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THE KAYA YEI PHENOMENON IN GHANA: FEMALE MIGRATION FROM THE UPPER-WEST REGION TO KUMASI AND ACCRA.

By

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Abstract

Theories on rural-urban migration up to the late 1970s generally recognized only men as migrants and regarded women mostly as associational migrants who accompanied their husbands or close relations to urban centres. Within the last two to three decades, there has been the phenomenon of independent migration among women within and between countries. This paper focuses on independent migration of females from a rural district (in the Upper-West Region) to the two leading cities (Kumasi and Accra) in Ghana. Eighty-three females from the Wa district, and working in Kumasi and Accra were interviewed. In addition, one focus group discussion was held in Kumasi. The migration of females from the less developed Upper-West Region to the more developed enclaves in the south to work as head porters (*kaya yei*) is related to a process which provides the women with economic and social independence which they could not have achieved in their place of origin. Although there are some inherent difficulties and/or risks associated with the *kaya yei* business, the study revealed that the women have benefited from migration through improvement in their economic situation and physical appearances. This migration of females from rural areas of the Wa District to the two cities has implications for the discourse on gender-based migration.

Keywords: Migration, gender, *kaya yei*, marriage and independence

Introduction

Historically, commercial human portage began during the trans-Saharan trade in West Africa as a supplement to riverboats, donkey and caravan transport (Ajayi and Crowder, 1985). Footpaths were the common routes through which head portage of various kinds of goods were conveyed from one town to the other. Initially slaves and some individuals served as head porters. With time and the abolition of slavery, head porters were predominantly individuals and also migrants. Payments were mostly in kind and varied according to both the quantity and quality of the load (Adu Boahen, 2000). As production of cash crops, jewelry and the introduction of imported European goods expanded trade along the coastal areas of sub-Saharan Africa, the services of head porters became even more important as more people became involved in carrying goods between interior market and coastal centres.

From the 1860s, an intermediate means of transport such as draught animals, which had been introduced, were considered to be a more convenient means of conveying goods. Nonetheless, head portage continued, especially in the forest and coastal areas where the presence of tsetse flies made it difficult to use draught animals (McPhee, 1971). After the 1890s, motorable roads and railways were constructed to facilitate the transportation of bulky goods from the interior of the country to the coast (Dickson and Benneh, 1988). Even after that, porters were still used to carry cash and food crops along bush paths to the main roads.

Until recently, foreigners (except Nigerians who were mostly engaged in trading) such as Ivorians, Malians, Nigerienne and Burkinabes, especially the males, were mostly

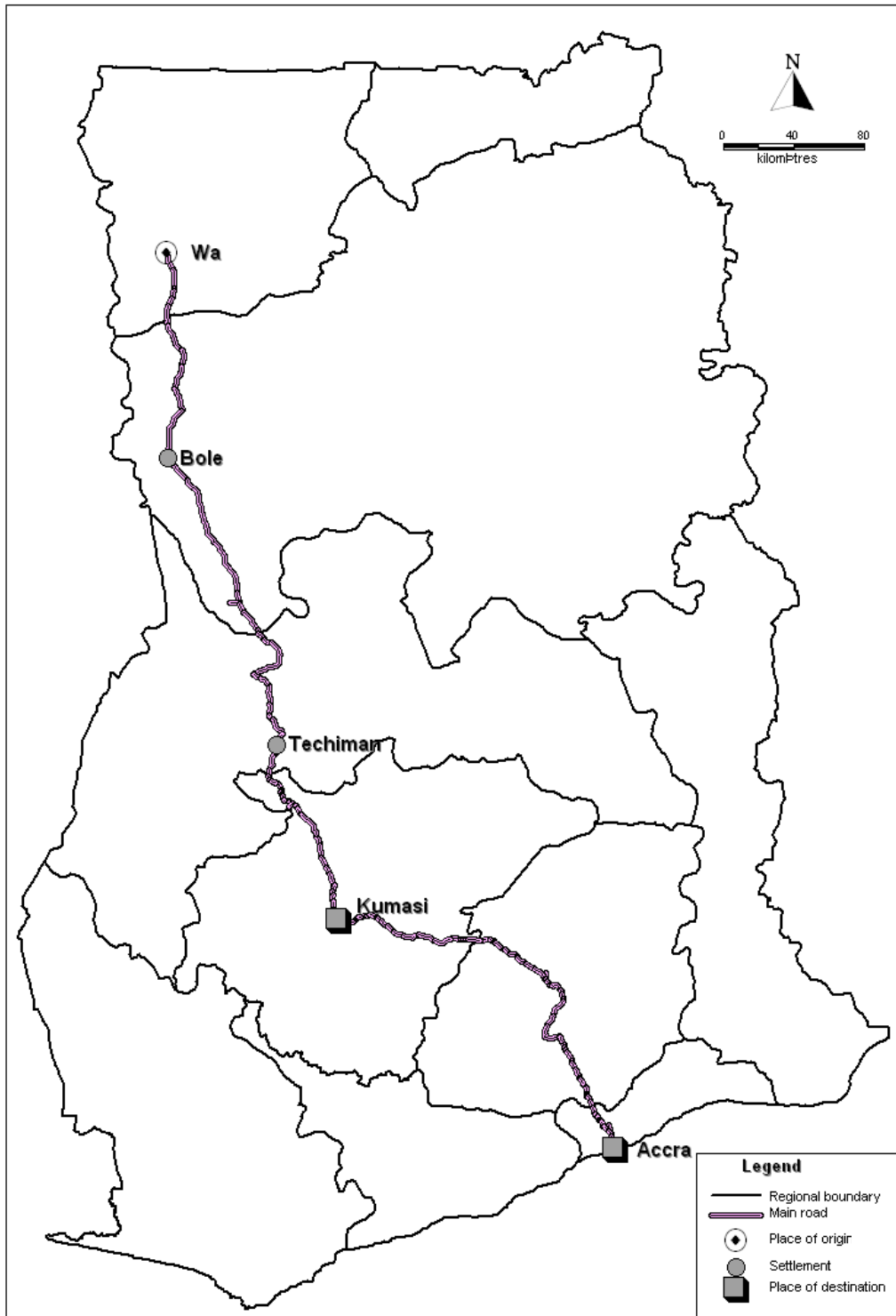
involved in the head portering business in towns and market centres. For instance, the 1960 Population Census of Ghana showed that about 12.0 per cent of the total population enumerated was of foreign origin. In 1969, the government of Ghana enforced a law, the Alien's Compliance Orders, which enjoined all foreigners in the country without valid residence permits to leave the country within two weeks or regularize their stay in Ghana. With the order, a number of non-Ghanaians from the West African Sub-region left the country because they could not regularize their stay (National Population Council, 1994). As the group that was noted for the head portering sector, their departure created a vacuum and this was gradually filled by Ghanaian women from the three northern regions of Ghana.

With the involvement of women in the business the term *kaya yo* (Plural *kaya yei*) was coined to differentiate them from the males who were involved in head portering and their females' counterparts. Etymologically, the term is derived from two words, *kaya* a Hausa word meaning wares or goods, and *yo* (*yei*), a Ga word meaning a woman (women) (Attah et al 1997). Therefore the term *kaya yei* refers to female commercial head porters (Abur-sufian, 1994; Attah et al 1997). The shift from male dominated 'enterprise' to one dominated by women, represents one of the changes in the composition of the work force in the last two decades and provided avenues for independent female migrants from one of the impoverished parts of the savanna zone of Ghana.

Until the last two decades, migration from present northern parts of Ghana had been dominated by men who moved to cocoa farms in rural areas and mining as well as constructional sites and industrial points in urban areas (Nabila, 1987; Songsoore and

Denkabe, 1995). The men migrated mainly in the 6-month dry season leaving the women behind as defacto heads of households. The men returned to farm during the 6-month rainy season. In the dry season when the men were away the women engaged in minor economic activities such as the sale of fuelwood and/or charcoal and other jobs such as weaving in order to earn income to meet some of their basic needs. With time the seasonal migration gave way to long term migration for the men. Some women migrated during that period but they were mainly associated migrants who accompanied their husbands or close relations to the points of destination in the forest and coastal regions of Ghana (Figure 1). Job opportunities in the formal sector mostly favoured men and women who got involved in the informal sector in the points of destination to earn income to supplement that of the men.

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



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

The pattern that emerged conformed to the situation in the area of origin where women, whether as wives or daughters, were obliged to assist men in their farming activities but had little or no say on how income from farm produce was used. The men determined the quantity of farm produce to be kept for household consumption until the next harvest, and what should be sold for their personal interests. In some cases the farm produce might not have been adequate for household consumption up to the next harvest, yet some men still sold part of the output (Songsore and Denkabe, 1995; Bekye, 1998). Unlike their counterparts in southern Ghana, especially among the Akans, where women have access to and own farmlands on which they cultivate crops to improve upon their economic situation, in the Wa District women have no access to farmlands, the main means of production in rural areas.

In the present rural market economic system the women are unable to meet their basic economic needs with the existing arrangements. Therefore, migration has become one outlet through which they can mobilize resources to meet their basic needs. Starting initially in trickles, the migration of females in the northern savanna to the two main cities in Ghana (Accra and Kumasi), has become a visible phenomenon. The migration of women from rural areas in the Wa District, mostly on their own, to urban areas in southern Ghana, particularly to Kumasi or Accra, therefore presents a challenge to issues of gender and development, especially to production and reproduction. This paper examines some of the dynamics contributing to the independence migration of females from the Wa District to Accra or Kumasi and assesses some of the challenges that such women face at their places of destination.

Theoretical and empirical perspectives on female migration

One of the most popular theories of migration is the push-pull theory developed by Lee (1966) for analyzing the factors that predispose people to migrate. The factors, which generally prompt migration, are classified into 'push' and 'pull'. The push factors indicate the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the area of origin, which literally 'force' people to move out of such localities. The pull factors, on the other hand include the attraction or the socio-economic opportunities available at a destination. The theory implies that both males and females would move out of rural areas if socio-economic conditions are unfavourable to urban centres where conditions are generally attractive. However, this has not been the case and over the years males migrated leaving women behind.

Migration is not only due to economic opportunities but also socio-cultural and political factors (Heering et al. 2004). The theoretical basis is the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions for labour migration. Though economic factors are necessary conditions for migration, they may not be the deciding factors, especially for female migration. While some people migrate mostly for economic reasons, others may migrate for non-economic motives. The non-economic motives might include escape from forced marriages, the intention of improving chances of getting married or for independence; a way out of a life of traditional dependent status (Heering el al., 2004).

In sub-Saharan Africa, due to socio-cultural factors, males are mostly the heads and main decision makers in households. Whether women would be allowed to migrate or not depends on the decision of men as heads of households. Where women have migrated they have been mainly associational migrants who accompanied their husbands or close relations to urban centres. In such circumstances the decision to migrate was determined by men and not women. Women therefore seemed to be insensitive to the push and pull factors since they could not initiate the decision to migrate let alone migrate on their own. Another reason why female migration in Africa was neglected was the fact that their migration was more locally bound to movements between neighbouring villages and mostly associated with marriage (Pittin, 1984).

One major factor which tends to discourage the migration of young unmarried women to urban centres is the concern about their moral and sexual propriety. The fear is always that once they are there alone, free from parental or family supervision and protection, they can be corrupted in the new environment jeopardizing their chances of getting married (Chant, 1998). Moreover, since migrant women are more likely to work at the bottom rank of the occupational hierarchy, they are likely to be vulnerable to factors such as rape and sexual harassment (Oishi, 2002; Heering et al. 2004). For example, in Bangladesh, the popular argument against female migration abroad is that they will be exposed to abuse and exploitation in a foreign land (Oishi, 2002).

In a study on household, gender and rural-urban migration, Chant (1998) argued that, in sub-Saharan Africa, women have equal access to farmlands as men and this perhaps explains why they have little or no urge to migrate to urban areas where they may have limited opportunities in the labour market. While this may be the case in some

areas, it is not necessarily so in others. For instance, in Ghana, matrilineal Akan women have access to farmlands but not among the patrilineal Mole-Dagbani where women do not have automatic access to farmland. In such areas, women do not benefit from farming which is the main economic activity. Also the propensity to migrate is circumscribed by societal norms and, therefore, women are unable to embark on independent migration. Nonetheless, independent migration has emerged with changes in the socio-economic landscape of countries. With the independent migration of women, networks have been found to be important (Heering et al. (2004).

The emergence of independent migration of women has also led to the development of female-specific migration models. (Khoo et al., 1984; Boyd and Grieco, 2003). One of such models which was adapted for the study is a systems model of female migration by Lean (1993) (Figure 2).

The components of the macro elements are the socio-cultural and economic factors at the places of origin and destination. These constitute the push-pull factors in migration. In the Wa District, the push factors include the harsh environmental conditions, lack of job opportunities for females and the negative socio-cultural factors which work against the socio-economic advancement of women.

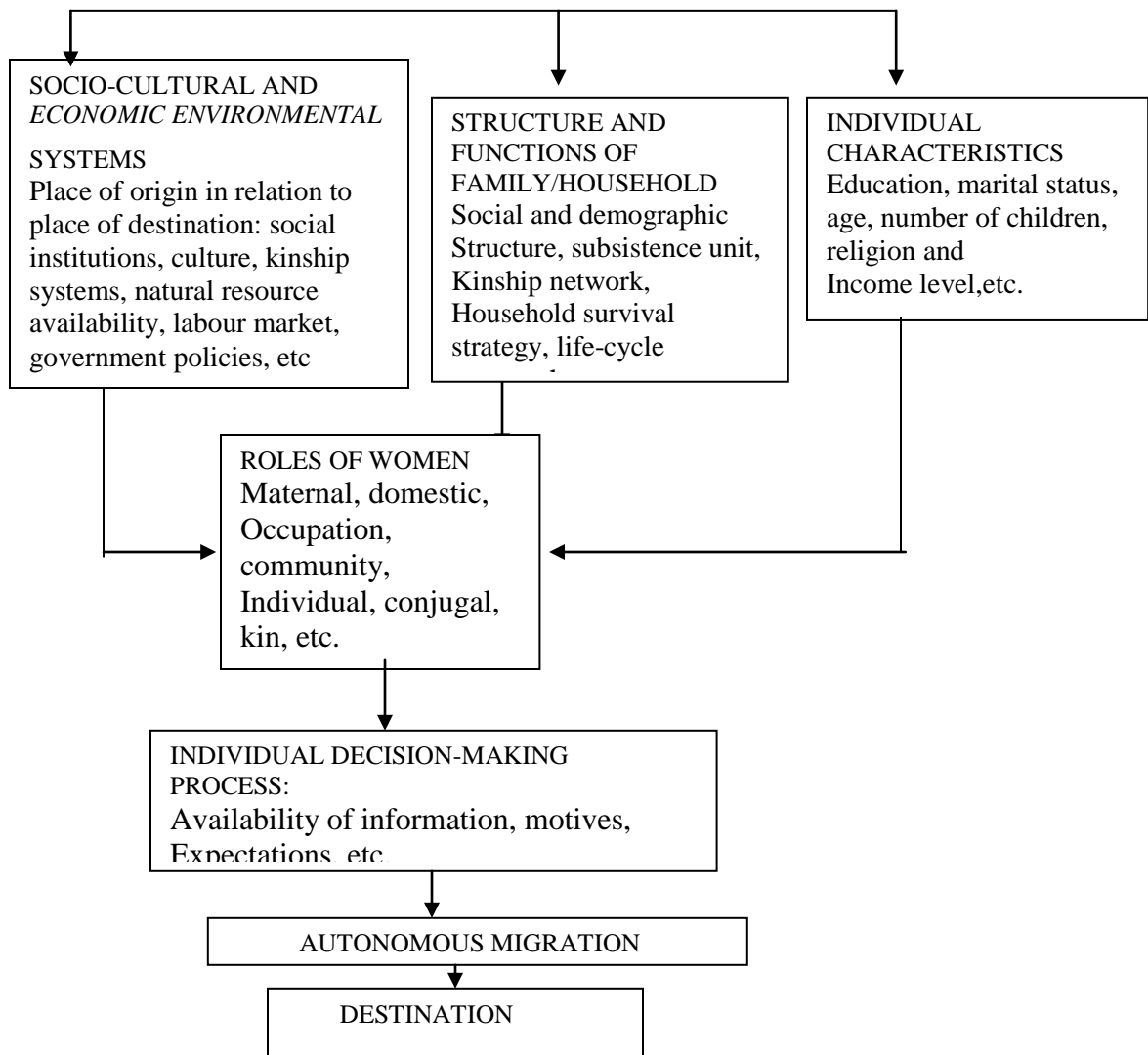
The structure and functions of the family/household, consisting of the demographic characteristics, kinship networks, economic unit and survival strategies have implications for migration (Lean, 1993). As an economic unit, the household plays a significant role in decision-making regarding the migration of its members, in some

cases encouraging some members to migrate with the hope that they could remit some of their earnings to supplement household income. Moreover, the presence of the kinship network in the framework enhances female migration as members of the kinship network could provide some financial assistance to reduce the cost of travel to the migrant and benefit from some initial support at place of destination.

The microelements consist of the socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, marital status, number of children and level of income. These characteristics tend to influence the decision of females in migration as for instance, young females who are not married and have no direct domestic responsibilities are more likely to migrate independently than married women. Furthermore, the role of women in domestic, occupational and maternal spheres have some influence on the motivation to migrate and expectations from migration. Some married women who have children may be preoccupied with domestic or maternal responsibilities such that they may decide not to migrate while others may decide to migrate in order to earn some income so that on their return, they would be in a better position to cater for the children. In the context of this model it is hypothesized that women in the dry northern savanna zone are likely to migrate on their own to escape the existing conditions with the view to improving upon their socio-economic conditions.

Figure 2

A systems model for female migration.



Source: Adapted from Lean (1993).

The study areas

The Wa district, where the female migrants come from, is located at the northwestern corner of the Upper-West region of Ghana (Figure 1). It had a total population of 224,454 in 2000 with an annual population growth rate of 2.6 per cent between 1984 and 2000 compared with the national population growth rate of 2.7 per cent within the same period. Females constituted 51.2 per cent of the total population giving a sex ratio of 95.3 males to 100 females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). Apart from Wa, which is the regional capital and the main commercial town, the rest of the district is rural. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. Besides the few civil and public sector employments, private enterprises are quite few and job opportunities for females are limited, especially during the dry season.

Accra, the largest city in the country and the national capital, is located in the Greater Accra Region. It is a major destination for both internal and international migrants. According to the 2000 census, it had a population of 1,657,856 in 2000 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002) with 37 per cent of the population in the region being Ghanaians born in other regions of the country. It is the main centre for commerce and offers services such as education and health as well as the seat of government administration. As the most developed enclave in the country, Accra has become the major destination for migrants.

Kumasi, located in the Ashanti Region, is the second largest settlement in Ghana after Accra. It had a population of 1,017,246 in 2000 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). It

is the hub of transportation and commerce in Ghana after Accra (Anarfi et al., 1999). As a result of its central location, it has become an important trading and administrative centre. The main transportation routes from the south to the northern parts of the country pass through Kumasi. Besides, it serves a thriving agriculture and mining hinterlands making it a focal point for migrants from the northern part of the country. Kumasi has physical and social infrastructural facilities which support socio-economic activities, which in turn provide employment avenues for many people and the name of the town has become an euphemism for migrating from the northern to the southern parts of the country.

Methods

Data for the study were collected between April and June 2003 from the *kaya yei* at both Kumasi and Accra, especially those who hail from the Wa District. The Wa District has been identified as a major area of origin of migrants to Accra and Kumasi which are the main destinations for female migrants who engage in the *kaya yei* business. The target population was females aged between 14 and 54 years. The assumption was that females of this age group were old enough to travel on their own and could engage in any economic activity. The sample frame comprised all female migrants involved in the *kaya yei* business at both Kumasi and Accra at the time of the survey. Since the exact number of *kaya yei* from the Wa District was not known, it was not possible to determine a sample size. However, the study arbitrarily targeted 100 current migrants at Kumasi and Accra. Of the 100 current migrants targeted, it was proposed that three-quarters (75 respondents) should be allocated to Kumasi and one-quarter (25) to Accra. The decision

was based on the fact that during the preliminary survey it was much easier in Kumasi to identify *kaya yei* who hail from the Wa district than it was in Accra (See also Anarfi et al., 1999). This may be attributed to the concept of intervening opportunity as Kumasi lies between Wa and Accra, it provides an intervening opportunity for women traveling from Wa to Accra for the *kaya yei* business as they could equally do the same business in Kumasi.

The data collection begun at Kumasi where a *kaya yo* who hail from the Wa District was first identified and interviewed, and then she was asked to direct the team to where her colleagues could be found. Through this procedure (Snowball technique) 70 respondents were interviewed at Kumasi. Using the same procedure, only 13 respondents out of the target of 25 were identified and interviewed in Accra because it was quite difficult identifying those who hail from the Wa district. This is probably due to the effect of distance decay since Kumasi is nearer to the Wa district than Accra. One focus group discussion (FGD) was held at Kumasi with some *kaya yei* of similar demographic characteristics, after booking appointment with them the previous day. But in Accra, the few who were identified live far apart and therefore it was not possible to organize them together for a group discussion.

A survey questionnaire and an FGD guide were the two main instruments used in the study. The quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS while some sensitive parts of the information from the FGD were teased out to support some aspects of the quantitative results as indicated in the text.

Results

Socio-demographic background of respondents

Among the 83 *kaya yei* interviewed in Kumasi and Accra 39 per cent were aged between 15 and 24 years (Table 1). Ten per cent had had formal education up to the Junior Secondary School Level, indicating a high illiteracy rate among the group. Fifty-five per cent were married while 40 per cent were never married. The fact that 55 per cent of the females were married was contrary to the view that single females migrate independently. At the time of migrating, 65 per cent of the women had between one and four children still alive while 31 per cent had no children. The latter were females who were yet to marry. Of those who had children still alive, about 53 per cent of them migrated together with one child, usually the youngest, to their destination. Consequently, children become victims of the process either as people taken away or left behind during migration. The background of the migrants indicated that the majority were aged between 15 and 34 years, had no formal education, were married and had had at least one child. These are females in their reproductive and productive ages and therefore female out-migration from the Wa district could have both demographic and economic implications.

Table 1. Socio-demographic background of respondents.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Less 15 years	9	10.8
15-24	32	38.6
25-34	26	31.3
35-44	13	15.7
45+	3	3.6
Total	83	100.0
Highest level of education		
No formal education	75	90.4
Primary	4	4.8
Higher	4	4.8
Total	83	100.0
Marital status		
Never married	33	39.8
Married	46	55.4
Separated/divorced/widowed	4	4.8
Total	83	100.0
Religion affiliation		
Muslim	53	63.9
Christianity	21	25.3
Traditional	9	10.8
Total	83	100.0
No. of children still alive		
0	26	31.3
1-2	29	34.9
3-4	25	30.1
5+	3	3.6
Total	83	100.0
No. of children sent to destination		
None	23	40.4
One	30	52.6
Two	4	7.0
Total	57	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Decision to migrate could be a composite of the following factors: one's own idea, that of other family members, that of the household and friends. Sixty per cent of the respondents migrated due to the influence of friends who were return migrants. The influence of return migrants on potential migrants has been noted in many studies. It could be either through the provision of information about a destination through direct contact or indirectly through the demonstration effect associated with returnees such as the display of material items or mere improvement in their physical appearance (Gugler and Gudrun, 1995; Ouedraogo; 1995 Anarfi et al., 1999). Although 25 per cent of the respondents said the decision to migrate was influenced by circumstances, they did not give any specific reason even after several probes. For such women, it is likely that the reason for migration is related to marriage and/or family issues which they are reluctant to disclose to strangers (Table 2).

Table 2. Influence on decision to migrate.

<i>Influence on decision to migrate</i>	Frequency	Percentage
Own decision	21	25.3
Parents	8	9.6
Spouse	2	2.4
Sisters	2	2.4
Return migrants	50	60.2
Total	83	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Another factor closely linked to the decision-making process is the existence of migration networks. Migration network, defined as a set of interpersonal ties that connect current migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in areas of origin and destination (Anarfi et al. 1999), provides further impetus for women to migrate. The principal argument is that current migrants at destination provide information to potential migrants at places of origin and also provide initial support to new arrivals which help to reduce the costs and risks at place of destination (Ouedraogo, 1995; Oishi, 2002; Heering et al. 2004) . In the survey, all the respondents (100 per cent) reported that they obtained information about various destinations from return migrants and 78 per cent indicated that the pre-migration information influenced their choice of destination and that they migrated to destinations that they had more information about than others (Table 3). On whether respondents received some initial support on their first arrival at destination, 93 per cent reported that they received initial assistance of food and accommodation from friends and relations. This shows that a migration network exists among the *kaya yei*: return migrants provide information to potential migrants at the origin while current migrants at the destination provide some initial support to new arrivals. Since the migration network tends to reduce the costs and inherent risks associated with migration, the implication is that women would continue to migrate from the Wa district to Accra or Kumasi for the *kaya yei* business (Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler, 2003) (Table 4).

Table 3. Obtained information and influence of information on choice of destination

Influence of information on choice of destination	Obtained information about destinations before migrating		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
Yes	100.0	0.0	78.3
No	0.0	100.0	21.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	65	18	83

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Table 4. Age and type of initial assistance received.

Type of initial assistance received	Age of respondents					Total (%)
	>15years (%)	15-24 (%)	25-34 (%)	35-44 (%)	45+ (%)	
Received no assistance	0.0	0.0	15.4	7.7	33.3	7.2
Feeding and accommodation	100.0	100.0	84.6	92.3	67.7	92.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	9	32	26	13	3	83

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Funding of trips

Deciding to migrate implies the ability to fund the trip, or an assurance of some financial support. In a situation where the migration of females depended on the migration of males, whether as their husbands or close relations, the principal migrant was responsible for the cost of migration. But as women start to migrate on their own, it was deemed necessary to identify the source (s) of funds for migration. Results from the study indicate that 72.0 per cent of the women funded their trips from their own resources through the sale of fuelwood and/or charcoal (Table 5). These included the few widowed, divorced or separated women and 89 per cent of those who were married. Financing migration from the sale of charcoal and/or fuelwood involves a long-term process of saving. As indicated by Adia⁴ (19 years) during a focus group discussion:

Although it is quite tedious to gather, process and carry fuelwood and/or charcoal to town (Wa) to sell, we have no other option, it is the only means through which most of us obtain funds, save some, until it becomes possible for us to travel (to Kumasi).

Harvesting trees for fuelwood also contributes to putting stress on the already fragile environment.

Twenty four per cent of the respondents said their trips were financed by their mothers, and these were mainly those who were never married (54.5 per cent). Among those married, the trips of about 7 per cent were financed by their husbands, and this accounted for 3.6 per cent of all support. Funding the trips for some women to enable them migrate to the south implies that some households support female out-migration from the Wa district. Such households are not likely to support any policies that aim at preventing out-migration of females from the Wa district to Accra or Kumasi, especially if they receive some remittances from those whose trips they funded.

Table 5. Marital status and source (s) of funds for migrating.

Source (s) of funds for migrating	Marital status			Total (%)
	Never Married (%)	Married (%)	Separated/divorced Widowed (%)	
Own resources	45.5	89.1	100.0	72.3
Mother	54.5	4.3	0.0	24.1
Husband	0.0	6.5	0.0	3.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	33	46	4	83

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Marital status and main reason for migrating

For 74 per cent of the married females and 91.0 per cent of those who were never married, the main reason for migrating was economic (Table 6). They migrated in order to earn income to support themselves and/or their families. In the FGD at Kumasi, Zanta (22 years) indicated that:

As women our needs are many but our husbands are not able to provide us with some of these needs. Meanwhile, there are no job opportunities at home. That is why back at home, some of us have to engage in the sale of fuelwood or charcoal to be able to get some money to buy some clothing. We decided to come to Kumasi to work because it is easier getting money here than at home.

Nearly 22 per cent of the respondents migrated as a result of family/marriage related problems and 3.0 per cent who were yet to marry, migrated in order to escape from forced marriages. Also, in the FGDs, Nyala, about 19 years, reported that some of them migrated in order to escape forced marriages. According to her:

It is not only poverty and lack of job opportunities in our villages that cause some of us to migrate to Kumasi but also others migrate in order to avoid harassment from suitors or to escape from forced marriages

Using migration as an opportunity to escape from forced migration is an indication of the psycho-social dimension of migration which some women go through but which is not amply discussed in most theories of migration. The implication is that those who did escape are likely to stay longer at the destination on the assumption that the long absence from home could compel the suitors to look elsewhere for marriage partners. Thus, for the *kaya yei*, the reasons for migrating are both economic and social. The interface of the social with the harsh economic conditions tends to precipitate migration.

Table 6. Marital status and main reason for migrating

Main reason for migrating	Marital status			Total (%)
	Never Married (%)	Married (%)	Separated/divorced Widowed (%)	
Economic	90.9	73.9	0.0	77.1
Marriage/family related	6.1	26.1	100.0	21.7
Escape forced marriage	3.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	33	46	4	83

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Economic situation of the *kaya yei* in Accra and Kumasi

The study explored the experiences at the destination, focusing on income and daily expenditure. The rationale was to obtain information on the respondents' present income and expenditure in relation to their objectives for migrating. Of the 83 respondents interviewed, about 4 per cent earned ₵20,000.00 (\$2.50⁵) or more per day while 17 per cent earned less than ₵10,000.00 (\$1.25) per day (Table 7). Compared with the national minimum wage of ₵5,200.00 at the time of the survey (2001), more than half (51 per cent) earned daily incomes of more than twice the national minimum wage. It is from this amount that they met their needs and even remitted home. Over 50 per cent indicated that they spent ₵2,000.00 each per day on food. All the 70 respondents interviewed in Kumasi said they paid ₵200.00 a day as toll fees to the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly and those in Accra paid much higher fees of ₵500.00 each per day, to the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

To assess the economic situation of the *kaya yei*, the income and expenditure of those in Kumasi was analyzed as most of the current migrants were found in Kumasi

(Table 8). Using the minimum daily income of ₪10,000.00 and a maximum of ₪20,000.00 over a 25 day period, a *kaya yo* could earn between ₪250,000.00 and ₪500,000.00 per month (i.e. ₪10,000.00/₪20,000.00 * 25 days). Allowing for incidentals, a *kaya yo* will spend about ₪100,000.00 (\$120.00) per month. According to them they spend minimally because ‘*we want to save as much money as possible so that we could purchase more material things whenever we want to go back home.*’ Based on their income and expenditure, they are able to save between ₪150,000.00 and ₪400,000.00 per month. This excluded expenditure on medication and other contingences.

Table 7. Total income per day.

Income per day	Frequency	Percentage
>₪10,000	14	16.9
₪10,000-₪15,000	27	32.5
₪15,001-₪20,000	39	47.0
₪20,000+	3	3.6
Total	83	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Table 8 Estimated monthly income, expenditure and net income per month.

Estimated monthly income	
¢10,000.00 per day * 25 days (Mini.)	Total income ¢250,000.00 (Mini.)
¢20,000.00 per day * 25 days (Maxi.)	Total income ¢500,000.00 (Max.)
Estimated monthly expenditure	
Item	Monthly expenditure
Food	¢60,000.00
Rent	¢ 4,000.00
Night security	¢2,000.00
Market toll	¢ 6,000.00
Income tax per kiosk	¢3,000.00
Sanitary items	¢25,000.00
Total	¢100,000.00
Estimated net income per month	
Minimum income less expenditure: ¢250,000.00 - ¢100,000.00 = ¢150,000.00	
Maximum income less expenditure: ¢500,000.00 - ¢100,000.00 = ¢400,000.00	

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Although the data show that the respondents are within the critical poverty zone of living on less than \$1.00 a day, to them it was income earned from which they spent, saved and remitted home. Compared to their economic situation at place of origin, the respondents felt they were better off, as pointed out by Salat (35 years), in the FGD:

It is possible to earn some little money at home through the sale of charcoal and/or fuelwood but one cannot save some money because from that little money one has to buy millet, mill it, and also buy soup ingredients. But in Kumasi, through the kaya yei business you can save some money. The only daily expenditure is on food. For example, this morning I spent ¢600.00 on kenkey, in the afternoon I will spend ¢500.00 on Tuo zaafe⁶ and in the evening I may spend ¢1000.00 or we may contribute money to buy some yams to prepare food.

Compared to their situation at place of origin, the migrants considered themselves to be economically better off than they would have been without migration. Thus, to them their economic situation at the place of destination is far better than the conditions at home.

Working life of *kaya yei* in Accra and Kumasi

In the FGDs, the *kaya yei* said they usually begin their daily work as early as 5 a. m. when vehicles which arrived the previous night or dawn begin to off-load goods. Some of them indicated that at times they even help to off-load the goods without knowing the owners but with the hope that the owners would ask them (*kaya yei*) for their services. Most of the *kaya yei* work several hours in a day throughout the week and this could expose them to serious health problems either in the short or long term. The data in Table 9 indicate that more than 90 per cent of the *kaya yei* work between 12 and 14 hours a day, and most of them (70 per cent) work every day. On the difficulties involved in their job, 74 per cent of the *kaya yei* said they carried all kinds of goods and walked about the whole day till dusk. Carrying all kinds of goods from one point to the other at market centres or lorry parks expose the *kaya yei* to several risks including the risk of motor accidents (Table 10). For example, during the FGDs in Kumasi, Julia (about 20 years) reported that:

It is really true that our work involved some risks. My own friend from Dorimon was knocked down by a vehicle here in Kumasi about a year ago.

Accommodation is scarce, about 74 per cent of the *kaya yei* lived in kiosks⁷. During the FGDs, those who lived in the kiosks complained about serious mosquito bites during the night, leaking roofs whenever it rained and overcrowding in some kiosks as some of them lived with their children. Furthermore, information from the FGDs indicates that some of

the *kaya yei* also lived with their boyfriends most of whom were involved in low-paid jobs at the lorry parks or the market centres. During the FGD at Kumasi, for example, it was reported that such relationships sometimes led to unwanted pregnancies. For example, Safula (about 24 years) indicated that:

Some kaya yei have boyfriends in this town who provide them with accommodation and financial support. When they become pregnant they either go back home to stay, give birth and later come back to this place or they continue to stay with their boyfriends until they give birth or they may decide to abort the pregnancy.

For those who become pregnant and terminate the pregnancies, it means that they engage in unprotected sex which could expose them to the risk of contracting STIs including HIV/AIDS. The media has ever reported cases of HIV/AIDS infections among the *kaya yei* in Accra (Annoh, 2005). *Kaya yei* who abort pregnancies are likely to engage in unsafe abortion since most of them cannot afford the cost of abortion at private clinics, and may not also want to undergo the procedure at government hospitals since abortion is illegal in Ghana except under certain critical conditions. The consequences of unsafe abortion therefore could be either death or infertility in the long-run

Table 9 Number of hours work per day and number of days work per week at both Accra and Kumasi

Hours per day	Frequency	Percentage
14	35	42.2
12	40	48.2
10	8	9.6
Total	83	100.0
Number of days work per week		
7	58	69.9
6	25	30.1
Total	83	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Table 10. Dangers and difficulties involved in work and type of accommodation at both Accra and Kumasi

Dangers and difficulties	Frequency	Percentage
Carrying heavy loads the whole day	61	73.5
Lack of rest	11	13.3
Risk of motor accident	7	8.4
Other	4	4.8
Total	83	100.0
Type of accommodation		
Kiosk	61	73.5
Abandoned warehouse	15	18.1
Living with a friend	7	8.4
Total	83	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Duration of stay and achievement of aims of migrating

Migration is regarded as an investment in human capital. It involves costs and benefits and the desire of many migrants is to minimize costs and maximize benefits (Nuro, 1999). The respondents were asked how long they had stayed at their destination and whether or not they had achieved their main aim for migrating. As Table 11 shows, only 15 per cent of the respondents had reportedly achieved their aim; some had acquired personal effects (58 per cent) while others (42 per cent) had been able to remit their relatives at home. However, 86 per cent indicated that they had not achieved their aim of migrating at the time of the survey. For these people, about 90 per cent reported that they had spent less than one year at their current destination. From this analysis, it means that the duration of stay at destination depends on the achievement of aims of migrating. The implication is that some *kaya yei* may stay at the destination for more than a year in order to achieve their aims of migrating. For those who are married and have some children,

staying longer at destination means shirking their domestic and conjugal roles at home and this could affect the stability of their marriages (Table 11).

Table 11. Duration of stay, achievement of aims of migrating and type of achievement.

Duration of stay	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a year	63	75.9
One year	9	10.8
Two years	3	3.6
Three years	2	2.4
Four years and above	6	7.2
Total	83	100.0
Achievement of aims of migrating		
Yes	12	14.5
No	71	85.5
Total	83	100.0
Type of achievement		
Remitted relations at home	5	41.6
Acquired personal effects	7	58.3
Total	12	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

Available evidence suggests that *kaya yei* migration tends to be seasonal or short term (Abur-sufian, 1994). There is also the anecdotal evidence that these female migrants are staying longer than previously. The *kaya yei* were asked whether or not they intend to return and the reason (s) for either case. Although about 90 per cent of the *kaya yei* were less than a year at the destination, almost all of them indicated that they intended to go back home despite the fact that some migrated owing to unfavourable socio-cultural factors at home. However, one was not sure of whether they would stay up to a year or more before going home, as some have indicated that they had not yet achieved their

aims of migrating (See Table 12). The reason(s) for intending to return home were varied: 49 per cent wanted to return to take care of their children; 35 per cent wanted to return to get married; 2 per cent said they wanted to return to continue with their education (Table 12). Thus, domestic issues dominated the intention to return home. Therefore, the major challenge, particularly to the *kaya yei* who are married and have some children at home, is the conflict of interest in terms of meeting their material needs and at the same time the need to take care of their children at home.

Table 12. Intention to return and main reason

Intending to return	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	83	100
No	-	-
Reason		
To take care of children	41	49.4
To marry	29	34.9
To continue with edu.	2	2.4
To learn a trade	1	1.2
To take care of children	8	9.6
Other	2	2.4
Total	83	100.0

Source: Data from fieldwork.

The *kaya yei* felt that by migrating they had improved upon their appearance and general outlook; they had been exposed to new things in the city and acquired experiences which will be useful to them in future. Olusatu (24 years) had this to say about their personal appearances:

Besides money and other material gains, our appearances also change. When one of my relatives visited me here, upon seeing me he called me madam⁸ because according to him, my appearance had changed. Also, over here I have my peace of mind and I do whatever I want.

Since improvement in appearance and exposure to modern life are some of the non-monetary gains associated with migration, potential migrants can easily be attracted by these visible signs to also migrate to the south. This is even more important to young unmarried women whose main aim of migrating is to prepare for their future marriages. Migration to the south would continue as long as the women consider the migration to the south to be socially and economically beneficial.

Discussion

In general migration from the savannah zone to the forest zone has partly been created and hastened by the 6-months rainy season for farming and the 6-months dry period within which people remain 'idle' (Bekye, 1998). During the dry period from November to April, people tended to migrate to the forest zone to engage in all kinds of economic activities to supplement their low incomes, and return to their villages to farm during the rainy season. This pattern of seasonal migration has now generated into long-term migration initially for males but now for both males and females. While male migration from the zone has been documented, that of females is yet to receive much attention (Nabila, 1985:208-217; Ghana Statistical Service, 2002).

The observation seems to be part of the general trend whereby the growth of the services sector, especially the informal sub-sector in less developing countries in the last two decades, have contributed to female migration. The urban economy has expanded tremendously providing the impetus for women to migrate from rural areas, where their

participation in agriculture at the household level is quite low, to urban centres (Chant, 1998).

Most of the females migrated due to economic reason which is the most important push factor at the origin. At the same time their migration was partly in response to the socio-economic attractions at both Kumasi and Accra. For some of the women, migration has become a survival strategy not only for themselves but also for other family members as evidenced by the support a third received from either mother or husband, and also the fact that some of the women remitted their relations at home.

As indicated in the conceptual framework, the role of the kinship network was found to be crucial in the study. Return migrants provided information about destination to potential migrants while migrants at destination provided initial support in the form of food and accommodation to the new arrivals. Thus, the migrants themselves facilitate and sustain the migration process.

The literature on female migration indicates that female migrants are mostly young unmarried females whose main aim of migrating is to acquire some material items for their future marriage (Anarfi et al., 1999). However, on the contrary, it was found that most of the women were married, and some of them even have children. The migration of married women could be attributed to lack of dependable source of income at home.

In spite of the unfavourable conditions in which the migrants operated, they considered their situation to be an improvement on their conditions at their places of origin. This in

itself is an incentive for women to continue to migrate to Kumasi or Accra. Any attempt to deal with the *kaya yei* phenomenon will therefore have to factor in the conditions that 'push' them from their places of origin.

The psycho-social aspects associated with female migration are also emerging. In the study, for example, it was found that some women migrated in order to escape from forced marriages at home and some respondents felt that the migration has helped to improve their outlook. These are dimensions which are also likely to influence further migration from the area of origin.

Conclusion

This paper examined the causes and implications of female migration from the Wa District to Kumasi or Accra for the *kaya yei* business. Using both survey questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGDs), 83 females aged between 14 and 45 years were interviewed at both Kumasi and Accra through the snowball technique. As indicated by earlier studies that females are no longer associational migrants but rather independent migrants, this study also found that most of the women migrated on their own from the Wa District to Kumasi or Accra.

The women migrated mostly because of economic reason but some migrated for social reasons mostly marriage-related. This is due to the generally low socio-economic status of women in the Wa District which poses a challenge to development and gender advocates.

Although the women in the *kaya yei* business face some challenges such as poor accommodation and lack of rest at the destination as most of them work throughout the day, some of them have achieved their aims of migrating and also have been able to remit their relations at home. Those who have not yet achieve their aims of migrating are likely to stay longer at the destination which has implications for production and reproduction at their places of origin.

As part of the efforts to stem female out-migration from the three northern regions of Ghana, the government should aim at bridging the gap of unequal development between the north and the south through the provision of incentives for girl-child education, establishment of cottage industries and the promotion of agricultural activities. In fact, any policy, which aimed at providing a lasting solution to the *kaya yei* phenomenon, should be implemented at their places of origin and not at the destinations. This is because it is the general economic deprivation in the three northern regions of Ghana, more than anything else, which compels the women to migrate to the south to work as *kaya yei*.

It must be noted that the study did not cover every aspect of the *kaya yei* phenomenon; topics such as migration and fertility among the *kaya yei* or the health status of the *kaya yei* and/or their children or the role of the *kaya yei* in Kumasi or Accra could be considered for future research. Indeed, more research on the *kaya yei* is still needed to enhance our understanding of the *kaya yei* phenomenon, and also to provide adequate literature on the topic.

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Endnotes

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- ³ In the study, a household was defined as all those who own and farm together on the same piece of land, and share the same house-keeping arrangement and are catered for as one unit.
- ⁴ Pseudonyms have been used to disguise the identity of the respondents in the FGD.
- ⁵ The exchange rate at the time of survey was \$ 1 = ₵8000,00 (June, 2001).
- ⁶ A local meal prepared from maize flour. It is the staple food of most people from the northern part of Ghana. It is less expensive and in most cases there may be little or no protein in the soup.
- ⁷ A kiosk is a small wooden structure with poor ventilation and often serves as a store where all kinds of goods are sold. The older ones which are often in very bad state are either abandoned or hired out to all kinds of people including the *kaya yei* who live and work within the lorry parks or market centers.
- ⁸ Madam in this context refers to an emancipated woman who has been empowered economically.