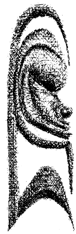

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Wealth, Consumption and Migration in a West African Society

New Lifestyles and New Social Obligations among the Kasena, Northern Ghana

Albert K. Awedoba and Hans Peter Hahn

Abstract. – Mobility and global entanglements in consumption are among the key concepts of globalisation. However, in social sciences there is an ongoing dispute about the consequences of human mobility, i.e., migration. Whereas many scholars assume that it has a beneficial effect on wealth in both, the sending and the receiving community, others relativise the economic effects and highlight the cultural patterns as motives for migration. This article sheds more light on these issues in a West African context. As shown through linguistic analyses and ethnographic evidence, migration leads to changing notions of wealth as such, thereby redefining in the sending community what is required to have a good life. The change of these concepts contributes to the increasing reconnaissance of consumption and to the expression of wealth through the possession of consumer goods. As a consequence, the acceptance of the consumerist concept of wealth engenders the desire to migrate: only through migration is it possible to acquire the financial means to participate actively in prestigious consumption. "Owning things" and "owning money" increasingly equals social reputation. This is also expressed through funeral arrangements, which become more and more costly. A proper funeral requires the financial means typically provided by migrants, thereby giving evidence for the deep cultural embedding of the new consumerist notion of wealth. *[Ghana, Kasena, migration, wealth, funerals, cultural change]*

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> Honestly, I do not have any cultural identity crisis as such. I practice the best of my own culture as well as the best of the culture in my temporary place of abode
>
> (Efurosibina Adegbija 2007: 113)

Introduction

In West Africa, migration and mobility have a long tradition. For over a century now, people from the villages in the savannah countries have left their places of birth seeking a better destiny and new experiences abroad. Initially, migration within the region was boosted by the colonial economy, but there are clear indications that already before submission to the colonial powers, considerable levels of mobility existed among the people (Rouch 1956).

With the British colonisation of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast the way was open for the intense exploitation of the area's labour resources to make up for the deficit in the labour requirements of the colony (Thomas 1973; Plange 1979). Confronted with the labour demands of the Gold Coast

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colony, the governor concluded that the Northern Territories must serve as the labour reservoir of the colony (Plange 1979: 662). There was naturally considerable resistance against this assumingly new form of exploitation. Coming so soon after the Zamberma slave raids, forcible recruitment must have seemed to communities such as the Kasena like another round of slave capture resulting in the permanent loss of kin to their communities. Recruits were sent where there was need for their labour – the mines, the cocoa plantations, civil work, etc.

The initial encounters, especially for those who worked in the mines, could not have been pleasant, and those recruited often used the least opportunity to escape (Thomas 1973: 82). The stories they brought home could not have been reassuring. But not all returned and some may have found less risky and better rewarding work elsewhere in the south. With time some began to espouse the opportunities associated with migration, particularly when migration was voluntary and seasonal, taking advantage of the long dry season when there was not much farmwork to do. The illiterate youth could visit the south and make the little money that enabled them to acquire the new merchandise available in southern stores. The stories told by these volunteer migrants recounted favourable experiences of a utopian life in the more developed south, and they had the material goods to support their claims. Soon the opportunity to go down south became the goal and life's ambition for youthful men.

It seemed to have remained so until recent times. Migration is attractive mainly because of the difficulties encountered in the area's seasonal agriculture. The poor soils and the dicey weather have not prevented the incidence of famine every other year. Since colonial times, there have been very few alternatives to subsistence agriculture, as the north was never part of anybody's scheme for industrialisation. Household incomes have indeed been very low. Against this backdrop migration was and still is irresistible.

Today the migrants are no longer mainly illiterate men, although illiterate migrants can be found. Kasena migrants consist of men and women, people of different ages and varied educational and professional backgrounds; some are people at the summit of their professions who can afford flamboyant lifestyles, and others languishing in low-income jobs, as well as the unemployed. Many of the migrants are networked by voluntary associations, some are pan-ethnic, others religious, and yet others bring together the elite from particular villages (Parkin 1966, Pratten 1996). For a number of these people the hometown is just a twelve-hour journey in the luxury of air-conditioned cars, which need not be an annual event, but a trip made whenever there is the inclination for it. But for each of these people a visit is a return home, and it goes with some particular obligations.

Against this background, we assume that migration is not something new or alien to Kasena society. Mobility of individuals and families and cultural exchange are part and parcel of most communities in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso since over a century. This has been and still is leading to social and cultural change and transformation and the Kasena have managed to integrate ideas and concepts brought along by migrants into their local sets of values and cultural orders. Given this conceptual framework, the aim of our contribution is to show the influence of migration on a particular relevant field of mobility, which is the notion of wealth and consumption.

As a rule, economic assets are among the core motives for migration. Young people migrate because they seek better economic opportunities elsewhere. These people leave their places of origin because they want to realise their dreams of acquiring consumer goods. This is reflected in particular by the notion of the "target worker." Gregory and Piché (1983) use this term for designating those migrants, who have a particular consumer good in mind when they leave home. They adapt their travel plans according to the chances of realising their goal. This means, in contradiction to economic theories, that better income opportunities may lead to a shorter term of migration, while the lack of jobs may force migrants to a prolonged stay (Hart 1974, 1978b). Nevertheless, migration in West Africa in general and in the Kasena society in particular did not directly lead to a significant change of economies and living standards at the places of origin. In sharp contrast to this, more than 40 years of research on migration in this area have shown that the effects of economic development and well-being, stimulated by migration, are significantly lower than expected (Cleveland 1991; Whitehead 2002). Therefore, the relation between migration and new emerging consumption patterns needs further thorough study in the context of the Kasena as well as on the general level of migration studies.

It is not possible to equate migration success and material well-being, as suggested in modernist approaches to migration (Redfield 1962; Byerlee 1974). Migration is a more complex issue; as anthropologists have repeatedly stressed, migration is not just about earning money or acquiring wealth. Rather, social and cultural issues are at core, too. Although some earlier studies pointed to the threat

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to traditional values, local patterns of consumption, and established social order (Bohannan 1955; Skinner 1965), there is now a broad consensus about the fact that most societies in northern Ghana and Burkina Faso have managed to integrate migration as part of their everyday life (Meier 2003; Cassiman 2008). The relevance of migration is not so very much based on remittances, which never reached the level expected, but to the integration of ex-migrants and to the maintenance of social bonds between those people left behind and their family members living elsewhere (Gugler 1991; Cliggett 2003).

Anthropologists have further shown that migration is not simply the flight from the place of origin. Instead, it is the desire to undergo a personal transformation, if not to speak about an initiation (Dougnon 2003). Leaving, staying abroad, and returning mark the three phases of migration. This corresponds to an initiation by which young people become fully recognised members of their societies. Although the economic role of consumption is questionable, it does play a crucial role in articulating this kind of transformation. In this context, consumer goods may have an emblematic quality at the conspicuous moment of returning home. External transformation can be effected through clothing and the acquisition of goods, indicators of a new social status (Newell 2005). The struggle for reintegration and social acceptance of the ex-migrants has been a point of scientific interest fairly early (Fortes 1936), and the question about the extent to which the ex-migrants' norms and values are integrated in their communities of origin is a point of frequent negotiations (Hahn 2007). Anthropology furthermore has made it clear that migration can only be understood properly by proceeding to the ethnography of the places of origin (Hage 2005). Without denying the relevance of economics, anthropologists suggest culture as the key factor for migration. The notion of "culture" in the context of migration may not be limited to a local community; it has become an organising factor of translocal and transnational networks. Migrants become mediators between the cultures of their places of origin and their host cultures (Adegbija 2007). Culture, therefore, is a topic of negotiations and migration may become a key for cultural self-consciousness (Sahlins 2000).

Based on this framework we will elaborate the changing notions of wealth and consumption in the Kasena society. We expect to show the resistance of local notions in spite of the emergence of new lifestyles which are closely connected to migration. This does not mean that notions of wealth remained unchanged, on the contrary, lifestyles of migrants never acquired the status of a ruling paradigm for all members of society. Thus, we expect negotiations about what is the proper way to consume and about the valuation of wealth and lifestyles to be a fruitful approach to understanding the role of migration in Kasena and their neighbours. We will present the findings of our ethnographic and linguistic research in two sections. The first one discusses concepts of wealth and consumption in Kasena society, while the second will present some findings on the lives of migrants and mediating strategies regarding the concepts presented previously and those of the migrants. In a final section, we will elucidate the question of cultural change attributable to Kasena migrants' lifestyles.

Changing Images of Wealth of Men and Women in Kasena Society

In this section, we will explain some meanings of wealth and consumption in Kasena society. What is consumable, what is consumed, and how it is consumed obviously differs considerably in time and space (Hahn 2008). Patterns of consumption changes throughout history and differences can be seen between adults and non-adults, men and women. However, for the case study in question here, there are some important commonalities. Generally speaking, rural Kasena people cannot be said to be very wealthy persons. Unless someone is employed in the formal sector or is a businessman or businesswoman, his annual income will not exceed GH₵ 400 or € 125 (exchange rate in 2013).

Local concepts of consumption can be defined in terms of how valued possessions are acquired and used. Consumables are physical/material or intangibles that matter to people – men and women; children and the elderly. There is an appreciation that the things that are consumed can be used up and, therefore, usually are finite; they will not remain forever with use. However, the objects of desire include things that Kasena people have to ask their ancestors for, when they offer prayers in ancestral sacrifices. From a male perspective, these desirable things, which cannot be acquired by money, include the following:

1. Health (*yazura* = *yera* [body] + *zura* [cool]: lit. "cool body") is something that a person has or does not have, and is pleased to have. *Yazura* is of course more than absence of illness; it means absence of serious illness, presence of peace and contentment – socially and spiritually.
2. Wives, children and other dependents. This is reflected in the concept of *kwaga* (the back or the

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followers) or evidence of continuity after death. It is said that the antidote to death is progeny – descendants to survive your demise.
3. Good relations and, therefore, a good name, and alongside this, influence in the community and beyond.

The kinds of goods that will be found in the typical prayer made to Kasena ancestral spirits include the following:

1. Livestock (*kônô*) – cattle, goats, and sheep: these are reared with the expectation that they will increase in numbers. Though not consumed directly, they are deployed in sacrifices, bridewealth transactions, and in funeral rites; they can be sold to generate cash to meet essential expenses, but they can also be bought from the market, if necessary.
2. Large farms and good harvests: stored food in abundance in the granary. This provides assurance that in the lean season, or when famine strikes, the family will not starve.
3. Cash (*sèbu*) may be saved against a rainy day, or spent in payments or for entertainment. Selling farm produce is criticised but so is the selling of farmland. The revenue is spent and not invested.
4. Clothing (*gwaro*): big gowns and smocks made from expensive hand-woven "Daboya" material, and wax-prints (*gwar-vɔɔ*) for women.

As a rule, the assistance of spiritual powers is required if an individual is to come into substantial quantities of these goods which also belong to the category of consumables. For those who have been blessed by the ancestors, their benevolence is to be treasured and used, but not expended with reckless abandon.

A proper Kasena supplication to the ancestors does not fail to request for good health, wives for the youth, childbirth for the young wives, peace, good yield from the farms, and livestock and food on the table (Awedoba 1985). These items are not, however, valued equally – some are more highly valued than others and sought after. Kasena distinguish between *wonnu* (purely material things) and *na-biina* or *kwaga* (kin and associates) giving a strong preference for the last. The prioritisation of *kwaga* makes sense in an economy depending on simple technology.[1] Where land is easily available, dependents make a critical difference to a person's wellbeing. They transform labour into wealth. Kin and associates are also one's support and bulwark in disputes. The typical wealthy person ("man," to be precise) or *nadum* is one who has maximised on these classes of things. Literally, the term means "weighty person," i.e., one who has become weighty as a result of his personal possessions; this should reflect in his appearance too.

This concept of wealth is to be contrasted with the *wonnu tu* (lit. the owner of things) and *sabu tu* (lit. the owner of money). Both terms are assigned to people who do not fully meet the standard of wealth. With those people, the following material items are to be expected:

1. A house or houses built from cement blocks and roofed with metal sheets rather than mud and roofed with grass;
2. Motor vehicle: a saloon car, working vehicle such as a tractor, or a motor cycle;
3. Household goods: bicycles, TV and video, refrigerator, saloon furniture, etc.

Despite polygyny being a traditional conjugal ideal among Kasena, some well-to-do people today (i.e., *sabu tu*) would rather opt to remain monogamously married but entertain a paramour – a woman who might be a divorcee or widow, or even a married woman with whom they enjoy a platonic relationship. The relationship springs from a desire for female companionship unfettered by conjugal obligations; the partners are more solicitous of each other's wellbeing and it is more rewarding because of the personal attention that each of the partners lavishes. This type of girlfriend would prepare sumptuous dishes to which her boyfriend is invited and entertained. For his part, he might send gifts of farm produce and guinea fowl meat, not excluding performing agricultural chores for the girlfriend.[2]

Women treasure more or less the same things as men. They often have to depend on a husband to access some of these things. Although this is not always the case nowadays, the wealth of the husband should be reflected in the well-being of his wife and children. Women traditionally treasured their handiwork and related objects such as pottery (pots and clay vessels of all kinds used for domestic

1 Farmers now have access to chemical fertilisers, herbicides and occasionally the services of motor vehicular-drawn ploughs. Bullocks and donkeys drawn ploughs are also used. However, in the cultivation of grain crops the ordinary village farmer still has to make do with the hoe.

2 This type of opposite sex friendship does not have to have a sexual component. Because of its value to a polygynously married man many still enter into such a relationship. It is not unusual for a man to take as a friend a woman who is much older than himself or is already married. In the past, husbands did not necessarily resent their wives' involvement in such relationships.

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purposes), calabashes of various kinds and sizes adequately decorated, a store of mats made from giant grass and millet stalk, etc. The following items of value to women are displayed in their rooms:

1. *sampogo* (*sampôgô*); this is a rack suspended from the roof of a hut; it holds a woman's collection of new mats;
2. *chirayiga*; this is a large support in the living room built out of clay, where pots and calabashes are arranged and displayed;
3. *zono* (*zônô*); this is a large net made of twine which holds the different calabashes in a woman's collection. The net is suspended from the roof.

Some of the most prestigious objects of women's possessions have totally disappeared from the villages today, although in the rural areas some respected old women still treasure them for ritual use.[3] As it has been described in literature from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, (Cardinall 1920, 1923; DeCarbo 1977) particular rich women exhibited their wealth in those days through bracelets from ivory (*swe* [swɛ]), stone bangles (*pɔpɔrɔ* [*peo*]), and waist beads (*koofia*).

Today wealthy women like to collect cloths and wax fabrics of various colours and designs (Scheld 2003). Women also by their own exertions come by money, livestock, and some now are able to build a house of their own in town, thereby affording themselves a life of independence. The best conduit for the Kasena female lacking formal education is to brew millet beer and to have a "chop bar" where cooked food is sold. Women may also sell a variety of items in the market place, such as grain products, vegetables, and various condiments necessary for broth preparation. They may visit bigger markets in the upper east, like Bolgatanga or even Tamale and Kumasi to buy goods that can be retailed in the smaller markets in the north.

In Kasem, as in most of the other languages of the Voltaic cultural zone where Grusi and Oti-Volta languages predominate, the verb *di*, "to eat," has implications for the local concepts of consumption. The meanings of *di* (to eat) are associated with the mouth, but it also conveys more generally the meaning of consumption.[4] A thing, an object, or a particular status can be ingested, so to speak; but it has to be good for the person or otherwise it will harm the individual who does the consuming. Nevertheless, although *di* is associated with eating and consumption in the physical sense, it is also metaphorical. In Kasem language, people can be eaten. For example, witches eat people, but also men literally "eat" women when they marry them, humans are eaten by the earth when they die. When one person takes advantage of another, he or she is said to have eaten a portion of the unfortunate person. Furthermore, money itself is said to have been eaten when it is expended in purchase or embezzled. Particular difficult conditions are eaten, when they manifest. Thus, to be in poverty is to *eat* poverty. To be in shame is to be "eaten or consumed by shame," i.e., when it engulfs the individual. The opposite is expressed similarly: Someone who is honoured does "eat" his name, while whoever take leads or wins in a competition or contest is said to eat his outstanding position. Achieving a leadership (i.e., chieftainship) is expressed as "eating the new position" and, more generally, having power is "eating power." The only exception in this semantic field is the acquisition of ritual offices, as those positions cannot be gained through competition.[5] The ambivalence of death is conveyed by the fact that people "cry" (*keeiri*) or mourn the dead, but they celebrate or "eat" the final funeral rites: *ba <u>di</u> lua*. Indeed, killing and eating can be related, as in the proverb that states that "If God does not kill, the earth will not consume."

As these examples make clear, eating and, more generally, consumption, have a much broader sense compared with Western languages. Consumption is the internalisation of something good, but also the experience of difficult situations or any other kind of particular social status. In the following, we will turn to the phenomenon of migration and ask to what extend newer concepts of consumption, as found with ex-migrants, can be integrated into the semantic framework of eating and consumption.

Migration, Lifestyles, and Conspicuous Consumption

In Kasena society, those people looking back on a longer or shorter period of time spent in one of the

3 Until recently it was a disgrace for female affines of the category of mother-in-law to attend the final funeral rites of a deceased man of the category of father-in-law without taking along a new mat. The delegation was sure to be snubbed if it failed to provide the mother-in-law's mat. One of the authors witnessed this in 1995.

4 The importance of the mouth is reflected in the proverb that "it is better that your farm does not yield than that your mouth does not function" (*N kara na saare gare n ni na saare*). This proverb also shows that material wealth is useless if it cannot be consumed.

5 The one who has fortified himself with sorcery and magical powers is said to have "eaten" medicines, though in this case he or she has not come into a formal office or position as a result.

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urban centres at the West African coast can be recognised by their personal possessions. The experience of migration, life in the south, and the knowledge about urban lifestyles has a profound impact on the identities of the persons in question. The material objects attached to this experience leave some distinctive traces in the migrants' compounds in two regards. On the one hand, everybody can recognise the higher share of the goods of Western origin in the migrant's house. On the other hand, some of the goods have been brought along when returning from the destinations of migration, and, as everybody knows, these particular things are difficult to acquire in the markets of the region.[6]

When migrants return to their villages of origin for a visit or with the intention of staying there for good, they bring along money and as many consumer goods as possible. The wealthiest, in recent years, will even hire a taxi from the bus station in order to transport their entire luggage.[7] This luggage may contain a wide range of standard objects, like soap, pomade, clothing, and wax prints, which have a generally accepted use value (Cunningham 2009). Some of these objects are handed over as gifts to neighbours or relatives living in other places, but the bulk remain in the migrants' compounds. At the moment of arrival, these objects doubtlessly have an emblematic quality: They indicate where the migrant comes from and whether his trip was successful or not. Moreover, the objects confirm the new identity of the migrant as a "been-to" and express his abiding ties to kin and place of origin (Fortes 1936).

But there are further objects of a merely doubtful use: posters, plastic objects, radios, and toothbrushes, and so on. Within a few weeks the usage of the objects changes, i.e., many of the items brought along are not in use any more, others are still in use, but people have learned that these objects are not very well adapted to the conditions of the rural milieu. Thus, the objects reveal their ambiguous role. Some ex-migrants challenge the people left behind by their conspicuous lifestyle (Hahn 2004).

In order to understand the role of consumption within this process of reintegration, it is important to keep the focus on the things, which have such an important role at the very beginning. The more or less fluid categories of these things as "indicators of success," or "everyday stuff," or just "things you keep without having any proper usage" show the span of changes they undergo. Obviously, the ex-migrants do have strategies to reactivate the role of these goods, for example, when they decide to offer one or several items as a gift to members of the local community. Another strategy is to keep the things in the house and not to show them to the public. By doing so, the migrants contextualise these things as individual markers of difference, which cannot be shared with those who do not have the experience of migration.

Ex-migrants as a group can be credited with a particular lifestyle. A systematic analysis of their material possessions would reveal significant differences, compared to the possessions of nonmigrants (Koenig 2005). This is true in spite of the fact that a great share of the items are handed over as gifts. Furthermore, the particular experience of migration justifies the evaluation of the ex-migrants as a lifestyle group. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of distinction (1979), one might compare the relevance of red wine and beer for social differentiation in the French society to the usage of toothbrushes and wooden chewing sticks in the West African Savannah. Those, who ostentatiously brush their teeth with a plastic toothbrush show up their difference to the "locals" and mark a difference to those people who have never learned to appreciate the proper usage of "modern" teeth cleaning utensils.

This example of the particular migrants' consumption pattern reveals also the limits of the lifestyle approach in the West African context (Hahn 2006). The habitus of using toothbrushes – and other distinctive objects – is not as stable over longer time periods as one might assume. As we observed, after a few months, when the brushes have worn out, they are not replaced. Instead, most people resort to using chewing sticks. The vanishing of the material signs of "having been migrant" also applies for other consumer goods, like wristwatches, which rarely are used once the watches have ceased to function due to a depleted battery cell; or calendar posters, which are a "must" for most returning migrants. When these posters are bleached out or eaten up by termites, few ex-migrants care to replace these posters in order to have the valid calendar.

Another example of the negligence is the bicycle, or, more recently, the motorcycle, both being among the most prestigious goods in the possession of migrants. For nonmigrants it is very difficult to acquire a bicycle or even a motorcycle from the earnings from agriculture in the village. To buy one of these items is one of the most important aims of

6 The long distance from the coast means that unless commodities brought in are subsidised, they end up selling at a higher price.

7 In the past, kin were informed and they came over and helped carry the luggage. There is the joke about the returnee who did not bring back much, but to hide his shame he stuffed his box with stones to give the impression that his box was full of valuables and that his trip had been a success.

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migrants, and it is the classical topic of the aforementioned "target worker." Thus, these items are a fairly good indicator for the presence of migrants or ex-migrants in a compound, although some migrants manage to bring a new bicycle every year when they visit their family. These objects are eventually given to relatives in the compound. However, it is not sufficient to have a bicycle or a motorcycle, the owners also must have the physical capacity to ride it and they have to invest in the maintenance of their vehicle. Some owners even extensively invest in the decoration of their possession. Their effort to "show off" is a demonstration of conspicuous consumption.

This is a critical aspect turning quickly into a topic of judgements of the migrants. Someone who is investing too much in his bicycle or in the maintenance of the material objects brought along will be criticised for marrying (or, literally "eating") his bicycle instead of looking for a wife. Whoever cares too much for his material things is soon on the agenda for critical commentary and becomes the subject for critical statements about migration. Judgments on an individual's migration experiences are not only based on the quantities of goods brought back but also on the way a migrant distributes his new richness, how much he is giving away as gifts, how many things he is keeping for himself.

The bicycle, which can be married (= eaten), instead of marrying a woman (as young men are supposed to do) is just one example for the difficulties and dilemmas of managing consumer goods in Kasena society. Other examples hint at the challenge of proper remitting and distributing wealth in the village: Migrants very often are criticised for bringing along "just things" from the south, so-called "novelties," instead of money to be shared out among kin. Or they are accused of giving away too many items immediately after returning, instead of keeping the bulk for personal use. Fashionable clothes are a case in point. Jeans are a "must" for the returning migrant, however, jeans are not suitable for fieldwork in the tropical climate. Thus, people argue that migrants should bring cloth instead of fashionable urban clothing to the village. Paradoxically, when they bring money, they are sometimes criticised for spending too much with their age mates in the market, instead of leaving the money with their parents and so on (Hahn 2007).

Discussion

Through the commentaries on the returning migrants' behaviour it becomes evident that the migrants bring along a new understanding of wealth and consumption. Being quite close to the idea of the already mentioned *wonnu tu* (lit. owner of things) and *sabu tu* (lit. owner of money), albeit temporarily their attitudes reflect a new set of preoccupations and priorities. Concern with money and things bought on the large markets in southern Ghana becomes more prominent. However, as made clear in the previous section, keeping and accumulating these things is no option for the returning migrants conforming to local norms and expectations about consumption. The appropriate investment at the moment of the arrival in the place of origin is in social relations, not in increasing the material possession per se.

Consumption in this context is associated with exhibition and demonstration. The things coming from the south are conspicuous objects, and they do attract public attention. However, the general approach is the expectation of temporariness: This kind of material wealth will not last for long time, and the best thing a migrant can do is to convert his riches into the somehow larger notion of wealth, prevailing among those who did not leave the village. Wealth and consumption of the migrants, as far as it is distinctive, can only be regarded as something episodic and circumscribed. One could emphasise this somehow contradictory notion by saying that the proper way of dealing with wealth is to get timely rid of it (Walsh 2004).

Affluence in material things is not beyond Kasena notions of wealth, but Kasena would express a somehow restricted mode of wealth. Reintegration, therefore, means reducing the wealth in material possessions and increasing property in the dimension of and in *na-biina* or *kwaga* (kin and associates). It also has to be remarked in this context, that the presentation of respect is just as important as the giving of presents. The returning migrant should visit all the households, greet the people, and socialise with them. He should present his condolences at the various compounds for all the bereaved members of the community. This should include his in-laws and affines and even distant kin like his mother's people. He would have failed miserably if he did not do this. He could be labelled as another *wonnu tu* who does not think human relations matter: literally, he has allowed "his prosperity to cover his eyes."

Material possessions are an integral part of the local notion of wealth, as has been shown with the traditional objects of value. Currently and in particular through the migrants' action, this aspect of wealth is being expanded and now includes a large number of consumer goods. But nobody would con-

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tend that this singular dimension is sufficient for a *nadum*. The public judgement of the migrants' action is mainly concerned with the distinction between *sabu tu* and *nadum*; whereas the first indicates a misunderstanding or even a misguided narrowing of the concept of wealth, the second is regarded as the proper way to be wealthy.

To engage actively in a movement from the first towards the second is the key to recognition or even reintegration of the migrants. To some extent the neglect of their material possession and the failure to invest in its maintenance are conditions for a successful conversion of one form of wealth into the other (Bohannan 1955; Steiner 1954). The limited relevance of the consumer goods becomes all the more clear when looking at their destiny after some time in the village. The spoiled watches, the clothes handed over to children because nobody wants to wear them when working, the radio and torchlight which cannot be used because no batteries are available: all these items had their conspicuous moment – their presentation at the moment of arrival. In the months and years thereafter, their relevance for everyday life becomes marginal to their owners.

The objective of engaging in such a transformation should not be underestimated. People from Kumasi and Accra told us several times that a visit to the upper east would not cost less than GH₵ 1.000 (equals $ 700 in 2009) being more than six times the monthly salary of average employee. The high costs are not due to transport expenses alone, they are attributable to the costs entailed in purchasing gifts to be presented on the arrival to kith and kin and the cash handouts to expectant relatives. The village market, which falls once in three days, has always been the place for the migrant to exhibit his successful venture abroad – his "improved" self and his gear –, i.e., clothes, perfumes, etc.: to see and be seen beyond the lineage boundaries. Here, however, migrants come under considerable pressure to entertain acquaintances to a pot of *sana*, the local millet beer (or even to a number of bottles of beer, which are regarded as a luxury consumer good). What is entailed in a return is considerable investment, given the types of occupations open to the illiterate migrant, and it explains why migrants can only make these visits after a long period of sojourn in the urban centres and a parsimonious lifestyle abroad.

But these types of migrants are forced to invest in the narrow field of "wealth as possession in consumer goods" and to prepare themselves for the transformation into the larger sense of wealth prevailing at the place of origin. There are, however, strategies open to migrants who can choose to maintain contact without having to incur the expenditure described above. The era of the cheap mobile phone presents a reprieve. In particular, mobile phones have created the opportunity to keep in touch with the relatives left behind, and many migrants prefer to offer a mobile phone plus a SIM-card with a limited phone account (Hahn and Kibora 2008: 98) to their immediate kin, including aged parents; it does not seem to matter that the recipients lack alphabetic and numeracy skills.

The question of how much the migrants should invest in order to pursue this path of conversion is highly disputed. There is always the suspicion that the migrants do not engage entirely, that the narrower concept of wealth has gained so much influence on them that they hold back part of their means. While the gift of a mobile phone is appreciated, its value is limited as far as the wider kin networks are concerned and does not quite compensate for the excitement and social value of the actual visit. At best it postpones the return and allows the migrant to plan towards an appropriate return. Translating the negotiations about remittances into the process of mediating between differing concepts of wealth and consumption has the important advantage of separating the phenomenon of permanently flowing remittances from the questions of development and increasing standards of life through the surplus from labour migration. Although those left behind never hesitate to highlight the help and the improvement of their precarious situation provided through the remittances, as a matter of fact the expected economic development did not happen. Labour migration is relevant for the Kasena, but it has hardly ever been an economic "development device." The experiences of the migrants are rather more relevant as an indirect factor of development.

To understand the complex relationship between migration and the different concepts of wealth and consumption, and in order to underline the economic marginality of migration, it is helpful to look at funerals, which are not only among the most prominent social events in Kasena society but are also the occasion for conspicuous consumption. Customarily, Kasena final funeral rites take place sometime after the burial of the deceased: the time lapse depended on family circumstances – consensus among the immediate kin and the elders about when to hold the rites, and more importantly, the availability of quantities of foodstuff is necessary for the rites. Thus, the final funeral rites that entail feasting can be postponed for years, if not decades, until a suitable occasion has been found (Abasi 1995; Atadana 1987). Funerals are one of the most important motives urging migrants to come back to the village. Whenever a migrant loses a relative in his family, a straight-

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away visit to the village of origin is obligatory.[8] The great "final funeral rites" as such may take several days and need heavy investments from the immediate relatives. Funerals constitute the moment, when the social position of the deceased is expressed in the public and, thereby, the honour of the bereaved is challenged. There is no greater shame then than to fail in organise funeral and burial rites befitting the status of the dead.

While in the past kin members of "Kumasi" hardly participated in burial rites, it is now becoming the norm to delay burial in the expectation that any immediate kin in the "south" would arrive. In order to properly organise the funeral of a respected person,[9] the migrants' input of money, provisions, and logistical have become obligatory. Only a migrant's financial means can give sufficient support for the multitude of invited guests (often in their hundreds). People in the area even say that a funeral itself may become a memorable event to be talked about for some time to come, only when the migrant members of the deceased's family engage properly. We may agree with van der Geest (2000) that at present funerals provide occasions for the living to demonstrate their social, political, and economic excellence among the Kasena of Navrongo. The family members will not hesitate to do their best as hosts of the funeral (Cantrell 1992). They bring along not only money but also lorry loads of chairs, generators, music devices, boxes of soft drinks and alcoholic beverages, food, and so on. All this is a far cry from the traditional mortuary observances, when cooking was forbidden in the compound where the death occurred until the corpse had been buried. Then the immediate family had to be fed by distant kin and friends lest they starve; now the bereaved must bestir themselves to provide entertainment for the guests.

Investing consumer goods in funerals does not mean wasting resources, but it is an opportunity for the migrants to convert their wealth into social reputation, which in the specific sense is also part of wealth. As Keith Hart (1987b) has stressed in his critical account on the measuring of life standards, the inhabitants of the West African savannah are not willing to allocate all their resources in consumer goods, and, therefore, are deficient in one of the core parameters of life standards. As he argues, investment in social relationships and events, like funerals, are more important to a good life than material possessions. Still referring to Hart, this does not mean that people disregard material possessions. But the costs for material consumption are so high that the investment in the sphere of the social seems to be more rewarding. All these remarks fit perfectly to our findings concerning the returning migrants' behaviour.

At this crucial moment, migrants may "eat up all their money," but at the same time they "eat the honour" of contributing to the success of the social event. Thus, the verb "to eat" makes clear that both aspects, wealth in consumer goods and wealth in social recognition, are part of the local concept of wealth. Although Kasena have integrated the modern consumer goods in their local economic system (Hart 1987a), they have managed to maintain their extended meaning of wealth, which includes the values of social networks.

Funerals are one idiom expressing the complex notion of wealth; in the Kasena case they emphasize the aspects of *kwaga* (people belonging to someone) and *wonnu* (things, consumer goods). As Kasena migrants engage in these events, they recognise the validity of the local concept of wealth. On the other hand, when people say that a good funeral is only possible with the material engagement of migrants, it becomes clear that the local concept of wealth in a particular way has integrated the migrants' notion of wealth.

8 Failure to attend the burial rites of kin, close associates, or affines is a serious matter, making it a serious indictment for it to be said that one does not attend funerals. Where attenuating circumstances prevent participation on the burial day, efforts must be made to visit later to condole with the bereaved. Kin and affines in the chiefdom and in neighbouring communities must be notified of deaths to enable them to attend the burial rites. A large funeral congregation is thus an indicator of the deceased's importance and social worth. In the past, when migrants living in southern Ghana could not afford the expenses of an unplanned visit, it was understandable if a person did not attend even his own parents' burial rites. There were then no refrigeration facilities in local hospitals for the preservation of corpses, and instant communication with kin in southern Ghana did not exist. Within the last decade it has become necessary for close kin in the diaspora to come home for the burial rites. They are now under moral obligation to do.

9 In 2008, when a respected teacher passed away, bus loads of sympathisers from all over the country, not to mention well-to-do Kasena working outside the area, converged in Navrongo to sympathise with one of his sons who was a highly placed civil servant. The MP's father's burial was even grander, with the President of Ghana himself attending the event to sympathise with the MP, who was then also a cabinet minister. Between 2006 and 2009, Navrongo has witnessed several of such high profile burial events.

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