established between people in different places, with state boundaries being crossed (regardless of, or beyond the power of the nation state), the term still reflects the implicit importance of the national element. This leaves open the question we asked earlier, namely ‘is international migration more interesting than intra-national migration’. Yet it is my conviction that this emphasis on state boundaries is much less interesting in the African context where state boundaries were often imposed on a territory with other boundaries such as pre-colonial trade routes, political sovereignties and cultures. I would therefore like to suggest using the concept of translocal networks (Andersson 2002) when discussing migrant fishermen. Historical boundaries between ethnic groups have been more influential than relatively recent state boundaries. ‘[P]eople’s local, village or ethnic citizenship (…) may be more important than their state law citizenship rights, as many internal migrants in African states (…) have experienced’ (Von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2005: 3, Wartena 2006). The Ewe are an example of a group that has been split by state boundaries: ‘Though the present boundaries [of Ghana, Togo and Benin] cut through this ethnic group, i.e. the Ewe, their linguistic identity and other cultural similarities transcend state boundaries. For these reasons the Ewe are able to move from one country to the other, settle and mix freely with the inhabitants without feeling like aliens’ (Odotei 2003: 2; [my addition]). One should however be careful not to fix – as a consequence – the boundaries of these ethnic groups, for instance ‘the Ewe’ or ‘the Anlo-Ewe’, for these as well have been fluid and changed over the years. Nugent (2002) contests ‘much of the conventional wisdom about African boundaries’ and found that local populations were actively engaged in the creation of the Ghanaian-Togolese border. According to him, ethnic identities were actually the product of the border – rather than existing prior to the division. Nugent’s contestation underlines why one should also be careful with the boundaries of ethnic groups. Nugent also found that the Ewe in Ghana do identify with some kind of Ghanaian identity and they do consider Togo to be a foreign country, where ‘unpredictable (and often unpalatable) things were likely to happen’ (Nugent 2002: 7). I believe however that people’s identities are layered; or as Sen calls it: ‘identities are robustly plural’ (Sen 2006: 19). One is Ewe and Ghanaian, and depending on the situation people can shift in the emphasis put on one or the other, depending also on the goals they want to reach. This is shown in my research when fisher migrants when asked about their access to the sea reply with ‘Aren’t we all Ghanaians?’ whereas in other contexts they would fiercely set themselves apart as Anlo-Ewe (see Chapter 3)

Fishing and boundaries, territories and space
Questioning the importance of state boundaries is also relevant in fisheries research. First of all the fishing business itself is highly transnational; ‘trade networks and product chains based on coastal resources stretch far beyond a predefined geomorphological or ecological coastal ‘zone’’ (Visser 2004: 35). However, the coastal resources are also part of ecosystems that do not stop and begin at state boundaries. Neither do the
people, as we know. Yet ‘[g]overnment officials often still regard users of coastal resources as sedentary people who live in territorially fixed settlements, because this suits the governmental ‘tunnel vision’ that enables development policy and politico-administrative control to be standardised. This governmental view contrasts with present day and historical evidence’ (Visser 2004: 35, Scott 1998). ‘[B]orders, hence territory, are not necessarily biophysical or ecological divides, but conceptual tools of state formation imposed on a physical environment’ (Visser 2004: 36). ‘(...) Terms [such as illegal, transborder or transboundary] are related to political, economic or geographical discourses that assign a dominant role to physical space and the political-economic process of demarcation’ (Adhuri & Visser 2007: 119).

Management plans are based on national units – every national government prepares plans for their own fisher population and fish stocks. International fisheries agreements are built upon the assumption that there is a national usage of the fish stocks, resulting in a surplus of fish within the boundaries of the EEZ (Exclusive Economical Zone), which the African countries can sell to bidders from other countries. This has more negative than positive effects on the ecosystem and the social system (see www.seaaroundus.org/Dakar, notably Christensen et al. 2004, Kaczynski & Fluharty 2002, Atta-Mills et al. 2004).

Fisheries research (and policy) demands a different perspective that follows the logic of the activity. Fishing is done in a certain space; fishing techniques are applicable to certain spaces and fish species are found in certain spaces. Fishermen map their environment in certain ways and these maps have relevant boundaries. This is often completely different from the kind of mapping done by governments in coastal zones due to technical and institutional needs for fixed boundaries. The ‘fluid’ qualification of the ‘coastal zone’ doesn’t seem to match with fixed concepts and ideas (often derived from the more fixed land environment) (Visser 2004). The transnational migration approach leaves much more space to this flow and fluidity.

The migration of fishermen has a logic of its own which is related to the nature of the fishing practice (such as upwelling and mobile resources) and to for instance the market. Migration has a lot to do with space. Migrant fishermen need to find space to fish and space to live. The importance of this space concept becomes clear when we look at the internal migration of Ghanaian fishers. One might not expect the internal mobility to happen in a country where a lot of people along the coast are heavily involved in fishing. Why would the Fanti in the Central Region allow Anlo-Ewe fishermen to come and fish in their waters? Why have more competitors, even ‘strangers’ come looking for the same fish? I believe that the ethnic specialisation of fishing techniques allows for this internal migration. The existence of the Dangbe’s and some Ga’s exercise hook and line fishing, the Fanti and Ga’s drifting gill net and purse seine fishing and the Anlo-Ewe beach seine fishing (Mensah et al. 2006: 37) clearly shows that the sea has been divided into different spaces. In the Volta Region most local fishermen are active in the first couple of miles of sea. Generally speaking they do not venture any further. In the Greater Accra Region and in the Central Region the near-coast area is hardly used, leaving space for the Anlo-Ewe fishermen to come and fish there. Then the fishing grounds are also quite well divided between the Dangbe and Ga using hook and line and Ga and Fanti using encircling and drifting gill nets. The hook and line fishermen will prefer a rocky seabed which the others like to avoid. This idea is supported by the chief fishermen I spoke to in the research locations who explained to me that most conflicts occur between users of the same gear (interview 32, chief fisherman of Woe, 6-5-2004;
Another aspect of fisher migration based on the logic of the fishing activity relates to type and duration. The migration of the Fante is very different to that of the Anlo-Ewe. The Fante are much more flexible and their migration seems mainly to be seasonal: they move to a certain location for a fishing season and move back at the end of the season. The Anlo-Ewe are much more sedentarised. This is because of the different types of gear used. A beach seine implies having access to a beach and thus, to a certain extent, to a community and their market whereas the Fanti can catch fish in one location and land it somewhere else (including at home) since their large canoes and ice boxes allow them to stay away for considerable periods of time (the same holds true for the Ga). Fanti are also said to have followed the fish along the coast, and therefore track and chase the fish more, like hunters following their prey.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the mobility of the artisanal fishing sector in West Africa. We focused in particular on the Ghanaians, who migrated from Gambia to the Congo, but who are especially dominant in the zone from Côte d’Ivoire to Benin. We assessed the existing literature with a view to finding explanations for this widespread migration. Most of the research on fisher migration has been empirical and has discussed push and pull factors of either a biological or socio-economic nature.

The start of the migrations has been explained by the occurrence of upwelling, the mobility of fish species and the availability of existing migrant networks. The continuation thereof has been explained by coastal erosion, overfishing of home shores, population pressure and by a variety of economic pulls such as the stronger CFA in neighbouring countries, being able to save money away from family and migration as being an adventure with the experience adding to one’s status.

It has been observed that Ghanaian fisher migrants have, in general, been welcomed at their migration destinations with the fishermen contributing considerably to local and national economies. On some occasions, however, the arrival of the Ghanaian fishermen also led to hostilities. These negative confrontations underscore the insecurity of a migrant’s position and highlight the fact that migrant fishermen are not only active in niche creation but also in niche protection and maintenance.

These previous studies have provided us with a lot of information on why fishers have migrated, but all in all they do not give us sufficient understanding. We therefore contextualised the fisher migrations as part of West African mobility, we used another migration perspective to emphasise the fishing activity and shed new light on concepts as border, territory and space.

In West Africa in general, and Ghana in particular, migration is not an exceptional phenomenon and it is often an integral part of a family’s livelihood strategies. In policy and research, however, migration has long been seen as an anomaly to normal sedentary life. Fisher migration has been largely omitted from migration research.

A translocal perspective to fisher migration gives us a greater understanding. Migration is then seen as ‘a continuous flow of people, goods, money and ideas that transgress state boundaries and thereby connect different physical, social, economic and political spaces’ (Mazzucato et al. 2004: 131).
If we reason on the basis of the fishing activity and the fish chain, we see that state boundaries are less relevant. First of all fishing is a transnational business and secondly marine ecosystems transcend state boundaries. Fisher migration means looking for livelihood space. First of all space in which you can fish, live, sell your fish and in which the locals accept you. This space finding is crucial and is a process – the negotiation is never finished. Taking account of this spatial perspective based on the fishing activity allows us to understand why internal fisher migration takes place in Ghana, namely because there is space as a result of the ethnic-technical divide.