After the First World War, young boys, Dogon and Bambara, left their villages in great numbers for the Gold Coast (today's Ghana) where they worked on cocoa and coffee plantations. Expelled from Ghana like all other foreigners in the 1970s, they then turned to Ivory Coast and the capital cities in the region, namely Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou. This is why even today young men are called 'Accra Boy', i.e. a young man from Accra (Ghana's capital city). Today, young men go to cities or to neighbouring countries in search of remunerative work between the two rainy seasons to find work to pay their taxes and meet the expense of marriage and other family needs.

The diatigi is a trustworthy person who hosts a migrant, sometimes for a long time. It is usually someone who originates from the same village and the same ethnic group as the migrant.

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villages to go to distant regional cities like Bamako, Segou, Djenne or Sikasso and to cities like Ouagadougou, Conakry, Dakar and Abidjan. Migration on such a massive scale by young peasant girls is being undertaken for cultural reasons linked to strong economic incentives. One of the main reasons is the paramount importance of the family’s honour in village affairs. Honour is a strong incentive and motivates countrymen to accumulate savings in order to complete the purchase of costly ‘modern’ wedding trousseaus. This conspicuous rural competition for an expensive trousseau has had such an inflationary effect on the cost of the wedding itself that the girls’ parents are no longer willing or able to afford to pay for everything by themselves. Today the wedding trousseau can be acquired only through money accumulated by the young migrant girls after several years of wage labour in harsh surroundings in cities. Although peasant girls always gave the need for bride wealth as a primary reason for migrating, my research shows that their migration was inspired by a complex set of different motives. Indeed, collecting bride-wealth items was the more legitimate reason while others were more hidden. Most were associated with feelings of deteriorating social links and living conditions in the villages. More specific reasons, like the obligation to care for a divorced mother, a widowed grandmother or an isolated aunt, appeared to be important extra incentives to undertake urban migration. And some expressed the wish to experience city life or escape forced marriage. Admittedly, these reasons were of a different nature but they were not necessarily at odds with others previously mentioned. The current situation is that numerous young peasant girls are leaving their villages for periods of five to six years to help their family and provide for their bride wealth. While in the urban areas, these young girls are quickly exposed to situations in which they may be sexually exploited and face the violence associated with these situations.

This chapter aims to show the social process that exposes young migrant peasant girls to ordinary violence. From an analysis of the situations of the ‘52’ in the region of Djenne, the nature of their vulnerability to violence is

4 A UNICEF survey undertaken in Mopti by Brigitte Delay in 1999 established that 80% of young home helps (n: 769) had sexual intercourse in exchange for gifts or money. 15% became pregnant and, of these, 90% had a dangerous abortion to terminate their pregnancy. The remaining 10% were unmarried girls who were at risk of being banished from their village.

5 I coordinated field research on this topic in Mali for two years. The village data for the region of Jenne was collected by one of my students, Youssouf Maiga. The interviews involved different categories of people: unmarried migrant mothers, the migrants’ parents, fiancés or lovers, village leaders, social workers, etc. A total of 85 interviews were conducted in 17 villages (Soala, Djenné–ville, Sirabougou bambara, Bougoula, Kouin, Gagna, Diongué bambara, Dorobougou, N’Dobougou, Yébé, Siratinti, Bankassi, N’Djibougou, Flaco, N’Gola, Kéké,