Politics, Patriarchy, and New Traditions: Understanding Female Migration among the Jola (Senegal, West Africa)

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Urban migration has been one of the key processes unfolding in West Africa, as well as globally, over the past century (see Guglar and Flanagan 1978). It is hard to imagine a West African community that has not now been significantly shaped by the movement of its members between rural and urban locations. Indeed, other key social processes that have been unfolding in Africa over the last century, such as the expansion of educational opportunities, the growth of urban employment opportunities, and the centralization of political institutions, cannot be fully understood unless they are placed in the context of urban migration. My research on migration in Mandégane was driven by an awareness that, in addition to having an impact on macro-level demographic, economic, political phenomena, urban migration was also profoundly shaping institutions at the local level, such as village economic strategies, local political institutions, and gender relations.¹

Over the past forty years, the people of the Jola village of Mandégane² have been extensively involved in urban migration. In the early 1990s, roughly two thousand people lived in this large village. However, by then the impact of migration had transformed this village into what I refer to as a ‘translocal community’ dispersed throughout

¹ Archival and field research for this paper was conducted in Mandégane and Dakar from 1988 to 1990 and during several shorter research trips that occurred between 1987 and 2002. This research was generously funded by the US Department of Education (Fullbright-Hays), Harvard University, and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I thank Hans P. Hahn, Vincent Foucher, Ferdinand de Jong, and Valerie Lambert for their generosity in providing comments on this article. Of course, I remain solely responsible for any shortcomings in the argument.

² Mandégane is in Senegal’s Basse-Casamance region, an insular region wedged between the Gambia and Guinea Bissau. For an extended discussion of the impact of migration on Mandégane see Longing for Exile (Lambert 2002a).
Senegambia. In 1990 roughly one quarter of its members lived in the rural village of Mandégane, one quarter in other rural locations, one quarter in Dakar, and one quarter in other urban locations. Despite the dispersal of its members, relationships between members of this migrant community remain dense. Seventy percent of women and eighty percent of men marry people who trace descent to Mandégane.\(^3\)

The current level of local involvement in urban migration is so extensive that virtually all men and women born after 1960 have migrated to urban Senegal in search of employment.

The high levels of female migration attracted my attention to this village. Scholars have long recognized that Jola and Serer women provide the bulk of labor for Senegal’s rather expensive and poorly paid urban domestic labor market.\(^4\) This contrasts with other ethnic groups in Senegal, the Halpulaar for example, whose women rarely migrate independently of men (see Diop 1965).

My research on female migration in Mandégane began with a set of questions about the facts of female migration: What form did their migration take? Where did they live? How did they find jobs? And how long did they stay in the city? In pursuing answers to these questions I found that, while poverty looms large in the decisions of both men and women to migrate to urban locations, economic factors alone cannot explain the extent and shape of Jola female migration. This article foregrounds a significant feature of Jola female migration that cannot be easily incorporated into analyses that overemphasize economic factors: in order to migrate to urban locations, Jola women have to negotiate social and political barriers. Local Jola men erect some of the most formidable of these barriers, united as they often are in their opposition to female migration.

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3 This data was derived from a comprehensive genealogical census that I compiled for one section of the village Mandégane. I included in the census all individuals, regardless of where they were living, who were genealogically related to residents of this village section.

4 Other significant works which address Jola female migration include De Jong (1999); Hamer (1981, 1983); Foucher (2002, 2005); Lambert (2002a, 2002b, 1999); Mark (1978); Reboussin (1985); and van der Klei (1977, 1985).

5 I thank Hans P. Hahn, coeditor of this volume, for pointing me in the direction of this approach, which he suggested in his opening comments to the lecture series out of which this volume emerged.

6 See Foucher (2005) for a detailed examination of the efforts of male dominated Jola urban associations to control female mobility. Foucher persuasively argues that female migration was critical in the development of a ‘national’ identity in the
plan, which had not met much success, in the late 1950s. Less than fifteen years later, a village-wide association banned female migration. Though this created quite a stir, it, too, proved ineffective. On a rainy night in 1990, the father of a thirteen-year-old girl vehemently protested his daughter’s plans to spend the summer in the city. Several hours later, she boarded the bus for Dakar. Less than a year earlier, a man forced his daughter to return to Mandégané from Dakar for an arranged marriage. Six months after the marriage her husband died, and she fled back to the city. Some villagers were convinced that she had killed him.

The fact that the women of Mandégané resisted the attempts made by men to control their mobility should not be surprising. Jola women are popularly viewed as enjoying considerable power and autonomy from men. Yet Jola women have not always expressed their autonomy through migration. Although migration has a long history in Mandégané (dating back to the earliest recorded period) it has only been with the emergence of urban migration in the 1940s that female mobility has become progressively autonomous of the movements of men.

Prior to this time female migration was predominantly associational. That is, women moved with their spouses and their labor and earnings remained largely under the control of men. Alice Hamer (1981, 1983) and Peter Mark (1976, 1977) have documented the migrations of Jola women through the 1920s, who journeyed with their husbands as far as The Gambia to collect rubber, palm oil, and forest products for trade with European and Manding traders.7

In the 1920s, this seasonal labor migration began to change. The rubber market collapsed, and men began to turn to peanuts as a source of cash (Mark 1977; see also van der Klei 1985). Rather than exploit the highlands surrounding Mandégané, these men left Mandégané during the rainy seasons to cultivate in other villages as tenant farmers. Initially, women did not accompany men during these seasonal migrations (referred to in French as navétane). By the 1930s, this had changed, and sisters began accompanying their ‘brothers’ to help in the fields by planting the peanut seeds and in the household by cooking and tending to other chores. The compensation women received for this work was meager. Some of the women with whom I spoke claimed that their brothers would give them a few pieces of cloth. Others said that they were allowed to gather the peanuts that remained on the ground after the harvest. Under this arrangement, men firmly controlled the earnings and female labor.

This began to change after the Second World War when men and women began pursuing economic opportunities in urban Senegal. Post-World War II changes in French colonial policy opened up more attractive and lucrative ways of earning cash. France transferred some of its industries to Dakar and later promoted the development of Senegal’s urban economy by increasing its investments in the urban infrastructure, including public education. France also began expanding opportunities for Africans in the military, the civil administration, and Senegal’s industries (Manning 1988: 119-130).

At the outset, Mandégané’s elders were wary of the consequences these new economic opportunities might have on the village. One of the original male migrants told me that the elders opposed migration, a reasonable stance for a community that was dependent on agricultural production. In the 1940s several young men defied the wishes of the village elders, enrolled in this school, earned their primary school know other details concerning their migration, such as where they lived and how they managed their earnings.
certificates, and ventured to Dakar and Ziguinchor, the regional capital, in search of jobs.

Other men were to follow, but during the 1940s and 1950s, urban migration was limited to those who had attended school. It was not until the 1960s that all men, regardless of educational attainment, began venturing to Dakar in the hope of securing permanent employment. By the 1960s at the latest, men were explicitly pursuing long-term migration. They hoped to settle, marry, and raise their families in urban Senegal and reap the benefits of economic policies that favored the development of urban Senegal over the rural hinterland (see Bates 1981).

By the 1950s, Mandégy’s women had also begun to engage in seasonal urban migration to take advantage of post-war opportunities in urban Senegal. By then, women could earn more working during the dry season (from January to July) as domestic workers in urban locations than they could on the navétane. Moreover, by working as domestic workers, women had more control over their earnings. Initially, not all women took advantage of this opportunity, and they were not pressured to do so. One woman told me that she had gone to Ziguinchor for one season but decided not to return to the city. She did not understand why she should work for a ‘stranger’ instead of remaining in the village to help her mother. Other women, however, began migrating to Ziguinchor or Bathurst (now called Banjul, The Gambia) in the dry season to work as domestics. Like male migrants, they retained close ties to the village. They returned for the wet season and most married and settled in the village.

By 1960, however, women’s patterns of urban migration had begun to change. By then nearly all women had abandoned the navétane in favor of seasonal urban migration. This shift was due in part to the completion of the Transgambian highway. This road, which connected the Casamance overland to Dakar, rendered Senegal’s most lucrative labor market easily accessible to Mandégy’s women. This shift was also due to the fact that, by then, goods such as manufactured cloth and cooking utensils were starting to become commonplace in the village.

As the demand for these goods increased, women realized that the few pieces of cloth their brothers had sometimes presented them after the navétane was not enough. Moreover, they knew that they could not depend on their rural-based husbands to provide them with these goods.

The attempts to control female migration I mentioned earlier provide vivid evidence that many people in Mandégy’s, particularly men, were anxious about female migration. They probably had reason to be anxious. Dakar was distant from Mandégy, and many village elders had not visited there. There was probably genuine anxiety for the well-being of these young women, anxiety over the potential loss of labor for rice and peanut cultivation and anxiety that potential marriage partners were being lost to the city.

Women understood this, and they timed their seasonal urban migration so that it presented as little disruption and posed as little threat to the community as possible. Although they did withdraw their labor from the navétane, they usually returned to Mandégy’s to assist their rural-based relatives with the onerous tasks of rice transplanting and harvesting. They also limited their seasonal migrations to a couple of seasons before they married—when they were old enough that their parents would not be alarmed by their living in the city but before they were burdened by the considerable demands placed on married women. They shaped female urban migration to allay fears that women, and their reproductive abilities, were slipping out of the community.

Within a few years these female seasonal migration patterns had become institutionalized and expected, even required, of all women. The community expected women to use their earnings to amass a trousseau of clothes and cooking utensils. Through the 1960s, this seasonal urban migration was primarily a means to procure a trousseau. Most women spent only a couple of dry seasons in the city. By the mid-1970s, however, women had begun migrating at much earlier ages and returning much later, if at all. Young schoolgirls, some as young as thirteen, began leaving the village during the summer to work in the city. By the late 1980s, female migration had become a defining feature of Mandégy’s. Women were spending several years in the city
even before they began collecting their trousseau. Some unmarried women had been living there for fifteen years. By the time of my research in 1990, female migration was no longer a transitional activity that filled the years between adolescence and marriage. By then most women, like their male kin, aspired to become permanent urban residents.

**Empowering Institutions:**

This represented a significant departure. Until the development of patterns of urban migration, women usually migrated under the tutelage of men, usually their husbands and/or brothers. Now, with urban migration, many female migrants live independently of men and manage to evade the demands that men have historically placed on their labor. They achieved this by concealing their struggle against local expressions of patriarchy in new cultural traditions and by mobilizing female institutions. Two of the most important of such institutions were networks of patrilineally related sisters and the age-gender groups.

Gender segregation is pronounced in Mandégané. This is not just reflected in daily activities, such as work and leisure, but also in what might be called a ‘gendered division of power.’ For almost any men’s association there is a corresponding women’s association. Both men and women have their sacred forests. The village and section men’s associations are mirrored by those of women. Significantly, few in Mandégané expect the women’s associations to acquiesce to decisions made by men.

In addition to these larger associations, there is also a long history of other informally organized associations, the most important of which are what Olga Linares (1988) has referred to as *kuriiman*, or groups of patrilineally related sisters. Although the Jola are patrilocal, married women retain close ties with their sisters and other female members of their patrilineage. The small size and large number of these groups probably makes it easier for them to work covertly, allowing them to hold meetings without informing male relatives. In these meetings, it is easy for them to arrange secretly for the migration of young women. I find it interesting that when men became alarmed about female migration they attempted to end the women’s newfound mobility by focusing on ending female migration, pure and simple. At no point did I hear of an instance in which the men confronted these groups of patrilineally related sisters which most everyone in the community knew to be involved in promoting female migration. It is as though the men did not have the will or ability to challenge directly these women’s groups. The possibility that men would make such a challenge became increasingly remote as the target of female migration became increasingly accepted by the people of Mandégané as a ‘tradition.’ The first female migrants might have purchased goods for their personal use, but by the late 1950s this had changed. By then, all women were expected to amass a trousseau for their wedding day.

By all accounts, the trousseau was a new institution that developed within the context of female urban migration. An older woman explained to me that, before urban migration, ‘women entered their marriages empty handed.’ To be sure, they might have entered their marriages empty handed, but they did enter their marriages with their hands, which these women used to weave baskets, some of which they traded for clay cooking materials—items that they would use in their conjugal households. Apparently, women have always been responsible for acquiring cooking materials, but it was only in recent years that women were expected to have collected these goods before they married.

Women assembled this cultural expectation behind the scenes, beyond the knowledge and control of men, mostly in the tightly woven social networks of the *kuriiman*. When women first moved to urban Senegal as associational migrants, they established networks of patrilineally related women that spanned rural and urban locations. Rural-based women used these networks to aid their daughters in collecting their trousseau. Daughters were often sent to live with maternal aunts. These urban women provided young girls with lodging and employment. Some received their nieces’ salaries directly from the girls’ employers. When the time came, they helped their nieces choose their
goods. The goods were then stored in the aunts’ home until her niece married. On the eve of the marriage, the bride’s maternal relatives held a ceremony at which the bride displayed her trousseau to them—aluminum cooking pots, serving bowls, cooking utensils and cloth. After the marriage the bride’s mother stored the trousseau. Then, as they were needed, the goods were surreptitiously moved into the bride’s matrimonial household. Several years might pass before a man even saw these goods. Once women were armed with a culturally sanctioned reason to migrate there was little anyone could do to control their mobility. The construction of meaning surrounding female migration did not end there. Other meanings emerged that legitimized the migration of even younger girls.

By the early 1970s, young teenage girls, some as young as thirteen, had begun spending their summers in the city. I happened upon this type of migration by chance on a hot June night. Around midnight a bus rolled into the village. All the girls climbed aboard, filling the bus beyond its legal capacity. Some girls were sitting on the dashboard as the bus lurched off for Dakar. I assumed that parents were sending their daughters to the city to increase their household income. As it turned out, however, many of these girls left for the city against their parents’ wishes. These girls did not seek to increase household income or amass a trousseau. They had climbed aboard the bus and were heading to Dakar for the summer because they wanted clothes.

Style and Village Politics:

By the 1970s, young girls had started attending school in the village. This accelerated the demand of young teenage girls for new clothes. Before then, girls rarely left their village section. The school, in the center of Mandégane, drew girls out of the informality of their residential areas of the village, each of which has roughly 200 inhabitants.

8 Vincent Foucher (personal communication) has collected testimonies from women which reveal that some unmarried migrant Jola women were taking their younger "sisters" with them on these seasonal urban migrations earlier than the 1970s.
9 Mandégane is divided into eight village sections. These are intimate residential sections into an arena that demanded formality—the school even had a dress code. They also moved out of their sections into the dance halls where, during the summer, young female return-migrants used clothes to flaunt their urbanity. Together, the school and dance hall provided the youth with locations in which to develop and pursue their own styles, styles the youth used to confront the elders’ authority but which were beyond the elders’ control. In the dance hall, young village-based girls were exposed to the presumed success and sophistication of older urban-based sisters who worked as domestics in the city. A young woman, who was not raised in Mandégane, confessed to me that even she was almost seduced by these displays. She told me that in her early teens she wanted to quit school and become a domestic. She said that would have done so had her father not been so adamantly against the idea. For most village-based girls, employment as a domestic is the only visible path into the urbanity to which they are exposed.

These new youth styles presented a problem. Although older girls could pursue long-term employment in Dakar, the question of how to satisfy the demand for clothes of pre- and early teenage girls remained. How could they ensure that they would be appropriately dressed in front of their peers at school and in the dance hall? Few, if any, of their mothers earned enough trading ‘forest fruit’ and vegetables to ensure this for their daughters. Some village-based mothers claimed that they decided that seasonal migration was the solution. Although most of these girls lacked the experience to find full-time employment, it was not difficult for them to find part-time seasonal work cleaning clothes or doing other household chores. The girls conspired with one another to make sure that they would not miss this opportunity.

Central to the social organization of the village are gender- and age-based groups. These groups organize agricultural labor (Thomas 1959; Péliossier 1966) and are central to the social and political organization of each village section. Not surprisingly, girls used these groups to assume control over planning their migration. In some sections, the men’s association has had to negotiate with these groups, at times unsuccessfully, to ensure the timely return of girls and women for the
agricultural season. In such groups, girls arrange the logistics of their migration. This is what happened, I later learned, when the girls climbed aboard the bus for Dakar on that night in June.

**Deceptive ‘targets’**

By the 1990s, cultural meanings surrounded and legitimated the migration of women ranging in age from the early teens to the mid-twenties. Female migrants did not choose these meanings. Nor did they control the institutions in which these meanings were produced. Still, they were accountable to them. Young girls were expected to have clothes for the school year, and young adult women were expected to amass a trousseau.

Whatever the men’s opinions, by their mid twenties women were expected to have a history of migration: a history pieced together through the pursuit of a series of targets. This is how women described it. They pursued targets. Men did not. Men explicitly pursued long-term migration. Men did not disguise their goal of finding secure urban employment and settling in the city, whereas women claimed that once they attained their target, they would return to the village. Schoolgirls said that they would return to school at the end of the summer. Late teenage girls said that they planned to return to Mandégane once they had collected their trousseau.

While most schoolgirls did indeed return to the village, many slid into pursuing a trousseau by not returning for the school year. The trousseau was a particularly powerful target. It legitimized female migration as a strategy by which women could enhance their future husband’s domestic situation. Moreover, by the time I conducted this research the collection of a trousseau was accepted by all as a legitimate cultural tradition. But are these targets really what these women are pursuing or are they covers behind which women pursue other objectives?

Once during an interview with two young teenage women, I asked them why they had migrated to the city. They shyly looked down and shuffled their feet. When it became apparent that they would not respond, an older married woman quickly and boldly stated what the young women were too embarrassed to admit. The older woman explained that the young women had gone to the city in the hopes of marrying there. When I asked her why they did not want to return to the village, her response was both straightforward and reasonable: village working conditions are too difficult. In the village, women must collect firewood, draw and haul water, and work in the fields. Very simply, urban wives are freed from these tasks. This was not the only time that I heard women claim that this is why women did not want to remain in the village. The subtext is that women use migration to challenge the gendered labor arrangements of rural life.

Although women use ‘targets’ to create opportunities to migrate, ultimately they have to find a way to stay in the city. Most women have limited long-term employment possibilities. Rarely do they have more than a sixth grade education. They work in the informal sector and earn about 20,000 CFA/month. Only a few secure lucrative jobs such as jobs with European employers, particularly now that the market for domestics has become saturated. Moreover, living conditions are poor. Most share small rooms in crowded houses with four or five friends. They might earn enough to prolong their stays in the city, but certainly not enough to remain independent for the duration of their lives. Marriage presents them with their best chance of remaining in the city and improving their economic situation. This goal is not easily achieved, however.

In light of the high rates of endogamy among members of the village of Mandégane (see the second paragraph of this article), the success of women in achieving this goal depends on the success of the village’s men. Following the Second World War, the demand in Senegal for educated Africans was high. Now, Senegal’s stagnant economy, together with a considerable labor surplus, makes finding employment in the formal sector difficult. Men who do not secure jobs

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10 At the time, the CFA was pegged to the French Franc at the fixed exchange rate of 100 CFA to 1 French Franc.
eventually return to Mandégane and marry women who have failed to marry men employed in the city.

Anxieties about marriage informed the economic objectives of men. Unmarried men knew that they could strengthen their hand in choosing with whom and when they married through employment in Senegal’s formal economy. The ill-fated marriage, mentioned earlier, in which a reluctant bride was accused of murdering her rural-based husband made the link between marriage and migration all too clear.

This tragic event struck a nerve in Mandégane. It forced reflection on female migration, the efforts which are made to control the movements of women, and the anxieties of men that they will not marry, or at least, will not marry a partner of their choosing. To be sure, men, even those who fail, do not expect to die at the hands of their wives. Yet this story and others that circulate in Mandégane are unsettling. For example, after her marriage to a village-based man, one woman quietly moved her belongings to the forest. Then one morning she disappeared. In the late 1970s, another woman, perhaps in protest against a village marriage, entered her husband’s household pregnant by another man. These stories, told repeatedly, underline how marriage is closely tied to urban migration. Moreover, they underline the close connection that exists between migration, power, and patriarchy.

When women started migrating in the late 1940s, many might have viewed their short sojourns in the city as relatively insignificant. They might have been pleased by the earnings and goods they brought back to the village. They did not and could not foresee how female migration would change over the next sixty years. By all accounts, in the past (possibly as much imagined as real) youth were largely restricted to their respective sections. Localized patriarchal and gerontocratic systems of domination rigorously disciplined their behavior. As this community became increasingly involved in the cash economy, other institutions came to discipline the youth. Of particular importance for women were their cohorts, female centered kin networks, youth styles, and goods. Now, in Mandégane, these girls (and women) have become a powerful force in disciplining the men of Mandégane.

This discipline was not imposed through brute force. Rather, it grew slowly like a creeping vine. It is a discipline born of colonial policies, local politics, and newly created cultural traditions that now has this community firmly bound to the practice of migration.

Poverty and Migration

This ‘practice of migration’, that so marks population movements in Mandégane, must be understood against the background of the dire poverty that renders these population movements meaningful. The community of Mandégane is poor, and Senegal is beset by poverty. According to the estimates of the Senegalese government (which defines poverty as consuming less than 2400 calories a day) over half of Senegal’s population lives in poverty (Senegal 2003). The region of Ziguinchor, home to the village of Mandégane, has the second highest rate of poverty among Senegal’s seven regions. Poverty is readily encountered within the rural community of Mandégane. With the exception of just a few of the residents, everyone depends on rice and peanut cultivation for their livelihood. Moreover, the lack of animal or mechanical traction greatly limits agricultural production. In a survey that I conducted in this community, I found that all households were dependent upon store-bought rice for at least one-third of their household needs. Much of the money for this rice is not earned in the village but instead is procured through remittances from urban migrants. With the exception of the occasional festival, meat is not a part of the normal diet, and fish is unavailable during the summer months. Most homes are of adobe construction, have dirt floors, and have neither electricity nor running water. Women draw water from wells that often become salinated and procure fuel by cutting firewood from the surrounding forest. There are few if any opportunities to earn a cash income beyond the marketing of locally grown peanuts and fruits.

Conditions for members of this community who live in the city of Dakar are equally bleak. Young unmarried men and women live in cramped conditions. Usually groups of five or six men or women live in a room scarcely two meters by two meters. They often share toilet
facilities with up to twenty other similar rooms in the complex. Usually when they are married, they no longer have to share their lodging with members of their age cohort but often their living quarters are just as cramped. Small families often live in the rented space that was once occupied by the cohort of young men or women. A few members of this community have done well enough to purchase their homes. The community considers these people to have escaped poverty, but their numbers are few.

Despite the failure of migration to provide a solution to their poverty, the people of Mandégane frequently maintained that poverty explained why they left the village for the city. Both men and women claimed that they and others left Mandégane for Dakar so that they could find jobs. Many also claimed that they never would have left the Casamance if there were more jobs in the region. Others attributed the willingness of elders to let their daughters go to the city to the degree to which they were dependent on the remittances these women would send back to them.

While, without question, migration has not provided the people of Mandégane with a solution to their impoverishment, poverty has significantly shaped the experience of migration. In particular, poverty and the desperate hope migration engenders helps explain why people move from locations rooted in subsistence economies to ones based in the cash economy, the intensity of the migration flows, and the cohesiveness of the community in the receiving location. The community of Mandégane and the density of relations that members of this community share with one another in urban locations echoes Carol Stack’s (1974) study of poor communities in the United States that are bound together by poverty into reciprocal gifting relationships as a way to make ends meet.

Poverty, and its relationship to migration, is not just an economic reality. It is also political, and it speaks to the way by which economic inequities have been built into the Senegalese landscape. Mandégane’s poverty must be seen against the background of the regional political economy and how the village of Mandégane was relegated to the margins of Senegal’s economy. Ingredient to this was how the French incorporated the Casamance into Senegal during the colonial era, the introduction of peanut as a cash crop, and how port, rail, and road networks economically favored emerging urban locations on the Cap Vert peninsula, and the way in which these inequities have been perpetuated in post-colonial Senegal.

One outcome of these developments, female migration, has been marked by controversy at the local level. Until as late as 1978, there have been collective efforts in Mandégane to stem the flow of women to the city, and to this day, some men try to prevent their daughters from migrating. While the institution of the trousseau has provided women with a cultural institution within which they can present their stays in the city as legitimate, this institution is not apolitical. The approach to migration that I have used in this paper reveals that the trousseau is a potent expression of gendered tensions and (local) political struggles. On the one hand, women present the trousseau as evidence of their commitment to the institutions of rural marriages and local forms of patriarchy, and then, on the other hand, they use the trousseau as a tool to make it possible for them to break free from these institutions.

I close with the conundrum that this has presented to the women of Mandégane. These women have been able to score a victory in their struggle against local expressions of patriarchy. The women of Mandégane have used the trousseau and urban migration to force men to confront women’s dissatisfaction with rural gender roles. In addition, men have responded by aggressively, if at times futilely, striving to secure urban employment and provide their future wives with positions in urban households. Yet the fact remains that most people of Mandégane who reside in Dakar live on the economic margins of urban Senegal, and that, by way of migration, they have merely moved from one experience of poverty to another. Most women of Mandégane moved to Dakar to work as domestics, a marginal and exploited occupational niche in the urban economy. This is a niche that provides women with neither long term economic security nor much, if any,
opportunity for advancement. Due to their lack of education these women are excluded from pursuing the more economically secure salaried positions in urban Senegal, positions which men are much more likely to land. One must wonder whether these women of Mandégané have struggled and won against one expression of patriarchy only to find themselves entwined in another.

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Migration as Discursive Space – Negotiations of Leaving and Returning in the Kasena Homeland (Burkina Faso)

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1. Introduction

This essay explores a particular perspective on migration. It deals with migrations from a rural area in Burkina Faso to the West African coastal regions (Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) and in particular with the situation of returning migrants and the perspective of those left behind in the village of origin. A closer look at this case study allows us to move beyond the dominant discourse on migration which explains the migratory phenomenon as a result of deficits in the society of origin or as a search for an improvement of one's economic situation. Within this line of reasoning, to compensate a deficit or to improve a situation always tends to be regarded as the underlying motive of migrants. This explanation, which may be called the "deficiency-model", is a widespread but not always explicitly pronounced argument both in modernization (or development) theory as well as in dependency theory in migration studies (Kearney 1986). Arguably, it may be a result of the researchers' personal bias and of their own social experiences, stemming from non-mobile contexts (De Bruijn et al. 2001). In opposition to this deficiency-model the following essay is based on the assumption that migration is not "born out of need", but embodies part of the everyday strategies of many people in Africa and elsewhere. With this I am pursuing the line of thought as outlined in the introduction to this book.

1 A preliminary version of this paper was presented in November 2005 at a Colloquium at the Institute for African Studies at Bayreuth University. I wish to thank my colleagues for their comments on this text.