



**Migration and social mobility  
in Burkina Faso: historical perspectives  
on the migration divide**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
What is the migration divide? Conceptual and theoretic outline	6
Limited access order	8
History of migration as a means to social mobility	9
The Pre-independence elite of African educated “Company Boys”	10
Academic migration as the means to social mobility following independence	12
The ascendance of an elite constituted by return migrants	13
Academic migration and elite status today	15
Breakdown of the social elevator	15
Conclusion	18
References	20

## **ABSTRACT**

Abstract: Mobility is a resource and a privilege that is unevenly distributed between countries, and within countries. People from developing countries depend on visas and residence permits to a larger extent than citizens of the developed world. Most migration policy research determines the inequality of mobility mainly as a consequence of restrictive immigration policies in destination countries. The focus of this paper is instead on the limited access order that has led to unequal access to migration between people from an African sending country, which has been largely overlooked. This paper shows the historical emergence of a *migration divide* between intercontinental and intra-African migrants. Through a historical analysis, the paper underlines how academic migration to France became a means to social mobility in Burkina Faso after independence, while today there is a breakdown of the social elevator via migration since preferential access to migration is likely to enhance the divide between rich and poor.

*Keywords:* migration divide, academic migration, return migration, elite formation, Upper Volta/Burkina Faso.

## INTRODUCTION

Burkina Faso has always been a country of high emigration, mainly providing cheap labour to neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. The large majority of migrants thus stay within Africa for income diversification or even survival. However, after independence in 1960 academic migration to France became a means to social mobility in Burkina Faso. This led to the ascendance of a new elite constituted by return migrants. Academic migration has since remained a standard prerequisite for elite status. This is in spite of the continuous development of the University of Ouagadougou (founded in 1974), combined with restricted access to intercontinental migration due to increasingly closed European borders (also from 1974 on). Migration has thus served as a vector of social mobility and elite distinction for a select few, while there has been a breakdown of the social elevator through migration for the large majority for whom restrictions on mobility have increased.

The paper presents a historical analysis through primary sources (surveys and journals) of the role of migration in acquiring social mobility in Burkina Faso: First, the history of when intercontinental migration became a means to social mobility after independence, and, secondly, the consequent breakdown of the social elevator. Building on existing theories of Limited Access Order (North et al., 2007) and elite structures in developing countries, the working paper expands the concept of the migration divide, which was developed to describe the difference between those who can and cannot migrate to the global North (Carling and Åkesson, 2009). The migration divide should also include the difference between those with access to intercontinental versus intra-African migration, since this has

broad consequences on social mobility and inclusion in light of the weak education system in Burkina Faso. Theories mainly determine inequality of mobility as a consequence of restrictive immigration policies in destination countries. However, this working paper introduces the argument that there is limited and preferential access to migration – thus a migration divide – that is to a large extent determined by initiatives from within the sending states.

It is noteworthy that the West African pioneer migrants arrived in France to a relatively positive economic and political context, which facilitated the success of their migration: “The pioneers of international migration and their successors from the years that coincided with the big droughts drew many benefits from migration”<sup>1</sup> (Dia, 2010, 312). Presumably, the relative closing of the European borders has fostered the divide between elite migration to the global North versus low-skilled migration to neighbouring countries, allowing those with dual citizenship or funds for visas to further profit from their early arrivals. The ensuing arrivals of rural people in the early 1970's marked the beginning of worsening economic situations in both entry and departure countries: 79% of the million foreign workers that arrived in France between 1955-1965 were regularised in 1965, but radical changes and politics of limited immigration were instituted in Europe from 1974 (Manchuelle, 2004). It has therefore become increasingly difficult to migrate to the global North as well as to acquire social mobility from such migration. While intercontinental migration spurred social mobility and changed the societal elite

<sup>1</sup> “Les pionniers de la migration internationale et leurs successeurs des années ayant coïncidé avec les grandes sécheresses ont tiré beaucoup de bénéfices de la migration”

structure after independence, there is today a « breakdown of the social elevator partly linked to the hardening of conditions of entry and stay in western countries and the worsening of material living existence in departure countries”<sup>2</sup> (Dia, 2010: 240).

Today, access to migration is a privilege that is unevenly distributed among human beings from developed versus developing countries. Even though we live in an ‘age of migration’, the Migration Without Borders scenario has underlined the global divide between the free mobility of people from developed countries versus most developing states (Pécoud and De Guchteneire, 2007; Castles and Miller, 2009). Wealthier people and societies are therefore generally more mobile than relatively poor people and societies: emigration rates as a share of population are around 2.1% in low-income countries and 3.6% in high-income countries (Bakewell, 2011). This divide is blatant in the case of Africa; since Africans only account for approximately 10% of the foreign-born in OECD countries, thus fewer than any other region in the world (UNDESA, 2013).

Since the large majority does not have the financial, social or human capital to migrate to the global North, there is a migration divide between the masses and the elite. Indeed, 65% of sub-Saharan African migrant stay within the continent, representing the largest South-South flows in the world (UNDESA, 2013). In West Africa, 86% of migrants stay within the sub-region (OECD/SWAC, 2006). Burkina Faso is one of the main emigrant sending countries in Africa, with the corridor to Côte d’Ivoire representing the largest bilateral flows (1,6 million emigrants) on the continent even after the violent conflict in

2002 and increased discrimination (World Bank, 2010). 94% of all Burkinabe emigrants migrate to neighbouring countries.

With only a privileged few having access to intercontinental migration for academic or wealth accumulation, migration has become a key criterion of elite distinction in Africa. I have reviewed the CV’s of ministers in the governments under Burkinabe President Blaise Compaore (in office since 1987): It is striking that with only 6% of all migrants going outside the African continent the absolute majority of ministers have undertaken academic migration to OECD countries, for example 99,6% of the ministers in the 2002-2007 government. A comparative study of elites in African countries indeed showed that migration is a common characteristic of elite distinction in Africa (Kotzé and Steyn, 2003). In a society with a basic limited access order - built on interpersonal relations - such as Burkina Faso, many elites have been educated in the Open Access Orders of Europe and North America (North et al, 2007; 30). However, the theory of Limited Access order does not further elaborate on the correlation between migration and access to opportunities for elite formation. With academic migration as a main entry point to access this limited social order, this working paper will therefore question the factor of migration as an element to institutionalising open access and the link between migration and social mobility.

## **WHAT IS THE MIGRATION DIVIDE? CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETIC OUTLINE**

The concept of the migration divide was developed to describe the increasing difficulty of accessing the resource of migration to

<sup>2</sup> “panne de l’ascenseur social a partie liée avec le durcissement des conditions d’entrée et de séjour dans les pays occidentaux et l’aggravation des conditions d’existence matérielles dans les pays de départ”

OECD countries, and it mainly alludes to a difference between those who *can* and *cannot* migrate (Carling and Åkesson, 2009). It is related to the concept of ‘involuntary immobility’ of Africans wishing to improve life conditions in the global North (Carling, 2002). It doesn’t address the fact that a large majority of those who ‘cannot’ migrate to the global North instead migrate within Africa. This paper suggests that the migration divide should include the difference between intercontinental and intra-African migrants, since these two forms of migration throw up great disparities in the social mobility they confer.

Both theories of involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002) and the scenario of Migration Without Borders (Pécoud & de Guchteneire, 2007) define migration and mobility as a strategic resource and underline the contradictory reality of enormous flows versus increasing restrictions to mobility. However, the moral responsibility is largely placed on the receiving and developed countries and the inequality of mobility has mainly been determined as a consequence of restrictive immigration policies. Against the background of tightened immigration control and the securitisation of migration, the debate about ‘open borders’<sup>3</sup> has spread in recent years. Sending country initiatives for equal access to migration have been largely overlooked. Scholars have rather focused on the asymmetry of the right to *emigration* - as underlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) - not being complemented by an internationally recognized right to *immigration* (Walzer, 1983, Pécoud & de Guchteneire, 2007, Zolberg, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive collection of arguments for and against open borders can be found at <http://openborders.info/> (Accessed 30/01/2013).

One of the moral arguments for open borders is the issue of inequalities (Carens, 1987; 2011). While citizens from developed countries may travel and settle down almost anywhere in the world, their counterparts from less-developed countries are usually restricted in their movement. “Citizenship in Western liberal democracies is the modern feudal privilege – an inherited status that greatly enhances one’s life chances” (Carens, 1987). Inequality also prevails with regard to the selection of desirable migrants as opposed to ‘undesirable’ ones (Pécoud & de Guchteneire, 2007; 9). Carens underlines that every argument for movement within the state also applies to situations beyond borders. Christopher Bertram (2011), in that regard, underlines that the poor who lack valuable skills are those whom rich states have no right to exclude, which according to Arash Abizadeh would imply open borders (Abizadeh, 2006).

Neoliberal economists are also generally in favour of relaxing restrictions on immigration, since the liberalised movement of workers could increase world GDP and lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth (Clemens, 2011; Rodrik, 2005; Pritchett, 2006; Tabarrok, 2006). The achievement of inclusive growth depends, to a large extent, on the capability of the most disadvantaged social groups to participate actively in the formation of wealth and receive, in return, a rewarding proportion of growth that can spur social mobility. For migrants this would mainly be achieved through an income increase and the concomitant increase in remittances.

The concept of the migration divide, as defined in this paper, therefore combines the theories involuntary immobility and migration without border in order to nuance the understanding of the migration divide while introducing a sending state perspective and looking at initiatives related to access

to emigration. The paper suggests that the migration divide should differentiate various categories of migrants (high-skilled versus low-skilled, and intercontinental versus intra-African, the elite versus masses), and include the large contrast between those for whom migration represents a livelihood - or even survival – strategy, compared to those where it is an opportunity, an investment or an insurance function for income diversification.

One might therefore start looking at in-country African factors that enhance this divide. Recent reports (OECD, 2011; Oxfam, 2014) underline how extreme poverty is decreasing but more inequality is rising, and that growth has mainly benefited the elites. In Africa, increasing rural and urban poverty has amongst other led to further in-country inequalities (IFAD, 2011). This leads to question the agency-based approach of migration being a being a personal choice and opportunity (Sen, 1999). Indeed, "... the differentiation of migrants between privileged possessors of human capital credentials and disadvantaged groups with weak legal status who can be easily exploited casts doubt on this positive view" (Castles, 2012; 30). It therefore important to investigate the human agency of migrants, and the way this agenda interacts with macro-level and societal structures in the sending state. This in-country approach would demand looking inside Burkina Faso; more specifically at elite formation and how the population can access the resource of migration.

### **Limited access order**

With a population of almost 17 million in Burkina Faso, where about 90% of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, the elite is exclusive. Burkina

Faso additionally has a poverty rate of 46,7 percent, and a ranking as 183rd out of 186 countries in the 2013 UNDP Human Development Index. One might therefore cautiously estimate a group of a few hundred people representing the elite. Given that Burkina Faso has a general emigration rate of 9,8%, and 94% of migrants go to other African destinations (UNDP, 2009), one should underline the blatant correlation between access to intercontinental migration and elite formation when the absolute majority of every government since independence has been constituted by return migrants from Europe and North America.

North, Wallis, Webb and Weingast (2007) analyse the interplay of interests within elites. They distinguish between 'limited access social orders' characteristic of developing countries based on interpersonal relations, and 'open social orders' characteristic of developed countries built on rules and regulations. The middle and low-income developing countries today, like all countries before about 1800 can, according to North et al, be understood as limited access orders (LAO). The limited access order creates limits on access to political and economic functions, and political elites divide the control of the market, each getting some share of the rents.

Throughout literature, narrow interest groups within such a bourgeoisie have been described as 'distributional coalitions' or 'predatory cartels' (Olson, 1982), 'patrimonial and neo-patrimonial State' (Bayart, 1993), 'embedded autonomy' (Evans, 1995), 'crony capitalism' (Haber, 2002), 'patron-client relations', 'insider systems' (Meisel, 2004, 2007), 'hand-in-hand arrangements' (Moore and Schmitz, 2007) and now 'limited access social order' (North et al, 2007). In a peaceful country such as Burkina



Faso, social alliances among elites are not necessarily based on class solidarity, but on the willingness to co-operate with strategic allies in order to receive more of the spoils associated with the state. Jean-François Bayart (1993), in this respect, talks of the ‘assimilation of elites’, forming an uneasy ruling coalition, or a hegemonic bloc.

Its survival as an elite depends directly on its capacity to close off access to this social order. They distinguish between fragile, basic and mature LAOs. Burkina Faso can be categorized as a society with basic LAO in which “the only durable organization is the state itself, and elite rights and privileges are closely identified with it” (North et al, 2007; 12). Indeed, basic LAO’s are incapable of supporting organizations beyond the state structure. The public sector and politics represent what Vilfredo Pareto (1977) describes as governing elites, and is predominant in the limited access order of Burkina Faso. As a basic LAO, Burkina Faso also has institutions that support the succession of leadership and the general succession of elites – one of those are access to academic migration. The following will outline the role of migration in acquiring social mobility in this limited access order.

## **HISTORY OF MIGRATION AS A MEANS TO SOCIAL MOBILITY**

Already in the commercially based society of 19<sup>th</sup> century West Africa migration was key to elite status. In this competitive hierarchic society, where influence was measured in riches, migration was a resource and a strategy for the elite in order to either stay in power or gain power. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, Soninke migration represented a power

strategy<sup>4</sup>. In the same sense, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Krou chiefs in Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia had migrated as sailors aboard European ships, and accumulated riches during their long periods overseas (Manchuelle, 2004). Over time the most prosperous migration patterns have been practiced by the elites; from navigation to railroad construction, and from diamond trading to today’s Western academic migration (Dia, 2010; Gaibazzi, 2012).

Historians such as Manchuelle (2004) and Gaibazzi (2012) have underlined the lack of correlation between poverty and migration among the pioneer migrants. If many scholars have seen migration as being a consequence of poverty<sup>5</sup>, instead of being linked to profit, it also means that the factor of elite migration as a resource in political strategy has been largely overlooked. The pioneers of West African intercontinental migration were the Soninke, and mainly the upper social classes<sup>6</sup>. Clientelism has yet to occupy a main place in migration studies, but alliances among certain aristocratic families and clans

<sup>4</sup> While migration for the Soninke represented a road to power, migration for the Foutanke (the neighbours of the Soninke) was not a strategy practiced by the chief families. The elected nature of the Foutanke government obliged the candidates to renounce migration and stay close to the political arena. Simultaneously, the maraboutic Foutanke had very early on played a political role (from the 18<sup>th</sup> century), and did thus not have to focus all energy on commerce in order to acquire influence solely through riches.

<sup>5</sup> The general perception of the causes of migration during colonization has mainly been that they lay in the instauration of colonial taxes and the pressures exercised by the colonial powers, as well as the impoverishment of the rural regions during colonization.

<sup>6</sup> Historically, the main basin of emigration towards France was thus around the Senegal River, the border area linking Senegal (regions of Bakel and Matam), Mauritania (Hodh Baydân and Gidimaka) and Mali (Kayes region), inhabited by the Soninke. Their migration towards France inscribes itself within a tradition of mobility that has its roots long before the massive black labour recruitments into the French colonial maritime traffic and before the enrollment of African soldiers during the First World War.

contributed to the further development and monopolizing of migration. In societies with weak, decentralised and non-existent states - or in limited access orders - clientelism has often been one of the essential elements of power enforcing the goal of establishing a clientele (Manchuelle, 2004).

The Soninke also had a precursor role in shaping intercontinental migration pattern, for example for the Burkinabe. The following section shows that it was only after the Second World War that intercontinental migration for profit was introduced in the societal order in Burkina Faso. The Soninke influenced the movement of other ethnic groups - such as the Houssa and the Mossi of Upper Volta - who started arriving in Dakar and other African cities after the Second World War and subsequently in France largely due to the ties developed with the Soninke during work migrations (Manchuelle, 2004). This migration was neither generated by colonization nor by poverty but rather by pull factors such as profit and politics.

### **The Pre-independence elite of African educated “Company Boys”**

Prior to World War One, only a tiny number of Africans were educated in metropolitan French schools. In 1946 there were less than fifty students from francophone Africa in metropolitan France, and these were mainly Senegalese (Le Vine, 1967). The introduction of a modern education system introduced significant political consequences. Education played a key role in the decline of the traditional elite, with the introduction of an alternative means of social mobility beyond the traditional structure in society. The following sections will show how “The prestige of the chiefs fell sharply and passed

on to the white man’s scribblers” (Ayandele, 1967), first through education acquired within African then by academic migration to the global North.

During colonisation, the French indirect rule had permitted traditional leaders to retain traditional authority and status if they cooperated with the colonial administration. The French had created territorial units in West Africa as well as a federal administrative entity; Afrique Occidentale Francaise (AOF)<sup>7</sup>. The colony of Upper Volta was created in 1919 after the conquest of the territory around the River Niger. Upper Volta was, however, broken up and merged with the neighbouring territories (French Soudan, Dahomey and Ivory Coast) from 1932 to 1947 in order to create a reservoir of manpower. These migration patterns of providing manpower from the Burkinabe hinterland to the more prosperous coastal country of Côte d’Ivoire has since then represented the majority of all emigration, and still represents the largest bilateral flows in Africa.

The AOF simultaneously established modern educational systems and productive enterprises linked to the world market; such as cotton production in Upper Volta. The territorial structures with their administrative centres, schools, and the new economic activities combined to produce a new migratory movement to the towns and the emergence of non-traditional elites centered in the urban areas.

Victor Le Vine, in his book ‘Political Elite Recruitment and Political Structure in French-Speaking Africa’, describes the French-speaking African elite from 1945-

<sup>7</sup> AOF was composed throughout most of its history of eight territorial units: Dahomey (Niger), French Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, French Soudan (Mali), and Upper Volta (Burkina Faso).

1960 as “company boys” (Le Vine, 1968; 372). This group existed parallel to the traditional elite, respectively laying claim to prestige and positions in the urban, territorial social structure as opposed to the rural traditional one that was on the decline. “Those recruited were middle-level civil servants, professionals, quasi-professionals, trained before the war, and in Africa, plus chiefs and notables, most of them appointed or legitimized before the war” (Le Vine, 1968; 377).

The electoral law of the territories of October 1946 did not specifically discriminate against the chiefs, but it was heavily weighted in favour of the educated and urban elite. Thus came into existence a very small urban elite, where membership was obtained through education (acquired in Africa at that time). In Upper Volta, civil servants - such as Blaise Benon, Francois Bouda, Zinda Kaboré, Christophe Kalenzaga, Tindougou Ouedraogo, Zabango Pahi and Maurice Yaméogo - were among the only

persons with the training and education required for candidacy. It should be noted that political oppositions to chiefs (such as the Movement Democratique Voltaic led by Gerard Ouedraogo) also started to form, and the Mogho Naba retained less power and autonomy within the new African states than, for example, did the Lamibé in Cameroon, or the Marabouts of the Mouridiya ‘confréries’ in Senegal, who held political leverage with the modern government of President Leopold Senghor.

Before academic migration was introduced as a means to social mobility, the schools in Africa were among the few institutions that could allocate and regulate privileges, mainly built on Western liberal traditions and Christian values. The majority of the first group of African educated civil servants had attended the Pabré Seminary in Burkina Faso or the William Ponty School in Dakar before joining the ranks of the administration. This group included, amongst others, the first

Table I.

<i>‘Company boys’ – African-educated (pre-colonial elite)</i>	<i>New elites – return migrants (France) (post-colonial elite)</i>
<i>Maurice Yameogo (b. 1921), first President of Upper Volta (1960-1966),</i>	<i>Major General Aboubakar Sangoulé Lamizana (b. 1916), President (1966-1980)</i>
<i>Ouezzine Coulibaly (b. 1909), first Vice-President of the Territorial Assembly (1957-1958),</i>	<i>Colonel Saye Zerbo (b. 1932), President (1980-1982)</i>
<i>Joseph Conombo (b. 1917), first Vice-President of the National Assembly of Upper Volta (1961)</i>	<i>Thomas Sankara (b. 1949), President (1983-1987)</i>
<i>Daogo Mathias Sorgho (b. 1920), first Minister of Education and Ambassador to Paris (1963-1966)</i>	<i>Fidèle Toé (b. 1944), Minister of the Conseil National de la Republique (1984-1987)</i>
<i>Gérard Kango Ouedraogo (b. 1925), first Prime Minister (1971-1974)</i>	<i>Blaise Compaore (b. 1951), Current President (1987-)</i>

President of Upper Volta and the first Prime Minister, as outlined in the left column of the table below. The right column, on the other hand, portrays the introduction of academic migration as a means to social mobility for the post-independence elite.

One can therefore distinguish three groups of new elites in Burkina Faso since independence and since the decline of the traditional elite: The first group are African-educated civil servants, the second and third groups - respectively military and academic elites - intertwine in regard to migratory trajectories, both having France as transit points for political posts. The latter groups and especially the academic group - with around 99% of the current ministers being return migrants - have since independence represented the governing elite.

### **Academic migration as the means to social mobility following independence**

After 1946, opportunities for technical and higher education in France were extended to thousands of French-speaking Africans. University students in Paris have continuously since 1945 represented the radical leaven in French-speaking West Africa. By 1957, expanded educational opportunities (in France but also in Africa) plus the activities of political parties and modern organizations, such as unions, began to produce a new and younger generation of recruitable leaders. At the eve of independence in 1959, the number of 'boursiers' in France from French West Africa and Madagascar had rapidly increased to 3000 from 471 in 1953 (Le Vine, 1967). It quickly rose to 5000 in 1961 for French Africa and Madagascar.

"As new generations of persons return from abroad with more varied educational

experiences, and with degrees from a variety of foreign educational systems ... those derived from the colonial period (were) increasingly challenged" (Coleman, 1965; 45). Consequently, in the first years of independence, a large distrust towards the other generation developed. "The national leaders, using the state machinery and the national party structures, are in a sense constantly struggling on both fronts, and have thus far managed to remain in power in all the states of French-speaking West Africa." (Wallerstein, 1965; 32)

This was coupled with a progressive change of tactics by the French administration under the leadership of the then Minister for Overseas Territories, Francois Mitterand, from systematic opposition to the 'new' modern elite - the emergent enlarged administrative bourgeois class - to cooperation with it. The victory of the modern elite was secured in July 1957 by the mass parties with the establishment of territorial governments under the loi-cadre. It gave them the essential legal and political tools with which to consolidate their power against traditional elites, the 'old' urban elite, and the colonial administration, and even more so after independence in 1960.

Among the respondents to Victor Le Vine's 1966 survey of the West African elites, it was the case that most of the first generation elite tended to feel that some form of activism was the prime characteristic of the elite, while most of those in the second generation stressed the possession of formal education as the main feature. "Education now confers a privilege previously unknown" said a respondent to the survey (Le Vine, 1967; 15). Magnus Bassegy explains that, without exception, all initial leaders of the trade unions and youth movements in Africa were also individuals educated in the West:

‘Western education was not only the prime mover of political socialization in Africa but also its ’’Open, Sesame’’ (Bassay, 1999; 107). Formal education was linked directly to employment prospects and education became key to elite formation in post-independence Upper Volta. Academic migration thus enforced the divide between the haves and have-nots due to the uneven acquisition of education between ethnic groups and regions. ’’In Africa, education is not only a means of social, political and economic reward, but also a powder keg or megaton bomb’’, (Basse, 1999; 107).

Sources from the 1960’s underlined the following characteristics of the political culture of the new elite: 1) common French educational experience, 2) shared political values, 3) common political education, 4) contact with or participation in French political parties and/or trade unions, or their African affiliates, 5) involvement in or participation in transterritorial African political parties, movements or associations (Le Vine, 1967; 5-7). In Peter C. Lloyd’s introductory chapter to ‘The New Elites of Tropical Africa’ from 1966, he defined the new elites as “those persons who were Western-educated and wealthy to a high degree relative to the mass of the population” (Lloyd, 1966; 4). Or as Victor Le Vine put it: “The definition of a political elite in French-speaking Africa, moreover, is clouded by the fact that membership of the ‘elite’ is claimed by most people who have acquired modern secondary and higher education” (Le Vine, 1968; 375).

### **The ascendance of an elite constituted by return migrants**

The drive towards centralisation meant that after independence politics became primary

not only in an ideological sense but also in the sense of being the main vehicle of personal wellbeing and social mobility for the elite. While from 1947 to 1960, political life in Upper Volta was characterized by a multiparty system (Massa and Georges, 1995), the Upper Volta of the early 1960’s can generally be described by primacy of the party (over the administration, and over interest groups) and the structure of the party as a mass party (Wallerstein, 1965). Aristide Zolberg (1966) has characterized this as the ‘party-state’. By July 1962, all French-speaking West and Equatorial African States, except Gabon, had become (formally or de facto) single-party states. In six States, a ‘parti unique’ had been installed before independence<sup>8</sup>. In Upper Volta, the UDV was the de facto single-party<sup>9</sup>. In 1966, *Afrique Nouvelle* wrote that: “Nobody is hiding, and especially the youth, that a dictatorship of a little clan has imposed itself on Upper Volta<sup>10</sup>” (*Afrique Nouvelle*, 1966, Nr 962; 16). In fact, the Yamoeogo government was described as a “Clan who had against it the youth, unions and traditional leaders”<sup>11</sup> (*Afrique Nouvelle*, 1966, Nr 965; 16).

The conversion from multi-party to a single-party system represented a fundamental change in the elite recruitment system: apart from the official theory of rapid Africanisation, none of the West African governments were willing to employ all the

<sup>8</sup> Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic and Niger

<sup>9</sup> Burkina Faso is still a de-facto single-party state, without a powerful opposition and with every Prime Minister under President Blaise Compaore – in power since 1987 - having been from the ruling party.

<sup>10</sup> “Personne ne cache ici, et surtout par les jeunes, qu’une dictature d’un petit clan s’est abattue sur la Haute-Volta

<sup>11</sup> “Clan qui avait contre lui les jeunes, les syndicats et les chefs traditionnels.”

‘intellectuals’ available<sup>12</sup>. One simple economic reason was the fact that the French government paid the salaries of its civil servants who were seconded to work with African governments<sup>13</sup>, thus providing an important subsidy to African budgets that would be lost by Africanisation.

But the main reason was political, with fear of being overthrown by the younger returning academic migrants: “We send them abroad so that they can learn to help us. They return believing us all wrong in everything we do, and burning to replace us.” (Le Vine, 1967; 52). They instead created party structures, composed of men who were less educated than the technicians but more committed to the new governmental structures, to keep watch over the administrators. Under the slogan of “pas d’africanisation au rabais” (Wallerstein, 1965; 21) the students contested the non-employment of many intellectuals. Therefore, some returning elites preferred to withdraw from active participation in the dominant party to await a hypothetical ‘changing of the guard’.

When reading *Afrique Nouvelle* from the months around the 1966 elections, a generational clash indeed seemed to be approaching. “One could easily imagine a real quarrel between ancients and moderns

in Upper Volta”<sup>14</sup> (*Afrique Nouvelle*, 1966, nr 966; 16). The coup that in neighbouring Dahomey in October 1963 forced President Hubert Maga out of office and placed Colonel Christophe Soglo at the head of Dahomey’s government was almost certainly engineered by a group of young second-generation elites in the government, the trade unions and education (Le Vine, 1967). Likewise for the bloodless coup in Upper Volta in January 1966, the trade unions were said to have played a key role in organizing the general strike of January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966. *Afrique Nouvelle* wrote: “If the old regime were to regain power.. Upper Volta would lose its elite.. the students would refuse to return<sup>15</sup>” (*Afrique Nouvelle*, 1966, nr 964; 16). The coup indeed brought a significant number of the second-generation elite to power. In what is described as an “Immense crowd, popular relief.. The unions and the young people, peaceful but determined have decided to call for Lieutenant Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana” (*Afrique Nouvelle*, 1966, nr 962; 1), with banners saying “power to the army” (*Afrique Nouvelle*, 1966, nr 962; 16).

One might add that migration not only played a key role in accessing power, but also in constituting political alliances. Thomas Sankara, during his further military education in Morocco, met Blaise Compaore. Their common stay in Morocco consolidated the future group of revolutionary military leaders consisting of Thomas Sankara, Blaise Compaore and Jean-Baptiste Lingani and Henri Zongo. In Bordeaux, he joined Fidèle Toé when he reached out to Burkinabe

<sup>12</sup> Additionally, unlike Senegal, Upper Volta did not have an intellectual surplus. Rather, there was a lack of trained personnel, especially trained technicians, engineers and doctors. Official manpower-need projections for the period 1961-1965 listed 542 positions in government. In March 1965 only 124 Upper Voltans of the more than 350 abroad in secondary and higher education institutions in France and Africa were said to be trained in those positions.

<sup>13</sup> Over 450 French personnel worked in Upper Volta during the presidency of Yameogo, including those providing technical assistance in the governmental machinery, but also 56 French teachers fulfilling their national service obligations by teaching at the Lycée Oezzin Coulibaly in Ouagadougou and other schools.

<sup>14</sup> “On pourrait facilement imaginer une véritable querelle des anciens et des modernes en Haute-Volta.”

<sup>15</sup> “Si l’ancien régime revenait au pouvoir.. Haute-Volta perdrait toute son élite : syndicale, administrative.. Les étudiants refuseraient de rentrer.”

students, and in Paris he met Valère Some who frequented the anti-imperialist circles with among other Touré Soumane. When Sankara entered the government of Colonel Saye Zerbo as Minister of Information, he chose Fidèle Toé as cabinet chief and included Serge Theophile Balima in their team. Balima later became Minister of Information in the Sankara government and Ambassador to France.

### **Academic migration and elite status today**

This section demonstrates the demographics of the current governing elite – specifically with regards to their migration patterns.

The demographic trend of the African elite is, as one could imagine, mainly returning academic migrants from the global North<sup>16</sup>. A survey of African elites shows gender disparities, with more than 75% of the sample being male representatives (Kotzé, 2003). Their average age is somewhat similar to that of ministers in developed countries (generally between 43-53 years old), which however stands in stark contrast to the average age of adult men in African countries. In fact, life expectancy at birth is 53 in Burkina Faso, and 52 throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The African elites included in this survey additionally show high levels of education. Almost half of the ministers in Burkina Faso hold a PhD (mainly from European and North American universities) – which

is above the education level of ministers in developed countries and, naturally, massively above the level of the total population which has a literacy rate of just 21.8%, as well as an average duration of education of only five years.

In Francophone West Africa the absolute majority of Ministers have attended schools in the global North. In Burkina Faso, all prime ministers in office during the presidency of Blaise Compaore have studied in France (mainly Dijon, Lyon, Nantes and Paris), obtaining either a masters or a PhD. While this information only applies to ministers, one should note that the top administration (such as ambassadors and chiefs of cabinet) of the rather politicized state machinery have generally followed the same trajectories in their route to political positions.

In Burkina Faso today, out of 36 ministers, as well as the current Prime Minister and President, only three – whereof two are women – have not undertaken intercontinental migration during their education (one has however attended further training in Europe during her career). The intercontinental destinations have mainly been France (Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, Montpellier, Toulouse and Nancy) or francophone Canada (Montreal, Laval, and Sherbrook). One has been to the Netherlands and two in Germany (Saarbrücken).

### **BREAKDOWN OF THE SOCIAL ELEVATOR**

The previous sections have shown that around the time of independence education became a means to social mobility, first through secondary education in Africa. Later on, the main route to political destinations and elite

<sup>16</sup> While the difference between the general population and the governing elite is particularly imposing in West Africa, one does not necessarily expect the elite to possess the same basic demographic characteristics. This law of increasing disproportion seems to apply to nearly all political systems. Robert Putnam (1976) notes that “*the disproportionate advantage of male educated, high status recruits increases as we move up the political stratification system.*”

status would be through academic migration for higher education, mainly to France. While we have learned that after independence, all initial leader were educated in the West (Bassey, 1999), academic migration to the global North has remained a key characteristic of elites in Burkina Faso. Foreign education has since generally imposed itself as the common heritage of the elite political culture of limited access order in French speaking West and Equatorial Africa. While academic migration became a key element to social mobility and elite distinction in post-independence Burkina Faso: ‘In Africa at the present, the elite is characterized by the number of its members who have come from humble homes..’ one should note that ‘..the well-educated and wealthy elite is tending to become a predominantly hereditary group’. (Lloyd, 1966)

This preferential access to migration has led to underrepresentation of certain groups in state bureaucracies, and consequently to uneven distribution of national resources in favour of those who have academic qualification from the global North. For example, while the Fulani population in the Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso supplies a large proportion of the country’s emigrants, and the Bissa have to a large extent monopolized the migration towards first Gabon and then Italy, some subgroups have never practiced migration, and this is again represented in the elite structure among ethnic groups in Burkina Faso (Hampshire and Randall , 1999).

After independence, academic migration was perceived as the quickest route to social mobility and became key to access elite status for those who decided to return to Africa. Membership in the new elite thus appeared to be represented by the historical sample of francophone African students in France

surveyed by Jean-Pierre N’Diaye in 1961. In 1965, James Coleman underlined that; ‘The relationship between formal education and the formation of the new political elite in African countries is so clear-cut... Indeed, because formal education has come to be viewed as presumptively determinative of political elite status, students now in school are uncritically regarded as preordained members of the second or third-generation successor elites’ (Coleman, 1965; 4).

Even today, Burkina Faso is a country with very low school enrolment and literacy rates, and only 26% urbanisation<sup>17</sup> – and consequently a limited number of students have access to the best schools teaching French and English at satisfactory levels. However, after independence secondary school education became a mechanism for sorting and selecting young Africans for upward mobility. Secondary education nonetheless remained - as during the colonial regimes - limited to intermediate and top-level African officials (Uchendu, 1979). “Secondary education, which will train the cadres of the country, and particularly higher education, is reserved for bourgeois and petit-bourgeois children, the middle-classes” (Moumouni, 1968; 146). Magnus Bassey argues how educated elites in Africa have “made opportunities available to its members to the exclusion of the poor through selective ordering, legitimization of certain language forms in school, legitimizing of certain thinking types and legitimizing of elite codes” (Bassey, 1999; 3). The nature of the education system in Africa, together with the great disparity in home conditions and especially the restricted access to academic migration or schooling ‘.. gives the elite parent a very

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/fields/2212.html> Accessed on 30/1.2013.



good chance of ensuring that his children will enjoy the same status as himself' (Bassey, 1999; 57). The educated elites are thus able to use their power to obtain the best education abroad for their children at the secondary and university level. Life chances of an individual in Africa for achieving political elite status are enormously enhanced if they already belongs to, or can through academic migration, access the exclusive elite in the limited access order (North et al, 2007).

Migration to the global North requires more social and economic resources, and migrants to Europe or North America thus tend to be wealthier and more educated than migrants to other African countries. Studies and surveys have also confirmed this over time: A study of the Fulani found that seasonal labour participation increased with higher household wealth (Hampshire and Randall, 1999). A survey of rural households in four villages in Burkina Faso furthermore showed that intercontinental migrants tended to come from the highest-income groups (Black et al, 2005). Those receiving remittances from outside Africa are thus in the top consumption quintiles, and were already wealthy to a degree relative to the general population before migrating (Hampshire Randall, 2002; Black et al, 2005; Ratha et al, 2011). Wouterse and van den Berg (2004) also found that the more people in a Burkinabe household with secondary education, the greater probability that someone from the household would migrate. The majority of highly qualified people emigrate, both during and after their education, with 74% of those educated at college level having left the country (Shaw, 2007).

Reversibly, migration from Burkina Faso to other African countries is undertaken by comparatively poor households in response to lack of work and insufficient income

(Wouterse and van den Berg, 2004). The profile of Burkinabe labour migrants to Côte d'Ivoire has not changed drastically since independence. The majority of emigrants are thus non-skilled workers providing labour for commercial agriculture in neighbouring countries, mainly in the plantations in Côte d'Ivoire (Shaw, 2007).

It should be noted that while this cross-border migration has led to improved human development effects through acquisition of skills and sending remittances to those left behind, it has not necessarily led to social mobility for the large numbers of low skilled workers. While women have increasingly joined the stream of South-South migrants, these emigrants are mainly poorly educated young men (mainly Mossi) from rural areas that migrate to rural areas in Côte d'Ivoire for low skilled labour (Dabire et al, 2009). Some stay on for generations, while rural migrants to Côte d'Ivoire often migrate on a temporary basis (circular migration) in order to diversify income and increase resilience (CONAPO, 2006). A large portion of this migration is thus short-termed (approximately 2 years) and circular, while recent socioeconomic factors have also led to elevated numbers of returns (Beauchemin et al, 2005; Zoukaleini, 2005). Scholars have noted that this migration is mainly a response to push-factors such as poverty, and becomes a 'consolidation or survival strategy' (Broekhuis, 2007), also known as 'eat away' migration (Wouterse, 2008).

Pierre Bourdieu has studied such perpetuation of status quo through the reproduction of forms of domination by state institutions and their actors. In a series of works dedicated to class, culture and structures of domination, he indeed shows how institutions – including educational institutions – can help preserve

existing hierarchies and social orders (Bourdieu, 1984). This functions with the conversion of economic capital into cultural, social and symbolic capital – in this case academic migration as a criterion for access to political posts. According to Bourdieu, the reproduction of structures of domination in society precisely depends on the imposition of cultural values which are represented as universal but which are in fact politically and historically determined (Bourdieu, 1991).

In a classic Bourdieuan (1984) perspective one might underline that academic migration has introduced an additional elite selection criteria that has helped maintain the dominance of the few with the required education and means to migrate: From during colonial times, development unions, families, clans and communities contributed money to send their sons abroad to receive education in order to subsequently integrate the state system. It is noteworthy that almost all the early political leaders from independence in Africa had benefited from such arrangements. Reverend Thévenoud, who managed the Pabre Seminary, made sure to acquire finances to send his students to France to attend medical studies, while Hamidou Dia has shown that government scholarships in Senegal today are largely influenced by interpersonal relations among the elite. Academic migration had thus become a key element of elite distinction, and in the case of Burkina Faso it has become increasingly difficult to access the resource of migration, especially intercontinental, as well as to acquire social mobility from migration. Therefore, beyond looking at the role of restrictive immigration policies in shaping a migration divide, one should include domestic factors that might limit access to the resource of migration.

## CONCLUSION

Intercontinental migration is a resource and a strategy for the wealthiest and most powerful sections of the West African population. Migration requires resources, and while the poorest often cannot migrate, the majority of migrants go to neighbouring countries for low-skilled professions. This paper has introduced the concept of the *migration divide* between the few with access to intercontinental migration versus those that migrate within Africa, since there are broad differences in the access to social mobility related to the two migration patterns. Intercontinental migration yields greater increases in income and livelihood security than intra-African migration and tends to exacerbate household inequalities (Wouterse, 2008; De Haas, 2009).

The paper has demonstrated the decline of the traditional elite and the introduction of academic migration to the global North as a means to social mobility since independence. This led to the ascendance of a new elite constituted by return migrants. Academic migration has since remained a key characteristic of elites in Burkina Faso. In spite of the continuous development of the University of Ouagadougou and increasingly closed European borders, foreign education has become the standard and the prerequisite for elite formation in Burkina Faso. With limited and unequal access to the resource of migration, it enhances elite monopolisation rather than increases social mobility today. There is in fact a breakdown of the social elevator via migration, and poverty is a strong deterrent of geographic and social mobility.

Consequently, without a strong stance on migration, the Burkina Faso case supports Hein de Haas' argument that the potential contributions of migration to development and poverty reduction are reduced since

preferential access to migration is likely to reinforce structural inequalities between rich and poor (de Haas, 2012):

“... more difficult the access of the poor to non-exploitive forms of (labour) migration is, the higher is the probability that the impact will fit within the predictions of the migration pessimist, particularly with regard to the potential contributions of migration to sustainability, macro-level development processes. In these situations, migration might even function to reinforce pre-existing inequalities by mainly serving the material interests of the already well-off and by maintaining the (often authoritarian) political status quo.” (de Haas, 2012, 14)

Today, we live in a contradictory age of migration, where rising numbers of migrants cross borders every day, combined with increasing restrictions to migration (especially for poor and low-skilled migrants). While alliances among certain aristocratic families and clans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the further development and monopolising of migration (Manchuelle, 2004), one might draw parallels to the current 21<sup>st</sup> century situation of highly politicised state machineries in West Africa, where foreign diplomas represent a comparable asset to ensure and maintain elite distinction. In Burkina Faso’s small traditional and largely hierarchical society with a limited access order built on interpersonal relations and informal processes, the current situation has maintained the established elite as the few with access to academic migration. ”The ability to control and manipulate others also derives from the privileged access to and control of valued resources such as education,

personal wealth, housing, food, health care and weapons of war”, wrote Seth Kreiberg in 1992. Today, ‘intercontinental migration’ should be added to the list as a key element for elite distinction.

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