

## **Four Wives and a Migrant Husband. Female Migration from Rural Burkina Faso since the 1950s**

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The idea in development policy thinking that migrants' remittances and return journeys are instrumental in creating economic growth and social change among the people they have left behind rekindles dualism in representations of those on the move who are perceived as 'modern', rational economic agents and those staying behind reigned by poverty and customary practices. Yet, in regions of sustained high levels of labour migration, many of those staying behind are, in fact, former migrants and the frequency of returns and remigrations stimulates vital social and symbolic connections between the different communities linked by migrants. This paper aims to foreground a medium term perspective by looking at how the meaning of migration changes over the life course. Evolving around the biographies of four women from the Centre-est of Burkina Faso and contextualised by ethnographic research in that region and among its migrants in Ouagadougou and Abidjan, the paper explores women's justifications of being migrants and returnees at different points in their lives as well as their expectations of children who are migrants. Through their puzzling stories, we learn much about the value in rural areas of different types of remittances, gifts and investments and how they may challenge gender and generational ideologies. The paper addresses both young and older women's migration, their economic accumulation strategies inside and outside marriage and their interpretations of how their children's (migrant) status shaped their social position.