Article

Aspiring While Waiting: Temporality and Pacing of Ghanaian Stayer Youth's Migration Aspirations

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Abstract
Many youth in Global South countries, whose parents have migrated abroad while they have stayed, i.e., "stayer youth," also aspire to migrate. While the current literature depicts stayer youth as "waiting" to emigrate, connoting passivity, recent critical youth studies suggest the importance of centring young people's agency when focusing on their aspirations and experiences. This article investigates how stayer youth in Ghana "pace" their migration aspirations while "waiting." By observing how youth change their aspirations over time, we first distinguish between different aspirations according to when youth first aim to migrate. Second, we "follow" stayer youth after their secondary school graduation to understand how they seek to fulfil their migration aspirations and the strategies they adopt therein. We use ethnographic data from 38 Ghanaian "stayer" young people. Our analyses show that stayer youth adapt their decision-making when they realise some misalignment between their migration aspirations and capabilities. By analysing their adaptation strategies, we emphasise stayer youth's agency despite structural forces confining them to what has been called "waithood."

Keywords
Ghana; international parental migration; "left-behind" youth; migration aspiration; waithood

1. Introduction

Literature on "left-behind" youth highlights that these youth have international migration aspirations influenced by information from their parents and larger social networks (e.g., Böhme, 2015; Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). But while many "left-behind" youth aspire to migrate, little is known about how parental migration shapes their migration aspirations (Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021; Sun et al., 2020). Moreover, their aspirations have mainly been studied as though they are static: Once youth desire to migrate, they always desire to migrate (Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). However, how stayer youth's migration aspirations change over time and what strate-

gies they employ when their aspirations are frustrated are questions that have received little to no attention. In this article, we use the term "stayer youth" instead of "left-behind" to avoid the negative connotations of the latter term.

In this article, we analyse how stayer youth navigate "waiting" to migrate and the actions they take while trying to realise their aspirations. Following the recommendations of scholars in contemporary migration studies, we investigate aspirations in tandem with capabilities (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2021). Migration aspirations combined with the ability or capability to migrate determine who experiences mobility or immobility. We study young people's migration aspirations by considering the local context in terms of opportunity structures available

to youth facilitated by their transnational family characteristics, social networks, access to information, and personal motivations (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). Capability here refers to young people's agency and their freedom to decide to move or stay based on their financial, human, and social resources, or "capital" (de Haas, 2021). Using this framework, we discuss stayer youth's initial migration aspirations and follow changes over time as they try to align their migration aspirations and capabilities.

We conducted 15 months of ethnographic data collection in Ghana, where almost 37% of children have at least one migrant parent (Ghana Statistical Service et al., 2014). We focus on stayer youth who have transitioned out of secondary school, between the ages of 16 and 23 years old, and their decision-making over time. Most of the literature presents stayer youth's aspirations as dependent on the plans of their parents, caregivers, and relatives abroad. Researchers provide adult-centric perspectives (Böhme, 2015; Dreby, 2010; Kandel & Massey, 2002) and, as a result, depict young people as passive actors whose lives are fully planned by adults. Little is known about how stayer youth agentically plan for their migration. In adapting their aspirations while waiting to migrate, stayer youth in early adulthood may pursue their migration aspirations together with significant others, especially migrant parents, or they may pursue them independently. In this article, we explore how stayer youth decide to emigrate over time based on their socio-economic background, parental support, and educational competence. We examine when and how young people involve migrant parents, local caregivers, and wider social networks in their migration decisions, and how they adapt their strategies over time.

We also extend current research by showing how stayer youth themselves adapt while waiting to migrate based on the temporalities of their migration aspirations and capabilities. The aspirations and capabilities framework we draw on conceptualises people as either moving or not moving. Yet work on temporalities has argued that movement is better studied in terms of the varying forms, durations, and timings of movement. Amit and Salazar (2020) propose the concept of "pacing" when investigating diverse temporalities of mobility. For stayer youth, this means they do not simply "wait" but have various pacings: They wait for longer or shorter periods, develop strategies to deal with these, and adapt their migration aspirations accordingly. Hence, they agentically shape their lives even when waiting. They do not sit and do nothing. We explore the pacing of their migration aspirations and decisions by first distinguishing initial aspirations according to when youth aim to move. Secondly, we follow stayer youth as they try to fulfil their aspirations and observe how they adapt their strategies to ensure these align with their capabilities while also adapting the pacing of their aspirations. Finally, we show how stayer youth make decisions about when, for how long, and where to move depending on their realisation of their capabilities. By studying how stayer youth try to align their migration aspirations and capabilities over time, this article shows how they pace their lives while waiting to migrate.

2. Youth in "Waithood"

Our article focuses on how stayer youth in Ghana pace and adapt their migration aspirations while waiting to migrate. Youth in the Global South have been described as "stuck" or "entrapped" in their developmental trajectories because they mostly focus on futuristic visions rather than their present lives (Hage, 2009; Hansen, 2005; Sommers, 2012). The term "waithood" was developed to denote a liminal state between childhood and adulthood in which youth feel trapped by prevailing economic, political, and social structures in many African countries (Honwana, 2012). African youth are mostly more educated than their parents but also more likely to encounter youth unemployment. This situation leads to great frustration for these youth, who perceive themselves as just as literate and employable as their Global North peers but with fewer chances to develop themselves. Hence, they develop waiting tactics, or agentic strategies of dealing with waiting, until they become employed or take advantage of opportunities to emigrate. Honwana (2012) calls for more studies on youth "waithood" and how different groups of African youth apply diverse tactics to cope with waiting.

Within the field of critical youth studies, various scholars have taken up this call to investigate how those in the Global South manage waiting. Barford et al. (2021) found that youth "in waiting" adapt to changing social contexts both on their own or by relying on social network support. In other studies, waiting youth preoccupy themselves with playing, talking, scheming, or working in order to derive some benefits from waiting or simply to keep their minds "off the stresses" (Stasik et al., 2020; Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021; Zharkevich, 2020). A range of concepts point to the strategies youth in the Global South use to cope with waiting: "killing time" and "building solidarity" (Ralph, 2008), doing "timepass" (Jeffery, 2010), "hustling to survive" (Munive, 2010), and "zigzagging'' or meandering through available opportunities and forms of entrepreneurship (Jeffery & Dyson, 2013). By exercising their agency through self-help and drawing on social network support, youth waiting to migrate cannot be categorised as "stuck." Hence, by using an agentic lens and studying what youth actually do, we seek to contribute to works that show that youth in the Global South are not passive victims. Rather, they put varying forms of human agency to use when encountering life hurdles like "waithood."

3. Linking Migration Aspirations With Capabilities

For waithood to end, migration aspirations and capabilities need to align. Migration aspirations and the

capability to migrate determine who experiences mobility or immobility and whether it is experienced voluntarily or involuntarily. Carling (2002) shows how socio-cultural factors like family support, gender, age, personal dispositions, educational background, migration policies, and psychological motivations to stay or move shape migration aspirations, which refer to people's desires, wishes, dreams, or plans to emigrate. Carling defines migration ability as a set of opportunities (requirements) and constraints (barriers) that varies from person to person and affects migration aspirations (Carling, 2002). Meanwhile, de Haas (2021) defines migration capability as the capacity to exercise certain freedoms which give people the agency to become mobile. Aspiration and (cap)ability must align for migration aspirations to become actual mobility (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). Here, "mobility" refers to people's freedom to choose where to live, which includes the option to stay, rather than the act of moving or migrating itself (de Haas, 2021). This perspective conceptualises moving and staying as complementary manifestations of people's migratory agency. Key to turning migrant aspirations into actual migrations are the resources aspirants have and are available through their social networks, like material support and information to help overcome structural immigration constraints or barriers (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Francisco-Menchavez, 2020). These resources range from social (other people) and cultural (ideas, knowledge, and skills) to economic (material).

We extend this literature on aspirations and capabilities by focusing on the pacing of aspirations. As we discussed above, movement and mobility can best be understood through pacing, i.e., the process through which a certain pace is strived for, maintained, or reacted against (Amit & Salazar, 2020, p. 3). By showing the temporal shifts in stayer youth's migration aspirations, we identify how stayer youth strategise to migrate, and when and how they adapt their migration aspirations to their capabilities over time. We use the term "stayer youth" in the narrow sense to refer to youth who stay in the country of origin while their parents migrate abroad.

4. Research Context and Methodology

4.1. Structural Opportunities and Constraints That Secondary School Graduates Encounter in Ghana

For senior high school (SHS) graduates in Ghana, entering higher education, obtaining employment, or emigrating are priorities before marriage or starting a family (Dadzie et al., 2020; Honorati & de Silva, 2016; Palmer, 2005; Rhoda, 1980). However, it is difficult for all SHS graduates to enter local higher education (universities, polytechnics, and colleges, private or public) due to entrance examination requirements, financial costs, and limited admission slots. In addition, high youth unemployment rates and limited chances of finding a desirable

local career push youth in Ghana to consider emigration (Dako-Gyeke, 2016).

4.2. Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted 15 months of fieldwork in 2018–2019 with 38 stayer youth aged 16 to 23 years. All participants were SHS graduates. We recruited participants from a previous survey which collected data from eight randomly selected schools in two cities in the southern part of Ghana: Sunyani and Kumasi. We followed up with students from the last wave of this survey (www.tcra.nl) conducted in 2015. Out of the 442 students in this survey, 87 were stayer youth, i.e., children of migrants staying in the origin country. During fieldwork, we learned that some stayer youth had moved abroad for family reunification or further schooling. Others in Ghana refused to participate in the research. In the end, we were able to trace 38 young people who were living or schooling in five Ghanaian cities—Sunyani, Kumasi, Accra, Tamale, and Ho—while one or both parents resided abroad. After obtaining the necessary ethics approvals, we collected our data primarily through in-depth interviews, offline and online conversations, and participant observation. As is the practice in long-term ethnographic research, we approached informed consent as a process by regularly reminding participants about the research aims and asking for their oral consent. We conducted the research in homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces like gyms and stadiums. After participants completed SHS, the first author joined them as they searched for jobs, worked, and engaged in leisure activities. Such occasions enabled the researcher to collect observational data and participants to develop trust in the researcher. We also conducted semi-structured interviews to deepen some of the themes emerging from the research.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases. First, we hand-coded details about young people's migration aspirations, including which significant others shaped those aspirations. In a second phase, we coded all the activities that young people engaged in while "waiting" to migrate. The final analysis entailed case-by-case profiling and case comparisons. We wrote 38 vignettes highlighting why participants were waiting to migrate and how they pragmatically adapted to waiting. To decipher patterns, the three authors discussed these vignettes in detail on several occasions. Afterwards, we compared the 38 cases studied using a table in Excel that summarised participants' main characteristics, their aspirations, and the strategies and activities in which they engaged during their wait.

All participants aspired to migrate. However, they took advantage of the time between their high school graduation and when we met them in the field (between one to three years after graduation) to adapt their aspirations as they came to better understand their actual migration capabilities. Two decided to move later on in life with the consent and support of their migrant

parents. The remaining 36 young people wished to migrate right after high school graduation. Of the 36, seven could not get the help and approval of their migrant parents for their international migration aspirations, even if these parents could have assisted them if they had agreed with their children's aspirations. A set of 18 young people had consenting migrant parents who lacked the economic capital to aid their children to migrate. The remaining 11 young people could not count on their migrant parents for any help to realise their international migration aspirations. Young people in each category shifted their strategies over time to try and align their migration aspirations with their capabilities. Although youth do not have full control over which strategies to employ, we highlight youth's agency, even in waiting to migrate.

5. Adapting While Waiting to Migrate

Like Somaiah and Yeoh (2021), we observed that stayer youth differed in their migration aspirations and capabilities. We assessed capability by considering participants' secondary school examination performance, as this opens or closes certain possibilities for post-secondary school transitions, as well as the financial and moral support offered by migrant parents for their children's migration aspirations and local career development. Stayer youth's migration aspirations shifted over time, both in terms of when and how they wanted to migrate and in reaction to their changing understanding of their migration capability. In waiting to emigrate, they aligned their migration aspirations with their shifting perceptions of their capabilities. We identified different alignment strategies used by four groups of stayer youth (see Supplementary File, Table A).

The first group comprises stayer youth whose migrant parents both support their children's migration aspirations and have the financial means to help them realise those aspirations. The second group consists of stayer youth whose migrant parents have the means but disagree with their children's migration decisions. The third group of young people has migrant parents who agree with their aspirations but do not have the means to assist their children's migration. Finally, the fourth category consists of young people who do not have much contact with their migrant parents. Stayer youth in the first category do not need to alter or adapt their aspirations as they concur with their capabilities. They often plan an eventual migration some time after graduating from SHS to give themselves the time to first develop themselves in Ghana. In contrast, those in the other categories often aspired to emigrate right after secondary school completion. But lacking the capability, then they decided to postpone their migration project and turned to finding local career opportunities to not passively wait. This section discusses each group's initial migration aspirations and the adaptation strategies they employed while waiting to migrate.

5.1. When Migrant Parents Agree With Stayer Youth's Migration Aspirations and Have the Means to Help

This category of stayer youth represents the most privileged in our sample because their parents both agreed with their desire to migrate and had the means to help. Two participants, Cutter (aged 18, male) and Trendy (aged 19, female), felt confident in their ability to migrate and therefore chose to time their migration to best suit their aspirations. They both chose to first focus on obtaining a higher degree in Ghana. Thus, their aspirations could be seen as involving voluntary waiting. Also, the type of migration these young people aspired was different from that of their counterparts discussed below. They preferred to travel as tourists or for temporary migration. Trendy wanted to explore the world, while Cutter aimed to find employment abroad in nursing due to the better-earning possibilities. Cutter perceived this as a temporary plan that would allow him to earn enough money to save for his return to Ghana to marry and start a business.

Cutter's migration aspirations are akin to those of other youth who perceive higher returns from an education in their home country (ILO, 2013). Like others in our sample, Cutter aspired to migrate because his migrant parents encouraged him. But his parents preferred that he began university in Ghana and occasionally visited his family in the UK to acquaint himself with the UK context. They advised him to relocate to the UK only after obtaining his nursing degree, as entering university in the UK would be more difficult. Once in the UK, he could do some additional courses before joining the UK nursing workforce. For Cutter, this plan was also a way for him to reunify with his family abroad. He also saw it as a stepping stone to establishing his own family and future. With his UK income, he could marry and establish a business back in Ghana. Yet something got in the way of Cutter's plans when he did not get admitted into his locally desired university programme. Subsequently, he made an alternative plan with his parents: file for family reunification immediately while he still qualified age-wise. Two weeks after his mother visited him in Ghana, Cutter departed for the UK in her company to pursue an international college education. His parents thought it was better to continue schooling within the UK right away rather than stay home for one year in Ghana before reapplying.

Trendy, meanwhile, wanted to travel and experience Western culture. Trendy explicitly mentioned that she did not want to move abroad to join her family or to get an international education because she felt that people who travel for these reasons face racial discrimination, while tourists do not. While travel might not be considered migration, Trendy's case highlights that some young people aim to be mobile without necessarily migrating. Unlike Cutter, whose parents influenced the nature and timing of his migration aspirations, Trendy decided to discuss her plans with her migrant father only when the time was right for her. Trendy preferred to travel when

she could finance it fully herself or with only partial support from her father. She therefore first sought to finish her university degree and find a job in Ghana.

Trendy and Cutter also show that structural factors can influence how stayer youth strategise and shift their aspirations. When the structure of the Ghanaian educational system meant Cutter did not gain admission to his desired programme after secondary school completion, he resorted to changing the timing of his migration aspirations. To avoid racism, which she equated with working and educational structures abroad, Trendy planned to travel at a time when she could go as a tourist. Similar to Kandel and Kao's (2000) findings, Cutter and Trendy had extensive knowledge about the possibilities offered by Ghana's educational landscape as well as ideas about what they would encounter overseas, which motivated them to consider pursuing their university education at home before travelling.

5.2. When Migrant Parents Have the Means to Help But Disagree With Their Children's Migration Aspirations

The stayer youth in this category aimed to pursue additional education abroad and/or reunify with their family. While their migrant parents had the required documentation and financial means to support their children's migration plans, they disagreed with their aspirations. They often encouraged them to pursue local schooling or professional training. But the young people refused to forego their migration aspirations and tried to persuade their parents to sponsor their moves abroad. When they realised their parents would not change their minds, they started to comply with their parents' wishes. They adapted by attending local teacher or nursing training schools like Pippy (aged 18, male), getting apprenticeship training like Lassy (aged 22, female), or joining online sewing classes like Marble (aged 22, female). They therefore postponed their migration aspirations (Pippy and Lassy) or replaced moving plans with plans for staying (Marble). This process of shifting and postponing their aspirations to fit their capabilities, as determined by the help their parents were willing to give, lasted from a few months to four years after SHS.

Pippy aimed to pursue higher education right after secondary school graduation in a country different from where his migrant parents resided. He did not want to go through the process of family reunification, which would entail living with his controlling migrant parents. He preferred to migrate individually to study to become a lawyer. Yet, he ended up enrolling in a local teacher training college, as his mother had recommended, after his parents clearly indicated that they would not sponsor his migration. After training, Pippy's mum encouraged him to find a government job, which would be easier to get as a public college trainee. As a government employee, Pippy's mother thought he would be able to save for his future international migration and legal career. Pippy's trajectory was not without bumps. After a year of fruit-

lessly trying to persuade his parents to allow him to migrate, Pippy gave up and followed his parents' advice to pursue his self-development locally through teaching or nursing training. Pippy chose to follow his migrant parents' instructions not as a renunciation of his own aspirations to migrate, but in order not to lose his parents' support. Pippy simply delayed his plans for migration, which he hoped to finance himself later.

Lassy aimed to reunify with her family in the UK. She missed them and wanted to be physically close for emotional support, like her younger siblings who resided with their parents overseas. Lassy conceived her plan for family reunification while in secondary school. For about three years, she tried to persuade her parents to support her migration, including arguing that her siblings were receiving a better education than she was in Ghana. Yet, her parents insisted on her staying in Ghana. She also did not pass her secondary school examination after three re-sit attempts. After the third re-sit, Lassy accepted to enter a local apprenticeship training, as her parents directed. Although her parents did not share her views, Lassy thought that the local apprenticeship training and a subsequent entrepreneurship plan would equip her with relevant skills to obtain international employment whenever she gets an opportunity to emigrate.

Although youth in this category feel disappointed by their migrant parents' lack of support, they recognise, with time, that persuasion cannot motivate their parents to help them migrate. They therefore comply with their parents' instructions to be assured of parental support for their daily needs. Yet, they perceive staying in Ghana as a temporary solution, probably due to a local substantial migration culture, and often do not abandon their aspirations to migrate. Rather, they pace their migration aspirations through delaying strategies.

5.3. When Migrant Parents Agree With Their Children's Migration Aspirations But Do Not Have the Means to Help

Some stayer youth aspire to migrate, and while their migrant parents agree with their children's plans, they lack the means to help. These parents offer young people hope that family reunification is realistic, but they often face financial and legal constraints, especially those migrant parents who are undocumented (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). Some youth in this category latch on to the hope offered by their parents and put off finding alternative opportunities in Ghana. Donna (aged 18, female) attached herself strongly to her father's promises and did nothing for a while after secondary school completion. While waiting, Donna helped her maternal grandmother, her local caregiver, with sales in a small kiosk in front of a rented room. After one year, Donna grew dismayed with her father's promises and applied and gained admission to study business at a local university. Donna seemed proud of her decision to return to school instead of waiting for family reunification:

At first, I liked the idea that my father was there [abroad], and every time he would tell us that he would come and take us. Now he has made me forget about travelling. Now I am not relying on him. Last time he said I should look for someone to do a passport for my younger sister. My sister told me that I should stop because my father is deceiving us….We have waited for things to change, but nothing has changed. Things are just as they are.

Donna did not abandon her aspiration to migrate. On the contrary, she hoped a local degree would make her better placed to later apply to do an international master's degree. Donna gained admission to a local university with the financial and moral support of her migrant father.

Ntonsu (aged 22, female) similarly grew dismayed with her mother's empty promises and decided to take her aspirations into her own hands. What seemed most achievable to her was the romantic partner pathway. Ntonsu's mother lived in the UK as an asylum seeker. She lacked the required financial resources to support Ntonsu's migration aspirations but promised Ntonsu that she would assist her to move to the UK as soon as she became a documented migrant. This promise started as soon as Ntonsu's mother arrived in the UK, when Ntonsu was about 10 years old. Ntonsu's fervent desire to join her mother influenced her decision to accept a long-distance romantic relationship proposal from a young Ghanaian man living in Italy. They started their relationship online and met physically on his occasional visits to Ghana. However, she stopped the relationship when she realised that he was married. Now Ntonsu is pursuing a diploma to become a medical counter assistant. Through her work, she hopes to save enough for further local training to become a licensed nurse like her sister. Ntonsu hopes her nursing salary will then help her to save for her migration dream.

A clear pattern amongst the youth in this category is their strong desire to reunite with their parents abroad and belief that family reunification will be possible, largely encouraged by their migrant parents' assurances. Yet, when they realise that the situation is not as hopeful as they initially thought, they re-strategise about when and how to move. They take actions based on what they perceive to be their capabilities and pace their migration aspirations from family reunification to education or labour migration at a later date.

5.4. When Migrant Parents Are Detached From Their Children's Migration Aspirations

This group consists of two sets of stayer youth: (a) those who are not encouraged by their parents in their migration aspirations because these parents cannot afford to sponsor their children's migration and (b) those who barely have contact with their migrant parents. In both cases, the young people get inspiration and capabilities for migration from other sources.

Dusty's father does not have the resources to support his son financially. Yet, unlike the parents of young people in the third category above, he also does not offer any promises. Dusty (aged 18, male) therefore turns elsewhere for his inspiration:

He [the migrant father] is not performing. Sometimes we have disagreements with him….The person who inspires me was my senior at SHS. We used to play in the same team. But he was my senior. He too moved to Accra. He came to settle here [Accra]. Later, he was able to get the chance to go abroad [Italy] and play football. So, he has been inspiring me to, like, work hard so that I can come outside [abroad] and play.

Young people like Dusty pursue their migration aspirations by relying on moral and financial support from adults in their local and international networks, like his football manager (current caregiver), church members living in Ghana and abroad, and stayer mother. Dusty got financial support from his stayer mother and her partner to obtain a passport. His manager arranges matches for him. In the quote above, his previous teammate provides him with tips and tricks he can implement in Ghana to get an international football opportunity. Additionally, members of his church encourage him to remain hopeful.

All the youth in this category consider migrant parents' support for their migration aspirations to be inaccessible. Feeling abandoned by their migrant parents, these youth still aspire to migrate. Education provides a pathway, as Gusta (aged 21, male) and Mape (aged 19, male) told us. Realising that it is impossible to travel for international bachelor's degrees right after secondary school, as they initially hoped to do, Gusta and Mape gained admission into two different public universities in Ghana to study chemistry and computer science, respectively. They studied with their stayer parents' financial and moral support and that of extended relatives in the diaspora. Unlike Gusta, who shifted from aiming to migrate by pursuing an international education degree to pursuing a musical career abroad in an unknown future, Mape received a promise from a maternal aunt residing in South Africa that she would assist him financially to follow an international master's programme after he successfully completed a local bachelor's degree. This promise was Mape's main motivation to remain studious and hopeful about emigrating soon.

Goshie (aged 16, male) was less lucky. He did not manage to qualify for university entrance in Ghana, which he attributed to his migrant father's neglect. Lacking support from his father for his education and daily survival, Goshie failed an examination required for him to enter a local university or polytechnic. He now hopes that his stayer mother can raise the needed finances for him to apply for study abroad scholarships. Goshie knew his mother was too poor to help him financially but urged her to call on her rich friends and family members for money. His mother did everything possible,

but the help was not forthcoming. Goshie therefore decided to look for local jobs, including street sales and primary school teaching, to save money for his future migration project. Goshie felt it was worth working hard to align his migration aspirations and capabilities rather than bemoaning his migrant father's abandonment of his family in Ghana.

Given the lack of support from their migrant parents, youth in this category pace their migration aspirations via delaying and replacement while continuously strategising to increase their migration capabilities. They rely on broad social network support, including from caregivers and friends, for information, money and motivation for their migration plans (Böhme, 2015; Francisco-Menchavez, 2020).

6. Conclusion

The aspirations of youth in the Global South, including those of stayer youth, are shaped by their capabilities, which stem from family support, access to migration information, gender and academic achievements (e.g., Böhme, 2015; Kandel & Kao, 2000; Somaiah et al., 2020). Yet, aspirations are too often treated as unchanging: either you aspire to migrate or you do not. Simultaneously, youth in the Global South have been characterised as being in "waithood"—a state of limbo between childhood and adulthood—due to a lack of opportunities at home and restrictive policies in the Global North (Batan, 2010; Honwana, 2012). Focusing on when youth aim to migrate and the strategies they use to realise their migration aspirations, we unpack what waithood looks like for stayer youth and uncover the diverse activities and strategies entailed in waiting (Stasik et al., 2020). First, we categorised participants according to their initial capabilities. Then we studied how stayer youth adapted their migration strategies given their migration capabilities, resulting in the pacing of their migration aspirations (Amit & Salazar, 2020).

Using a temporal lens that considers how aspirations change over time, our ethnographic study found that stayer youth's migration aspirations were paced differently based on their capabilities. Parental emotional and financial support determined stayer youth's initial migration capabilities upon completing secondary school. After secondary school completion, some participants aspired to migrate immediately. Others preferred to wait until they had achieved a particular milestone in Ghana, be it a tertiary degree or the acquisition of other skills that would better equip them for finding a job abroad. Stayer youth then employ agency based on their socio-economic status to pace their migration aspirations to better align them with their capabilities. Privileged participants had parents who agreed with their aspirations and had the means to support them. As a result, these youth experienced voluntary waiting. The other youth we studied encountered involuntary waiting. They lacked the ability to migrate due to

transnational family power struggles, financial or legal constraints, or detached parenting. Consequently, these stayer youth resorted to shifting by delaying or replacing their aspirations in line with their capabilities. They thereby expressed their agency through various strategies to cope with waiting while aspiring (Cooper et al., 2021; Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Osei et al., in press).

This article thus contributes to transnational migration studies that overlook stayer youth's agency and their ability to cope with and shape forces structuring their lives. While structural forces constrain or encourage youth's migration aspirations, youth demonstrate agency in aspiring to move, irrespective of whether such aspirations are realised and become actual migration (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021; Setrana, 2021). Literature on stayer youth's aspirations has mainly emphasised that youth aspire to migrate because their parents reside abroad. Yet, by studying the perspectives of stayer youth and observing what they do to realise their migration aspirations, we find that they may start with unrealistic ideas of their migration capabilities. But as time progresses, they adapt and strategise to align their aspirations with their capabilities. In so doing, they actively pace their aspirations (Amit & Salazar, 2020). Stayer youth have been conceived of as being in a state of waithood: stationary and largely reacting to their parents. By focusing on the perspectives of stayer youth, we contribute to recent calls in critical youth studies to unpack waiting. Even in waiting, youth express agency.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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