

Migration Looked Full in the Face: Reflections on the Use of Family Biographies and Testimonies of Ghanaian Migrants

Ann Cassiman¹

¹University of Leuven, Institute for Anthropological Research in Africa, Leuven, Belgium

ann.cassiman@soc.kuleuven.be

Starting from the social biography of an extended Ghanaian family which I have followed over the past decade, I will elucidate the complex migration histories as they continue to unfold in the increased movements of young women between villages in northern Ghana, the urban centres of the south, and Belgium. In my paper, I follow the tracks of a few specific women of different generations within the family. Against the broader canvas of their migratory movements, the focus of my paper is on the moral imaginations within the different generations of women. In a fragile interplay of mobility and immobility, grandmothers, mothers and (grand)daughters reshape the contours of kinship, and reconfigure modes of loyalty, care, trust and interdependency in an increasingly tenuous web of intergenerational relationships.

The paper draws on interviews, personal life histories and observations, and as such tunes into the tendency to give migratory patterns face-value by linking personal narratives to a larger societal context. A number of these migratory biographies are used in the context of an exhibition: the Ghanaian migrants are given a voice through the use of filmed testimonies. Some of the theoretical but especially moral limitations of biographical approaches are explored.