‘WHERE IS NOT HOME?’: DAGAABA MIGRANTS IN THE BRONG AHAFO REGION, 1980 TO THE PRESENT

GARIBA B. ABDUL-KORAH

ABSTRACT

The 1980s marked the beginning of a significant shift in the pattern of Dagaaba migration to southern Ghana. Instead of the mining centres of Obuasi (Ashanti region) and Prestea and Tarkwa (Western region) respectively, many Dagaaba men and women have been migrating to predominantly agricultural areas in the Brong Ahafo region. There is also evidence that Dagaaba migrants, who previously worked in the southern and coastal regions, have been relocating to the Brong Ahafo region when they either lost their jobs or retired. This article explores the factors that have culminated in the mass movement of Dagaaba men and women to the Brong Ahafo region and the reasons why ‘step’ Dagaaba migrants are relocating to the Brong Ahafo region in large numbers instead of going back home (to the north) as many of their predecessors did. The article adds to the ongoing discussion on the migration phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa by foregrounding the internal ways in which communities themselves shape migration through extended, gendered social debates over production and reproduction.

The Dagaaba of the Upper West Region (UWR) have migrated to the southern part of Ghana in various capacities since the pre-colonial period. However, since the annexation of the Northern Territories (NTs) to the Gold Coast colony in 1901, the nature and pattern of Dagaaba migration to southern Ghana changed and continues to change. Like all people of the

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then NTs, the British colonial state required the Dagaaba to contribute their labour power to colonial pursuits in the mines, plantations, and other sectors of the colonial economy mainly in the southern and coastal regions of the country.\(^2\)

In response to this policy, the first batch of state-sponsored recruited labourers from the UWR (then Northwestern Province) was sent to the mines at Tarkwa in 1909.\(^3\) Thus, while colonial policies forced the first generation of Dagaaba migrants to migrate, others, especially after the abolition of forced labour in the Gold Coast in 1936, migrated to the south without force or coercion. I will argue that unlike their predecessors who migrated to the south for a different set of complex reasons,\(^4\) the mass movement of Dagaaba migrants to the Brong Ahafo region since the 1980s is mainly due to conditions internal to their communities — ecological conditions in the UWR which began to visibly deteriorate in the 1970s. As Nsiah-Gyabaah points out, only after an ‘exceptionally severe drought’ in the 1970s did people, especially those in the UWR, begin to realise that the Sahara, which previously had been thought to be far away, was close to home.\(^5\) I will also argue that, apart from the ecological conditions in the UWR, the majority of ‘step migrants’ — those who migrated first to work in the mines and other sectors of the economy further south but decided to relocate to the Brong Ahafo region when they either lost their jobs or retired — were unable to make adequate preparation for their return home because declining conditions in the south, especially in the mining centres, generally made it impossible for migrants to save enough money, as was possible for earlier generations.

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**Migration analysis: a West African perspective**

Migration studies conducted in West Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s argued that economic factors were mostly responsible for labour migration. Prothero, for example, points out that central to labour migration in the Sokoto Province were two related issues — overpopulation and a limited land resource base. He notes that ‘the economic motive was shown to be outstanding in the reasons for migrating. . . . Ninety-two percent may be said to have been seeking to supplement their incomes in various ways’. 6 Similarly, Skinner’s study among the Mossi of Burkina Faso revealed that the Mossi migrated in large numbers to work in southern Ghana and the Ivory Coast, mainly because of economic reasons. According to Skinner, when migrants were asked why they left, ‘the answers were similar and extremely repetitious; I am poor; I need money to pay taxes and to buy clothes’. 7

In a recent study on Burkinabè migrants, however, Cordell and others emphasised the internal dynamics of West African societies in shaping the migration phenomenon. To them, the reasons why the Burkinabè migrated and continue to migrate are not static but change over time and space. 8 Similarly, Manchuelle in his study on Soninke migrants points out that African societies were not mere victims or passive recipients of external changes but societies that were capable of making decisions or choices according to their internal socio-economic and political backgrounds. 9 Though a localised study, Manchuelle’s study argues against the notion that taxation (a view that I share with him) was a cause of labour migration in West Africa. He believes that ‘existing economic and demographic models of migration can only identify why people decide to move, but they cannot explain the reasons for mobility itself’. 10

In the northern Ghanaian context, attempts to explain the migration phenomenon have always centred on theories of overpopulation, land shortage, taxation, lack of resources, and ‘bright lights’, which compelled northerners to migrate to the south in search of wage labour. Nabila, for instance, argues that overpopulation on a limited land resource base in northern Ghana made it advantageous for people to migrate and that out-migration provided an escape-valve from the stringent survival system. 11

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10. *Ibid*. Manchuelle also points out that the evidence available on the majority of taxation policies introduced by colonial administrators to promote labour migration is that they failed.
Similarly, Berg contends that the seasonal nature of labour migration — based on alternating slack and busy seasons between northern and southern Ghana — makes north–south migration appear as a natural adaptation. 12 Many development-oriented studies have also addressed the issue of north–south migration in Ghana since the 1960s. 13 Basically, these studies viewed labour migration as a direct result of a deliberate colonial policy to underdevelop the north. Songsore and Denkabe, for example, argued that northern Ghana’s present underdevelopment is the product of a colonial policy to turn the north into a labour reserve to serve the interests of southern cocoa planters, mining industries, and the metropolitan economy. 14

Moreover, Brukum believes that the colonial state was solely responsible for the underdevelopment of the north. 15 Lentz and Erlmann, for their part, have traced the origins of an urban labour force in Ghana to developments in the industrial sector after Second World War and during the immediate post-independence period. The majority of this emerging labour force, they argue, ‘was drawn from migrants from the French territories to the north of Ghana and the NTs that had been “pacified” and thus opened up as a labour reservoir since 1906’. 16

More recently, attention has been paid to the increasing feminisation of migrant labour in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa. 17 Agarwal and others, for example, in their study on the working girl child (kayayoo) observed that ‘many such girl children are part of a pattern of labour circulation between the north of Ghana and Accra’. 18 These girls (kayayoo), who are mostly school dropouts, view ‘self employment as the only way to acquire minimum assets for either better marriage prospects or greater economic

stability’, they added. Some studies have also addressed the issue of young men, mostly school drop outs, leaving home for other places especially in the south to engage in illegal small-scale mining operations popularly known as galamsey. While these studies are vital to our understanding of north–south migration in Ghana, most exclude the experiences of ordinary men and women migrants in shaping these processes. Yet it is essential that household reproduction and local communities take centre stage in investigations of labour migration. It is also essential that discussions of labour migration in West Africa address the issue of ‘step migration’ — the reasons why men and women who migrated earlier to work in other sectors of the economy, especially the mining industry, refused to return home when they either lost their jobs or were retired but decided instead to relocate to other regions, in this case the Brong Ahafo region.

The Brong Ahafo region: background

The Brong Ahafo region was created in 1959 as part of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) government’s decentralisation policy. Before then, it was part of the Ashanti region and was known as western Ashanti.

In terms of land area, it is the second largest region in Ghana, with a territorial size of 3,955,708 sq. kms. The region lies within longitude 0°15'E 3°W and latitude 8°45'N 7°3'S. As such, it forms part of the ecozone between the forest to the south and the savanna to the north, giving it a unique characteristic of producing both forest industrial and savanna food crops (Figure 1).

Today, the Brong Ahafo region comprises 13 administrative districts, with a total population of a little over 1.8 million (1,815,408) and an intercensal population growth rate of 2.5 percent between 1984 and 2000. The region has an economically active population (seven years+) of

19. Ibid.
21. The Convention Peoples Party (CPP) was formed by Nkrumah in 1948 and led the Gold Coast to independence on 6 March 1957.
24. The administrative districts in the region include Sunyani, Techiman, Wenchi, Tano, Berekum, Dormaa, Jaman, Atebubu, and Sene. The rest are Nkoranza, Kintampo, Asunafo, and Asutufi.
890,407, of which approximately 73 percent live in rural areas. Like most of the other southern regions in the country, the Brong Ahafo has a tropical climate.

26. Ibid., p. 34. For a detailed discussion on the methods of enumeration, see also Ibid., p. 9.
climate with temperatures averaging a little over 23.9°C (75°F). Unlike them, it has a double maximum rainfall pattern ranging between 1143 mm in the northern parts and 1651 mm in the southern parts; the rain falls between March and July and again from August to October.27 This climatic advantage has, in part, given the region its special attraction to Dagaaba migrants. For example, the Brong Ahafo region is one of two in Ghana that has since the 1960s exhibited a unique characteristic of continuously attracting in-migrants.28 Zachariah and Nair have estimated that, out of a total of about 84,919 net in-migrants in the Brong Ahafo region in 1960, 40.9 percent were from northern Ghana, 27.7 percent from Ashanti, 12.8 from Eastern and the remaining 18.6 from the other regions.29 This figure increased to 117,291 in 1970 and continues to do so today. The 2000 population census of Ghana, for example, estimated that well over half a million people who lived in the Brong Ahafo were born in other localities; of this figure, as many as 168,434 were from the UWR.30

**Dagaaba migrants’ experiences**

As noted earlier, Dagaaba migration to the southern part of Ghana, as in other parts of Africa, was not a colonial construction — it predates colonialism. As such, any attempt to understand the reasons why Dagaaba men and women migrated and continue to migrate today requires reference to a concrete historical analysis of developments within Dagaaba society over time.

Today the Dagaaba are located in the northwestern corner of Ghana in what is now known as the UWR. They constitute about 56 percent of the population and occupy three of five administrative districts of the region — Nadowli, Jirapa-Lambussie, and Lawra-Nandom districts.31 The other main ethnic groups in the region are the Wala and Sissala. In terms of social organisation, Dagaaba society was and still is characterised by a predominantly communal mode of production in which village communities were/are relatively autonomous with the earth-priest (*tendaana*) acting as a mediator between the people and their land.32 According to Songsore and

31. There are a few Dagaaba villages in the Wa district, and although some of the interviewees for the study were from those villages, the bulk (95.6 percent) of them were from the Nadowli District.
Denkabe, ‘if social differentiation at the level of the larger society could be described as rudimentary for most areas [in today’s UWR], the same could be said for the household political economy. These were patriarchal societies’. The household was and still is ‘based on male-headed units of extended families, consisting of one or several wives and their children and often extended with unmarried or elderly relatives’. The most important means of production, land, is still controlled by men because of the belief that it was men who discovered the village boundaries in the process of hunting. The economy is centred on agriculture with about 80 percent of the population engaged in subsistence farming. Though the social structure of Dagaaba society itself might not have changed much over the years, the dynamics within it has and continues to change. This brief overview of the socioeconomic and political organisation of Dagaaba society provides a window through which we can investigate the reasons why Dagaaba men and women migrated and continue to migrate to the Brong Ahafo region since the 1980s.

To ascertain the reason(s) why there has been an influx of Dagaaba migrants, not only of those migrating directly from home (the UWR) but particularly ‘step migrants’ in the Brong Ahafo region since the 1980s, I conducted 50 interviews (32 males and 18 females) with migrants mainly from the Nadowli district aged between 18 and 35 years who migrated directly from home between 1980 and 2001 to the Kintampo, Wenchi, and Techiman districts of the Brong Ahafo region. I also interviewed 20 male ‘step migrants’ and their spouses of various ages and collected the life stories of many of them. The findings revealed a myriad of factors that were responsible for migrants’ decisions to migrate in the first place and their decision to settle in the Brong Ahafo region. Broadly, these factors can be grouped conveniently under three headings: ecological, economic, and social.

33. Ibid., p. 74.
35. Songsore and Denkabe, Challenging Rural Poverty, p. 74.
36. As a result of the imposition of colonial rule and the introduction of Christianity and Western education into the area, relationships between men (young and old) and women in terms of roles, status, access to productive resources, and inheritance of property have and continue to change. See Gariba B. Abdul-Korah, Migration, Ethnicity, pp. 124–57.
37. Among the 32 male interviewees, 15 of them had no formal education, 10 dropped out of school at the junior secondary school (JSS) level, and the remaining 7 graduated but could not make it to the senior secondary school (SSS). Of the 18 females, 15 had a formal education — they had graduated either from the JSS or SSS. The remaining three had no formal education.
38. Only 8 of the 20 male ‘step migrants’ interviewees had completed middle school. The remaining 12 had no formal education and none of the women (their spouses) had a formal education.
Lying within the Guinea savanna belt, the UWR has one of the most degraded environments in the country. Rainfall patterns in the region are characterised not only by their seasonality but also by their variability and unreliability. Although the rainfall varies between 950 mm and 1050 mm per annum, occurring between May and October, effective rainfall is far less because this amount may occur within a few months (if not weeks) with a rapid run-off. The net result is soil erosion and depletion of soil fertility, poor harvest, and therefore the inability of people to adequately feed their families. This, coupled with the lack of alternative sources of income in the region, has made many people decide to find greener pastures elsewhere in the country.

Table 1 summarises that, among the ethnic groups in the UWR, the Dagaaba have been the most migratory and that Dagaaba living outside their home region (326,492) are more than those at home (315,434). Among the receiving regions, Brong Ahafo topped the list, followed by Northern and then Ashanti region. The reason why the Northern region attracted a significant number of migrants is because of the farming activities in the Damongo area, which, like the Brong Ahafo region, has attracted Dagaaba migrants for some time now.

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Table 1. Inter-regional migration by people of the Upper West region by ethnic composition, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Dagaaba</th>
<th>Wala</th>
<th>Sissala</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>3,171</td>
<td>2,648</td>
<td>2,066</td>
<td>8,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>1,302</td>
<td>1,005</td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>3,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper East</td>
<td>7,998</td>
<td>1,939</td>
<td>1,624</td>
<td>11,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>34,383</td>
<td>5,492</td>
<td>3,488</td>
<td>43,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>12,131</td>
<td>5,315</td>
<td>3,999</td>
<td>21,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>89,385</td>
<td>7,770</td>
<td>9,261</td>
<td>106,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Accra</td>
<td>15,678</td>
<td>9,651</td>
<td>15,125</td>
<td>40,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>45,998</td>
<td>20,289</td>
<td>17,242</td>
<td>85,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper West</td>
<td>315,434</td>
<td>89,607</td>
<td>87,556</td>
<td>492,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brong Ahafo</td>
<td>115,900</td>
<td>29,820</td>
<td>17,242</td>
<td>168,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All regions</td>
<td>641,926</td>
<td>173,536</td>
<td>165,535</td>
<td>980,997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


39. Except in a few areas along the Kulpawn River basin (popularly known as samuni among the people), the rest of the region is degraded.
40. Songsore and Denkabe, Challenging Rural Poverty, p. 23.
41. See Nsiah-Gyabaah, Environmental Degradation, pp. 54–6.
two ethnic groups (Wala and Sissala) in the region, almost half of their populations are away from home. The implications of this trend on the development of the region, I suggest, are enormous. It is true, as the majority of interviewees put it, that ‘conditions back home are not good for farming’. However, a situation where almost half of a region’s able-bodied men and women are living away from home requires thorough investigation.

Among the interviewees, 87.5 percent of the males (mostly married) mentioned ecological factors to explain their decision to emigrate and their choice of destination. They all complained about the climatic conditions at home — inadequate rainfall, bush fires, and therefore their inability to feed their families — as the main reason why they decided to migrate to the Brong Ahafo region. Almost all interviewees made reference (even if partially) to the unique climatic conditions, especially the double rainfall pattern, as a motivation for their decision to settle in their present places of residence. For example, an interviewee said that it is a waste of time and energy staying back at home. ‘You go to the farm everyday but it will not rain so you end up getting nothing at the end of farming season. You cannot even feed your family let alone buy a cloth for your wife.’

According to him, there were times that his children had to go to bed without food, and as a man he could not go out begging. ‘Even if you decided to beg, who are you going to beg from? Everybody up there [the north] is the same’, he added. What is worth noting in this story is the gender stereotype he uses to justify his case — begging defies masculinity among the Dagaaba. His plight at home was reflected in several other interviews conducted in different farming communities in the Brong Ahafo region. The majority of the men mentioned the lack of adequate rainfall and the consequent difficulties coping with life and family responsibilities as a major reason why they left. For example, an interviewee said that

In the past, yiri da numang (lit. ‘home was sweet’). It rained, and when we farmed, we got a lot of things and we had enough to eat. We would even sell some to buy clothes for our wives and children at Christmas. But it came to a time. I don’t know what we did to God. It would not rain again. You will farm and there will be a drought and everything will die off. Sometimes, you end up sowing three or four times. But in the end, you have nothing to feed your family. And where is not home? Anywhere you go and the people are nice towards you, and you are able to get your daily bread, you call there home. That’s why I decided to come here. . . . Here, we have two seasons and if you are not lazy, you will always have enough to eat.

42. Interview with Simon Yellale (34 years) on 4 December 2001, Amponsah-Krom (farmer at Amponsah-Krom).
43. Interview with Jonas Bomangsang (35 years) on 6 December 2001, Subinso (farmer at Subinso).
Though this interviewee also expressed concern about his inability to adequately provide for his family, he went further to talk about previous conditions at home, which have changed. He also believed that anywhere can be ‘home’ provided the people (hosts) are nice and one is able to obtain his/her daily bread. However, as we shall see, the definition of ‘home’ simply as a place where one can find his/her daily bread is problematic. From such testimony, it became clear that migration has been more about survival than the improvement or betterment of previous conditions, as earlier studies tend to suggest. To the majority of migrants, unlike their predecessors, they have lost the ability to care for their families, which in turn has affected their status and power in the family. Ferguson found a similar phenomenon among Zambian Copperbelt migrants that the majority of these migrants saw ‘their material poverty not as a lack but as a loss’ of previous conditions.44 Similarly, a recent survey on the living standards of Ghanaians revealed that domestic considerations rather than employment needs played a crucial role in the decision to migrate for the majority of people — almost 60 percent of all migrants mentioned a marriage-related issue (domestic disputes and family responsibilities) as the basis for migrating.45

Interestingly, while the majority of interviewees, especially those migrating directly from home to the Brong Ahafo region, blamed their plight on the lack of rainfall, they paid little attention to other factors, such as soil fertility, that ensure good harvests. As Lewis and Berry have pointed out, low agricultural productivity in the savannah grasslands of sub-Saharan Africa is not only because of the seasonality, variability, and unreliability of the rainfall but also because of poor soil fertility.46 But, as noted earlier, though interviewees were aware of the environmental degradation at home, the majority (about 87 percent) of them paid little attention to other causes of environmental degradation — beyond inadequate rainfall. As one interviewee said, ‘if it does not rain, what can we do? It is God who sends the rain so if it does not rain, the only thing you can do is to pray. There is nothing we can do about it’.47 A recent study on environmental degradation in the UWR also revealed that 100 percent of farmers and 89 percent of non-farmers were aware of crop loss and famine, and 96.6 percent and 100 percent, respectively, were also aware of deforestation, drought, and water shortage but that only a few people were aware of the causes and possible

47. Interview with Cletus Daari (33 years) on 6 December 2001, Techiman (farmer at Techiman).
remedies of these environmental problems. This was because, as the study further revealed, the majority of people in the region, as in other parts of Africa, believed that the weather was under the control of supernatural beings. As such, during periods of drought or other weather-related disasters, traditionalists make sacrifices to their gods and Christians and Moslems offer prayers to God. But resorting to prayer in times of adverse weather or environmental conditions implies the lack of education on environment-related issues among the people. By implication, this study suggests that most people in the area have yet to realise the impact of their own actions (bush burning, use of fuel wood, shifting cultivation, and other farming practices) on the environment. The techniques and strategies for dealing with environmental degradation have not been made known to the local people, or the rate of dissemination of the information is rather poor. While not discounting these conclusions, I suggest that farmers may have been aware of some strategies for restoring soil fertility, for example, but the lack of the necessary resources and skills to do so have always been a major obstacle. For example, an interviewee remarked that 'we know that the “soil is dead” [infertile] but we cannot afford to buy fertilizers to increase soil fertility. Where is the money?', he asked.

Like those married male migrants going directly from home to the Brong Ahafo region, male ‘step migrants’ also expressed concern about the environmental conditions at home — ‘there is nothing up there to go back to’, an interviewee remarked. Interestingly, however, they explained their decision to relocate to the Brong Ahafo region in ways that relegated that environmental concern to a secondary position. The majority (90 percent) of them decided to settle in the Brong Ahafo region instead of returning home because they had not accumulated sufficient wealth to ensure an appropriate social status in the UWR at the time that they either lost their jobs or retired. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the Dagaaba have assumed that people migrate to find wealth, and when they return, they are expected to do something (build a nice house, buy a motor bike, bicycle, etc.) to prove that they actually achieved their aims for leaving home. A returned migrant who cannot do anything to prove that she/he is better than those at home (non-migrants) is usually seen as a failure. For example, an interviewee said that he migrated first to Prestea, where he worked as a miner for five years. According to him, he travelled back home on a two-week leave but overstayed due to family problems. When he got back, he was discharged for absenteeism. He decided to relocate to Bamboi in the Brong Ahafo region with his family and had this to say:

49. Ibid., p. 163.
50. Ibid., p. 10.
51. Interview with Angsonaah Ali (34 years) on 6 January 2002, Ombo (farmer at Ombo).
I came here because at the time that they removed my name (discharged), I had very little money on me. And you know that when they remove your name, they don’t give you anything. So I weighed my options and decided that it would be better to come and try my luck instead of going home with empty hands. *Nyeveri la buohuu* (lit. ‘life is property – if there is life there is hope’).52

Another interviewee who had worked with the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation (AGC) for 12 years but lost his job in the mid-1980s and then moved to Techiman with his family lamented that ‘the only bad thing about mine work is that they can remove your name at any time. When my name was removed, I did not have any savings so going home was not option’.53 He explained that the reason why most people risk their lives to work underground is the hope that one day they will be lucky to find some gold with which to make an extra income, but he emphasised that gold theft was the leading cause of dismissals from the mines. He said

> They say that we should not steal gold. But we also go underground because of that. If not because of the hope that one day you will get ‘something’ small that will help you do something at home, who will go underground? . . . At the time we were caught and discharged, the place was not good (he was financially handicapped) but friends helped me to get started here.54

Stories like these were repetitive among interviewees — most of them expressed concern about how they will fit into society if they returned home with empty hands. So it can be inferred from their testimony that if they had saved enough money to return home, they probably would have done so instead of relocating to the Brong Ahafo region. The interesting thing, however, as we shall see, was that their wives were the brains behind their decision to relocate to the Brong Ahafo region. More than 60 percent of the male interviewees admitted that their wives came up with the idea that they should move to their present places of residence instead of going back home. This contrasts sharply with women in previous generations who migrated along with their husbands and did not have real agency in the migration process.55

Although the majority of married males migrating to the Brong Ahafo region directly from home were, by their testimony, motivated by ecological conditions both at home and at their destinations, others, especially those who were young and unmarried, migrated to improve their economic well-being. Nearly 12 percent of the male and all the 18 female interviewees made reference to poverty — lack of income-generating activities at home and their inability to satisfy their needs — as the main reason why

52. Interview with Joe Tizaanaah (56 years) on 2 December 2001, Bamboi (farmer at Bamboi).
53. Interview with Dumba Dery (58 years) on 20 November 2001, Techiman (farmer at Techiman).
they migrated. Though their decision to settle in the Brong Ahafo region was, in part, based on kinship, the availability of employment opportunities in that region was the main motivation. Their decision to settle in and around Techiman town, for example, was dictated by the opportunities that the market there offers for potential employees.\footnote{The Techiman market is the largest weekly market in Ghana. It operates from Tuesday to Friday reaching a climax on Fridays and attracts traders from the north, south, and even the neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire.} Attesting to the importance of the market and other employment opportunities that are available in Techiman town, an interviewee said that

Here in Techiman, you cannot go without money in your pocket except that you are lazy. If you don’t have a farm, but you can always get money by working as a \textit{paafuo} [contract labourer]. There are also ‘by-day’ jobs every where.\footnote{Interview with Lawrence Banye (26 years) on 6 December 2001, Techiman (loading boy or \textit{kayayoo} at Techiman central market).}

He went on to say that he came to Techiman with two other boys and together they worked on farms for two months, his friends returned home because they were lazy, but he decided to stay behind to work as a loading boy (\textit{kayayoo}) in the market.\footnote{Ibid.}

Similarly, another interviewee who has been working in Techiman for the past ten or so years as a loading boy said that he decided to migrate to the Brong Ahafo region because conditions at home were unbearable. He lamented that he could not afford to buy clothes and had to depend entirely on his uncle for pocket money to go out with friends on Sundays which was not always forthcoming. As such, he decided to migrate to Techiman. Though he was worried about what he would do on arrival as he did not know of any close relatives there, he was surprised that Techiman was just like home. ‘I even met people from my village here.’ A Dagao that he met on the day of his arrival offered him accommodation. That, he said, was how I started here in this town. But my luck was that our work involved strength so my size gave me an advantage over my colleagues at the station and that was how I got my name, ‘Killer’. Within a short time, I became a boss at the station and had boys working for me and from that time, I started making money.\footnote{Interview with Killer Dakurah (34 years) on 20 November 2001, Techiman (loading boy or \textit{kayayoo} at Techiman central market).}

Stories like these were common among the single, unmarried male migrants. This suggests that while their older kinsmen were more concerned about the upkeep of their families and saw the Brong Ahafo region as a place where they could adequately address those concerns, the young men were motivated by the need to improve their economic well-being. Surprisingly, even though the \textit{kayayoo} business is increasingly becoming
popular among northern migrants in the south, not many of my male inter-
viewees were enthusiastic about it and none of the females reported work-
ing as a *kayayoo*.

Like the young unmarried men, all the unmarried female interviewees were also motivated by economic reasons, but unlike them, the majority had a formal education. They had either completed junior secondary school or senior secondary school. The lack of educational facilities coupled with rising costs continues to affect the UWR in diverse ways. Even though there has been an increase in the number of senior secondary schools in the region since the 1980s, the increase is unmatched by the number of students graduating from junior secondary school in any given year — they are not able to absorb all the graduates. At the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) level, the situation is even more precarious because only a handful of students usually qualify to enter the university from these schools in any given year. There is therefore a new trend whereby males and young female graduates who did not qualify for the next stage of their education begin to migrate to the south independently to find work. In fact, today, females in the UWR are beginning to outnumber males in terms of intra- and inter-regional mobility. This is consistent with Adepoju’s observation that the traditional ‘male-dominated, long-term, and long-distance’ pattern of migration in African societies is increasingly becoming feminised. He notes that ‘anecdotal evidence reveals a striking increase in migration by women, who had traditionally remained at home while the men moved around in search of paid work’. This emerging trend in Dagaaba mobility to the south can be explained by a number of factors but more importantly by the fact that the mines, which in the past had served as the sole employer of Dagaaba males, are not only refusing to employ new workers but also cutting down the number of old employees because of drastic economic reforms embedded in the structural adjustment programmes adopted by the government in the 1980s. As such, males have very few options in the south today because the majority of them still believe that school-going and farm work, menial jobs like *kayayoo* and bartending, and many more are incompatible and therefore refuse to accept jobs in these occupations or sectors.

Thus, unlike during the colonial period, when female migration was closely linked to male movements — women merely accompanied their husbands and did not seem to have ‘real dynamic or strategic autonomy’ — things

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60. This was disclosed by the Headmaster of the Kaleo Senior Secondary School, Felix Suglo, when I had an informal conversation with him on 15 January 2002 at Kaleo.
have and continue to change, even for those girls who did not have a formal education. One of the reasons for this may be explained by an observation made by Ouedraogo of Dagara girls in Burkina Faso:

"Traditionally, unmarried girls would ‘steal’ a little of the harvest on the way home from the fields, which they then used in their money-earning activities [and] from such activities, they were able to derive an income which, though insufficient, still guaranteed them a small degree of financial independence."

This was possible in the past in the UWR but has changed because of poor crop yields and poor harvest due to the ecological conditions in the region. The situation is further compounded by the exposure of these girls to a ‘world’ beyond their home villages through Western education. As Ouedraogo points out, these women find themselves trapped within the web of political and economic domination. The younger ones in particular, he says ‘find their status as “outsiders” more and more unbearable and, by emigrating, reject it’. I found this borne out by the case of a 20-year-old Dagarti girl working as a waitress in Wenchi. She disclosed that she was fascinated by the way of dressing and the style of her friends returning from Obuasi, but because she did not have any close relatives at Obuasi, she decided to come to Wenchi, where she has an uncle. She is very satisfied with her job as a waitress and happy that she is able to afford her most pressing needs from her own earnings.

Another interviewee (also a waitress) pointed out that she completed secondary school and did not do well in her final examinations, so she came to Wenchi to work to get money to enable her to register to rewrite the examinations. Such testimony clearly reveals that, unlike in the past, Dagaaba women now have become independent actors. Rather than joining husbands in the south or visiting relations, they migrated to the south independently in search of wage labour. Their exposure to the world beyond their villages in the course of their education might have contributed in part to this change in attitude. As the majority of them put it, ‘the world has changed and our eyes are opened’. One interviewee, for example, said that in the past when an unmarried woman travelled to the south, she was automatically branded a prostitute.

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64. Ibid., p. 306.
65. Ibid., p. 308.
66. Interview with Theresa Nantiera (20 years) on 24 November 2001, Wenchi (waitress in a bar at Wenchi).
67. Interview with Diana Sabile (19 years) on 24 November 2001, Wenchi (waitress in a bar at Wenchi).
68. For a detailed discussion of the conditions under which Dagaaba women migrated to the south during the colonial period, see Abdul-Korah, Migration, Ethnicity, pp. 124–57.
But now who cares? If they call me a prostitute and I know that I am not one, why should I be worried? They can say anything they want. Once I am able to work and get money to buy the things that I need, I don’t care about what people might say.69

Similarly, another interviewee explained that her uncle sent her to Tarkwa as a maid but that he lost his job with the mines after four years and they had to return home to the north. Without money or employment opportunity, she decided to migrate to Kintampo to secure financial independence:

I was in the village for more than one year doing nothing. I did not have capital to start a business of my own so all you do is to go to the farm and come back and cook. Is that work? So I decided to come here to find work so that I can at least buy my clothes.70

Though she did not have the opportunity to go to school as several others of her age or generation, her exposure to life at Tarkwa served as an ‘eye opener’ — giving her a sense of independence to strive for her well-being. What is worth noting about her testimony is her definition or notion of work. To her, farm work and domestic chores do not constitute work. This is consistent with Lindsay’s observation that even though women’s contribution in the domestic sector is generally acknowledged and appreciated, it is not included in national statistics.71

These stories suggest that Dagaaba girls of the present are confronting past social obstacles to their advancement by following the example of the young men of their generation who are migrating especially to the Brong Ahafo region in search of work to improve their economic well-being. To these girls, migration paves the way for the future. As such, Dagaaba girls became actors as they manoeuvred their way through the ‘complex terrain of social domination’ and tried to shape their lives in ways commensurate with their experiences in the ‘world’ beyond their home villages.72 So like the unmarried young men who chose to emigrate to the Brong Ahafo region because of the availability of job opportunities, all the girls had similar reasons for migrating there.

69. Interview with Abena Saalia (22 years) on 20 November 2001, Techiman (waitress in a bar at Techiman).
70. Interview with Jane Sankuba (20 years) on 22 November 2001, Kintampo (waitress in a bar at Kintampo).
72. For another example of how society tried to control the movement of women, see Elizabeth Schmidt, Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona women in the history of Zimbabwe, 1870–1939 (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 1992).
‘Step’ migrant women, who were very influential in their husbands’ decision to relocate to the Brong Ahafo region, explained their action along similar lines. Although they worried about conditions at home and therefore their inability to support their families, their main concerns centred on the lack of capital to start a business of their own and the complexities of the extended family system, which completely denies junior women power and control over farm produce. For example, an interviewee explained that

When my husband lost his job, we did not know what to do to be able to raise our children. But we knew that going home was out because we could not go home with empty hands and do what? My husband was not very excited about coming here but I was able to convince him that it was worth trying. Now, he is very happy here because we are always able to send some food to the people at home and even sell some to buy some of our needs. I would even say that this place is better than Obuasi, where we were at first.73

Another responded even more emphatically that ‘if we had returned home, we would have been dead by now’.74 She explained that when her husband lost his job, they had no savings and that it would have been difficult if not impossible to get started at home without initial capital. ‘Besides, at home, you will toil on the farm all year round and would not even know where the harvest goes. Here, I control everything that we get from our farm’, she added.75 Thus ‘step migrants’ were reluctant to return home to the north because they were unable to make enough savings to enable them to return home and fit well into society. Expectations at home about migrants served and continue to serve as a deterrent to the majority of migrants who were unable to save enough money to do something significant (build a nice house) at home; none of them wanted to be seen as a failure.

Apart from the ecological and economic concerns that motivated many Dagaaba men and women to migrate to the Brong Ahafo region, others migrated because of social reasons. Prominent among the social factors that migrants mentioned as reasons for their migration to the Brong Ahafo region were family disputes and witchcraft. This is not surprising given the adage that ‘a hungry man is an angry man’. As the majority of people tried to confront the difficulties of feeding their families in a ‘hopeless’ situation, as they put it, domestic disputes were unavoidable. An interviewee, for example, said that at a point, he got so frustrated because of quarrels between his wife and his brother’s wife that he decided to move his family to Subinso in the Wenchi district. He explained his decision to move in a

73. Interview with Ombomah Dassah (34 years) on 25 November 2001, Subinso (housewife at Subinso).
74. Interview with Lorimah Diala (38 years) on 25 November 2001, Subinso (housewife at Subinso).
75. Ibid.
proverb ‘*ka daari ba piele taa, a ba douro taa*’ (lit. ‘if trees are not close to one another, they cannot scratch one another’). According to him, the move to the Wenchi district was helpful in two important ways. First, it put an end to the daily quarrels between the two women, and second, he was able to adequately provide the most important need of his family — food. He said that he is much happier at his present abode than he was at home because he has no difficulties feeding his family and he is also able to send his children to school, something he could not do at home.

Similarly, another interviewee said that his father had four wives and that they were four boys (half-brothers) farming with their father. He explained that one of his half-brothers decided to run away to the south, and exactly a year later, another left for the south just after Christmas to visit his uncle. But before long, they heard that he was working there. ‘So I also decided to leave for this place. I was angry because by their action, they expected me and my younger brother to stay in the village and continue farming for their mothers. Who is a slave to toil for others?’ he asked. He continued that when he decided to leave, he did not run away like his other half-brothers. ‘I told my father and, even though he was not happy, I still left.’ He also said that with the help of a friend (from his home village), he acquired a piece of land not long after his arrival, and since then he has been sending food and money to his mother every year, especially after the main harvest. In many ways, these stories suggest that the ‘traditional’ family/household structure and the dynamic and complex relationships within it compounded the daily struggles of younger men in particular, as they tried to confront the realities of life at home.

In the UWR and other parts of Ghana, as Bannerman-Richter points out, witches are not only real but ‘they are formidable and their tentacles reach far and wide’. And McCoy adds that ‘there was one particular evil spirit, called *suobo* [witch] that held great sway among the Dagaabas and Sissalas’ and that whenever a death or incident aroused suspicion, the relatives of the deceased would consult a witch doctor to identify the individual possessed by this evil spirit. To the majority of Dagaaba, then, any incident or event that defies explanation is usually attributed to witchcraft. Interestingly, 25 percent of male interviewees explained their migration in terms of such suspicious and unexplained circumstances. For example, an

76. Interview with David Sabogu (35 years) on 25 November 2001, Subinso (farmer at Subinso).
77. Ibid.
78. Interview with Daari Abudu (33 years) on 25 November 2001, Tuobodom (farmer at Tuobodom).
Interviewee said that he migrated first to Obuasi in the early 1980s and worked in the mines for four years before he was discharged. With the little money that he had saved, he returned home and decided to build a house. According to him, there was a bit of a disagreement among clan members about the site that he chose to build his house because it was a sacred place or shrine and he could not build a house there. However, supported by his elder brother who was also a Christian, he defied the warning and built the house. A year after the project was completed, the whole structure was infested by termites. He got frustrated as he had nothing to look up to at home. He abandoned the house and left with his family for the Brong Ahafo region. He believed and still believes that what happened to his house was the work of witches and wizards. His elder brother, who was his source of inspiration and support, also decided to join him in the Brong Ahafo region for the same reason(s) — they both believed that there was no guarantee on their lives if they continued to stay at home.81

Another interviewee explained that he had four snakebites within a period of four months, and his father told him proverbially that ‘the chief’s guinea fowl that goes wild is usually the one that survives to produce the next generation of guinea fowls’. According to him, this proverb was enough for him to pack his bag, and he left for the Brong Ahafo region three days after that conversation with his father. He believed and still believes that if he had defied his father’s advice and remained at home, he would have been dead by now. To him, what happened to him was not natural and was therefore the work of witches. Interestingly, however, the witchcraft stories of this generation of migrants were different from those of earlier generations. That is, while the victims in the 1930s and 1940s were mostly women accused of witchcraft and ostracised from society, those of the present generation were mostly men who believed that their lives were being threatened by witches and they had to run away. This shift, I suggest, could be attributed to the impact of Christianity and Western education on Dagaaba society. As many Dagaaba came to accept Christianity, it became increasingly difficult for them to combine their Christian faith with supernatural beliefs publicly. As such, belief in superstition, especially witchcraft, was suppressed and the methods previously used to identify witches such as ‘carrying the mat’ were relegated to the background in many villages.84 Thus, because witches could no longer be

81. Interview with Baibu Dong (34 years) on 4 December 2001, Subinso (farmer at Subinso).
82. Interview with Mathias Naamwinbong (33 years) on 5 December 2001, Wenchi (farmer at Wenchi).
83. For a detailed discussion of witchcraft stories of migrants in the 1930s and 1940s, see for example Abdul-Korah, Migration, Ethnicity, pp. 124–57.
84. For a detailed description of how the mat was used to identify witches among the Dagaaba, see McCoy, Great Things Happen, p. 65.
identified and ostracised from society, people who had reason to believe that they were bewitched left, rather than become victims.

Even though the majority of migrants, especially those with families, were more concerned about the lack of rainfall and therefore their inability to care for their families, others had economic and sociocultural reasons for migrating to the Brong Ahafo region. However, the economic motivations also superseded the sociocultural factors because almost all the girls who migrated during the period under review were motivated by purely economic factors/concerns — to improve their material well-being. As Cordell and others observed, Dagaaba men and women, like their neighbours to the north (Burkinabè migrants), migrated and continue to migrate for a complex set of reasons that changed over time, gender, and generation.85 For example, while women, irrespective of their marital status, migrated to the Brong Ahafo region for very similar reasons — lack of capital, lack of alternative sources of income for their overall economic well-being — married and unmarried men had very different sets of reasons for migrating.

More importantly, almost all interviewees mentioned the receptiveness of the Bono people as an important factor in their decision to settle in the Brong Ahafo region. They compared them with their neighbours, the Ashanti, and said that the Bono are honest and very helpful people. ‘They willingly lease their land to you to farm and they will not cheat you’, an interviewee remarked. About 50 percent of interviewees also mentioned the nearness of the region to the UWR as the basis for their decision to settle there. ‘You can leave here and get home to attend a funeral or an emergency on the same day’, an interviewee said. As in every human society, even though these migrants had occasional misunderstandings with their hosts, all the interviewees described their relationship with them as cordial.

Finally, like their predecessors, migrants also relied on kinship networks as the most important survival strategy in their communities. They tried as much as possible to live close to one another so that they can always be available to help in times of difficulties. They also use these networks to help new arrivals settle in — by helping them to acquire farmland and to put up shelters. The net result of these kinds of arrangements is that migrants have established satellite Dagaaba communities throughout the Brong Ahafo region. To further strengthen these ethnic or kinship ties, they have associations and chiefs who oversee their activities and ensure peace and order in their communities. They also observe market days as holidays, and on these days, all those in the very remote farming villages come to the market to socialise with all others from their home town — creating a sense of togetherness, community, and a common identity. Thus, even though the majority of these migrants believed that anywhere

85. See Cordell et al., Hoe & Wage, p. 40.
can be home, I suggest that the communities that they have established in the Brong Ahafo region, which they call ‘home’, are homes away from ‘home’, because in their testimony they continued to refer to the villages in which they were born also as home. More importantly, they all expressed the wish to be buried near their ancestors when they die — in the UWR.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that migration is a complex phenomenon and that the reasons why people migrate are not static. I outlined the reasons why the younger generation of Dagaaba migrants left home and why the majority of them have chosen the Brong Ahafo region as a destination. I have argued that the younger generation of migrants was compelled to leave by the fast deteriorating ecological conditions at home. The inadequate rainfall coupled with the lack of alternative sources of income in the UWR made it almost impossible for the majority of people to provide for their families. Thus, Dagaaba migration during the period under review was more about survival than it was about the betterment or improvement of previous conditions. Migrants were motivated more by the need to feed their families and therefore sought places that could better support their agricultural activities. Unlike their counterparts who migrated earlier, especially during the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods, they did not go to the mines, ports, railways, or cocoa plantations but decided to go to predominantly farming areas in the Brong Ahafo region. Also unlike their predecessors, who either left their families behind or had them join them later, these migrants migrated with their families because, as the majority of them put it, the well-being of their families was their number one priority.

The article also has demonstrated that, unlike in previous generations, Dagaaba women became independent actors during the period under review. Rather than joining husbands in the south or visiting relations, they migrated independently in search of wage labour. This was mainly due to their exposure to the world beyond their villages during their education. As the majority of them put it, ‘the world has changed and our eyes are opened’.

As the evidence presented here illustrates, the pattern of Dagaaba mobility changed from rural–urban (earlier generations) to rural–rural in the case of those migrating directly from home to the Brong Ahafo region and urban–rural in the case of the ‘step migrants’. The length of stay also changed from seasonal or short-term (1930s–1950s) and long-term (1960s–1980s) to more permanent stays in the 1980s and 1990s. The majority of these migrants have no plans to return to the UWR any time soon because to them ‘where is not home?’.
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