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**MOBILE YOUTH WITH LITTLE FORMAL EDUCATION:
WORK OPPORTUNITIES AND PRACTICES**

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Abstract

This paper explores the frictions experienced by child and youth migrants in the urban labour market and in particular between family labour, wage labour and being independent. It is based primarily on the author's research in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire but also draws links to recent research in both Francophone and Anglophone West Africa. The paper looks at new migrants' initiation to the urban labour market, their occupational repertoire, employment relationships and how young people negotiate these relationships. Furthermore, it examines young migrants' strategies played out in job-hopping and occupational bricolage.

Introduction

This paper explores rural children and youth's participation in the urban labour market. The broad range of activities in which teenagers engage has by and large been left under-researched, as has the progress that young migrants make as they gain more knowledge about urban ways and the labour market. The 'informal sector' is sometimes mentioned in connection with the worst forms of child labour but apart from the studies on *kayaye* - young female head porters - in Ghana (Agarwal *et al.* 1997, Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008, Kwankye *et al.* 2009), little research has focused on children and youth involved in this sector.

Much has been written about the informal sector and especially about the dichotomy between the formal- and informal sector coined by Hart (1973) to describe the complexity of labour and income in urban economies in Africa in the 1960s. However, the economic crisis and structural adjustment programmes since the 1980s have had such pervasive consequences that this dichotomy is no longer relevant. Most people, irrespective of their economic standing, increase their earnings by stretching income-generation across several formal and informal activities (Calvès and Schoumaker 2004, Lachaud 1994a). Employees in the public service or in private enterprises may thus invest part of their income in small informal businesses such as telephone centres, internet cafés and small restaurants and put their wife or a close relative in charge of the daily running of the business (Kanté 2002). We are therefore not dealing with two separate sectors but with an increasing informalisation of the entire economy (Meagher 2005). While activities in the informal realm of the economy are usually labelled as self-employment and small-scale businesses dependent on unpaid family labour, the increasing intertwining of finances deriving from formal employment and informal endeavours has led to stratification among the actors operating in the informal arena. As a result, new forms of employment have emerged outside the formal structures of a regulated labour market. Frequently, employment is ambiguously defined because employers seek to cast doubt about the existence of an employment relationship and about the respective terms of reference for the employer and the employees (Chen 2004). According to Roy & Wheeler (2006: 454) more than 80% of all enterprises in West Africa in the early 2000s operated informally and they provided jobs for around 50% of all workers.

Nevertheless, few studies have focused specifically on employment practices in the informal labour market. For children and youth this is particularly important since the failing educational system and deepened poverty push them into precarious work. Moreover, economic difficulties and stark competition encourage employers to choose low qualified but cheaper labour (Kanté 2002, Morice 1987).

The notions of self-employment and unpaid family labour have stuck to activities in the informal economy. Presumably this is because recent research has had different foci, e.g. female entrepreneurs, micro-finance, social exclusion and empowerment through global organisation. This paper goes against the grain and aims to foreground employment practices involving children and youth. More specifically, it aims to explore the tensions they experience between notions of family labour, wage labour and self-employment/independent remunerative activities. To understand their experiences however, it is important not to take these notions for granted but to unpack what they imply in the West African context.

Family labour, for example, does not only resonate with a nuclear family of two or three generations but with a much broader set of people who can make claims on the labour of, or are obliged to work for, particular persons (Robertson 1984, Whitehead 1986). Such claims are usually made within households and lineages, across lineages tied together by marriage, and in social relations that have developed family-like, affectionate qualities. For children, complying with or going against claims on their labour is linked with establishing and maintaining important social relationships, hence the sense of family and the willingness to accept being family labour may be linked more with household membership and the fulfilment of its associated bundles of obligations and responsibilities than with blood ties (Thorsen 2008).

The notion of wage labour, on the other hand, relates to a capitalist mode of production, where labour power is separated from social relations and marketable according to skills, supply and demand. In a text about the colonial discourses on labour in African societies, Frederick Cooper makes clear what is at stake in the African context;

the problem [for the colonial administration] was not just that getting Africans *into* wage labour was a many-faceted social process, but that once *inside* places of work, Africans were still social beings, and the relationships and attitudes they formed among themselves helped to determine how efficiently they worked and how much danger they posed.

(Cooper 1989:746)

Although African economies have undergone continuous processes of change since then, the increasing informalisation casts doubts as to whether we can speak of employment relations as really being wage work based uniquely on capitalist market relations. Concretely, people are put to work because of their position within the household, the network of kin or social relations, not because of their skills which they potentially could sell in the labour market. Moreover, most employment relationships are part of low level patronage systems and they are based on thick social relations which people seek to extend and consolidate even more (Chauveau 1998, Whitehead pers.com.).

Finally, the notion of self-employment at the heart of common conceptualisations of the informal economy has elicited varied interpretations over time. In the 1960s, small-scale informal activities were perceived negatively as backward, traditional and of low productivity, whereas in the 1970s they came to be seen as the solution to urban unemployment and poverty, and in the 1980s and 1990s as entrepreneurial and flexible (Potts 2008:154-56). These views are all reflected in recent strategies to target urban youth unemployment, which in the spirit of neo-liberal ideologies accentuate individual entrepreneurship but also that youth lack the right skills to be either employable or capable of running their own business.

Advancing a culture of apprenticeship among youths is central to economic growth and thus job creation in West Africa. Surveys indicate that a significant proportion of young people would prefer to be self-employed rather than salaried. Finding ways to realise the business ideas of young people, and then promoting micro and small-scale enterprises would be one way to bring this about.

(UNOWA 2006:25)

The following sections examine young migrants' concrete experiences in the urban informal economy and offer a window on how they negotiate working relations on the border line between family labour and wage labour, whether they really prefer being self-employed, why that is and what obstacles they encounter. First, I outline the types of jobs that are available to rural children and youth coming to the city, then I discuss the family labour - wage labour nexus before moving on to show how youngsters mature and develop skills and aspirations that shape their life trajectories. Finally, I outline in which areas policy measures could be of importance for child and youth migrants in this kind of setting.

Work and Employment Opportunities in the City

Policy on children's work has generally been targeted at eliminating the worst forms of child labour. As a result, the focus has been on exploitative employment in which children were perceived to carry out work that was physically much too hard for them, work without remuneration or both. Another group of children, who have received much attention, are those working in the streets. While they were also perceived to be in need of protection, the logic was slightly different in as much as they have often been linked with delinquency and the best protective measure has been perceived to be getting them off the streets and into vocational training.

Working youth, on the other hand, have not received much attention - unemployed youth have. Within the West African region, young men especially are seen as potential security threats in fragile states while young women are perceived to be at risk of moral decay because the lack of employment pushes them into prostitution and thus puts them at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, youth are perceived to undertake risky journeys to Europe to escape unemployment and the lack of opportunities to secure a better future for themselves.

Qualitative research with child and youth migrants within the region offers a more nuanced picture by highlighting the variety of occupations and the differences in how youngsters get into certain types of work.

Initiation into urban work

Most independent child migrants are in their mid or late teens when they first migrate, and despite the fact that they are independent in the sense of not travelling with their biological parents, they rarely travel on their own. Their entry into urban work depends on their travel companions. Moreover, it depends on their age, gender and local concepts of age- and gender appropriate work.

My research with adolescent, predominantly male migrants from the Bisa region in south-eastern Burkina Faso¹ in 2005 revealed that almost half of the interviewees migrated to Ouagadougou with friends and brothers of a similar age while the rest went with older kin, of whom some were closely related and others just belonged to the same lineage or village. Travelling with other juniors implied setting off with an age-mate who also had no urban experience or going with someone who had worked in the city for a few years. The former was often the case, when younger boys left without their parents' knowledge and failed to convince any of the slightly older migrants to take them along. It did however not mean that they were left to their own devices once they were in the city. Distant relatives or members of the same ethnic group put them up temporarily while they searched for work by going from door to door. Entering the informal labour market in this manner emphasised the wage labour relation that the youngsters wished for – or perhaps rather the wage itself than a formal employment relation. They were happy to sleep in their employer's household and saw it as a positive quality when they were treated like a marginal household member.

A 16-year old migrant explained that he had worked for a woman who also employed two girls to do the domestic work and prepare the different types of cold drinks. In his view, the girls were the ones who worked hard while he just wheeled around two ice boxes to reach

¹ Very few girls migrated independently to Ouagadougou from this region in 2005 but they had begun migrating to rural towns in the region either to work as daytime domestics returning home at night or to sell cold drinks and snacks in the market during the dry season.

out to customers. He lived in his employer's household and usually started work at 7 am after having had breakfast and he finished around 9 pm when he had his dinner. During the day, he bought his own lunch. Although he worked long hours, the rest of the household members were likely to work just as much, and like several other migrant boys living with non-kin, his relationship with his employer resembled one between members of the extended family.

Most rural child migrants in Ouagadougou became itinerant vendors of sachets of iced water and local juices or dishwashers in food stalls at the road-side and in tiny food kiosks when they first arrived. In the literature on the informal economy, street vending is usually perceived as self-employment or micro-enterprises, possibly drawing on the labour of one's own children. However, in towns and cities in Burkina Faso it is common for women to employ boys and girls to sell their home-fabricated juices or snacks from trays carried on the head or ice boxes on a small cart. The children work on a contractual basis where they earn a 20% commission of their actual sale or a fixed wage, which in 2005 was 3,000 F (US\$ 6.25, one-tenth of the formal minimum wage) per month. Vending cold drinks was a hot-season occupation, once the rains began and temperatures cooled down, the trade rapidly declined and many women switched off their freezers because the profit did not cover the electricity bill or the children earned so little that they began to look for other jobs.

Older and physically stronger boys found work delivering water from communal water taps to households by pushing small carts with a water drum. Although they earned two to three times more than the little street vendors did, they did not make it their line of business by buying a water drum but remained employees or shifted to different types of jobs. Others found employment as kitchen hands and waiters in food kiosks and small restaurants and as brick-makers on the periphery of construction sites. Contrary to vending cold drinks, these jobs were not seasonal but of a longer duration.

Travelling with junior migrants was linked with circular migration and the fact that many youngsters returned to help their family farm if their labour was needed or to attend important ceremonies such as funerals and weddings. When these young 'early career' migrants travelled to the city again, they were often accompanied by younger 'brothers', who could be biological siblings, half-siblings, cousins or friends of a similar age. These

relationships were relatively equal as the older migrants could not easily find employment for the younger ones or create work for them in their own business because they were in precarious economic circumstances themselves (Thorsen 2009a). Instead, they initiated the younger ones to the same type activities in the informal economy and inculcated similar strategies for maximising their incomes.

Of four itinerant shoe-shiners interviewed in 2005, the two oldest, aged seventeen and eighteen years, had come to Ouagadougou every dry season in the past five years during which time they had held different types of jobs. Shoe-shining was a tide-over occupation for young Bisa migrants before finding employment and between jobs. This year, the older boys were accompanied by two younger brothers aged fourteen and fifteen years and they spent the first couple of days introducing the newcomers to the secrets of shoe-shining. They showed them how to shine shoes, in which neighbourhoods they could expect to find most customers, how to approach them with the deference required in customer-dealings, especially while awaiting the standard payment of 50 F (US\$ 0.10) per pair of shoes. They also introduced their younger brothers to urban life in general and, perhaps most importantly, encouraged them to enquire about employment in small food kiosks, restaurants and bars. It was rare to see itinerant shoe-shiners in their twenties, generally the young Bisa succeeded in finding employment or alternatively entered into itinerant trade or migrated to other destinations.

For children and youth, travelling with senior migrants usually implied that they would work for their travel companion or that the senior would take charge of finding work for them. Young migrants coming to Ouagadougou or Abidjan with senior migrants often worked in their food kiosks, small shops or on brick-making sites. Prior to migration both children and youth claimed that they did not mind what work they would be asked to do, the primary objective was to become a migrant. None of the interviewees complained about the work they had been asked to do but, as we shall see below, disagreements over the status of the relationship and thus of the need for a remuneration sometimes created tensions.

Analogous practices operate in Ghana when rural children and youth migrate from the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions to Accra or Kumasi. Studies carried out by Kwankye *et al.* (2007) and Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf (2008) show that the vast majority of girls worked as *kayayei* in and around the big markets, whereas boys had a slightly wider range of possibilities. In Accra, almost half of the boys interviewed by Kwankye *et al.* (2007) worked as technicians or mechanics and one quarter as street vendors or petty

traders, while in Kumasi close to half the boys worked as 'truck pushers' – porters moving goods on small carts and the other half engaged in street vending and trade.

The initiation to urban work for these youngsters also happened through friends and relatives and the low entry costs in these types of work were of key importance to enable them to set up as marginal actors in the informal economy (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008, Ofosu-Kusi and Mizen 2005). Similar to the young migrants seeking

Kayayei work is lowly paid. Even though girls and young women sought to protect their earning capacity by subtly demarcating work territories founded on ethnicity, they only earned 10,000-20,000 cedis (US\$ 1.20-2.20) per day on average. One older *kayayei* described their protective practices as follows,

At first, Dagombas were in Agbogloshie market, now they are also in Accra central and their base is the lorry station near Novotel. However, they can move to anywhere they like. We, the Mamprusis, are based in Tema Station. We can carry goods to the Novotel park but cannot pick goods from there unless there are no Dagomba around. We cannot mix with the other ethnic groups because if one mixes with them they might do something wrong and one will get into trouble with them.

(Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf (2008:177)

employment spontaneously, shoe-shiners and *kayayei* made certain that they would earn some money rather than being free family labour.

Initiation through social relations tends to create occupational niches: in Ouagadougou, almost all the itinerant shoe-shiners were Bisa and in Accra and Kumasi, most of the *kayayei* were Dagombas and Mamprusis. In spite of social regulation, the sheer number of youngsters engaging in a niche occupation means that they out-compete themselves by saturating the market for their services and risk eroding their earning capacity, as is common across the informal economy (Chauveau 1998). At the same time, the lack of employment opportunities and the importance of knowing the right behaviour and invisible boundaries between permissible and off-limit places not to get into trouble with the police and watchmen reinforce the mechanism of newcomers entering the same niche activities as their friends and relatives.

Whether young rural migrants become independent street workers offering petty services for negligible fees, or employed street vendors on commission or workers in food places, shops or brick-making sites for a low monthly wage is linked concretely with their travel companions.

At a more abstract level, it is linked with the demand for cheap labour to maximise the profit of small catering businesses or to provide cheap services.

Occupational repertoire

One of the obstacles for young rural migrants in West Africa is their low level or lack of formal education, which narrow the range of jobs available to them because they are turned down for jobs where literacy or numeracy is a prerequisite. Table 1 gives an indication of the diversity of occupations for rural children and youth in Ouagadougou. Upon closer scrutiny it

Table 1. Young migrants' present and past occupations, Ouagadougou 2005.

	Current occupation		Work trajectories ^b	
	Girls (n=2)	Boys (n=47) ^a	Girls (n=2)	Boys (n=47)
Street vending				
Cold drinks or snacks	1	1	1	19
Own goods	-	3	-	4
Services				
Managing communal water tap	-	1	-	2
Delivery of water to households	-	1	-	4
Itinerant shoe-shining	-	24	-	29
Parking guard	-	1	-	1
Domestic	-	-	1	3
Food places				
Food stall or BBQ at the road side	-	4	-	13
Food kiosk	1	7	2	14
Restaurant	-	3	-	4
Bar	-	-	-	5
Other types of work				
Brick-making	-	2	-	5
Construction-work	-	1	-	1
Night-watch	-	1	-	2
Apprentice	-	-	-	1

^a Three boys held a job but also engaged in shoe-shining or trade part-time and four boys had enrolled in evening school while shining-shoes during day-time.

^b This column indicates the number of occupations the adolescent migrants have or have had during their migration.

is clear that their job repertoire is mainly restricted to itinerant work on the streets (thirty of forty-nine youngsters) and to working in various types of food places (fifteen of forty-nine). But it is also clear that there is some mobility within the informal labour market; a theme that I will discuss in more detail below.

Despite their willingness to work, they quickly learn that local concepts of age- and gender-appropriate work shape relatives' view on the type of work they should mediate for young newcomers and also employers' willingness to take them on.

The older brother of a 13-year-old newcomer, who was vending cold drinks in the streets with his friend and travel companion, took upon himself to find better paid work for the boys. He mediated a job as a fishmonger for the older one while the 13-year-old was put to shine shoes until he took action himself and found a job as dishwasher in a woman's road-side food stall.

Another migrant persuaded a friend of his to employ his younger brother as a brick-maker although the boy was only 14 years old and quite skinny. The employer gave him the lightest task of driving the donkey cart and did the heaviest tasks of loading sand, mixing cement and fabricating the bricks himself. Nevertheless, the boy left the employment after two months only, not because of the work load for he began to work with another brick-maker but because of his first employer's attempts to socialise him and thus restrict his autonomy.

Wide-spread agreement of what constitutes appropriate work for children in particular age groups protects to a certain extent the youngest ones from very hard physical work but it also keeps them in occupational positions requiring no particular skills and yielding low incomes until they have proved their ability to work. The youngest migrants thus experience social exclusion from more economic arenas than older youth who are better at navigating the urban context because of their life skills and often also their longer migration experience.

Gender also influences the kind of work, in which young migrants are able to engage. The Ghanaian studies mentioned above suggest that unskilled girls' repertoire of occupations is narrower than boys' in as much as they primarily became *kayayei* though in Kumasi girls also worked in trade, street vending and as technicians (Kwankye *et al.* 2009). Hashim's (2007) study of independent child migrants from the Upper East to rural and urban destinations around Kumasi offers more details about the diversity of skilled occupations at which young migrants aimed if they were not in formal education. She found that girls

aspired to training in tailoring, tie-and-dye, hairdressing and catering while boys trained in mechanics and carpentry. A study of child relocation in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali adds sewing, embroidering, weaving and knitting to girls' training and welding, fishing, tailoring and becoming truck drivers to boys' repertoire (Riisøen *et al.* 2004).

While boys may enter into some of the occupations domineered by girls, it is rare to see girls train in typically male occupations such as mechanics and carpentry. It is also worthwhile to note that the vocational training typical for boys and young men had an employment potential whereas girls' and young women's training in for example knitting and embroidering was more likely to help them diversify their sources of income than in finding employment or having business potential in the sense of employing others.

Gender differences do not only derive from local notions of appropriate work but also from particular foci in policy thinking. Advocacy against child labour has been particularly concerned about girl domestic workers in urban settings and the extent to which the girls were exploited as cheap labour, trafficked and at risk of sexual abuse. Applied and academic research has, on the other hand, documented girls travelled with sisters of a similar age and got help from long-term female migrants to find a placement or were brought to the city by a female relative (Burkina Faso (Terre des Hommes 2003), Côte d'Ivoire (Jacquemin 2002, 2004), Mali (Castle and Diarra 2003, Lambert 2007)).² The emphasis on girl domestic workers, and especially on negative aspects of their work, overshadows the plight or pleasure of boys and young men's domestic work.

Seydou had worked as a domestic for a Bisa in Ouagadougou with whom he was not related. "I worked for five months without receiving any pay and finally in the sixth month my employer gave me 25,000 F (US\$ 52) Even though the money didn't cover what he owed me, I left to find another job."

Yaya, a 24-year-old migrant in Abidjan, explained why he would have liked to work as a domestic. "When I came from Burkina, I'd never imagined that I would do the work that I do at the moment. I thought I would get a job that wouldn't make me tired and, well, that I

² The topic of domestic work is dealt with in detail in the paper presented to the workshop by Dr. Mélanie Jacquemin.

wouldn't be under the scorching sun all day, perhaps working in the house of someone and not getting too exhausted!"

Gender blindness and narrow conceptualisations of who carries out what works also affect boys and male youth. Those working in domestic service doing laundry, ironing and cleaning are completely invisible, even if this type of employment ranks high in status as positioned between manual work requiring physical stamina and indoors white-collar work. For those with some education but without competitive certificates, domestic work in elite families and customer service in various businesses are attractive for exactly this reason.

Bar work is subject to a similar stereotyping: both the advocacy and the research literature focusing on adolescent girls' reproductive health have linked this type of work with prostitution. Young men's work as waiters thus becomes invisible, as do young women's motivations for taking jobs in bars. Ouédraogo's (1995) study of young female Dagara migrants in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso offers a window on waitresses' aspirations to 'be someone' and their building of social status through clothing, hairstyles and grooming but also through assisting in keeping younger siblings in school and supporting their mother.

In spite of low levels of formal education, rural children and youth have a range of possible occupations but within a narrow section of the labour market.

Although preferences for vocational training are highly gendered, training broadens the occupational repertoire significantly for both girls and boys but providing boys with more employment opportunities.

The Family Labour – Wage Labour Nexus

Child and youth issues are usually dealt with separately in advocacy and development literature hence conceptual contradictions related to the group of children/youth aged fifteen to eighteen years tend to pass unnoticed. Children's work outside their home is generally considered to have a negative impact on them while youth, on the other hand, are perceived to have the right to employment outside the family, assuming that this is required for their transition into adulthood. Both views are premised on a complete separation of waged work

from social relations and obligations. This fits poorly with the West African context where family and friends are key sources of information and instrumental for being introduced appropriately to potential employers (see for example, Chant and Jones 2005, Hart 1973, and Lachaud 1994a).

Qualitative research highlights the blurred boundaries between family relations and employment in the informal economy.

Negotiating the terms of labour

Focusing on a mixed group of migrants and non-migrants, Guichaoua (2006) examined what kind of contractual forms they entered when working in construction sites and small garment industries in Abidjan. He observed that employment by a parent, intermediation by a parent, intermediation by a friend or spontaneous applications were equally important channels through which youth found work. Only paid workers, of whom the majority worked in construction sites, were re-employed by former employers but the most common ways of getting a job was through applying spontaneously to an unknown employer (33%) and through friends' intermediation (25%). Apprentices and unpaid workers, which constituted the two other analytical categories in Guichaoua's study, primarily worked in the garment industry. More than half the apprenticeships were mediated and sponsored by parents (52%) whereas unpaid workers frequently worked for a parent (43%) or had a parent mediating the employment relationship (43%).

What is particularly interesting in Guichaoua's study is the link between the access to employment and its remuneration or lack of it. On average, the paid workers in construction sites - and thus the employees who managed to exert their rights to pay - were young men in their mid-twenties, whilst the apprentices and unpaid workers in the garment industry were young women and men just under twenty years of age³. Despite the fact that all employees, including those in construction, continued to use kinship ties to acquire employment, Guichaoua (2006:15) points out that the dynamics changed. This is, he argues, in part because parental authority over children slacken once the children grow older, and in part

³ 76% of the apprentices were young women, as were 36% of the unpaid workers.

because the children over time build up their own social networks through which they seek work.

The argument is based on the assumption that parents are able to exert stronger claims on the labour of children living in their household than are strangers who employ the children. But it raises the question of at which age children are able to disengage themselves from claims on their labour within the household. Guichaoua suggests it happens in the early twenties, though not as a linear process but as a response to vulnerabilities and opportunities. Other studies show that children may travel to look for work inside or outside the network of kin earlier (Chant and Jones 2005, de Lange 2007, Erulkar *et al.* 2006, Hashim 2005).

When adolescent boys from the Bisa region in Burkina Faso did not travel with age mates they sought to persuade close kin to take them along or they befriended distantly related migrants and exposed their wish to find waged work. Established migrants with small businesses in which the youngsters could work often recruited workers in this way. The individual relationships that the youngsters had, and developed, with relatives and employers and with other members of the households where they lived shaped both seniors' ability to make claims on their unremunerated labour, and their willingness to carry out such work.

The orphan Boureima came to Ouagadougou in 2004 with his mother's younger sister, his classificatory 'little mother' (*na puure*) as it were, but left her house over a disagreement about his remuneration. "I walked around in the neighbourhood to sell iced water and because her children are still too small to work, I was the one who worked while her children went to school. At one point, I asked her to pay me, not much, just buy me some clothes but she said she had no money for clothes, so for that reason I left. I'd come to Ouagadougou to work! I found someone else for whom I sold water but soon after my brother told me of this job, as a brick-maker, where I could earn 6,000 F (US\$ 12) per month." In his first job change, the motivation was clearly diverging ideas about the status of the work relationship.

Where Boureima's interpretation hinged on the idea of an employer-employee relationship, although he did not care much if he was paid in kind rather than in cash, his *na puure's* interpretation centred on their close kinship and on her obligations to assist her elderly mother, who had taken care of Boureima and his two brothers since the death of their

parents. In her view, the 13-year-old boy could, and should, be incorporated into her household as a son on whose help she could count. We cannot know whether she thought housing, feeding and bringing the boy into adulthood was sufficient but presumably she would buy him clothes eventually or let him keep some of the money earned by selling water. He did not have the patience to wait, not necessarily because he felt mistreated but because he wanted the autonomy of someone who worked and earned money.

Almost one-third of the adolescent Bisa migrants lived in accommodation provided by their employer, hence the boundary between family labour and other types of informal employment relationships was blurred. Not only did they work for relatives of different closeness, from direct relatives to distant classificatory relatives of the same clan, they were also allocated different types of housing. Some lived in the same compound as their relative or employer, others slept in the workspace and thus functioned as a night-watch too, and others again shared a house that their employer had built to make claims to a title deed on the outskirts of Ouagadougou where title surveys were in process.

In Abidjan, a 23-year-old Bisa migrant explained that he had come to Abidjan with an older brother in 2000 when he was fifteen. He had come to look for money but worked in his brother's shop in the beginning. "I wasn't paid for this work because he is my brother. Once I was to return to the village, he was going to pay my bus ticket plus an additional sum." However, the shop had little business and as his brother spent most of the money drinking, the prospect of receiving anything for his work shrank. In the end, the young migrant went to another part of Abidjan and began the physically much harder work in hand-irrigated vegetable farming. "Here I work with another brother, we have the same father but different mothers; the first brother - the shopkeeper - comes from our village but we are not of the same family.

Even when the terms of labour seem to be agreed upon, ambiguities may arise if the relationship deteriorates or better opportunities emerge. The escalation of the civil war and xenophobia in Côte d'Ivoire obliged many migrant youth to accept working for family members although their migration had been motivated by the wish to earn money. In the above example, the young migrant only rejected the working relationship with his distant brother once the chances of receiving a lump sum and a ticket home faded away and once he was strong enough to do the gardening. However, it is also clear that the type of work elicits different types of family relationships. The young Bisa migrants accepted being

remunerated at the end of the stay when working in the shop or food kiosk of a family member, whereas they expected to be treated as wage labour for physically challenging work like gardening or brick-making.

19-year old David worked at a BBQ for a non-related employer. Although he lived in his employer's household, money was deducted from his wages for food. Except, the employer rarely paid David his full wage. "Apart from the first month, my boss never paid the 15.000 F (US\$ 31) that he'd promised me per month. At least, I convinced him that if he didn't have enough money at the end of the month, it was better to give me 500 F (US\$ 1) per day and subtract 200 F (US\$ 0.41) for food." David solicited a literate friend to help him keep accounts because his boss frequently ran out of money before the end of the day. "My boss's wife was very kind to me," explained David. "At a time when he hadn't paid me for a while, she advised me to run away with the revenues of one day.⁴ I hadn't thought about this option and, in fact, I thought about it for a long time before following her advice. What finally made me do it, was a phone call from home to let me know that my father had fallen ill. When I told my boss that I'd like to go home to help farm, he asked me to wait a little, as he didn't have money right now. At the end of that day, I took the revenues - 25.000 F (US\$ 52) - and I gave 5.000 F to his wife before leaving. My boss owed me 35.000 F."

Informal employment relations cannot be described as clear-cut wage labour. Many migrants in the age bracket of 14-24 years share the disappointment of dwindling wages or non-payment. Not only do some employers pick the slightest mistake and cut the payment to cover imagined or real losses, they also take advantage of children and youth's understanding of household relations, vulnerability and the likelihood of having to collect larger sums of money from several sources when having unforeseen outlays. Finally, employers are able to replace workers easily and avoid being punished for non-payment because their young employees lack of solidarity and organisation. Youth are not without agency but they cannot raise their voice against an employer: it would amount to disrespecting someone of higher social and economic standing. Instead, they 'vote with their feet' and leave the work to find other employment or engage in the niche occupations described above. On the other hand, employers may also assume a parental role, take on certain responsibilities and treat the youngsters very well. Finally, young workers are often

⁴ In West Africa, wives and husbands usually have separate purses and discrete responsibilities within the household while at the same time having a shared interest in the well-being of household members. In a case like this, several issues may have led the boss's wife to give advice counteracting her husband's economic benefits. Firstly, she may have felt that he neglected his moral responsibilities towards a young hard-working and respectful household member. Secondly, she may have felt equally uncared for in her husband's economic dispositions and therefore had few stakes in his economic gains.

recruited to do a job without having prior experience. Their lack of skills is not necessarily seen as an obstacle because they are expected to learn as they do the different tasks. However, this practice also reduces their leverage in asserting their status as paid workers.

Young migrants' sense of belonging in the different households they inhabit influences their interpretation of what work they are obliged to do as household members and what they should be paid for.

Children and youth seek to find a balance between the safety of being part of family networks and wanting autonomy to establish themselves as young adult migrants.

Apprenticeships

Programmes targeting the abolishment of child labour frequently promote children's vocational training and help place street working children in non-formal apprenticeships (Diouf *et al.* 2001). The importance ascribed to different kinds of education is also mirrored in global explanations of youth unemployment in Africa as an outcome of skills deficiency. As mentioned above, the UN Office in West Africa encourages 'a culture of apprenticeships' (p. 3) to support economic growth and entrepreneurship. Empirical findings suggest however that a difference exists as to whom are interested in vocational training.

Youth unemployment is proportional to their level of education, at least until senior secondary school. [Lachaud] notes that youth with no [formal] education rarely are unemployed because they quickly orientate themselves towards traditional apprenticeships or find an occupation in the informal sector. Those who have finished secondary education often have higher expectations related to the wage level and working conditions.

(Lachaud 1994b cf. Chauveau 1998:28, my translation)

Guichaoua's study in Abidjan of work in construction sites and the garment industry gestured towards the overlapping nature of apprenticeships and family labour. There is, in fact, great variation across West Africa in the way in which children and youth enter an apprenticeship and how long their training takes. This proliferation of non-formal vocational training is linked to the failure of the formal educational system to accommodate the need for training and to

the selectivity of technical training centres that exclude most poor youth (Chauveau 1998:34).

Studies show that it is common for apprentices to pay a substantial fee in the coastal countries amounting to around 150,000 franc (US\$ 312) for a three-year training in Abidjan (Guichaoua 2006), range from Ghanaian Cedi 480,000 – 1,500,000 (US\$ 55-170) in Ghana (Hashim 2005) and 30,000-160,000 franc (US\$ 60-330) in Benin (Chauveau 1998). Although apprenticeships may also be monetised in the Sahelian countries, it is more common that youngsters are taken in as apprentices by kin, usually a classificatory parent, or apprenticeships are mediated by a relative with someone in his or her social network.

Payment or not, the apprenticeships are similar in that no contracts are written, the teaching style is didactic and the recruitment is rooted firmly in social relations. Apprenticeships resemble a socialisation process or an initiation more than it does some sort of professional training (Chauveau 1998:42). Apprentices have therefore been linked with free or very cheap labour and exploitation (Chauveau 1998, Diouf *et al.* 2001, Morice 1987). Allegations have been made that patrons ignore the safety of their apprentices, fail to take the transfer of skills seriously and employ more apprentices than necessary because it is a way to inject money into their business (Chauveau 1998, Riisøen *et al.* 2004). However, Morice (1987) contended that patrons also take in more apprentices or workers than they need because the recruitment through social relations obliges them to help their friends.

Diouf *et al.* (2001) raise the question of whether youth's entry into this type of non-formal training is a 'forced' choice and discuss both youth's and their parents' views on apprenticeships. Based on a study in Senegal, they point out that most parents claim that they decided to enlist their children in vocational training while 42% of the youth claimed to have made the decision themselves, though 39% of them acknowledged their parents' influence. My study in Ouagadougou revealed that adolescent migrants were quick to state that they wanted to start an apprenticeship but that they did not have relatives with technical skills and their own workshop or that they needed to have someone pay for their food and possibly also accommodation during their training. In some cases however, they stuck with

low paid work instead of beginning an apprenticeship because they longed for having money.

David's mother tried to make her sons choose long-term strategies when first going to Ouagadougou but she overlooked her sons' wish for immediate incomes to buy clothes and small commodities that they had never earned before. Only when David had satisfied some of his yearning for money and had experienced the frustrations of being cheated in spite of his behaviour and willingness to work and having had to resolve them through means he did not like, was he willing to listen to his mother's advice. He finally approached her brother who owned a garage in Ouagadougou and did quite well and became his apprentice at the end of 2006. Work was scant at times and David and two older apprentices hung around waiting for their patron to arrive to assign them tasks and to give them money for food. It was boring but David stuck it out without complaining, not least because his uncle was a man with multiple activities and social arenas and he introduced David to a host of them. By 2008, David was often given the task of searching for spare parts all over Ouagadougou, he now knew most basic reparations but was still working without a pay and his uncle had pushed him to follow evening classes to learn to read and write, since this would help him in the long run. Finally, he had also begun learning to drive. If he had doubts about whether this was the right decision in 2007, he never voiced them. But in 2008, when things worked well, he judged his fellow apprentices, who had left the garage, as having been too impatient and greedy because they wanted money for their work despite the fact that they did not know how to work independently.

The case study introduces another dimension to the discussion of vocational training and youth employment: differences between urban and rural areas. Village children often need to migrate to rural towns or urban areas to learn skills other than farming, forging, pottery and other traditional skills. This implies that they live with relatives, the employer or in rented accommodation, while urban children can stay at home. Secondly, rural children usually depend on urban relatives or linkages between rural parents and urban artisans to enter apprenticeships without fees. Such linkages may be weak and less attention paid to the quality of their formation, which in turn may result in abandoning the training before completion.

The large intake of apprentices increases competition within a relatively narrow range of occupations and thus their ability to find employment or establish viable workshops themselves.

Not all children and youth may be able – or willing – to forego an income for three to four years

Occupational Trajectories

Children's work and youth's unemployment has been on the policy agenda for some time, and yet little is known about their ability to influence the situation they are in. Policy-thinking has focused in particular on education deficits and thus on how to get children back to school and youth into vocational training to enhance their chances as independent entrepreneurs. United Nations Office for West Africa claims that youth prefer to run their own business rather than being salaried workers (UNOWA 2006) and therefore supports the development of skills and the access to micro-credit but without dwelling on the underlying reasons for such preferences and the long-term viability a further proliferation of micro-businesses.

Research methodologies centring on biographies and participant observation offer more dimensions to children and youth's navigation of the urban labour market and their opportunities in the informal sphere of the urban economy.

Job-hopping: adaptation and learning

When rural children migrate to the city for the first time, they know little about what is in store for them. They are very confident that they will cope and be successful, not because they do not hear about hardship and see migrants return as poor as when they left but because they aim to imitate those who do well (Thorsen 2007). What they do not consider is that working conditions differ tremendously from farm work in the village, where they sometimes abscond from work allocated to them by a parent.

Three examples of adolescent migrants' first encounter with urban work:

After a big argument with his uncle, 15-year-old Maana ran away from home to Ouagadougou. He had been sent to the market to buy some medicaments but instead of coming straight home, the boy watched a film in the video club, so by the time he got home

his uncle was very angry and told him off. His pride hurt, Maana set off to Ouagadougou where he found work in a busy food kiosk with around ten employees. He now learned to bid his tongue and curb his pride. With working hours from around 7 am until 10-11 pm, there was no time for video clubs and he found himself working for a bad-tempered patron who sneered at the boys when he was in a bad mood. As the boys were discontented with this treatment, they left if they could find other employment or went home to help farm and then looked for another job once they came back.

When Hamidou came to Ouagadougou for the first time at the age of 12 years, he worked as a domestic for a week. He quit the job because the woman he worked for shouted at the children whom she had taken charge of from her village, and although she treated Hamidou well he was afraid that she would eventually be malicious to him too. However, the aunt with whom he was staying did not understand that he was protecting his integrity and had standards for how he should be treated, she thought he was just lazy.

Similar divergences in the views on how work should be done emerged in relationships in the borderland between being family labour and wage labour. The older classificatory brother of a 16-year-old, who had felt obliged to employ the youngster to make his early migration a good experience, found him lazy compared to the other boy he had employed. The 16-year-old expected to work in the same manner as he was used to in the village, with small breaks whenever he felt tired but he also counted on being remunerated. Such divergences often created tensions. In this case, the older brother was prepared to pay but only at the end of the youngster's stay. Of course the young migrant did not know that and got so worried about being cheated that he decided to return to the village, at which point he – much to his surprise - was given some new clothes, a bus ticket and a lump sum.

It is a steep learning curve for children and youth when they first migrate. Although they are used to work on the farm and do some trading in the rural markets, they have had a fair amount of liberty which is restrained significantly when entering paid employment. Moreover, they are obliged to put up with being spoken to in condescending ways, in part because they are young and newcomers but also because of their poverty is inscribed in their clothing, demeanour and low level of formal education. That the beginning is difficult, especially for the younger and more immature migrants, is reflected in their mobility within the labour market (see Table 1). Street vendors and dishwashers in food kiosks often change jobs several times within this line of work that requires little prior knowledge, usually because they find the employer's way of talking offensive, the work too hard or they discover that they have accepted a too low wage and can win a wage increase by finding similar employment elsewhere.

A widespread discontent, that also made youngsters look for new jobs, was related to vulnerabilities regarding wages. Many had experienced a delay before being paid their wage because their employer coaxed them into continuing to work by reasoning that he did not have money right now because someone was lacking behind with a payment to him or because business had slowed down momentarily but that the employer intended to pay as soon as he received money.

22-year-old Ibrahim was cheated several times. The first time, he worked for a distant classificatory brother in Ouagadougou, who promised to put aside his wages to help him save up money but when Ibrahim wanted to leave after eleven months, his relative staged an argument to avoid paying him. The second time, an employer fell behind with paying his wage, Ibrahim worried and discreetly began to look for another job. When he was paid with a 10,000-franc-note (US\$ 21) cutting down his wage with 1,000 F per month, he stepped up his search. Lucien had had a similar experience when he worked on a BBQ outside a bar. At first, his employer paid him 500 F per day then gradually decreased the wage until Lucien walked out, because the 300 F he was offered barely covered his expenses for food and thus left him penniless at the end of the day.

For hard-working youth it is quite a blow to get less money than expected or not being paid at all. Being cheated once taught them to be more cautious and to lessen their patience waiting for payments. However, they do not always discover the deception immediately because they leave some or all the wage with their employer to save up. In spite of labour market legislation and the creation of institutions that should secure children and youth's rights, it is difficult for them to claim their workers' rights: they have no contracts and more often than not, they have accepted working for wages much lower than the minimum wage but include food and often also accommodation. Besides, most agencies and NGOs work with children under 14 years of age.

Older relatives may put pressure on employers to pay their arrears, sometimes threatening to go to the police, but the youth themselves point out that it is not worthwhile to take such cases to the police.

"With our tiny wages the costs would surpass our claim," explained a group of youth taking a break from itinerant street work in Ouagadougou. "Not only would we have to pay stamps and slip a few extra notes into the file for the police to open a case, we'd also spend several days coming to the police station, days where we could make money. It's just not worth it!"

Besides the boss might know someone at the police station and he'll turn around the complaint and say that we've stolen. Of course the policeman will believe his friend and not a poor youth from a village."

Not being able to take a day or two out to pursue a claim on wages that were rightfully theirs contradicts the idea of youth sitting around because they are unemployed. Rather it suggests that differences exist based on youth's origin and their level of education. Rural children and youth who have come to the city to work cannot afford being idle. Not only do they need money for food and accommodation, earning money is also the principal motivation behind their migration. Finally, they are obliged to work even if they live with kin in order not to be labelled as lazy and sent home (Chauveau 1998, Thorsen 2009b).

Labour migration is a maturation process for children who learn to put up with hardship and to overcome difficult situations

Occupational bricolage

The informalisation of African economies is characterised by income diversification. While rural children and youth are familiar with a number of sources of income based on farming and traditional artisan skills, it can be difficult for them to diversify their activities in the early years of their migration, simply because they lack resources beyond covering the most basic needs. Instead, they engage in an occupational bricolage where they learn a diverse range of skills superficially by shifting between job-categories and imitating flourishing independent activities. Rather than being a strategy of refining their skills within one profession, occupational bricolage aims to increase their ability to take advantage of any job opening and income-earning possibility.

For those who can live with relatives the situation may be more alike to that of urban youngsters. In a study of non-migrant and migrant youth in Accra, Langevang (2008) describes how youth navigate the urban context by seizing upon every opportunity that seem to bring them closer to the goal of social mobility by 'making it' through making money.

Without sitting the final exams of junior secondary school, a 16-year-old boy who lived with his mother in Accra left school to find work. He went through a series of occupations: from

'truck pusher', to apprentice in bicycle repairs and in opticals, both of which he quit before beginning to learn the skills of a barber. He then became involved in illicit activities, which put him on a promising ascending path that allowed him to open a barber shop with a friend as well as a small telephone kiosk, and he paid a middleman for papers to get to Europe. The papers fell through and he had to give up his businesses when falling out with his partners. Still optimistic about his future, he then began an apprenticeship as a hairdresser, preparing himself for the European labour market before giving up the ascend at the age of 28 and move to the North to farm (ibid 2008:2041-42)

Beginning vocational training does not always lead to an enhancement of opportunities, an apprenticeship may be aborted because the youth does not find it interesting, cannot cope with not having an income or because the transfer of skills is negligible or the patron is malicious. But coming towards the end of a non-formal apprenticeship may also require some negotiation as the passage to worker often is gradual. Among the young Bisa migrants in Ouagadougou, an employer's refusal to increase their wage despite the fact that they, in their own opinion, had become sufficiently skilled in the work was a reason to look for a new employment. Strategising of this kind happened in food sector as well as in non-formal apprenticeships.

One male tailoring apprentice in his early twenties negotiated with his patron in Ouagadougou after almost three years of learning that the patron should give him a little something for his work. At first, the employer protested that he could not give his knowledge to the youngster and then also pay a wage, but in the end, he had agreed to meet the request of three meals a day and a small sum of money. After a while, and just before the busiest time of the year, the apprentice fell ill and stayed away from work for more than a week. His patron was sure that he had found a new job and regretted this, so when he returned to work again, the patron promised to pay him a commission. However, once the busy time ended the patron paid him 2,000 F (US\$ 4) instead of 7,500 F. Some time after this incidence, he began to work for another tailor who paid better but still 'ate' into the promised wage, so the apprentice decided to work for himself, borrowed 10,000 F (US\$ 21) from a brother to buy his first sewing machine and started his own workshop.

His business did not go well in the beginning and it was only because he had also bought a donkey cart and collected sand for brick-making in the mornings that he was able to reimburse his brother. Another brother advised him to get a driver's licence and help him pay for driving lessons but defaulted on mediating a job as a taxi driver. Although he did establish himself as a tailor and was busy in the workshop for some years while employing younger migrants to make bricks, he closed the workshop within a decade and diversified his activities to a small shop and later a kiosk selling tea and coffee.

Trajectories told retrospectively like this one always seem smooth and present the migrant in a very proactive and assertive manner. Although not all youngsters are equally resourceful,

the trajectory does show their mobility within the informal economy. But it also shows that *because of* the cheating of wages they prefer to set up their own individual enterprises and *because of* difficulties pertaining to the competition between small businesses specialising in the same thing they are obliged to diversify and regularly end up doing completely different things than what they trained for. Diouf *et al.* (2001) argue that in Senegal youth are unable to set up their own workshop because they lack the financial means to do so but I will argue that it depends on the trade and the need for and cost of special tools. The key difficulty is to build up a corpus of customers.

Those who are not in non-formal apprenticeships learn urban skills informally through a trajectory of jobs which either allow them to build up expertise in one line of work, e.g. moving up from dishwasher, to kitchen hand, to waiter or cook, or enhance their future ability to diversify their incomes by having worked in many different jobs. Alternatively, they move to labour markets with higher wages and quasi-formal employment like in Côte d'Ivoire.

Child and youth migrants strategically make an effort to move away from insecure and low-paid work by consolidating skills that could be valuable in the future and by going independent to reduce vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the young migrants become acutely aware of their marginalised position in the urban space within a very short time of their arrival, they learn the necessary tactics and strategies to bypass some of the obstacles. They are preoccupied with their goal of earning money and of getting by, like many others in the informal economy, but the problems they experience with kin and non-kin employers make them wary of patron-client relationships. Although these types of relationships operate on a low-level in all informalised employment relationships, the youngsters constantly balance the advantage of having paid work with the risk of being cheated and they are quick to move on to a new employment or independent petty services such as shoe-shining or head-loading at the least suspicion. At the same time, their experiences teach them to work hard, to endure hardship and plan for

unforeseen events and to control themselves and act respectfully towards seniors even if they are treated unfairly.

The empirical material presented in this paper raises some fundamental issues concerning policies and the scope for supporting children and youth's mobility.

1. Skills enhancement – how should it be done?

The strong focus in current policy on educational shortcomings and the need to enhance youth's skills to make them employable or capable of being entrepreneurial begs the question of who should be responsible for the form and curriculum of the training and of ensuring its quality. Currently, non-formal apprenticeships are recognised as the most important channel through which children and youth may achieve skills outside the formal school system. Yet it is clear from empirical research in West Africa that the duration of an apprenticeship can draw out significantly because apprentices are cheap labour and/or because the skills transfer is slow due to lack of work or lack of interest on the patron's part. Furthermore, there are no limitations regarding who can become a patron teaching apprentices and therefore also not standards for their qualifications. In a context where many businesses are very small and employ casual workers or one or two employees only, the number of non-formal training places inevitably proliferates. Skills enhancement is therefore about more than the number of apprentices who can be put through training; it is also about maintaining and even improving technical qualifications in the long term.

A second question relates to youth's working conditions during and after their training. While so much attention has been given to the worst forms of child labour in other workplaces, the silence on non-formal apprenticeships has been remarkable. Thinking about protective measures does however imply some regularisation and serious enforcement by the state. Are the West African states interested in such changes at all? And if so, will regularisation reduce the number of apprenticeships available to youth?

Thirdly, non-formal apprenticeships are particularly common for learning technical skills, e.g. to repair cars or weld iron gates, whereas the food sector is characterised by informal

learning, that is by learning-by-doing. In practice, children and youth are able to climb the wage ladder within the sector because of the skills they can demonstrate but they have no diplomas or track record of their learning.

2. Rural and urban differences – how to improve rural youth's chances?

Another important question is which youth should be favoured in accessing vocational training? The empirical evidence presented in the paper shows that rural and urban youth aim at the same skilled occupations, which currently are to be found in urban areas and perhaps in rural towns. This means that rural youth are disadvantaged compared to urban youth because they are newcomers and have fewer social relations on their own account. Some policies aim to keep rural youth away from the city by creating jobs in agriculture but it is questionable whether the same youth who aspire to become a mechanic, a tailor or a hairdresser would be keen to take up agricultural wage labour.

3. Self-employment and independent businesses – is this what youth want?

The conviction that youth prefer to work for themselves is supported by the empirical material presented above. Of course, social status is ascribed to someone who can employ others and thereby build up and consolidate his or her societal position, but some of the examples also show how difficult it is to stay in business, *let alone* make it grow enough to employ others than younger siblings who will work as free family labour. More importantly, the work histories of young migrants show that many of the shifts from one employment to another and to independent endeavours are the outcome of unforeseen and unfair pay cuts and non-payment of wages. The number of youth preferring the insecurity of being a petty trader or service provider could well decrease if wage labour was not as insecure.

Secondly, the policy thinking about youth employment generally leans on the idea of micro-finance which has been successful with women's cooperatives. Again, there might be a difference between rural and urban youth in as much as neighbourhoods often provide the frame for associations and rural youth's integration into a neighbourhood will depend on their allegiance to that neighbourhood and to their plans for additional migrations. While, on the one hand, they may wish for a credit scheme that can boost their opportunities to engage in

trade or set up a small business, they do not, on the other hand, want to be tied down since their coping mechanism is their mobility.

4. Proliferation of micro-businesses

Empirical evidence shows just how difficult it is to start up a business and create a circle of clients, especially for young people whose social network is thinner than adults' networks. Hence, by supporting vocational training within a narrow set of occupations and the expansion of small business with only one or two employees, current policies targeting youth appear to postpone the problem of high rates of unemployment rather than providing long-term solutions. But is it possible to think outside the box to find alternatives?

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