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Institutionalized Networks: The Role of Transportation Workers in West African Mobility

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Abstract

This paper concerns the social process of mobility control in four West African countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Ghana. Mobility has long been an important aspect of West African social, cultural, and political life, although now mobile people cross the borders of what are relatively newly-defined nation-states. Most migration research in this region considers international boundaries as merely theoretical and unimportant to the lives of migrants, and empirical research on borders focuses on the ethnic groups living in border zones. This study explores everyday enforcement of international and internal mobility control, and the ways in which mobile Africans respond to and resist the actions of security agents. I do this using ethnographic evidence gathered when traveling over 10,000 miles in Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire over a period of nine months. Data were gathered through participant observation at 23 international borders in West Africa, and 175 security control checkpoints in total. This evidence is supplemented by twenty-nine interviews with transportation workers across the four countries studied.

Based on the notion that border interactions entail important socio-economic, cultural, and political processes affecting individuals differently based on their social positions, this paper explores the roles and responsibilities of transportation workers in assisting Africans to negotiate border crossings. Augmenting the traditional social science literature on migrant networks with an approach proposed by development economists, this paper shows that transportation workers play an essential, institutionalized role in mobility control in West Africa. It demonstrates the strength of weak ties and the need for a re-conceptualization of migrant networks that is more attuned to the realities of an African context.

Introduction: Mobility in West Africa

The point of departure for this is the idea that the movements people make in West Africa do not and cannot occur without social interactions between various actors: transportation workers, passengers, and security agents, in particular. These interactions help shape mobility, and are based on the socio-economic arrangements, cultural practices, and political realities of the region. In academic terms, we usually refer to “migration” when discussing the movement of people from one residential location to another. However, “‘migration’ as a term, does not cover the whole phenomenon of geographical mobility. Africa is a continent where a considerable part of the population leads a mobile way of life” (van Dijk, Foeken, and van Til 2001: 14). Here, while I address the movement of all people, or at least of all people traveling in vehicles, not “migrants” strictly defined, I make reference to migration as often as mobility because the literature deals almost exclusively with the former and little is written about the latter. My research aims to expand the body of knowledge surrounding the social process of migration and mobility in West Africa, where the movements of people are historically rooted in pre-colonial patterns of mobility linked to trade and expansionism and colonial era policies aimed at making labor migrants.

While much research has been done on migration in West Africa, the role of mobility control and transportation as they affect people’s movements has yet to receive much critical attention. This study enters the discussion of migration and mobility in West Africa by placing migration, transportation, international borders, and internal mobility control in the same frame of reference, making cross-national comparisons based on qualitative data. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted in

four West African countries, this research addresses how mobility occurs for Africans in, and between, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Ghana. Beyond the individual experiences of migrants, this dissertation addresses some salient aspects of the experiences and practices of mobile Africans, be they labor migrants (the main focus of the literature), travelers, tourists, adventurers, or anyone crossing internal and international boundaries in West Africa. In particular, for those moving about West Africa, I examine the processes of mobility control and border crossings in terms of the functioning of networks, focusing on the roles of transportation workers and security agents, and their effects on mobile Africans' ability to secure passage across internal and international borders.

Why a Multi-sited Ethnography of Mobility Control?

Some readers may wonder why we need an ethnographic account of mobility control in West Africa. Simply, movements between two or more countries, or within a country that has internal mobility control procedures, is not simply a matter of getting in a vehicle at the place of origin and exiting out at the destination. There are numerous occurrences along the way that determine if the person making the move actually arrives, and these occurrences, in general, do not figure very prominently in studies of migration or migrants. Instead, this literature tends to address decision-making in the place of origin, or settlement and integration at the destination. In an attempt to see migration as a process, and not simply an event, it is important to engage transportation processes and security procedures as well.

Michael Burawoy (2000: 32), a main proponent of the extended-case study method in sociology, reminds us that “[a]t the beginning of this century anthropology

narrowed its global focus to accommodate professionalization that was marked by devoted and extended fieldwork, by dwelling rather than traveling, by enclosing community in both space and time.” Fighting against this imperative to choose a single site to study, anthropologists have begun arguing for the importance and relevance of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995, Hannerz 2003, Burawoy 2000). This appeal to a multi-sited perspective emerges both from the intellectual leanings of post-modernism and as a response to empirical changes in the world and the transformation of local sites by increased globalization (Marcus 1995). Small, rural towns are connected via telecommunications links to larger cities, and to other countries. Consumer products and culture are traveling faster and faster around the globe as transportation and technology make connections more immediate and easier to maintain. Hannerz (2003) notes that the power of the multi-site model has not been as strong outside of anthropology, but some sub-disciplines, like migration studies, have been at the cutting edge of the approach as migration scholars have already recognized the links between sending and receiving societies which create a need to conduct fieldwork in both. These linkages “make the multi-site study something different from a mere comparative study of localities (which in one classical mode of anthropological comparison was based precisely on the assumption that such linkages did not exist) (Hannerz 2003: 206). Because of the role of these particular individuals and groups in reshaping the social world in which we live, ethnographers are called on to “combine dwelling with traveling” (Burawoy 2000: 4) and to follow the people (see Rouse 1991), objects, and ideas as they circulate in our increasingly interconnected world (Marcus 1995). Taking these calls seriously, an ethnography of movement from place to place, and the security controls that mobile

people encounter along the way, offers important lessons about the social world of migrants and other mobile people that are obscured by single-sited studies, or by studies focusing in the circumscribed locations of migrant origin and destination.

As part of this multi-site imperative, David Fitzgerald (2006: 20) calls for “intensive research in several connected sites selected for their potential theoretical yield.... The object of this comparative ethnography is not only to follow people or things as they move, but also to understand the influences of different kinds of boundary crossings and ecologies on their experiences in multiple domains.” As such he advocates for multi-sited fieldwork in countries of migrants’ origin and destination and “the removal of national blinders so that both domestic and international migrations are brought into the same frame for comparison” (Fitzgerald 2006: 1). Indeed, here I address internal and international mobility control in the same project, doing so in four countries in comparative perspective. This promises to help create a regional view of migration in West Africa, and avoids looking at movement as occurring within particular nations, or simply between pairs of nations. The increasingly important trend of transit migration in West Africa makes this type of analysis even more pressing.

Methods

To conduct this research I employ both interviews and participant-observation. Over the course of nine months, from October 2005 through June 2006, I conducted formal semi-scheduled interviews with twenty-nine transportation workers in Burkina Faso, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana.¹ During this time, I also traveled extensively in

¹ One must add to this the two years of experience living and traveling in the region as a Peace Corp volunteer in 2000-2 and earlier research, which I conducted in Burkina Faso in the summer of 2003.

these four countries and participated and observed in mobility control procedures at the internal and international checkpoints we encountered. My on-going interactions with transportation workers at their stations, and our informal conversations, both during this research, and during my previous time in the area, also inform this study. Through these qualitative methods I was able to observe and evaluate the complex social interactions of internal and international mobility control in the four countries aforementioned.

The main ethnographic observation that informs this study was collected during the more than 10,000 miles I traveled in various types of passenger transportation vehicles including converted pick-up trucks, station wagons, mini-buses, and larger buses.² While traveling, I crossed 23 international borders, representing all of the possible combinations of countries under study. Since some countries require multiple types of entry and exit control at their international borders (some combination of police, gendarmes, and health and customs agents) I observed 82 security controls at international borders. In addition to this I observed 87 internal controls, for a total of 169 mobility control checkpoints. During these controls I observed the interactions between drivers, passengers, and agents, and participated in interactions at these sites. I often discussed these controls informally with passengers and drivers as we continued to travel together.

Having lived in Burkina Faso for two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer I had pre-existing relationships with several drivers working in southwestern Burkina Faso. I began by approaching them for interviews, and then I used snowball techniques to select a non-random sample of twenty-nine transportation workers in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire,

² Because there are seldom road markers to denote distances and many of the roads I traveled are too rural to be located on most maps, it is not possible to identify the exact number of miles I traveled. Using the information I have this is a very conservative estimate.

Mali, and Ghana. Although I was primarily interested in drivers, I interviewed others engaged in transportation as well (including union officers and drivers of goods trucks) when I had the opportunity.

In terms of language, Fitzgerald (2006) notes that observation in multi-site fieldwork is often difficult because of the linguistic competence required to work in multiple sites, which can cause variations in the quality of the fieldwork from site to site, rendering systematic comparison difficult. In response Hannerz (2003) argues that interviews, as opposed to pure ethnographic observation via participation, take on an increasingly important role in multi-site projects. Marcus (1995) argues that the multilingualism required by this type of research makes the fieldwork even more substantive and exacting. I conducted interviews in French, Dyula, and English (and often in a combination of two languages). I learned French as an undergraduate and my accent and vocabulary were adapted to West Africa during my previous work and research experiences in the region, during which I also learned Dyula. Admittedly my Dyula is not perfect, but it allowed me to conduct interviews in all four countries.³ I tape recorded and fully-transcribed these interviews. They consisted of open-ended questions about work experience, with specific questions about drivers' relationships with their passengers and with security agents. I specifically asked drivers to make comparisons between the various countries in which they had worked and across time periods. Whenever possible I interviewed drivers in semi-public spaces, within view of other people, but far enough away to ensure a modicum of privacy. This strategy allowed me to ask questions about somewhat sensitive topics, like security interactions, while not taking

³ Bambara in Mali, and Wangara in Ghana, are the other regional versions of Dyula. With slight accent and some vocabulary differences they are all mutually comprehensible.

respondents too far away from their job sites where they were often waiting for passengers. All respondents accepted being tape recorded, but I asked them not to use any names during the tape to protect their own identities and those of other transportation workers. I also labeled all of the tapes with codes to protect the identities of the drivers in case the tapes were lost or seized.

In addition to the interviews I conducted participant observation at bus stations, and in public transportation vehicles while traveling. Over the course of nine months I frequented bus stations in Banfora and Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), Ouangolodougou and Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire), Sikasso (Mali), and Sampa and Wenchi (Ghana). In some instances these visits were informal, where I sat and chatted with drivers as they waited for enough passengers to undertake a journey. On other occasions I was a passenger waiting for enough people to fill the vehicle so we could depart together. During these visits I observed the daily interactions between drivers and their passengers, amongst drivers, and between drivers and their union officials. I often ate with the drivers or got a drink with them (although since most of my respondents are Muslim, they do not drink alcohol) to establish friendly relations and trust. I passed around my business cards with my cellular phone number (I had a SIM card for each country I worked in) and maintained contact with several respondents in this way. During my writing I continued to maintain contact with several of the interview participants, both as a way of maintaining friendly contact, and to ask for precisions about certain topics.

The Role of Transportation Workers in West African Mobility

So, when we arrive somewhere we must take the passengers into consideration like they were our children. It is because of them that we went to Côte d'Ivoire in the first place. So we must get along with the authorities.

-- Kambiré Tibieré, August 26, 2003

Tibieré was a contract laborer Côte d'Ivoire for a few years in the 1980s and then worked in transportation for sixteen years on a route from southern Burkina Faso to northern Côte d'Ivoire. By referring to the passengers as children, he is not indicating their inability to deal with the situations that arise while traveling on their own, but rather the degree to which the transporters feel responsible for their passengers' welfare. He even describes an instance in which he was arrested by the Ivorian authorities for refusing to let them search a passenger. Discussing their experiences traveling to and from Côte d'Ivoire, returned Burkinabe migrants echo Tibieré's claims, revealing the ways in which their interactions with transportation workers were essential for their ability to cross internal mobility control checkpoints and international borders. Here I consider the transportation worker, often unknown to his passengers, as an important actor in the West African networks which impact individuals' and groups' ability to move within their own, and between countries.

Building on the notion developed earlier in the dissertation that borders are, in part, socio-economic formations that extend past simple international boundaries to various points in which decisions about someone's right to be in a particular nation-state are made, the general goal of this paper is to analyze the socio-economic character of the border, and of internal mobility checkpoints, from the perspective of those crossing them,

including public transportation⁴ drivers and their passengers. I adopt the concept of the migrant network as it plays a role in affecting individuals' and groups' abilities to negotiate border crossings. However, my approach departs from the dominant conception of migrant networks as employed in the social science literature, and continues to build on refinements of the concept so as to be more appropriately employed in West Africa. Beginning with a brief review of theory of migrant networks as it predominates in the current social science literature, this paper explores the most common and important criticisms of this theory, drawing heavily on the work of Christophe Guilmoto and Frederic Sandron (2001), to outline an institutional approach to migrant networks appropriate for the African context.

Migrant Networks Models

Over the last thirty years the theoretical trajectory of migration studies has moved towards intermediate level analyses. In Africa, household strategies models dominate the literature (Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996; de Haan, Brock, and Coulibaly 2002; Bryceson 1999; van Dijk, Foeken, and van Til 2001). Other theoretical approaches are generally under-explored on the African continent, while in other geographical contexts, such as the Western hemisphere and Asia, migrant networks theories (or social capital theories) are gaining popularity. In her review of the role of networks in migration, Monica Boyd (1989) claims that centering networks in migration studies mediates between the over-socialized view of the macro-structural approaches and the under-

⁴ The French term *transport en commun*, is more directly translated as “mass transportation” in English, however, this term does not accurately reflect the situation of African transportation. I prefer the term public transportation, although this is not to imply that these are public services subsidized or provided by states.

socialized perspective of the neo-classical models by seeing how structures are channeled through social relationships that act as conduits of information, and social and financial assistance. Most research in the field of migration studies focuses on the formation, direction, and composition of these networks (Boyd 1989). They treat migration decisions as facilitated by the establishment of social networks based on family, friendship, and community ties that reduce the costs of migration by giving migrants access to information about the receiving zone (Massey and España 1987; Massey et al. 1998). Migrant networks help to explain the concentration of migrants from the same places of origin to the same destinations and why migration patterns are often stable in the face of economic variation and changing migration policy (Portes and Borocz 1989). As such, migration becomes self-perpetuating, and independent of the processes that initiated it (Massey and España 1987). Often network-related linkages and support systems are attributed to patterns of chain and circular migration in which family members or older migrants assist and/or accompany new migrants, establishing the financial and emotional links that migrants retain with their home area (Adepoju 1991). Portes (1997) comments that the microstructures of support migrants establish across borders are one of the fundamental realities of migration in the twenty-first century.

Criticisms of Migrant Networks Approaches

Considering their relative youth in the field of migration studies, migrant network theories have yet to sustain as concerted a critical appraisal as earlier migration theories (Pessar 1999). However, Boyd (1989) and Doug Gurak and Fe Caces (1992) notice that migration studies have been slow to incorporate lessons from the field of network

analysis and as such, the concept of “networks” requires further refinement. For example, Boyd cites Granovetter’s notion that it is weak ties, those determined by relationships of acquaintance, as opposed to strong ties, that maximize information flows (see also Krissman 2005, and Gurak and Caces 1992). Granovetter’s (1973) weak ties refer to those that are devoid of emotional attachment or routine interaction – like relationships between clients and service providers. These ties serve as bridges, uniting diverse networks without requiring major investments by members, and networks depend on weak ties to expand their reach and resources.

Gurak and Caces (1992) remark that the migration literature widely accepts that migrant networks based on kin, friendship, and community ties link sending and receiving communities, but tend to see them as closed and insulating structures. As such, the literature fails to describe empirically how migrant networks operate (Gurak and Caces 1992). Echoing this appraisal, Steven Vertovec (2004) explains that most social scientific research focuses on kinship, friendship, and community-based networks that assist in selecting migrants and channeling their movements and settlement. He advocates an approach instead that takes account of the multiplexity of contemporary migrant networks, and their multiplicity as well.

Krissman (2005), in his highly critical stance on migrant networks approaches as they are most often employed, claims that the current approaches are a-historical and of a post-factum nature, and that we must not leave out the role of labor recruiters and people smugglers, that is, those actors that respond to the demand for migration. So far most researchers have focused on the symmetrical relationships of hometown actors and ignore the role of others even though empirical studies show that actors exogenous to the

hometown can influence the development of migration networks as well (Griffith and Kissam 1995; Wilson 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Spener 2001). He refers to “artificial” networks that do not conform to the predominant migrant networks models in either form or function and he claims that the vast majority of the participants within artificial networks are single young men newly arrived in the United States whose networks are created and perpetuated not by the migrants, but by intermediaries such as farm labor contractors who need a clientele to support various business activities. They are essential in arranging jobs for the workers, and “provide additional services, such as cash advances, transportation, housing, food, drink, false documents, and other necessities, including illegal vices” (Krissman 2005: 19). He notes that a few studies challenge the reciprocal nature of network exchanges (Menjívar 2000; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Mahler 1995), which he thinks is essential since migration networks have “multiple functions; reciprocal and asymmetrical relationships--with exchanges of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ social capital--develop among migrants (including between close kin), as well as between migrants and non-hometown network participants” (Krissman 2005: 17).

To benefit more fruitfully from network analysis, migration studies should take into account the defining characteristics of networks beyond a simple understanding of ties between migrants and their home areas or family, friendship, and co-village relations.

Wellman (1979: 1203) describes network analysis as:

an analytic perspective which focuses on structured relationships between individuals and collectivities [that] gives attention to (a) structured patterns of relationships and not the aggregated characteristics of individual units analyzed without reference to their connectivity, (b) complex network structures and not just dyadic ties, (c) the allocation of scarce resources through concrete systems of power, dependency, and

coordination, (d) network boundaries, clusters, and cross-linkages, and (e) complex structures of reciprocal relationships and not just symmetrical relationships or simple hierarchies (cited in Gurak and Caces 1992: 160).

Drawing on these characteristics of networks, Krissman's (2005) claim that non-hometown network participants also play an essential role in the migration process, and the importance of centering "weak ties" as they operate in West African migrant networks, this paper describes the complexity of the links that exist between various actors in the process of mobility in West Africa, notably drivers, passengers, and security agents, as they interact to structure the social processes by which mobility and migration occur in the region. In particular, it focuses on the structured relationships between drivers and their passengers, most of who have never met before, and drivers and security agents, to uncover the multiplex ties between them. Doing this, I build on existing notions that migration and migration systems are institutionalized in the developing world.

Migrant Networks as Institutions

In Africa, and the Third World in general, scholars have remarked on the institutional arrangements, solidified by migrant networks, acting as "informal control subsystems," that, along with modes of formal control, create systems that perpetuate and reinforce international flows along certain pathways (Mabujonge 1970: 1; see also Held et al. 1999). This institutionalization often occurs in the form of informal sector dealings in which individuals and organizations profit by helping and exploiting migrants in ways that are no longer controllable by state governments (Massey et al. 1998; Castles 2000). Arjan de Haan argues that migration plays an essential role in the livelihoods of people in

developing societies and that “insufficient attention has been paid to the institutions that determine migration,” which are “social and cultural institutions, embedded in local customs and ideologies” (1999: 4).

Also, discussing migration from the particular perspective of the developing world, Guilmoto and Sandron (2001), basing their interpretation on the lessons of development economics, discuss migration in terms of its institutional character. They argue that migration systems are institutionalized as increasing numbers of individuals and organizations engage in interactions determining and determined by them. Characterizing Third World migration as institutionalized, they “mean its transformation to an apparently quasi-autonomous system, with rules and norms, allowing specific individuals and organizations to attain their objectives” (Guilmoto and Sandron 2001: 144).⁵ Essentially the migration institution is a system of rules that contextualize exchanges. These rules reduce coordination and information costs by limiting the variety of possible choices open to individuals and collectivities participating in migration processes, and they produce the routinization of practices that stabilize these processes into institutions (Guilmoto and Sandron 2001).

Noting the lack of migrants’ access to perfect knowledge, and their attempt to minimize risks,⁶ institutional arrangements develop that allow migrations within certain networks and channels which play a preponderant role as they replace or compensate for insufficient markets, inadequate home-based networks, and a lack of social capital.

⁵ For Guilmoto and Sandron (2001: 142), an institution is “a set of socioeconomic rules . . . that seek to define the conditions in which choices, individual or collective, regarding allocation and utilization of resources can take place.” Their explanation of the functions of these migration institutions echo the findings on the ways in which migrant networks operate to assist migrants and perpetuate migration systems in the face of changing political and economic circumstances.

⁶ Risk minimization is necessary because Africa has highly uncertain markets and environmental conditions and is characterized by high information costs (Guilmoto and Sandron 2001).

Migrants will have recourse to networks at different stages of their progress: support for the migration project, identification of destinations and desirable periods, advance of the costs of moving, accompaniment during the voyage, passage across borders, lodging and establishment in the labor market at destination, material and non-material exchanges with the village of origin (Guilmoto and Sandron 2001: 149).

However, in addition to links with the area of origin, and recalling the criticisms of the current conceptions of migrant networks models (Boyd 1989, Gurak and Caces 1992, Krissman 2005), they also discuss the importance of weak ties as they operate to expand migrant networks in scope. Guimoto and Sandron (2001: 150) refer to the “external mechanisms” that function as components of networks and act as important intermediaries in the migration process, which compensate for the services migration networks cannot provide, especially in the case of clandestine migration. To them, this demonstrates the “formation of a market of assistance to migration that supplements the shortcomings of the migration network.”⁷

Migrant Networks: Evidence from Africa

Having reviewed the major criticisms of the extant migrant networks literature, and offering insights from the approach of Guilmoto and Sandron (2001) who consider migration as an institution, I continue in this section to review the empirical evidence on migrant networks from the literature on African migration. Drawing on Boyd again, several themes dominate the empirical research related to migrant social networks, in general:

⁷ Certainly this type of arrangement exists in the other areas as well. Take into consideration the proliferation of *coyotes* as central agents in the migrations of increasing numbers of Mexican and Central American immigrants to the United States. However, what occurs in West Africa differs significantly from the arrangements seen in the case of *coyotes* who charge sums often reaching into the thousands of dollars to sneak immigrants across the border.

1) economic, political and social structural factors in sending and receiving countries; 2) bilateral treaties between countries regarding labor migration; 3) government policies governing the admission of international migrants; 4) linkages to sending areas, and often analyzed through remittances and returns; and 5) the settlement and/or integration of migrant populations (1989: 643).

However, migrant network models have yet to be applied consistently to cases of migration in Africa. Indeed, the condition noted by Akin Mabogunje in 1970, that most migration models' relevance for handling migration patterns in developing areas has hardly been considered, and that Africa is a unique area from which to draw important empirical evidence about migratory phenomena, remains true today. As these models have been elaborated without much reference to Africa, their application on the continent has been sparse as well. When applied to case studies of African migration, scholars discuss networks almost exclusively in terms of the fourth and fifth themes (the remittances and return migration that link sending and receiving areas, and the settlement of migrant populations) that Boyd identified, noting the establishment of one way of life across rural and urban areas in which households take on a multi-spatial character (Bryceson 1999; Gugler and Flanagan 1978; Adepaju 1998). While sometimes discussing aspects of migrant networks, because most studies focus so heavily on migration as a household strategy for income diversification, they rarely adopt networks as an organizing principle or unit of analysis, and most often simply note them as an empirical fact. In addition, much research on African migration focuses on processes of urbanization, thus highlighting internal migration, and leaving international migration relatively less studied.

In the last twenty years, scholars of migration have paid increasing attention to migrant remittances as they play an integral role in local and national economies in many regions of the world. However, the lack of appropriate quantitative data limits the number of studies on this topic in most African nations. Migration scholars studied the factors that determine whether migrants remit back to, and/or return to, their areas of origin in Cameroon (Schrieder and Knerr 2000). They find that financial relationships cement a network of mutual support in which the families assist migrants at the outset of their migration in the hopes of receiving remittances later, but when the migrants do not expect an inheritance, they are less likely to send remittances (Schreider and Knerr 2000).

Focusing on internal return migration, Mark Collinson and his colleagues (2003) argue that it is a more common phenomenon than previously acknowledged, and continues to be important when considering migration dynamics, especially in South Africa where return migrations from urban centers balance permanent migration to cities. They highlight the high propensity for older males to retire as returnees back to their homes, and note the “on-going links between the rural household and the absent” migrant including high rates of communication (Collinson et al. 2003: 6). However, these authors’ only specific reference to migrant networks is to support the theoretical position that migrant networks affect the economy of the home area (Collinson et al 2003).

My own quantitative analysis of remittances and return migration in South Africa supports the notion that sending remittances in South Africa is primarily determined by household characteristics and labor market status, rather than migrants’ individual characteristics (Mechlinski 2007b). Contrary to the literature, I find that there is no statistically significant effect of gender on either return migration or remittance sending

when controlling for occupational status and migrants' links to their home communities. Finally, one of the most interesting and important conclusions of this study, which contradicts findings in the literature on remittance sending and return migration in Africa (Schrieder and Knerr 2000; Adepaju 1991) is that financial support of migrants by the home community, and borrowing resources from relatives, do not have a significant impact on either remitting or return migration. Unfortunately, the various studies just discussed are based on quantitative analyses and fail to acknowledge and incorporate the social norms that regulate migration or the culture of migration that these arrangements create.

Fortunately, relative to other parts of the world, scholars of African migration have given more qualitative attention to social norms as they determine migration processes. According to Josef Gugler (2002: 22), scholars of migration in Africa started writing about networks a generation ago. They study the socio-cultural organization of rural-urban migrations (Andersson 2001), arguing that “the world of the migrant and that of his homeland are not separable entities – they are both part of a wider society, a society which has reached a high level of instant internal communications and is defined by nationwide institutions” (Gugler and Flanagan 1978: 67). However, these studies most often give impressionistic notions of some of the functions of migrant networks, but do not adopt them as an organizing principle in the research design. In opposition to the approach of earlier studies that see migration as the result and cause of social change, Andersson (2001) sees mobility and the connections it entails as a stable social form and as an expression of African socio-cultural patterns.

Many scholars of African migration report that the presence of relatives in receiving communities helps in making migrants' moves easier and can assist them in finding work (de Haan, Brock, and Coulibaly 2002; Andersson 2001; Gugler and Flanagan 1978), or a place to stay (Coulibaly, Gregory, and Piché 1980; Andersson 2001; Gugler 2002). They also discuss the role of migrant organizations, in terms of home town associations, or ethnic associations, in the politics and development of the sending area (Gugler 2002; Gugler and Flanagan 1978). Scholars of African migration discuss the importance of migrants' desire to be buried at home (Skinner 1958), and reveal the great efforts and expense undertaken by migrants' friends, families, and co-ethnics to fulfill these wishes, often even traveling with the coffin across impossible roads (Gugler 2002).

Based on his empirical research of circular migration in Niger, David Rain highlights the importance of "weak ties" to show that "social ties are often far more immediate, and perhaps more unpredictable" than other factors determining the migration process and migrants' successes or failures (1999: 21). Instead of family members, friends, or co-ethnics, for many migrants it may often be a connection made at a bus depot, or a train station, that provides their next meal or a place to stay for a few days when money is running low or problems arise.

Managing the Road: The Roles and Responsibilities of Drivers

Taking into consideration the relative lack of critical focus on networks in the African migration literature, and the fairly narrow range of foci of this research – focusing almost exclusively on remittances and return, or on the settlement and integration of migrants, the question of the role of migrant networks in transportation and

border crossings is a neglected topic in studies of African migration. Here, I offer some empirical evidence of the structured relations existing between transportation workers, migrants, and security agents in West Africa, taking account of the ways in which these inform the allocation of resources across groups with varying power, and the complexity of the asymmetrical manner in which these relationship are structured. Building on Guilmoto and Sandron (2001: 150) I argue that transportation workers are part of the “market of assistance to migration” that emerges to supplement the networks formed by migrants’ kinship, friend, and community ties operating within a system of rules determining the exchanges occurring between passengers, drivers, and security agents.

Many passengers traveling across West Africa are experienced migrants, traders, and adventurers and they have had extensive dealings with security agents at internal mobility control checkpoints and international borders. But the majority of people crossing these formations each day are less frequently on the road, and they rely on the assistance of transportation workers to ensure they arrive at their destination, particularly when they do not have proper documentation. Alassane Mossi, a 30 year-old Burkinabe driver who has worked in Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso for eight years, explains that many passengers do not know how to behave in front of security agents, and they tremble with fear when talking to them. Other drivers recall that since many passengers lack experience on the road, their pride causes them to speak rudely, angering agents, and preventing their progress towards their destinations. To avoid these problems, in West Africa, public transportation drivers very often assume the role of intermediaries between their passengers and the security forces that regulate internal and international mobility control.

For example, Bima, a 24 year-old Burkinabe driver, with seven years of experience working in transportation, describes his role when a passenger confronts a problem. He explains that “when an agent takes a passenger’s papers I must intervene so that he lets him go. That’s because it is me who drove him on the road where the agents stopped him. So, I take responsibility all the way until he arrives at his destination.” In fact, drivers take this responsibility so seriously, that they rarely, if ever leave a passenger at a control post.⁸ When asked if he had ever left a passenger behind because of a lack of proper documentation, Yssouf replied:

I will not do it. We the drivers, the policemen know us down there. We are afraid of the policemen on behalf of the passengers. So any moment you leave the passenger [with the police] it means that you kill the passenger. And that is not a good thing. As a driver you must not do such things.

Yssouf’s explanation of his inability to leave a passenger at a security checkpoint reflects the position of other West African drivers as well, all of whom describe their unwillingness to leave a passenger at a control post because of a lack of documents. They comment that by leaving one person today they jeopardize their clientele base for tomorrow because they will gain a reputation as a driver who cannot, or will not, protect his clients from problems on the road. In this situation there is a complicated relationship between the driver and his passengers. The passengers are to be feared, as they determine the driver’s future client base, and they are to be respected, and protected, all at the same time. This relationship is structured, and does not depend on their pre-existing personal relationship. As network analysis indicates, the driver-passenger relationship is structured

⁸ Of all of the drivers interviewed here, only a few had ever left passengers behind, and these cases were always when the passenger had committed some crime and was caught trying to flee, or when the passengers refused to pay for their items at customs. I have never seen a bush taxi driver simply leave a passenger because he or she did not have papers.

on patterns of relationships between the groups, and is not particularly dependent on the individual characteristics of either driver or passenger.

Because of their determination to have their passengers arrive safely, West African drivers engage in a number of strategies to ensure their passengers' arrival. In particularly difficult regions drivers can collect the papers of all of their passengers so as to keep them out of the hands of security agents. Burkinabe drivers often did this in Côte d'Ivoire in the period right before the rebellion of 2002 because at the time Ivorian security agents were exacting large sums of money from any passenger with a Burkinabe (or Malian) ID card. The drivers preferred to lie and say that everyone was undocumented than to allow the agents to check each passengers' papers one by one. Instead, they tried to avoid contact between the passengers and agents by taking a collection from the passengers at the beginning of the trip and using the money to manage the road. By offering a sum⁹ to the agents immediately upon arrival, drivers can often avoid having their clients checked for papers and they quicken the process, assuring faster arrival. In this manner, it is clear that the networked relationship between drivers and their passengers is not merely dyadic, but is more complex, involving security agents as well.

When traveling with undocumented passengers, other drivers often ask the person in question to sit next to him in the front of the vehicle. When discussing with security agents the driver often presents this person as a relative or even as a "protected" person (one that the driver has promised to assist beforehand in his or her interactions with

⁹ I am reluctant to refer to this behavior as bribery for the simple fact that the drivers hardly ever refer to it as such. They rarely use the work "bribe" or "corruption" and tend to refer to these exchanges as "arrangements" or as "leaving some some money." This is discussed in more detail in some of my other work (Mechlinski 2007a).

security agents), and explains the case to the agent, hoping he will not charge the person a fine. Some drivers with more experience claim that they can get several passengers through security checkpoints as “protected” because of their relations with security agents. Undocumented passengers who know the road well often present themselves to the driver before leaving the station, explaining that they have no papers, but want to go to a certain location. The person may offer what he or she can afford and the driver will decide if he can take the person and use the money offered to take care of the expenses he will incur on behalf of the passenger during the journey.

If all else fails, drivers and passengers resort to paying agents to let them pass. In Burkina Faso, passengers who can afford it pay an official fine, and get a written receipt from security agents, which can be used for a period of 24 hours and costs 3000 CFA (\$6). However, because times are increasingly difficult economically, due to the rebellion in Côte d'Ivoire, many passengers simply cannot afford to pay the entire fine. They often offer what they have, usually giving it to the driver to hand off to the agent for them.

Zakaria, a 32 year-old taxi driver with four years of experience in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire explains how this works on the road between Sampa and Bondoukou:

If you tell us, we can take 3000 CFA and arrange the road with it. When we arrive at the police we can say that you are our older brother and ask them to pardon you. We give them a little; they can tell us to give them 1000 CFA and we can ask to give 500 CFA. We pay a little here and there until we arrive.

However, if the passenger has no money, the driver himself often pays on his behalf. When asked if he has paid for a passenger in the past, Assouma, a Ghanaian driver, with five years of experience driving the road between Bondoukou and Sampa, replied:

Sure, that can happen, especially for a person whom I know and respect. If the passenger doesn't have the money and I see that the agents are causing problems, I can take money from my pocket to give to the agents. When we arrive, if the person pays me back I accept it, but if not I do not make a case out of it.

Yssouf mentions that because he has such longstanding relations with the agents on the road that when they know it is he who is paying on behalf of a passenger, they often do not collect the money.

The preceding examples demonstrate that drivers make decisions about how to allocate resources from passengers to agents, groups with asymmetrical power relations. They try to minimize the amount exchanged from passenger to agent through a variety of strategies, assuring that the passenger will cross the border, or mobility control checkpoint, and make it to his or her destination. However, of course agents and drivers are not equals in terms of power either, as Mahamdou S., a Malian driver with 29 years of experience on the road as a chauffeur of both passenger and goods vehicles explains: "Here, in Mali, we the drivers are like fruit for the agents. They do what they want to us and no one can talk." He is referring to the amounts of money that drivers pay to security agents. Drivers not only make financial arrangements for their passengers, but often have to pay themselves as well, especially when their vehicles are not properly documented or insured.

Sometimes, if agents are not willing to let passengers without proper papers (or even passengers with proper papers in certain areas) go without paying, and neither the passenger nor the driver has the money to pay, drivers engage in long negotiations, asking the agents to excuse the passengers. Abdoul describes spending as much as two hours at a time at certain checkpoints:

I always make do so that the passengers can leave with me because they have already paid. All drivers are not the same, but with me, we go together. One time I was taking a person without any papers or money. We spent almost two hours asking the agents to let us go. The other passengers insulted me so much they tired themselves out. But the person had already paid his fare. When the agents saw that I was pleading with them so much, eventually they let us go.

Quite simply, Nalourgo, a 25 year-old transporter in northern Côte d'Ivoire, states that “between the passengers and agents, if the driver himself is not beside the passenger, he will not arrive at his destination.”

Except in cases where plain determination and patience win out over the agents' agenda, be it to make undocumented passengers pay official fines, or asking passengers to pay other sums of money, transportation workers' ability to intervene on behalf of their passengers and act as their intermediary with security forces is predicated on the relationships they maintain with the agents on the road. This is clearly a contested relationship in which drivers must protect their passengers, and their own economic interests against agents, but it is also a relationship that transportation workers characterize as friendly, or as an alliance. Yacou, a Malian driver with 10 years experience on the road, says that the security agents have become like his relatives after years of interacting on the road. Bima, for example, explains that from his point of view the agents are kind, because if they wanted to, they could totally block the drivers, whose vehicles lack proper papers, from working at all. Because of the economic downturn in the region, caused by the problems in Côte d'Ivoire, transportation workers' revenues are down. This, coupled with rising oil prices, means that many drivers who would prefer to properly insure their vehicles, and pay for other complete documents, must remain

without proper documentation.¹⁰ Pecali, an Ivorian driver with 12 years of experience in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso refers to the security agents as his “brothers” who make his tasks easier by helping him find solutions to the problems posed by the Ivorian rebellion. In particular, he and the other Ivorian drivers note that Burkinabe agents have become increasingly relaxed with drivers whose vehicles lack proper documentation because they realize the difficulties Ivorians are facing living in the rebel-held north where there are no functioning social services, and the problems Burkinabe are facing due to falling clientele.

To create and maintain positive relationships with security agents, transportation workers provide them with a number of services and favors. Yssouf describes the need to “pamper” the agents in Côte d'Ivoire, and Aba describes how drivers “gently flatter” agents so as to be on good terms with them. Drivers often transport security agents and/or their relatives free of charge, and bring them items back from other areas where they are less expensive. For example, the Ghanaian drivers often bring gasoline into Côte d'Ivoire for security agents. Some drivers take items to the city to be repaired or charged while others simply bring gifts of bread, beverages, yams, or other items, to agents. Pecali states clearly his position related to the requests he receives from security agents:

Everything they ask of me, I accept. Why? Because of my passengers. If it's just for me, I know that it's a small fine that we can take care of between us.... With passengers it's not the same thing. What we can understand, a passenger cannot understand. So we are obliged to submit to the agents so we can take care of our passengers.

The other drivers describe similarly the reasons they render so many services to the security agents on the road. Zakaria says that if the agent tries to ask the passengers for

¹⁰ Of the seven Burkinabe drivers I interviewed, only one had a complete set of documents at the time of the interview, and owing to the rebellion, none of the Ivorian drivers did.

money he will be ashamed to do so in front of a driver who has treated him well. Similarly, Assouma claims that when the agent looks at an undocumented passenger all he will see are the favors the driver has done for him and he will let the person go. Indeed, as network analysis indicates, these relationships are not merely characterized by simple hierarchies, but involve complex elements of reciprocity as well. Oftentimes security agents need drivers' services, especially because they are somewhat immobile owing to their careers. They are required to stay in a particular location for work, often in somewhat rural locations, and need drivers to bring them items they need or desire.

Seeing this, Nalourgo, an Ivorian driver, turns the notion of submitting to security agents on its head: "It is up to the chauffeur to appease tensions between passenger and agent. And because of the driver's regularity, the agent is obliged to submit and to let him pass." Regardless of who is submitting to whom, Assouma says it precisely, "You know, the police and the drivers, they are one people. We eat together."

*The Migrant Perspective*¹¹

Having analyzed the relationships between drivers, agents, and passengers from the drivers' point of view so far, this section briefly addresses the perspective of migrants, as they discuss the role of transportation workers in their migrations. Migrants recognize the role of transportation workers in their ability to travel in West Africa. In particular many younger migrants, whose parents or family members own land and continue to live in Côte d'Ivoire, describe being entrusted to drivers by their relatives. Djemi Kambou recounts how his father enlisted the assistance of a transportation worker

¹¹ These data come from my earlier research in the region (Mechlinski 2004), which addressed the experience of Burkinabe migrants as they move to, within, and back from Côte d'Ivoire.

to get his sons back to Burkina Faso after they had visited and worked for him during their summer vacation:

Our father looked for a vehicle for us. He entrusted us to a chauffeur and said that if there was a problem, the chauffeur should negotiate with the police for us and if the police asks for money to say that there is 1000 CFA apiece for these children, and if he does not accept to offer 1500 CFA apiece. If that does not work, call him and he will come.

Although their father did not know the driver personally, by entrusting his sons to him Djiami's father assured that his boys, who were in their mid-teens at the time, would be spared from negotiating with the Ivorian authorities themselves. In a similar instance, Dah Ini's older brother enlisted the assistance of a chauffeur, who was a friend of his, to secure a safe place for Ini, who was also in her mid-teens at the time of the trip, to sleep if the vehicle she was traveling in had to stop for the night. Although in the second case Ini's brother relied on someone with whom he had a prior connection, we can see that Djiami and Naba's father relied more explicitly on the structured relationships between security agents, passengers, and drivers in the region, knowing that the driver would assist his children.

Whereas the transporters help migrants in many situations, there are also many instances in which passengers help each other. Both Poda Sonabana, a female migrant, and Dah Ollo, a teenager at the time, described situations in which older men helped them along the way:

I should say that in going there, there are not too many problems. Especially, if there is a man next to you, you who are a woman, he pays for your food while you are on the road.

-- Poda Sonabana

The man sitting next to me, who had two kids, told me to help him with a kid. So I took one of his kids ... and he told me that he was behind me and he would take care of me during the trip.... When the police would take my card he negotiated for me all the way to [the next major town] where he got out and I continued alone.... For food, it was he who paid for me all the way until he got out.

-- Dah Ollo

These examples demonstrate Rain's (1999) earlier claim that social ties are often immediate. Ollo's benefactor, for example, was a man he had never met, and with whom he only had a relationship lasting a few hours. But it is a relationship based on existing structures, in which there are norms of reciprocity, and assistance. As a teenager, his companion protected him from negotiations with agents, and fed him as well.

We can also see the ways in which Desiré, a more experienced traveler, assisted Siembou to circumvent security controls during his first crossing back into Burkina Faso from Ghana. Siembou does not have a yellow fever vaccination card, and may have been asked to pay at the exit of Ghana, the entrance to Burkina or both. Realizing this, he was able to rely on the assistance of another passenger to conserve his money, and cross the international border clandestinely.

Drivers, Passengers, and Agents in Action

Acknowledging their role as intermediaries in the exchanges occurring between their passengers and security forces, the relations drivers establish with security agents, and the strategies they employ to assist their passengers, the following ethnographic examples shed light on the processes by which these interactions take place.

March 9, 2006 - from Boundoukou, Côte d'Ivoire to Sampa, Ghana

The seven mile road between Bondoukou and Sampa is not paved, and is in extreme disrepair. In the past it was a busy thoroughfare for trucks carrying merchandise and passengers between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, but in the last several years it has become a less popular route. Some guess that this is because the roughness of the road makes it less attractive than the paved routes to the south that are in better shape, but others propose that it is common knowledge in the area that the security agents on the Ivorian side are particularly difficult in this area and people travel across the borders to the south to avoid paying so much. Drivers report that foreigners, those from Mali, Burkina Faso, or other countries are often required to pay as much as 5000 CFA at each of the two security posts in Côte d'Ivoire between the town of Bondoukou and the international border. Ivorians with valid ID cards are usually not asked to pay anything in the nationalist side of Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghanaians, owing to their country's lack of national identity cards usually pay 1000 CFA per post, without much need for negotiation. Considering that the local residents of these two towns share a common linguistic and ethnic background (they are Nafana, and Wangara), many have relatives on both sides of the international border, and movements back and forth for marriages and funerals are common. Transportation between these two towns is provided by a group of private car owners who operate their vehicles as taxis. The majority are Ghanaian, and although they are technically illegal entrants into Côte d'Ivoire, for lack of appropriate insurance and international documents, they have been working this route for years. Each day that they pass into Côte d'Ivoire they give 1000 F at each post for

their vehicle as they enter, and are permitted to pass back to Ghana without paying again later in the day.

In mid-afternoon three Malian men approach Yssouf, a young Ghanaian driver who is waiting at the motor park for clients, about taking them to Sampa. One does not have any money and he asks Yssouf to take him to Sampa. Wanting to help the man, Yssouf accepts. The other two do not have papers, and know that the money they have is not enough to negotiate their way across the three security posts between the two towns (two are in Côte d'Ivoire and one in Ghana). They ask Yssouf if he can take them across the border, and give him a total of 5000 CFA (\$10) with which to manage the road.¹² Although he risks paying four times that much out of pocket to ensure that the Malians arrive in Ghana, Yssouf, whose nickname is "Allakabon" (God is Great), accepts.

At the gendarmerie stop at Yongso, just a few miles outside of Bondoukou, Yssouf parks his car a bit out of the way of the agents' building and walks up to present his papers. He has parked further away than usual as a way to keep his undocumented passengers away from the agents. At this particular stop one agent starts negotiations with Yssouf about transporting some chairs for him from Kumasi to Bondoukou. They discuss prices and Yssouf says he will think about it, giving his number to the officer, showing his good faith and interest in assisting him, effectively guaranteeing that the agent would not cause any problems for his passengers. Because the agent has just asked him for a favor, and he has agreed, they let him pass without checking his passengers' documents at all. They pass through the barrier and continue to the police post at Soko, the international border. Again, Yssouf parks a little out of the way and gets out alone to

¹² The transportation is normally 1000 CFA per person, so in essence these two men gave Yssouf 1500 each to cover the costs of the security posts.

approach the agents. Luckily for his passengers, this time an agent requests that Yssouf purchase some items for him since they are less expensive in Ghana. The agent hands him 20,000 cedis (about \$2.20) to purchase wine and water. So, having asked a favor, at this post they do not check the passengers either and Yssouf takes his passengers the remaining few miles through the forest to Sampa in Ghana. At the Ghanaian immigration post Yssouf goes to explain that he has two Ivorian and two Ghanaians in his car and they are coming to Sampa for a funeral. Accepting his claims at face value the immigration officials let him pass. Arriving in Sampa, Yssouf drops his passengers off at the station and goes to the store to purchase the items the agent in Côte d'Ivoire requested. He finds another driver who is heading to Bondoukou and passes off the items to be delivered.

This example demonstrates how, although usually considered to be more powerful than drivers, the security agents, considering where they were posted, relied on Yssouf for certain favors, essentially admitting their reliance on him in some respects. Having checked his passengers' identification papers, and asking them for money to let them pass the agents could certainly have jeopardized their ability ask Yssouf to assist them with their errands. We can see this, in terms of Guilmoto and Sandron's (2001) argument, as one way in which rules determine how exchanges occur in the migration process. In addition, in this instance, for the Malians, who may not have know what lay ahead on the road to Ghana, or having heard about how difficult it could be, the migration network, as in institution, compensated for their lack of papers and knowledge of the area.

May 28, 2006 – from Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire to Sikasso, Mali

Although the road from Korhogo, in the rebel-held territory of Côte d'Ivoire, to Sikasso is paved and in good shape, the distance between Ouangolodougou and the border is particularly difficult to pass because the rebels there ask for much more money than along most other roads in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Between Korhogo and Ouangolodougou the rebel agents ask passengers for a donation, oftentimes not specifying the sum, but simply asking passengers to give what they can, or to give some money they can use to buy some cigarettes or water. If passengers have some change they can give it to the rebels, but if not, the donation is not required. Even when being more forceful the rebels ask for 200 CFA (\$0.40) at most. However, between Ouangolodougou and Malian border the rebels ask for 500 or even 1000 CFA (\$1 or 2) per passenger at six different posts. For this reason, many drivers in Korhogo prefer to take a route through the bush that links up with the paved road in Mali. It is technically an illegal route for international passenger transportation, as there is no official immigration control on the Malian side. Between Korhogo and the border there are ten rebel posts, and in Mali there are two security checkpoints before the route rejoins the paved road.

Very early in the morning, nine passengers load into a Peugeot 504, an aging station wagon with an extra seat added in the back. There are two women in the car, one with a small child of about five, and the other traveling with her sick teenage daughter. They are both Malian by birth, but live in Côte d'Ivoire. Among the men, there are two older men and several young men, all returning home for various reasons. In addition, an Ivorian man is traveling to Mali to seek medical care, and one Mauritanian man is traveling home by way of Sikasso. At the first several checkpoints in Côte d'Ivoire the

rebels approach the car and check everyone's documents, and the two youths without IDs get out to deal with the agents while the rest of the passengers wait. The rebels do not even ask the women for their papers. About nine more miles down the road the one young man gets out and the rebel agents make him sit down. He claims that his paper is lost but they try to make him say that he just does not have them. Although the driver does not intervene, the other passengers ask the rebels to pardon the man and eventually they let him go. After each control post the passengers discuss the politics of identification papers; one woman talks about how she had her Ivorian papers forged. She recounts the stories she told to the local authorities where she lives to make them give her an Ivorian identity card.¹³ She was actually born in Mali though and shows her fellow passengers where she keeps her Ivorian card in one compartment in her purse and her Malian card in another. At the next rebel post all of the men get out and line up while the women wait in the back of the car. The rebels check IDs one by one and have the men cross a barrier made of wooden posts and a rope. As they wave the men by, they take a small donation of two hundred CFA from all but the oldest man. A few miles later, at the next stop all of the passengers get out and the rebels go around and look at their items one by one and ask them for money, but still only for relatively small amounts. The car passes several more checkpoints before reaching the final stop in Cote d'Ivoire, where everyone gets out again, even the women this time, and they all pay 200 CFA.

¹³ The issue of migrants in Côte d'Ivoire obtaining Ivorian identity cards, either by having Ivorian elders pretend to be their parents, or by purchasing illegally manufactured cards was a large debate when I interviewed migrants in 2003. The prevailing argument for why a person would keep two identity cards is that movement in Côte d'Ivoire was so difficult and costly for non-Ivorians before the rebellion that a foreigner could "not even move 100 meters." Whereas some migrants opted to maintain only a foreign identity card, many, if not most, opted to obtain Ivorian cards.

As the car enters Mali, about 10 kilometers in, they stop and everyone gets out again, except the two children. The Malian police take all of the passengers' papers and they go into their mud brick house, calling them in one by one. Each person goes in to answer the agents' questions about where he or she is going, and for what purpose. The other passengers wait outside, where another agent sits on a hammock, to be called in. Eventually, everyone having retrieved their papers, they all get back into the car to continue the voyage. Several passengers angrily discuss being forced to pay money to enter their own country. The Malians, with their up-to-date Malian IDs, still paid 1000 CFA, and the Ivorian man, who had both a valid ID and a current yellow fever vaccination tells the others that the agents said that his vaccination card was not good because it was not from a Malian doctor, and they still made him pay 2000 CFA: the same amount that the Mauritanian man paid. At the next town the passengers all have to chip in 500 CFA a piece to pay for a police escort because the paved roads are closed after dark because of rising banditry in the region. At the entrance to Sikasso the car stops at a barrier and the police check the passengers' IDs. If the papers are good they let each person go without paying, but they make one woman get out because her teenage daughter does not have a card. She goes to the agents' building to discuss her case; her daughter is sick and they are headed to the hospital. In addition, the girl is not old enough to be required to hold a national identity card. The other passengers criticize the chauffeur for not doing anything to intervene on behalf of the passengers like he should. He goes eventually to resolve the issue and the woman comes back; he finishes the negotiation for her.

From this fieldnote, although the driver did not assist his passengers as much as I contend is the norm, it is still possible to observe certain aspects of the institutionalization of weak ties and drivers' responsibilities towards passengers in that the passengers took pains at the end of the trip to shame the driver into assisting the woman whose daughter did not have papers. In this instance the other passengers supported her socially, by constraining the agent to help her. This example also demonstrates the limited number of outcomes these negotiations can engender. Although the driver did not intervene as aggressively as some others might have, in the end all of his passengers made it the entire 240 km. journey, with or without papers.

June 14, 2006 – Bankass, Mali

About 10 miles east of Bankass, on the road to Koro, the Malian police stop the vehicle to check its papers and the passengers' documents. The woman sitting in the back of the Peugeot 504, with her young daughter beside her, does not have a card. The agent does not say anything and walks away from the car. The driver asks the woman for 500 CFA with which he will pay the agent since she is undocumented. She hands him a 1000 CFA note and the driver goes to the agent and pays him. The agent makes change and the driver comes back to give it to the passenger.

Although brief, taking this fieldnote into consideration with the one above, we can see evidence of the routinization of these interactions as part of the migration process in West Africa, as Guilmoto and Sandron's (2001) have postulated. Crossing the Ivorian border in southern Mali, the Malians pay 1000 CFA, and the foreigners pay 2000 CFA. In the Malian interior, the price is so established, 500 CFA, that neither the undocumented

passenger, nor the driver needed to negotiate at all. They simply paid the amount they knew would be required. Still, the driver handled this interaction, effectively preventing any contact between the agent and the passenger.

November 6, 2005 – Tiefora, Burkina Faso

Leaving Banfora a two hundred kilometer road crosses to the east towards the Ghanaian border. Unpaved, the road is in fairly good condition and a few bush taxis and busses take it each day towards Gaoua, the major town of the Lobi region. In the period before the Ivorian rebellion the road was well traveled with Lobi, a particularly mobile ethnic group, traveling to and from Côte d'Ivoire. In the mid-afternoon, Sibiry, driving an aging red Toyota Hiace minibus, stops at a security checkpoint not far from the village of his birth. He is taking several passengers east today, including a young Lobi man and his teenage girlfriend, who are sitting in the back. A police officer begins checking the passengers' papers in the vehicle, while Sibiry laughs with another officer off to the side. Security controls on this road had been increasing in frequency because of the discovery of gold in the region and increasing mining activity, which takes place purely as speculation. When the agent finally asks the young Lobi man and his companion for their papers, they do not have any. He asks them to get out and walks off to the side. The two stay seated and Sibiry returns to talk to them. He tells the young man to put a certain sum in his pocket and to offer it to the agent, saying it is all he has. From afar the agent is calling for the two to get out the vehicle and the young man finally goes over to him to discuss his case. The officer teases the passenger, calling him a wife-stealer, and keeps

asking why the girl has not gotten out too.¹⁴ Eventually the officer accepts the money the young man offers him, and the passengers continue on down the road.

In this case, the relationship between driver, passenger, and agents comes into view as a complex interaction, not merely a dyadic tie as much writing on migrant networks implies. Sibiry, not related in any way to his passengers, and with no community link to them, still acts on their behalf to assure their ability to make it to their destination. Sibiry is exogenous to the young couple's kinship, family, and community network, yet it is precisely through his involvement in this situation that the young man gets the information he needs (how much to pay, and how to offer the money) to deal with the security agent, and make it home. This supports the notion, as Krissman (2005) has highlighted, that actors exogenous to the hometown influence the development of migration networks.

Conclusion

There is significant room for development and refinement of migrant networks theories, especially in Africa, where their application has been sparse and limited in scope. Benefiting from the lessons of network theory, and an institutional approach to migration, which looks at migration from a Third World perspective, this paper demonstrates some important aspects of the way in which networks operate in migration in West Africa. The interactions occurring between driver, agents, and passengers at

¹⁴ "Wife stealing" is a particular Lobi custom in which a male suitor absconds with the woman he would like to marry, with her permission, to a relatively distant area for a few weeks. The idea is to prove to his potential bride's family that he can take care of her and is ready to marry. As the Lobi are often considered to be more rooted in their customs than other groups, and are still largely practitioners of their traditional African religion, they are regarded as "backwards" by other Burkinabe, particularly by Muslims who see them as pagans.

international borders and internal mobility control checkpoints are structured by patterns of relationships – which only operate because of their interdependence. They occur within complex networks, not simply involving a pair of actors, that distribute resources according to systems of dependency and power. The relationships between drivers and passengers, and drivers and security agents, depend on a reciprocity that defies simple hierarchies. These networks operate to create a system in which passengers in West African transportation can rely on the assistance of drivers (and sometimes on other passengers), even those to with whom they have no pre-existing connection – indeed these are institutionalized ties, not personal or community ones. This institutionalization, organized according to the needs and objectives of the various groups involved, serves to guarantee that drivers have passengers to transport, agents are making extra money on the road, and passengers are arriving at their destination, papers or not. Being based largely on “weak ties” this institutionalization expands the scope of migrants’ community-based networks, assisting them even then when they are traveling far from home, or where they know no one.

The paper presented here, contributes to an overall analysis that makes several important contributions to social science theory, methodology and to our knowledge of African mobility. First, this project is a multi-site cross-national ethnography of an understudied social process. No other ethnography of migration conducted thus far in West Africa (e.g. Fièloux 1976, 1981; Amselle 1978; de Haan, Brock, and Coulibaly 2002), has attempted to use as extensive a multi-national approach as the one employed here, nor has any study on African borders applied a comparative approach (e.g. Nugent 2002; Flynn 1997; Lentz 2003; Miles and Rochefort 1991). In addition, the majority of

countries this research addresses are former French colonies, which are inadequately treated in the English-language anthropological and sociological literatures (Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996). As a part of the world that American researchers have tended to neglect due to linguistic limitations and cultural unfamiliarity, this understudied region will prove particularly interesting for assessing existing understandings of mobility in general, and in Africa in particular.

By empirically documenting what is going on at West African security checkpoints and international borders, this research has important policy implications as well. Standardizing mobility control procedures, and strengthening uniformity across countries, would assist in the free movement of persons in the region (which has long been a goal of West African regional and economic institutions), as well as the movement of goods since so many mobile people in West Africa are traveling with items for trade. Both the Republics of Mali (RM 2005) and Côte d'Ivoire (RCI 2005) note the importance of transportation in poverty reduction strategies, and highlight the problems associated with road blocks and security in hindering trade. In addition, considering the important role that security checks and the abuses of agents towards northern passengers played in the Ivorian rebellion, and the consequent restructuring of security in the Ivorian north, it is important to reform policies to prevent similar problems from developing in other regions, particularly in southern Mali, which has already experienced some problems, and in which security agents seem to be taking more and more liberties in extracting money from passengers and drivers.

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