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Discussing rural-to-urban migration reversal in contemporary sub Saharan Africa: The case of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

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Cover:

Cité d'amour. Graffiti on a major road leading into Ouagadougou.
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Abstract

In recent research on rural-to-urban migration in sub Saharan Africa, a major point of discussion has been to what extent cities in this region are growing as fast as previously assumed and what role rural-to-urban migration plays in this process. Some of the literature suggests that the extent of rural-to-urban migration has been exaggerated and that some cities are even experiencing a migration reversal. A much used example of this 'reversal' is Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. In this paper, we argue that most of the published literature regarding rural-to-urban migration in Burkina Faso relies on retrospective survey data covering the period prior to 2000 and that in fact little is known about migration trends in the last 15 years. Based on ethnographic field data, our results suggest that recent socio-political and environmental developments in Burkina Faso give rise to at least six distinct reasons for leaving the villages to settle in Ouagadougou. The paper therefore raises the question whether a rural-to-urban migration reversal is currently observed in Ouagadougou. Based on qualitative data no definite answer to this can be given in this paper but the results presented indicate that Ouagadougou might no longer be a good example of rural-to-urban migration reversal.

Keywords: Rural-to-urban migration, Migration reversal, Qualitative research, Burkina Faso

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1. Introduction

Africa is known as the continent with the highest rates of urban growth in the world. The recent history and current development of urbanisation in sub Saharan Africa (SSA) is, however, controversial. The conventional view perceives urbanisation as an explosive process for which rural-to-urban migration is largely responsible. In contrast, it is increasingly argued that the speed of urbanisation in this region is slowing down and that rural-to-urban migration is no longer an important factor of urban growth (e.g. Beauchemin, 2011). Natural increase and reclassification of areas from rural to urban are seen as the predominant growth factors behind most contemporary urbanisation in SSA (e.g. de Brauw, Mueller, & Lee, 2014; McGranahan, Mitlin, Tacoli, & Turok, 2009; Montgomery, 2008; Potts, 2012b).

A major reason for the controversy is the data sources used to argue for rapid urbanisation in this region. UN Habitat reports, for example, are cited widely. Yet, these reports are often based on census data from “the 1980s or early 1990s” or even earlier (Satterthwaite, 2010, p. 5). As net in-migration rates to cities across SSA were high in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, projections based upon data from these decades are “often misleading, and have exaggerated urbanisation levels” (Potts, 2012b, p. 2). Moreover, many SSA nations have conducted only one, two or three census since the late 1940s (Satterthwaite, 2010).

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, has in recent research been used as an example to challenge the assumption that rapid urbanisation is “occurring across sub-Saharan Africa, in every country and every region” and that rural-to-urban migration is a major cause of this (Potts, 2012a, p. 1382). Data from retrospective surveys conducted in Burkina Faso showed that migration contributed only “moderately to urban growth” and that rural-to-urban migration was “declining or at least in stagnation while the reverse flow (urban outmigration) was tending to increase at the end of the twentieth century” (Beauchemin, 2011, p. 48).

The counter rural-to-urban migration studies in Burkina Faso suffer, however, from the same lack of sufficient and timely demographic data as the UN Habitat reports. Few demographic studies have been carried out on internal migration between rural and urban areas in Burkina Faso (e.g. Beauchemin, 2011; Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004; Beauchemin & Schoumaker, 2005, 2009; Henry, Boyle, & Lambin, 2003; Henry, Schoumaker, & Beauchemin, 2004; Kabbanji, Piché, & Dabiré, 2007; Wouterse & Taylor, 2008). Except for the Wouterse and Taylor (2008) study, which does not mention a stagnation, but rather that migration continues to play an important part in local livelihoods, the data used to argue for rural-to-urban migration stagnation in Burkina Faso covers the period 1970-1999, with the latest surveys being conducted in 2000 (Beauchemin, 2011) and 2002 (Henry et al., 2004).

Basing their analysis on retrospective data from national migration surveys gives strong statistical results. We do not challenge the findings of these studies, but we question whether they represent the situation since the turn of the century. Since then, Burkina Faso has experienced a number of events which might have altered the rural-to-urban migration trend observed in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. A reasonable question to ask is hence whether the conclusions on a stagnating or reverse rural-to-urban migration in Burkina Faso still hold. Reliable up-to-date statistical evidence is hard to come by and therefore either refuting or confirming migration trends observed since the late 1990s is not as such possible. Yet, we argue based upon qualitative research conducted in Ouagadougou in 2013 that the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire – the favoured migration destination of rural Burkinabe – since the early 2000s and problems with food production in many rural zones of the country due to changing precipitation patterns have caused important rural-

to-urban migration flows. Additionally, social issues in the villages such as sorcery accusations, arranged marriages and rising divorce rates, as well as increasing work opportunities in urban areas, are similarly given as reasons for contemporary rural-to-urban migration by new urban dwellers in Ouagadougou.

The paper is organised as follows. We begin with a methodological overview and a brief introduction to the research setting. This is followed by the results. Focus here is on showing that contemporary rural-to-urban migration in Burkina Faso is a complex process influenced by economic, cultural, political and environmental events of recent origin. In the subsequent discussion we embed the results in recent research literature from Burkina Faso and other countries in SSA. A major point of doing so is to show that the trends observed during fieldwork are supported by this literature. Lacking actual numbers of rural-to-urban migration this is the only way in which we can substantiate and support our qualitative findings. Finally the discussion draws out some larger implications of our findings for the current debate on the extent of rural-to-urban migration in SSA. The paper is rounded off by a conclusion.

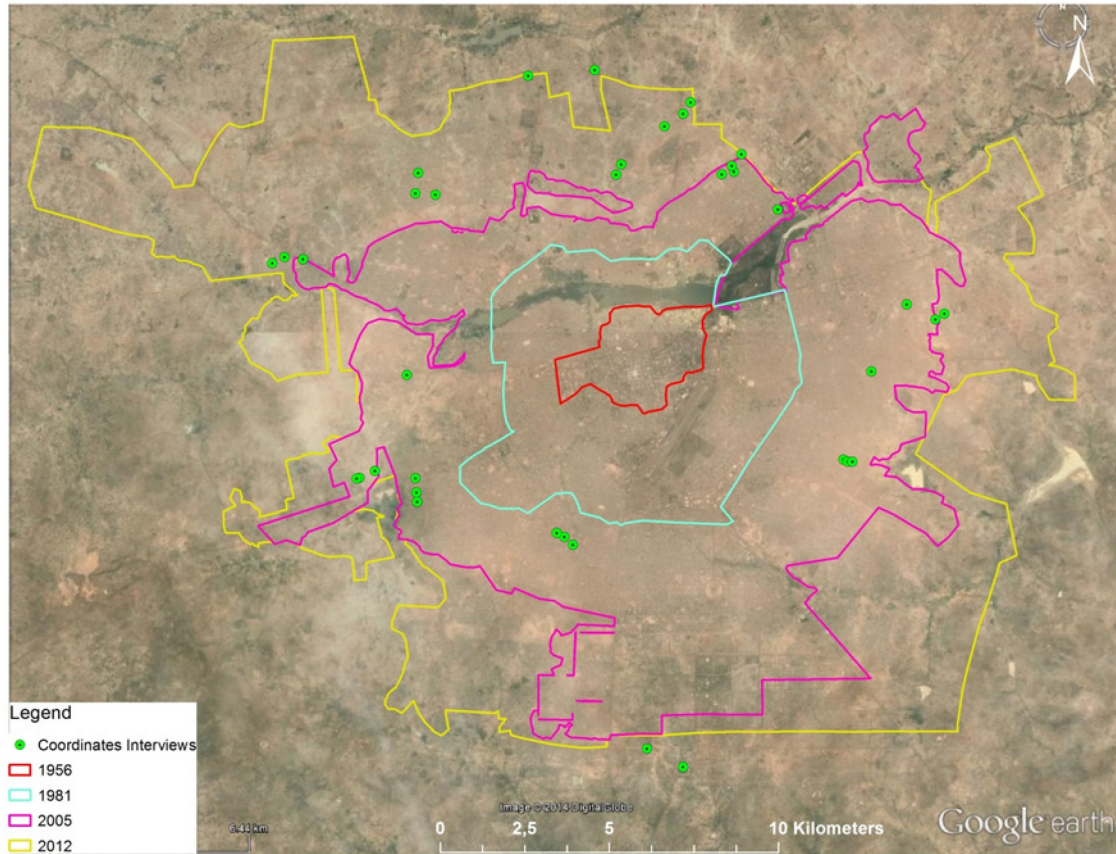
2. Methodology

The study is based upon qualitative research methods. It incorporates two of the main sources of data collection and data recognised in qualitative research: participant observation and interviews (e.g. Bernard, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These methods were supplemented by transect walks, informal interviews and GPS measurements. The field study was conducted during September and October 2013 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. During the research, the first author lived in a private home in the northern district of Tampouy. Focusing solely on Ouagadougou was done in order to capture recent rural-to-urban migrant's stories. Rural areas in Burkina Faso exhibits large differences regarding livelihoods, service provisions, climate factors and other major drivers of rural-to-urban migration (D'haen, Nielsen, & Lambin, 2014). Obtaining a representational sample of rural areas and the reasons within these for rural-to-urban migration within a qualitative research project was hence not possible. It should, however, be noted that both authors have worked mainly in rural Burkina Faso since 2007.

Participant observation was chosen for the research because it puts the researcher where the action is and makes it possible to collect stories, figures, routines and observations of daily life. To be of value, participant observation must lead to insights, "the noticing of apparently insignificant points, the making of connections" (Cohen, 1984, p. 220). Often this happens because details, however small they might at first appear, add up over time, pointing the way to other elements and other details that might otherwise go unobserved. Among such 'details', the fear of sorcery and the search for a suitable partner by women from the countryside were significant for the research.

The basic insights gained via participant observation were explored further in 38 semi-structured interviews of between one and two hours duration with rural-to-urban migrants. It has been rightfully pointed out that research on rural-to-urban migration in SSA should be careful in assuming that large numbers of, for example, young people in the city imply a corresponding high urbanisation rate (Gugler, 2002). Consequently, age, length of time and commitment to life in Ouagadougou were important interviewee selection criteria. Place of residence was also an important selection criterion. In order to achieve representativeness, it was considered necessary to cover almost all peripheral districts of the city as it is generally here where migrants settle (Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004). The interviewees were further selected according to

gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity, thus covering many of the major differentiations within Ouagadougou as well as different migration histories. Each semi-structured interview site was registered with a hand-held GPS (see Map 1).



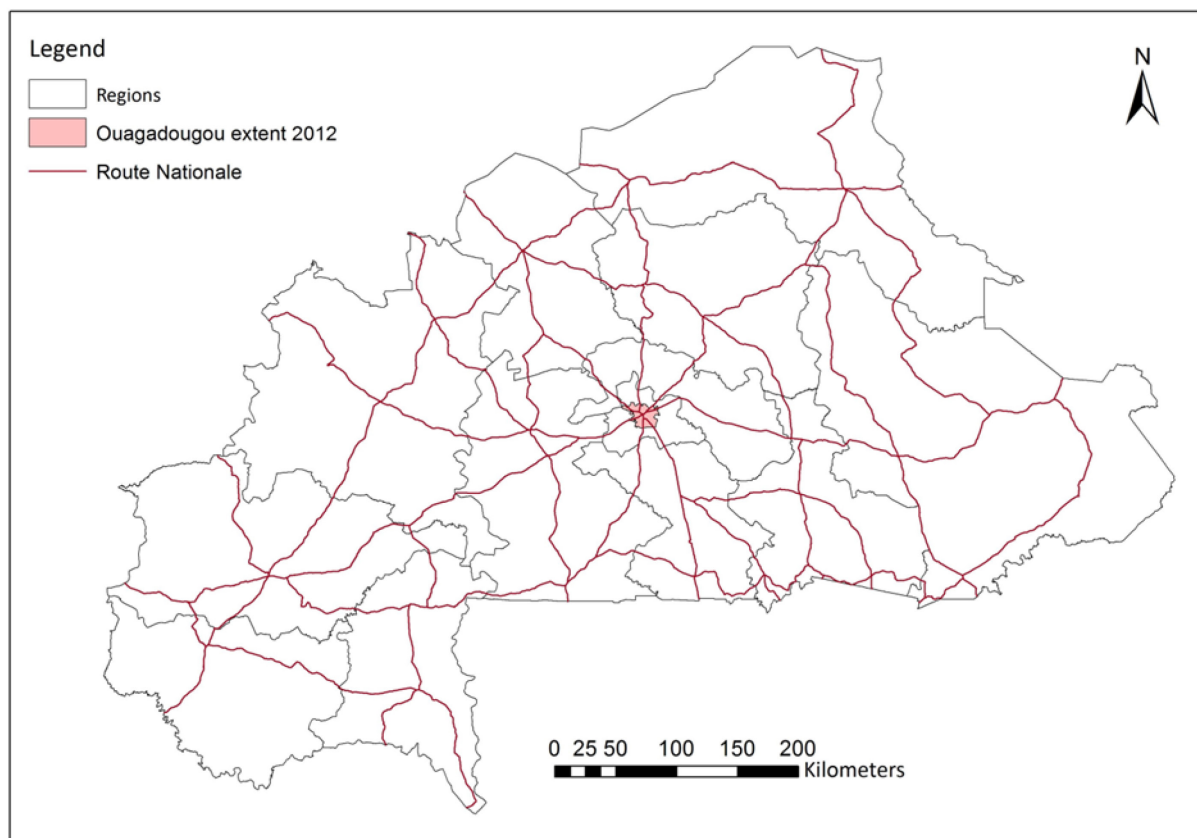
Map 1. Showing the interview sites and the spatial expansion of Ouagadougou in the period 1956-2012. Note how two of the interviews took place outside what was considered the city limit in 2012 (IGB, Institut Géographique du Burkina and Google Earth. Own adaptation).

The interviews were directed towards understanding the informants' perspectives and were therefore relatively non-standardised and open-ended (see Kvale, 1996; Spradley, 1979). Nonetheless, each respondent was asked about: (1) their life history (e.g. where they were born, how long they had been in Ouagadougou); (2) the current situation (e.g. household and neighbourhood composition, main income sources, main expenditures, main concerns, main wishes); (3) housing (e.g. how long they had lived in a particular plot, how they got the plot, from where they had moved to the plot); (4) Ouagadougou (e.g. how well they knew the city, changes to the city and neighbourhood since they moved there, and what the reasons behind these might be); and (5) rural-urban relations (e.g. relations with their village of origin, the presence of family or village members in Ouagadougou, why they had come to Ouagadougou, whether they thought of returning to their village, reasons for returning or not wanting to return, whether they thought other people were currently leaving the villages and, if so, why). Particularly the latter category of questions was always followed up by questions concerning changes in these parameters over the lifetime of the interviewee. All interviews were conducted in Mòoré with the help of an interpreter or in French when the interviewee was sufficiently fluent. All interviews were digitally recorded.

In most of the districts (7) in which interviews were conducted, a transect walk with a local resident was arranged. The resident was identified during the interviews in the district. They, in all but one case, were male and walked us through the district, relayed different developments, events and challenges as well as changes over time. During the transect walks informal conversations around issues of pertinence to the district were held with people joining us. Many of these conversations revolved around rural-urban relations in contemporary Burkina Faso.

3. Setting

Burkina Faso (Map 2) is a poor country. It is ranked 183 out of 187 nations in the 2013 Human Development Index, has an annual GDP per capita of 1,149US\$, an under five mortality rate of 176 per 1000 live births, and an adult literacy rate of 28.7% (UNDP, 2013). Being located in the Sahel proves a further disadvantage. Within this zone, mean annual rainfall ranges from 350 to 800 mm and is highly variable in time and space (Hulme, 2001), making agricultural production, the mainstay of many households in this region, difficult (D'haen et al., 2014). In Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, mean annual rainfall during the rainy season, roughly late May till early October, is 782 mm. During the dry season and particularly from January to April, the climate is very dry, dusty and hot with mean temperatures around 29 degrees (Offerle, Jonsson, Eliasson, & Grimmond, 2005).



Map 2. Burkina Faso.

Burkina Faso is experiencing a rapid population growth. In 1975, it had a population of approximately 5.5 million. The current estimated number of 14 million is expected to rise to around 19 million in 2020. This population increase is also seen in Ouagadougou. In 1950 there were 35,000 inhabitants, in 1970 126,000, in 1990 562,000, in 2000 900,000, and currently approximately 1.4 million inhabitants live in Ouagadougou. By 2020, the population in Ouagadougou is expected to reach 1.8 million (all population numbers from Africapolis (2013)). The urban area has expanded accordingly from around 25 km² in 1956 to around 372 km² in 2012 (see Map 1).

Ouagadougou is a hot, bustling place. Located on a flat plain and built with largely similar buildings, it has a fairly homogeneous appearance. Only in a few but increasing amount of the districts, and particularly in the central business district, concrete buildings around four storeys high can be found. There, most streets are also paved. In contrast, most of the surrounding residential areas consist of a mix of modern constructions and more traditional clay huts, and almost all secondary streets are unpaved. The constructions found in a particular district depend to a high extend upon whether the district is *lotis* or *non lotis*. The former is a district in which an official subdivision has taken place. There, houses and plots are formally registered to individual owners. In these districts, the houses are often constructed in concrete and organised in a grid structure along large wide roads. Public amenities such as sanitation, access to running water and electricity are established and accessible. In the latter districts, usually found on the city margin, development occurs without any central planning. Houses are constructed in clay, are small and often located very closely together. Electricity is not available, roads and sanitation are non-existent and water is bought from a common source, often a pump.

The inhabitants in the *non lotis* districts are often engaged in the informal sector (Thorsen, 2013). Working on construction sites, as maids, guards, waiters, mechanics, selling food, beer, coal or other products, often along the major roads, and making bricks are some of the most commonly held occupations. Both the *lotis* and *non lotis* districts are ethnically very mixed but the majority of the residents are Mossi, the traditional inhabitants of the central plateau of Burkina Faso where Ouagadougou is located. The spoken language in the city is accordingly their language, Mòoré.

4. Results

Rural-to-urban migration is a complex process in contemporary Burkina Faso, influenced by economic, cultural, political and environmental events. While all interviewees nearly unanimously mentioned finding work as a reason for moving to Ouagadougou, various non-economic reasons were often mentioned as being equally or in many cases more important (Table 1). In this section we focus on the six most commonly given reasons given to us by interviewees and people spoken with during fieldwork behind contemporary rural-to-urban migration: The Côte d'Ivoire crisis, sorcery, marriage, divorce, climate variability and work.

4.1 The Côte d'Ivoire Crisis

The Ivorian crisis was a much discussed topic during fieldwork. The crisis broke out in the late 1990s and, as will be shown in section 5, it has a complex history resulting in a targeting of mainly rural Burkinabe living and working there. The armed conflicts within Côte d'Ivoire in the early 2000s were replaced from 2007 onwards by a general calm following the signing of the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Accords. Yet, the situation of personal and economic uncertainty persisted for many Burkinabe living there and in that way out-

lasted the eruption of armed conflicts. This state of affairs was continually highlighted during fieldwork. All returned Burkinabe interviewed or spoken with mentioned that they had left Côte d'Ivoire because of attacks, rumours of imminent attacks, social tensions, deteriorating living conditions in the villages and/or a desire to "live peacefully" as it was often put. A family having moved to Ouagadougou from a village in the north of Côte d'Ivoire (where many Burkinabe live working with agriculture or on various plantations) in early 2011 told, for example, how "the war might have ended but the situation continues", giving this as the reason for coming to Ouagadougou. A young man having moved to Ouagadougou in early 2012 spoke about how in Côte d'Ivoire the mistrust between the villagers of either Burkinabe or Ivorian origin remained such that "I am never sure whether I will wake up in the morning" alluding to a number of retaliation killings in his village.

Table 1. Reasons mentioned by interviewees (N=38) for moving to Ouagadougou since the year 2000. Note that many interviewees mentioned several reasons as being equally important.

Reason for migration	Number of Interviewees mentioning this	Percentages of Interviewees mentioning this	Number of Interviewees mentioning this as most important reason	Percentages of Interviewees mentioning this as most important reason
Côte d'Ivoire Crisis	32	84%	23	61%
Sorcery	28	73%	16	42%
Marriage	23	61%	18	47%
Divorce	14	37%	14	37%
Climate variability	34	89%	25	66%
Work	36	95%	27	71%
Other	6	16%	1	2%

This 'trickle' of mainly rural based Burkinabe returning or going for the first time to Burkina Faso has been argued to constitute the main form of displacement caused by the Ivorian crisis (Bjarnesen, 2013; Boswell, 2010). During interviews and conversations we were often told by returnees that "we were not refugees". Asked why not, the most common response was that they, unlike the refugees, had arrived back in the country by their own means, without the involvement of any authorities and one by one. The latter point was often followed by reports of how the husband had left first and was followed, when housing had been secured, by wife and children, or how a couple of friends had left together. Very similar statements were conveyed to Bjarnesen (2013) during fieldwork in Bobo-Dioulasso. Consequently, a central point of conversation during fieldwork was when the largest bulk of people from the Côte d'Ivoire had arrived to Ouagadougou. Again, interviewees always pointed out that people arrived one by one and continue to do so, but when informants having lived in Ouagadougou prior to the Ivorian crisis were shown a preliminary version of Map 1 and asked to explain what they thought were the major reasons behind the spatial expansion, the Ivorian crisis was always mentioned. The expansion seen on the map between 1981 and 2005 was by 14 out of 17 interviewed on this matter attributed almost exclusively to return immigrants from villages in the

Côte d'Ivoire in the early 2000s. Hence the spatial expansion of Ouagadougou prior to 2000 had been slow, according to these informants. Similarly, a sudden large influx of Burkinabe immigrants around 2005-2006 was often given as an explanation for the expansion between 2005 and 2012.

Regardless of whether most of the return settlers came in a 'trickle' or in bulk, all informants argued that the Ivorian crisis has had a significant impact upon the growing population and spatial extent of Ouagadougou. This reason was in fact the third highest ranked by all informants asked, because, as it was often put, where else would all these people go? Obviously not all Burkinabe leaving the Côte d'Ivoire resettle or settle in Ouagadougou. A number of them go to their 'origin' villages or to other urban areas within Burkina Faso (Bjarnesen, 2013), but it seems indeed as if a large number of them came and continue to come to Ouagadougou (Wouterse & Taylor, 2008). Major reasons for this were and still are that work might be found there as well as the lack of access to agricultural and residential land in their so-called home villages (which many of them had actually never visited).

4.2 Sorcery

Sorcery has received considerable attention in the Burkinabe media since the mid-2000s, particularly because an increasing number of older women have been accused of sorcery (HelpAge, 2010). In Burkina Faso, according to the interviewees, sorcery, or *sorcellerie*, takes on a particular form. Once a person has been chosen by a sorcerer as a target, the sorcerer tries to capture the soul of the victim. This is often done at night by way of getting inside the victim's head snaring his or her soul. Once the soul is under the control of the sorcerer it is most often transformed into an animal, often a goat, sheep or cow. The sorcerer then tries to sell the animal. The buyer is often another sorcerer using the animal/soul for his/her own purposes but it can also be a non-initiated person. When the animal eventually dies, often relatively shortly after the sale due to it being slaughtered, the soul of the person inside the animal dies too. The latter results in the physical death of the person whose soul was taken.

According to interviewees, it is not just older women practicing sorcery in the villages, but, as one older woman expressed it, "the old, the young, men and women". Asked why, this informant echoed all others: "they all do it for the money". What happens is that by snaring the victim's soul and eventually killing him or her, the sorcerer potentially gains access to this person's wealth, goods like mobile phones, motor bikes, clothes and cash, or in some cases partners or spouses. As most labour migration returnees are seen as being well off in the villages, they are, as it was often expressed, "targeted". A middle-aged man explained how he had gone on labour migration countless times but how the last return stays in his village (2010-11) had been uncomfortable. "I was all of a sudden being told to keep a low profile, to say nothing to no one as the village was full of sorcerers". Asked what he did, he explained how he "tried to stay low, to only visit my family and friends during the night, but it was no good, I was being targeted and I left the next morning".

That the destination was Ouagadougou was no coincidence. Again and again we were told how sorcery can only work if the sorcerer knows something about you. Because everybody in the village knows everything about everybody, it is easy for a potential sorcerer to target you. Keeping silent on matters related to wealth helps but it is not enough. "It is always possible to find out in the village" as a couple having fled a central plateau village in 2012 due to fear of sorcery along with "3 or 4 other couples" expressed it. Because the neighbourhoods in Ouagadougou are extremely mixed and often made up of recent migrants from all over Ouagadougou and Burkina Faso, relative anonymity can be found there and this is crucial. "For

me”, a young man said, “the fact that no one knows me here is why I came”. Moreover, the belief in sorcery seems to be strongest among the Mossi. Although they constitute the majority of people in all the different neighbourhoods visited, the presence of, for example, Muslim northerners and better educated neighbours – perceived among all the interviewees as not believing strongly in sorcery – apparently prevented sorcery taking root in Ouagadougou unlike other SSA cities (Bonhomme, 2012). This was often illustrated during the transect walks. It happened only once during these that a potential sorcerer house was pointed out. Fear of walking alone, with wealth visible or showing other signs of success, was hence small among our informants and as one of them said “here, in Ouaga, I can become successful without fearing jealous sorcerers and death”.

4.3 Marriage

Female migration is not a new phenomenon but since the 1990s it has become much more common in West Africa (Adepoju, 2003). Among the women spoken to during fieldwork many reasons were mentioned as motivating contemporary rural-to-urban migration. Increased level of education and a subsequent desire for greater autonomy, less restrictive rules against women moving to the cities, new work opportunities for women often as maids in the cities and the presence of development projects and their discourse of female equality were among the most common. So were the hardship of village life and particularly agricultural work and preparing food. In Ouagadougou, better food, better health and better education could also be found, and “people are cleaner”, as many of the woman strongly emphasised. Finding a husband was, however, a major reason behind rural-to-urban migration for many of the women interviewed.

Marrying in the village was considered unattractive among most of the women spoken with. If you marry in the village “you end up on the field”, as a woman in her mid-thirties expressed it, and “that”, she continued, “is a life of hard work and no prospects”. In contrast, marrying a man living in Ouagadougou was not a priori perceived as a life without prospects for the women. Men in Ouagadougou, according to the women interviewed, want an “independent, working wife” as money is needed for expensive city living. This explanation was strongly reinforced by stories of how to find a husband in Ouagadougou. All the women told us how they were “discovered”, as it was put, by their future husband, doing a job, often as maids. This work, the women explained, proved to the man that they could take care of themselves and therefore would be an economic asset. And, as we were told by a young woman working as a maid and currently looking for a husband, “the best men want that”.

Marrying an Ouagadougou man thus entailed both an escape from a village life deemed hard and unattractive and a dream of a new and different life encompassing greater financial independence. For these reasons, the women were often very committed to life in Ouagadougou (see also Gugler & Ludwar-Ene, 1995). This commitment was reinforced by the circumstances surrounding the process of finding a husband. It can take a long time to find a husband, often five to six years, and in combination with the fact that many marry outside their ethnic group, as reported in 19 of the 27 interviews on this matter, this make a village return problematic. Consequently couples settled in Ouagadougou and none of the interviewees had ever heard of a couple having married in Ouagadougou subsequently leaving to settle in a village.

4.4 Divorce

Stories of village vulnerability among women were also given as a reason behind much contemporary female rural-to-urban migration. Many of the women going to Ouagadougou do so to get away from ar-

ranged marriages, hostile in-laws, threatening or violent husbands and ex-husbands, and a village environment in which little security in terms of policing can be found. Although - as with the other reasons for rural out-migration mentioned in section 4 - actual numbers were impossible to obtain, all the women and most of the men interviewed on this matter were adamant that many women go to Ouagadougou because of bad husbands or to escape arranged marriages. Two younger women (aged 22 and 23, respectively) told us how they had decided to move to Ouagadougou three years ago because they were to be married to an older relative and “didn’t want that”. For them, and many other women in similar circumstances, Ouagadougou represented the only place to go. Often, a network of women from the origin village already exists in Ouagadougou providing the younger women with initial help in finding a place to live and work. Consequently, most of these young women first live with relatives before they normally find a job as maids moving into a new household. For the older women having lived in Ouagadougou for many years, going back to their village was thus perceived as stressful because, in the words of a middle-aged woman, “many of my young relatives want me to help them with this or that and constantly ask me about life in Ouagadougou”.

According to the elder women spoken to during field work, such requests had increased over the last decade or so. Asked why that was, they explained, as alluded to in section 4.3, that the young women today had much more freedom or at least had hopes for different lives than their older relatives. They do not “make do” as it was often expressed. This increased sense of freedom, again according to the women spoken with, is also one of the reasons why more and more women are choosing to get divorced (see also Thiombiano & Schoumaker, 2012). As with getting out of arranged marriages, Ouagadougou was considered the only place to go. Divorce is problematic for women living in a village, and for the eight divorced women spoken with, going to Ouagadougou was a matter of existential as well as personal safety. One woman told us how she had been frozen out of the village by her former in-laws, another told us how she had been the target of some nasty rumours and yet another told us how her former husband often raged through the village in a drunken stupor threatening her with violence. For the latter woman, moving to Ouagadougou was specifically related to the fact “that here is police that can stop crazy men”. Indeed, a common reason among women moving to Ouagadougou was that the city is considered safer for women than the village.

That Ouagadougou was considered the only place to go was also related to the fact that the city offered recently divorced women a chance to start anew. This idea was very closely related to finding a new husband, something all of the divorced women spoken with desired. In contrast to the villages, the personal histories of the women do not matter so much to potential future urban husbands. Indeed, during fieldwork we were often told that many Ouagadougou marriages were not first marriages.

4.5 Climate variability

Considering the climate variability experienced in Burkina Faso over the last decade (e.g. D’haen et al., 2014; Epule, Peng, Lepage, & Chen, 2014) and future climate change predictions (Christensen & Hewitson, 2007), it is perhaps not surprising that among our informants precipitation variability was considered a major problem. Interviewees from all three major rainfall regions of the country told us how agricultural production remained difficult due to poor and unpredictable rainfall. Combined with this, an increased competition for land, a growing population, lacking mechanisation, fertilisation and improved seeds, and poor soils had resulted in an increasingly untenable agricultural situation in many villages (see also Reenberg, 2009). “Agriculture”, a middle-aged man from the central plateau said, “does just not make

much sense anymore". Asked if this had not been the case since the major droughts of the early 1970s and 1980s he told us that the problems with precipitation today were the same, but that "the length of time there have been problems with rainfall in this country is the problem". This was a common storyline among the people interviewed on this matter. For them agriculture had become increasingly unattractive as there appeared to be little hope of improvement of the rainfall. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, according to the interviewees, people still hoped for an improved rainfall regime, but now this hope was no longer present for many people.

This has major implications for circular migration. According to the interviewees, many of the people moving from the villages to Ouagadougou no longer plan to return or in fact do return. Regarding the latter, we were told in 27 out of 34 interviews touching upon this topic that while people in the past had almost always returned home after some time in Ouagadougou this was no longer the rule. The reasons for returning were almost exclusively connected to agricultural work "but for many of my friends this is not attractive, you work all day and get nothing because of poor soil and rain". Moreover, many of the young men like the one just quoted have no land in the village to practice agriculture on. This is particularly the case for many of the returnees from the Côte d'Ivoire and hence for them, like other young men, circular migration was not on the agenda: "No there is nothing in the village for me, no land and even if I had some land I do not have the machines, the seeds or the fertiliser to do agriculture and there is always the variable rain. One year it rains, the next it doesn't. So I will stay here".

4.6 Work

Many of our informants mentioned work as the most important reason behind contemporary rural-to-urban migration (Table 1). Work is extremely hard to find in many villages and due to deteriorating climatic conditions, a growing rural population, less available land and, according to our informants, increasing job opportunities in Ouagadougou many people go there to find work. Regarding the latter, a perceived economic development of Ouagadougou since the mid 2000s was frequently given as a reason. The opening of new clothes shops, supermarkets, pharmacies and markets selling imported second-hand goods such as furniture and household appliances from Europe were mentioned by many of our informants. Similarly, new banks continue to open up in Ouagadougou. Prior to the early 1990s, only three banks existed one informant told us and now "it is impossible to count them". The banks have also moved out of the centre and are now found in almost all areas of town. So are new housing developments. Concrete buildings can be seen across town and along the major roads, many of these four or more floors tall. The increased number and diversity of banks as well as the amount of different and more up-market shops, markets and houses since the first visit by the first author to Ouagadougou in 2007 was indeed striking. So was the increased traffic. According to our informants, most people in Ouagadougou own a motor bike, and an increasing number of people own a car. Traffic is accordingly becoming increasingly heavy and going through town now takes considerably longer than it did in 2007.

According to our informants, the reason behind these developments is that more people have more money. This money comes from a perceived general economic development of Burkina Faso since the early 2000s. This development was linked to a better educated population, the return of better-off migrants from Côte d'Ivoire investing in the country, a growing population generating more competition and activities, and gold. Indeed almost all informants linked the economic development of Ouagadougou to people working with gold. One middle-aged man explained how people working in the mines "invest the money

they make here in Ouagadougou". This, in turn, created jobs for people coming to the city. For the women, as mentioned in section 4.3, often as maids, but also in small-scale commerce, as hair dressers, as shop assistants, and waitresses. The men often found work in the construction sector, as mechanics, vendors, and/or guards. As, according to our informants, such jobs have multiplied over the last decade, coming to Ouagadougou has become a lot more appealing. Another aspect of the gold mining boom experienced in Burkina Faso was that three of the young men interviewed now commuted from their home in Ouagadougou to the mines in alternate shifts of 10 days home and away.

5. Discussion

The six categories described in section 4 were the reasons behind contemporary rural-to-urban migration mentioned most by our informants, and they were all perceived as having developed or become more pronounced since the turn of the millennium. Founded upon qualitative research, it is obviously difficult to argue that the six reasons constitute major demographic trends as we do not know how many people the categories affect: We simply do not have any numbers to support these findings. Consequently we do not claim that the findings presented should be seen as representing demographic trends per se. Yet, the findings indicate that very good reasons for a renewed interest in rural-to-urban migration in Burkina Faso can be found and that these might have had an influence on the number of people leaving rural areas of Burkina Faso and the Côte d'Ivoire to settle in Ouagadougou.

Recent literature from the region to a large extent lends support to this claim. The continued crisis in the Côte d'Ivoire is the first case in point. The crisis has a complex political-economic history, but a fundamental aspect of the crisis were notions of autochthony and belonging captured in the nationalist rhetoric of *ivoirité* taking hold of the Côte d'Ivoire during the 1990s (Bjarnesen, 2013). This had the effect that Burkinabe living permanently often in rural areas or going regularly to the Côte d'Ivoire for seasonal work were singled out as strangers and as unwanted. The brutal killings of more than one hundred Burkinabe migrant workers in the Ivorian town Tabou in 1999 was not the first violent manifestation of this political turn but the killings generated the first visible flow of Burkinabe refugees from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso (Hagberg & Bjarnesen, 2011; Zongo, 2010). During field work it was consistently pointed out how migrants from Côte d'Ivoire continued to arrive, illustrating that relative security for Burkinabe settlers in Côte d'Ivoire has not been obtained. Combined with the reports of growing existential uncertainty in Burkinabe villages for many returnees due to sorcery, poor living conditions and no access to land, the argument heard among the informants that most of these returnees come to Ouagadougou makes good sense. Bearing in mind the tentative estimates of about 500,000 to one million forced returns from Côte d'Ivoire during the period 2002-2006 (Boswell, 2010; Zongo, 2010), it is reasonable to assume that the conclusion made by our informants that the Ivorian crisis has caused an increasing number of mainly rural migrants seem fair.

This might also be the case regarding the influence of precipitation variability on contemporary migration patterns within Burkina Faso. In Burkina Faso, the climatic conditions are critical to rural households for which rain-fed subsistence agriculture represents the main source of livelihood (Niemeijer & Mazzucato, 2002) and a correlation between historical as well as immediate rainfall and labour migration has been identified (e.g. Cordell, Gregory, & Piché, 1996; D'haen et al., 2014; Henry et al., 2004; Nielsen & Reenberg, 2010; Rain, 1999).

Yet, the effect of rainfall variability on rural-to-urban migration and the growth of cities in Burkina Faso is not straightforward (Henry et al., 2003; Henry et al., 2004). A reason for this is the preference for circular migration as a livelihood strategy among the different ethnic groups in Burkina Faso (e.g. Rain, 1999). It has been estimated that as many as 60% of men and 15% of women leaving their village after the age of 15 return within 10 years (Henry et al., 2004). Such migration implies that rural Burkinabe migrant workers formerly going to the Côte d'Ivoire and now, as argued in this paper, increasingly Ouagadougou return home as soon as possible (e.g. Bjarnesen, 2013; Gugler, 2002) "suggesting that life in town is undesirable" (Parnell & Walawege, 2011, p. 517).

Henry et al. (2004, pp. 255, italics in original text) note the emphasis on circular migration in their own results and in the literature on rural-to-urban migration in Burkina Faso arguing that "it could be fruitful to examine the effect of environmental conditions of the village of origin on the risk of *returning* to that village". On the continental scale, it is increasingly argued that global climate change makes returning less and less desirable, encouraging more permanent rural-to-urban migration (Annez, Buckley, & Kalarickal, 2010; IOM, 2009; Parnell & Walawege, 2011). McGranahan et al. (2009, p. 12) notes that it is "likely that as a consequence of climate change this movement will increase and intensify, and possibly become more permanent". If climate variability makes returning less attractive, as most of the returnees would go back to participate in rain-fed agricultural activities (e.g. Nielsen & Reenberg, 2010), then the number of returnees could be significantly affected. Indeed, the results showed that this might be happening. Almost all interviewees emphasised that the continued problem with poor rain has resulted in not only people leaving the villages but also that far fewer migrants go back to their village. The explanation being that no hope for improved climate conditions remained. Whether this trend persists over time will have to be seen, but combining poor precipitation, a growing population and various other problems associated with living in the village (see section 4.2, 4.3, 4.4), it seems very likely that a potential break down in the strong emphasis on circular migration might have taken place since the turn of the century, resulting, in turn, in less urban out-migration as the migrants settle permanently in Ouagadougou.

Turning to the issue of increased female migration, the literature also tends to support our informants' observations. Migration rates of young females (aged 15-19) have been on the increase in Burkina Faso since the early 1980s, and in the 1990s young females were recorded as having higher rates than their male counterparts (Beauchemin, 2011). Towards the end of the 1990s this trend was so pronounced in Burkina Faso that, at the time, researchers expected "an increase in female rural out-migration" (Le Jeune, Piche, & Poirier, 2004). Massive rural out-migration of the male population has left many rural women in poor living conditions and resulted in 'the feminisation of poverty' in West Africa. This has driven women out of the rural areas including Burkina Faso (Adepoju, 2003); a point often raised among our informants.

As mentioned in section 4.3 and 4.4, the perceived increasing numbers of female rural-to-urban migrants among our informants were not only linked to economic factors. Among them, as well as in the literature, it is increasingly argued that "women leave rural areas not only to escape from poverty but also from male dependency" (Le Jeune et al., 2004, p. 148). Our informants linked this development in Burkina Faso to increased education enhancing aspirations for autonomy among women (e.g. Bocquier & Traore, 2000), to restrictive social norms preventing female out-migration from rural areas breaking down (e.g. Le Jeune et al., 2004), to new work opportunities in the cities as mainly maids (e.g. Beauchemin, 2011), and to rural

women being increasingly exposed to the discourse of female empowerment among the growing number of development projects in Burkina Faso (e.g. Nielsen, 2010; Nielsen, D'haen, & Reenberg, 2012).

The most prominent reasons given were, however, the desire to marry a city man in order to escape village life, to divorce or to escape arranged marriages. Regarding the latter, considerable social pressure to marry early, particularly in the rural areas, is part and parcel of many women's lives in Burkina Faso (Ouedraogo, 2013), and almost 52% of Burkinabe women get married before they are 18 years old (Walker, 2012). Arranged marriages are now less common but it is still a wide-spread practice according to our informants and the literature (Nielsen, 2009; Ouedraogo, 2013). As noted in section 4.3 and 4.4, younger women increasingly leave their villages to escape an arranged marriage, but also when they have gone through a divorce. According to our informants, and the literature (Thiombiano & Schoumaker, 2012), the divorce rate is increasing in Burkina Faso. Because women are largely confined to their husbands' home in the villages a divorce is, however, problematic for the women. The patrilineal and patrilocal kinship systems found among almost all ethnic groups in Burkina Faso entail that the woman leaves her father's house when marrying and moves in with her husband and his family (Gausset, Mogensen, Yameogo, Berthe, & Konate, 2012; Samuelsen, 2006). For this reason the women remain a 'stranger' in their new home and often new village. This leaves many Burkinabe women vulnerable and they are in increasing numbers reported to be seriously exposed to exclusion, discrimination and violence (Bila & Egrot, 2009; Gausset et al., 2012). This sense of vulnerability was expressed by our female informants, and the combination of this and increased female autonomy due to, for example, education seem very good reasons behind the apparently growing number of women moving to Ouagadougou from various villages across the country.

This can also be said about sorcery, and again the literature seems to support our informants' observations, as problems with sorcery across SSA and Burkina Faso are increasingly reported. In many parts of contemporary SSA, there is a general consternation about the proliferation of sorcery over the last decade (e.g. Cimpric, 2010). Found in all sectors of society from the village to the city, from the rich to the poor, in politics, in the financial sector, in hospitals and universities, the recent interest in sorcery is not just "a novel twist of the anthropological tradition" but something that "imposes itself in often quite dramatic and also unpleasant ways in the field" (Geschiere, 2011, p. 235). In the literature, the sorcery discourse is often linked to issues of modernity and seen as remaining relevant because it offers a language which helps people make sense of modern changes including new forms of wealth and inequality, as Geschiere (2011) notes (see also Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993). This aspect was also emphasised by our informants.

In Burkina Faso, the issue of sorcery has received considerable attention in the media since the mid-2000s and a government plan of action aimed at halting the increasing banishment of particularly older women from their homes due to sorcery accusations is currently being implemented (Guardian, 2014). The discrimination of older women and their subsequent flight, often into government and NGO shelters located in the major cities including Ouagadougou (HelpAge, 2010), is a dramatic example of the level of sorcery currently found in Burkina Faso. Although these shelters are growing, according to the people asked and to media and NGO reports, the fact that older women were increasingly accused of sorcery was not mentioned as really influencing rural-to-urban migration. It was rather the fear of being *subjected* to sorcery in the villages that figured among the men and women, particularly those returning from the Côte d'Ivoire, as a major reason behind contemporary rural-to-urban migration.

Among our informants, finding work was another crucial reason for coming to Ouagadougou. This is not surprising. African migration is often explained in terms of finding employment, and most theories of migration posit that “[e]mployment is central to all rural-to-urban migration theories because the search for a job is seen as the primary, if not the only, motivation for migration” (Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004, p. 2257). The literature that emphasises a declining or stagnating rural-to-urban migration accordingly often explains this in terms of an economic decline in the cities (Potts, 1995, 2005). In Burkina Faso, Beauchemin (2011, p. 61) similarly links the migration stagnation or reversal during the 1990s to an increasing precarious economic situation in Ouagadougou because there, as well as elsewhere, “the economic crisis affected not only the modern sector but also the informal sector, which employs the bulk of the urban population”. This situation has created a “new urban poor” (Potts, 1997) forced to adjust their behaviour according to new economic circumstances often resulting in a return to the rural home (e.g. Potts, 1997; Tacoli, 2008).

Such a return requires, however, that there is food and employment available in the village (Harris & Todaro, 1970), but, as our results indicate, this is often not the case, mainly due to climate variability and lack of land. Moreover, return migration seems increasingly unattractive because of sorcery, existential vulnerability and poor living conditions. More importantly, the economic downturn experienced in Ouagadougou during the 1990s seems to have changed. Among our informants, this was linked to a general improvement in the economic situation of the country. This explanation is supported by data from the UN and the World Bank showing relatively strong annual growth rates during the 2000s. Particularly the trade balance has improved significantly (UN Comtrade, 2014). This is very closely related to the export of gold. In 2009, for example, gold worth an estimated 379.5 million US dollars was exported while the number for 2011 was 1790.4 US million dollars (UN Comtrade, 2014). That this has affected life in Ouagadougou by way of creating economic activities and jobs, as our informants argued, seems, again, reasonable to assume.

These findings obviously need to be supported by for example census data. Yet the consistency among our informants’ stories and the strong correlation between the findings and the literature indicate that the findings presented have the potential to at least challenge or move contemporary research on rural-to-urban migration in SSA forward. As such this paper is meant as a reflection upon the issue of rural-to-urban migration rather than a definite statement. The same can maybe be said about research based upon statistical census data. It is consistently argued that much of the literature on this issue of rural-to-urban migration is based upon UN-Habitat data which are dated, limited in scope and in some cases of questionable character (Satterthwaite, 2010). The UN-Habitat (e.g. 2010) series *The State of African Cities*, one of the major sources of the data used to explore this phenomenon, even acknowledges these shortcomings. In their 2010 report they write, for example, that urbanisation is slowing and that radical revisions of previously published urbanisation levels and their datasets is needed which “suggest that past errors are being recognised” within the UN-Habitat (Potts, 2012b, p. 3).

Particularly a change in rural-to-urban migration patterns is put forward as an explanation for the claimed erroneous urbanisation predictions within the UN-Habitat (Satterthwaite, 2010). For Potts (2009, p. 254), the “data speak for themselves”. According to Potts, “there is accumulating evidence... that net immigration to towns has slowed very significantly” in SSA, leading in some cases to “counter-urbanisation” (Potts, 2009, p. 254). A substantial part of the evidence Potts draws on comes from Francophone West Africa (e.g. Beauchemin, 2011; Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004). Potts writes that a drop of rural-to-urban in-

migration and subsequent urbanisation seen in SSA “tie in with the general findings of other research on migration and urbanisation in francophone West Africa” (2012a, p. 1386). In this region, migration is argued to contribute only “moderately to urban growth” and “rural outmigration (i.e. rural-to-urban migration) was declining or at least in stagnation while the reverse flow (urban outmigration) was tending to increase at the end of the twentieth century” (Beauchemin, 2011, p. 48). Secondary towns in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal registered similarly a net loss of migrants from rural areas between 1988 and 1992 while net migration rates of rural areas of Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger were close to zero “suggesting that rural-to-urban migration is not as massive as expected or that the reverse movement has increased” (Beauchemin, 2011, p. 49; Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004). Regarding Ouagadougou, the decreasing amount of migrants has been used to explain a drop from annual growth rates of 9.8% during 1975-85 to only 4.4% during 1985-96 (Beauchemin & Schoumaker, 2005).

We do not question these studies, but our results indicate that since 2000 (a period not covered by the above cited studies) a number of events with a potential to change the declining rural-to-urban migration rates have taken place. That these, such as the Côte d’Ivoire crisis and the economic developments, have affected the contemporary pattern of rural-to-urban migration seems plausible considering our informants’ statements and the literature. While, and as mentioned earlier, we cannot support this argument by actual numbers, we nevertheless believe that our fieldwork and the literature provide some food for thought. Using pre-2000 census data to argue for a rural-to-urban migration reversal, at least as far as Burkina Faso is concerned, seems questionable in light of our findings and the literature. Accordingly, the data used to argue for a rural-to-urban migration reversal might no longer ‘speak for themselves’. Where this leaves the counter-urbanisation and rural-to-urban argument in SSA is an open question, but it should at least caution researchers from pulling in Burkina Faso as an example of a contemporary rural-to-urban migration reversal. As Potts herself notes, urbanisation and rural-to-urban migration in SSA increasingly calls for research that examines “what is actually happening and where” because there is “accumulating evidence that there are important variations occurring both within and between countries” (Potts, 2012a, p. 1382). This paper has provided such research. Admittedly the evidence presented is qualitative but in the absence of reliable and current quantitative data on the topic qualitative data is all we have.

6. Conclusion

Rural-to-urban migration in SSA is currently a much debated topic. In this paper we have focused on the six most important reasons behind rural-to-urban migration given by people currently living in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. A key finding was that contemporary issues such as the Ivorian crisis, sorcery, gender roles, climate variability and new work opportunities are very influential in generating recent rural-to-urban migration flows. Placing this finding in current literature suggests that our results are rooted in more general contemporary “economic, political, and demographic factors underpinning urban population growth or rural-urban migration” seen across SSA and Burkina Faso (Satterthwaite, 2010, p. 5).

That contemporary issues drive current rural-to-urban migration has wider implications. Ouagadougou is an often used counter example to the underlying assumption in much of the literature that rural-to-urban migration is currently a major reason behind ‘out of control’ urbanisation in SSA (Satterthwaite, 2010, p. 7). Strong literature based upon retrospective data from national migration surveys conducted in Burkina Faso

has shown how in the late 1980s and 1990s an urban-to-rural migration stagnation and urban outmigration took place (e.g. Beauchemin, 2011, p. 49; Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2004). We do not challenge these results nor do we argue that the move from rural to urban areas in Burkina Faso is unlikely to alter until it “reaches the point at which their countryside have aged and become underpopulated” (see also Bryceson, 2002; Bryceson, Gough, Rigg, & Agergaard, 2009, p. 731). Nevertheless, our results and the literature do indicate that the stagnation or reversal trends recorded in the 1990s are perhaps no longer observable in Burkina Faso. Hence, post-2000 Ouagadougou might no longer be a valid example to challenge the “myths” (Potts, 2012a) of rapid rural-to-urban migration and subsequent high urbanisation rates in SSA.

To really determine whether our findings represent new demographic trends further research is needed. This should ideally be quantitative research as this is better suited to determine demographic trends than qualitative ethnographic research is. Lacking quantitative data (as is often the case in SSA) should, however, not stop research into this issue. As demonstrated, qualitative research on migration can reveal potentially important migration reasons and trends such as changing gender relations. Such insights could, in turn, provide information for future quantitative survey/census based studies. Including the six categories discussed in this paper in, for example, a national migration survey would, we think, provide a good picture of recent and current rural-to-urban migration trends in Burkina Faso.

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