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Umoja means solidarity, unity, and oneness in Swahili, an East African language widely spoken as a lingua franca.

Black Children's Identity: Race, Gender and School

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Abstract

This study illuminates the meaning making world of African American children. Ethnography, questionnaires and interviews, captured the voice and manifestations of Black children's definitions of gender and racial constructions and their intersections - racialized gender identity. Participants were 5th, 6th, and 7th graders in a large Midwestern urban city after-school program. The boys expressed an externally derived maleness focused on humor and toughness, yet spoke of masculinity as marked by caring. Femaleness emerged as strong and complicated, yet sexualized and silenced. The children also expressed a keen sense of racial projects, especially in the school context, imaging "Blackness" around lack and deviance. In contrast, their defining of what it means to be Black was filled with strength and triumph. The multiple produced and projected representations were juxtaposed against the participant's discourse reflecting the presence and desire for a self apart from external constructions.

Key words: racialized gender identity, schooling, representation

Introduction

African American children represent the beginning of the journey, the "struggle" and strivings for self that African Americans undertake, yet a body of work focusing on African American children and identity development is still growing and there is an even smaller amount of work which centers on gender and racialized gender constructs. Seldom in identity work are African American children the focus group and rarely is it their voice that is used to define their sense of self (Hemmings, 1998; Proweller, 1999). We need to know more about who African American males and females say they are, more about the constructs of identity, and more on the ways in which those constructs impact schooling.

Both the contextual and theoretical frames for this work come from multiple fields of

study. An investigation into the racialized gender identity constructs of African American children and their implications on schooling calls for an understanding of the socio-historical context from which identity emerges (Stevens, 1997; Hemmings, 1998; Proweller, 1999). In this case that context includes issues of colonialism, race, and gender. As a result, this study utilized sociological, anthropological, psychological and gender studies theories for conceptualization and analysis.

Raced and Gendered Context

Long before the "peculiar institution" of slavery in the U.S., the earliest contact between Europeans and Africans began the process of constructing the notions of "Blackness." Those initial impressions of Africans as savage, over-sexed heathens have yet to be shaken in the centuries that

have followed (Takaki, 1994). Slavery coupled paradigms of race with deeply imbedded sexist ideologies and began the destruction and subsequent re-creation of the Black psyche. A process housed in an emerging American culture marked by the oppressions intimately woven into its very fabric (Isom, 2007).

How easy it would be if slavery remained a discussion of history, a period long past and forgotten, but unfortunately, it bleeds into today, carried into our American consciousness and society with ramifications for both “race” and gender. Omi and Winant (1994) describe race as “a matter of both social structure and cultural representation... [Where] racial projects connect what race means... [with] the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning” (1994: 56). It is these racial and gender “projects,” according to Omi and Winant (1994), that display the ways in which structure and representation work together and manifest the images and meanings around gender and race on the structural and experiential planes. Forged into our macro- and micro- social behaviors and environments as well as our psychological notions are the images of African American men and women defining and constraining what slavery had not already distorted (Ani, 1994).

Identity

To function within those social and ideological constraints, African Americans generate their own images of who they need to be in order to navigate the racial and gender charged environment in which they find themselves. Stevens (1997) points this out for African American adolescents by describing “a core developmental task [as]

synthesizing coherent meaning systems from three experiences of socialization: (1) mainstream society (Euro-American worldview); (2) a devalued social status (affected by the status convergence of gender and race); and (3) cultural group reference (Afro-American worldview)” (1997: 148). All of those domains become the sources of meaning making, resistance, and ultimately identity development; “multitextured socialization experiences from which complex identities develop” (Stevens, 1997: 146). DuBois spoke of this process as “double consciousness,” the “peculiar sensation...of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Dubois, 1903, 1994: 2).

If one were repeatedly told that one was stupid, one’s feelings would be hurt. If other people believed that this was true, opportunities might be tougher to come by, parts of the self could be damaged, maybe, but not destroyed. If one internalized that projected stupidity, one might begin acting stupid—or trying to prove smartness in order to survive, give in to, or resist the message and messengers—but the “real” self would still be present. It is not until one begins to believe that one is truly stupid, begins to see the messengers of this truth as knowing more than oneself, that identity becomes threatened (Fanon, 1967).

It is authentic identity that stands uniquely equipped to acknowledge the conflict between the authentic and constructed, the performance and performer. “It is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are” (Marley and Chen, 1996: 473). The

knowledge of self in positionality, in relationship, in context, becomes the distinctive task and empowering force of the authentic.

That acknowledgement of relationships, between the self and context, the self and others, the self with self, can only come from a sense of the authentic as not simply a fixed, essentialized entity, but an amassing of knowledge and experiences. The authentic both accumulates and is the accumulation, with much of that awareness coming out of experience and the process of becoming, reclaiming, and remembering one's created self.

Raced and Gendered School Context

School, in many ways, stands as a microcosm of our society and wields such presence and power in the minds and lives of children. Like the broader context from which it developed, schooling is infused with issues of race and racism (Tatum, 1997, 1999). As an institution and practice, education not only reflects the Anglo-centric norms and culture of U.S. society, but also the racialized structures and representations from which it arose. Alone, the existing cultural and ethnic gap between White teachers/administrators and students of color assists in the race-based constructions of the environment of schools. "Whiteness" becomes imaged as the possessor of power, knowledge and normalcy; juxtaposed to a Blackness marked by lack, need, and deviance. That process is exacerbated by the lack of teacher preparation in understanding the oppression and racial projects at work in students, themselves, their curriculum, pedagogy or the very institution they serve and represent. School structure, resource allocations, academic expectations, curriculum content all speak to

the power and presence of racism and neo-colonialism (Banks, 1994; Price, 1999). We have yet to eliminate "the power that [schools and] teacher[s] wield over students, not just in the allocation of grades, but in the maintenance of racism in the United States through what and how they do and do not talk about regarding students' lives and their collective histories" (Price, 1999: 241).

Educational research has investigated the effects of race and gender on schooling focusing largely on external issues of treatment, behavior, institutional assumptions and expectations and student response. A number of researchers postulate the existence of a relationship between racial/gender identity, view of self, and school achievement (Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas, 1997), but just what that relationship is, however, remains a bit of a mystery. That African American students fall prey to academic problems and obstacles including, lower GPA, test scores and college entrance (Cousins, 1999; Horvat and Antonio, 1999; Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas, 1997) is largely agreed upon. Beyond those tangibles of performance, well recorded is also the sense of "otherness," "not belonging," and "being distanced" that African American students commonly feel in school (Horvat and Antonio, 1999). This lack of belonging was echoed in the words of one student who stated, "I feel like, you know, I am this black girl walking through the halls of a white school" (Proweller, 1999: 792). She was not able to feel that her presence alone gave ownership or belonging to the place where she was, locale was separate from being, creating a dissonance that seems likely to affect how one saw or valued oneself and how one would perform in that setting.

Horvat and Antonio (1999) speak of the “pain and anguish...endured by [African American children] living out their lives as outsiders” and how “the psychic cost of crossing boundaries created by race and class ‘can be great, cumulative and...inhibitive’” (1999: 336). Instead of leaving one’s “true” self at the schoolhouse door, Witherspoon, Speight and Thomas (1997), argued that African American students need to, “reject white society’s negative evaluation of Blackness and construct an identity that includes Blackness as positively valued and desired” (1997: 346). Indeed, Hemmings (1998) added that, “studies of the identity work of Black students document, and often endorse, the primacy of resistance to misrepresentations as key to Black student empowerment” (1998: 332). Her work defines “identity formation...as ongoing struggles for selfhood and social position,” fighting for control and production of group images (Hemmings, 1998: 331).

Methodology

This research was conducted at a community based after-school program located in a lower/working class African American community near a large mid-western city. The program was located on the first floor of a three story former school building that contained a gym, multi-purpose room, and classrooms. Students in grades five, six, and seven were selected as the population of interest for this study. The researcher felt that the study of students in this age group would provide critical insights into some of the earliest conceptions of self and others with regard to both gender and race—particularly their intersections (Isom, 2007).

Seventy-five children enrolled at the program in grades 5-7 constituted potential

subjects in the ethnographic observation. All but one of the students was African American (the lone exception being a White female seventh grader). The fifth grade room enrolled 14 boys and 10 girls, the sixth grade room 13 boys and 16 girls, while the seventh graders were equally divided at 11 each.

On average, approximately 50 students attended regularly. Forty-one students were in attendance when the researcher requested parental permission for participation. Of those forty-one students, thirty-three returned signed consent forms. Twenty-six of those students agreed to participate in the study and were asked to complete a questionnaire. Of those twenty-six students, eighteen completed the questionnaire. The parents/guardian of twenty-three of the students were given permission to be interviewed. To accomplish the interviews a random selection of two boys and two girls from each grade level was taken.

Given the over-representation of females in the program and pool, the selection process and numbers were chosen in order to establish diversity across gender and grade levels. The absence of consenting and available seventh grade males limited the total interview number to 10, comprised of 2 male and 2 female fifth and sixth graders respectively and 2 female seventh graders. Those 10 interviewees reflected similar levels of programmatic participation and social variables as the broader population of students in the after-school program (Isom, 2007).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the meaning-making that children undertake in their expression and development of a racialized gender identity.

The two-pronged approach, participant observation and semi-structured interviews are central for conducting a naturalistic research study (Guba, 1978). Level one, participant observation, provided an introduction into and overarching perspective for the study by examining the participants, their environment and their daily lives at the center from homework time to basketball free play to talent shows (Isom, 2007). Later stages of that process allowed me to become closer to the participants by building on the material gathered earlier. As opportunities arose, I used the informal gathering of single sex and co-ed pairs and groups of students to conduct semi-structured interviews (level two). During these informal gatherings, I informally posed questions of gender and racial defining, behavior, attitudes, school and schooling issues. I also used these gatherings, that emerged earlier in the study, for both verification and clarification of themes (Isom, 2007).

Individual interviews allowed for the discovery of the students' sense of reality, the capturing of their voices, in terms of race and gender-based concepts and identity. These research techniques not only provided access to the phenomenological world of the participants, increasing my understanding of them, but also allowed for the possibility of comparison and contrast with previous findings, "to develop, question, refine and/or discard" emergent information (Metz, 2000: 63).

For the present study, the set of notes from nine months of observation (including the informal focus groups), the eighteen questionnaires, and transcripts from the ten interviews made up the data for analysis. This multi-layered method also allowed for

what Eisner (1991) called "structural corroboration...the confluence of multiple sources of evidence or the recurrence of instances that support a conclusion" (1991: 55). This structural corroboration, often called triangulation, provided important cross-validating data and numerous reference points heightening the study's reliability and dependability (Isom, 2007).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) expounded upon research endeavors designed to prevent potential distortions by making the participants, the findings, and the researcher the subjects of analysis. Taking their lead, this project utilized participant checks and external peer reviews. As an additional source of data for analysis, the field notes, recorded not only what was observed, but also the observer's responses. This made evident my frames of reference and analytical lenses, serving as conduits for establishing the finding's trustworthiness and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

As a means of increasing the possibility of producing credible findings, the research strove for "prolonged engagement" with the participants, in-depth "persistent observation" throughout the project, and "triangulation" of data sources and collection methods (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 108, 301). During the eight months of the study, I served as a volunteer (tutoring, hanging out, playing games, participating in the activities of the rooms and the center at large) in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade rooms an average of three times a week. This level of engagement and observation allowed for the discovery of distortions, clarified context as well as salience, and along with triangulation built contextual validation. The use of long-term engagement

and in-depth observation also served in the creation of “thick description” which was central to the generalizability and transferability of the research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Geertz, 1973).

Findings

Maleness/Masculinity

The results of the research on the boy’s view of maleness followed the results of previous research on Black males (Franklin, 1999; Majors and Billson, 1992; Price, 1999) defining it as an attained, external status marked by humor, physicality (the body, roughness), coolness, and showing off. Maleness was so externally derived that it could be given to a girl (as was the case with a fifth grade girl who was great at basketball) or be taken from a boy (identified by the boys of the study as “fags” and “the kind of boy girls don’t like”).

Given this construct, previous research characterizes the notion of masculinity as hyper-maleness, yet here the males of the study differed from that work. The boys defined masculinity as a relationally-situated, socially-responsive, caring manhood by describing it as “helping an old woman with her bags,” “being someone others could talk to,” and “being someone people can look up to.” They appeared to know that maleness is more than the facade and wanted to mature beyond the constructions (Isom, 2007).

Femaleness/Femininity

Consistent with research on female self image (Gilligan, 1982, 1994; Pitcher and Schultz, 1983; Thorne, 1993), when the girls of the study were asked on the questionnaire about who girls are, a third of their responses focused on relationships (“good person to talk to,” “having a boy friend”)

and another third on behavior (“good,” “nice,” “friendly”). Both of those areas remain central to the “ladylike” image long associated with the social construction of femininity.

Similarly, a third of the boys’ definition of girls was focused on behavior, but half of their comments referenced appearance (“pretty,” “make-up,” “hair,” “worry too much about clothes”). Here is the notion of femaleness as centered on appearance and determined by the external gazer.

Interestingly, in interviews and informal focus groups females were identified by the girls of the study as more or better than males (“smarter,” “more mature,” “more sophisticated,” “better,” “more responsible,” etc.), yet the comparison model employed here placed males as the center, the point against which females are measured. The girls were not the focus of their own identity; they reflected being marked as female and unmarked as subject.

In contrast, when characterizing femininity and womanhood, both the boys and girls described a multi-dimensional female that carried racial overtones, as with the response of one participant who said, “the way they can get a man, possess a man. The way they hold themselves up like a strong Black woman, gots her job, independent, went to college, got her degree, everything like that [sic].” Here we see female (specifically the Black female) imaged as strong, sexy, successful...“superwoman.”

Throughout the research, in interviews, observation, and questionnaires, the children of the study moved in and out of gendered identity domains. Shifting between established constructions of gender, to

racialized ones, to ones emerging from their notions of their gendered selves, multiple “identities” were manifest.

“Blackness”

I was surprised by the children’s first responses to the interview question- “What is Black or Blackness?” Again and again the children spoke of it as “just a race” or “a color.” After further conversation with each participant, it became clear that those first comments were not an exposing of racial neutrality or insignificance, but rather a prophetic utterance. “Just a race or color” spoke of being defined by, trapped, in race and yet wanting to speak it out of existence, to speak equality into being.

The meaning became even clearer when asked about being Black during the interviews. Discussing Blackness more in depth, their words articulated a passionate awareness of the complex context in which they are coming to self. Some examples included: “What it means to be Black is to be strong...just to know that you have accomplished something that was very hard to do...even if it’s not that much...that’s what really, like, enlightens me about being Black, that’s why I love to be Black ‘cause it’s like, we, sometimes, we get more opportunities, sometimes we don’t, but we still keep working hard.” “You have to face to things, like certain things, like being Black.” And, “You have to be able to take it.”

The children spoke of Blackness as marked by struggle and triumph and in doing so appeared to operate out of a willful self-creation or, as Cornel West (1996) describes, “the dogged determination to survive and subsist, the tenacious will to persevere, persist, even prevail” (1996: 80).

Race and Gender Intersections and Multiple Selves

The questionnaire asked the children to name the first words, image, and/or description that came to mind when they read the words “boys,” “girls,” “Black boys,” and “Black girls.” These questions represented one of the first formal opportunities the study participants had to explicitly speak to racialized gender (the intersections of race and gender). Interestingly, though the children often assumed an African American identity was implied when they or others spoke of gender, their responses to the questionnaire when asked to specifically apply race to gender greatly changed the gender definitions. Appearing to draw on externally-produced representations and internalized notions of “Blackness,” the children’s responses reflected race as a corrupting force. When describing “girls” the boys’ replies were “pretty,” “booty,” “nice,” “friends,” and “talks a lot,” yet when the category was “Black girls” their answers became- “hootchie,” “booty call,” “nice butts,” “crazy ghetto,” and “talks stuff.” Their responses were not simply sexualized, but reflected an exploitative, non-relational view of woman and images that mirror popular culture representation of the Black female (Isom, 2007). Not as pronounced as the male variations, the girls of the study also exhibited a corrupting racial force by describing Black boys as connected more to sports and “showing off” than “boys” more generally.

When the usually very verbal and expressive girls of the study learned of the highly sexualized descriptions of girls made by the boys, they fell silent. Silence appeared as their tool of resistance and survival. Similarly, the girls portrayed in Blake’s

(1999) work, "She Say, He Say: Urban Girls Write Their Lives," also displayed the use of silence to manage social situations in which they were reduced to objects or images, feeling a sense of threat to their very being.

Schooling and Identity

When asked, "How are you as students?" on the questionnaire, the children's answers averaged (given the choice between "Excellent," "Good," "Pretty Good," and "Poor") as "Good" for both the boys and girls. Yet, the representation of African American children as behavior problems and at fault for their own academic failures appeared operationalized in the participants' view of African American boys and girls as students. When asked during interviews, "What are Black boys like as students?" both the males and females of the study described them as, "Bad," "Dumb," "Fooling around" and not "paying attention, [they] talk, laugh, don't know when to stop." Though African American girls were characterized as "better," "smarter" than the boys (by both the girls and the boys), they were also seen as having "attitude" (Isom, 2007). Interestingly, even as they depicted African American boys and girls behavior problems and responsibility for their failure, they reported getting good grades and gave personal explanations for their classroom behavior. Though they saw themselves as capable students, they saw their racial group as problematic—multiple positions in a single consciousness.

Some of the sadder moments in a study filled with poignant stories and images, emerged from the children's comparisons of "White and Black" students. Though numerous students spoke to their desire for and sense of racial equity by defining "Blackness" as "only a race," "a color," and

saying, "we are the same, equal," eight of the ten children interviewed said that Whites were smarter than African Americans. "White boys figure out math problems faster than a Black boy;" "Some White people are smarter than Black people...seems like they're more educated or somethin'." They also felt that Whites were "smarter" due to the choices African Americans made to "not care," "not read," "not act right." Again we see a projected representation of "Blackness" and now "Whiteness" emergent in the children's sense of self. White imaged as all that "Black" is not, reflecting the "pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies Blacks with the body and Whites with the mind" (Gilroy, 1993: 97). Despite seeing themselves as good students, as African Americans, they felt inadequate.

Tatum's (1999) findings that the dominant group's labeling of the other as "defective/substandard," when internalized, renders it difficult to believe in one's own ability, appeared in the student's responses to projected racial identity. According to the children, their perception of Whites as smarter emanates not simply from an internal value, but also from an external production. The young woman who spoke of Whites as "smarter...more educated" went on to report that she thought that because the teachers "make you seem like you dumb...you always have to get help from White people...you always have to ask White people: 'can you help me with this?'"

Here, the internalized racial representation can obscure the messenger while raising the question of which message is to be believed. Surrounded by the messages of Blackness in pop culture and often reinforced in school, the children barely have a chance to find themselves. They are caught in a matrix of

images and messages, a reifying mechanism that can diminish the presence and validity of their own voice. Their authentic/created selves then may occupy less space and thus potency than the story of them told through the eyes, words, and actions of the peers, teachers, and schools in which they are coming to self (Isom, 2007).

Articulating and remembering their authentic selves, the children described what they wished their teachers knew about them, the boys stated: “That I’m more kind...than they saw,” “That I am smart and that I do put my mind to things and that I have a funny side to me,” “That I can be smart...and caring sometimes,” and “Nice to other people...kind...helpful...I’m a nice guy some of the time.” Again, proclaiming while speaking for and against, the boys describe a full self and manhood; they name the parts of them that too often go unseen.

Similarly, the girls spoke from that same self-naming power in saying that, “I love math and I don’t like social studies...and I love to get good grades,” “I can do my work and talk at the same time,” “I’m Black and I’m smart and I love to play basketball and double dutch, and I like to draw and I like pets and I’m pretty,” and sadly, “I’m not a bad kid; I AM NOT A BAD KID.” They understand the limitations inherent in the externally-produced notions of African Americans and females and they refute the constraint in an effort to establish self outside of the constructions. Like the boys, the girls spoke against and to, attempting to dis-empower the messages of raced and gendered constraints while placing themselves within their own racialized gender notions of the multifaceted complexity of the African American female identity.

Their words speak of themselves and to the racialized and gendered images projected on them. The “I can be’s” and “I’m not’s” of their declarations reflect again on their “willful self creation” and their belief in their own power.

Conclusion

Moving beyond the victimization literature surrounding African American children, this study revealed the yearnings that mark their voice, a desire to be strong, to triumph, to speak to and against those who do not see, but whose gaze defines, to be known and to know, to have those further down the path show them the way. We must care take, remember, and foster the sentiment expressed by one of the young women of the study regarding what she felt “Blackness” meant: “It means that you’re an African American, and you’re the only person that can be like you.”

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Perceptions of Return Migrants and Non-migrants to Female Migration: Case of Ghana

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Abstract

The past three decades have witnessed a phenomenal increase in female migration especially in developing countries where females now migrate independently. These forms of migration now challenge the stereotyped male migration from rural to urban areas. This paper focuses on the perceptions of returned migrants and non-migrants to the emerging independent female migration from the Wa District in the Upper-west region of Ghana to the two largest cities of Ghana, Accra and Kumasi. Using both questionnaire and focus group discussions, 94 return migrants and 86 non-migrants were interviewed in four villages in the Wa district of Ghana. The study shows that lack of job opportunities and more especially, access to farmland at the place of origin compelled the women to migrate to Accra and Kumasi for the *kaya yei* business. Both return migrants and non-migrants perceived migration as an opportunity through which women acquire basic material items that they need in later life. In particular, the return migrants claimed that their socio-economic status has improved through migration. Although the women benefit in diverse ways through migration this has been at the expense of domestic, conjugal, maternal and kin roles in their place of origin. It is partly for this reason that some community members, especially males, do not support the autonomous migration of women to Accra and Kumasi for the *kaya yei* business. Nonetheless, given the demonstration effects of return migration and the relatively poor environment of the place of origin, autonomous female migration from the Wa district to Accra or Kumasi for the *kaya yei* business is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Keywords: Migration, gender, marriage, livelihoods, *kaya yei*, perception

Introduction

The expansion of the informal service sector in Sub-Saharan African countries after independence has generated internal dynamics, including rural-urban migration for various reasons (Adepoju, 2004). With the introduction of the modern market economy, the needs and responsibilities of women in the agrarian household have changed considerably and moved beyond stereotypically traditional roles for males and females (Olurade, 1995). For instance,

female migration has changed from associational migrants to independent ones (Synnove, 1999).

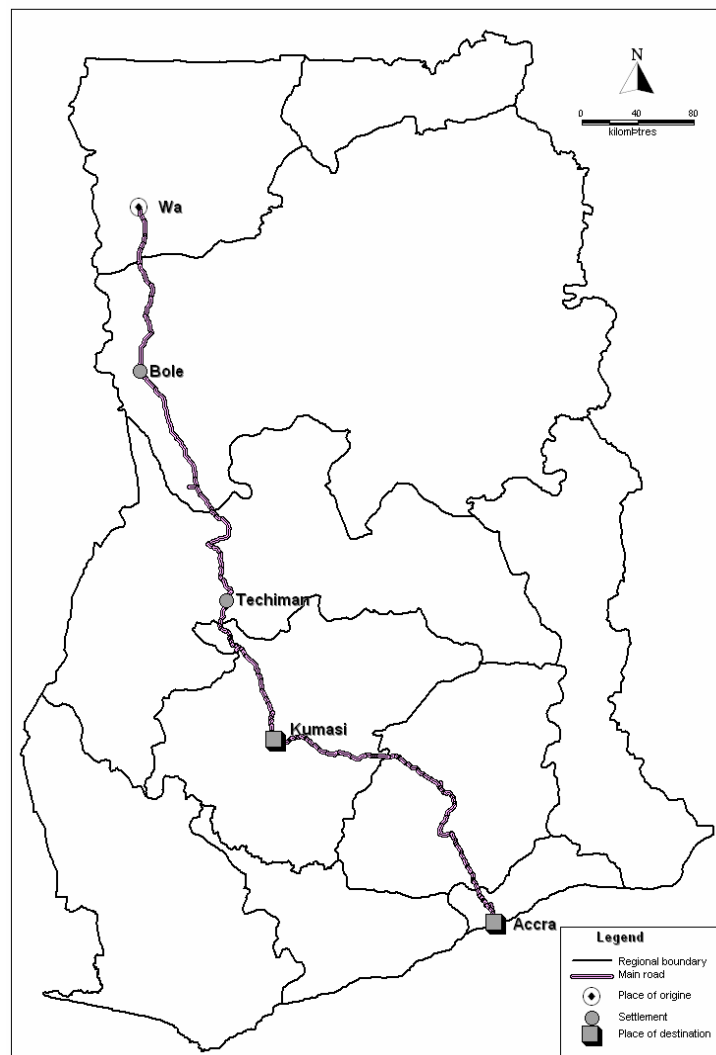
The autonomous migration of females has generated debate as to its benefits to the individual and household. One strand of the debate is that women, when they migrate, are able to obtain some basic needs and are also able to acquire new perspectives which benefit both nuclear and extended families (Abur-sufian, 1994). Compared to males,

females are more likely to send remittances and also devote higher levels of their earnings to the needs of the households back home than males (Chant, 1998). A second argument is that female migration disrupts household chores at the place of origin as well as creates conditions for moral corruption at the place of destination. Migration of females then is not in the

interest of the women themselves, their children (if any) and their husbands/households (Tanle, 2003).

This paper examines the perspectives of return migrants and non-migrants to female out-migration from the Wa district to southern Ghana (specifically to Kumasi or Accra) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of Ghana showing the route from Wa to Kumasi and Accra.



Source: Cartography & GIS Unit, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

The intention is to explore the changing perception and the social tension surrounding the migration of females. Specifically, the paper is focused on women who migrate from the Wa district in the Upper-West region of Ghana to either Kumasi or Accra in southern Ghana to engage in the *kaya yei* business.

The term “*kaya yei*” (Singular “*Kaya yo*”) refers to women who engage in carrying wares for a fee. Etymologically, the term is derived from two words, “*kaya*” a Hausa word meaning wares or goods, and “*yo*,” a Ga word meaning a woman (Attah et al., 1997). The term *kaya yei* therefore refers to female commercial head porters (Abur-sufian, 1994; Attah et al., 1997).

Perspectives and issues on female migration

In earlier studies of rural-urban migration in Africa, women were generally regarded as associational migrants who accompanied their husbands or close relations to urban centers (Lean, 1993; Olurade, 1995). As associational migrants, they did not exercise autonomy in the choice of occupation or social responsibilities. Given the fact that migration became a continuation of the traditional biased sex roles, people tended to tolerate it. Within the last three decades, however, autonomous female migration has been observed with some of the migrants now moving over long distances, and some others engaging in international migration (Pittin, 1984; Khoo et al., 1984; Abur-sufian, 1994; Synnove, 1999; Todaro, 2000; Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

For the present study the household strategy and core-periphery theories have been adapted. The household strategy theory has been used to explain migration, especially

for females. The theory contends that migration decisions are not made by individuals but by the household. The household strategy proponents have argued that people act collectively to maximize expected benefits and to minimize vulnerability of its members (Oishi, 2002). As a strategy to survive or to accumulate savings for investment in non-farm activities at home, some households tend to encourage some of their members to migrate. In such situations household resources could be used to finance the cost of migration so that in the long run, the entire membership of the household could benefit from the migration (Adepoju, 1985; Synnove, 1999). While in some countries males have been favored to migrate, in some other countries it has been females, based on expected returns. For example, in the Philippines, Oishi (2002) noted that young single women are encouraged to migrate to work as household help or nurses, occupations dominated by females. Thus, independent female migration becomes a major survival strategy in response to changing socio-economic conditions and increasing scope for self-development.

Migration as a survival strategy invariably originates from areas of relatively low socio-economic development (periphery) to areas of relative affluence (core). With an underlying dependency relation between the two areas, the core offers goods, services and job opportunities to the periphery which in turn supplies low-cost productive resources including labor (Fik, 2000).

In the present study, the Wa district in northwest Ghana constitutes the periphery (the migrant-sending area) with less endowed resources, poor socio-economic development and origin of migrant streams,

while Kumasi and Accra are the most developed areas attracting the migrants (Nabila, 1974).

Situation of women in the study area

The study area, the Wa district in the Upper-West Region, located in the northwestern corner of Ghana, is bounded in the west by Burkina Faso, in the north by the Nadowli and the Sissala districts of Ghana and in the east and south by the Northern region. Wa is both the district capital and the regional capital of the Upper-West Region. Wa town is the main commercial town dominating a largely rural landscape. The major ethnic group in the district, the Walas, operates a clan-based system with clear division of labor along sex lines (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995). Although they practice both matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance, women do not inherit property, especially land which is the main means of production in the area (Ouedraogo, 1995; Songsore and Denkabe, 1995).

With no access to land, women assist men during the farming season either as daughters, sisters or wives in planting crops, weeding, harvesting and transporting farm produce to the village. Very few women, mostly widows, may own land temporarily on behalf of their sons who might be too young to claim full ownership of land that their late father had bequeathed to them. Men have absolute control over the use of farm produce and, in some instances, may even sell some of the produce even though the remainder of the annual harvest might not be adequate to support all of the members of the household until the next harvest (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995). Therefore, women are highly dependent on males either as daughters, wives, or mothers.

Over the past two centuries, the northern part of the country has been an area of heavy out-migration of men to cocoa farms, mines and constructional sites in the southern half of the country (Caldwell, 1969; Nabila, 1974; Songsore and Denkabe, 1995, Adepoju, 2004). Because most of the farms in the north depend on rain-fed agriculture during the six-month rainy season (May to October), people become “idle” during the six-month dry season (November to April) creating conditions for the men to migrate to the south to work, later to return home to farm during the rainy season. The harsh environmental conditions which push people to migrate was exacerbated by the policy of the colonial government to concentrate on agricultural, mining, and industrial developments in the south which already had locational advantage (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995). While the men developed a pattern of seasonal migration enabling them to obtain additional income, the women were left behind with little or no economic activities to enable them meet some of their basic needs.

In an attempt to survive, some of the women depended on minor economic activities such as collecting fuelwood and/or processing of charcoal for sale, petty trading and animal rearing. With their husbands away, some of the women became the *defacto* head of household who had to meet the needs of all of the other members of the household as well as be responsible for the property of the household, especially livestock (Waddington, 2003).

As daughters, their right to marriage depended on the choice made for them by their parents. Although changes have occurred, there are still instances, especially

in rural areas, where young girls are persuaded or forced into marriage by either parents, relations or suitors. With marriage ceremonies being elaborate and expensive, coupled with patrilocal residence, married women are virtually regarded as the “bonafide property” of their husbands whether alive or dead. Once a man has been able to pay the expensive dowry to the father-in-law, the assumption is that he has “bought” the right and freedom of the woman (Goody, 1967). As a result, the power relation between men and women is asymmetrical, with men controlling the allocation of resources within the household and the community.

Although formal education is widespread in the Upper-West Region, school enrollment is generally low compared with other regions in the country. Over the years, much attention and priority were given to the education of boys at the expense of girls, especially beyond the basic level. Table 1 shows school enrollment by age and sex in the Upper-West Region and the total for Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). In both the Upper-West Region and total for Ghana, the enrollment rates for females are generally higher than those of the males at ages 5-9 and 10-14 years. At age 15 and beyond (i.e. beyond the basic level), the enrollment of males far exceeds that of

females: at age 20-24, enrollment of males in the Upper-West Region is one and half times (32 per cent) that of females (19 per cent). For Ghana as a whole, the proportions are 45 per cent males and 41 per cent for females. The low enrollment rate for females in the region after age 15 is partly due to the fact that many parents influence their daughters to marry after basic education has been completed while others feel reluctant to educate their daughters beyond that level. Some parents claim that it is the future husbands and their family who will benefit from any investment in the education of females and therefore they need not invest in the education of their daughters (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995 and Bekye, 1998).

The low school attendance for females has implications for marriage and childbearing. The median age at first marriage among women in the Upper-West Region aged 20-49 years is 19.2 years (GDHS, 2003). Other socio-cultural practices such as women not having access to farmland and also the right to inherit property, have contributed to the high proportion of women who depend on their husbands or other male relatives for their basic needs (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). It is this dependence that some females would like to break through migration.

Table 1. School enrollment by age and sex in the Upper-West Region and total Ghana in 2000.

Age	Upper-West Region		Total Ghana	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
5-9	9.9	10.8	24.5	24.6
10-14	75.1	78.1	83.3	85.8
15-19	26.6	24.9	44.6	41.4
20-24	31.8	19.2	29.9	21.4

Source: Ghana Statistical Service, 2002.

Sources of data

The main data for the study were derived from a survey carried out between April and June 2001 in the Wa district of the Upper-West Region. The target population was females aged between 15 and 54 years. The assumption was that at 15 the females were old enough to travel on their own and could engage in any economic activity while after age 54, they would not be inclined to migrate on their own.

The sample frame was comprised of female return migrants—that is, females who migrated to Kumasi or Accra, engaged in the *kaya yei* business, who had returned to their villages of origin—and non-migrants selected from four villages in the Wa district noted for female out-migration to the south for the *kaya yei* business. The villages were Chansa, Diesi, Nakori and Verimpere. Since the exact number of return migrants and non-migrants was not known, it was decided, though arbitrarily, to interview 100 respondents of each category, i.e. 100 return migrants and 100 non-migrants.

Female return migrants who had returned to the Wa district within the last five years were identified and interviewed through the snowball technique. A five-year period was chosen because it was felt that five years was long enough to capture those who might have begun any investment or training since their return home. For the non-migrants, a systematic sampling technique was employed: every third house was chosen. In all, 180 respondents, comprising 94 return migrants and 86 non-migrants were interviewed successfully in the four villages.

Two questionnaires were administered separately to return migrants and non-migrants. The questionnaire for the return

migrants covered five modules, namely, 1) personal profile, 2) migration network and history, 3) motives for migrating, 4) experiences and benefits realized at destination, and 5) general opinions about migration and the intentions to migrate again in future. Some of the questions in the non-migrants' questionnaire were on socio-demographics and economic characteristics; for example, sources of income and its adequacy, expenditures on basic necessities, savings, borrowing, remittances from relations in the south, and the occupation of the husband if the respondent is married. Other questions asked focused on the intention to migrate in future and motives for intending to migrate in future. With the exception of a few open-ended questions, both questionnaires were mostly close-ended.

In addition, two focus group discussions (FGD), one for males and the other for females, were held in each of the four selected villages. The male group consisted of chiefs, opinion leaders, assemblymen, religious leaders, teachers and farmers while the female group comprised leaders of various women's groups, teachers, farmers and traders. In all the villages, the discussions centered on a comparison between previous (about two decades ago) and current occupations of women in the village, changes that have been observed, and factors that caused those changes. Other issues discussed were the causes of female migration to the south, the general opinion or perception of female migration, whether or not female migration to the south should be controlled, and general suggestions on female migration. The discussion that follows deals with the non-migrants and the return migrants interviewed, and the FGDs conducted in the four villages. In

this paper the term return migrants or *kaya yei* (plural of *kaya yo*) will be used interchangeably since the return migrants were all involved in the *kaya yei* business at their former destination.

Results

Socio-demographic background of respondents

The socio-demographic background shows a largely young, illiterate, female population: 61 per cent of the non-migrants and about 80 per cent of the

return migrants interviewed were 34 years or below; about 6 out of every 10 return-migrants and more than 8 out of every 10 non-migrants had never been to school (Table 2). The illiteracy level among the respondents is therefore higher than the national average of 50.2 per cent of women with no formal education (Ghana, 2003a). Perhaps this explains why those who migrated engaged in the *kaya yei* business since it does not require any formal knowledge in education.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the *kaya yei* at destination.

Demographic characteristics	Respondents			
	Non-migrants		Return Migrants	
Current Age	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0-14	6	7	8	8.5
15-24	17	19.7	32	34
25-34	30	34.9	35	37.3
35-44	22	25.6	13	13.8
45+	11	12.8	6	6.4
Duration of stay				
>1 year	-	-	19	20.2
1-2	-	-	61	64.9
3-4	-	-	12	12.3
5+	-	-	2	2.1
Highest education level				
No formal education	72	83.7	56	59.5
Primary	9	10.5	29	30.9
Middle/JSS	3	3.5	8	8.5
SSS/Secondary	2	2.3	1	1.1
Religious affiliation				
Christianity	32	37.2	29	30.9
Islamic	45	52.3	54	57.4
Traditional believer	9	10.5	11	11.7
Marital status				
Never married	13	15.2	22	23.4
Married	66	76.7	65	69.1
Separated	2	2.3	2	2.1
Widowed	5	5.8	5	5.4
Children still alive				
0	19	22.1	27	28.7
1-3	26	30.2	36	38.3
3-6	37	43	30	31.9
7+	4	4.7	1	1.1
Total	86	100	94	100

Source: Data from fieldwork

About 90 per cent of the non-migrants and 88 per cent of the return migrants professed either the Christian or the Islamic religion. Over two-thirds of both the return-migrants and the non-migrants were married. That about three-quarters of both non-migrants and return migrants have between 3 and 6 children is consistent with the national average total fertility of 5.6 children per a woman among women in rural areas of Ghana (GDHS, 2003) (Table 2).

Over 90 per cent of the non-migrants and 83 per cent of the return migrants were engaged in farming as a primary occupation and something else as secondary occupation, indicating the centrality of access to land in the rural economy. The secondary

occupation included sale of fuelwood and/or charcoal (48 per cent) and trading (33 per cent) (Table 3). Except trading and sewing, the rest of the activities were environment-based. Among the return migrants, 17 per cent were engaged in weaving and hairdressing, occupations that are minimal among the non-migrants. Involved in relatively higher income earning activities such as trading, sewing, weaving and hairdressing, the return migrants appeared to have relatively higher income than the non-migrants. It would appear that the capital and skills the return migrants obtained through the *kaya yei* business provided them with resources to pursue new occupational activities which are not based on the environment.

Table 3. Socio-economic background.

Main occupation	Percentage	
	Non-migrants	Return Migrants
Trading and farming	22.1	33.2
Stone winning and farming	2.3	16
Pito brewing and farming	15.1	7.4
Sale of fuelwood and/or charcoal and farming	48	20.2
Sewing and farming	2.8	6.2
Weaving of traditional cloth	9.7	11.7
Hair dressing	-	5.3
Total income per month		
Less than c100,000	3.5	4.4
c100,000-c150,000	73.3	4.3
c150,001-c200,000	20.9	75.4
c200,001-c250,000	2.3	13.8
c250,001-c300,000	-	2.1
Total	100	100
Number	86	94

Source: Data from fieldwork.

On average, 23 per cent of the non-migrant women earned over c150,000 (\$18.75¹) a month compared to 91 per cent of return migrants. These variations in economic

status between return migrants and non-migrants provide part of the backdrop for female out-migration in the study area.

To move or not to move: views on the migration of females

In the study, both non-migrants and return-migrants were asked if the migration of females to the south should be allowed to continue. It was expected that return migrants would present two scenarios: they would support female migration since they would want to justify their involvement in the *kaya yei* business or discourage out-migration given the experiences they had in the *kaya yei* business. Female non-migrants would be expected to be either ambivalent or not predisposed towards female migration. The results show general support for female migration: 90 per cent of return migrants and 74 per cent of non-migrants

were of the view that females should be allowed to migrate. This is because through migration young women are able to acquire basic material things which benefit their households as well (80.0 per cent of return migrants and 92.0 per cent of non-migrants) or serve as a means of reducing pressure on household resources which, in both cases, addresses the concept of maximization of benefits and minimization of cost or vulnerability in the household strategy theory. However, the study also revealed that migration could be an outlet for unfavorable social conditions such as forced marriage and/or family/marriage related problems (6 per cent of the return migrants and 4 per cent of non-migrants) (Table 4).

Table 4. Reasons to abolish or not to abolish female migration.

Abolish female migration	Percentage	
	Non-migrants	Return Migrants
Yes	9.6	25.6
No	90.4	74.4
Total	100	100
Number	94	86
Reasons not to abolish migration		
Need for basic material things	80	92.2
Avoidance of forced marriage	3.5	3.1
Escape from family/Marriage problems	5.9	-
Opportunity to learn vocation	4.7	-
Provides capital for trading	5.9	4.7
Total	100	100
Number	85	64
Reasons to abolish		
Loss of their services at home	55.6	50
Loss of moral values	22.2	18.2
Threat to stability in marriage	22.2	22.7
Exposure to risk at destinations	-	9.1
Total	100	100
Number	9	22

Source: Data from fieldwork.

In an environment where females have limited options in life such as the acquisition of personal property, out-migration becomes an avenue for self-actualization. Even non-

migrant females favored the out-migration of females to the south for the *kaya yei* business.

In the FGD held in the four villages, the women's groups were particularly in favor of female migration to Kumasi or Accra since it provided the women with avenues for earning income for their personal needs as well as that of their households. General socio-economic changes have led to changes in the needs of women. Although three decades ago the basic needs of women (such as clothing, cooking utensils and cosmetics) could be met within the existing socio-economic conditions, it is not the case now. Among the changes are types of dressing, bodily adornments, schooling—all of which require some additional resources. As pointed out during the FGD:

Previously, our basic needs were quite few and we could easily meet some of our needs through the little income that we generate here (Abeeta,² 40 year old female).

These days because of the changing lifestyle our basic needs as women are now quite many. Meanwhile, there are no job opportunities here (like Kumasi). We have to be allowed to migrate (to Kumasi) to work and earn some money to buy some of our needs (Duobe, 29 years).

The views reflect the changing perception of females in the area. While people were previously content with meeting basic needs, there is now the desire to acquire other items which were not considered essential a few years ago. The little income which could be said to be enough a decade ago is no longer enough to meet the needs of individuals

and households. According to a 34 year old woman in an FGD, their inability to meet their basic needs from farm produce and other sources seems to have been precipitated by declining production.

Many things have changed in recent times. For example, farm production is always not adequate; we are now compelled to sell fuelwood and/or charcoal to supplement the household food requirement.

For women the underlying challenge is the lack of access to farmland, the major resource in such a rural environment. In any agrarian society access to land is very important for survival. Lacking access to land, the women do not have avenues to acquire income. Access to land in the area is through a husband or a son when he is too young to take custody of bequeathed land. These issues emerged in the FGD, as indicated by Naabu:

Over here the main activity is farming, but women have no access to farmlands. The men have full control over land and all the farm produce. Although most of us are engaged in the sale of fuelwood or charcoal, we do not earn enough money from it (Naabu, 36 year old female).

Furthermore, in the traditional system where females had limited avenues to express their views and/or dissent, they bore some of the conditions in silence. Young females rarely protest when they are given out in marriage against their will. Now, migration provides

an avenue to escape from unfavorable conditions as indicated by Nyala, 38 years:

It is not only poverty and lack of job opportunities in this community which cause some of us to migrate; some migrate because of harassment from suitors or to escape from forced marriages.

Both men and women who were against female out-migration expressed varied views. Ten per cent of female return migrants and 26 per cent of non-migrants were not in favor of female out-migration. Of that proportion, about half mentioned the loss of the services of the females in the household and community, especially during the farming season as a major constraining factor. About a fifth of both groups indicated that female out-migration posed a threat to the stability of marriages. Other reasons given were the temptation of the girls who migrate to lead an immoral life or to be seduced at the place of destination and the effects of migration on education of females. A concerned mother noted that:

Some of them, particularly the young girls, become pregnant out of wedlock. One of my daughters returned home with pregnancy and to date nobody knows the person who impregnated her (Saafia, about 42 years).

The phenomenon of single motherhood creates problems in a strong patrilineal society. The child in such a system has no automatic inheritance since the mother is not entitled to any property in the system, thus constituting a threat to the system. The views expressed by men in the four villages

during the FGD, although many and varied, were generally not in favor of female migration. The main reasons for not being in favor of female migration included the general negative perceptions of female return migrants as people who are morally corrupt and the disruption of farming, marriages and household activities that are commonly associated with females in rural areas. Bashiru and his colleagues explicitly expressed these sentiments as follows:

Sometimes, some of the women come home with problems such as sickness or pregnancy. This becomes an additional burden to parents and/or husbands (Bashiru, about 37 years).

Their migration, especially during the farming season, affects our farming activities in many ways. You know farm activities such as planting of crops, harvesting of crops, especially groundnuts, and the transportation of farm produce home is best done by women. Last year for example, my friend's wife escaped to Kumasi in the middle of the farming season. As a result, my friend's farming activities were affected and also he had to take care of the two children the wife left behind. In that desperate situation, I saw that my friend needed support so I assisted him to marry another woman, to ensure that his farming activities went on smoothly. When the first wife returned from Kumasi, my friend accepted her as his wife but her position now was that of

a second wife and no more a first wife (Munaano, about 42 years).

The men considered the migration as a cost to their economic activities as well as an affront to their position in the patriarchal system. To them, the major constraint was the loss of the productive (and reproductive) capacity of the women. Migration denies the men the free labor of females as daughters, sisters and wives. Some also feel threatened by the economic dependence associated with out-migration. One respondent noted as follows:

For me, I don't support the out-migration of females. Women are such that when they are economically better than a man, they become less submissive and somehow disrespectful (Dauda, 40 years).

In the men's FGDs, some of the young men also expressed negative views about girls who had ever migrated to Kumasi or Accra for the *kaya yei* business. They had even nicknamed the girls as "tavama" which literally means a *load carrier, do not push me down with your load*. The general impression they have about these girls is that the girls have no good morals. They feel that the urban lifestyle has corrupted their moral values (Olurade, 1995). One major implication of this attitude is that single girls who return to the villages after some years of working in the south are not likely to get husbands in and around the village because of the negative perception the young men have about them. This was underscored in the FGD by Baba (29 years):

In this village, some of my friends feel reluctant to marry

girls who have ever traveled because they assume that such girls are "spoiled."

Some men who were in favor of female migration to the south, tended to stress the immediate benefits to the household/ family.

Female migration is quite profitable because they occasionally remit foodstuff and/or clothing to some of their household members. Others also need to acquire some basic skills and/or items before they marry. For example, my sister who returned from Kumasi with a sewing machine last year is now a seamstress apprentice in this village (Adami, 37 years).

The evidence suggests that on the positive side the migration of females tends to benefit individuals as well as some members of the household. It is possibly in this context that the question as to whether female out-migration from the Wa District should continue or be discouraged remains a topic for discussion in the community.

The positive attributes can be situated within the context of household survival strategies. Some households either directly or indirectly support female migration based on economic returns to the household. Being able to acquire personal wealth relieves the household of part of the expectation of setting up a daughter in life. Traditionally, parents are expected to set up a child in life. Within the subsistence agricultural economy, the items included clothing, cooking utensils and other items for females and land, gun/bow and arrow, and farming implements for males.

With changes in the economy, the needs have become more diversified. Unable to provide most of the needs, out-migration provides an avenue for the females to acquire wealth, new skills and exposure. This is an opportunity that eludes those who do not migrate. Thus, in this context the return migrants could be considered winners while non-migrants could be regarded as losers (Heering et al., 2004). Return migrants are able to invest in off-farming activities from the income obtained through migration.

Discussion

The past three decades have witnessed an increase in female migration, especially in developing countries where females now migrate independently (Pittin, 1984; Khoo et al., 1984; Abur-sufian, 1994; Synnove, 1999; Todaro, 2000; Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Women's needs have not only increased but also vary with time and in space. This is partly due to emerging socio-economic changes in society, especially the changing lifestyles among women in particular. But the changes are also due to the shift from a subsistence economy to a market economy.

Some few years ago women in the Wa district depended for their lives on what they could obtain locally. According to them, they had fewer needs and life in general was quite simple. Unfortunately, within the Wa district, socio-cultural factors continue to inhibit women's socio-economic lives thereby making some of them perpetually dependent on men. It is in this regard that some females from the Wa district tend to migrate to Accra or Kumasi to engage in the *kaya yei* business as a means of earning some income for themselves as well as their households.

The present study revealed that more than 30 per cent of the return migrants were less than 25 years old, meaning that they migrated at a young age. This is consistent with other findings in the migration literature that females generally migrate at a younger age than men (Anarfi, 1999; Synnove, 1999).

It is also noted that some of the return migrants were married and a few of them even had children. Since some children are likely to be left behind at the place of origin under the care of other relatives, they may not get the best of care as with their biological mothers. This is one area where further studies are needed.

Although the return migrants and their households have benefited from migration, it is a threat to the stability of marriages and exposes the women to sexual immorality and sexually-transmitted infections (STI) such as HIV/AIDS. The Ghanaian media, for example, have reported cases of HIV/AIDS infections among the *kaya yei* in Accra (Annoh, 2005).

Information from the FGDs on the perception of female out-migration from the Wa district to Accra or Kumasi reflects a debate not only between men and women but also within each sex group. While some women (supported by some men) felt that female migration enhances the status of females, some men (supported by some women) are against female migration because to them it is not only the fear that their moral values could be corrupted but also the loss of their labor (female migrants) at home since women generally play a key role in the Ghanaian economy.

In Ghana, for example, women form 51.9 per cent of the agricultural labor force producing 70 per cent of the national food crop output (Awumbila, 2001; ISSER, 2004). In traditional Ghanaian society, and especially in the patriarchal society where this study was conducted, women are expected to assist their husbands or fathers in their work. Women therefore play a very crucial role in production and reproduction (ranging from planting through transportation of farm produce to the house for processing, marketing and storage), basic household chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning, drawing of water, and all forms of child care. Given the level of participation of women in the socio-cultural and economic spheres, their absence poses some challenges to the household as well as the entire community.

It is partly this challenge to the socio-economic system that has generated concern about female migration. The power relations that put females at a disadvantage appear to be threatened, and the emerging dynamics involved in female migration in Africa present a challenge to traditional leaders, religious bodies, gender advocates and policy makers.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was on the examination of female migration from the Wa district to southern Ghana, especially females who migrate to Accra or Kumasi to engage in the *kaya yei* business. The principal objective of the study was to identify the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of both non-migrants and the return migrants in the Wa district, and to also assess the perceptions of the non-migrants and return migrants about females who migrate to Kumasi and Accra

to engage in the *kaya yei* business. Two sets of survey questionnaires were used for the return migrants and non-migrants while a focus group discussion guide was the instrument used for the group discussion with males and females community members.

The study shows that unfavorable socio-cultural and economic conditions at the Wa district compelled females to migrate to Accra and Kumasi for the *kaya yei* business. Although some of the women and their household members have benefited through migration, out-migration of females from the Wa district poses both productive and reproductive problems to the women themselves and also to their households. The perception of people in the Wa district about female migration to the south continues to be a debate.

Endnotes

¹The exchange rate at the time of the survey in June 2001 was \$1 = c8,000.00.

²Pseudonyms have been used to disguise the identity of the respondents in the FGD.

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Emerging Production Systems in Conventional Development: Experience of the *jua kali* Economy in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper is focused on emergent production systems and how they are viewed by conventional development theory (CDT). The literature reveals that conventional development theory disregards the innovativeness, creativity, values, and philosophies of emergent production systems. CDT sees development occurring only when informality is or will be transformed. This paper gives examples of emergent production organization that deals with the realities of every day life in Kenya. The paper demonstrates the integratedness between the individual, the family and community in emergent production systems.

Key words: emergent production, conventional development theory, *jua kali*, integratedness, informality

Introduction

In developing economies there is a proliferation of emergent production systems that are inadequately explained by conventional development theory. These production systems thrive even when macroeconomic and sectoral policies are unfavorable. Largely defined as the informal sector, the emergent production systems are viewed as wanting in policy and practice. There is a raging debate on whether these production systems can spearhead development.

In this debate, informality is being viewed as the main obstacle hindering these production systems from effectively participating in development. Informality defines the physical disposition of production systems, i.e. what the eye can see rather than defining the intrinsic values and structural characteristics of the production system.

Debates surrounding these production systems have been extended to include their legality. It is argued that businesses in these production systems operate outside the law, do not pay taxes, nor are they registered.

However, the focus on informality and illegality surrounding the emergent production systems is not a productive debate. Efforts to formalize and legalize them have not worked—at least not in Kenya. The *jua kali* sector has continued to define itself by extending its frontiers and markets, forming new businesses and expanding spatially. A clear understanding of its values and intrinsic structural characteristics, whether implicit or explicit, need to be studied. This paper analyses perspectives on *jua kali* in conventional development theory; *jua kali* philosophy, and structural characteristics. It concludes by showing how an integrated approach to understanding society and emergent

production systems illuminates the situation of *jua kali* as opposed to seeing the sector as informal or illegal.

Perspectives on the *jua kali* economy

Capitalist development theory makes unsubstantiated assumptions about the *jua kali* economy. Like the early missionaries in Africa, its aim is to convert, mainstream, transform, upgrade and oversee development. Before we look at these processes, the following assumptions about *jua kali* are made:

- It is a second rate economy
- Products are below standard
- It operates outside the law
- Lacks innovation
- Lacks entrepreneurship
- Individuals are moonlighting or straddling
- It's capital deficient

These assumptions do not have a historical or cultural basis in regard to the evolution of the *jua kali* economy. According to Kinyanjui (2006), *jua kali* is a unique African way of organizing production and has been gradually responding to the changing needs of the population.

The *jua kali* economy has evolved market and social institutions that define business rules and regulations and enhance transactions, which the conventional capitalist development theory largely ignores. It is argued here that the *jua kali* economy is an integral part of Africa's development in general, and in particular, Kenya's.

Jua kali desires the autonomy and preservation of a community's heritage. The

first generation of *jua kali* businesspeople was comprised of war veterans whom the colonial government settled in Burma and Kariakoo; African businesspeople who were relocated by the colonial government to the infamous African quarters of Ziwani, Shauri Moyo and Muthurwa. These people lived, expressed, and celebrated the attainment of independence by engaging in the *jua kali* economy. Meanwhile, they hoped that their children would expand their businesses and maintain the culture of working for themselves, which the colonial government had denied them. It is this desire for self-employment that was misconstrued as anti-development or backward by conventional capitalist development theorists or illegal from the World Bank's perspective.

Capitalist development thinking does not hold that the *jua kali* economy can actually spearhead development without first being transformed. What makes business news in the local and international media is the happenings at the stock exchange, the MNCs and mainstream local companies. *Jua kali* makes news only when it is seen to be breaking the law as witnessed during strikes in the *matatus* industry. Yet, little is mentioned about the way the *matatu* sector edged the Kenya Bus Service (KBS) and Overseas Trading Company (OTC) transport companies out of business through fierce competition.

Jua kali dynamism at the local level blocks the expansionist policies of MNCs and conventional local firms. It stymies the spread of international capitalism as a production system. Its philosophy and ideology is deeply rooted in the principles of what South Africans call *Ubuntu*, or what East Africans call *Utu*. *Ubuntu* or *Utu* refers to serene humanity.

The paradox of the failure of development and perceived African crisis is nothing other than the rejection of international capitalism and the celebration of *Utu*, which has been struggling against international capitalism for ages. The engagement between *Utu* and international capitalism has been characterized by open conflict and silent resistance.

What is *jua kali*?

Jua kali as a production system emerged in response to the failure of socio-economic systems failure. One of the social system failures is a lack of, or deficiency in, entrepreneurial skills. Arguably, since the work of the ILO (1972), many studies have been carried out to demonstrate the lack of entrepreneurial skills in the *jua kali* sector. One fundamental question often raised in papers and dissertations is: are *jua kali* operators entrepreneurs? For example, Kinyanjui (1996) raised the question whether enterprise formation in Central Kenya could be regarded as entrepreneurship or just plodding along. Sociological analyses have also shown that *jua kali* entrepreneurs have low levels of education and skills, and lack positive motivation (Otunga *et al.*, 2001; Njoka and Njeru, 2001).

The missing sociological inputs in the *jua kali* industry are supposedly responsible for its failure to grow or transform. A key question comes to mind: *is the absence of an attribute such as education in an individual a weakness?* Yes, to many observers it is. Thus, the recommendation of skill development programs for *jua kali* businesses. But in *jua kali*, functional literacy and education is easily picked up, adapted, and adopted. The *jua kali* players have a peculiar or unique way of decoding,

interpreting and applying knowledge. This is reflected in the way they decode scientific and engineering concepts to make equipment such as metal presses, folding machines and gliders (Kinyanjui, 2006) regardless of their low levels of education. Personal initiatives and ideation involved in knowledge generation in *jua kali* is immense. However, conventional development theory seems to be completely ignorant of the sector's innovativeness.

In the eyes of many anthropological analysts, *jua kali* enterprises are survivalist firms locked in cocoons of informality (Hart, 1971), a major impediment to their growth. Informality of *jua kali* enterprises has generated a lot of criticism in development circles with some quarters interpreting it as a sign of backwardness. Efforts to formalize the enterprises have involved their registration and legislation through reduction of legal barriers. However, to date, this has not changed the status of *jua kali*. This is an indication that debate on the sector and attempts to formalize it should be reconsidered. Just because there is no cashier behind a till does not mean the business is informal.

The story of informality is well told in volumes of papers and journal articles. At present, it is the subject of debate at the World Bank, which has developed a website forum to discuss this issue, the Private Sector Development Blog (www.psdblog.worldbank.org). Tom Kenyon raises the question whether it makes sense to formalize the informal sector. In his argument, he observes that 70 per cent of workers in developing countries are to some extent outside the scope of government regulation.

He recommends the following: “economic history has taught us that states are indispensable for making markets and public services work on a large scale.... We need to uncover ways of making institutions in developing countries perform the same functions they do in developed countries” Kenyon (2006: 1).

Is it true that 70% of workers are largely outside the scope of government regulation and control? I would largely argue that the *jua kali* economy as perceived by development analysts is not outside the scope of government regulation. Operating outside the law does not make an individual informal; it makes him or her a lawbreaker or a criminal. *Jua kali* businesses abide by spatial laws. Local authorities have confined them to clusters such Ziwani, Kigandaini, Kamukunji, Quarry Road, Kibuye Market, Akamba wood carvers, Kongowea Market and Sega Market to mention but a few. To abide by the land laws, the *jua kali* economy has gone as far as buying land for its operation in the case of Ziwani and Akamba wood carvers (Kinyanjui, 1998).

What *jua kali* has rejected is the ideology and philosophy of the state in its role of spreading international capitalism. The paradox of the African state in general and Kenyan state in particular is founded on Western political thought: to appropriate surplus and to chaperone citizens to make sure that all their productive life is geared towards meeting the needs of the state. In addition, the government creates laws and regulations which citizens are required to comply with. The state promotes nothing other than structured living and the need to always have a vantage point at whatever cost, be it social, economic, loss of human dignity, and or loss of life.

Formality under international capitalism conditions people to a lifestyle that is anti-informality. I argue that informality constitutes the state of being human, and is rooted in respect for other people’s human dignity under whatever circumstances. Production within the formal context is directed towards satisfaction of excessive consumption lifestyles and using others to advance a lifestyle where money and power are core desires: the rule of use and dispose. Formality lacks values and norms. It ignores the very essence of life, which is sharing and letting others experience the fullness of life. In structured living, the same questions are asked and the same answers are given, all aimed at gaining a vantage position. Formality kills creativity and the beauty of diversity the essence of humanity.

What is referred to as the “informality” and “African business” crisis is nothing other than the rejection of formality and structured living. An informal production system has brought Africans in general and Kenyans in particular, to where they are today. This informal system created conditions that enabled people to survive colonialism, the Mau Mau struggle, inequalities, and the betrayals of post-independence capitalism. It also contributed to the survival of African enterprise during the era of super imperialism under the Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAP).

Consider the spirit of informality I observed in Wamiti whose creative work I profiled in an IPAR Working Paper (Kinyanjui, 2006). The same spirit is also evident in the officials of Kamukunji *jua kali* cluster and two *jua kali fundis* I have worked with.

Wamiti knows no other job other than working in the *jua kali* sector. He has never

broken any law or failed to register his business. He relies on his sweat, ingenuity and foresight to fabricate various items in his makeshift workshop. For pictures of the various products that he has fabricated over time, see IPAR Working Paper No. 82/2006. These products include bicycle pedals, plastic drain covers, pressing machines and rubber bushes. His goal is to develop himself and his business bureaucracy notwithstanding (Kinyanjui, 2006).

The Kamukunji *jua kali* officials are making extraordinary efforts to publicize their mission. Informality is a struggle for human dignity; it epitomizes shared responsibility and experiences. I see it in two *jua kali fundis*: one, a trained carpenter; and the other, a floor tile fitter. The carpenter is a village polytechnic graduate while the other has acquired his skills on the job. Their different levels of education and sources of skills do not seem to come between them. They are inseparable. They look for work together, moving from one construction site to another. Every morning they walk from Githurai to Kahawa Sukari looking for jobs. Sometimes they are lucky but other times they are not.

Their working styles are, however, different. The polytechnic graduate is very good in measurements and rarely makes wrong estimates of building materials. His error margin is small. His counterpart does not know how to estimate. His margin of error is large. However, his leverage point lies on job performance: he is very articulate and thorough; he works for long hours; he never makes excuses for not working; and, unlike the polytechnic graduate, he never questions what I tell him. The graduate at times engages me in discourse about politics, his main concern being in the performance of

the current government. He is very conscious about money and, unlike his counterpart, cannot use his pay to buy cement when it runs out while I'm away. At five o'clock he is always in a hurry to leave. During visits to Tiles and Carpets Supermarket on Mombasa Road, he thoughtfully looks at each one of the tiles very carefully without comment. His face does not show any emotion.

They both refer to me as *daktari* and sometimes I wonder whether this title means the same to both of them. All I know is that the three of us have many answered questions deep in our hearts. Sometimes the poly graduate compares me with other people he has worked for. He falls short of asking me why I'm so learned yet I'm not able to buy enough materials to finish building my house. I'm not bothered by the questions from the polytechnic graduate. I am worried by the calmness and silence of his friend. I always wish I can make him open up and tell his story. I want to learn the message behind his calmness and silence. I want to understand what can be done to bring out his personality, unmodified knowledge and interpretation of reality.

***Jua kali*: an indigenous production system.**

Jua kali literally means severe "hot sun." It is used to describe an indigenous production process and phenomenon that takes place in urban and rural Kenya. The *jua kali* production process is characterized by hard long hours of work under very difficult conditions. It's also characterized by self preservation and determination. It involves using one's ingenuity to develop products for consumption in households and for use in the agriculture, construction, and transport industries. The methods adopted in

production are non-conventional and are creative in terms of reducing wastage, substitution of processes and raw materials, markets and networks.

Galvanized by the principle of working for oneself and responsibility, that is, “if I do not work, I will go hungry,” “if I do not do something for myself there is nobody else to do it for me,” *jua kali* producers hammer, fold and press materials into shape. They wade through mud during the rainy season, or contended with dust while selling fruits, vegetables, cereals, and groceries in such places as Gikomba Quarry Road or Kongowea market in Mombasa. They are self-driven and self-motivated individuals determined to succeed at any cost. Like-minded individuals get together to constitute spontaneous production settlements or become a band of traders, commonly known as hawkers, who peddle their wares from one street to another.

Interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the *jua kali* production system

The *jua kali* production system is fairly interrelated and interconnected with a variety of social and production institutions. I will first dwell with interrelations at the social level. The *jua kali* artisan is first related to the family or household. He/she has a responsibility to the family, both at the nuclear level and the extended level. *Jua kali* entrepreneurs start businesses to fulfill not only their entrepreneurial goals, but also to meet the needs of their families. These are basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, health, and education. Seen through this lens, business success is not measured in terms of accumulated profits in form of savings in banks but whether the individual clothes his/her family, is able to take his or

her children to school, has shelter, or is able to access health care.

Diversifying the household’s economic base such as buying or keeping animals, being able to take care of cash crops such as tea, horticultural products, coffee, etc. are some of the indicators of income generation. One is considered incomplete if he or she does not have these facilities. Of course one may wonder what kind of logic lies behind this form of accumulation? Is it not a primitive form of accumulation compared to investment in shares and stocks? The response to this is that monetary benefits are one aspect of investment value. There are psychological benefits drawn from watching animals graze or seeing sheep return from pastures in the evening. It is equally satisfying to be awakened up at the crack of dawn by the crow of a cock, or watching chickens as they come home to roost.

Diversification versus specialization of the household economy is critical, especially as far as the gender division of ownership and control is concerned. The woman is engaged in productive activities beyond household chores such as cooking and caring. By tending the animals, she realizes some form of self-actualization and supplements the household income. The children in the household also have a role to play in the household economy. They learn by doing as the head of the household assigns duties to everyone in the household. It is not the state that provides jobs it is the head of the family. The household head is the first to be consulted where issues of work and incomes of siblings are concerned. It is not the sub chief or the chief who constitute the first point of entry to the central government. The local councilor or Member of Parliament is also unlikely to be consulted. If an

unemployed young person fails to get a job, it is not the Member of Parliament who is held responsible, it is the immediate household head that should provide direction and means of accessing work. It is for this reason that *jua kali* entrepreneurs do not just invest for themselves; they invest for their kith and kin.

The emergent *jua kali* economy is also connected to the community at large. The *jua kali* entrepreneur is a daughter or son of the village, location or division, from which he or she comes. These entrepreneurs are expected to offer leadership and support to their community and are judged on the basis of their usefulness to the community. This includes supporting local fund drives, which range from funerals to weddings. They also include supporting self-help projects such as construction of churches, cattle dips, dispensaries and schools, or supporting local self-development initiatives such water and power projects. This is because the *jua kali* entrepreneurs do not live in isolation and their self-actualization is realized through community actualization. The success of a local school or hospital will depend on the so-called “people from Nairobi.” This support to the community is rendered notwithstanding the fact that *jua kali* entrepreneurs pay taxes directly or indirectly. They indeed act as the state substitute in their locations.

The self-reproduction of the *jua kali* sector

Self-reproduction is critical to any organism and *jua kali* is no exception. Employment generation often used as a measure of *jua kali* dynamism with most scholars attesting this fact. *Jua kali* businesses start small, remain small, or die small. They grow

horizontally as reflected in the mushrooming of many small *jua kali* enterprises.

The truth of the matter is that *jua kali* enterprises reproduce themselves. The first form of self-reproduction is in the replacement of the old generation with the young one. In *jua kali* sites such as those in Githurai, Kamukunji, and Wakulima market, the young generation aged between 15 and 35, is gradually replacing the older *jua kali* entrepreneurs, aged 45 and above. One entrepreneur observed that his two sons have taken over his work at Wakulima Market because he is not able to wake up as early as he used to. He says that diseases associated with old age have caught up with him and, consequently, he is not as active as he used to be. Another operator in Kamukunji expressed similar sentiments: “the number of people of my age in this cluster is declining. We are now gradually handing over the work to the young generation who have the energy to toil and do the heavy manual work in *jua kali*.”

The other form of self-reproduction is through diversification. This is through shelter upgrading, for example, building permanent homes or rental houses, buying land, a truck, *matatus* or pickup vans. A good number of *jua kali* entrepreneurs have indicated to me that the rental houses they own, in Kayole and other areas, were bought or built with the proceeds from their work in *jua kali*. They have also made reference to individuals who have educated their children up to university, both locally and abroad, using earnings from *jua kali*. Some have been able to pay brideprice and meet expenses incurred during initiation rites through proceeds from their *jua kali* activities. Epic rags to riches stories abound in the *jua kali* sector.

There is however no class differentiation in the *jua kali* sector. There are bonds that unite *jua kali* people, regardless of their monetary worth, gender, or ethnicity. *Jua kali* entrepreneurs have had to come to terms with certain realities that divide people, especially Kenyans. For example, in March 2006, the Kamukunji *jua kali* Cluster held its election. The first thing they did was to arrange how the issue of ethnicity was to be addressed. It was agreed that the seats should be distributed on the basis of ethnicity whereby each ethnic group was represented. No ethnic group was allowed to have more representation than others in the cluster government. Individual ethnic group interests are secondary to the interest of the people in the cluster whose main goal is *kufanya biashara* (to trade) so that they can sustain themselves economically.

Marafiki SACCO is based on philanthropic principles and has a membership of 1,500 market traders. Membership is drawn from a wide spectrum of individuals: men, women, the young, and the elderly, low income and high-income earners. They believe that only by being united can they grow. Members' daily contributions range from as low as Kshs. 50 to Ksh.10,000. Large contributors do not feel that they are subsidizing the small contributors while the latter do not feel intimidated by the former. This has enabled the group to grow from strength to strength since its inception. Members borrow depending on their ability to pay. As a result, most of the members have managed to buy plots and build residential houses in areas such as Githurai, Kayole, Kasarani, Rwai, Kahawa *jua kali*, and Airport Road, among others.

Men and women also work and grow together as partners in Marafiki SACCO.

Indeed, 65% of the memberships is comprised of women. They negotiate, bargain, and arrive at a consensus on the sharing of positions of power. They are able to draw and benefit from their savings. By working together with men, their road to empowerment is enhanced. The pooled resources benefit women more, although they constitute the majority of the small savers.

Jua kali: the law and government regulations

Jua kali, like other forms of indigenous production systems, operates independently. It does not comply with the norms and set out best practices especially when complying with registration, tax and standards regulations. As far as registration is concerned, there is a presumption by the government that it does not know who is in *jua kali* and who is not. It also assumes that *jua kali* is an amorphous, haphazard, and disorganized activity, which is difficult to reach. These assumptions are based on the state of the mind of the bureaucrats and their lack of understanding of what *jua kali* is really about. For example, the Kamukunji *jua kali* cluster is perceived by many as just a group of artisans who make similar metal boxes on Jogoo Road. A Senior programme officer of the Kenyan Government illustrated the inefficiency of *jua kali* to me by showing me through his boardroom window a woman vegetable vendor who daily exhibits the same stock and has resisted movement by the city authority after the latter destroyed her kiosk.

The bureaucrats' perceptions of *jua kali* as a temporary phenomenon, which will soon be replaced by formal firms, have hindered their appreciation of its *raison d'être*, or the boldness with which the sector pushes and

extends its frontier. Undoubtedly, the lack of *jua kali* registration has to do with the government's lack of ideology and moral authority. This is because such registration comes with responsibility, and the government does not have the any framework to use in meaningful dialogue with the *jua kali* entrepreneurs. This may explain its procrastination especially in the *matatu* sector, even after Michuki's attempts to reform it.

Lessons from indigenous production to conventional development theory

I have learned from this case study the difference between the balkanisation and differentiation of men and women, the youth and the old, the rich and the poor in conventional capitalist development models; the failure to recognize the integrated nature of the whole society and how many actors have worked towards the realization of specific community goals and objectives. In conventional development, there are women's projects, projects for the marginalized and the poor. It is this political philosophy that has contributed to non-development.

Jua kali calls for a different political philosophy of integratedness and shared destiny in a context where each body interacts with the other. Social justice is based on the consideration of the other (Kinyanjui and Khayesi, 2005) and it is given prominence. Persuasion and appealing to reason are the main tools of arbitration. In debt recovery for example, auctioning of an individual's property is a last resort lest it interferes with business harmony and integrations. This is because if one's person's property is auctioned, other members are adversely affected. This is considered unfair and selfish. The *jua kali*

economy only turns to the conventional capitalist modes of maintaining law and order as a last resort (Kinyanjui and Khayesi, 2005).

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Africa’s Silk Road: China and India’s New Economic Frontier. By Harry G. Broadman. World Bank Press, Washington, D. C. 391 pages. \$20.00 (paperback).

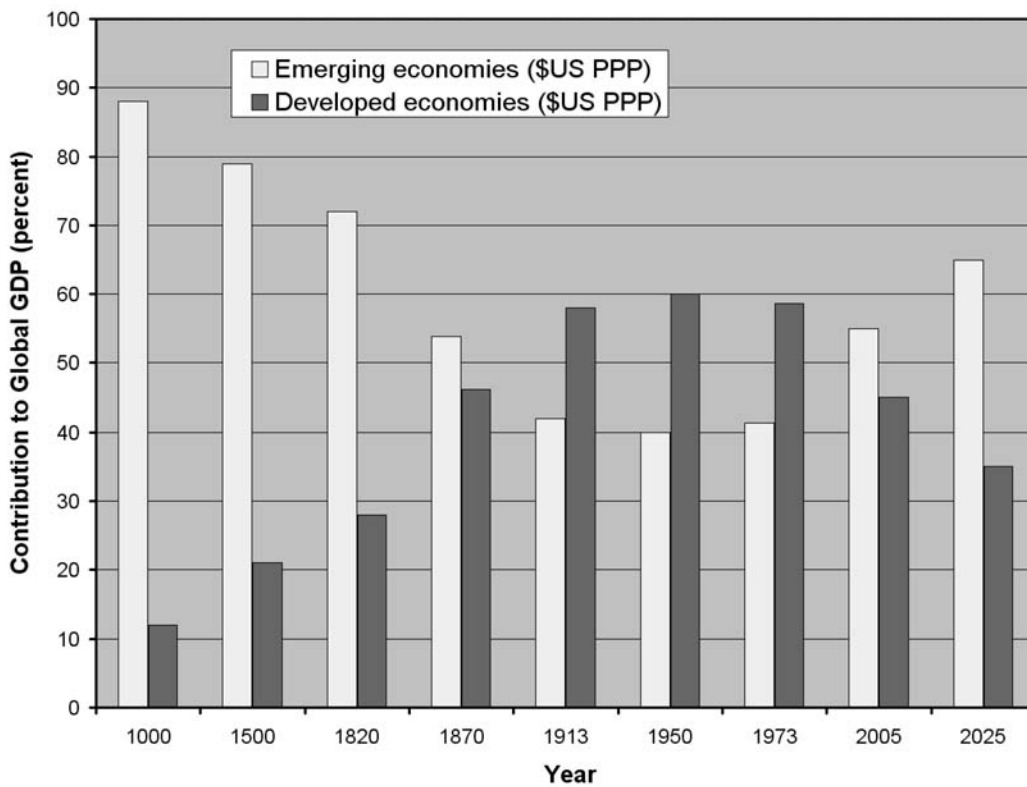
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This important empirical study is focused on African-Asian trade and investment flows: the growing “South-South” trends in economic development. The author calls this growing trade one of the most significant recent developments in the world economy.

According to a report published in the *The Economist* 2006), in the 18 centuries to 1820, China and India produced about 80% of world GDP (Figure 1) calculated with the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). The development of industrial capitalism in

Figure 1. Percentage contribution (PPP) to world GDP of today’s emerging and developed economies, 1000 to 2025 CE.



Adapted from *The Economist* (2006).

Britain, its spread to the continent, the massive competitive advantage machine technology conferred on the Europeans

resulted in the rise in the European share of world GDP. Concomitantly, Europe’s rise made the relative contribution of Chinese

and Indian economies much smaller—despite the fact that absolute world GDP was much larger. Last year, for the first time since the late 19th century, China and India contributed over 50% of world GDP.

Although both China and India have traded with Africa deep into the past and the pace picked up after independence, particularly for cheaply made Chinese consumer goods, the author of *Africa's Silk Road* argues, that the current trade and investment flows are unprecedented.

Africa's Silk Road: China and India's New Economic Frontier explores one geographic dimension of the Chinese and Indian “miracles.” The purpose of the study was to help policy makers and decision makers in business to understand the development of African-Asian trade and investment relations. Specific questions addressed in the study are:

1. What has been the recent evolution of the pattern and performance of trade and investment flows between Africa and Asia, especially China and India, and which factors are likely to significantly condition these flows in the future?
2. What have been the most important impacts on Africa of its trade and investment relations with China and India, and what actions can be taken to help shape these impacts to enhance Africa's economic development prospects?

The study is organized into six chapters. There are two introductory chapters and four chapters focused on key factors that, the author asserts, are “significantly affecting

trade and investment between Africa and Asia” (p. 4).

Chapter one, “Connecting the Continents,” provides the historical context for the study, its conceptual scope, and methods. The growth of trade among developing countries is a significant (and long-sought) development in the global economy. As the author observes, world trade and investment has been dominated by trade between developed countries and trade between developed countries and less developed countries. But trade between less developed and less developed countries has been a small feature of the global economy until recently. The study is based on a new dataset collected at the level of the firm that was developed in 2006, firm-level Investment Climate Assessments (ICA), aggregated official government statistics, and qualitative Diagnostic Trade Integration Studies (DTIS).

Chapter Two, “Performance and Patterns of African-Asian Trade and Investment Flows,” summarizes the trade flow data over the last 25 years. The author concludes that if African countries wish to trade more in Asia, they will have to do more than just liberalize their trade policies. They must address constraints within their own borders (for example, lack of electricity, lack of credit, weak markets), at their borders (for example, high tariffs on raw materials, high export taxes, lack of investment promotion policy), and between borders of trading nations (mainly constraints on efficient working of ports of exporting and importing countries).

Each of the three subsequent chapters investigates one of the three constraints to trade and investment identified in Chapter

Two: those within the African country, those at the border, and those between borders. Chapter Three assesses the challenges at the border, Chapter Four, the challenges behind the border, while Chapter Four looks at between-the-border problems. Each chapter concludes with specific policy recommendations to address the constraints to trade and investment.

Chapter Six, “Investment-Trade Linkages: Scale, Integration, and Production Networks,” is focused on African participation in “global value chains.” A value chain is a series of activities—a process in steps that involve supply chains, productive processes, and distribution networks. In order to produce a product, a potential product (or its elements) must pass through the entire series of activities. As each step in the series is completed, value is added to the product until it emerges at the end of the chain as a finished product, or good, ready to be used. The process of globalization has created global value chains where the series of activities necessary to produce a finished product are scattered across countries and continents. According to the author, such “...fragmentation of production processes has changed the economic landscape facing the nations, industries, and individual firms in Sub-Saharan Africa” (p. 289). The results of the study indicate that African countries have real opportunities to use Chinese and Indian investments and trade to diversify their exports, add value to their export products, and increase the volume of their exports—to acquire more on the value chain than simply the export of primary products. The author suggests that, in managing Asian investments to this end, African countries must improve the competitiveness of their markets, build institutions that are

responsive to increasing commercial opportunities, strengthen institutional capacities, and improve governance, transparency, and accountability. Success, according to this very interesting and well-research study, rests on well-crafted and uniformly applied policy.

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Untapped: The Scramble for Africa's Oil. By John Ghazvinian. New York: Harcourt Books, 2007. 320 pages. \$25.00

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At a time of great uncertainties in the global oil market, this is a timely book that takes our focus off the Middle East and forces us to look at Africa's growing clout as energy provider. Africa seems on the verge of playing a bigger role in world energy security and the challenges and complexities of this transformation form the backbone of Ghazvinian's excellent investigation. These challenges and complexities are well captured in the book's title. To "tap" into Africa's oil potential, oil companies from all over the world have been heavily investing in exploration and production activity. Since 1990 alone, the petroleum industry has poured in more than \$20 billion. A further \$50 billion will be spent between now and the end of the decade—the largest investment in the continent's history. According to a National Intelligence Council's report on Africa, 25% of US oil imports will come from the continent by 2015. China already imports 28% of its oil from Africa (up from 17% in 1997). But, as the second half of the title suggests, this investment frenzy has given ground to a new "scramble" by the big oil companies, driven by a "grab-it-while-you-can mentality" which reminds us of the first scramble for Africa that took place between the 1880s and the start of World War I, when colonial empires in Africa proliferated more rapidly than anywhere else on the globe. The first scramble is considered by many as the canonical example of the New Imperialism.

Against this background, John Ghazvinian's investigation is centered on the following key questions: Will oil be a curse or a blessing for Africa? What have been the social, economic and political impacts of the oil wealth? How is the oil revenue being managed? How do oil companies involved in this new scramble envision and assume their corporate responsibilities, especially in regard to social and environmental concerns of the populations? How has the oil factor played out in conflicts affecting Africa's petro-states? How is the competition for Africa's energy being fought among the traditional players (US, UK and France) and the new comers (China, India)?

To answer these questions, the author travels through nine African oil producers (Nigeria, Chad, Cameroun, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Angola, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe) meeting with industry executives, politicians, social activists, warlords, oil workers, scientists, and ordinary people whose lives have been transformed by the oil boom. This on-the-ground investigation is what makes the book appealing. What emerges is a fascinating account of the African petroleum landscape. The author has succeeded, in a mix of adventure travelogue and fact-filled examination, in conveying some complex petro-economics and politics in a painless way. John Ghazvinian's style is hard-boiled, like a good crime fiction. Across the states the author travels through, the lead story is

that of deception, despair, frustration, corruption, greed, environmental pollution, rapacious behaviors by both the oil companies and the new local “oil nomenklatura” and, here and there, a glimpse of hope.

Although this is not an academic book, the author – he has a doctorate in history from Oxford and is currently a visiting fellow at the University of Pennsylvania offers interesting analytical and theoretical perspectives to the depressing reality he encounters. The author explains the current state of affairs in African petro-states by, among others, the *curse of oil* and the devastating effects of the *rentier state*.

The Curse of Oil

This is a term that has become hugely fashionable in recent years among those concerned about poverty reduction and the effect of resource booms on developing countries. The author writes:

That oil wealth could be a curse seems counterintuitive. When an oil bonanza is discovered in a struggling African country, the instinctive assumption is that it can only be a good thing; that it will result in a rapid improvement in the lives of the people; that suddenly there will be money for hospitals and vaccines.... To the contrary, however, studies suggest that the real GDP and the population’s standard of living nearly always decline where oil is discovered. Between 1970 and 1993, for example, countries without oil grow four times faster than those of countries with oil (p.95).

To explain this “paradox of plenty,” the author refers to what economists call the “Dutch disease,” a term originally used in 1977 and which described the collapse of the manufacturing sector in the Netherlands following the discovery of natural resources there in the 1960s. Today, the term more generally refers to “the negative effects of exchange-rate depreciation on an economy that become suddenly over reliant on one type of export commodity.” Reflecting on the Dutch disease in Nigeria, Africa’s leading oil exporter, the author stresses that:

...between 1965 and 1975 petroleum production went from accounting for just 5 percent of government revenue to a whopping 80 percent, bringing with it a dangerous dependence on oil-price volatility, the bottoming out of traditional farming and manufacturing, and the inauguration of a never-ending cycle of external debt”. (pp. 97-98).

The Rentier State and its Political and Psychological Effects

Another theoretical explanation as to why oil-exporting countries did not have the fastest-growing economies in the world was offered by the Iranian economist Hossein Mahdavy who suggested, in 1970, that countries that are reliant on oil exports for the majority of their income be described as “rentier states,” which he defined as “countries that receive on a regular basis substantial amounts of economic rent.” John Ghazvinian uses Mahdavy’s pioneer work to discuss the political effects of a rentier state and its psychological effects on the populations of Africa’s petro-states. He writes:

When leaders no longer feel the need to tax their citizens to raise revenue, they become far less interested in what those citizens think about them, and unresponsive to complaints about their job performance. Meanwhile, citizens who pay little or nothing in taxes become far less interested in politics, and begin to see the cash-rich state as simply a source of lucrative contracts and easy favors. Before long, it appears that hardly anyone has a stake in how the country is governed, and a dangerous democratic deficit can open up (p.105).

As devastating as they may be, the political effects of the rentier state pale in comparison to its subtle psychological effects on the population who comes to develop a “rentier mentality” defined as

...a shift in the general attitude toward work and compensation such that reward becomes a windfall, an isolated fact... people who witness vast amounts of money appear out of nowhere and shared unfairly begin to view personal wealth as the result of an accident, or an ability to be in the right place at the right time, rather than as a reward for hard work (p.106).

Another important theme that permeates the book is how developments and prospects in Africa’s oil industry have reshaped major powers’ foreign policy toward the continent. Of particular interest is how China’s growing reliance on African oil has put it on

a collision course with the US political priorities for the continent. Besides the fight against terrorism, the growing US military presence in Africa, exemplified by the recently proposed AFRICOM (Africa Command), is aimed at securing the Gulf of Guinea as a vital energy source for the American market. From an energy-security perspective, Africa is even more important to China than it is to the US. Africa’s share in China’s oil imports has climbed from 17 percent in 1997 to 28.7 percent today and it is expected to grow in the coming years. To that end, China has developed a New Asian African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) and is stepping up its political and economic activities across the continent with overall trade worth \$80 billion (up to \$1 billion in 1989). This growing international competition is the subject of an excellent book by Peter Navarro, *The Coming China Wars: Where They Will be Fought and How They Can Be Won*. Africa is already a battle ground.

This is an important book on a pressing subject. I recommend it to anyone interested in contemporary world affairs, Africa or the oil industry. I am going to assign it as one of the texts for my *Understanding Africa* class. As Ghazvinian superbly writes, “Between night and day, there is a twilight in the tropics, though if you blink you may miss it. Between heaven and hell, there is an Africa few of us even know” (p.298). I hope this book would contribute to a better understanding of Africa.

A number of interesting books have been published on the issue of African oil. Here are some suggested readings:

Alden, C. 2007. *China in Africa: Partner, Competitor or Hegemon?* Zed Books.

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