

***Identity, migration and diaspora from  
the perspectives of French speaking  
West Africans in Bergen and Oslo –  
their thoughts and their stories.***

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## **The African person as defined by Desmond Tutu:**

“We say in Africa that a person is a person through other persons. A solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. We are made for togetherness, for friendship, for fellowship. ... We are created to live in a delicate network of interdependence and we are different precisely in order to know our need for one another. Diversity, difference, is the essence of who we are.”

(Bishop Desmond Tutu in *Discovery of a continent. Food, flavours and inspirations from Africa*, by Marcus Samuelsson 2007:vii)

## **Acknowledgements and some thoughts...**

This has been a long and interesting journey, but also a test of my stamina. Writing a master thesis is no small feat, and it is a process of development. The student's life is engulfed by the thesis, and every day is influenced by what the state of the thesis is on that particular day. The author undergoes many stages, of "where to begin", of frustration and of a blank mind, of confusion, but also after a while stages of inspiration and of "Eureka moments", and finally the thesis is completed.

My 10 years during my childhood in Côte d'Ivoire have certainly influenced both my choice of topic and of the selection in category of people to write about. First, I would like to thank my informants. It has been a privilege to meet with these jovial and warm people, with such interesting stories and experiences. It was easy to relate to quite a few of the identity shaping processes they have gone through with the drastic movement they have gone through by moving from Africa to Norway, as I grew up in Africa and moved several times between continents myself. Secondly, my supervisor professor Leif Manger has contributed with much sage advice and a great insight into and interest for the various topics of the thesis. Thank you for your patience, lending of books and very helpful comments as my work progressed! Thirdly, I wish to thank my parents, who have taken an interest in my thesis, backed me up, given me a push when needed, and who have encouraged and supported me through this long process.

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## Introduction and the lay-out of the thesis

This research has been conducted among the French-speaking West African immigrant communities in Oslo and Bergen, the two largest cities of Norway. Both Oslo and Bergen were chosen as the group in Bergen is small in number. According to the Norwegian Central Bureau of Statistics there are 263 men and 166 women from the chosen countries in the whole of Norway; 14 men and 11 women live in Bergen. In Oslo, however, there are 113 men and 67 women from the same countries; that is eight times as many men and six times as many women as in Bergen.

### Research focus:

The research question or focus has changed since the initial stages of the project. It was at first intended to be on the issue of identity among French-speaking West African immigrants in Bergen and Oslo. More specifically, the intent was to look at the aspects of identity – both individual and group identity. This field work was initially intended to be a study of *their own* perceptions of *their own identity* in relation to their social surroundings, both in the Norwegian society in general but also internally in the/a social group. Would the way they think of or about themselves effect how/whether they form social groups in their every day lives? In a way, I did get an impression of how their view of their own identity shaped their social lives and their relationships, but it did not play out as anticipated. Most of them stressed the fact that they had a lot of Norwegian and international friends, not that they had a lot of friends from their own country. The African friends they had were from the whole region, and even some English speaking, not from any very specific country or area, although perhaps mainly West Africa. This is very interesting, as it can be discussed from two opposite angles. It could be part of the reason for their apparently well-integrated status/situation, or it could also be seen as a result of their being well integrated. It is, somehow, a bit of a chicken and egg dilemma, and is approached further later in the thesis.

However, as the interviews progressed, it became increasingly clear that there would not be enough material on the identity theme to enable this to be the single focus of this thesis. At least; not in the way first intended. The main reason was this; there was a great discrepancy between the levels of awareness and self-reflection prior to the interview, among the

informants. Some understood the questions asked very easily. They grasped the concepts proposed quickly, and were able to engage in very fruitful discussions and philosophising with me. Others seemed to hardly understand the questions asked, and had to be explained the meaning of terms and concepts to the degree that it felt like the answers practically were given to them.

As the interviews progressed, other interesting, related and very relevant themes surfaced, and a red thread for the whole thesis eventually became apparent. Thus, there will be a chapter on the identity theme in the thesis, instead of it being the focus of the thesis in its entirety. A higher level of connection on the topics of immigration, diasporas and identity will be this red thread that binds the different chapters together. The reasons for this are explained in the following paragraphs.

The migration in question is not a group migration as such, but is of a much more individual nature and consists rather of single cases. Therefore we do not find diasporic groups as perhaps expected, and the analysis will be shaped accordingly. For instance, a significant portion of these people are musicians. They are here because of a particular skill they possess that is in demand in Norway, which Norwegians cannot provide themselves. In these cases, the immigrant becomes a resource, instead of a stigmatised person. In situations like these, the immigrants might wish to protect their status, and perhaps not mingle too much with people who are from groups that are known to be stigmatised in Norwegian society. This shows that in general, this is a different kind of immigrant. They are resourceful people who come here for various individual reasons. As will be seen in the following chapter, where their stories are told, they usually have many Norwegian friends, and socialise with international groups of friends – not merely friends from the same country or area they originally come from themselves.

Another thing that became clear quite early in the process of the field work was the fact that participant observation of social groups of West Africans would be very difficult, not to say virtually impossible. Participant observation was intended to be part of the methods used in field work. However, the relations between people seemed to be one-on-one relationships, rather than social groups of West Africans as was expected prior to field work. This confirms the lack of diasporic groups among these people.

The African countries of origin chosen are Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Togo, Benin and Niger. The decision to limit the thesis to certain countries is made on the grounds that otherwise there might be too many people to interview, and rather different backgrounds – particularly in reasons for coming to Norway – might make the chosen focus rather more difficult to stick to, as many more issues would come into play. For instance, people from these countries are not, with the exception of Ivorians though only in very recent years, war refugees. Thus, as war refugees would bring about many other necessary themes and discussions, choosing only the French speaking countries of West Africa, as opposed to all the French speaking countries of the continent was a very deliberate decision.

### **Getting started:**

I got started with one informant in Oslo and one in Bergen. The informant in Oslo was a friend of my father's, an Ivorian who'd lived in Norway for around 22 years. I explained my project to him, I got to interview him, and he gave me some numbers to people I could telephone to ask for interviews. The initial contact person in Bergen I got through some people I came across quite randomly. I was out walking with a friend, when I overheard some African men speaking French. I went over to them, introduced myself and asked if they lived in Bergen, and what African countries they were from. They were from Chad and Burundi, so not from the countries I would be concerned with in my research. However, when I explained my project to them, they very kindly agreed to help me get in touch with people from the relevant countries.

A few days later, one of them telephoned me to tell me about a young man he knew. Although originally from another English speaking country in West Africa, he had lived in Ivory Coast for many years, and he knew the French speaking West Africans in Bergen. When I met up with the young man and explained my project to him, he understood it and found it interesting and relevant, and agreed to help me find more people. He himself felt that he was rather outside the group I intended to study, so he said that he didn't think it would be very useful for me to interview him.

## **Meeting people:**

Having started this way, with one contact person in each city, my method for coming into contact with interview objects was the snowball method – getting in touch with new people through those I had already interviewed, getting in average two to three telephone numbers from each person I had already talked to. That way, when I telephoned people to ask if they would be willing to meet me, I could say that I got their name and number from their friend, and right from the beginning make myself a less intimidating or potentially suspicious person. However, although the snowball method was the way that seemed best to me, in terms of finding people in a way that did not involve official means, it is also a rather slow method. Telephoning people who might not answer the phone when a number they do not recognize appears on their telephone, or who are very busy and ask you to call again next month (with one lady this happened twice, and finally she just put me on hold until I took the hint, hung up and stopped trying to contact her), or can meet you no sooner than in two weeks' time, makes for slow progress, and frustration.

However, most people I called were very forthcoming, and went out of their way to help me and make possible a meeting and an interview. Ranging from one hour as the shortest to four hours as the longest interview, I have had many pleasant experiences with friendly, forthcoming people. All, except three people, I have met and interviewed at a café, as I wanted to meet in a neutral environment where neither would be more or less at home or out of place than the other. One man made time to meet me during his lunch hour, because he had a very busy schedule. Another was a student, who I met up with at the cafeteria at his school. The third was a lady who had been on sick leave for some time, who did not feel quite up to coming in to town to meet me, so I went to her house to see her. She was also somewhat apprehensive about the interview, so my coming to her home was more reassuring to her.

## **Problems:**

One quite major issue that was not at all as I expected before entering the field, was the realization that there was no real community consisting of the French speaking West Africans, neither in Bergen nor in Oslo. I had expected to be able to do some participant observation, although the in-depth interviews were always intended to be my main method of field work. However, when I asked my interview objects if there were any places where they usually met



up, or if there often were gatherings with all the French speaking West Africans, they all said no.

Most of them had more Norwegian friends than African friends, mainly through work, school, and spare time activities. They all had other African friends, but not exclusively French speaking, and quite often it was a one-on-one relationship, not a group of Africans. Having one friend through one setting and another from a completely different setting, and a third from yet another place was the general trend. They could have many acquaintances, and were on a “greeting basis” with most of the other Africans from the same country of origin, and through knowing who their friends’ friends were. However, they all differed explicitly between friends and acquaintances. Finding the field to be like this, I realized that I had no real group of people to observe interacting with each other, there was no French speaking (West) African community as such. My method would have to consist of in-depth interviews with individuals.

### **Discussion of method:**

Concerning my method, I did in-depth interviews, and also collected life histories in connection with the interviews. I found that since I met them all one by one for an in-depth interview, it was easy to get a good tone and to create a relaxed atmosphere with most of them. Particularly in my encounters with the women, I found that my background of having grown up in Ivory Coast and my ability, because of that, to easily relate to what life is like for women in Africa, became a very important way of creating a mutual sense of understanding and trust. Also, I think just being a woman helped, in my meeting with the women.

I was afraid, before I started the field work, that my being a woman, and looking rather young for my age, might make it difficult for the men to take me seriously, that they might just see me as some little girl trying to bother them with her little school project. However, they were all very nice, and I did not once feel that I was not taken seriously. Several times they expressed that my project was interesting, and they perceived the questions they were asked to be important and relevant ones.

I also collected each person’s life history. I would start each interview that way, in order to get to know the person and to start with questions that hopefully were neither intimidating nor difficult to understand and answer. Of course some of their stories were emotionally difficult

to tell, as some were refugees. However, none of my interview subjects were war refugees. There were two political refugees, two religious refugees and one refugee on humanitarian grounds. The other reasons for coming here were mainly studies, work, or spouses. Several have ended up in Norway through pure coincidence.

In general, the fact that I had lived in Ivory Coast for 10, 5 years, and that I spoke French proved something positive, as they were all able to tell me things about Africa and then say “But you know this, you know what it’s like down there.” I could relate, and yes, I did know. I was often asked how I’d experienced growing up in Africa like that. When I could answer honestly that I loved Ivory Coast, they knew that I meant it, and I believe that this helped create situations where they felt they could trust me with their stories.

Of course, my position as a Norwegian might make for complications in getting clear and truthful answers, as they might worry about whether I could pass on information about them to the Norwegian government or other authorities interested in their doings. I made sure it was clear to each of them that the information they gave me would be completely confidential, and that they would be anonymous in my public thesis.

However, I did not get the feeling that they were simply telling me what I wanted to hear, because they gave me their stories with (to me) apparent openness and detail about difficulties etc. Of course I might not have been able to realize it if they were giving me a polished version, or if they were omitting details they felt might be unfavourable to my perception of them, but I must say I felt that I was given the real version.

A couple of them had to be reassured that I would never pass on any information to the government or the immigration offices about them, but this concern seemed to arise mainly from the fact that they had trouble understanding where I was connected to. They thought that perhaps I was a journalist, or once I got the point through that I came from the university, they thought for a while that the university was connected to the government and that I was working for the government. It was only after vigorous explaining and quite a bit of clarification of much confusion that they understood my intent and my connections, I was merely an innocent student and their concerns were finally laid to rest.

### **Finding that red line – moving towards a thesis:**

Finding a red line in the material for this thesis took some time. For a long while the material seemed like a pile of individual interviews, and finding very clear commonalities seemed hard. Of course there were the obvious ones; regional background, French ex-colonies, ending up in Norway, being mostly work immigrants and not war refugees. But these would be very general categorical criteria. Eventually, however, the fact that this category of people are so heterogenic, much less homogenic than expected before commencing the research, became the explanation for another fact. They are not war refugees. They do not belong to a category of immigrants that arrives in mass numbers, all for the same reason of fleeing from war or some kind of common trauma in their country of origin, and their reasons for coming are so diverse that their backgrounds naturally are diverse, too. Many factors determine each individual background. What kind of place in their country of origin they came from is an important determinant; village, town, city, the capital. Whether they are from a wealthy family or a poor family often though not always says something about how hard they might have had to work to get where they are today. This question of family background usually also has some connection with their level of education or at least how easy their access to education has been. Some have, instead of having a high level of education, shown a remarkable entrepreneur spirit which is how they have made their way in the world. Their stories, which are very interesting, will be returned to at a later stage in the thesis.

These observations are exactly that – observations – and very general outlines of a much more complex category of people than this initial picture shows. Still, the justification for that is that these are just vantage points, which give a place from which to start the analysis. They create the initial framework which enables the painting of a picture with a big brush. The details and variations of the picture are what the analysis will bring out throughout the thesis, with the final result being a detailed analysis and a clear picture of this category of immigrants in Norway.

What I found when I was doing the interviews, was that each person had their own individual story, their own reason for being in Norway. Each had a different way of coping with life in Norway, though most or all of them seemed to be, as far as I could tell, well integrated into Norwegian society, at least as far as speaking the language, having a job and abiding by Norwegian law and order as good citizens should. And they all stressed this point with me;

that they were good, law-abiding citizens who had a job, supported themselves and their families, causing no problems for the Norwegian state and government. This was an important point for them, that they were good citizens, who respected Norwegian traditions and culture, being no burden to the state. Though many of the people I spoke with have Norwegian passports, they all said that “even if I have lived most of my adult life in Norway and I know I have been influenced by the Norwegian way of thinking and acting, in the bottom of my heart, I will always remain an (for instance) Ivorian, an African.”

Concerning the French language as a possible important identity component, which was one of my interests in this field research, this varied greatly from person to person. As Africa has so many local languages in addition to the official languages, their first language was most often a local language, then they might speak one or two other African languages belonging to neighbouring tribes, and *then* French would come in as a third or fourth language. So depending on their personal history, level of education etc, their degree of connection to and identification with the French language was very individual. Each of them was given the choice between an interview in Norwegian and an interview in French, and for the most part, they chose Norwegian. For some, the deciding factor was which language they spoke better, for others it seemed to be about proving to me that they spoke Norwegian well. Yet another reason seemed to be to test my French speaking abilities, and fortunately they seemed satisfied a little while into the conversation. Maybe a third or a fourth of the interviews was done in French.

However, a young boy with a terribly traumatic story to tell, as one of the few asylum seekers in the group, chose Norwegian, although linguistically, French would clearly have been easier for him. Upon closer reflection, as we discussed language as a part of our identity, I realised and he confirmed, after some thought, that his choosing Norwegian was a way of distancing himself emotionally from the very difficult, very personal story he was telling me. It contained fearing for his life, a close escape from a threat on his life by a whole group of people, losing his home and his family, and he can never return back to his country. He would surely be murdered. If he had told it in French, it would have made it that much closer and much harder to relive the traumatic experiences through telling me his story. It was a very interesting discovery to make, as it made it clear how closely language can be linked to identity. I will not dwell upon this incident now, but it will be returned to for a further perusal at a later point in the thesis, in the identity chapter.

My questions concerning whether they felt they had been “identified” or categorized by others in a way that they felt did not match their self-perception were not always easy to explain. In part because some of them did not understand this rather academic (perhaps) and abstract way of looking at identity, and in part because not very many of them claimed to have experienced this.

A few had stories of what they labelled racism or unfair treatment due to (according to them) their foreign origins, but for the most part they said they did not find Norwegians to be unfair or racist. At least they themselves had not experienced such things. However, the one man who had any stories about racism towards himself and his family naturally had very specific opinions on racism in Norway. His story will be returned to at a later stage in the thesis for a closer study. One woman also had a story about experiencing racism and her story, too, will be returned to later in the thesis. A third informant actually thought that Norwegians are too afraid of being thought racists, and sometimes try too hard to be politically correct. This causes them to overcompensate in the other direction, and display a misunderstood “overkindness” (the man used this term) in an attempt to be understanding of other cultures. The informant claimed that this actually is to do the immigrants a huge disfavoured. “When I ask Norwegians whether something I have done is good and acceptable or not, they smile politely, nod and say it is fine, instead of helping me to understand how I could change my behaviour to something which is acceptable to Norwegian society.” However, he did not claim to have encountered what he thought was racism, and like most of the other people interviewed, he did not think that Norwegians in general are racists.

Whether I got these answers because I am Norwegian or because they are the actual truth, I do not know. I do not know whether there is a better way I could have asked them, and if I then would have got other answers. However, the line between having to explain my questions so in detail that I practically had to spell them out and trying to avoid ending up putting answers in their mouths is difficult not to cross. I some times felt I was getting a little too close, and thus I would choose not to pursue the matter further. Those who had academic educations – which quite a few of them did – understood my questions concerning identity very well, and were often well reflected on the subject. In those cases we got an interesting and fruitful discussion. However, since there were such large gaps in the results of the identity

discussions, it is difficult to find the red line and draw a conclusion. At least at this point in the process it seems difficult.

### **The thesis layout:**

At this point, it seems pertinent to give a brief preview of how the thesis is arranged. The order of the chapters and the content of each chapter will be laid out in the following paragraphs. This will make the red line running through the thesis more apparent.

### **Chapter one:**

In this first chapter, the intent has been to bring the reader into the background for the thesis. The questions intended to research, with a focus on identity, and the reason for the slight alteration of the focus are explained; the discrepancy in pre-fieldwork expectations and the actually findings once the fieldwork was started. The whole process of getting started and making contact is laid out here, problems anticipated and encountered, and reflections around this. A discussion of method is also placed in this chapter. The group intended to research was not a group as such but rather a category, and the focus has had to shift somewhat. With group identity initially being the main focus, their ties to a diaspora, their historical regional background and the individual life histories helped to create a larger framework for analysis and paint a much more realistic picture.

### **Chapter two:**

In the second chapter, the reader is acquainted with the people that this thesis is about. This is the part where their stories are told. Their life histories describe what background they came from in Africa, concerning family situation, education and work opportunities. How they came to Norway and why is also an important part of this picture. Statistics are presented here which show the spread in country of origin, the gender ratios, and their dispersion between Bergen and Oslo, and the total numbers for all of Norway. These are official numbers from the Norwegian Bureau of Statistics. Also some tables which show the great variation in their reasons for coming to Norway, the number of years they have lived in Norway, and the numbers of each gender interviewed in each city are presented here.

### **Chapter three:**

The third chapter is on the topic of identity. Identity and belonging is a vast anthropological topic, and Fredrik Barth's work on *Ethnic groups and boundaries* creates an excellent vantage point for this discussion. Richard Jenkins' book, *Social identity* contains very fruitful discussion on both Barth's work, and also on Irving Goffman and his front stage – back stage theory on identity. Jenkins' theories on both group identity and individual identity are very to the point, and his discussion on the differences between group and category, belonging and identity are illustrated by case examples from the interviews of the informants. Rogers Brubaker's book on *Ethnicity without groups* is also used in this chapter.

### **Chapter four:**

The fourth chapter discusses the theme of migration and diaspora. The book of Øivind Fuglerud, *Migrasjonsforståelse. Flytteprosesser, rasisme og globalisering*, is used to look at the different anthropological discourses that constitute the history of migration studies. It is also pertinent for discussing some of the cases of the informants. For a complementary discussion on diaspora, the article "Evaluating 'Diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity?" by Floya Anthias is employed, both for theoretical historical discussions on the theme of diaspora and how the scholars have thought about the subject since it became a topic for academic analysis. It will also be employed for analysing specific examples from the informants' histories. Contextualisation through comparison is done through looking at the book of Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga on Congolese tradesmen, *Congo – Paris. Transnational traders on the margins of the law*. There are very interesting differences as well as similarities that link both to identity and to diaspora themes.

### **Chapter five:**

In the final chapter, a general West African history is laid out, to contextualize the backgrounds of these people. The history of anthropological discourse concerning the West African French speaking region and common traits in West African society are traced through the use of Jon Pedersen's article on "Vest-Afrika" in the book *Fjern og nær*. A complementary, more scholarly perspective is taken from Charles Piot's book *Remotely global. Village modernity in West Africa*. Piot analyses and gives his criticisms and evaluations of the various

kinds of anthropological schools or discourses that have shaped the scholarly debates and studies on West Africa throughout the years. The main topics treated from Jon Pedersen's article are common traits and a general regional history, language, mobility as a mindset, social organisation, and a tradition of knowledge and its links to secret societies. A general education issue for all the countries is also discussed here. This is the issue of the much lower literacy levels of women compared to men. Finally, in the general section on the region, the ancient kingdoms, the formation of states and regional politics are treated. The countries they have originated from are also presented in this chapter. Each country's recent political history, from the time of independence until the present, as well as a short description of their economic situations. The starting point of the recent history is mainly the time of independence from France, around the 1960s, in order to bring out the similarities of the region yet also to show each country's individual recent situation. This section is given to present an even clearer, more specific idea of the backgrounds the informants in this thesis originally come from. Case examples from the informants which illustrate certain points in the theories or societal traits are included and discussed here.



## **The people and their stories:**

### **Chapter introduction:**

This chapter will concern the main subject of the thesis; the people interviewed – the French speaking West Africans in Bergen and Oslo. This is where they tell their stories; what kind of background they came from originally, in terms of level of education, family situation, job opportunities, and how they finally ended up in Norway. The numbers and statistics will also be laid out here, to create a frame for the stories, which completes the picture. Each country of origin also gets a paragraph, describing its recent history and the political and economic background. This is in order to provide a fuller background. Nevertheless, the people are the important part of the whole. First, however, the facts will be presented, to give the readers some pegs to hang the different stories on while reading them. Secondly, their stories are told. If their country of origin is mentioned by name, the name of the country has been altered for the protection of their anonymity. Thirdly, the countries are described.

### **The numbers and facts:**

Below are the tables with the number of immigrants from the various countries, with the specific numbers for the whole of Norway, for Oslo and for Bergen, as the two cities are the site for the field work. As is clear from a simple glance at the numbers, the gender division is quite unbalanced. There are far more men than women, although for some of the countries the differentiation is larger than for some of the others. Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, have a much larger difference in gender ratio than Benin or Guinea. The total number of men compared to the total number of women from all the countries is, nevertheless, much higher. There are about 100 men more than women. Whether these numbers have something to do with the type of immigrants most of these people are, namely work immigrants, I do not know. But since they are from Africa, and there mainly are work immigrants in this category, it is perhaps no surprise that there are more men than women. It is much easier for a man from Africa than for a woman from Africa to get an education, travel abroad and get a job. This is not a prejudiced remark, the statistics speak for themselves. Illiteracy percentages for African women are always higher than the percentages for men. This is discussed further in the final chapter.

**2006 numbers****First generation immigrant without Norwegian background**

		<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Norway</b>	Benin	7	4
	Ivory Coast	94	50
	Guinea	38	31
	Mali	13	7
	Senegal	59	41
	Togo	40	31
	Burkina Faso	12	2

**2006 numbers****First generation immigrant without Norwegian background**

		<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Oslo county</b>	Benin	1	0
	Ivory Coast	36	14
	Guinea	17	12
	Mali	5	4
	Senegal	36	25
	Togo	14	12
	Burkina Faso	4	0

**2006 numbers****First generation immigrant without Norwegian background**

		<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Bergen</b>	Benin	1	0
	Ivory Coast	3	5
	Guinea	2	0
	Mali	1	1
	Senegal	3	2
	Togo	4	3
	Burkina Faso	0	0

**Spread of informants Bergen – Oslo**

<b>Bergen</b>		<b>Oslo</b>	
Men	Women	Men	Women
3	3	9	2

Country of origin	Male	Female
Senegal		I
Guinea		II
Mali	II	
Burkina Faso		I
Ivory Coast	IIII	
Togo	II	
Benin	II	I
Niger	I	

Reasons, arrival in Norway	Male	Female	Duration of stay in Norway:	
			Male	Female
Coincidence	I			
Work as a musician	I		39	22
High education – work related reasons		I	3,5	4,5
			21	5
			22	8
Spouse is Norwegian	I		23	22
Spouse or relative(s) already in Norway		II	24	
			10	
			6	
Political refugee	II		20	
Refugee on humanitarian grounds		I	6	
			6	
			6	
Religious refugee	I	I		
Studies	II			

## The journeys

The push/pull factors for these informants are varied and many, as has already been explained to some extent, but as an explanation of these diagrams, it will be specified and developed further in the following paragraphs. First, however, the dispersion of countries of origin and the difference in gender representation has to be addressed. The reason for there being such an over-representation of men in comparison to the number of women has a very simple explanation. Firstly, there are much fewer women than men from these countries living in Norway. Secondly, the women were much more difficult to track down and then get hold of, than the men were, and a couple of the women also turned down the request for an interview.

Concerning the dispersion in countries of origin and the number representation there, that, too has a quite simple explanation. The numbers of people from the different countries living in Norway at the time of the fieldwork were very varied. Côte d'Ivoire was among the highest represented countries, whereas Togo and Burkina Faso, for instance, were very few in number in the whole of Norway. It also depended on who people knew, as the snowball method was used as the means to find informants, which again made it somewhat random as far as people's country of origin was concerned. The difference in numbers of informants between Bergen and Oslo is really due to the ratio of the number of people from the countries in question living in each of the cities. Many more lived in Oslo than in Bergen, and it was thus much easier to get hold of people in Oslo. As Oslo is the capital of Norway, this is a very clear reason for its higher number of immigrants. There are more work opportunities there in general, but particularly if one is a musician, with the Centre for Conveying African Culture being situated there.

The centre focuses on African musical traditions in dancing and music, and offers courses for Norwegians in order to create more understanding of what African culture actually contains and entails. Many of the West African musicians in Norway came through this centre first, and often for a limited employment, and although some go back home after their contract has ended, others stay on. They renew their contracts, or they find other employment. They are adept musicians, with knowledge and a type of musical skills that Norwegian and Western musicians do not have, and so they fill a very particular niche in Norwegian society which no other group of people can fill.

**“I cannot be other than what I am. I am a patriot.”**

The man who uttered these words has been in Norway for four decades. He still has an African passport, although he has permanent residency permission in Norway. It is a matter of principal to him. He feels enriched to have Norway as a partial home and as his working site, but Africa is home. This man contributes to Norwegian society in many ways. He is engaged in political questions concerning immigrants in Norway. He is the “grand frère” among his countrymen here. If anyone has for instance a baptism, or they have troubles of any kind, they come to him. This man came to Norway quite young, more by coincidence than anything else. He was applying to another European country for a visa, and the Norwegian embassy was in the same building. He applied, just for the sake of it, and as it happened, Norway replied first,

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and the answer was positive. So he went. Once in Norway, he began to study. He felt he had come to “the land of dreams”. He had been an active student in his own country, too, and so it was natural for him to be active, both in the student environment and also socially in general. He thus became very well integrated, and encountered few troubles. “At the point in time that I came to Norway,” he said, “there were still few enough immigrants that we were still considered exotic and exciting. We were very lucky.”

Before coming to Norway he had a good education from back home, from a high level school in the country’s capital, and he also studied in France for a year. He now has siblings living there, and pays closely attention to what is going on in France, especially in politics concerning immigrants, social change, integration and political solutions. France has much more experience in this than Norway, he said. France has had immigrants from its previous colonies coming to live and to study for a long time, and there are many more immigrants there than in Norway. Around the time of this interview, French immigrants were causing a great stir in France, and rioting frustrated immigrant youths burning cars and fighting the police held the attention of the whole world.

He looks at himself as a bridge builder between cultures. When he is in Africa he is advertising for Norway, bringing cheese slicers, Norwegian brown cheese, and Norwegian calendars. When in Norway, he is a living advertisement for Africans and African culture. He also believes that the French speaking West Africans have an advantage over the English speaking Africans. They do not have the same difficult relationship with the terms “black – white” as the English speaking do. In the French ex-colonies, a lot of Frenchmen remained after the colonies had become independent, and the countries mostly kept up their relationships with France after the colonial reign was dissolved. France was the country they all dreamed of going to for studies and for work. This entails that the French speaking Africans in general have a much less complicated relationship to the white people, and thus do not automatically have a minority complex which complicates things unnecessarily. These are his words and his reflections. He also believes that Norwegians have a big problem, both in the state and in the people in general, with over-kindness to immigrants. They are too afraid of being though racist and discriminating, which results in, for instance, lack of transparency and requirements for money given by the government to support various immigrant enterprises, such as social clubs and organisations which are for promoting immigrant interests. “The opportunity creates the thief”, he said, meaning that the lack of requirements in

having to prove what they do with the money and also the lack of follow-up in controls from the government creates very tempting situations with money and embezzlement opportunities.

**“I have a foot in two cultures.”**

These same words, about over-kindness and the misunderstood intention of being nice, while actually doing the immigrants a huge disfavor in not setting the same standards and requirements for them as for everybody else in Norway, were uttered by another informant. This was a man who is a political refugee. Originally from a village, he has still studied higher education in France for several years, before returning to his country for merely a few months. Being politically active as a student in Africa eventually became dangerous, and he had to leave his country. He then left straight for Norway, although the choice of country itself was rather random. In Norway he has studied more, several subjects at university level like in France. After several years in Norway, he lived abroad for over a year in order to do some more studies. He has done much during his years in Norway, being active in many areas, both through work opportunities, politically and socially partaking in work and debates around the immigrant problematic and related themes. Through this he has acquired many friends and acquaintances, and since he speaks Norwegian, French, English and a fourth European language, he has a very international set of friends.

He has since been back to visit his country of origin several times, and he did feel that he came home. However, he said, he felt that he has several homes. He is a Norwegian African, or Norwegian although originally from Africa. When he went back to visit, he felt that he was part of the culture. However, he had been away and his experiences from other places had left their impressions upon him. He explained that those who have lived in Europe are called “white”. This basically means that they are viewed as someone who are resourceful and have a different way of being. This view comes from the fact that the Europeans who have been in Africa were once the colonial masters, and in later years, the ones who bring foreign aid with them. It is not the poor in Europe who come, and so, if you are white, you are by definition also rich. The man’s conclusion on where home is and where he feels belonging was this statement: a home is where you feel safe and provided for, where you can be a part of the system, and be and feel accepted.

## **“Norway is Paradise on earth. Women matter here.”**

A young woman told me her story, and it was the hardest story to listen to out of all the interviews. In genuine fear for her life, she fled a terribly difficult living situation in Africa, through an awful journey to get to Europe. Back in Africa, she was working a little, plaiting the hair of the neighbourhood women and selling cold water in the market, in order to keep herself in school. Her father could not afford to pay for her, but she had a desire and a dream to achieve an education and to make something of herself. However, her father did not share her view of this, and as she came from a relatively poor family, he was in need of money. She was married, despite heavy protests and even an attempt to hide on her wedding day, in her mid-teen years.

Her husband was a much older, powerful Muslim in her village, and she became wife number three. He was not satisfied with the extent of her circumcision, and demanded that it should be repeated, this time in a much more radical way; he demanded a Pharaonic circumcision – the most invasive, extensive kind of female circumcision often heard of from Arabia and Somalia. He was violent towards her, both sexually and eventually physically in general. He would not let her stay in school, either, despite her strong wish to do so, and he sent her to a Koran school instead. The other two wives beat her, and she attempted to run away. Her own family was afraid of him and sent her back – they had already received the money he had paid for her and were powerless. She was treated even worse, and ran away again, this time pregnant. They found and retrieved her from one of the country’s largest cities – this time they beat her so badly that she lost the child she was carrying and she can no longer have children. A third time she ran away, this time staying in an international harbour, trying to get out of the country because she realized she would not be safe anywhere if she stayed in the country. Finally, she got on a ship, but got no relief there either. She was raped by some of the crew, who took advantage of her desperate need to get away. At last she arrived at a Scandinavian country, where she came across some other Africans. They kindly helped her get transportation to Norway. Once she got there she went straight to the nearest police station to seek asylum. There she was taken care of, given medical assistance as they could easily see how she had been treated, both on the boat and by her husband and his wives. It did, fortunately, not take her long to be granted asylum in Norway. She feels she now lives in Paradise, and she repeatedly called Norway “Paradise on Earth”; “women matter here, we

have our own voice and we can walk left in peace on the street. I can go to school and become anything I want. It is Paradise here.”

**“Had I stayed, I would have been dead by now!”**

Another of the asylum seekers was a religious refugee. As a young woman, she had had to flee from her country to escape her own grandparents, who had already killed both her parents and a couple of her brothers because they would not follow the traditional religion of the grandparents. Family tradition is extremely important in African society, and the elders enforce it with a stern hand. Abandonment of family ways and traditions is not taken lightly, although the punishment may not always be as severe as in this case. However, as told in the first chapter, a young boy among the informants had much of the same kind of experience in his family, and is a religious refugee, too. This young woman stressed how “in Africa, people don’t have to come to you physically to kill you, (she feared being killed through witchcraft), but people in Norway don’t understand this. Had I stayed, I would have been dead by now. I can never go back.” She had been granted asylum, too, but had had to wait longer than the young woman in the previous story. This was probably because she did not carry on her any physical evidence like the other woman in the previous story so obviously did.

She had taken a professional education in Africa, and worked for several years, before having saved up enough money to start up her own business back in Africa. It had been her dream, and she had been very happy when achieving this. After a while, she sold her enterprise in order to do other things. However, she eventually began to fear for her life, as members of her family began to die and she knew her grandparents were behind it. She keeps track of the news from her country of origin every day, through internet, and she talks on the phone with her other surviving siblings, who have also fled Africa but live in other countries. She says she will always feel African, although she would have liked to have a Norwegian passport. She does not have one yet. Both through her husband, through work, through the church she attends and through African women who have contacted her on the street to ask her where she is from, she has many friends.



**“I could feel Norwegian – if Norwegians treated me as such.”**

This was stated by one of the women. She has lived in Norway for more than two decades, and her whole family now has Norwegian citizenship. She already had a good university education when she came to Norway, and used it the first couple of years she was here. Her husband had a high position at his work place in Norway, and his job was their reason for coming to Norway. When he lost his job a few years back, the Norwegian government wanted them to move back to Africa. The woman protested and applied for citizenship for the whole family. After having lived in Norway for over two decades, her children were Norwegian and they were all tied closely to Norway. They were granted citizenship.

In Africa, when she grew up, her father was in the French army. The army rewarded those who got sons, and her mother gave her father only girls. He still did not wish to take another wife, but finally his wife got him one herself. The second wife bore him many children, and several of them were boys. The second wife died early, however, and so yet a new wife was got. She, too, bore many children, and altogether the man got 12 sons and 12 daughters by his three wives. Each wife lived in her own house with her children. And still, despite having so many siblings, this woman got a good education. She had a good job back in Africa, but eventually left for Norway to be with her husband.

She often calls her family back in Africa on the phone, and she follows the news on internet every day. Her sisters also have children in countries all over the world, and she has contact with them, too. This woman tells of having experienced only one encounter with racism during her years in Norway. It was a work colleague, who was responsible for training her when she was new at the job. She treated her badly, and so the informant went to her worker's union and got help to raise a case against the prejudiced woman. She won the case, and has never encountered any problems since then. All her other colleagues are very nice, and some have become actual friends, too.

**“I know my grandfather's names seven generations back.”**

This man came from a small village. His family was poor, and he quit school early. His father died when he was very small, and his older brother wanted him to continue in school – a good diploma could be sold. However, the younger boy felt that both could the family not spare the

money that school would cost, but if the diploma was to be sold, it would also have been a lot of work for nothing. So he quit school after only a few years, and stayed home and worked instead. Eventually he travelled around in several countries in the region, working odd jobs. Finally he lived for a while in the same place, trying to work up enough money for the boat fare to Europe, because he was curious of how people lived elsewhere. He had two jobs for a while, growing some fruit and working for a Scandinavian man.

Once in Norway, he started to study and get an education. Since he did not have much from Africa, he has taken several classes and spent a few years in the Norwegian school system, to learn Norwegian well and to study the subjects he never did in Africa. After that, while working on the side to earn some money for his living, he began to study to learn a profession. He has since then acquired two profession diplomas, and proven the Africans who told him he would never get a job once he was done with his education to be very wrong. They tried to tell him that all his schooling would do him no good. He would not listen to them, and stressed the importance of education and knowledge also in his interview. He has few African friends, he says, most of his friends are Norwegians from different social arenas.

This man also stressed the importance of family. “Someone from my country,” he said, “will always look for their countrymen when arriving in a new country. They are your family in situations of emergency and need, when your own flesh-and-blood family is too far away to reach you with help or consolation.” He knows the names of his grandfathers seven generations back. Plans for how he will organize his life when he some day returns to Africa have already been made. When his older brother dies, he will become head and protector of his family, with all the responsibilities that position entails, and so his plans are already in progress. Building of houses and purchasing of farm land is already thought of. He is very family oriented, and believes firmly in the importance of upholding traditions also.

**“I noticed that I thought differently of things when I went back to visit.”**

This man has lived in Norway for 24 years. He grew up in a small village, where his father was a rather powerful man – a *griot*. A griot is an African bard; someone who will sing the historic events of the tribe, functions as master of ceremony, and who also functions as a social critic. If they sing of someone who is not doing well for the tribe, it is a powerful instrument for bringing shame to this person and often makes them change their ways. Thus,

the informant and his brothers grew up with musicality and became musicians themselves, although not griots.

He is a Norwegian citizen, although he says that his passport is merely a piece of paper. It is not a deciding factor for his identity, and deep down there will always be something African in him. However, he sees himself as something in between Norwegian and African. He knows that he has acquired Norwegian attitudes and ways of thinking, for instance the Norwegian expectations to standards, punctuality and dependability. An example he gave of this is how he reacted when he tried to go to the bank in Africa to withdraw some money from his account there, and how frustrated he got with the people and the systems there.

He also said that the expression “African time” really did not sit well with him, as he felt placed in a box where people had most prejudiced and preconceived ideas of how Africans are – they are always late for appointments, and thus not particularly trustworthy and dependable. He makes a point of always being on time for his appointments, he keeps his promises, and his papers are always in order. Because of this, his Norwegian friends do not think he is a typical African. He is a musician, and that is how he came to Norway the first time. His friends are mostly Norwegians he has met through his work, and even some of the parents from the time when his children were in primary school. It is as a musician he has made his career here in Norway, and because of his outer appearance as an African he has some times been addressed in English. He is rather tired of the question “where are you really from?”, but he understands why people ask. Had he seen a Norwegian in Africa, he would have asked the same question.

He also mentioned how he has changed in terms of speaking his mind if he disagrees with something or thinks someone is acting badly. Had he still lived in Africa he would have had to be nice to everyone. This is because you never know when you might end up in a situation where you depend on them for help. If you have ever been rude to them, you can probably not expect them to want to help you. He could never move back to live in Africa again, he said. Africans are too dishonest, unreliable, and things happen much too slowly and in dishonest ways. When other Africans speak of moving back to Africa, for instance when they are retired, he says that he tells them to their face that they are being unrealistic. It would never work, he claims, because they have become too accustomed to how things work and are done

in Norway, and they would soon enough have to learn the hard way how much they have changed since moving to Norway.

**“I think a bit differently now, but I would like to move back when I am old.”**

This informant is one of those Africans who dream of moving back to Africa when they retire from work in Norway. In her home country she came from a large city, where she got 14 years of school before she became pregnant and continuing school became very difficult. She comes from a large family with many siblings, her father had 5 wives altogether, 4 at the time. An elder sibling raised her even more than her mother – as there were so many children to take care of the age difference is rather high. At least once a week she has telephone contact with both her mother and her elder sibling who raised her, and she also has other siblings and nephews and nieces who live both in Europe and in USA. She has training both as a housekeeper, as a baker and as a hotel maid from Africa, and worked for some years in the capital of her country. She eventually went to visit a sister living in Norway, and there she met the man she later married – also an African. He is from a different country than her, but they have an African language in common. She went back to Africa then, and he came to visit her. She had worked a little while in Norway, braiding hair African style, and for that money she managed to start up a little business back in Africa. A few years later she married, and moved to Norway. Eventually, her child also came to Norway.

Since coming to Norway she has got a Norwegian citizenship. Nevertheless, she calls herself Norwegian on paper and African at heart. Culture and tradition is in her head, she said, although she respects Norwegian culture and traditions. Her friends are both Africans and Norwegians – Norwegians from work, and Africans from several social arenas. She is a practising Muslim, but the closest mosque is rather far away from where she lives, so she does not have the opportunity to go there very often. After arriving in Norway to settle here with her husband, she has taken several courses to educate herself, and has achieved a diploma for a profession, which is her current occupation.

Having travelled back to Africa twice since moving to Norway, she noticed that she has begun to think differently and acquired some Norwegian attitudes towards certain things. For instance she mentioned how she reacted to the common drinking cup, feeling that it was rather unsanitary and unpleasant. However, she drank from it and said nothing, as she did not

wish to hurt anyone's feelings. Her dream is to one day move back, when she is retired in Norway. It is much cheaper to live there, and she would be close to her family, so she could for instance build two houses, and then live in one and rent out the other.

**“No one can deny me my Norwegianness. If they do, it is their problem and not mine.”**

The informant has lived several years in another European country before coming to Norway because he married a Norwegian woman. He grew up with a father who was employed by the state, so they moved many times during his childhood. He is used to being an ethnic minority, he said, as he is from an ethnic minority group in Senegal. He would speak his mother tongue at home, the local language in the street with the other kids, and French at school. He finished high school, and did a year at university, before he received a scholarship that enabled him to study abroad. He chose a European country – not France – and went there to study for four years. In another European country, where he had a very short stay, he met a Norwegian woman who he later married. He also made friends which he is still in contact with today. There is regular contact between him and his family in Senegal, and some school friends from Africa. He also has friends in France, and is in France at least 3 times a year. The contact with family and friends consists of both telephone calls and of e-mails. Since coming to Norway he has taken a bachelor's degree at college, and most of his actual friends, not counting acquaintances, are Norwegians. He has met them through his studies, at work, out on the town, and of course there is also his family-in-law.

When asked about language and identity, he said that concerning French, it was not all that important to him. It is not his mother tongue, but perhaps his third language. Because of this it was not natural for him to do the interview in French, as he spoke well enough Norwegian to express himself without any problems and I was Norwegian. About his Norwegian citizenship and his identity he said this; “I am Senegalese, African, and a Norwegian citizen. My Norwegianness consists of my partaking in Norwegian values, and also through my family here.” He thought that it was the same way with the first European country he lived in, partaking in the values of the country. The Senegalese lies in the foundation of it all, supporting it. As a good Senegalese one is a law-abiding, good citizen wherever one lives in the world.

The question was posed whether there were any particular arenas he felt that he could be himself, or where he felt he could not be himself. The reply was interesting. He said that there are always situations where one cannot be oneself, where one has to remain professional and hide ones thoughts. However, he felt that he was himself most of the time. Then he said; “But no one can deny me my Norwegianness, if they do it is their problem and not mine!” He has been back to Senegal about once a year, and he says that he has become accustomed to a few new values which he would like to count down there too. It does take two to three weeks to become Senegalese again, he says, but then it is all right. In the long term he would like to move back, to be able to contribute in the development of the country in a good direction. He does not think it will be a problem to move back, although there certainly will be a period of readjustment. New ways of thinking that one has acquired while living in other places in the world can contribute positively, he says.

**“I do not want to be a pensioner in Norway. I think it would be cold and lonely.”**

This woman’s parents were work immigrants from Guinea to Mali, where she then grew up. As her parents divorced, she had to leave school during middle school, as her father then stopped paying for her schooling. Her mother and siblings have since moved back to Guinea. As she had had to leave school, she auditioned for a musical company, and got a position there. As they travelled on tours, they travelled throughout West Africa, and also around Europe. On what was to become her final tour, one of the other members, someone in a position of authority, attempted to take advantage of her, as he had done with the other girls. When she refused, her passport was taken, leaving her stuck in Europe. Fortunately, another member of the group had family there, so she could stay with them while waiting for new papers. Once she got the papers, she could join her boyfriend, who by then had moved to Norway. She has some friends from the group that she still keeps in touch with, but they are now spread all over the globe. They speak almost once a week on the telephone, and also they e-mail with each other. Eventually, after coming to Norway she got residency permission, and has since been given Norwegian citizenship.

For many years, she had her own little African business here in Norway, before going back to school to study for a profession. Since then, she has been working according to her profession. Her friends are mainly Africans, although she works mostly with Norwegians and has made friends with some of her Norwegian colleagues. She meets her African friends in

church, and most of them are English speaking. The church is international, so everything is done in English. They do, however, have translation into Norwegian, so that those church goers who are not originally English speaking also are able to follow what is being said and sung.

About her Norwegian passport she said the same thing as the other informants said. It is merely a piece of paper, and it does nothing with her identity. She is an African from the bottom of her heart, and that is what defines her, not her passport. When she visits her mother and siblings in Guinea, she is “finally home”. There they are together all the time, and there are always people around. She is often in touch with her family; they speak at least once a week on the telephone. She has been back to Mali once, and has travelled to Guinea several times since moving to Norway. A couple of family members have visited her here in Norway, and they like it and think it is a nice place. They do think she has changed much, but they accept it. She is the eldest sibling, and so they still respect her. They are also quite close as a family. She says that she thinks in quite a Norwegian way, she speaks her mind much more than she would otherwise have done. Still, she does not wish to become a pensioner in Norway. It would be cold and lonely, she thinks. Not like in Africa, where her family would take care of her, and she would have her family and friends all around her the whole time. “In Africa,” she said, “it is nice and warm, and there is your family to take care of you when you get old and people all around you every day. I could sit on a chair outside my house and talk to my sisters and my relatives the whole day.”

**“Culturally speaking, everything makes me an African.”**

Coming from a big city in his African country, this man already had a degree when he came to Norway. Initially, when receiving a scholarship to study abroad, he had planned to study in France, like so many people from the ex-colonies do. However, by coincidence, a relative who was already in Norway persuaded him to come here instead. He travelled a few times between Norway and France as a tourist, as he was uncertain of what he wanted to do. Finally, he settled upon Norway. Once he was settled here, he began to re-do quite a bit of his schooling, everything since the high school level, as “translating” what he already had from Africa would have been quite difficult to do. The French school system, which is what the ex-

colonies in Africa are following, is very different from the Norwegian system of education. At the same time, he got to learn Norwegian very well.

He has many friends in France that he has known since his student days in Africa. In addition to having many friends in France, his friends are spread throughout the rest of Europe, and some of his very best friends live overseas. They speak on the telephone at least once a week. His wife is Norwegian, and he has lived in Norway for more than two decades now. His circle of friends here in Norway is very varied. There are Norwegians, Frenchmen and Africans – mostly French speaking Africans but not only. He has found friends at work, from the group of parents in his children’s classes, from playing sports, and even from being out on the town. Norwegian women, he said, seemed to him to be more open to getting to know foreigners than Norwegian men. It often depends on whether they have travelled much.

For over a decade now he has had a Norwegian passport. Like the others, he too calls it a piece of paper. He is a Burkinabé, he said, he will never become a Norwegian. It is very difficult to become a Norwegian, he said, although he of course is very influenced by Norwegian culture and ways of thinking. Thus, he said, “everything I do makes me a Burkinabé.” He has been back to Burkina Faso to visit his family every two years since moving to Norway.

### **Variation and individual cases:**

As is clearly apparent from these stories, this is a very individual number of cases, each story with its own reasons for leaving, reasons for coming and reasons for staying. There are refugees that are not war refugees and otherwise people who have ended up in Norway by chance, or because of a relative or a spouse. Others again have come for to a short term engagement linked to their resources as musicians of a kind Norway cannot originally supply, and have ended up staying here. Yet others have been head hunted for particular jobs because of their high level of education within that particular line of business. As for situation in life here in Norway, they were all doing well for themselves. There were, naturally, internal variations as far as wealth and easiness of livelihood went, but all in all these are resourceful people who do not need to depend on the Norwegian state for aid. This was also something that was important for them and which they stressed during the interviews; they are law abiding citizens who respect Norwegian culture and traditions, and they do not wish to be a



burden on society. This was in fact perceived by most as an important part of their sense of self and their pride in their accomplishments. Many of them were quite highly educated, and had clearly done some reflection around the questions of identity and belonging even before the interviews. This topic and their reflections are explored further in the following chapter.

# Identity and the red line

## Chapter introduction:

This chapter will concern identity in several different directions and discussions. Theories on the subject will be laid out, with the main theoreticians being Fredrik Barth, Erving Goffman, Richard Jenkins, Floya Anthias and finally Anthony Cohen. They share much of the same way of thinking about identity and how it is shaped. The influence of others in the process of creating identity is a major theme, and this dichotomy was first written about in Fredrik Barth's renowned theory on ethnic groups and boundaries. Fredrik Barth's approach to the question of identity formation in ethnic groups is the vantage point of this chapter. Then the thesis continues by looking at Richard Jenkins' work on social identity, from his book with the same name. He discusses the works of both Barth and Goffman, and applies Barth's outlook on ethnic identity to other kinds of identity also. Goffman's work on impression management, its links to identity and the formation and negotiation of identity are then treated. Finally, Rogers Brubaker's book, *Ethnicity Without Groups* will be utilised for analysing the use of the term identity. Also the usefulness of his discussions of the identity term to this thesis in particular will be looked at. The way the term identity has been used in different settings is an important theme in Brubaker's book. Both the way that popular culture has embraced it, and also the scholars' debate about whether the public's frequent use of the word has removed all its meaning, are amply analysed by Brubaker.

## Ethnic groups and boundaries:

In 1969, Fredrik Barth published his theory on ethnic groups and boundaries, in the book *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The Social Organisation of Culture Difference*, of which he was the editor. In the introduction to the book, he laid out his theory, and this brought about great shift in how anthropologists looked at and analysed ethnicity. Previously, the mainstream theory had been that ethnicity and ethnic group membership had been held together by the isolation of the group's internal characteristics from those of neighbouring groups. This, Barth claimed, depended on the group isolating itself from its neighbours, and made the survival of the group's characteristics dependent on non-interaction with neighbours.

In reality, this is not how the world works. Interdependence and interaction between groups has always taken place, and in Barth's (then) new way of thinking, this is not a threat to the survival of an ethnic group. Quite to the contrary, Barth claimed, interaction with other groups reinforces the group identity. This is because it helps the group members to identify their own characteristics by comparison with others, in also identifying what they are not. This point of view was what made Barth state that the interesting area of study in ethnicity was the boundaries of the ethnic groups, where the interaction and negotiations of belonging took place, and not the cultural stuff that these boundaries contained. He stated that in fact, it is at the boundaries of the group that the group identity is created and maintained; because it is there it has to be compared and negotiated in meeting with other criteria and identifying factors. The making of the self is happening in the process of the meeting with the other and thereof the determining of that which it is not.

“If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion. ... The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement. ... On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest.” (Barth, 1969:15)

### **Fredrik Barth on agents of change in ethnic groups:**

Barth speaks of “agents of change”, in cultural contact between different ethnic groups. He says that:

In their pursuit of participation in wider social systems to obtain new forms of value they can choose between the following basic strategies: (i) they may attempt to pass and become incorporated in the pre-established industrial society and cultural group; (ii) they may accept a 'minority' status, accommodate to and seek to reduce their minority disabilities by encapsulating all cultural differentiae in sectors of non-articulation, while participating in the larger system of the industrialized group in the other sectors of activity; (iii) they may choose to emphasize ethnic identity, using it to develop new positions and patterns to organize activities in those sectors formerly not found in their society, or inadequately developed for the new purposes. (Barth et al 1969:33.)

Basically, Barth is saying that there are three different approaches immigrants can apply when arriving in a new place with a different social system. They can either try to become just like the local people, leaving behind them their own characteristics linking them to a different place and culture. The second approach is to emphasize the similarities they share with the locals, and let the differences remain invisible, at least while out in public. Thirdly, they can be very ostensible and reify and enforce their difference and allow it to be the identifying factor that everybody else will see first when meeting them, creating their very own niche in the new society they have come to. The musicians are perhaps the clearest example of the latter case, at least in the situations where they come to Norway to earn their livelihood as West African musicians. They certainly, as immigrants, must face countless situations where they negotiate their identities and show different sides in different situations, depending on where they are and who the other participants are. All the different approaches mentioned in the quotation above can be used by the same individual in different situations, depending on what is the most useful at the time and in that particular setting.

One informant made some very interesting remarks about how he was in a constant negotiation situation, even in his own home. He was married to a Norwegian woman. She spoke Norwegian to their children, and he spoke French to them. They were very conscious and consistent about this. When he sometimes spoke Norwegian to his 8 year old son, because they had visitors or something like that, his son would simply refuse to understand him, (not because his father did not speak the language well, for his Norwegian was good) and quite harshly reply (in French) "Papa, tu n'est pas Norvégien! Tu es Africain, parle français!!" ("Dad, you're not Norwegian! You're African, speak French!!") The man of course laughed as

he told me this story, but at the same time reflected upon the irony of how “the others” putting him in a certain category even were represented there in his own home, through the stern judgement of his little son.

Marianne Gullestad criticizes Barth for focusing too much on the self-ascription of identity, thereby not seeing how much power lies at the hands of those ascribing identities onto others. (Gullestad 2002:46) The ascription could be “the outside’s” ideas of what the characteristics of the group are; if there is a discrepancy with the group’s own perception of them, this could potentially be limiting for the group. Certainly if the ascribing side is also the lawmakers this could have very specific consequences for the group in its opportunities in the general society. The ascription could also be done by other group members, if there is a discrepancy between the individual and the group perception of what constitutes the group identity, thus putting in question the individual’s group membership. An example of the importance of the external ascription of identity will be given a little further into the chapter, when we return to the issue with Richard Jenkins.

### **The diaspora – homogeneous or heterogeneous? Group or not?**

Floya Anthias, in her discussion of “Unitary Categories and Assumption of ‘Community’”, concerning diasporas, says that “The idea of diaspora tends to homogenize the population referred to at the transnational level. ... the diaspora is constituted as much in *difference and division* as it is in *commonality and solidarity*.” (Anthias 1998:564) A priori to fieldwork I suspected that some of the deciding factors in possible discrepancies in group identity could be how long they had been in Norway, whether they had yet got a legal residency, or even Norwegian citizenship, and the reason why they came to Norway. Also, could the level of education have any effect on this, in terms of reflection over the subject in general? – Some of the assumptions were right. Probably the two most deciding factors in terms of the level of conscious self-identification variables and self-reflection around their identity and belonging were how long they had been in Norway. What level of education they had was also an important factor, at least in connection to how abstract the discussion around their identity could be made. Some with less education understood the question of identity more as a question of personality, and had trouble relating to some of the questions posed, as mentioned in the introduction to the thesis. Those with higher education had clearly a more reflected and already thought-through conception of the questions surrounding identity and belonging.

Whether they had citizenship or not did, however, not make much of a difference – at least to the ones who had it. As I will discuss later on in the chapter, they described it as a piece of paper that made it easier to stay in Norway, a practicality. Certainly they were grateful for it; they did not deem it an unimportant thing in general. But when asked whether it was a deciding factor in the issue of their identity, they did not see it as important.

### **Jenkins on Barth's ethnic groups and boundaries:**

Jenkins discusses Fredrik Barth's renowned theory on ethnic groups and boundaries, applying it to other kinds of identity as well. He focuses specifically on group identity, and how the behaviour of the individual to achieve accept and belonging within the group displays itself.

"In belonging to a collectivity, an individual accepts the right of co-members to judge, and seeks to be accepted and judged by Others only in particular ways." (Jenkins 2004:98.)

According to Jenkins, Barth says that the individual will do its best to maintain identifications suitable to the situation, by using tact, sanctions and selective perception, because this is easier than having to make up new, alternative identifications or definitions of situations. (Jenkins 2004:99.)

A group may and usually does consist of different roles, according to the group dynamic. Certain sections of the group may have expectations of or make claims upon other parts of the group; depending on the roles they ascribe themselves and each other. When a part of the group or some individuals in the group refuse to comply with expectations or demands from other parts of the group, it can cause tensions to arise internally. When a discrepancy occurs internally, a sense of unity may become difficult to maintain, especially if the problematic issues concern topics that are perceived to be an important matter to the group or to parts of the group. The group may dissolve or at least become more dispersed.

An example of this can be seen in the story of the group of West Africans who cannot come to agreement and form one single union with the people from that specific country. It will be told in more detail in a later chapter, but the brief version is as follows: The expectations and demands from the "newer" immigrants from that country, brought with them from "back home" where such demands could be said to be justified, or at least common practice, about the help they feel that the "older" immigrants from the same country are obliged and supposed

to give them, collide with the latter's perceptions of this. This creates a point of conflict, and causes a lack of a union which could otherwise have been a socially unifying thing for them. Also the example of a man from Mali is pertinent here. He made some very interesting reflections on how his relationships with people in Mali when he was back there to visit were very different from how he relates to friends in Norway; for instance what they would do together, and what their claims were on him. His friends in Mali would come over, to watch TV in his house with the sound turned up very high, and help themselves to things in his refrigerator without asking. When he asked if they should perhaps turn off the TV and just talk instead, he would be met with a blank stare.

“Do what??” “Talk.” “About what??”

And he would realise that his interaction pattern had become very Norwegian, and remind himself that this was the way friends socialized when they came to each other's house. Things which would be considered very rude behaviour in Norway were completely acceptable in Mali. He had to remind himself where he was, and had to switch between 'Mali mode' and 'Norway mode', as he put it himself.

### **Impression management – Erving Goffman:**

According to Erving Goffman, all people attempt to control how others perceive them. What “sides” of one's personality one shows varies a great deal from situation to situation. People usually speak and act differently on a job interview than they do at a game of tennis with a friend, or in their own living room. Some of the limitations (or the lack thereof) on their own behaviour depends on what they deem appropriate for the situation, others depend upon what impression of they wish to give of themselves to the others who are involved in the situation. “When a person comes together with others, he will usually act deliberately to give the others the impression that is in his interest to convey.” (Goffman 1992:13, this is my translation from the article in Norwegian.) This is the phenomenon which Goffman calls “impression management”.

Goffman's theory could be seen as somewhat “square” at times – that people should have such control and such a good survey of all social situations is not very likely. Still, he has a good foundation how people often attempt to make a certain specific impression on others. He

can perhaps be rather too adamant in how much oversight or control he apparently believes people have in social situations. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of how we wish to appear this way or that, depending on our audience, is very much to the point. How others then wish to receive or accept our portrayal of ourselves, whether they accept it or not, is in the end not within our control, and here we enter into the internal-external dialectic which Richard Jenkins writes about.

“The art of seeing through a person’s endeavours for well calculated unintentionality seems to be better developed than our own ability to juggle with our own behaviour, so anyway...., it is likely that the spectator has the advantage over the actor, and that the initial asymmetry in the communication process is preserved.” “Goffman 1992:17, my translation from the Norwegian article.”)

### **Jenkins and Goffman on social identity:**

Richard Jenkins, in his book *Social Identity* (2004), says that “identifications are to be found and negotiated at their boundaries, in the encounter between the internal and external.” (Jenkins 2004:22) Erving Goffman (1992), as explained previously, says some of the same things as Jenkins; that both how we see ourselves, but also other people’s views of us influence our identity. Others may have a great influence on how our identity is allowed to play itself out. Much depends on whether they “accept” the impression of ourselves that we wish to give them; the identity we wish to claim in a given situation. If they disagree with that impression, and ascribe us another identity, this will have great consequences for how our identity may play itself out, in that situation and with the people it involves.

“Others don’t just perceive our identity, they actively constitute it. And they do so not only in terms of naming or categorizing, but in terms of how they respond to or treat us. In the dialectic of individual identification the external moment can be enormously consequential.” (Jenkins 2004:73.)

There are a couple of very specific examples of this among the stories of the informants. The first example is of a man who came from a very powerful position in his home country, but then eventually came to disagreement with the president. He and his family had to flee to a neighbouring country, and their home and all their belongings were confiscated by the



president. After several attempts by the president's men to force them back to their country, their temporary host country sent a SOS call out to the rest of the world, because it was too dangerous for them to stay so close to home. Norway responded, and they moved.

At first they lived in a town quite far from their current residence, and that is when the incident in question occurred. Some of his children were threatened with a weapon at school, and told their parents. The school refused to believe that anything had happened, and the principal denied it also. Not until the police got involved did the principal admit it was true. After this, however, the principal and the children's father spoke, found understanding for each other's situations, and eventually became good friends.

The man got involved in an anti-racism organisation in that town, and is still involved in that organisation, although they now live in another of Norway. His point was, in this story, that the principal judged him and his children before she knew them, and therefore did not believe or wish to admit the truth there was to their side of the story. This was the same year as a young boy in Oslo, who was a mulatto with a Norwegian mother, was brutally knifed down and killed by other teenagers in his neighbourhood. Tensions across the country were, understandably, high when it came to these kinds of situations.

Another example is of a man who, when asked about his identity and where he felt that he belonged, gave a very interesting reply. He said that he had a Norwegian passport, and he could very well have felt Norwegian. The thing holding him back in this was that he knew that Norwegians would always see him and see his African skin colour, and because of this would never fully accept him as a Norwegian. Not completely. And this was why he would never feel quite Norwegian – he said he knew how others saw him. Here we have a very clear example of Jenkins' theories on "nominal" and "virtual" identity, which will be explained further in the following paragraphs. Shortly, this has to do with whether you yourself decide that such is your identity, or if someone else decides for you, in a given situation, what it is. This is also what constitutes the difference between categorisation and group membership. Thus, the man felt that no matter what his own virtual perception of his identity as Norwegian was, others would always nominally categorise him as non- Norwegian, due to his skin colour.

### **Nominal versus virtual identity:**

Jenkins uses the terms "nominal" and "virtual" identity. Nominal identity is the identity you are ascribed by others, and virtual identity is what/who you yourself think you are. He also gives other names to these kinds of identities; group and category. A category you are put into by others, so it is your nominal identity. Group membership is what you chose for yourself, so it is a voluntary belonging, and your virtual identity. Put into practice this means that the man, who thought that his group membership or virtual identity could have been Norwegian, felt categorized as or given the nominal identity as a non-Norwegian by ethnic Norwegians.

"Individuals will self-categorise themselves differently according to the contexts in which they find themselves, and the contingencies with which they are faced." (Jenkins 2004:90.) Again we see traces of Goffman; different sides of the individual will be important or more visible depending on the context in which it finds itself. Jenkins claims that identification is based on both differences but also on similarities.

"Logically, *inclusion* entails *exclusion*, if only by default. To define the criteria for membership of any set of objects is, at the same time, also to create a boundary, everything beyond which does not belong. (...) In the human world, similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view: our similarity is their difference and *vice versa*." (Jenkins 2004:79.)

What this means is that what a group has in common is not only what brings them together as a group, but also that which then separates them from others. Defining "us" entails, at least to a certain extent, to define "them". We define ourselves, who we are, by who we are not. Group identification is, in other words, also a categorization of the others, as the creation of a group necessarily also excludes someone. This is a direct reference to Fredrik Barth's theory on ethnic groups and boundaries, which has been treated previously in this chapter.

The people interviewed for this thesis usually look different, initially speak a different language (or several), and come from quite or even very different cultural backgrounds than the one they arrive to in their new country. The need to have a sense of self, of identity, in a very new place where one is very different to everyone else, feeds to the need of finding someone more similar to you. That way you can feel belonging; find yourself a group to join where you are like the others.

The things that - a priori to field work – seemed to be potential boundary defining group identifiers among these people were language (French), a West African origin, and immigrant status in Norway. The findings a posteriori to the field work were not completely consistent with the expectations. National identity was important, but as a larger group identity there was also the African identity. This would also contribute to the sense of belonging to the West African French speaking diaspora. The sense of belonging to a larger fellowship – the African identity, so to speak – is already there and so the thought of belonging to a largely spread, greater group is nothing new to them. The fact that very many of the wealthier families in the former West African French colonies send their children to study in France also contributes to the commonality of having relatives and contacts in far-away places. It shows again the mobility of the mind, as well, as the idea of travelling that far from home in order to have a good education is nothing out of the ordinary. On the contrary, it is a sign of wealth and high class to be able to send your children away to European schools for higher education. In fact, one of the informants was a student in Norway, come to get a higher education abroad. He had studied in France one semester, but felt it was not for him. Thus he applied for a scholarship to come to Norway for his degree, and he managed to get it. He came from the capital in his country, and his family background was in the higher social classes, perhaps upper middle class.

### **Passports, identity and the sense of belonging:**

As for actual citizenship, several of the informants had Norwegian passports, and all had permanent residency permission in Norway. When asked about the passport and whether which passport they had had any influence on where they felt they belonged, or on their identity, very interesting replies were given. As written in the previous chapter, all those who had Norwegian passports claimed that as far as identity was concerned the passport was insignificant. It was a piece of paper which simplified life in Norway. The one who had lived in Norway the longest among the informants did not have a Norwegian passport. He said “no, I could never be anything other than what I am, I am a patriot. I feel blessed to have Norway as a working place and as a partial home, but my country in Africa is Home.” To him, it was a matter of principal.

In terms of language as a group identifier and its importance as a common identity factor, there turned out to be discrepancies. West Africa is very diverse, also where language is

concerned. All the informants stated that their maternal language was an African tribal language. As a second and even in some cases third language, they often also spoke the African languages of neighbouring tribes. Then, for most, did French come in; never as a first language, more often as the second, third or even fourth language. Some still chose to speak French for the interview, either because it was still easier than Norwegian, or to test the aptitude of the interviewer. Some, however, chose Norwegian, because they spoke it better than French, as French had never been a very important language to them. This was mostly the case for those who had not studied much before coming to Norway. Those who had already been some or many years in school previous to ending up in Norway had naturally learned French for many years. The school systems in the previous French colonies are all following the French school system, and so the children have to learn French from their very first day in school. The teaching of national languages in addition to French in the schools varies, in some of the countries, like Côte d'Ivoire, no other languages beside French are taught in the schools.

### **Anthony Cohen and symbols of identity and group membership:**

Anthony Cohen, in “Culture As Identity: An Anthropologist’s View”, defines culture as

“...the means by which we make meaning, and with which we make the world meaningful to ourselves, and ourselves meaningful to the world. Its vehicle is the symbol. Symbols are quite simply carriers of meaning. ... They are pragmatic devices which are invested with meaning through social processes of one kind or another. ... potent resources in the arenas of politics and identity.” (Cohen 1993:196)

Symbols of identity and belonging could, for the group concerned here, consist of such things as African clothing for their social gatherings, their common language(s), common country or area of origin. They dressed quite or very European, and as there were no major gatherings or any larger social group as such, as expected to find a priori to field work, what symbols could there then be of a group identity? There were not many, at least not the kind of outwardly very obvious symbols one might expect. Religion, for instance, was hardly a factor in the cases of these specific informants, except mainly as a social field, for a few cases. There was only one who seemed to feel that this was something important for him to describe and explain to me. His religion was a kind of Buddhism, which is very untypical for an African. However, this

man had travelled much, and the kind of Buddhism he belonged to is a rather marginal form of Buddhism, a kind of philosophy of life more than an actual religion. A few of the informants were Christians, mainly attending international churches where English is spoken. Others claimed to not be active in any religious area, and one woman said she was a practising Muslim. Her access to a mosque was rather limited, however, so she did not get to as often as she would like to.

For those who are in Norway in the capacity of professional musicians, performing African music and doing classes on the djembe drums and African dancing are powerful ways of acting out, ostensibly showing and even perhaps reifying their identities. The social arena where this takes place, however, does not usually consist of other Africans where they display a common group membership or group identity. This social arena consists of Norwegians, and so the theories of Barth and Jenkins, as discussed previously in this chapter seem very to the point here. It is in the meeting between the two groups, the Norwegians taking the classes and the West Africans teaching the classes, that they negotiate and reaffirm their different identities. The Norwegians see the African identity as foreign, exotic and very different. The Africans, on the other hand, reaffirm and strengthen the African part of their identity in this particular meeting with Norwegians. In this situation they do not approach the Norwegians with the identity factors they usually have in common, because that is not the intent in this specific setting.

In general, the level of education was relatively high; most of not all had higher education, although it varied whether they had done their studies before or after coming to Norway. Some had done both, starting at university in Africa and then studied more after arrival. One could say, at least of the people interviewed that they are resourceful people, who do not in general come to Norway out of a need, but for other reasons, as is made evident in the previous chapter.

### **Rogers Brubaker's Ethnicity Without Groups:**

As explained in the introductory paragraph of the chapter, Brubaker's book discusses the different uses of the term identity, both the laymen's popularized use and the scholarly debates. Brubaker also analyses the implications the various uses of the term, especially in the context of talking about ethnicity and ethnic groups. A man example of his is how the media

and the different actors involved, for instance politicians or social scientists even, in these discussions and some times conflicts some times use the term to describe conflicts which are not, initially, ethnic conflicts but conflicts between minor groupings. This way they contribute to promoting the arguments of the protagonists of the conflicts. They might have different interests than the general public initially, but then eventually manage to arouse the popular opinion to their advantage, through invoking sentiments of identity, belonging and loyalty through ethnicity.

Brubaker calls ethnicity a “perspective on the world”, instead of viewing it as a thing in itself. (Brubaker 2004:17) If we see ethnicity as a cognitive perspective, he says, it will help us understand how it influences people as they look at, think of and interpret the world around them through the perspective specific to them and/or their group, through their ethnicity. Looking at this from cognitive perspectives, he claims, can help in the process of understanding how nationhood, ethnicity and race are constructed.

“They can help specify how – and when – people identify themselves, perceive others, experience the world, and interpret their predicaments in racial, ethnic, or national rather than other terms. They can help specify how “groupness” can “crystallize” in some situations while remaining latent and merely potential in others. And they can help link macro level outcomes with micro level processes (Hirschfeld 1996).” (Brubaker:2004 18)

Brubaker goes even further than Richard Jenkins, and writes about the difference between group and groupness. He calls groupness an event, distinguishing it from the usual understanding of a group. Brubaker describes it as a phenomenon where the sense of group belonging and commonality occurs only once or just occasionally, triggered by some event or occasion, between people who do not usually see themselves as a group. A specific example of this came from an informant in Oslo during an interview. It was from when Senegal was doing well in the world championship in football. The informant recalled how a lot of Africans came to the Centre for African Culture to view the football matches together on the centre’s big screen TV, and how suddenly “everyone” was Senegalese. A group is defined by Brubaker much as it is by Jenkins, as explained earlier in this chapter, and he also distinguishes between categories and groups *and* groupness.

“If by “group” we mean a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerted action, or even if we adopt a less exigent understanding of “group”, it should be clear that a category is not a group. It is at best a potential for group-formation or “groupness”.” (Brubaker 2004:12)

Brubaker also writes about how the term category can help in analysing and understanding ethnicity without the groups. This is a very pertinent point to this thesis. The people concerned are not necessarily a group, but a category defined by some pre-determined “pegs” by the anthropologist. French speaking West Africans from certain countries that have lived in Norway for more than three years was the category. In certain situations or if asked certain questions the informants might have defined themselves as a group in the way meant in Jenkins’ and Brubaker’s analyses, although using Brubaker’s terminology that should perhaps be viewed as situational groupness, such as the example given above, with Senegal doing well in the football World Championship.

In his analysis of the term identity and its various uses, Brubaker divides it into two main categories; a soft and a hard use or understanding of the term. Both categories have their virtues and their flaws. In the last years, anthropology and scholars in general, as well as the popular opinion, has seen identity more and more as something fluid, shifting, situationally determined. An example of this is given earlier in this chapter, with Erving Goffman’s front stage – back stage views on identity and shifting roles as parts of the identity whole. The hard understanding of the term is the view of identity as something fixed, set and whole, not so much divided into various parts that are more and less prominent at different times, as the more fluid version is.

It is perhaps the more fluid, softer version of identity which has been applied in this thesis, as identity has been portrayed as something multisided, whose various components come out in different circumstances. The fixed hard version of identity is also important, for as Brubaker says, if there is nothing fixed whatsoever, the concept will become so soft that there is no force left in it as an applicable term at all, as it becomes so soft that it can be moulded to fit absolutely any meaning at all. Such a concept is not usable in analysis. However, the fluidity needs to be there, also. Even the informants themselves saw their identities as changing, as

was shown in the previous chapter. However, they all stated that deep down inside, there was something never-changing; their African identity lay at the bottom of it all. So we cannot completely dismiss neither the soft understanding nor the hard understanding of the term, as they both have their uses.



## Migration, diaspora and the journeys

In this chapter, theories on migration will be laid out, and used in an attempt to understand and mapping the different situations and histories of the informants concerned in this thesis through more case examples from the field work interviews. For an additional debate, expanding on the topic of diaspora, an article with a discussion of the term diaspora and its use will be looked at. Comparison to other immigrant studies will be done, which will help to further outline the group characteristics of the people interviewed for the thesis.

The main means for the theorization part of the chapter will be the book of Norwegian anthropologist Øivind Fuglerud about understanding migration, “Migrasjonsforståelse. Flytteprosesser, rasisme og globalisering”, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2007. Fuglerud maps out the history of migration theory, discussing the various theories as he explains them. He then goes on to discuss current themes from the topic, such as racism, ethnicity, and slavery as a historical aspect. Fuglerud also looks at fugitives in a changing world, and at migration and globalisation. His analyses of theories and themes will be used as a guideline and as reference points throughout the theoretical discussion in this chapter. The book is in Norwegian, so quotes in English are my own translations.

To broaden the scope of the themes in this chapter, a discussion on diaspora through Floya Anthias’ article “Evaluating ‘Diaspora’: Beyond Ethnicity?” will be done. Anthias sees the term ‘diaspora’ as a different way of looking at transnational migration and ethnic relations. The article reviews how the terms diaspora, ethnicity and race have shaped the scholarly debates on migration and ethnic relations, and how thinking in terms of the ‘diaspora’ may be a fruitful alternative to the latter two concepts.

The theorisation by Fuglerud will come first, laying the brickwork for a further analysis. Secondly, for an expansion on the subject, the article by Anthias on the term diaspora and its use will be discussed. Thirdly, as an important part of the analysis, a contextualisation of this type of migration will be done through comparison.

A very different kind of migration from French speaking Central Africa is described by Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga’s book “Congo – Paris. Transnational traders on

the margins of the law.” Congolese tradesmen travel back and forth between Congo and Paris, getting rich through trade and showing it off by behaving as real yuppies with gold and gadgets. Their elaborate trade networks stretch from Paris to Congo, and they easily juggle both European/Western and African ways of thinking and acting, two cultures simply being more at opposite ends of the role spectres of their identity, than being separate identities or components.

### **Theories reviewed by Øivind Fuglerud about understanding migration:**

In the very first chapter of his book, Fuglerud begins by explaining the history of migration theory. The two first and perhaps most important, historically at least, are E. S. Lee, a statistician who in 1966 supported and embellished upon the theories of the demographer E.G. Ravenstein from 1885 concerning “the laws of migration”. Ravenstein is seen as the “founding father” of migration theory, as he presented his article already in 1885, in London. It was an analysis on the results of a British population count from 1881.

Although Ravenstein pointed out that the “laws” of migration were not something constant like the laws of nature in science. This was the first attempt on a scientific approach to a model on the sum of an individual’s choices. (Fuglerud 2007:20). Lee the statistician, 81 years later, came back to these same points, and he has four things he sees as major regulatory factors in migration:

“Place of origin

Place that is migrated to

Hindrances for movement

Personal factors.” (Fuglerud 2007:20)

Fuglerud shortly explains Lee’s main hypotheses, and then moves on to explain later theoretical approaches to migration. Lee’s hypotheses, as explained by Fuglerud, are the following: (loosely quoted, translated by me)

- The extent of migration within a given territory varies with the degree of inequality between the areas that are part of said territory.
- The extent of migration varies with the degree of inequality between people.
- The extent of migration varies with the degree of economic development within an area.

- Any larger flow of migration entails the development of a flow of migration in the opposite direction.
- The efficiency of a migration flow (the ratio between the flow and the reverse flow) varies with the economic conditions: high in good times and low in bad times.
- Migration is a selective process. (Fuglerud 2007:20-21)

### **Neoclassical economic models:**

Next, Fuglerud reviews what he calls “neoclassical economic models”. These have many common aspects with Ravenstein and Lee’s theories. The idea is that to understand migration one has to look at the factors that are deciding when someone is trying to determine whether to move or not. The neoclassical approaches brought about the concept of “push-pull” theories, and the whole process is seen from a very economical and individualistic point of view. The push-pull factors for these particular informants will be discussed further later on in the thesis.

### **New migration economy:**

However, yet another model aiming to understand migration criticizes the neoclassical theories. The main issue is that it is the individual choices which are the focus. The “new migration economy” has the vantage point that decisions to migrate often are taken within a larger group, such as for example the extended family. An extended family has an advantage that the individual or the core family does not. It can spread out its resources, such as labour force. Someone can move either to a larger city or even to a country far away, in order to make money or gain knowledge which will benefit those who stay behind and still participate in the local economy, some way or another. Quoting Fuglerud who is quoting others:

“Put in other terms, the new migration economy argues that a household divides its work force not just to improve its situation in absolute terms, but also to increase its relative income compared to others. Thus they can diminish their own poverty seen in relation to the other households they compare themselves with (Stark 1984; Stark, Taylor and Yitzhaki 1986; Stark and Yitzhaki 1988).” (Fuglerud 2007:24)

After these brief summaries of different theories on migration, Fuglerud then proceeds to mention three major points of criticism against them. First, he says, the economic models

focusing on the individual decisions to move, say very little about how the person's actual experience of the whole moving process and how it affects their quality of life. In this perspective, the move might just be from the village to the city, or it could be from one side of the planet to the other – and the difference in degree of life changes is rather radical. The experience of the moving process and the impact on their sense of self is part of the focus of this thesis. The moves the informants have made are all between continents, not just countries, so the need for a larger perspective is vital for a proper understanding of the whole picture.

Secondly, this lack of distinction between different situations and processes makes for problems when they attempt to explain why some decide to move and others do not. Also the reasoning that is behind the choices of place to migrate to, among those who do move becomes difficult to explain with these previously mentioned theories. Were the push-pull way of reasoning to be taken literally, Fuglerud says, most work migrants in the rich Western countries should be from the poorest countries in the world, and from the poorest parts of these countries. And this is not the case. Work migration does not seem to always follow patterns that can be explained by economic models. (Fuglerud 2007:25) As the informants in this thesis are mostly work migrants, these economic models would fail to shed much light upon the actual situation and the individuals concerned.

Thirdly, Fuglerud claims that the statement made by Lee, where he says that his theory does not distinguish between internal and international movement, shows that this is “a theoretical tradition which has little contact with reality”. (Fuglerud 2007:25) Nowadays it is precisely the degree of control the modern nation-state practices on its boundaries that colours international migration. Migrants will move to where it is possible to gain entrance, rather than choose by where the conditions are the most promising. This is a very important point, and a very precise observation! Fuglerud then goes on to say that “The opportunity to move is a privilege which on a world basis is unevenly distributed, and which is controlled by economic and political interests.” (Fuglerud 2007:26) The consequence of which is that migration as a process cannot be seen as separate from division of power, or from relationships between nation-states and the global political picture in general.

As Norway is an increasingly difficult country to gain entrance to, in addition to it being one of the richest countries in the world, the picture is complex when discussing migration. Depending on the category of immigrants, it can be very difficult to be permitted to move

here. Polish labourers who pick strawberries in the summer, or who work for Norwegian contractors are numerous. They can come more easily because they are within the European Union's system and thus regulations of freer working permits and movement apply to them. Africans, for instance, have a harder time gaining access to the employment markets in Norway, because there are no quotas or international regulations that are in place for them as a work force. Fuglerud's criticisms and this conclusion bring us to his two final theory analyses; on global system theory and theories on economic articulation.

### **Global system theories:**

The global system theory is about independence theory and theories on system relations on a world basis. The dependence theories claim rather an opposite view from the modernisation standing. That there is a flow of economic gain going from the periphery to the centre, which means that the periphery is becoming more under-developed, or has development in a negative direction, is the main argument. According to Fuglerud, Immanuel Wallerstein's more general theory includes most of the same argumentation.

### **Economic articulation theories:**

Yet another theory reviewed by Fuglerud is on "economic articulation". Basically it is a perspective that attempts to overcome the gap between macro and micro economies, trying to unite or link the analysis of the two. Quite opposite from the dependence theories, these theories do not focus on the centre but rather on how the processes articulate themselves on a local level. The main point of the articulation theories is how they claim that "...capitalism as an economic formation not necessarily replaces local, pre-capitalism means of production, but coexist with these, building up under them and reinforcing them." (Fuglerud 2007:28.) For instance, it would look at not only the exchange relationship between the centre and the periphery, but at the production systems where these values are created.

According to Fuglerud, the innovative feature of the articulation theories in regards to migration is Meillassoux' description of how the local non-capitalist economy "simultaneously is preserved and destroyed – preserved as a form of organisation which produces values for imperialism, destroyed because it eventually, under the pressure of the exploitation, is robbed of the means for independent reproduction." (Meillassoux 1981:97 in Fuglerud 2007:29.) The

strengths of these theories, from an anthropological point of view, are how they put great weight on the significance of the local societies. Also, the natural unit in such analyses is neither the individual nor the society, but the household. The household and microeconomic planning can help close the gap between the two previous units, in terms of analyses.

As for the relevance of this latter theory to the informants in this thesis, their families were often an important part of their life histories, and several of them send money back home to their relatives. One of the men even has plans for how he will do it when he returns to Africa to be the head of his family upon the death of his elder brother. This shows how the family was important in this man's plans for his future and his economy.

### **Voluntary versus involuntary or forced migration:**

The final theories or themes Fuglerud discusses are on voluntary versus involuntary or forced migration; in other, more simplified terms – refugee versus labour migration. This is a very important subject in migration studies, compared to other areas of society. The reason for this is because whether or not someone is an involuntary immigrant – a refugee or asylum seeker – can have great impact on their rights in both national and international legislation. This is usually simply determined as either a flight from war or economically motivated migration.

However, this dichotomy or polarization creates certain problems. It does not always reflect people's own perception of their situation. People who clearly fall under the category of refugee are not necessarily in a very different position from migrants who do not satisfy this definition. Fuglerud says some critics claim that "those who perhaps are in the greatest need of fleeing from conflict, and if they did so would be labelled refugees, often are incapable of doing so, due to economic or other resource related barriers". (Fuglerud 2007:30.) This would be the category called *IDPs*, Internally Displaced Persons. So a polarization between voluntary and forced migration does not really work if we are to fully understand migration processes. "Individual and collective decisions, also about migration, are to a large extent dependent on the societal distribution of social, political and economic resources." (Fuglerud 2007:30.) A more gliding scale with several points of reference is necessary, containing both the degree of autonomy in decision making concerning the question of migration, and the interplay between economic and socio-political factors.

During the interviews, several of the informants who were asylum seekers stressed this exact problem; westerners too often do not realise that it is possible to be a refugee with a very real question of life and death without fleeing from war. If you are a refugee, by Western popular culture definition, you are fleeing from war in your home country. There are so many other possible reasons for fearing for your life and needing to leave in order to survive; starvation, absolute lack of possibility for a livelihood, religious persecution, social or societal conditions and political persecution, to mention a few. As illustrated in some of the informants' life histories, both cases of religious persecution and political problems were represented among the informants. Unfortunately, as Fuglerud puts it, debates on migration are sadly usually led in terms of internal political premises, instead of it reflecting the complexity of the situations and areas that the refugees and immigrants come from. The issues involved require a much broader understanding of the processes and connections that tie the immigrants' homelands and their country of current residence together, allowing them to be in the same framework of analysis. (Fuglerud 2007:32-33.)

### **Refugees, but not from war zones:**

As one informant repeatedly said during the interview; "...there are so many other reasons for fleeing besides war. And your government does not understand this." Her life history was truly awful, and she was alone in Norway in her early twenties. She will not dare to contact her family for many years yet, fearing for her life if they discover her whereabouts. I have never felt worse or more undeserving about the sheer luck of simply being born into a Norwegian family than during that interview. She opened herself to me and told me details of her story which were really hard to listen to. Her story has already been related to the reader in the second chapter. This is the girl that was married to a much older man, who demanded that she be circumcised a second time, and who beat her and mistreated her to the extent that she lost the child she was carrying. The two cases of the religious refugees have also been told. They can never return to their countries for fear of being killed by family members who are against the religious choices they and their parents made.

But again, these cases clearly describe the need for a larger understanding of the term "refugee" and what it could entail besides simply "people fleeing from a war". The political refugees interviewed for this thesis did not flee from wars either, but from political climates which would have been lethal for them to stay in, as they in some way or another became part

of the opposition in countries with dictators at power. However, their situations today are somewhat different from those of the two religious refugees. The latter will never be able to return, whereas the two political refugees may be able to return at some point, when the political climates of their countries have changed sufficiently. One of them even suggested that in his case, this may not be too far away into the future.

### **Anthias evaluation of diaspora:**

Such is Anthias' definition of the term diaspora:

“‘Diaspora’ references a connection between groups across different nation states whose commonality derives from an original but maybe removed homeland; a new identity becomes constructed on a world scale which crosses national borders and boundaries.” (Anthias 1998:560).

Anthias claims that the ethnicity paradigms focus on the processes within the nation states rather than on what is happening at the transnational levels. This will not show the whole picture and is thus inadequate for understanding the whole global process or situation of migration, which is by definition a transnational phenomenon, and its implications and impacts. However, the ethnic paradigms are useful in certain other aspects. They enable discussions of boundary formations, social identity, cultural contents of groups, and processes of disadvantage and exclusion. These topics have been closely examined in the previous chapter in identity, through the theories of Fredrik Barth, Richard Jenkins and Irving Goffman.

Anthias says that the use of the term ‘ethnic minority’ has tended to assume that the dominant group within the state does not possess an ‘ethnicity’. I am not sure that this is necessarily the case in Norway; at least in the latter years, ‘ethnically Norwegian’ has not been an uncommon term heard and read in the national media, in debates and articles. Perhaps it may have been more the case in the past, but there seems to have been an awareness process which culminates in an awareness of the presence of ‘Norwegian-ness’. What that would entail and also exclude, and whether one could really call anything “Norwegian-ness”, and the “hard” and “soft” (Brubaker) takes on this kind of identity, could be the topic of a very lengthy discussion. It could perhaps even be the topic for a whole other master thesis, so we will only scratch the surface here. What is remarkable, however, is that this spring there has been a



heated political debate on immigrants, and on their degree of integration into Norwegian culture. The two most recent examples are whether the use of head scarves or hijab for female Muslim police should be allowed – in Norway, the police uniform is by law required to be value neutral. Also, a rightwing politician started a very heated debate on what she called sneak-Islamisation of Norway. This was related to the hijab debate in terms of special allowances for certain groups of the population in Norway. It raised an uproar of voices, in the media, in political circles, and in the population in general; everyone had an opinion about it. Both those that shouted of racism and prejudice, and those who felt that it was high times these concerns were voiced by someone, as they were overdue for discussion.

Anthias discusses the works of Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. She credits them for the revival of the term diaspora, as it traditionally was used about the Jewish population scattered around the world. According to Anthias, they make important and interesting contributions to the diaspora subject. However, she claims they are mainly applicable when discussing the black diaspora. Thus, they are inadequate for a wider, more general view of the term diaspora. Certain aspects of the field, like the importance of class, gender and inter-ethnic differences somewhat fall through in these theories. For instance, Anthias sees Gilroy's focus as essentially androcentric, as she says that the female perspective and the question of differences between genders and gender related experiences are missing. As there was an overweight of men in the general numbers for the immigrants from the countries in question in Norway, and because the men were easier to find and to get meetings with than the women, the gender issue has not been touched much in this thesis. The reason is that there simply is not enough material for a good enough foundation to say very much about it.

The next topic that Anthias analyses as one of two main approaches to the subject is Robin Cohen's work on global diasporas (Cohen 1993, 1997.). Cohen's essential point is the movement from an original homeland. He defines the diasporas descriptively, referencing to that origin. The homeland will continue to be an important identity factor for the diasporas. However, this homeland is not necessarily a nation state; it can be a nation or an ethnic group. Cohen thus uses the term homeland not so much in a territorial way, but rather metaphorically. The homelands of the informants are described and discussed in the final chapter, where the migrants and their stories are put into a wider context of homeland and diaspora, for a completion of the picture on a larger scale.

### **Cohen's criteria for diaspora as a term:**

Cohen has listed seven criteria for what enables the application of the term diaspora. These are; "...dispersal and scattering; collective trauma; cultural flowering; troubled relationship with the majority; sense of community transcending frontiers; promoting a return movement." (Anthias 1998:562) Cohen has also developed a typology of five different types of diasporas, that are victim; labour; trade; imperial and cultural. However, this analysis seems somewhat off the mark when looking at the informants for this thesis. They are a heterogenic mixture as far as the five categories go; only the imperial type is not represented within the group. Of the victims there are refugees; political, religious and humanitarian. In the labour category there are several. Some have jobs with the postal offices or are cleaning personnel at hotels. Others with high education are presently holding very good jobs in Norway (they could also be placed in a "brain drain" group or category). The cultural category particularly fits the musicians, of which there are several. Some came here by chance; others came in their capacity of being musicians, hired for a particular job or for a certain amount of time, and they ended up staying. Of the traders there are not quite so many, but one of the women did for a while have her own African hair style salon in Oslo, filling a very particular, small niche that no Norwegian could have filled with her skills and cultural know-how.

Anthias, however, criticizes this typology. According to her, the problem is that the criteria that the various types are based on are different from each other, from the development of certain cultural elements, to experiences, to just being an occupational category or type. This renders the typologies incomparable to each other. Anthias also points out how Cohen emphasises an explanatory potential in the origin or the reason for the dispersal. To distinguish diasporic groups from others, Cohen has to present the concept of diaspora as a "unitary sociological phenomenon" which can then be split up into different types. Anthias shows this by giving an example of how this would be a problem:

"... the factors that motivate a group to move, whether it be labour migration or forceful expulsion, do not constitute adequate ways of classifying the groups for the purpose of analysing their settlement and accommodation patterns nor their forms of identity. They would only be adequate if this motivation was seen to have *necessary* social effects. ... Cohen does not provide systematic evidence of this comparative potential." (Anthias 1998:563)

“Diaspora formulates a population as a transnational community”. (Anthias 1998:563) Cohen proposes that internal differences among members of a diasporic group could lead to them identifying with what he calls co-ethnics in other countries. Anthias sees this as a basically primordial view of bonding in the diaspora notion. She also proposes that Cohen’s typology is just as useful for describing internal differences or variations within the diaspora as for describing different types of diaspora.

“The idea of diaspora tends to homogenise the population referred to at the transnational level. However, such populations are not homogeneous for the movements of population may have taken place at different historical periods and for different reasons, and different countries of destination provided different social conditions, opportunities and exclusions. ... the diaspora is constituted as much in *difference and division* as it is in *commonality and solidarity*.” (Anthias 1998:564)

This certainly is the case with the people concerned in this thesis. They are a very heterogeneous group, in most respects. They come from eight different West African countries, each with its particular history. They come from all different layers of society back in Africa. They have different reasons for coming to Norway, and they all got there in different ways. Once in Norway, they also have very different life situations. Most are doing well; however, although that may have individual interpretations as far as level of education, type of job and level of income is concerned. That will be discussed further in the following section of this chapter.

### **MacGaffey’s “Les Sapeurs”:**

In their book, MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Gaga write about a group of people who come from cities that have been marked by civil unrest and war for many years. There is no longer a functioning legal and judicial system, and thus they instead rely on personal relationships to compensate for the lack of regulatory institutions. These traders started off as unemployed young men in Congo, Brazzaville, and in Congo, Kinshasa. A movement called La Sape emerged in the 1970s in Congo, Brazzaville. MacGaffey and her co-author call it a cult of appearance. They strove to show signs of wealth by dressing up and acquiring an ostentatious lifestyle. Acquiring French haute couture was a way of achieving this, and subsequently they looked for ways to get to Paris. Eventually they got into trade, which was one of the ways of getting there. They came from countries and cities who were very violent, and where

lawlessness prevailed more often than not. A translation of the words “sape” and “sapeur” are in place here: they are French words for a garment; “la sape” means *the garment*. Thus, the word “sapeur” would describe someone wearing this garment. That again means that the identity of the group being shown already in their name and it portrays their way of wearing flashy clothes and jewellery and leading a flashy life style. MacGaffey describes them as

“...individuals who refuse to abide by the constraints of the global power structure and its alliances between multinational capitalism, Western governments and African dictators. They contest the institutions and norms of both African and European society which frustrate their aspirations for wealth and status. They resist the hegemony and control of the large-scale entities dominating the global scene.” (MacGaffey 2000:3)

These traders, MacGaffey says, form part of what she calls a second economy, which “consists of activities that are unmeasured, unrecorded and, in varying degrees, outside or on the margins of the law, and which deprives the state of revenue.” (MacGaffey 2000:4). She also discusses how traditional anthropology has been accustomed to studying societies, more bounded entities, and wishes to show that very different systems can be studied also, as a network of human and trade relationships. In that respect, the study of the book is somehow similar to the study of this thesis. The people interviewed here are not really part of a fixed or bounded community; they are persons with individual, very varied stories and reasons for coming to Norway. However, the difference is that they are not part of a trade network as the informants of MacGaffey are; they have come to Norway in various ways, often by chance more than as the result of a determined attempt to get Norway specifically. Their commonalities are their region of origin, and their coming from countries which were French colonies and that still have French as their official language. The third part is their ending up in Norway, in one of the two largest cities, Bergen and Oslo. Their commonalities are not many, that has to be admitted. However, if they are regarded as a category rather than a group, they can justifiably be placed in this category if seen through the context of Norwegian society. This has been discussed in the previous chapter, where Fredrik Barth’s theories on ethnic groups and boundaries, and Richard Jenkins’ work on groups and categories were laid out.

One of the most interesting thematic links between MacGaffey’s book and this thesis is the theme of movement. The movement of traders in the region, and people in general,

throughout Africa and throughout African history, are treated in the following chapter on regional contextualisation. The camel caravans through the great Saharan desert and the nomadic cattle herders – both the Peul (the Fulani or Fulfulde) and the Tuareg are all prime examples of the general mobility of African society. The topic is also explored somewhat in the following paragraphs.

### **Historical movement and trading:**

In the following chapter, the story of one informant tells of how he travelled and worked his way through many of the western central countries of Africa, then travelling north through North Africa. Then he continued on to the Middle East for a few years to live and work there. After a while, his thirst for more adventure and something new and completely different to any of the places he had already seen brought him to Norway. Unbeknownst to him, he already had a close relative living there, so when he came to Oslo and found this out, he contacted the relative and could stay with him for a little while, getting settled in the new place. This kind of mobility of mind, and apparent ease when travelling between cultures and countries, has been written about by others, too. MacGaffey quotes Wolf on this in her book:

“Such intermingling of cultures and spatial transitions are commonplace in today’s cities, a part of the globalization of the world culture and economy. ... Throughout history, traders have travelled vast distances, or have sent commodities along trade networks; there is nothing new in this movement through cultures or in the exchange of cultural things around the world (Wolf, 1982).” (MacGaffey 2000:2).

As MacGaffey writes, she does not wish to polarize the different cultures that these men alternate between. She thinks that a polarization, viewing it as a duality in terms of identity, does not work, although it has often been done in analyses, also in anthropology. The findings in the interviews for this thesis are more consistent with MacGaffey’s views. In terms of how the informants view themselves and think of their own identity, they seemed to have various degrees of how African and Norwegian they thought themselves to be. One informant even said that he felt Norwegian. The obstacle, as he saw it, was how he knew that others saw him. As Norwegians, according to him, always would see his brown skin and never fully accept him as Norwegian, this would be what kept him from feeling completely Norwegian. As he saw it, the problem was not with him but with his surroundings. This leads very clearly into

another topic which has been discussed at much greater depth in the previous chapter on identity. It is the topic of categorisation by others versus self-determined group membership.

### **Passports and belonging:**

Another identity issue my informants were asked about was the question of citizenship and passports, and whether this created an inner identity conflict or a sense of duality in the informants. Several of the informants have Norwegian passports and thus citizenship, but they all called it a piece of paper and said it did not determine or decide anything as far as belonging or sense of identity was concerned. The passports did not make them Norwegians as such, merely on paper, and it did not change their sense of belonging. One of the informants actually has a double citizenship. Usually this is not allowed when one has a Norwegian citizenship, but the legislation of his country of origin makes it impossible to ever forfeit one's citizenship, one is of that nationality until death. As his Norwegian passport was a necessity because of an assignment abroad for the Norwegian state, he had to explain to the authorities that as a matter of fact he was unable to abandon his other citizenship, and so he was granted a Norwegian one as well. He too, however, stated the same thing as the others did. At the very deepest level, he was still African, still from his country of origin, even though he was well integrated into Norwegian society.

MacGaffey's informants have, as a group, successfully created an economic niche for themselves, as a means for achieving their goal of a glamorous appearance. They grew up in countries torn and destroyed by civil war, where the already privileged and powerful increased their fortunes at the expense of the rest of the population, this excluding them from many opportunities. Not belonging to this part of Congolese society, these young men have managed as a group to work around that. They have created their own opportunities by operating in a flux between legal and illegal activities, between France and Congo.

Crossing many boundaries, both physical and abstract, they also alternate elegantly between different sides of their identity – the Western and the African. MacGaffey tells of one man who sought the help of his ancestors through the help of African traditional doctors, parallel to a French doctor in Paris, as the French doctors could find nothing wrong although the symptoms continued. The Africans, a woman in Paris and a clairvoyant in Congo diagnosed it as witchcraft, and told him what to do about it. It is a quite common thing to do, and this

“double insurance” can be found in many places. As a small illustrative parenthesis, the first Ivorian president Felix Houphouët-Boigny was a catholic. This was quite usual for a well educated man from one of the most powerful southern tribes of Côte d'Ivoire. He had also worked for the French government as the minister of the African countries in the colonial times; a very important job and a powerful position, before becoming the first Ivorian president after the country's independence in 1960. Surrounding the presidential residence he had built for himself in the capital Yamoussoukro (incidentally also his birth village), were great ponds filled with large crocodiles. They became a popular tourist attraction. They are also the fetish animal for his tribe.

The informants of this thesis, living in Bergen or Oslo, neither form part of such trade networks as MacGaffey's Congolese tradesmen, nor do they have this style of life, almost flashy and wealth-displaying like yuppies or American hip hop artists. Their self-professed main goals seem to be quite the opposite; to be law-abiding citizens who have something to offer Norwegian society, to hold their own and not be a burden of the state or anybody else. This was very clearly important to them, because they all stressed this point when interviewed. They would provide for themselves, and be honest, hardworking people who contributed to society.

### **Participating in the diaspora:**

The informants in Bergen and in Oslo are mostly active parts of a West African diaspora. Most of them telephone home several times a week, sending money, and visiting their family at least once a year. This was a common factor for most of the informants. Those who were asylum seekers could, naturally, not contact people back in their country of origin; for several of them it would be a question of life or death to do so. Going back would certainly be impossible, as that would mean death or at least a terrible fate for three of the five. For the fourth, the political climate in the country is changing in a way which makes it plausible that he could actually return to his country some time in the relatively near future. He could probably even enjoy a quite powerful position in the political landscape there.

Those who were not refugees/asylum seekers had all been back to their country of origin to visit, usually several times, since they arrived in Norway. One man even had very detailed plans for how he was going to return home one day. When his elder brother, who was by quite

a few years his elder, was deceased and no longer there to provide for and take care of the extended family, he himself would become the elder brother and the head of the family. This was a responsibility he took very seriously and had already started preparing and planning for. The informant explained his plans of how he would build a good house for his mother in the village, and how he would make arrangements to take care of the family's fields and crops, and also have a house and perhaps a business in the nearby town. This seems to be a case which would serve well as a study for the articulation theories. The household, his extended family and its future is a very important part of this man's plans for his future, and is ultimately the goal that he is working towards, even though it may still be years ahead before it becomes actuality.

### **Pull factors:**

The major pull reasons are work, relationships and refugee situations, and also coincidence has been a factor for several of them. Coincidence cannot be called a pull factor in itself, but it has played an important role in how some of these people ended up in Norway, so it needs to be mentioned along with these other factors. Although it has only been mentioned as the reason for coming to Norway for one of the informants, in the diagram in the second chapter, it played a part in several of the other journeys as well. Several informants initially did not intend to come to Norway, they either studied in other European countries, or, for instance, they haphazardly applied to Norway for a visa since the embassy shared a building with other European embassies where they intended to apply originally. Norway replied with a positive answer before the other country, and so the informant came to Norway instead. His application had been made simply because the elevator was out of order and he had walked past the Norwegian offices on his way down the stairs. Thus, coincidence is a force to be reckoned with, and has no small place in the stories and the push/pull factors. This was made clear in the second chapter, where the people's journeys were told.

The other pull factors have also been mentioned in that same chapter, but they will be listed briefly here. The main factor, perhaps, is work – head hunting because of high education or special skills as musicians or government representative in some large state owned company's Norway office. Studies and education was a minor factor for a few, but it was rarely the main reason for coming here. Some had a relative or spouse already in Norway, or who was even



from Norway – several of the informants were married to a Norwegian, although most of them had met in Norway, after having come here on their own for other reasons. One mixed couple met abroad in a European country, at a work related course. Work as a musician, as a conveyor of culture, was another major factor for several. They came to Norway on a work assignment for a limited period at the Centre for African Culture. Many of those who do so do return back home, but some then find other jobs or remain at the centre for a longer period than initially intended, and thus become settled in Norway and decide to stay.

### **Push factors:**

The push reasons are not the strongest or most important part of most of these stories. Certainly in the stories of the five refugees, they are determining factors, and they would probably never have come to Norway were it not for those reasons. Religious persecution or the threat of death is an undeniably strong push factor. A political problem due to political standings or oppositional views to the government, which also would pose a death threat to possibly not only the main person itself but their whole family, is another very imminent push factor. The last reason, the story of the young girl who had been married off to the much older man has already been told. The threat on her life, too, is undeniable and the reason for leaving her country quite clear.

### **Chapter conclusion:**

The migration concerned in this thesis is a very individual kind of migration, and not a group phenomenon. Thus we do not find diasporic groups, and the field work and the category studied is not the traditional kind found among so many other immigrant groups, such as Somalis and Pakistanis in Norway, who are very many and who mostly come for the same reason. The Somalis are war refugees, often with very traumatic experiences in their past, and are quite homogenous – of course no group or category is ever completely homogenous, there are always internal variations, but they are still a much more homogenous group than the category of immigrants in question in this study. The Pakistanis came as work migrants and have been in Norway since the 1970s, and family reunion is now a very common reason for them to come here to stay.

The informants from West Africa are individuals, each with their own, very varied reasons for coming here, and the way they have adapted to Norwegian society is quite different from groups of immigrants who come here in large numbers. They can find people from their own groups with whom they easily identify and feel belonging to, whereas the West Africans do not necessarily find a similar type of group to belong to upon arrival in Norway. This may have several reasons – there may not be too many people they feel that they are immediately similar to. There may not be very many people from their region or country in Norway. They may wish to make mainly Norwegian friends in order to be more easily integrated into Norwegian society. The possibilities are as many as there are individuals. The variation found among the informants is also founding the countries they are from, and the context of the homeland and the history of the countries in the following chapter will illustrate this further.

## The regional context of the homeland

### Chapter introduction

*“Je suis Togolaise. Je suis un Africain.”* “I am Togolese. I am an African.” This is a direct quote from one informant, and it was repeated in various ways by most, if not all, of the informants during the interviews. Stating first their country of origin when asked about their “deepest” sense of identity and belonging, many of them also in the same sentence stated their own sense of belonging to a larger group; Africans. As important as a sense of belonging and self-identification specific to their country of origin was their identity as Africans, a much larger group identity far outreaching the country borders, embracing an entire continent. Thus, a general history of West Africa and more particularly of French speaking West Africa as a region seems both justifiable and opportune.

Later in the chapter the backgrounds which the French speaking West Africans once came from, will be mapped out. Their reasons for coming to Norway are manifold and each story is different. Descriptions of the history of their countries of origin to show a part, large or small depending on the individual story, of the background picture of how and why they have ended up in Norway is done further into this chapter. Some historical background for the countries was found to be necessary, although each country is presented just briefly. There are 8 countries represented in my field work; Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo, Benin and Niger. These countries have different histories. However, as they were all French colonies in the colonial period, they have certain similarities, too.

## Common traits and some history

Some things the countries all have in common. These things will be related in a short, general West African history, from around the 16<sup>th</sup> century and up to the liberation from the colonial powers. As a main source of information on the general traits of West African history and society, an article by Jon Pedersen has been used, “Vest-Afrika” in the book *Fjern og nær*. This book is pretty much an anthropological summary on this very subject, and which has proved very useful in creating a general picture of the region. The thematic divisions in the following review of West African history are taken from his article.

For a complementary perspective, we begin the chapter with a short section of a more scholarly focused anthropological debate concerning West Africa. It is taken from Charles Piot’s book *Remotely Global. Village Modernity in West Africa*. A review of the theories that have appeared in Africanist anthropology is also discussed very briefly here, just to explain a little how the scholars saw Africa and how Piot evaluates their efforts. Piot quotes:

“Evolutionism, functionalism, diffusionism – whatever the method, all represent otherness in the name of sameness, reduce the different to the already known, and thus fundamentally escape the task of making sense of other worlds. (Mudimbe 1988: 72-73, quoted in Piot 1999: 9)

Piot brings to our attention the issue of using Western concepts and ideas to understand that which is different, in this case African society. By forcing into familiar concepts and terminology, dimensions may be lost. Analysing the meaning of things within their own contexts could reveal other layers of significance. These are theories which have been developed by Western scholars throughout the history of Western studies of West Africa. Piot particularly writes about structural functionalism, Marxism and practice theory. Piot describes them as “Euroamerican view of society” (Piot 1999:11). What he finds to be the problem with all the approaches are the attempts to put the African tribes and groups into Western frames and systems, giving the phenomena Western names in order to make sense of how their societies are held together. It is the foreign – the Other – explained in the terms of the familiar and thus made our own. The problem, according to Piot, remains the same for all the theories, and he concludes his discussion of Africanist discourses over the past decades with this sentence; “it nevertheless relies at its core on a conception of persons and the social that is deeply Eurocentric.” (Piot 1999:15)

When looking at these perspectives, the thing that first comes to mind is, in addition to Piot's conclusions, that they are all rather homogeneous. The material acquired through the field work on which this thesis is based, suggests that another perspective is necessary to understand this category of immigrants. The informants' backgrounds are different; they both come from poor families where they could not even afford remaining in school when growing up, and from families who could afford to send them to Europe for their studies. They have all found different things to do after coming to Norway, and of they have little or no education upon arrival, they have all gone to school to receive an education. All of them are working people, and several of them have even filled niches which Norwegians themselves never could fill, and which are attractive in the work market. It is of course the musicians and dancers who have this particular opportunity. As African music, African dance classes and African djembe classes are very popular in Norway, particularly among Norwegian women, there is a great demand for such teachers and they do not lack work. So, throughout the interviews done for the field work, the main red thread running through all the stories was variation. How they had arrived in Norway, why, and how they thought of themselves after having lived here for a while – all the stories are individual and vary from person to person.

This is the reason why the theories applied throughout the identity and the diaspora chapters are theories which allow this individuality in the analysis.

### **Language and early history:**

West African countries are ethnically and linguistically very diverse; at least as much as the rest of Africa, if not even more. There has to some extent been developed lingua francas, for instance Dioula. It is the language of trade coming from the Mende language family, and it was spread by travelling Muslim tradesmen throughout a large area in central West Africa. However, no single language has acquired a similar position to the one of for instance Kiswahili in Eastern Africa, which has become a lingua franca stretching over several country borders and is the official language and the language of trade of several East African countries. The real lingua francas in West Africa are still the colonial languages; Portuguese is spoken in Guinea Bissau, otherwise mainly English and French, the latter still the official language in all the countries concerned in this thesis.

The coastal regions of West Africa were exposed to the slave trade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which caused great changes in political and economic situations. The financial centres moved from the inland to the coastal areas, as trade through desert caravans to a large extent was replaced by much faster and cheaper possibilities through trade by European ships. Movement has always been an important factor in West African society, and this will be explored further at the end of this paragraph. Slaves were certainly not the only goods traded at the time, Africa had much to offer in prime resources; ivory, gold, palm oil, rubber arabicum, spices, beeswax and lumber. In return, guns, ammunition, alcohol and glass beads were acquired.

Population wise also the coastal areas grew from almost void of human settlement to trade centres and thus population centres. A third important change that came about was the formation of what is today seen as the traditional African type of settlement; the fortified village. That came about in this period; previously the much more scattered settlements were the norm, with the extended families of grandparents with their children and their children's families being the core of the settlement.

### **Mobility as a mindset:**

Now back to the issue of historical movement in the region. There are particularly two large nomadic tribes in the region; the Tuaregs and the Fulani, also known as the Peul. They are traditionally cattle nomads, and particularly the Fulani people are very far spread out, perhaps somewhat further south than the Tuaregs. They travel far with their large cattle herds, towards the coasts in the dry seasons, to keep them fed, and in order to be able to sell them in markets along their way. The tradesmen could not stay in one place either, although their families usually did and still do. They depended on travels throughout the region, to sell their goods and make trades. This was how the lingua francas of trade languages were spread out. It was also how Islam came to West Africa; Muslim Arab tradesmen travelled widely across the entire region, bringing with them their religion, culture and traditions.

Moving elsewhere for financial purposes or opportunities is today and always has been very common in West African society. Moving away from one's home for a while in order to make money, whether it was to send home to sustain one's family, earn enough money to be able to marry, or make enough to build a house back home. This could be seen as one of the reasons why travelling far from home is still a very common thing to do. Whether it is for studies

abroad, for job opportunities or adventure, leaving home to live far away is something many do.

An interesting example of this mobility of the West African mentality came up in the field work. One informant travelled across half of Africa, travelling through country after country, stopping at random places to find work for a while when he needed money. He would also run into acquaintances of acquaintances that would then take him in and help him, half a continent away from home. After a while he lived for some years in a Middle Eastern country.

Eventually, however, the sense of adventure that had caused him to travel through all those African countries in search of new places and people again caused him to wish to break up from his current location. Once more in search of new and different experiences, yearning for further change in his life, he started the process of relocation. A friend of his helped him think of various options for places he could go which would be completely different from where he had already been. Norway was one of the places mentioned. He researched Norway a little, and then got on the plane. He has lived in Norway since, but works as a freelancer musician. A permanent job would not allow him enough freedom, he claimed, and he would soon get the urge to break up and travel again.

This example is certainly the most extreme, if that word may be applied, of the cases of the informants as far as amount of travelling and countries covered before reaching Norway is concerned. However, I felt it would describe well how there seems to be a sense that travelling far from home is not a huge undertaking, nor a dangerous expedition; in fact, it is quite a usual thing to do. Thus, having siblings or cousins living in neighbouring countries is very common. There is what I would call a geographical mobility of the mind or consciousness. However, the type of mobility seen among the informants is not the traditional nomadic movement with the seasons, nor is it like the movements seen among the Congo traders written about in the previous chapter. The Congo traders form part of a larger network of contacts, traders and business men. The informants concerned here are individual work immigrants who find their own niches to fit into where they arrive, and make their living and support themselves and their families. It is also a goal for them to support themselves, and not be a burden to anyone else, and to adapt to and respect Norwegian culture and Norwegian law.

## **Social organisation**

The classical kind of social organisation in West Africa is by gender and age, men generally being the ruling gender, and elders having a very important position of power in the society. These systems are usually referred to as patriarchal gerontocracy. (Pedersen 1996) Most tribes have patriarchal lineage systems. However, the actual power of men and elders varies from society to society, with different factors as modifiers, particularly other sides of social organisation, for instance household organisation.

A central resource in the household is the labour force of the woman and of her children; a man without a wife, or with few kids, has a much harder time getting his fields worked and ploughed, and is able to support less crops on his land. Thus, wives and children are valuable assets to a household. Also, the “traditional” household was and is built around and relies on this very pattern in order to survive. As previously mentioned, these households were built up around extended families, thereby increasing the work force available for working the fields and farming the family’s land.

Expectations of help and support from family members, even not very closely related family members, and the kinds of claims someone can lay on another family member, however distant, in a situation of emergency, are quite far-reaching. Implied is the expectation that “when I am in trouble, or in need of help, whatever the problem may be, you will help me.” Particularly the rich relatives may get a lot of help requests from worse-off relatives. And they will be obliged to help, or they will be seen as having turned their back on their own family. One informant always left all his belongings in the capital of his country of origin, even his wedding ring and his watch, bringing almost only the clothes on his back when travelling to the village to visit his family. This was because he knew that they would end up pressuring him to give it all to them before going back. He came from a small village, and they simply did not understand that although he may be rich in their eyes, in Norway he was making a very average income, and that he could not afford to give away all the things they expected him to give them. He certainly would send money to his old mother, as was expected of him as a good son, but he never brought any belongings with him to the village.



Piot expresses very well how relations and thus obligations towards family, friends and family friends are important in West African society, and through an example given by an informant this will be further discussed below.

“If, however, social relationship is presupposed, if the person is always an aspect of various relationships, we should see this person as composed of, or constituted by, relationships, rather than as situated in them. Persons here do not “have” relationships; they “are” their relations.” (Piot 1999:18)

Interestingly enough, a recent perusal of an African recipe cook book revealed a most interesting statement in the foreword of the book. It is written, no less, by Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa, and it gives almost the exact same view of Africans and social relationships:

“We say in Africa that a person is a person through other persons. A solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. We are made for togetherness, for friendship, for fellowship. Food is part of that fellowship. We are created to live in a delicate network of interdependence and we are different precisely in order to know our need for one another. Diversity, difference, is the essence of who we are.” (Bishop Desmond Tutu in *Discovery of a continent. Food, flavours and inspirations from Africa*, by Marcus Samuelsson 2007:vii)

“Elders” and “older brothers” (in rather loosely applied terms, including both family members and close friends) are important benefactors and people one turns to for help. As was explained by one of the informants, those from one of the countries in question who had come to Norway in the eighties had not had other countrymen to rely on for help, and had got to where they were today by themselves. They felt that they had gone by the Western, European ideals and built their own “fortunes”; managed on their own. Their ideas became somewhat westernised, they adapted a more individualistic way of looking at things. Then, when a new wave from the same country came in the 1990s, they expected much help from their countrymen who had by then already been in Norway for a decade. They had expectations of loyalty between countrymen abroad, helping them like elder brothers dutifully should have done back home in West Africa, to find housing, jobs, getting started with education and in general getting well and easily settled in Norway.

When they did not feel that the ones they saw as “les grands-frères” (the older brothers) were too inclined to help (they had managed on their own, why shouldn't the newcomers also learn to adapt to the Norwegian/European individualistic way of getting ahead in a new place??) this became a seed of conflict between the two groupings. One could say that the discrepancy between the expectations of the newcomers and the changed, more individualistic way of thinking of those who'd been in Norway for a while almost caused an identity crisis of some sort. That particular discussion will be approached more thoroughly later in the thesis, in the chapter on identity. This was named as the main reason (by a couple of the informants) why this particular group of people did not have their own union, like several other immigrant nationalities have formed in Norway. However, the people of this nationality, and of the other nationalities concerned in this thesis, are all of very varied socio-political and socio-economical backgrounds, and the levels of education are also very variable. These things may very well also be contributing factors to there not being a very distinct sense of internal group belonging.

To summarize on social organisation, then, the informants have taken with them quite a few traces of African social organisation to Norway. They keep in touch with their families in Africa and elsewhere around the world, and family is of great importance to them. They also send them money, to help and contribute to their family's well being as they are in a more privileged position themselves. Those who are refugees are of course exempt from this, for natural reasons. Some of them are in touch with some family members, but others could not make contact at all for fear of getting traced to Norway and killed. Those who are not refugees have all been back to visit, most of them travel back to Africa on a quite regular basis, many as often as every year or every two years. In other words, they show a globalisation of West African traditional values in social organisation.

### **A tradition of knowledge, and secret societies**

Many West African tribes have cast like social layering. With the words “cast like” are meant that for many tribes, within the tribe, different groups may have certain skills or professions as their special field of knowledge or craftsmanship. For instance, there usually are “griots”; bards, within a tribe, who can function both as masters of ceremonies, for historical memory of the tribe, and also as a channel of social criticism, if they are singing songs about someone who is not doing good for the society. An example of an informant whose father was a griot in

their village is given in the second chapter. The griots can also be linked to specific groups of craftsmanship, like masons, or blacksmiths, or any other group. However, despite an anthropological focus on social layering, West African societies have also been used as models for anthropological models of societies where political authority and control is enforced by a collective regulated through kinship, rather than by a central force. This can also be seen for instance in examples of traditional religion being enforced upon family members by family elders. The cases of two of the informants who are religious refugees clearly show this – family elders in one case and religious elders in the other were the reason the two had to flee for their lives and can never return, because they would not adopt the traditional religion of their family.

West African literature has quite a central place with the elites, in their understanding of themselves and their position. West African intellectual traditions go far back. Before writing and reading came to the region, traditions and family and tribe histories were passed down orally from generation to generation. The Malian author and professor, Amadou Hampâté Bâ said the famous line « En Afrique, chaque fois qu'un vieillard meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle. » “In Africa, every time an old person dies, it is a library that burns.” (Paul-Henri Siriex, *HOUPHOUTËT BOIGNY ou la sagesse africaine*”, 1986:287) All the knowledge that was lost with that person's death was lost forever, unless it had been passed down to the next generation. The trans-Saharan trade brought with it knowledge and the written word, and the development of Muslim learning centres, for instance in Djenne and in Timbuktu. The knowledge was also spread by Muslim scholars who travelled about in many areas, on their missions as military advisors for army leaders, for control of the coastal areas.

The importance of knowledge can be seen in the general level of education found in the informants interviewed for this thesis. Most have higher education, and those who have not had the opportunity to go to school in Africa have gone to school here in Norway and not only completed basic schooling but continued in school and acquired an education and either a university degree or a profession. The secret societies of West Africa also give much importance to knowledge, and could be said to be an aspect of the same reverence of knowledge that is found in the West African culture and history.

Secret societies are a common phenomenon in West Africa. These are organisations whose work and functions are hidden to those who are not members. One becomes a member

through rites of initiation. These secret societies are partly tied to the view that knowledge is a rare commodity, which can be bought and sold. The novice and their family pay a great deal for the initiation, which is legitimized by the knowledge gained by the novice. The effect is a massive transfer of resources to the leaders of these secret societies. For instance much of West African wood carving tradition is tied to these societies, but as they are secret, they are difficult to study and not much is known about them in anthropology. However, the point of this paragraph is to show that there is a long intellectual tradition in West Africa, and this is closely linked to the educational institutions of western type that were established early in many of these countries. Furthermore, it is linked to the many ethnological and folkloric institutes for African studies in many of these countries, intended to document their cultural heritage. According to Pedersen, the francophone West Africa has been more active on this area than the Anglophone in the latter years. (Pedersen 1996:197)

### **Education and literacy levels:**

However, education is still more for men than for women. At least the chance to get an education is unequal. The ratio in literacy percentages between men and women are never equal in these countries. The statistics, given below, speak a very clear language. The value of giving girls an education, too, has still not gained in the general African view. Particularly in the villages and smaller towns, the numbers are probably somewhat better in the larger cities, on the national level. That difference does not show in these statistics. However, in general the numbers are still showing the lack of schooling for girls. The following pages will show the literacy statistics for the countries concerned in the thesis. This will show exactly what has been written in this paragraph about the inequality in schooling of girls and boys. The definition of literacy in the following statistics is the percentage of people age 15 and over who can read and write.

**Niger:***total population: 28.7%**male: 42.9%**female: 15.1% (2005 est.)***Côte d'Ivoire:***total population: 50.9%**male: 57.9%**female: 43.6% (2003 est.)***Guinea:***total population: 29.5%**male: 42.6%**female: 18.1% (2003 est.)***Benin:***total population: 34.7%**male: 47.9%**female: 23.3% (2002 est.)***Burkina Faso:***total population: 21.8%**male: 29.4%**female: 15.2% (2003 est.)***Senegal:***total population: 39.3%**male: 51.1%**female: 29.2% (2002 est.)***Togo:***total population: 60.9%**male: 75.4%**female: 46.9% (2003 est.)***Mali:***total population: 46.4%**male: 53.5%**female: 39.6% (2003 est.)***Ancient kingdoms, states and politics**

In opposition to large parts of the African continent, centralized states have long been a main trait in West African social organisation. In many cases these kingdoms were societies based on trade or on a single strategic resource, such as slaves or gold. Today's Benin, for instance, is where the kingdom of Dahomey arose in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The organisation of these kingdoms seems to have been about how power and control could be maintained in a situation where groups could arise who could threaten the king's power. Jon Pedersen says that "there is continuity from the old kingdoms to the modern states, which may not have as much to do with cultural tradition as with financial realities." (This is translated from Norwegian, my translation.) According to him, West African states mainly have weak economic foundations and strong, stable social groups haven't developed.

Thus, an important strategy for those who are at power is to prevent the formation of groups that might threaten their power. The result is constant shifts in politics and alliances. Most of

the countries became independent without much military conflict around the 1960s. In general, France has been much more present in its former colonies than Great Britain has. Particularly the monetary alliance of the CFA which includes 13 French speaking countries in West Africa, a monetary union which was directly attached to the French franc is an example of this. Also, permanent French military bases, like the one in Abidjan in Ivory Coast, and the presence of French companies in the countries, for instance Elf, are other examples of French presence after independence.

### **Recent regional history:**

Only in Senegal and in Ivory Coast (until recent years) have the same regimes been at power since independence. In Ivory Coast, for instance, Felix Houphouët-Boigny as the country's first president was at power from independence until his death in 1993. Only in his very last years at power, around the 90s, there came a change to a multi-party system in the country. Most of the other former French colonies have had more turbulent political experiences, most of the regimes having been undemocratic ones. A couple of examples of this are found in the cases of the political refugees among the informants. One of them was a politically active student, which his government frowned upon, and he eventually had to leave the country, as the political opposition to the regime was threatened by the dictatorial regime at power. The other man was initially among the men closer to the dictator president, but as things worsened he did not wish to partake in the tasks the president had his men do for him. His refusal to act at the president's bidding was not well received, and he and his family had to flee the country, leaving all their belongings and property behind. They were in danger even in a neighbouring country for a while, as several attempts were made to force them back. Nevertheless, they escaped again as they managed to send out an emergency demand to be accepted by another country further away from this president's influence. Norway accepted them and they moved to safety here.

However, the last one or two decades or so there has been a tendency of democratisation. The beginning of this process came around about the time of the fall of the Soviet Union. This took away the legitimacy of the one-party rule. Still, it was more probable that it was the breakdown of the economies, in addition to western countries beginning to demand political reforms as pre-conditions for aid, which gave the democratic opposition parties of West Africa a fighting chance. (Pedersen 1996:196)

At this point, it seems pertinent to give some history from each country. Although the region has a few common traits, such as the French colonial reign, thereof the French language and the French school system, and Islam as the largest religion, it is nevertheless a diverse region. In the following pages, the recent political history (since independence around 1960) and some description of the economic situations in each country will be laid out. This is to give a more specific idea of the backgrounds that the informants come from, and to increase the understanding of the individuality of their cases. Employment opportunities, opportunities for education as well as political freedom of choice and stability of government are all strong forces in terms of push/pull factors in immigration movement. The facts about the different countries are taken from CIA's online web site called the World Fact Book, which contains information about all the countries of the whole world. The reference web site addresses are given in the literature list in the final pages of the thesis. The order in which the countries will be presented simply follows their geographical order from East to West.

### **Niger:**

Since independence in 1960, until 1991, Niger had single-party military rule. The country has 15,306,252 inhabitants (July 2009 estimate), and the main religious groupings are Muslim 80%, other (includes indigenous beliefs and Christian) 20%. In 1991, the public pressured the president, General Ali Saibou, to allow multi-party elections. By 1993, a democratic government was in place. However, internal disagreement rendered the government paralyzed, and the situation culminated in another coup in 1996, led by Colonel Ibrahim Baré. He was killed, however, in 1999, by a group of military officers who immediately held presidential elections, and democratic ruled was reinstalled. Mamadou Tandja came to power, and was re-elected in 2004. Being one of the world's poorest countries, Niger has insufficient funds and not enough government services to develop its resource base. In the north of the country, which is part of the dry Sahel region, Tuareg ethnic groups emerged in early 2007. They attacked military targets in the north of the country throughout that entire year. Since then, this has developed into open rebellion against the government by these groups.

Droughts in the Sahel region have had and continue to have very negative effects on the economy of Niger, which relies heavily on agriculture and subsistence based crops. Cattle nomads (Tuareg and Peul or Fulani) make up about 17-18% of the population, so livestock also form an important part of the country's economy. However, Niger also has one of the

world's largest uranium deposits. Unfortunately, due to instability and corruption, foreign investment is low. Niger has received much foreign aid, about half of its budget consists of foreign aid money, and much of its foreign debts have been cancelled by IMF (the International Monetary Fund).

### **Benin:**

Present-day Benin is a republic, with 8,791,832 inhabitants (2007 estimate). The official language is French, and the major religions are Christianity 42.8%, Islam 24.4%, and Voodoo 17.3%. Today's Benin became a French colony in 1872, and remained so until they regained their independence in 1960, like most of the other French colonies in West Africa. From 1960, there were several military regimes, until 1972, when it ended with Mathieu Kerekou came to power. His government was based on Marxist-Leninist principles. It was not until 1989 that he began to approach representative government. In 1991 free elections made the Prime Minister the new President, and this was the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power from a dictatorship to a democracy. However, Kerekou returned to power in 1996 and again in 2001, although the circumstances were somewhat suspect. He stepped down peacefully at the end of his second term in 2006, and was succeeded by a man who was an outsider and an independent. Thomas Yayi Boni has begun a high profile fight against corruption, and is also attempting to strongly accelerate Benin's economic growth. Its underdeveloped economy is still reliant on regional trade, cotton production and subsistence crops. An insufficient electrical supply is another continuing hindrance of the economic growth. The economy has received some relieving aid in the cancellation in some of its foreign debts announced in 2005.

### **Togo:**

Previously known as French Togoland, the name of the country became Togo at independence in 1960. Today, the country has approximately 6,019,877 inhabitants. The main religions are Christianity 29%, Islam 20%, and indigenous beliefs 51%. In 1967, General Gnassingbe Eyadema was installed as a military ruler, and he ruled with a heavy fist until his death in 2005. In the 1990s, under a cover of multiparty rule, Eyadema still had the majority in parliament, and this remains so today. At his death, the military installed his son as the new



president. The elections two months later, to “legitimate” his presidency, were rigged, also by the military. However, in 2007, elections were held again, and Faure Gnassingbe won again. This time the elections were approved by the international observers.

Democracy is gaining in Togo, and the country is making its back into the good graces of the international community. Togo’s small economy relies heavily on subsistence crops and some exports, mainly coffee, cocoa and cotton. Togo is also the world’s 4<sup>th</sup> largest producer of phosphor. However, the effort to induce economic reform to achieve change and growth is going slowly. A big problem is the lack of trust from foreign investors, with Togo’s past history as an unstable regime and slow growth as an important factor. Falling cotton prices, too, have had a very negative influence on Togolese economic growth, just as for several other African cotton producing countries, like for instance Côte d'Ivoire.

### **Côte d'Ivoire:**

The country is one of the most densely populated among the countries concerned in this thesis. It has about 20,617,068 inhabitants, French is the official language, and the main religions are Islam 35-40%, indigenous religions 25-40%, Christianity 20-30% (2001). From independence in 1960, the Ivorian president Felix Houphouët-Boigny ruled until his death in 1993. His long time in power was mostly peaceful, although his rule was a one-party rule most of the time, as mentioned previously. Côte d'Ivoire was in this period one of the most politically stable countries in Africa. The country also prospered under Houphouët-Boigny, as he maintained close relations with France, especially economically. As he had much experience from the French democracy and the Western way of thinking, he succeeded in making Côte d'Ivoire one of the most prosperous countries in West Africa, if not all of Africa, in terms of how to approach development of infrastructure and build a strong economy. It was called the African success story. However, in 1999, the first military coup in the country’s history struck the nation. The government was overthrown, and the president Henri Konan Bedié who had been hand picked by Houphouët-Boigny to be his predecessor, was forced into exile abroad. The military, lead by General Robert Guei, arranged elections in 2000. The elections were rigged, however, and Guei announced himself as the winner. The people protested so ardently, however, that he was forced to step aside, and the real winner Laurent Gbagbo took office as president. Since then, fighting between the government’s army and the

army of the rebels divided the country in half for a long time. In 2003, a failed attempted coup resulted in General Guei's death.

Several attempted peace accords failed, and mediations between the two sides by other African presidents, and the French, failed also. Finally, negotiations in Burkina Faso between the rebels and the government in March 2007 resulted in shared power in government, and a fragile peace has been settling across the country since then. However, several thousand UN and French troops remain in the country to help keep the peace. The economy took a heavy strike from the war, and the per capita income of the strongest economy in the region has declined by 15% since 1999. Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest producer of cocoa beans and palm oil, and since 2006, also gas and oil have surpassed the importance of the previous two. This is a field they wish to continue to develop.

### **Burkina Faso:**

The main religions followed in Burkina Faso are Islam 50%, indigenous beliefs 40%, Christianity (mainly Roman Catholic) 10%. With a population of 15,746,232, a densely populated Burkina Faso is one of the world's poorest countries. Due to poor natural resources, the country's economic prospects are bleak. Most of the people work in subsistence agriculture, and cotton is the main crop. However, the USA, which is a large producer of cotton on the world market, subsidises its cotton farmers such that poorer countries cannot compete on the prices. Together with Mali, Niger and Chad, Burkina Faso lobbies in the World Trade Organisation against this subsidy trend. Since 1998 there has been a gradual but successful privatisation of several state owned enterprises.

Enduring several military coups throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the country moved towards multiparty elections in the early 1990s, like several other African countries. In 1987, however, Blaise Compaoré came to power, and he has won all the elections since. The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire and the north of Ghana recently sent many thousands of Burkinabé migrant workers abroad to other neighbouring countries to look for seasonal employment. These conflicts have also had negative impacts on Burkina Faso's economic growth, which had been 6% the last few years prior to the conflicts, as prices for energy and imported foods rose. As Burkina Faso is landlocked, it relies heavily on the possibilities of importing through other countries, and the deep sea port in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire is the only one in the region which can harbour enough large ships to manage the flow of trade goods to feed the needs of the entire region.

Also, as Côte d'Ivoire has for many years been the main destination for many thousands of Burkinabé seasonal workers on all the coffee, cocoa and palm oil plantations, the war has had much negative impact on Burkina Faso's economy.

### **Mali:**

As part of the Sudanese Republic and Senegal, independence from France for this area of West Africa came in 1960. A few months later, Senegal withdrew and what was previously the Sudanese Republic or the Mali Federation became Mali. The main religions observed by the population of 12,666,987 are Islam 90%, Christianity 1% and indigenous beliefs 9%. Not until 1991 was dictatorship thrown out and the president of the time, Amadou Touré brought Mali into democracy. As one of the strongest democracies in the region, elections in 1992 brought Alpha Konaré to power. After being re-elected to a second term in 1997, he stepped down for Amadou Touré in 2002. Touré was re-elected in 2007 for a second term, and the elections were recognised by the international community as completely democratic and fair. Yet another of the world's poorest countries along with neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mali's area is 65% desert or semi-desert, as much of it is situated in a South-Western part of Sahara. Income distributions are highly unequal, and much of the economic activity is concentrated around the Niger River. 10% of the population is nomadic, and about 80% is in agriculture and fishing. With cotton and gold as its main export products, Mali depends heavily on changes in the world market's prices, and also on foreign aid. However, some economic reforms have been successful, and Mali is slowly managing to attract some foreign investment. Still, the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has influenced the economy of landlocked Mali much in the same way as it has Burkina Faso, and trade routes have been closed and migrant seasonal workers have had to find other sources of income.

### **Guinea:**

1958 brought independence from France to Guinea, slightly earlier than most of the other French colonies in West Africa. With its 10,057,975 population, (July 2009 estimate), the main religions observed in Guinea are Islam 85%, Christianity 8% and indigenous beliefs 7%. Since independence, however, Guinea has only had two presidents. Like in Côte d'Ivoire, the first president after independence ruled until his death. Sekou Touré passed away in 1984, and

the military seized power upon his death and made Lansana Conté the new president. It was not until 1993, however, when General Lansana Conté was elected president of the civilian government (he was previously head of the military government). Both in 1998 and in 2003 he was re-elected, but the elections were far from regular and free.

Since the conflicts in Liberia and Guinea Bissau have been stabilised, Guinea has become increasingly internally unstable, and the people increasingly dissatisfied with the government and the corruption and bad governance. This culminated in two large strikes in 2006 and a third in 2007, which resulted in two weeks of martial law; in other words the regular laws were set aside and military law ruled. The final result was a change of prime minister, by the president, to appease the protesters. Despite its major resources in minerals, hydro power and agriculture, Guinea remains a severely underdeveloped country. Sitting on half the world's resources in bauxite, about 70% of the country's revenue comes from mining exports. Due to lack of electric framework and other infrastructure, because of widespread corruption, and political instability due to the president's poor health, foreign investment has not blossomed in Guinea. Since they were cut off by the IMF, the World Bank and the U.S. Treasury Department, they are working with advisors from these institutions to attempt to come back into their aid programmes.

### **Senegal:**

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph on Mali, Senegal and what was known as the French Sudan were conjoined in a federation along with present-day Mali in 1959, and at independence from France were named the Mali Federation. However, the federation lasted just a few months. In 1982, Senegal joined with Gambia to form Senegambia, in an attempt to see through a confederation of the two countries. However, the planned integration was never fulfilled, and the union ended in 1989. Despite some minor insurgence separatist tendencies in the south of the country since the 1980s, Senegal has remained one of Africa's most stable democracies. For 40 years, the Socialist Party ruled the country until today's president Abdoulaye Wade won the elections in 2000. He was re-elected in 2007, although there were complaints about trickery in the process.

The main religions that the population of 13,711,597 follows are Islam 94%, Christianity 5% (mostly Roman Catholic), and indigenous beliefs 1%. Starting in January 1994 Senegal went

through a planned reform in its economy, which it developed and saw through, helped by the international community that is giving them aid. This was what the economy needed, and it changed things for the better for the country. Among other positive results they managed to stop and minimize the inflation, and from 1995-2008, the GDP has grown 5% yearly. The country continues to be dependent upon foreign aid, still, and during the last few years, about two-thirds of its foreign aid has been cancelled. Senegal has also been taking new steps to ensure further economic growth and development. In 2007, several large international companies got permissions to do mining for zircon, iron and gold. Despite this, illegal immigrants continue to attempt entrance into Europe, in order to search for employment and a better life for themselves and their families.

### **Chapter conclusion:**

In this chapter, we have seen the variation in the different countries that the informants have originated from. Their common regional historical traits in social organisation, society and culture have been laid out, and links have been made to the stories of the informants. Some anthropological history of the region has been laid out too, in order to show a little of how scholars have thought about the region. The importance of relationships and the duties that accompany them, and the importance of knowledge and education are shown. This is reflected in the stories of the informants, as told in a previous chapter, and lines are drawn from the stories told to the traits mentioned here. The portrayals of the different countries show even more of the varied backgrounds and contexts the informants have come from, and give a broader understanding of the complexity of the picture.

### **Tracing that final red line:**

In the final chapter, the lines are drawn from the stories to show that the informants are not a group as such, but rather a category. If one is to speak of a group membership, it would have to be on a level of belonging to an African diaspora. All the informants stated in the interviews that they would always have something “deep down in the bottom of their hearts” or in the foundation of their identity which was African. This would never change, no matter how long they had lived in Norway or elsewhere outside of Africa. They would always be Africans at heart. This shows the need for a global understanding of belonging and identity - a larger group belonging perhaps as French speaking West African diaspora, in a global perspective, as they all said they were Africans deep down. The group would be the West African diaspora as mentioned above, and within a Norwegian context, they would be a category rather than a group. This is because of the internal variation and the apparent lack of a sense of group membership among the French speaking West Africans in Norway. At least in most cases, situational groupness can appear at times. They are internationally minded, with Norwegian and international friends, but rarely only African friends. They are also influenced by Norwegian society and ways of thinking, and realise this whenever they go back to Africa to visit their families. Yet they still maintain that they are Africans in the very foundations of their identities. The importance of the dichotomy between self-identification and identity ascribed by others has been discussed, through the theories of Fredrik Barth and others. Statements made by the informants corroborate these theories, and identity as something fluid although with a few important foundational factors, such as their Africanness at the bottom of it all. Mobility of the mind and the tradition for movement in Africa is apparent in these people – they usually have relatives in more than just their African country of origin. France is the most common other country where they have relatives, but their networks spread from all over Europe to other African countries, and to America – the USA and Canada are also popular destinations. The links are many between their countries of origin and the rest of the world in a diasporic context. As the African countries are former colonies and, they have therefore had much contact with Europe, also after independence. This contributes to the global-mindedness and the sense of the perhaps more global than local group of the West African French speaking diaspora. Identity in such cases cannot only be studied in a local or national context, the international dimension is very important and a global perspective will give a much more nuanced and rich understanding of these issues.

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