

# Rootedness: Framing Interactions between Adult Migrants and their Non-Migrant Parents in Ghanaian Transnational Families

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## Abstract

Transnational social interactions at the micro-level highlight how migrants and their non-migrant relations sustain various forms of exchanges that crisscross their spatial boundaries. Despite this, 'disembeddedness' and 'fluidity' have been highlighted as distinctive features of mobile subjects, whose local ties become weakened as a result of their mobilities. While connectedness and 'disembeddedness' seem contradictory, they demonstrate multiple dimensions of complex processes of change and continuity that characterise migrants' social experiences. This study uses 'rootedness' as a conceptual framework to capture the contradictions. The forms and expression of the concept are highlighted and analysed through interviews of twenty non-migrant parents in Ghana based on their interactions with their migrant offspring abroad from October 2018 to December 2020. The parents' interviews are complemented by interviews with five of the migrants and other qualitative data-gathering methods that highlight the experiences of Ghanaian emigrants. Based on its various forms of expression, rootedness emphasises a strong sense of cultural bond to the homeland. The concept also highlights the norm of reciprocity, and the ability of migrants to rupture normative influences given the power their migration bestows on them. The analyses bring to the fore that migrants, amidst ruptures and transformations, also remain rooted in their homelands

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This paper is carved out of a broader PhD thesis. I appreciate the contributions, reviews, and insights of my supervisors, Prof. Akosua K. Darkwah and Dr. Peace M. Tetteh of the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, in the broader thesis and the two anonymous reviewers for the constructive feedback on this paper. I also appreciate the input of my colleagues at the Department of African Studies, University of Vienna and at the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana.

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## Introduction

In the past three decades, transnational social interactions have been noted at the micro level to emphasise the dynamic connections between migrants and their relations in the homeland (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 19; Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 56). Transnational interactions are dynamic because they respond to the socio-cultural environments that migrants and their non-migrant relations share in the 'transnational social field' (Levitt 2001: 9). Through such interactions, the socio-cultural spaces and the lives of migrants and their non-migrant relations are impacted to various degrees (Levitt 2004: 21; Pribilsky 2004: 332). The social interactions, facilitated by advances in communication technologies, underscore the primary importance of the kinship bond among transnational families (Charles et al. 2008: 185). This notwithstanding, macro-level accounts of the transformations in contemporary families emphasise an individualisation thesis that points to an increasing weakening of structural norms, a situation accentuated by migration (Bauman 2000: 33; Beck/ Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 22; Giddens 1992: 198). Migrants, therefore, are seen as agents who, by being spatially distant from their native lands, can more easily disembed from the constraints of traditional norms (Bryceson/ Vuorela 2002: 14). However, the extent to which the autonomous actions of migrants triumph over the overt and covert demands of their significant kin, such as parents, needs further examination given parents' important role in the lives of migrants.

I reflect on the seemingly contradictory phenomenon of the transnational bonds shared among migrants and their non-migrant relations in the homeland and migration-engendered individuation. I use the concept of rootedness to embody these contradictions among adult first-generation migrants and their non-migrant parents. As the root of a tree has several pathways, rooting migrants in the Ghanaian socio-cultural space also has several outcomes. The divergent paths are conceptualised in the study as acceptance, resistance, and transformations. The paths are outcomes of implicit and explicit negotiations among the migrants, their parents, and other relations in the homeland. This study highlights that parents begin the rooting process before the migration project, by usually discouraging the migration of younger, immature offspring who are more likely to be susceptible to the socio-cultural influences of the destination regions. Upon the successful migration of their adult children, parents rely on mobile phone calls and other media platforms such as WhatsApp, to sustain their influence on them. The pathways to rootedness are expressed through practices such as choice of marriage partner, food cultures, flows of remittance, and other forms of identity mobilisation.

The findings of the study are based on interviews with twenty parents in Nkoranza and Accra of Ghana conducted from October 2018 to October 2020. The interviews focused on their interactions with their adult migrant children through mobile phone calls and voice-over-internet-protocol (VOIP) platforms such as WhatsApp. The parents' interviews are complemented by interviews with five of the migrants and reviews of videos on Facebook and YouTube on the experiences of Ghanaian emigrants, as well as with personal observations in Ghana and among Ghanaian emigrant communities in Vienna, Austria, and Düsseldorf, Germany. Nkoranza in the Bono East region and Accra, the capital of Ghana, were purposively selected for the study as they represent critical rural and urban hotspots of transnational families in Ghana.

The following section presents a brief overview of the study areas and methods of data gathering. This is followed by an analysis of how parents negotiate and reinforce normative structural patterns and how they are accepted, rejected, or redefined by the migrants. The article ends with some conclusions based on the findings.

### **Study Areas, Participants, and Data Gathering Methods**

Accra is the cosmopolitan hub of Ghana, with the most significant opportunities for both formal and informal employment (Hess 2000: 37; Konadu-Agyemang 2001: 16). Despite this, there are burgeoning slums (Grant 2009: 119) and an increasing number of persons classified as urban poor, with an aggravated poverty and vulnerability index (Essamuah/ Tonah 2004: 94; Yeboah 2010: 46).

The fieldwork experience in Accra was markedly different from that of Nkoranza due to my position as a resident of Accra and the city being a relatively researched community. In Accra, field entry was negotiated at the micro-level such as the homes and workplaces of participants. The participants from Accra were contacted in the following suburbs: Achimota, Amasaman, Kwabenya, East Legon Hills, Legon, and Ashaley Botwe. Subsequent participants were selected through snowballing when initial contacts were established based on recommendations from my social networks.

Nkoranza, despite being the municipal capital of Nkoranza South municipality, is not as urbanised as Accra. The main economic activities of its residents are farming crops such as yams, maize, cashews, and watermelons, as well as informal trade and provision of services. Compared to Accra, the region has a relatively higher rate of persons who have never been to school—31.5% versus 12.4% in Accra. There remains a considerable urban bias in educational attainment in Ghana (GSS 2019: 23), and this partly accounts for the specific livelihood

choices of the people in Nkoranza—farming and informal trading. Field entry in Nkoranza occurred at the community level because, as a new person there, I needed to seek legitimacy for my activities from the community gatekeepers – the municipal office and the traditional council. Being an ‘outsider’, I also needed guidance to identify key research participants. Thus, I informed designated officials of the two institutions about my research interest in the community and sought their assistance. They welcomed my interest and generously provided the support I required.

**Table 1.0: Gender and Location of Participants**

Location of Parent	Nkoranza		Accra	
Relation to Migrant	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Number Interviewed	9	3	6	2
Total based on Location	12		8	

Source: Author’s Field Data (2020)

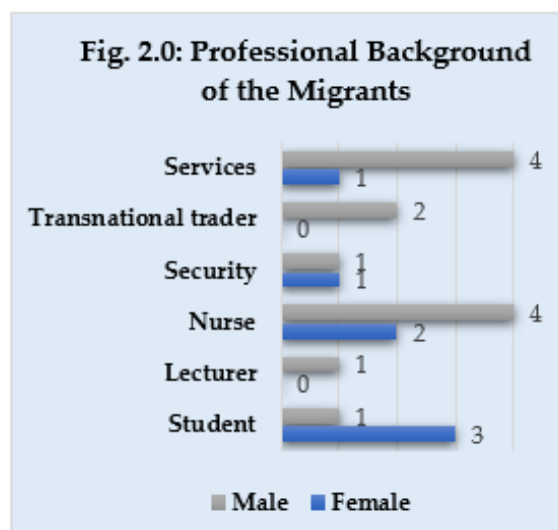
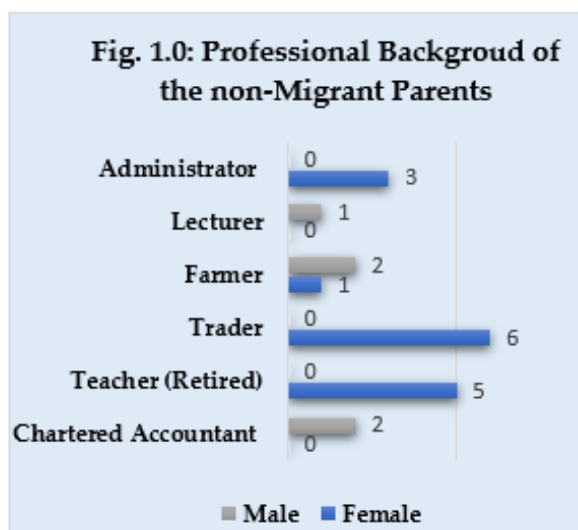
**Table 1.0** presents the gender and location of the twenty (20) parents interviewed for the study from the two areas.

The parents interviewed had adult migrant children living in the following destinations abroad: Italy, the United States, Germany, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, China, and the Netherlands. Each parent interviewed provided information on one migrant child and their relationship with them. The interviews, therefore, also focused on the lives of twenty migrants, fifteen of whom were married and had their own children. The single migrants were all males except for one. Further, six of the married migrants were females, and the remaining nine were males.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This underscores traditional migratory patterns in Ghana which are increasingly undergoing transformations with the feminization of migration, among others (Darkwah et al. 2016: 8ff; Setrana/Kleist 2022: 58f).

Another key variable within the parents' category of participants is the immigration status of their migrant offspring, whether as documented or undocumented migrants. Among the parents participating in the study, six had adult migrant children who were undocumented migrants at the time of the interview. By undocumented migrants I mean emigrants who do not have the authorization of the State in their destination countries to enter or live in those countries. Out of the six, five were from Nkoranza and one from Accra, echoing research that has revealed Nkoranza as a vibrant community of undocumented migrant networks (Bob-Miller 2012: 23; Darkwah et al. 2019: 7). Undocumented migrants are more vulnerable than their documented counterparts because they face the constant risk of deportation if discovered by authorities of the state. They always have to search for ways to minimise the risk of deportation, some of which place them in vulnerable positions.

Figures 1.0 and 2.0 below present the professional backgrounds of the non-migrant parents and their migrant offspring, respectively. The mothers from the parents' sample are mainly in professions such as trading, teaching, and administration, while fathers, despite their unequal representation in the sample, predominate in the formal sector in professions such as accounting and lecturing, and some are also found in the informal sector, as farmers. Even though the sample is not representative of all Ghanaian workers, the pattern of employment among the non-migrant parents to some extent aligns with the general pattern of employment in Ghana, in terms of the gender segregation and the sector of employment (Tsikata/ Darkwah 2013: 211).



Source: Field Data (2020)

The migrants whose parents were interviewed were represented in professions such as nursing (6), undergraduate (1) and postgraduate (3) students, services such as receptionists at hotels (1), and in the urban transport service (4). Others included security personnel (2), transnational traders who sell their products in Ghana and abroad (2) and a lecturer (1). The professional backgrounds of the migrants also to some extent aligned with the general patterns among labour migrants, particularly their proportions in the nursing and the service sector (Coe/ Shani 2015: 569ff).

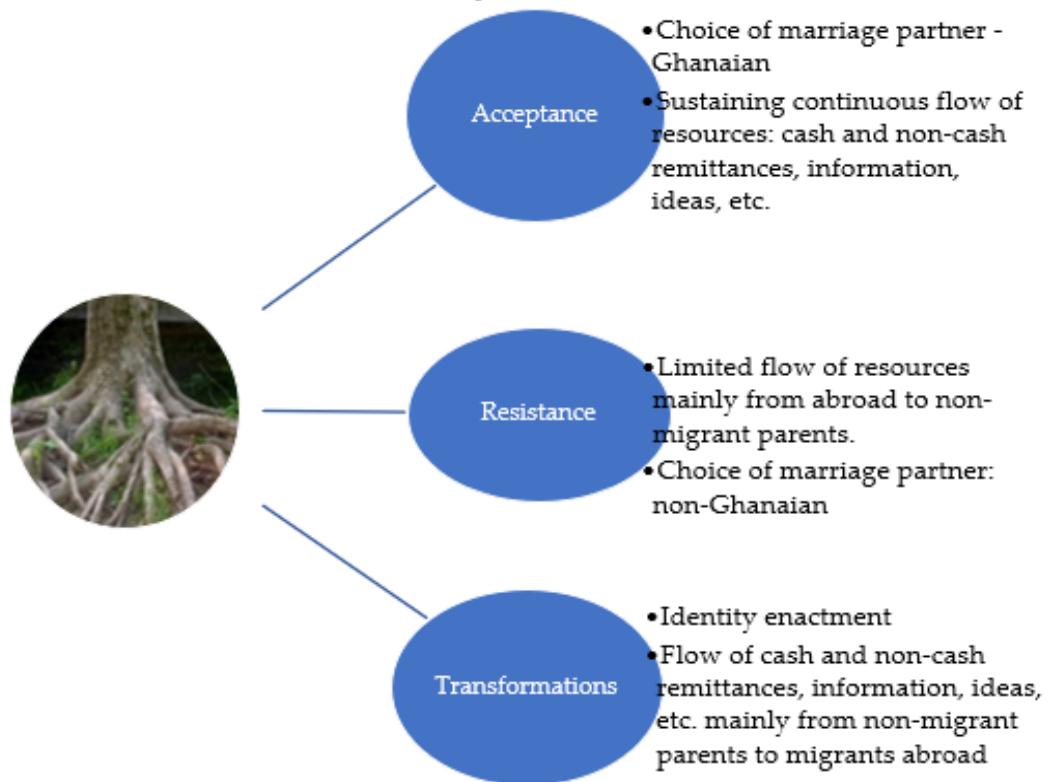
The data gathering and analysis took place concurrently. The analysis processes entailed transcribing the interviews and coding both open and axial. The coding was done in-vivo and in-vitro. In the in-vivo coding, participants' own words were used to generate the codes, whereas the in-vitro entailed the use of pre-determined concepts to capture insights from the words of the participants. A three-tier thematic network was generated from the themes, following the thematic network analysis method of Attride-Stirling (2001: 388).

### Rooting the Migrants in the Socio-Cultural Milieu of Ghana: Resistance, Acceptance, and Transformations

Figure 3.0 presents the thematic network of the field data that draws a broader theme and builds various sub-themes out of it. Thus, an in-vivo code labelled 'rootedness' (displayed as a picture) is used to capture the broader thematic focus of the nature of interactions between the migrants and their non-migrant

parents in Ghana. The concept of rootedness has three sub-themes, conceptualised as ‘acceptance’, ‘resistance’, and ‘transformations’. The manifestation of the three sub-themes and the practical ways in which they are expressed are given further elaboration in the analysis that follows.

**Figure 3.0: Thematic Network Analysis of Rootedness**



**Source: Author’s conceptualisation of data from fieldwork, 2020**

The concept of rootedness that underlines the interactions between the migrants and their non-migrant parents connotes the idea of origin or source. It also carries the notion of a sense of attachment, in this context to the people and cultures of Ghana, the originating region of the migrants. Parents’ desire to ensure that their adult migrant children are rooted in Ghanaian cultures, such as by being able to communicate in their mother tongue, marry someone who shares the same roots, and care for other members of their families, is brought into sharper focus upon migration. The non-migrant parents interviewed generally maintained an awareness that the socio-cultural offerings of the destination regions do not always align with those of the homeland and thus consciously asserted the importance of the latter.

How this awareness is sharpened upon the migration of their offspring is fascinating when one considers that even in the home region of Ghana other factors of change such as urbanisation, cultural diffusion perpetuated by returned migrants and other actors, formal education, religion, and visual and print media also introduce new cultural elements that may not align with traditional cultural expectations and obligations (Coe 2017: 543; Nukunya 2016: 211). This notwithstanding, rooting the migrants in a Ghanaian socio-cultural milieu remains a keen concern for their parents. The concern is articulated by the Ghanaian Ambassador to Norway in an excerpt from her conversations with the Ghana Union in Norway:

A time will come when you cannot walk. I don't think you would like to end up in an older adults' home here, some may, but if you will find the back of your palm to be sweet, it is not as sweet as your palm. In the future, you may like to go home, and your children, if you don't seep them into the Ghanaian culture, would not know that it is their responsibility to take care of you. You will be there during your retirement, and they would call to say 'hi' and later hang up (...). This is an opportunity to seek our Ghanaian culture for our benefit (Greetings from Abroad, Facebook Live Video on 10 October 2019).

The Ghanaian aphorism emphasised by the ambassador as “if you will find the back of your palm to be sweet, it is not as sweet as your palm,” captures the desire of parents to root their migrant children in the socio-cultural norms of Ghana. The quotation is a literal translation that in this context means there is no place like home, Ghana, and that parents must influence their children to appreciate the norms and values of the homeland. In concrete terms, the Ambassador highlights different cultural expectations regarding the obligations older children have towards parents in the two spaces they occupy, Ghana and Norway. She emphasises that older children fulfil their obligation in Norway simply by communicating with their parents, whereas in Ghana older children are expected to meet the material needs of their parents beyond just communication. Despite the contrast, it is essential to emphasise that the provision of both emotional and material care for parents by their older children is a social norm in both western and non-western cultures (Baldassar et al. 2007: 79; Charles et al. 2008: 125; Darkwah et al. 2019: 17; Twum-Danso 2009: 422).

Additionally, the structures and systems that provide care in the two countries are different. Where care systems and structures are mainly family-based and informal, as is the case in Ghana, the expectations from families and, more



particularly, older children will be higher. In societies where the care systems and structures are more formalised, the demands and expectations from older children and other family members will be less exacting. The quote of the Ambassador highlights that the migrants are caught up in two worlds that provide different degrees of benefits and constraints. From the point of view of their parents, they must therefore be constantly made aware of the need to give preference to the Ghanaian socio-cultural norms, underlining the drive to rootedness.

Parents generally maintain an ambivalent attitude towards the migration of their children. On one hand, they find opportunities in the job market and the prospects of higher educational qualifications obtained abroad attractive (Darkwah et al 2019: 13ff; Coe/ Shani 2015: 573). On the other hand, they also perceive some predominant cultural values abroad, such as the democratisation of the private sphere, where children can talk back to parents and sometimes challenge their decisions (Giddens 1999: 35), and the increasing individual orientation, to be undesirable. Their quest to root their migrant offspring in the socio-cultural milieu of Ghana, therefore, is premised on their desire to limit the perceived unfavourable cultural influences to which migrants are exposed in the destination countries. Oftentimes, parents also expect that their migrant children will eventually return to Ghana, so the continued rooting in Ghana's socio-cultural space is also meant to ensure the returning migrant will fit in and continue to belong after a prolonged stay abroad.

### **Flow of Resources**

When migrants move from their home regions in Ghana to overseas destinations, there is a general expectation among those back home that the migrants will provide various forms of support to their families and to some extent their communities. Uncle Agyenim, a 62-year-old Ghanaian who has been living abroad since the late 1970s, confirms this: "Once you are abroad, irrespective of your engagement (student, worker or striving to find a job), once you are outside of Ghana, you are presumed to be better off, and therefore the expectation is that you should send something home" (Uncle Agyenim, January 2019).

The expectation articulated by Uncle Agyenim reflects the norm of reciprocity that underlines social engagements within families (Mauss 1990: 16; Mazzucato 2009: 1106; Tsai/ Dorgbo 2012: 215). The norm of reciprocity is not only limited to migrants but generally applies to all members of a social group. However, one gets the sense from Uncle Agyenim's quote and indeed the sentiments of his non-migrant family that the expectation is pronounced for persons who are

abroad. The pronounced expectation from migrants abroad is linked to the assumption that their migration brings them closer to better opportunities that may be limited or unavailable in the homeland, even though the reality may be far from the expectations (Kleist 2017: 330).

Migration flows from the global South to the North have strong economic underpinnings (Abrego/ LaRossa 2009: 1071). However, the political economy of labour migration in an era of global capitalism introduces bifurcated social class status in the lifeworld of migrants. On the one hand, their migration positions them mostly in conditions and employment sectors that diminish the actual value of their labour and, consequently, their economic status abroad. On the other hand, given the relatively lower living standards in their originating regions, migrants can save and invest back home in socially lucrative ventures. Some of these ventures include housing (Diko/ Tipple 1992: 289; Pellow 2003: 79), small-scale businesses, community-level social projects (Levitt 2004: 24), or support for the chain migration of other relatives (Darkwah et al. 2019: 11). Given these dynamics, the social status of migrants increases vis-à-vis that of other community members back home (Nieswand 2014: 404). This high status of migrants influences the expectations that they possess increased material resources.

Parents, convinced of the greater opportunities available to their migrant offspring, engage in overt and covert actions to ensure the fulfilment of the expectation to send remittances home. The quote below from Mama Adwoa, a 65-year-old mother whose son is in the USA, provides further insights into some of the actions of parents:

As a retiree, I am always available to talk to my son. Ooh, when we communicate, we talk about daily reports and others. I tell him that he should further his education. When you travel abroad, and your educational level is low, you do menial manual work. I also tell him to manage his funds well, remember his roots, and think of investments back home because he would not live abroad forever. So, by the time he returns, he would have had some ongoing investment projects to support his stay, to make his life here comfortable. So, we communicate a lot. He can also ask me, 'ooh, Mum, how are you? What are the general prices of land in Ghana? What can we do to bring in some good returns?' And yes, he has taken concrete steps to acquire a house here. This house where I live now is from him. (*Mama Adwoa*, June 2019).

The transformative effects of remittances as elaborated by Mama Adwoa's quote support the new economics of labour migration (NELM) hypothesis (Taylor 1999: 76). The NELM hypothesise that migration is a household decision to deal with risk and uncertainties and to diversify income portfolios. Unlike the pull-push hypothesis, where migration is seen as linear, and a drain on sending communities with return conceptualised as a failure, the NELM highlights the positive ways remittances help sending communities and families. NELM also sees return migration as an integral part of the migration process, especially, when the initial objectives of migration are met. Despite the feminist critique of the household as rarely a site for cooperation but rather for competition and individuation (Chant 1998: 8), the NELM centres remittances and return as key markers of migration. Parents, therefore, weave their rooting practices around the imagined desire for return by their adult migrant children. When the possibility of return is emphasised, the migrants accept the proposals of parents to build roots in the homeland they would eventually return to, to ensure their smooth re-integration after their long stay abroad.

The idea of return is not only harboured by the parents but also by the migrants. This is emphasised by Patience, a 24-year-old emigrant woman in Canada who had been married for 6 months at the time of the interview:

Yeah, we (she and her husband) talk about it a lot. He is Canadian born but his parents are Ghanaian, and they are going to be retiring back home to Ghana very soon. So, he kind of has the idea that if we have a plan then we move back home because at the end of the day the family will be back home anyway. Hopefully, in the next 20 years, I would've been able to figure out what I want to do so that I can start planning my move back home. (Patience, June 2019).

The mutual desire of both the migrants and their non-migrant parents to return to Ghana, therefore, becomes an avenue for the parents to commit their migrant children to various investment and consumptive enterprises as part of their rooting processes. Further, one covert action of parents in promoting appreciation of the norm of reciprocity is encouraging the migration of children only when they are mature. Mama Adwoa's constant availability to interact with her son is due to her retirement and limited activity schedules. Study participants whose children are abroad emphasised that they would not have consented to the migration of their younger, immature children. These parents were, however, happy to fully support their mature children's migration because they believed their roots in Ghanaian society would be more profound than when they were

younger and immature. In this way, the parents believe, their children's level of cultural assimilation in their destination regions would not be total and they will therefore demonstrate wider acceptance of the Ghanaian norm of reciprocity and its expected forms of expression. Uncle Joe, a man in his late 50s, a non-migrant parent with his daughter abroad, highlights some apprehensions of parents when their children migrate at an immature age:

I would not be comfortable if my daughter migrated earlier. If the child lives in Ghana until she completes Secondary School before migrating, her level of integration in Ghana would be better. Thus, the socio-cultural environment abroad cannot influence her that much. (Uncle Joe, April 2019).

Given the potential for delayed migration, children's migration projects occur when parents are considerably older and nearing their retirement age and thus with more time for social interactions. The ability of parents to maintain frequent and intense communication with their migrant children is also due to the ubiquitous nature of contemporary communication technologies. Parents have more time to interact and the technologies to do so, consequently increasing their potential to influence the actions of their children.

When parents encourage the migration of their children at an older age, they ensure that the actions and dispositions of their children in the destination region become an agglomeration of their pervasive Ghanaian past, which serves as a frame of reference for their conduct. Their Ghanaian 'habitus' shapes their action in their destination regions even though they no longer live in Ghana (Bourdieu 1977: 86). As Mama Adwoa pointed out in her quote, her son listened to her advice and built a house in Ghana, which is currently her home. Building a house, providing for parents' material and non-material needs, and caring for younger siblings are valued social expectations required of older mature children in Ghana (Darkwah et al. 2019: 19; van der Geest 1998: 337). The migrants who conform to the expectation to send remittances home, such as Uncle Agyenim and the son of Mama Adwoa, reinforce the socio-cultural norm of reciprocity. It is generally believed that parents already fulfilled a significant part of their reciprocal obligation towards their offspring by seeing to their upkeep while young and dependent. When the children become of age, their fulfilment of the reciprocal obligation becomes to some extent an implicit expectation.

Additionally, as I observed during my interactions with the Ghanaian communities in Vienna and Düsseldorf, parents and other relations in Ghana also send

various non-cash remittances such as indigenous food, spices, herbs, clothing, and accessories to their relations abroad, mainly through friends and family who visit Ghana. This emphasizes the continuous reciprocal relationship between migrants and their families. Despite the noted mutual exchange of resources within transnational families, there are still considerable inequalities in the resource endowments and, consequently, the nature and densities of the exchanges. Family members in the homeland primarily provide services to those abroad, and in most cases, the financial cost of the services is borne by the migrants (Mazzucato 2009: 1110). Beyond the fulfilment of the reciprocal obligations, how the exchanges occur highlights social hierarchies that exist between the migrants and their non-migrant parents (Mauss 1990: 95). The migrants through the exchanges demonstrate more significant economic capital than their non-migrant relations (Tazanu 2015: 115). This conclusion brings migration to the fore as a route to economic advancement (Nieswand 2014: 418).

The potential of migration to lead to economic advancement notwithstanding, not all migrants achieve that goal, leading to vulnerability and increased dependence on their relations back home. Among the study participants, it was noted that most undocumented migrants who have been unsuccessful in using informal routes to secure employment and improve their livelihoods demonstrated resistance to the expectation of reciprocity. Mama Abena, a 55-year-old mother whose son is an undocumented migrant in Italy, emphasises this point: “My son Kwadwo has been abroad for almost five years, but because of issues with his papers, he cannot get an excellent job to help us here in any meaningful way” (Mama Abena, July 2019).

Additionally, some migrants flag the cost of living abroad as one way to resist the expectation of meeting their reciprocal obligations. Despite the pervasive influence of the norm of reciprocity, pragmatic exigencies of life may constrain an individual’s capacity to fulfil all reciprocal obligations, especially when one’s migration project has not been economically viable.<sup>2</sup> Migrants are highly likely to receive multiple demands, whether legitimate or not, from non-migrant relations due to their perceived higher economic status. This can be a source of strain, and therefore, it is not uncommon for migrants to allude to the high cost of living abroad as one way to show resistance. Uncle Boateng, a 62-year-old Ghanaian immigrant in Europe, makes this clear:

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<sup>2</sup> This may be due to several factors including one’s status abroad, whether as documented or undocumented migrant, and the stage of the migration project. Migrants who are at the early stages of their migration projects are more vulnerable than those who have settled in and have access to various relevant information and networks.

Mostly, the people back home think that if you are abroad, you are rich. However, our income here is for our daily subsistence, such as rent, transportation, food, and other utilities. We here are not better off, but as the musician Ampadu says, “living abroad is a daily striving”. We struggle each day to make ends meet. Thus, if I barely subsist here, there is very little that I can do for those back home. (Uncle Boateng, 29th January 2019).

Aboderin (2004: 135) highlights how economic hardship can trigger a decline in the honour code of caring for one's parents. The recourse to economic hardship can also be a smokescreen to limit the increased reciprocal demands on migrants by their non-migrant relations. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 14) emphasise that migrants use the geographical distance between them and their relations back home as a powerful tool to shape the terms of their relationships. Where their non-migrant relatives can hardly visit them in person, one has limited or no means of getting access to the migrants beyond the space they allow through communication technologies. Migrants can therefore ward off any demand they judge to be unwarranted by simply alluding to their vulnerable position abroad occasioned by economic hardship. Given this, migrants are relieved from the intrusive ways in which spatially bounded relations connect for various ends. Whereas such resistance can offer the migrants their desired relief from what they judge to be excessive demands from their relations back home, they also risk losing the social honour and prestige that accompanies the exchanges when they visit Ghana (Mauss 1990: 95).

Lastly, other migrants transform the expectations related to the norm of reciprocity by mainly receiving cash and non-cash remittances from their parents in Ghana to support their lives abroad. Uncle Kofi, a 58-year-old chartered accountant, highlights the support he and his wife provided their daughter in Canada who had completed school and was transitioning into the job market:

She was not on scholarship while in school, so we had to pay for her education and subsistence until she completed her degree programme. She opened an account with a bank in Ghana so I used to send her money through the account, and she would withdraw with her ATM card while in Canada. Apart from the cash remittances that we sent to her, her mother once sent her some dried fish through one of her friends who had visited Ghana and was returning to Canada. (Uncle Kofi, 9 May 2019).

In this kind of exchange where migrants, mainly from middle-class backgrounds, depend on their relations in Ghana, they transform the normative discourse on the flow of remittances. This transformative pattern is also emphasised by Adiku (2018: 1ff), who highlights three less predominant forms of exchange among migrants and their non-migrant relations. She emphasises that migrants from working-class backgrounds whose active migration projects have been unsuccessful are unable to remit to their expectant relations. Additionally, she notes that migrants from middle-class backgrounds either receive support from relations in Ghana or do not exchange remittances as no need is expressed or made visible. Irrespective of the outcomes of the expectation of reciprocity, the parents interviewed for this study maintained an active presence in the lives of their migrant offspring through regular communication. Regular communication becomes a primary ground for negotiating and reinforcing the various outcomes of the rooting processes.

### **Choice of Marriage Partner**

Generally, there is a normative preference for ‘racial and ethnic monogamy’ in marriages in Ghana (Darkwah/ Ampofo 2008: 200). Parents, therefore, expect that their migrant offspring will choose a partner from the Ghanaian community in their destination regions or from the non-migrant Ghanaian community at home. Mama V, a 65-year-old mother whose single son is abroad, emphasises the expectation:

He has family back home in Ghana—his mother, siblings, and cousins—so I have advised him that when he wants to marry, he should look to his roots... If I had a daughter married to a white man, she would bring the children back to her roots in Ghana. However, when a son marries a white lady, it is more likely that his children would be rooted abroad; in that way, if he marries a black lady over there or someone over here, we don’t mind. (Mama V, July 2019).

Mama V’s concern that her son marries from his roots and the reasons she elicits to account for her stance support the position that nurturing and caring for children is female work<sup>3</sup> (Anyidoho et al 2013: 348; Di Leonardo 1987: 452;

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<sup>3</sup> Even though women in Ghana like men have traditionally worked outside the home to contribute to the incomes of their households, these engagements are mostly in areas with flexibility to combine with their reproductive roles (Darkwah 2007: 206). The reproductive roles which include housework such as cooking and cleaning, nurturing and caring for children have traditionally been known as female work (Anyidoho et al 2013: 348; Klingshirn 1973: 290).

Hochschild/ Machung 2003: 8). This is irrespective of the transformations in the gender division of labour in the home, particularly among migrants (Manuh 1999: 77ff). Mama V's quote concludes that children are influenced more by their mothers than their fathers. Further, inferring from the quote, in inter-racial marriages where there are cultural differences the cultural dispositions of mothers become salient in the upbringing of their children. Such a conclusion appears to be blind to the gendered power imbalances that also shape the day-to-day running of the home, irrespective of the mother's provision of hands-on care for the children. In both historical and contemporary times in Ghana, decision-making in the home is largely in the domain of men with limited opportunities for women to shape the decisions of the household (Fuseini et al 2019: 301; Klingshirn 1973: 290).

However, Mama V's quote highlights that when 'racial and ethnic monogamy' is a goal, it is to ensure the continuity of the traditions and cultures of the older generation in/through the younger generation and to simplify the routines of social life. This simplicity of routines emphasises what Giddens (1991: 54) terms 'ontological security'—a psychological sense of confidence and stability derived from our everyday routines and self-identity. Parents, therefore, enjoy a sense of confidence and stability when their past cultural routines are re-lived by their children. My observations of the Ghanaian community I encountered in both Vienna and Düsseldorf show an appreciable acceptance of parents' expectation regarding the choice of marriage partner. Among the eleven couples I encountered, in ten cases both partners were Ghanaian and only in one case was the husband a Ghanaian and the wife a white non-Ghanaian.

Vivid as it may be, parents' hope that their offspring would marry someone from their Ghanaian roots is incomplete. The lack of absolute certainty in the hope was also expressed in the above quote by Mama V, where she highlighted that she would not have a problem with her daughter marrying a non-Ghanaian but expressed reservations about her son doing the same. One of the mothers I interviewed indicated that her son is married to a white non-Ghanaian. Her thoughts on this are captured in the quote below:

He married a white Canadian, and they have two children. He informed me when he decided to marry... he was a lecturer then at a university in Canada, so I told him to make his choice, and he did. I didn't have anything against his choice. My grandchildren, even though they are Ghanaian-Canadians, understand our local language. The firstborn is a Ghanaian at once... She was schooled in Ghana from basic up to the Bachelor's degree level and she went to Texas, USA for her Masters and PhD



degrees. From time to time, he and his family visit us in Ghana, and his wife and children encounter and learn aspects of our ways of life (Mama Adwoa, July 2019).

Both Mama Adwoa and Mama V reveal that migrants indeed have agency in their choice of marriage partner. There are times when the migrant offspring resist the expectation of ‘racial and ethnic monogamy’ (Darkwah/ Ampofo 2008: 200). However, even when there is resistance, other pathways are pursued to ensure that aspects of the valued cultural heritage are inculcated into the children of the migrants. As highlighted in the quote by Mama Adwoa, one is in raising the children of the migrant in the homeland. Asima (2018: 193) emphasises that the path of transnational fosterage, where migrants send their children to the homeland to be raised, ensures trans-generational continuities in the relationships between migrants and their families in the home country. The practice of transnational fosterage also highlights the reciprocal support mechanisms of transnational social life. Regular visits to the homeland and a circular flow of remittances are other pathways to ensure that elements of the Ghanaian roots are shared with non-Ghanaian spouses and the offspring in the marriage union.

Undocumented migrants, in some instances, also demonstrate instrumental resistance to the expectation of ethnic and racial monogamy. Yaw, a 40-year-old male former undocumented migrant who has been abroad for more than twenty years and was interviewed as a key informant when he visited Ghana, indicated that “I married a white woman and so that’s how I got my papers. I didn’t marry her because of the papers. We have been married for ten years now and have two children” (Yaw, September 2019). Marriage to a citizen of the destination region sometimes facilitates the regularization of the citizenship status of migrants. Popular accounts in Ghana emphasise that such marriages are more likely to be transactional and are usually annulled when the intended objective of gaining citizenship is achieved. However, Yaw’s account indicates that the attainment of citizenship status can become a secondary outcome of one’s marriage, as such marriages continue even though the migration status is regularised.

### **Food Cultures and Identity Enactment**

The continuous flow of cash and non-cash remittances, information, and ideas enable migrants to practice some of their food cultures and mobilize their Ghanaian heritage expressed through local dialects, clothing, and the use of indigenous food, among others. In both Vienna and Düsseldorf, I observed that

the women of the Ghanaian community took delight in wearing the native kaba and sleet attire for church services even during the winter season, while the men also wore locally designed African prints. Further, the pastor of the church I visited in Vienna, a white non-Ghanaian male from the United States, reported that the women of the Ghanaian community competed over who would send him a shito<sup>4</sup> gift whenever his stock ran out. During church events of the African community, where each person brought food to share, members took pride in presenting popular foods from their indigenous roots. In varying degrees, enacting some aspects of one's indigenous identity is a keen commitment of migrants. This can be argued to be partly due to parents' desire that their offspring migrate when they are mature and already have a palpable sense of the key aspects of their identities. Non-migrant parents also provide the material resources needed to perpetuate the enactment of indigenous identities through the continuous flow of mainly non-cash remittances across the transnational space.

However, how the migrants enact their identities is sometimes different from their expressions in the homeland. This is an obvious outcome for various practical reasons such as geographic variations, limited availability of indigenous material resources, and socio-cultural influences abroad. For example, given the tropical climate in Ghana, several indigenous Ghanaian clothes appear unsuitable for temperate climates. Migrants who were spotted wearing the indigenous kaba and sleet wore heavy shoes suited for the cold, demonstrating fashion transformations from the shoes that usually accompany the same attire in Ghana.

Additionally, in terms of language, expressions, and gestures, my observations in the field showed that the dispositions of migrants exhibited some forms of transformation. For instance, when they spoke Twi<sup>5</sup>, they made regular use of an expression which sounded like '*asoor*'<sup>6</sup> as a form of exclamation. Additionally, they were more likely to hug or give two/three kisses alternatively on each cheek as a form of greeting rather than the use of verbal greetings or designated gestures which are more popular in Ghana.

Consequently, in addition to the expressions of their transnational roots, migrants demonstrate some traits that show evidence of various degrees of cultural assimilation. The transformations in the ways migrants enact their identities can be significant across cultures. Tsuda (2003: 103), for example, emphasises that

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<sup>4</sup> Hot pepper sauce prepared with other vegetables, fish powder, and spices.

<sup>5</sup> An indigenous language of the Asante of Ghana.

<sup>6</sup> The exclamation '*asoor*' is not used in Ghana, and my mobility colleague who is a linguist and I often brought it up in our discussions about how it was popular among the Ghanaian community we encountered in Vienna.

non-migrant Japanese assess the cultural knowledge of return emigrants in areas such as language usage, food cultures and fashion, among others, as insufficient and thereby position such return migrants as culturally non-Japanese. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised here that I did not encounter any research participants who demonstrated visible resistance to the Ghanaian food culture and other forms of identity enactments such as language and clothing. This may be due to methodological constraints such as my focus on first-generation migrants and the use of church community events as sites of observation. Furthermore, I found that for first-generation migrants, as is the case of the sample for the study, the transformations in identities and food cultures do not represent far-reaching shifts compared to their dominant forms of expression in the homeland. The migrants invariably use their renditions of indigenous identities to demonstrate their 'Ghanaianess' in the culturally diversified destination regions where they find themselves, emphasising strong attachments to their roots.

## **Conclusion**

Given contemporary technological availability, parents are offered a cost-effective means of maintaining regular and intense interactions with their migrant offspring to promote their roots in the societies and cultures of Ghana. The practices of 'rooting' are expressed in various ways such as through flows of resources, choice of marriage partner, food cultures, and other forms of identity enactments such as style of clothing and the use of Ghanaian languages. These practices are negotiated through frequent and intense interactions between non-migrant parents and their migrant children upon migration and through the delaying of the migration project until the maturity of the children. Parents, through various rooting practices, ensure that their mature migrant children perpetuate the indigenous cultures of the homeland. The practices also reinforce the norm of reciprocity, a central norm that organises social life in Ghanaian societies. Through the various reciprocal practices among transnational families, several outcomes are produced, such as the securing and promotion of the welfare of both the migrants and their families back home. When migrants stay attached to their roots in their homeland, they establish pragmatic ways to deal with some social realities that constantly confront them in their destination countries, such as xenophobia, discrimination, and nationalist pushbacks. They are also able to maintain and redefine their unique identities while abroad, despite the ubiquity of other sociocultural influences.

The various practices that express the ways in which rootedness is enacted create an attachment to Ghana, the homeland. It is such attachments that animate the

life of diasporas. Also, even at its incipient stages, the rooting process serves a welfare function for families. From the perspective of non-migrant family members, it generates vital resources such as income through remittances for various consumptive and investment decisions. These interventions are salient because families and local communities are vital agents in the provision of social welfare services in Ghana.

Migrants pursue different pathways by accepting, rejecting, or transforming their parents' rooting plans. The varied outcomes of the rooting practices emphasise that migrants have agency and establish firm roots in their homeland irrespective of their mobility. This is an invitation to envision that fluid subjects can be rooted simultaneously; the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Finally, rootedness also encourages an appreciation of how structural norms are reinforced and reproduced while they are also resisted and transformed. These dynamics challenge and reinforce the individuation thesis on transformations in family life.

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### **Interviews**

Interview 1: Uncle Agyenim. Vienna, January 2019.

Interview 2: Mama Adwoa. Accra, June 2019.

Interview 3: Patience. Virtual (Phone Call Accra-Edmonton), June 2019.

Interview 4: Joe. Accra June 2019.

Interview 5: Uncle Boateng, Vienna, January 2019.

Interview 6: Uncle Kofi. Accra, May 2019.

Interview 7: Mama V. Accra, July 2019.

Interview 8: Mama Adwoa. Accra, July 2019.

Interview 9: Yaw. Nkoranza, September 2019.

Interview 10: Mama Abena. Nkoranza, July 2019.