

# Stayer youth shaping their transnational family lives

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# **Stayer Youth Shaping Their Transnational Family Lives:**

**Experiences and aspirations  
of migrants' children living  
in Ghana**

**Onallia Esther Osei**

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# **Stayer Youth Shaping Their Transnational Family Lives:**

**Experiences and aspirations of migrants' children  
living in Ghana**

**Dissertation**

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in accordance with the decision of the Board of Deans,  
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## **Dedication**

To all my participants and my son, Ethan.



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# 1

## Introduction



## 1.0 Introduction

*Soon after Guess's father migrated from Ghana to Italy in 2011, when Guess was 13 years old, he promised her that he would do his best for the family, consisting of Guess, her mother and two younger siblings, and would help them to join him in Europe as soon as possible. In the meantime, Guess attended five primary and secondary schools. When Guess graduated from secondary school in 2018 (aged 19 years), she was still eagerly hoping to emigrate to join her father. Yet she soon realised it was unrealistic, although her father encouraged her to be patient through their infrequent WhatsApp communications.*

*Over time, Guess's communications with her father had reduced. Guess explained that her father became difficult to reach because he could not afford to meet the needs and requests of his children. However, this situation did not deter Guess from seeking opportunities to engage with her migrant father about her life. So whenever they spoke via WhatsApp voice or video calls, Guess told her father the salient things he needed to know about her life, like her desire to join him right after high school completion.*

*After many years of aspiring to migrate, Guess realised she needed to take things into her own hands. Her father was undocumented, and therefore had insufficient money for her and her siblings' needs, and it was unlikely that he would be able to apply for family reunification. Guess therefore chose to enter into a romantic relationship while she was in high school for some required help to fill the gaps her father had left in her life and that of her remaining family members. With her father's migration, she no longer had someone in the family to guide and inspire her to study as her father used to do. Also, the infrequent communication between Guess and her father made it difficult for them to discuss all of her academic needs. She could not count on her mother for educational guidance and inspiration because her mother was not knowledgeable about the educational system or literate enough to assist her with homework. Furthermore, her mother's trading business did not always go well, making it difficult for her to provide for Guess and her younger siblings on a constant basis. All these problems underlay Guess's decision to date someone in the hope of receiving as much help as possible.*

*Guess's mother explained how her boyfriend's support saved the family in many ways, including financially, and she gained peace of mind knowing that her daughter had a stable romantic relationship. And indeed, Guess's boyfriend provided for most of her, her mother's and two younger siblings' basic needs throughout my fieldwork. Guess occasionally referred to her boyfriend's dependence on an uncle in the United States of America. The uncle provided materially for Guess's boyfriend and promised to assist him in relocating to the States. At the end of fieldwork, Guess was unsure exactly when her boyfriend's uncle would help him move to the USA, but she had plans to apply for family reunification through her boyfriend, hopefully by then her husband, as soon as he moved to the US.*

*Since Guess was unsure when she would migrate and what she could eventually do overseas, she decided to attend remedial classes for poor-performing high school graduates*

*to re-sit the exams she had failed. Guess planned to enter a local nursing school. Upon completing local nursing college, she hoped to work as a nurse in Ghana until she could someday travel abroad.*

Guess is one of the so-called ‘left behind’, that is, youth who remain in the country of origin while at least one parent migrates overseas. Her predicament of wanting to join her migrant father overseas, realizing the limited options available, and then adapting her aspirations was typical of the 38 young people I studied during 15 months of ethnographic research in Ghana. While ‘left behind’ youth have been objects of study, especially in the past two decades, surprisingly little research exists in which they are the main research interlocutors. This dissertation brings the voices of ‘left-behind’ youth to the front and centre. It shows how they exercise agency to shape their experiences of living in transnational families and their future aspirations. In the dissertation, I use the term ‘stayer youth’ rather than ‘left-behind’ youth because the latter term connotes something negative and portrays stayer youth as non-agentic. This connotation contradicts what I heard and observed during my fieldwork.

Children and young people growing up in transnational families are common in many countries in the Global South (UNICEF, 2006 & 2019), and Ghana is no exception (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Mazzucato and Cebotari (2016) estimated that about 16 percent of young people aged 11 to 18 years in junior and senior high schools (JHS and SHS) in urban areas in Ghana had at least one parent overseas, and their transnational families took diverse forms. These families might have a mother or a father or both parents abroad, while the youth lived with caregivers, such as a maternal or paternal relative, a religious leader or a parent’s friend. Many parents from Global South countries, including Ghana, emigrate to the Global North in the hope of ensuring a better future for their stayer children (e.g., Dreby, 2010; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Parrenas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004 & 2008).

Much research on transnational families where parents are abroad and children stay in the country of origin has focused on migrant parents’ perspectives (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Researchers have explored migrant parents’ agency in caring for their children at a distance (long-distance parenting, remittances and digital communication, local child fostering arrangements, parental home visits and family reunification) and the way parents shape stayer youth’s experiences and aspirations. Yet how stayer youth perceive their lives as the children of migrants, and the temporality of their experiences and aspirations, has remained under researched.

Unlike previous investigations of stayer youth, which often collect data at a specific point of childhood, my research participants were high school graduates undergoing post-secondary school transitions. This is a phase in young people’s lives when they develop and change their aspirations and agentially shape their life experiences to build the futures they aspire to, based on their past and present conditions. Thus, I collected data that captured how stayer youth’s experiences and aspirations evolve throughout parental migration. My

attention to how aspirations and experiences evolve allowed me to explore how stayer youth navigate life choices by interacting with their migrant parents but also their wider local and transnational contexts. In so doing, I gained knowledge about how stayer youth perceive their lives over time as members of transnational families.

Studying stayer youth like Guess revealed three dimensions of their lives that are particularly important for young people from transnational families in countries in the Global South. First, Guess's story shows that ICT is important in her efforts to influence her relationship with her migrant father. Second, Guess's actions are guided by her need to establish some security in her educational trajectory and to ensure support for her and her family. Finally, Guess constantly reassessed her situation and adapted her aspirations and potential strategies to achieve them. This dissertation thus focuses on: a) how stayer youth use ICT to shape their relationships with their migrant parents; b) how stayer youth shape their educational trajectories in collaboration with their migrant parents or in their absence; and c) how stayer youth adapt their migration aspirations over time to align with their capabilities of achieving them.

Because this is an article-based dissertation, each empirical chapter contains a section that goes into depth about the theories and literature the chapter draws upon. In the rest of this chapter, I bring together and summarize these different bodies of literature, in order to give an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this study and how they relate to each other. First, I discuss existing theoretical knowledge about digital communication between migrant parents and stayer youth. Subsequently, I review relevant literature about stayer youth's education and migration aspirations. The final part of this chapter outlines the chapters of this dissertation.

## **1.1 Stayer youth's use of new media technologies for communicating with parents abroad**

Communication between members of transnational families is increasingly easy and affordable with growing technological advances (e.g., Baldassar *et al.*, 2016). Mobile phones have become commonplace within transnational families, transforming relationships, including parent-child connections, and allowing family members either to connect intermittently or to be a part of each other's daily life (Madianou & Miller, 2011 and 2012). Video communication, such as through Skype and Facetime, allows users to see the person they are communicating with and thereby helps to strengthen relationship bonds (Baldassar, 2016; Francisco, 2015). Other types of media, such as emails and text messages, allow users to exchange information without immediate contact, and time can lapse before a response is given (Baldassar, 2016; Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005). There is a general consensus that digital communication sustains transnational parent-child relationships, especially when separations are long, parental visits few and remittances less forthcoming than expected (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Madianou & Miller, 2011 and 2012; Vertovec, 2004).

Nevertheless, most literature on transnational parent-child communication privileges migrant parents' perspectives and focuses on the way migrant parents initiate calls to maintain connections with stayer youth (e.g., Chib *et al.*, 2014; Dreby, 2006; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Parrenas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004 & 2008). This earlier research was conducted when phone calls from origin countries were expensive and mobile phone ownership was scarce. Consequently, stayer youth were found to "wait" with great anticipation for their migrant parents' calls (Horst, 2006), and they did not have many means to influence the frequency and timing of calls. The few studies on stayer youth's use of new media technologies, like cell phones, emphasize the difficulties youth experience. For example, due to high communication costs, stayer children and their parents were found to speak infrequently, which increased the emotional challenges young people faced in being separated from their parents (Madianou & Miller, 2011). In addition, stayer youth lacked technological know-how when young (Madianou & Miller, 2011). As a result, they usually relied on calls initiated by their parents or by caregivers, older siblings, and friends. Other youth skimped on food to afford calls to their migrant parents for emotional and academic support (Horst, 2006). Yet things have changed since many of these studies were conducted. The rapid increase in the accessibility and affordability of new digital media in migrants' home countries, and the rise of smart phones, has created a very different digital landscape. This situation necessitates further study on how new media technologies may or may not give stayer youth more agency to maintain transnational parent-child relationships. This dissertation, with its youth-centric perspective, investigates this issue.

Though eager to communicate with their migrant parents, stayer youth have also been found to be critical of how their parents use digital technologies in order to fulfil their parental responsibilities in transnational social space (Horst, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2011). Some youth find communicating with migrant parents irritating because they would rather do something else at agreed talk times (primarily weekends) instead of waiting at home for calls (Madianou & Miller, 2011). Communications from parents can also be inconsistent and sporadic, leading to ambivalent feelings (Horst, 2006). Other youth become angry or resentful because digital engagement offers migrant parents chances to intrude into their personal space and lives.

But with most transnational family literature focusing on old communication technologies like telephones, cell phone calls and text messages, and video or voice calls, often initiated by migrant parents to stayer youth (e.g., Horst, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Lam & Yeoh, 2018), there is a pressing need for new research. We have limited knowledge about how transnational parent-child relationships are established and sustained through rapidly developing social media applications like WhatsApp.

This dissertation thus extends the limited literature about transnational digital parent-child relationships to the new social media landscape. A range of social media apps are commonly used by youth worldwide (e.g., Markwei & Appiah, 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2018). This dissertation gives particular attention to WhatsApp to investigate how stayer youth engage

with migrant parents through smartphone technology. I found WhatsApp to be the most used form of social media that stayer youth employ to engage with their migrant parents, whether it be to seek support for their education, emotional comfort, or to actualize their migration aspirations. I offer thick descriptions of the different ways in which stayer youth use WhatsApp to sustain relationships with their parents. Exploring varying transnational parent-child communication strategies through WhatsApp, this dissertation explains how stayer youth experience transnational family life over time. I also show how and why those with inadequate support from their migrant parents seek additional support from local and international social networks for things that are important to them, such as their education. By studying stayer youth's use of social media to sustain transnational parent-child relationships, this dissertation shows how youth activate their agency and shape their experiences and aspirations.

## 1.2 Stayer youth's education

Literature on the effects of parental separation on stayer youth's education highlights two contrasting outcomes. On the one hand, parental migration can increase educational attainment (based on academic grades) through the remittances parents send, which give access to better schools (Clemens & Tiongson, 2013; Kandel and Kao, 2001; Nobles, 2011). Remittances have also been found to lead to stayer youth remaining in school until completion, especially for girls (Antman, 2012; Li, 2014). On the other hand, youth emotionally affected by parental migration may perform poorly in school, especially older youth (Dreby, 2007 & 2010; Heymann *et al.*, 2009; Lahaie *et al.*, 2009). Youth may also disengage from their schooling due to their desire to migrate and to follow in their parents' footsteps (Kandel & Kao, 2000 & 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). Not all parents can remit. Therefore, some stayer youth face financial difficulties. Other youth lack the motivation required for school learning and experience study problems without parents to help motivate them. There are also situations where local caregivers cannot support stayer youth with their learning due to the lack of support they receive from the parents (e.g., Peng, 2021), and caregivers sometimes have low levels of education.

So while it is clear that parental migration affects stayer youth's education, what remains less understood is how stayer youth experience things and act in situations of parental absence. For example, what do stayer youth do when their educational needs go unmet due to lacking or limited transnational family support? How do they gain control of their educational trajectories? This study investigates the educational challenges stayer youth face and how they navigate these challenges in attempting to complete their education with or without the support of their migrant parents.

I use an educational trajectory approach to investigate these questions. Most studies focus on outcomes such as grades or school completion. Yet, in this dissertation, I am interested in understanding how stayer youth attempt to complete their educational trajectories. Pallas (2003) defines an educational trajectory as a schooling pathway and recommends that

researchers consider how the national education system and school and family ecology support youth over time to attain specific educational outcomes. An educational trajectory approach allows me to observe changes over time and how past events and future aspirations affect the present.

In this study, I focus on how stayer youth navigate the Ghanaian educational system, especially in light of the interruptions they experience when moving from one school to another. How do they navigate these interruptions in order to complete their schooling? The youth in my study experienced many schooling interruptions but did not become school dropouts. I centre their perspectives on how they overcome the schooling challenges involved. I explore when and how stayer youth face hurdles in their educational trajectories that are related to their parents' international migration and how they put their agency to work to overcome the hurdles they encounter when moving schools. Furthermore, by talking about interrupted trajectories, which are rarely discussed in the transnational family studies literature, this dissertation broadly shows how stayer youth experience primary and secondary schooling in diverse ways throughout the period that their parents are abroad.

### **1.3 Stayer youth's migration aspirations and capabilities**

When someone aspires to migrate, they have a desire, plan, wish or dream of moving out and residing elsewhere (Carling & Schewell, 2018). Young people in the Global South, including stayer youth, are often socialised to think that it is better to move out of their communities to places in the Global North than to stay to pursue a career in their country of origin. The Global North promises a "better" life, while staying means limited local employment opportunities and poor social infrastructure (e.g., Dako-Gyekye, 2016; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Kandel and Massey, 2002; Setrana, 2021; Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021). Literature on stayer youth demonstrates that their international migration aspirations are influenced by information from their parents and others residing abroad (e.g., Böhme, 2015; Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). This information suggests it is economically lucrative to live and work in cities abroad, with the employment opportunities they offer. Yet there is a gap in our knowledge of how stayer youth pursue their migration aspirations while juggling information from migrant parents and knowledge of their parents' ability to assist them (or not) over time.

Furthermore, much of the literature on stayer youth's aspirations to migrate portrays aspirations as static. That is, stayer youth are described as either desiring to move or to stay, and these desires are seen as unchanging (Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). Yet the youth-centric approach in this dissertation reveals that aspirations change over time as youth navigate the space between their parents' desires for them, their own aspirations and their abilities to actuate them. To explore this change and to explain diverse observations about stayer youth, I employ the migration aspiration-(cap)ability framework and the concept of mobility pacing.

Migration capability has been defined as people's agency and freedom to choose to move or stay based on their financial, human and social capital (de Haas, 2021). As capital is unequal, Carling and Schewel (2018) also highlight the availability of knowledge, social network support and personal motivation as significant elements that inspire individuals to set migration goals. Capabilities are important because although any human can dream, wish or desire to move, the actual ability to move differs between individuals (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021). By focusing on aspirations and capabilities/abilities, this dissertation extends the limited view researchers have taken on stayer youth's migration aspirations. My work contests the static view of youth aspirations by showing how stayer youth align their migration aspirations with their changing capabilities.

Finally, I use the concept of mobility "pacing" (Amit & Salazar, 2020) to describe how stayer youth manage misalignments between their aspirations and their ability to migrate over time, which many participants in this study needed to do. I find that youth pace their aspirations to align them with their capabilities. This study provides a sense of the temporal adaptations associated with stayer youth's mobility aspirations and their changing migration capabilities after secondary school completion. It highlights stayer youth's agency as expressed in attempts to align their aspirations over time with their changing capabilities.

## **1.4 An outline of the dissertation**

This dissertation has an article-based structure and comprises three empirical chapters along with this introduction, a methodology and background chapter, and a conclusion. The three empirical chapters have all been published as an academic book chapter and international journal articles. They are all open access (see the cover page of chapters three, four and five for details). For consistency, I revised the format and numbering of the published chapters to match the presentation style of the dissertation. However, given their publication as separate manuscripts, some repetition is inevitable.

After this introduction, chapter two gives contextual information about the study's location, Ghanaian emigration, the educational system and the mobile phone landscape of Ghana, and norms around parenting related to child fostering. The chapter then describes the methodology employed, including the ethnographic design, the different data collection tools, and how the data were analysed. I also reflect on my positionality as both an insider and an outsider and on issues of reciprocity and ethics. Finally, I present the background characteristics of the 38 study participants.

The third chapter shows how WhatsApp enables long-distance socialisation and offers stayer youth more control over communications with their migrant parents. Prior research has mainly focused on how migrant parents communicate with stayer youth, resulting in limited knowledge from young people themselves. Additionally, transnational family studies have primarily focused on "old" ICTs such as the telephone and, more recently, Facebook and Skype. As ICTs have evolved, chapter three shows how stayer youth use emerging social



media technologies for more control over long-distance communications with their parents. This chapter further demonstrates that stayer youth employ various strategies and tactics to adapt to or sustain transnational parent-child relationships through digital communication. I show when, how and why local caregivers and friends and local and transnational siblings become instruments for sustaining relationships with migrant parents. Finally, the chapter shows how, through social media, stayer youth try to gauge how much their migrant parents can or want to support them over time.

The fourth chapter investigates how stayer youth shape their educational trajectories to overcome or avoid schooling interruptions. Previous research has focused on the consequences of parental migration on stayer youth's educational outcomes (performance and length of schooling), while less attention has been given to the processes involved in completing a secondary school education while parents are overseas. This chapter shows how the educational trajectories of stayer youth evolve after parents move abroad and examines youth's agency in activating an extended network of social support to overcome schooling obstacles. In this chapter, I show that frequent changes in houses or caregivers, insufficient financial resources, and a lack of learning support cause interruptions in stayer youth's educational trajectories. In response, young people mobilise support from local social networks, such as from classmates and teachers, to make up for what they lack in support from their transnational families.

The fifth chapter analyses stayer youth's shifting migration aspirations over time as they become cognizant of their capabilities and adapt their aspirations accordingly. The literature portrays stayer youth mainly as "waiting" to reunite with their parents and siblings living abroad. This narrative depicts stayer youth as passive and immobile. Chapter five extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how the migration aspirations of stayer youth evolve in line with their transnational family circumstances and individual capabilities during secondary and post-secondary schooling. I show how aspirations can be changing or stable based on migrant parent support. Finally, this chapter illustrates how stayer youth resist migrant parents' control over their decisions by making use of local opportunities and international networks, such as friends abroad, to raise the necessary resources for making their migration aspirations a reality.

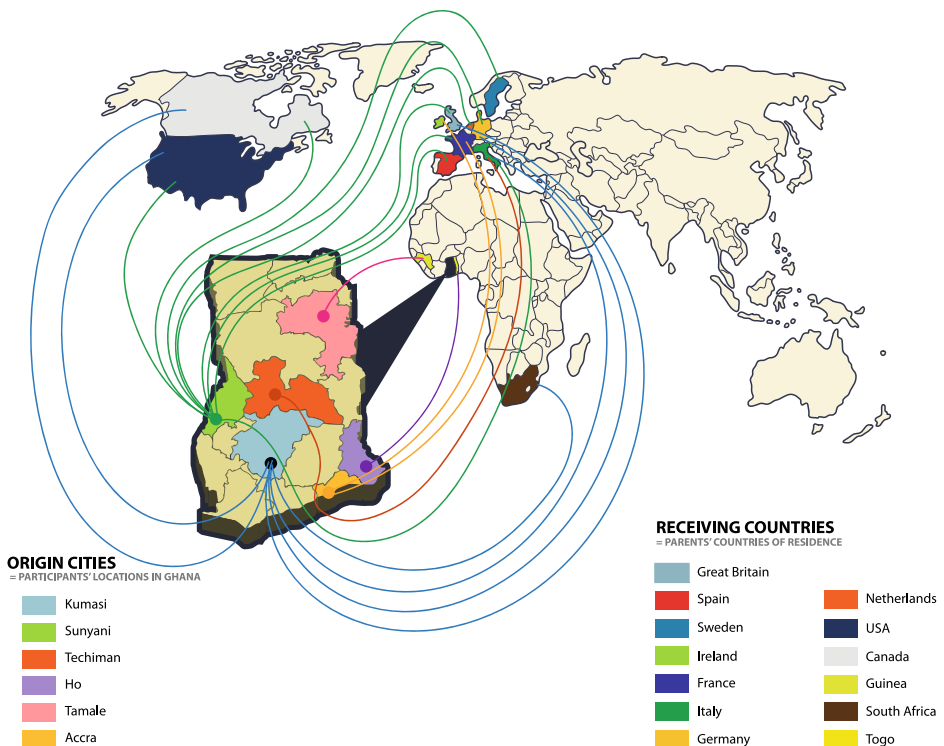
Chapter six concludes the thesis with a summary of findings and a reflection on the main theoretical, conceptual and empirical contributions I have made to the literature. These contributions concern my focus on youth-centricity, temporality and social networks. I end by discussing some of the gaps left by this study and make recommendations for future research.





# 2

## Background to the study, research methodology and participants' characteristics



## 2.0 Chapter outline

On the chapter's cover page, I provide a simplified map of the connections between stayer youth and their parents abroad. However, many things are not captured by simplistic portraits like this map. It does not show if and how the youth connect to their parents, how they experience physical separation and whether things change over time. It is a static and simplified representation of mobility and transnational connections. This chapter shows that we need to ask young people themselves if we are really to understand the dynamics of their experiences and aspirations during parental migration, as already alluded to in chapter one.

This chapter discusses the youth-centric methods I employed to study stayer youth's experiences and aspirations, taking into account that these change over time. The chapter first provides information about Ghana, its migration history, child raising norms and educational policy, to help us understand the conditions under which youth operate. Then, I outline the dissertation's research design. The subsequent sections discuss data collection, management, analysis and interpretation, after which I provide reflections on my positionality before, during and after fieldwork. Lastly, I discuss how and why reciprocity became a part of my fieldwork, consider ethical issues and provide background information about the 38 study participants.

## 2.1 The research setting

This section provides contextual information about Ghanaian emigration, youth education, mobile phone ownership and use, and historical and contemporary child fostering practices. This background knowledge is vital to understanding why I chose Ghana as my study area to extend knowledge about stayer youth's experiences and aspirations during international parental migration.

### 2.1.1 *Migrating out of Ghana*

Historically, Ghana's emigration has been categorised into four distinct phases: 1) periods of minimal emigration (*pre-colonisation to the late 1960s*); 2) initial emigration, often of professionals on the move (*1965 to 1980*); 3) large-scale emigration of unskilled and semi-skilled Ghanaians to other West African countries like Nigeria (*early 1980s until now*); and 4) increasing emigration to countries in the Global North like Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Canada and the United States of America since the 1990s (e.g., Coe, 2012; IOM, 2017; OECD, 2018). The current intensified emigration of Ghanaians to either the Global North or an African country involves skilled and unskilled migrants coupled with diasporisation (Anarfi, Kwankye, Ababio & Tiemoko, 2003; Ghana Statistical Service, 2014;). Some scholars classify Ghana as supplying a significant source of labour to the Global North (e.g., Cebotari & Dito, 2021).

For the last three decades, Ghana has been one of the top ten African emigration countries. The Ghanaian international migrant stock seems to range from 0.8 million (European Commission, 2016) to 1.5 million (Government of Ghana, 2016). In 2010, about 825,000 Ghanaians, excluding undocumented migrants, left Ghana for greener pastures overseas (World Bank, 2011). In 2018, 18,086 people from Ghana residing abroad were refugees, in addition to 12,557 asylum cases (UNHCR, 2019). The overseas Ghanaian population includes regular (legally recognised) and irregular (legally unrecognised) migrants. There is little evidence of return migration to Ghana since the mid-1990s, which can be attributed to minimal national and regional economic growth (World Bank, 1994). There has, however, been some repatriation of those without valid resident documents (Anarfi *et al.*, 2003). For instance, more than 2,000 Ghanaians were deported from 58 countries worldwide in 1993 (Van Hear, 1998). Despite increasing internal migration throughout the nation's history by people seeking better schooling and working opportunities, most Ghanaian adults today emigrate from Southern Ghana to the Global North, including those at transit points to Europe (e.g., Kwankye *et al.*, 2005; Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016; Mazzucato *et al.*, 2008).

Contemporary Ghanaian emigrants perceive themselves primarily as escaping socio-economic problems like unemployment and underemployment, and water and power supply problems (e.g., Dako-Gyeke, 2016; Setrana, 2021). Although the causes of migration are complex and hard to generalise, migrants from Ghana today are in search of better lives for themselves and their stayer relations (Cebotari & Dito, 2021; Nuro, 1999). As a result of high outmigration, around 16 per cent of young people at urban schools in Southern Ghana belong to households from which one or both biological parents are physically absent (Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016).

### 2.1.2 *Child fostering within Ghana*

Ghana is not the only origin country where stayer youth's lives are embedded in local child fostering as part of a transnational caregiving arrangement or parenting strategy (e.g., Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Coe, 2012; Graham *et al.*, 2012). The cultural practice of child fostering in Ghana has a long history which predates the nation's legal and policy instruments regulating foster care and adoption (Fiawoo, 1978; Goody, 1982). Ghana's child fostering can be described as a way for different members of a family or community to contribute to raising or rearing a child to become a responsible member of society (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985). Traditional Ghanaian child fostering, or social parenting, is commonly practised in all parts of the country by a maternal or paternal relative without the need for legal or customary rites (Nukunya, 2003). Non-kin can also become informal foster parents, however rare this may be in Ghana (Coe, 2012).

The 2008 Ghana demographic and health survey found that 4.3 per cent of children (aged 0–14) living in urban Ghana, excluding orphans, did not live with their mothers, and 22.3 per cent of these children did not live with their biological fathers. 15.2 per cent did not live with both parents. In 2014, 37% of all children, excluding orphans, lived without

at least one biological parent (Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service, and ICF International, 2014). The 2008 and 2014 surveys do not highlight the reasons many children don't live with their parents, probably reflecting how taken for granted child fostering is in Ghana and within Ghanaian transnational families as a strategy for caring for young people.

Ghanaian society expects informally arranged foster parents (relatives and non-relatives) to provide material and immaterial support for the foster children with little or no support from the biological parents, although arrangements depend on the capacities of the foster parents in relation to those of the biological parents. Various factors determine when children go to live with foster parents, including caregivers' wealth and health in relation to a child's biological parents, caregivers' geographical proximity to schools, and opportunities for foster children to learn important life skills within foster homes. The circulation of children among foster parents in Ghana can thus occur during childhood, adolescence or at points on the transition into adulthood (Coe, 2012). Sometimes traditional child fostering, particularly in urban settings, operates in the face of financial constraints and conflictual family relationships (e.g. Schildkrout, 1973; Poeze, Dankyi & Mazzucato, 2017; Dito & Mazzucato, forthcoming). Notwithstanding, traditional child fostering can have both positive and negative impacts on young people's lives, including their education (Ardayfio-Schandorf & Amisshah, 1996; Nukunya, 2003).

### 2.1.3 *Youth education in Ghana*

All people of school-going age in Ghana have a right to good quality education in a regular school (public or private) as long as they are not experiencing significant disability and irrespective of age, ethnicity, language, intellectual ability, and other social, emotional or economic characteristics (Ministry of Justice, 2005). However, this right does not translate into reality for *all* due to cultural, social and economic problems, which, working together or separately, cause children to drop out or make it difficult for them to continue their education at schooling transition points (Ministry of Education, 2013a). A key barrier to smooth schooling in Ghana is the high cost of education, due to school fees and boarding house costs in the case of private schooling, the cost of extra classes in both public and private secondary schools, and transport and stationary costs (e.g., Acheampong 2009). Available statistics also show that urban Ghanaian youth have more opportunities to access schooling than their rural counterparts, despite steady increases in enrolment and attainment in both rural and urban areas (GSS, 2021).

A 2013 Ministry of Education report (2013b) indicates that the number of private schools across preschool to higher education is increasing by four to twenty-one per cent depending on the region, compared to changes in the number of public schools of between minus two and six per cent. This situation suggests more investment in private schools than in public education facilities. Nevertheless, the total public spending on education rose by 15.2 per cent, from 5.7 billion to 6.6 billion (Ghana cedis), primarily due to a 16.3 per cent increase in the Government of Ghana (GoG) budget, from 4.5 billion to 5.2 billion Ghanaian cedis

(Ministry of Education, 2015). The internally generated fund (IGF) grew by 11.3%, from 718 million to 800 million Ghanaian cedis. Donor funding increased by 19.7 per cent from 267 million to 322 million Ghanaian cedis.

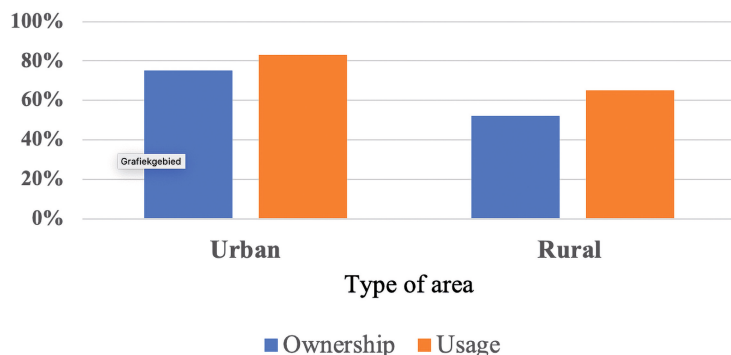
The growing number of school facilities has translated into increasing educational enrolment in Ghana, but not growing attainment compared to the Global North statistics. The recent Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) survey found that 33.5 per cent of 21,913,914 people in Ghana aged four years and older who attended school have attained primary education (GSS, 2019). About a quarter (24.3%) earned Junior High or Junior Secondary School (JHS/JSS) qualifications, though barely five out of every hundred persons in Ghana have attained a tertiary or professional level education. The most recent population and housing census (PHC) observed that urban females aged 15 years and above are more likely to have completed JSS/JHS (54.3% completed) than urban males (45.7%) (GSS, 2021). The census found that 13 per cent of those who have previously attended secondary school have completed a postsecondary or higher education program. About 41 per cent of Ghana's 18-and-older students attend polytechnics, universities, or colleges. Approximately 17 per cent of urban people aged 18 or more who were previously enrolled in secondary school hold a postsecondary degree. These figures reflect lower attainment rates than enrolment, possibly due to factors causing interruptions in youth's educational trajectories.

In Ghana, as elsewhere, education is vital for personal and societal development. Attending school enriches human capital and a country's total development, which is one of the reasons the Ghana constitution of 1992 insists on the gradual implementation of free compulsory basic education (fCUBE) (The Ministry of Justice, 2005). Furthermore, for personal, national and global gains, Ghana has also implemented all kinds of educational support policies, including free school food and free senior secondary education, in her desire to ensure equitable access to schools across the country (e.g., Edusei, 2022). Since senior high school (SHS) in all public and some private schools became free in 2018, many Ghanaian youth transitioned from JHS to SHS with few socio-economic hurdles (Edusei, 2022). With diverse initiatives, the educational attainment of Ghana's youth has been increasing, which is also reflected in the increasing technological literacy of Ghanaian youth due to the Government of Ghana's ICT policy, among others (Malcom & Godwyll, n.d; Peprah, 2016).

#### *2.1.4 Ownership and use of mobile phones in Ghana*

Digital technologies like mobile phones are crucial to the lives of the young people I studied and help them do many things. However, there is a wide gap between mobile phone ownership and usage in Ghana. 74.3 per cent of the Ghanaian population uses a mobile phone, but only 63.8 per cent owns a mobile phone (GSS, 2019). The Ghana Statistical Service (2019) further found that 10 per cent of people aged 12 and above in Ghana who use mobile phones do not own them. There is also about a 20 percentage point difference in mobile phone ownership between urban and rural dwellers, which ties in with the finding that more people in urban areas are knowledgeable of information communication technologies (ICTs) in Ghana than

rural dwellers. In urban Ghana, about 75 per cent of people are owners and 83 per cent are users of mobile phones, as shown in figure 2.1 below. For rural Ghana, mobile phone ownership sits at 52 per cent and usage at 65 per cent.



*Figure 2.1: Mobile phone ownership and usage in contemporary urban and rural Ghana*  
Source: GSS (2019)

More males own and use mobile phones than females (male ownership is 68 per cent and usage 77 per cent, while the figures are 60 and 72 per cent for females).

Despite disparities between mobile phone ownership and use, students in Ghana are often adept with using WhatsApp and Facebook (social media applications on their phones) for communicating with their relations and friends and to find information for their education and other things (Markwei & Appiah, 2016). The statistics indicate that all people in Ghana do not own a phone. However, usage is high. That is because, as I found, stayer youth borrow the mobile phones of caregivers, siblings and friends for use when they do not own one. Therefore, students in Ghana may be adept with innovative technologies using their own or a significant other's gadget. Below, I discuss how I used ethnography within urban Ghana to explore how stayer youth employ WhatsApp to shape their relationships with their migrant parents.

## 2.2 The research design

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork over a period of 15 months with 38 participants (May 2018 – August 2019). I studied stayer youth's experiences and aspirations. Before I delve into the specific methods employed, I will reflect on how this PhD and its methods are situated within the MO-TRAYL project. This dissertation is one of the four PhD investigations of a large-scale multi-disciplinary ERC-funded project called "Mobility Trajectories of Young Lives: life chances of transnational youth in the Global South and North" (MO-TRAYL), led by Professor Valentina Mazzucato. The MO-TRAYL project explores the linkages between youth mobilities and life chance outcomes (Mazzucato, 2015). Since 2017, the MO-TRAYL team has consisted of six females: the principal investigator, a post-doctorate researcher and four PhD researchers. Three of the PhD projects focused on the experiences and aspirations

of Ghanaian transnational youth living in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. My study contributes to the MO-TRAYL project by bringing a Global South perspective and focusing on the experiences and aspirations of young people who stayed in Ghana after their parents migrated abroad (stayer youth). While my dissertation is part of a larger project, I do not compare my work to the results from the wider project in this thesis. Comparison is part of a book we are writing as a team. This dissertation has its own research question and design. What is important to note, however, is that there are methodological tools that we developed as a team that we applied throughout the project, such as youth mobility trajectory and social network maps (see appendices 3 and 7 for details). For more information about MO-TRAYL and how this dissertation fits within it, visit <https://www.motrayl.com>.

### *2.2.1 Selection plan for study participants*

In contrast to conventional ethnography, this study's recruitment of participants happened through an existing dataset, the TCRA Ghana 2015 survey. TCRA stands for Transnational Child Raising Arrangements, which was the focus of a project called "Effects of Transnational Child Raising Arrangements on Life Chances of Children, Migrant Parents and Caregivers between Africa and The Netherlands". The TCRA Ghana project surveyed secondary schools for three years (2012 to 2015), studying stayer children present in sampled schools, and therefore had many participants whose parents resided overseas. Using the final (2015) dataset for this work in 2018 (i.e., three years from 2015), I interacted with all young people in the database who had their parents overseas and voluntarily participated in my fieldwork. For more information about the TCRA project, visit <http://www.tcra.nl/the-programme/>.

During fieldwork for my PhD, I intended to speak with anyone in the TCRA 2015 dataset whose biological parents resided outside of Ghana at the time. I had worked as a TCRA Ghana project fieldworker and favoured selecting participants from the TCRA dataset, as the respondents were already familiar to me. I asked the TCRA Ghana principal investigator (PI) for permission to track and recruit all participants who had consented to participate in follow-up investigations, such as my dissertation. It appeared more feasible to recruit participants via mobile phone conversations than to travel to the surveyed communities. This strategy saved me some effort in scouring my field site for participants, but it did not save time, contrary to my pre-fieldwork expectations.

### *2.2.2 Entering the field*

I called every one of the 442 young people in the TCRA 2015 dataset to give everyone an equal chance to participate in my PhD research. I did so assuming that some who had been the children of parents who had migrated abroad in 2015 might no longer be the children of migrants in 2018/19. Others might have parents who had become overseas migrants. To my surprise, most of my phone calls went to caregivers or stayer parents. Many TCRA respondents, it turned out, had given parents' and caregivers' mobile phone numbers to the TCRA project. For every first call, I introduced myself as a PhD candidate at Maastricht



University. I said I was investigating how international parental migration influences stayer youth's experiences and aspirations throughout the whole period of separation. I explained through the phone that the people I was trying to call had consented in 2015 to participate in follow-up studies. I informed everyone I spoke to that I got phone numbers and high school details from the TCRA project through the principal investigator, who is simultaneously the principal researcher of the MO-TRAYL project and my PhD promoter. Most caregivers were welcoming after I told them how I got their mobile phone numbers and how much I knew the young people, including their secondary school class and full names.

As I attempted to access potential participants, I considered the adults I spoke to be gatekeepers. Some gatekeepers were concerned about my project's societal relevance, including the direct benefits for the young people and their transnational families. I told them that my research was primarily for knowledge production. Participants had a chance to share their experiences and aspirations related to international parental migration. The findings might feed into future research, policy, practice and media discussions on TV and radio and in social media or newspapers.

As soon as a gatekeeper was satisfied with my explanations, they connected me to the young person I had targeted, sharing their mobile phone number with me so that I could call them directly. Sometimes, adults asked me to call another time to talk to the young person through the adult's phone, generally because the person I sought did not own a phone at that time. It was possibly also a double confirmation tactic. As I later learned from some participants, adults sometimes needed another chance to observe how the young people in their care interacted with me through phone conversations before giving their consent to any actual data collection. In several mobile phone conversations, I received gatekeepers' and participants' oral consent for the next phase of the fieldwork.

Once someone had verbally agreed to participate, I called to book an appointment for obtaining their written consent. For each of these gatherings, I took two copies of a written informed consent form (see appendix A1) for participants to sign. One form was for the participant and the other one for the project's record keeping. At consent-seeking meetings, I first read the consent form to participants and invited them to ask questions and pose comments for clarification. At this point, too, I shared the project's brochure with each participant (appendix A2). When the participant signed the consent form or chose to give oral consent, actual data collection began the next day or at least two weeks later.

### *2.2.3 Data collection*

Data collection occurred in two phases over 15 months, with all those who participated in phase one having the chance to participate in phase two. Phase one involved 38 participants. Phase two focused on 15 out of the 38 participants who volunteered for one or more fieldwork interactions. Phase one consisted of youth mobility trajectory mapping and in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide (see appendices 3, 4 and 5), while phase two consisted of social network mapping, observations and more conversations.

The youth mobility trajectory maps are methodological tools designed by all MO-TRAYL team members to gather information about the participants' changing places of residence, caregivers, family constellations, and educational trajectories (Mazzucato *et al.*, 2022). Exploring educational trajectories entailed mapping changing schools, educational tracks, transitions and pathways in each study participant's life. I indicated on all maps every school a participant attended, including who decided which school they would attend, throughout the participant's life course, based on information participants recollected and recounted. In a few cases, the young people were unsure who decided on the preschools they attended. Yet, I encouraged them to contact people who could provide such information and share the details with me through physical or digital conversations later. I then updated their mobility trajectory maps. On all youth mobility trajectory maps, I also systematically collected data about changes in schools, houses, caregivers and family constellations throughout stayer youth's lives. I collected data on each person who made decisions regarding changes in residential location, caregiver and school on the maps.

I then interviewed participants about their maps. By pointing to each change in place of residence and schooling (see appendix figure A1 and A2), every participant had a chance to talk about their experiences, aspirations and expectations (some information is presented in appendix table A1). The research participants reflected on and explained how each move on their mobility trajectories affected their lives. They described how they overcame challenging moments in their mobility trajectories, often seeking complementary or substitute forms of care to ensure their personal development. The flexibly planned interviews provided ample time for participants to reflect on their experiences and narrate their stories in ways that highlighted their agency in "claiming, resisting and negotiating a range of" experiences during international parent migration (Thompson *et al.*, 2004, p.221).

By mapping their mobility trajectories and discussing them in phase one, I sought to understand participants' transitions, pathways, critical moments, hurdles and coping strategies related to being a stayer youth and becoming an adult. Over four months, I observed how parent-child interactions took a central place in collected biographies. Subsequently, I revised the interview guide (see appendix A5) by adding specific questions about parent-child interactions. I contacted those interviewed before I revised the guide to ask them the new questions. By doing so, I gained deeper insights about participants' transnational parenting experiences.

Each meeting in phase one lasted 60 to 120 minutes depending on how deep each participant wanted to go into their experiences, aspirations and expectations. These meetings took place on a single day, or two days back-to-back, or over a couple of weeks. For the one-day sessions, participants sometimes asked to take a snack, lunch, dinner or stretch break when they wished to detach from telling their stories for a moment. Those who requested two-day meetings did so because they could not spend an extensive amount of time on one day on all issues I wished to discuss with them. We stopped talking when they wanted to leave and then scheduled the next meeting. At times, when participants seemed

uncomfortable or cried, I also gave them the possibility of finishing the conversation another day, though I did not leave them alone. I asked participants what they wished to do when they felt sad or worried. None preferred to be alone. They just chatted about what was “trending in” their minds or we went out to have fun. The boys were more inclined to tell me which eatery they wished to explore with me, while the girls preferred a non-data collection kind of conversation.

In preparation for phase two, I reviewed the maps and stories collected in phase one and conducted informal mobile phone conversations to clarify things I was unsure about. When I was ready to conduct phase two data collection with someone, i.e., to engage in social network mapping, participant observation and more conversations, I first called to ask about availability and readiness. Fifteen of the 38 stayer young people from phase one orally consented to phase two (see appendix A6). The remaining 23 referred to time constraints as the major reason they could no longer engage with the project. All 15 who agreed to participate in phase two did not show much interest in phase two right after I called them. Some people took a few days to several months to decide, though a few agreed to continue with phase two right after phase one ended.

I joined the 15 phase two participants at their institutions of higher learning, workplaces or social settings like parties, gyms and stadiums for conversations. Being together with the young people in this way allowed me to observe their activities, communications with parents overseas and interactions with caregivers, and to generate thick descriptive data about their experiences. I also joined interested participants as they searched for jobs through family members, friends of stayer parents and their own friends. I hung out a lot with participants in restaurants and meeting spots they suggested, including paid and unpaid workplaces like offices and shops. In phase two, I *followed* participants as often as possible to better understand their stories.

Additionally, in phase two, I used ego-centric maps alongside a semi-structured interview guide designed by the MO-TRAYL project (see appendix A6 and A7). Around the black dot which represents the ‘self’ in the applied ego-centric map are three concentric circles showing how close or far migrant parents and caregivers are from a participant; the farther a circle is from the black dot ‘self’, the less important participants considered the relationship to be. The locations of other people on the maps also indicated how important they were in stayer youth’s stories. Participants gave the people on the maps preferred names and indicated how they were connected to each person, labelling extended relatives, siblings, teachers, friends, and neighbourhood or community members (see examples in appendix figure A3 and A4). All 15 participants filled out a social network map and responded to the questions in appendix A7. By matching data collected through social network and mobility trajectory mapping, I gained a richer understanding of each participant’s biography.

Finally, in phase two, I conversed with the 15 core participants as much as possible and asked them to validate my observations before I exited the field. After finishing fieldwork,

I contacted the 38 participants whenever necessary via mobile phone to seek clarification or validation of particular points.

#### *2.2.4 Data processing, analysis and interpretation*

I kept this project's data during and after fieldwork in a folder on a protected university server that only my supervisors and I have access to it. I arranged transcription of all interviews and translated all interviews in Twi (a Ghanaian language) into English. I worked with transcription and translation experts in Ghana during data collection and a few months after fieldwork to enable me to retain local meanings as much as possible. All who translated or transcribed interviews for the project received the same guidance, including the need to indicate laughter, giggling, crying and other expressions of emotion. The transcription and translation experts signed a confidentiality agreement prohibiting them from sharing young people's stories. I also ensured that they deleted the transcripts and recordings from their computers in Ghana as soon as they completed the work. In addition to the transcripts and translations, my fieldwork diary, memos and fieldnotes became narrative data about participants' experiences, aspirations and expectations which I used for the analysis.

Data analysis occurred in two main stages – during and after fieldwork. During fieldwork, I read participants' files, particularly core participants' stories, to prepare for subsequent meetings with them. With this approach, I was able to clarify discrepancies or gaps in participants' accounts. In addition to project meetings, I checked in with the youth whenever I needed to validate their maps and stories. During my fieldwork, the MO-TRAYL team also had project meetings via video conferencing. Each researcher prepared debriefing notes of preliminary findings and dilemmas (empirical and methodological issues) and we discussed what was happening in the field. We would troubleshoot challenges, brainstorm solutions, and discuss emerging patterns in whatever data had been collected. Aside from the team meetings, there were also online and on-site supervision meetings between me, my fieldwork supervisor and two supervisors based at Maastricht University. With these collaborations, I started data analyses.

After fieldwork, I manually conducted open coding to identify key issues the 38 participants shared about their transnational family experiences and life aspirations. After coding, I identified recurring categories, patterns and themes. The main themes emerging for this dissertation were transnational parenting, transnational caregiving arrangements, timing and duration of parental migration, digitally mediated transnational communication (or lack of it), parental home visits (or lack of them), remittances (if forthcoming), educational experiences and aspirations, and migration aspirations and resources. Afterwards, I wrote vignettes about each case supported with quotes from the case files for my supervisors' analysis and interpretation. By discussing the vignettes and my coding processes with my supervisors and reading relevant literature, I improved my understanding of participants' experiences and aspirations. My supervisors gave constructive feedback and debated how young people's accounts related to emerging themes. This analytical strategy advanced

my analysis for the empirical chapters of this dissertation. I was slowly getting closer to unpacking the life expressed in my participants' ethnographic accounts.

### 2.2.5 *Researcher positionality*

This section is a reflection on my positionality in conducting this study. As a young Ghanaian woman with a lengthy transnational family background, I presumed that some people would consider me an insider before I entered the field. But participants and their families positioned me as an "insider-outsider". With the gatekeepers (stayer parents, caregivers and siblings) I approached when tracking down participants of the TCRA study, I was often an outsider until they learned about my background. I was not surprised by how hostile some gatekeepers were toward me. It was therefore important for me to inform gatekeepers about who I was, why I was calling and how I got their contact details for recruiting the young people in their care. I drafted a message that provided information about my name, current employer and position (PhD researcher at Maastricht University), the full name of the person I was seeking and their former junior or senior high school, and a few sentences about how I met them in 2012 to 2015 and tried to learn about their experiences and aspirations.

By stating the precise school attended and thoroughly explaining my research goal of following young people over time, parents, caregivers and older siblings gave me a listening ear. These gatekeepers then connected me to the young people I sought. However, a few gatekeepers feared that although I claimed to be a Ghanaian and interested in youth development, the project might be anti-immigration or an intrusive Western intervention into Ghanaian transnational family histories. These adults showed no interest in my background and no desire to ascertain if I had similar development experiences to their wards or children. They simply refused to connect me because they assumed I was a young Black woman based overseas promoting the West-led anti-immigration projects that I sometimes heard about in the field. Other gatekeepers requested an explanation about how the project would support the targeted youth. I assisted such gatekeepers to appreciate that this research, like many others conducted by PhD candidates, seeks to advance knowledge about a chosen societal issue. Both the gatekeepers who were sceptical of my project and those who were understanding helped to raise my awareness of my positionality to the point where I exercised a lot of caution throughout fieldwork. I ensured I always followed acceptable Ghanaian ways of interacting in formal and informal contexts.

During data collection, I tailored my discussions and conversations to stayer youth's experiences and aspirations and sought to gain participants' trust and confidence over time. Building trust and confidence were essential if participants were to share information about their lives freely. This meant telling people something about myself whenever necessary.

I presumed participants and their gatekeepers would consider me a privileged Ghanaian who grew up in Ghana and overseas and who had wealthy parents to sponsor my education. But in many ways I was similar to the people I was studying. I preferred to share a part of my biography with whoever seemed interested when they invited me for such a conversation.

I did not enter the field telling participants and their gatekeepers that I was also the child of a migrant. Rather, I took advantage of moments when they wished to learn something about me to share a piece of my story. This way, some participants and their gatekeepers recognised that I did not have an upbringing that was exceptional and that I wasn't entirely different from them. In waiting to share my story when asked or when it seemed appropriate, I sought to overcome confirmation-biased data collection in phase one. Second, I sought to correct preconceptions about my privilege that often emerged in the field when people found out I was pursuing a PhD. Finally, I aimed to give context to other factors, such as my current place of residence (abroad), that led participants and their networks to conclude that I was an *outsider* at times.

But I entered my field site ready to embrace whatever participants and their gatekeepers chose to call or label me. I happily became a learned friend, sister, aunt or daughter to people. To many participants, I became a learned friend or sister. I was a learned aunt to those under 18 years of age. To caregivers and a few migrant parents who learned about my research with their children, I was a learned daughter or young woman. To siblings, I was a friend or sister of the participant. As I tried to become to everyone in the field whatever they wanted me to be, they opened up gradually to me by sharing detailed information about their life histories and transnational family experiences. The closer participants felt they had become to me over time, the more freely they shared their stories with me in rich detail.

#### 2.2.6 *Reciprocity in this project*

My long-term engagements with participants resulted in a few requests for my support. Most requests related to immaterial help. Young people often sought my opinion about romantic problems or transnational parent-child relationship problems and how they should handle them. Others asked me for post-secondary school career guidance. A few people requested money from me to pay for their tertiary education application fees because they could not get anyone in their social network to help them. Others asked for groceries as tertiary or remedial students living in boarding schools. Those who sought academic help from me seemed to have limited transnational family assistance based on the information I gathered from their case files. I could not offer monetary support, but I offered groceries. I also often offered my time and listened to whatever people wished to share with me. I also took time to go through their academic performance reports with them. We explored the internet together to identify ways they could further their education with whatever scores they had attained and whatever financial support they had available. For those lacking financial support from close relatives, I encouraged them to seek help from their broader social networks.

I chose to avoid using money as an incentive to motivate participation in data collection. I preferred to rely on morally supporting participants rather than on material provisions. My material resources were limited, and I felt it was advisable not to start something I could not continue after my fieldwork ended. I knew from my Ghanaian background that young people might return later to request help if needed. And if I could not help them later, they might

misinterpret the resources I provided during fieldwork. This could have severe consequences for future engagements with them by other researchers. Before entering the field, I therefore planned to reciprocate participants' time by providing moral support as much as possible during and after fieldwork.

### 2.2.7 Ethical issues

As indicated above, this research employed a processual informed consent approach by providing participants with detailed information about the project. Right from entering the field until completion, I continuously educated participants about how sharing their experiences, perceptions, beliefs and desires would help to advance academic and policy knowledge. At the start, I gave participants ample time to ask questions about the investigation through mobile phone calls. I also designed an in-person meeting to discuss the project's aim and why I needed their written consent before I started data collection. All this was ample enough at the initial phase for each participant to decide about becoming involved.

I told participants to ask questions or make suggestions during data collection freely. Some people asked to continue another day or skip certain things they were uncomfortable discussing. A few participants needed short breaks from sharing personal and family secrets with an *outsider*, like me, as they sometimes called me on the field. Where a participant preferred to pause discussions for a period ranging from a few hours to several weeks, I ensured it happened and did not question their intentions. Once a participant asked for a break, I quickly reflected on the participant's demeanour. If they looked worried, I asked if they wanted to hang out before they returned home. I would then follow up on their wellbeing via phone the next day. I continued to check in on them until participants felt comfortable continuing to engage with me for additional data collection.

Before entering the field, I read much about emphatic data collection, which involves connecting my experiences and aspirations with participants' stories as a form of fieldwork therapy. I followed this approach as much as particular fieldwork encounters encouraged or allowed it, seeking "layered storytelling". For example, I considered sharing my story with two females (Ntonsu and Guess) and three males (Gusta, Goshie and Mape) who seemed demotivated about participation in my project because they often ended up talking about the negative impacts parental migration had on them. These young people looked sad while recounting such stories to me. No amount of encouragement and follow-up to check on their wellbeing helped until I started to share my own negative experiences with them online and offline. I shared my story with them because I felt they thought their stories did not fit the expectations that went with being a "boga ba"<sup>1</sup>.

By sharing my story, I hoped these young people would feel comfortable continuing to share their stories with me for the project. When I began to share my experiences and to

1 *Boga ba* is a Ghanaian (Twi) word meaning a child of an emigrant. Ordinarily, Ghanaian society expects such children to be pampered with material goods from their parents in compensation for their lack of physical presence, as the transnational family scholar, Coe (2011) has documented.



explain why I was passionate about their stories, they first seemed surprised and asked me why I did not shy away from recounting bad encounters to them. I said that if they were not shy about sharing their stories with me, why should I hide my experiences from them? I encouraged them to ask me as many questions about my experiences as I was doing with them. And they did. Overall, I discovered that the more I shared my experiences with demotivated participants, often those without continuous support from migrant parents, the more open they became in sharing their experiences of being stayer youth and their plans.

After every meeting, I called to check up on participants and subtly assessed how much the research meeting might have impacted them. Through these general wellbeing check-in conversations, I was confident that none of my participants suffered any serious harm as a result of my research. Those who felt negatively affected by transnational parenting, primarily one key female participant, sometimes cried while recounting experiences and aspirations. Others looked sad, looked away and avoided eye contact during conversations, and lowered their voices. Generally, I paused when someone cried or showed a sad face during interviews or conversations and offered to discuss their feelings with the participant. Since the literature makes clear that feeling sad is common for stayer youth, I watched out for emotionally affected participants and looked to show care and compassion as much as I sensed participants wanted. Implementing my research care plan, designed collaboratively with my supervisors before entering the field, could be one reason why core participants felt comfortable sharing extensive details about themselves and their transnational families, which ultimately yielded a rich dataset for this dissertation and future publications.

## 2.3 Characteristics of the stayer young people in my study

### 2.3.1 Basic background information

Thirty-eight females and males aged 16 to 23 years participated in this research. They lived, attended school or worked in six Ghanaian cities or towns – Accra, Kumasi, Sunyani, Techiman, Ho and Tamale. All participants had completed senior high school (SHS) when I first met them for this investigation, though a few re-entered SHS during my fieldwork to improve their WASSCE grades in order to enter higher education (see appendix table A1 for some details). Those who were in higher education during my research had the financial resources they needed for such education. Others searched for paid jobs by themselves or through their social networks after SHS graduation for money to pay for higher education or preferred working over continuing education. Some were unpaid workers after SHS because they could get adequate support for their next occupation desires or migration aspirations. Finally, some became “adidas”, i.e., SHS graduates who were mostly indoors watching TV without attempting to become busy with further schooling or work.

More young people in this study had one or both biological parents residing in Europe than in other destination countries, as shown in figure 2.2, table 2.1 and appendix table A1. The European destinations were the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden,



Ireland and the United Kingdom. A few Europe-based parents lived together. Undocumented migrant status and divorce or marital separation were the reasons why some migrant parents lived apart from each other within Europe. The African countries to which the parents of young people in my study went were South Africa, Guinea and Togo. Other parents migrated to Canada and the United States of America. This work confirms the finding that Europe, North America and Africa are the main receiving areas for Ghanaian migrants.

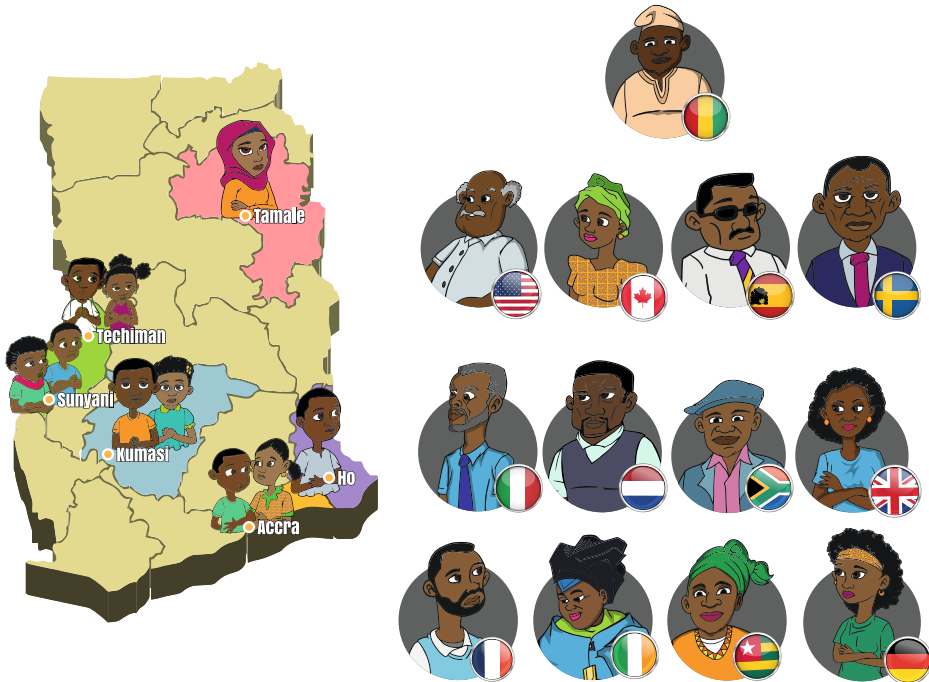


Figure 2.2: Geographical locations of participants and their migrant parents

Source: Fieldwork 2018-2019

### 2.3.2 Participants' mobility trajectories

Most participants changed places of residence or caregiver between one and seven times due to international parent migration. A few participants never changed their place of residence, while others often changed residential locations and schools, as reported in chapter four. As expected, there was often a change in caregiver even when a participant did not change the place of residence, as shown in appendix figure A1 and A2. Table 2.1 contains a summary of information, and appendix table A1 more detailed information about the study participants. The mobility maps in appendix figure A1 and A2 show that parents might migrate before a child enters the world, or sometime after the child was born. Fathers sometimes travelled abroad before their children were born; mothers only travelled overseas some years after the birth of their children.

Table 2.1: Participants' information

Characteristics	Description
Ages of participants	16 to 23 years old
Length of separation from migrant parents	From 3 months to whole lifetime
Location of migrant parents	Europe, North America and Africa
Type of caregivers	Stayer parents, migrant mothers' relatives, migrant fathers' relatives, older siblings and non-relatives like migrant parents' friends
Type of transnational family	<p><i>Mother-away:</i> Mothers left Ghana between 2000 and 2018. All gave birth to the participants in this study before leaving.</p> <p><i>Father-away:</i> Some fathers went overseas before participants were born.</p> <p><i>Both parents-away:</i> Some fathers migrated overseas before arranging for mothers to join them. Other parents travelled together. Some parents were not married or living together overseas.</p>

Source: Fieldwork 2018-2019

The people who decided on participants' places of residence and the schools they attended were mostly migrant parents or caregivers. Sometimes stayer parents facing financial crises made the decision. There could be two or three decision makers, always including a migrant parent or current caregiver in cases when a stayer young person went to live with a new caregiver or moved between schools, as discussed in the empirical chapters. Some participants requested new caregivers at some point. Other participants changed caregivers because their caregivers could not live with them anymore due to financial constraints or geographical relocation. If migrant parents sent remittances for the daily care of participants, then they often decided who would care for their stayer children and what school these young people could attend. However, when migrant parents were materially and emotionally disconnected from their stayer children, they often played no part in caregiving and schooling arrangements. Occasionally, some migrant parents could not remit but were emotionally caring. They had a moral influence in deciding the next home, caregiver and school for their stayer children, as discussed in chapters three and four.

All participants had changing educational careers while their parents were overseas. Participants changed schools two to seven times until they completed secondary school. A change in living place did not always result in a change in school, as shown in appendix figure A2. A few participants' parents moved when they were about to complete secondary school, while other parents had resided abroad for their child's whole lifetime. Nevertheless, all participants completed secondary school and moved on to higher education, work, apprenticeships or became unemployed based on their academic performance, career interests and financial resources, as discussed in chapters four and five.



# 3

## Sustaining Ghanaian transnational parent–child relationships through WhatsApp: A youth-centric perspective



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### 3.0 Introduction

Information and communications technologies (ICTs), and smartphones in particular, are speedily modifying how societies operate and transnational families are no exception. Transnational families, that is, families separated due to international migration, can experience ‘co-presence’ while not being physically close through their use of ICTs (Baldassar *et al.*, 2016). Through ICTs, transnational families remain connected despite geographical separation, which allows them to continue to act as families, with the associated material and emotional care that this entails (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Lim, 2016). Studying ICT-based co-presence thus helps us understand the ways in which family members maintain a sense of ‘being there’ for each other across distance.

For about two decades now, transnational family studies have shown that ICTs are vital to keeping parent–child relationships alive during separation, mainly by looking at how migrant parents interact with children who remain in their country of origin (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Little work has been done to date on children’s own experiences of ICT-mediated relationships with their parents. Yet, we know that transnational families involve power asymmetries (Faist *et al.*, 2015; Serra Mingot, 2020) and that people negotiate such asymmetries through ICTs (Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005). This makes it important to ask how stayer youth, that is children who stay home while their parents migrate overseas, display agency through their use of social media.

There is an important reason why focusing on youth’s experiences may shed additional light on ICT-mediated parent–child relationships. We already know much about how parents experience digital communication. Children in origin countries might have less access to ICTs than their parents due to the costs of cellphones and calls, but they are also usually more literate in using Internet-enabled media (Madianou, 2014). Age influences people’s views and experiences of social interaction that takes place through ICTs (Baldassar, 2016; Cabalquinto, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Consequently, it is important to look at how young people experience digital interactions differently from their parents.

Alongside phone calls and text messaging, children and parents currently rely on social media to stay in touch during geographical separation (Anh Hoang & Yeoh, 2012; Madianou, 2014; Parreñas, 2005). The social media platforms predominantly discussed by scholars of transnational parent–child relationships are Skype and Facebook (Ahlin, 2018; Baldassar, 2016; Baldassar *et al.* 2016; Madianou, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2011). Due to the proliferation of social media platforms, however, there is a need to widen the scope of research and to explore other platforms. Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular social media platforms used by youth (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019; Pew Research Centre, 2018), and Ghana is no exception (Markwei & Appiah, 2016). But despite its popularity, WhatsApp has been neglected in current studies of ICT-mediated relationships in transnational families. WhatsApp is a free communication technology used on smartphones with an Internet

connection. It therefore reduces one of the hurdles that youth face in staying connected with migrant parents during separation, namely, cost (Lam & Yeoh, 2018).

This chapter is based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana with 38 young people whose parents had migrated abroad. While the literature often refers to these young people as ‘left behind’, we use the term ‘stayer’ to avoid negative connotations (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2020). We conducted this investigation in Ghana because many young people there grow up far from their parents due to parental migration. Close to a quarter of all secondary school-age children have at least one parent who has migrated (Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service, & ICF International, 2015).

In the next section, we discuss the literature on ICTs and transnational parent–child relationships, showing that most studies focus on the perspectives of parents. We review our methodology, including our entry into the field, participant selection, consent, data collection and analysis. We also provide background information on our participants. In the third section, we discuss the media ecology of our participants. In the fourth, we analyse our findings on the strategies young people employ for communicating with migrant parents using WhatsApp. We end with concluding remarks and recommendations for further research.

### 3.1 Communication Technologies and Transnational Parent–Child Relationships

Communication is key to maintaining social ties at a distance, providing a sense of being together and ‘doing family’ despite being far apart (Ahlin, 2018; Baldassar, 2016; Leurs, 2014; Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005; Madianou & Miller, 2011). Due to international migration, it is common to find children and parents living separately across countries. Stringent migration laws, which apply especially to migration from Global South to Global North countries, often make it difficult for children to migrate with their parents (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2019; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2020; Jordan *et al.*, 2018). Leaving children in the origin country may also be seen as a better option for some parents who come from cultures where child fostering is a common phenomenon (Poeze *et al.*, 2017). During such geographical separations, members of transnational families stay connected through communication technologies, remittances and visits (Dreby, 2006; Poeze *et al.*, 2017; Schmalzbauer, 2008). Of the three means, ICTs are the most accessible to a wide variety of people as they entail fewer financial resources, or formal documentation than remittances and home visits (Veale & Donà, 2014). ICTs also help transnational family members to provide affective support during separation (Benítez, 2012).

ICTs promote virtual co-presence and are rapidly replacing old forms of telecommunication interaction and interpersonal exchange during long-distance separations due to massive technological developments (Licoppe, 2004; Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005). Although several scholars have conceptualised different types of co-presence, this article

relies on Baldassar's (2016) definition of virtual co-presence as sociability or sociality that results in a feeling of 'living together' based on the flow of social exchanges via ICTs (Madianou, 2014; Licoppe, 2004; Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005). Virtual co-presence includes 'real time-shared communication of voice over the telephone, video, Skype or Facetime, text over SMS mobile devices, and text and/or images on Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp chats' (Baldassar, 2016: 153). Baldassar distinguishes between active and passive co-presence based on differences in 'expectations of attentiveness, the pace of reciprocity, and the depth of emotional engagement' (p.150). By comparing real-time streaming and immediate co-presence via Facetime and Skype with texting by SMS and WhatsApp, she argues that texting enables 'intermediate', 'selective' or 'discretionary' co-presence because individuals choose when to read and reply to messages. She highlights the capacity of text-based communication platforms to store information for reading or rereading later. Although such discretionary co-presence fails to deliver the opportunities of being there in the moment that streaming and immediate forms of co-presence provide, it nonetheless helps create and maintain a strong sense of kinship. Hence, discretionary co-presence creates opportunities for passive, ambient or continuous co-presence in the background, as opposed to actively staying connected in the foreground.

In recognition of the increasing use of a wide variety of ICT, Madianou and Miller (2012) coined the term 'polymedia' to refer to the various media ecologies used for personal communication and relationship building. These media ecologies are made up of different communication platforms, such as Skype or Facebook messaging, each with its own functionalities. Treating them as an ecology recognises the fact that different media or platforms do not exist in a vacuum but in relation to each other. Through this perspective, an emphasis is placed in media analysis on how people use media and the social relations people have through the technology. But for polymedia to have such function, it must meet prerequisites: accessibility, affordability and technical literacy (Baldassar, 2016; Madianou, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Users must have a good range of media that they can afford and use confidently (Madianou, 2014). However, accessibility, affordability and technical literacy are not the same across generations and geographical space (Baldassar, 2016; Alampay, 2012; Elul, 2020). Madianou and Miller (2012) found that stayer youth are better at using modern communication tools than migrant parents, but ICTs are more accessible and affordable for migrant parents than the young people they studied.

The concept of polymedia has been criticised for how the proponents applied it in origin countries' contexts. In many countries in the Global South where migrants come from, access to technologies is limited and the polymedia lens omits less privileged groups (Alampay, 2012; Elul, 2020). Yet one of the proponents of polymedia argue that the concept is useful in identifying inequalities and socio-economic gaps in communication (Madianou, 2014, 2015). Madianou (2014) states that differences in economic status, media access and technical literacy have a high impact on transnational communication and the quality of transnational relationships. Additionally, age and duration of separation shape how different members of

transnational families use particular communication media to stay connected (Caballero, 2018; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Madianou, 2014). Madianou and Miller (2012) found that available media, age of separation and quality of parent–child relationships before migration defined how stayer youth viewed their experiences of mediated transnational relationships. Furthermore, Wilding (2006) shows that families experienced regular communication as helping to minimise the significance of distance, at least until there is a crisis, like a family conflict or illness, when the impediment of distance increases.

Knowing that various factors shape the nexus between communication and transnational relationships, we examine the media ecologies of Ghana and how our young research participants use particular media to which they have access to shape and sustain their transnational parent–child relationships. We focus on social media, in particular on WhatsApp. It is important to know how stayer youth adopt and use social media for transnational parent–child engagements because youth are frequent users of Facebook and WhatsApp as compared to other communication tools (Pew Research Centre, 2018; Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Social media can improve the quality of transnational relationships (Francisco, 2015). Social media platforms also support regular long-distance communication if the will and ability to use them are in place (Baldassar, 2016). But scholars have largely ignored WhatsApp. The existing literature primarily talks about how migrant parents stay connected with stayer youth through phone calls, webcams, emails, Skype, Twitter, Facetime and Facebook (Dreby, 2006; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Madianou, 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2001; Schmalzbauer, 2008). Little is known about the use of WhatsApp, though it is a tool commonly used by young people. WhatsApp's affordability, as compared to traditional international calls, means that cost is not a major barrier to communication for young people (Lam & Yeoh, 2018). By studying how young people use WhatsApp, we show how stayer youth display agency in transnational parent–child relationships.

Our focus on young people runs contrary to much of the literature on transnational families and ICTs. This literature has focused on migrant parents, reflecting the fact that power relations within families are unequal, with power usually laying in the hands of the parents. Furthermore, until recently, the cost and accessibility of communication technologies favoured migrant parents relative to their stayer children, giving researchers another reason to focus on the parents. In the past, much communication was done by phone call. Migrant parents have been found to make phone calls weekly and even daily to stayer youth (Dreby, 2006; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Jordan *et al.*, 2018; Madianou, 2014; Parreñas, 2001). Yet this adult-centric perspective has had the consequence of positioning stayer youth as passive actors in transnational family relations. But with the arrival of new media, and WhatsApp in particular, young people can initiate communication and can actively stay connected to their parents, which could result in increased youth agency and hence changing positions of power.

We draw on Licoppe and Smoreda's (2005) study of how, when and what people communicate via ICTs to understand how young people use their agency through



WhatsApp to shape communication with their migrant parents. Licoppe and Smoreda argue that ICTs, and specifically mobile phones, give individuals power to negotiate the constraints of communication. Additionally, they argue that ICTs provide new resources (i.e., communication tools) to negotiate time (i.e., absence and presence) and social exchanges, thereby adjusting social roles and hierarchies, and power asymmetries. Simply keeping in touch can also be important beyond what is actually said during communication. Licoppe and Smoreda show that the rhythm of speech, writing, gesture and silence are some ways people keep in touch through communication technologies. They also call on researchers to interrogate why people choose to use one mediated mode of interaction over another. People have reasons for communicating in a particular way, based on either conventional judgment or interpretive practice. For example, inner commitment to a relationship and inner experience of the strength of a bond shape the choice of communication technologies people use to maintain social ties across distance. Our study draws on different elements highlighted by Licoppe and Smoreda when analysing the strategies that young people adopt to communicate with their migrant parents via WhatsApp, even when parents seem unavailable or uninterested in communicating.

### **3.2 Participant Characteristics and Methodology**

Participants were selected from those who participated in a survey conducted in 2015 amongst secondary school students in three cities in Ghana (Sunyani, Kumasi and Accra) on the topic of transnational families (TCRA project, [www.tcra.nl](http://www.tcra.nl)). 442 children of migrants and non-migrants participated in TCRA Ghana project. Out of the 81 people identified as stay behinds in the TCRA dataset, three later reunified with their parents abroad and 27 could not be reached. This left 51 potential participants, though 13 declined to participate in our research. Our final sample consisted of 38 young people (Table 3.1).

The TCRA survey participants had given us their consent to trace them in the future. We contacted them through mobile phone calls and WhatsApp. Once we gained the written and oral consent of our 38 young people, plus the consent of the caregivers of two participants who were under the age of 18, we met in person for in-depth interviews. After these interviews, we conducted more in-depth research with a sub-sample of 15 young people. We met with them several times to conduct observations and conversations to enrich our understandings of emerging issues. The first author visited the young people at their homes, at school and during social activities. This allowed for occasional and unexpected first-hand observations of some transnational parent–child communications in action. We blended offline and online engagements in order to keep our contact with participants even when we were collecting data in another location.

We compiled 38 youth files comprising field notes and interview transcripts amounting to over 2500 pages of written text. We gathered information on participants' actual experiences and perceptions of living separated from their migrant parents. The data include participants'

socio-economic and family characteristics, their communication practices and their feelings about sustaining transnational parent–child relationships through communication technologies. We conducted thematic analysis based on deductive and inductive coding.

*Table 3.1 Characteristics of participants*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Ages of participants	16–23 years
Highest level of education completed	Senior high school (all participants)
Home regions	Greater Accra, Northern, Volta, Ashanti, Bono and Ahafo
Type of transnational family	Mother-away (5): Mothers left Ghana between 2000 and 2018. All gave birth to the participants in this study before leaving. Father-away (24): Some fathers went overseas before participants were born. Both parents-away (9): Some fathers migrated overseas before arranging for mothers to join them. Other parents travelled together. Not all of these parents are still married or living together overseas.
Location of parents	Europe, North America and Africa
Length of separation	From 3 months to whole lifetime
Communication technologies accessible to participants	Standard mobile phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook, Facetime, Imo <sup>1</sup> and Instagram
Family visits to Ghana by migrant parents	15 young people had experienced at least one parental visit from abroad.

*Source:* Fieldwork 2018–2019

*Notes:* <sup>1</sup>Imo is a social messaging application used on computers and smartphones like other social media platforms. Only one participant said that he communicates occasionally with his migrant father via Imo.

### **3.3 Contextualising Stayer youth’s Agency in Transnational Communication**

In this section, we discuss how stayer youth in Ghana exhibit agency through their use of social media to communicate with their parents overseas. We first outline the media ecology, i.e., the polymedia conditions, of the study area and of the participants, before moving on to show how young people use WhatsApp to sustain their transnational parent–child relationships.

#### *3.3.1 The Media Ecology of Young Ghanaians in Transnational Families*

There are no statistics on current phone ownership and internet usage for the period of our research, but in 2012, Ghana was described as becoming an information technology society because a significant proportion of the population owned mobile phones (Ghana Statistical

Service, 2012). More than four out of every five households owned a mobile phone in 2014 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014), while two years earlier, forty-eight per cent of the Ghanaian population aged 12-years-old and above owned mobile phones and 8 per cent used internet facilities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). As compared to other regions in Ghana, Greater Accra (74%) and Ashanti (56%) regions had the highest proportions of mobile phone owners. More urbanites than rural dwellers used the internet and mobile phones in Ghana in 2012 due to affordability. While 63 per cent of Ghana's urban population used mobile phones and 13 per cent the internet, usage in rural areas was 13 and 2 percent respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Internet infrastructure and limited financial resources pose the largest constraints (Elul, 2020).

Through promotional activities by telecommunication companies and mobile phone traders, the utilisation of smartphones and the internet is increasing, despite popular claims that communication is expensive in Ghana. Mobile phone traders in Ghana promote the consumption of communication technologies through the supply of affordable phones from China and sales of used phones. The National Communication Authority also controls market pricing of telecommunication services to protect consumers. The promotion of affordable smartphones and internet access has been a major boost to WhatsApp adoption and use in Ghana.

Since its inception in 2009, WhatsApp usage has increased astronomically. At first, WhatsApp was a text messaging tool for iPhone users, before also being made available to Android users. Later, voice and video functionalities were added. Currently, WhatsApp enables most people in Ghana, including our participants, to have desired private interactions, as compared to Facebook, which is mostly for public engagements (Elul, 2020). Two study participants did not have direct access to WhatsApp or any social media. Still, they would use WhatsApp through someone else's phone, usually their caregivers to stay connected to migrant parents. Additionally, some young people maintained contact through standard mobile phone calls and SMS, as pay-as-you-go (PAYG) subscribers.

PAYG is the same as pay-as-you-talk or prepaid mobile phone. Owners of PAYG smartphones must first purchase credit to use any of the communication services or tools on their phones. PAYG is the most available option for mobile phone communication as postpaid mobile phone contracts rarely exist in Ghana. Mobile phone users in Ghana purchase talk credit or data packages with their mobile money wallet or through top-up or refill cards from vendors usually found by roadsides or in grocery shops. Thus, while WhatsApp technology is free, it still entails a cost as it requires PAYG credit.

All the participants in our study commented on the costs of staying connected to their migrant parents. Sonna narrates:

It is like, my mother is not that knowledgeable. She is not that educated. So, it was difficult for her to use the Android phone that was given to her unless she gets someone to assist her in making the calls. I am the one who was supposed to call her. But it is

difficult to buy airtime here in Ghana. If I buy like GHS 5 airtime, I can't talk for long, and my mother is one person that when I call her, we can talk for long and that is why I don't call her. If I call her, we will talk for long, and so we don't get to talk often. Maybe in a week or two, we will talk once. (Sonna, 22 years old, male, July 2019)

The costs of communication fell on Sonna because his mother lacked the know-how. The issue of technological literacy is an important one. Our research corroborates previous finding that stayer youth have higher technical knowledge about smartphone and social media platforms than some migrant parents, especially when parents are illiterate (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Sonna's mother cannot call him due to what he describes as her lack of education. Hence, Sonna took up the responsibility of calling his mother to keep their relationship alive.

Not all our participants had smartphones. Accessing smartphones was also an issue for some of our participants. While the literature suggests that migrant parents often buy smartphones for their older children (Poeze *et al.*, 2017), this was not always the case amongst our participants. Some young people did not have smartphones before entering senior high school (grades 10 to 12) and could only get in touch with their parents through caregivers or other adults in the same house or neighbourhood. As the young people had to go through adults and sometimes non-relatives to call their parents, communication was intermittent and had to be scheduled. When participants reached secondary school age, boarders were permitted to use the school's mobile phone for a fee at designated times to get in touch with their parents. Some relied on their social contacts. For example, Neelde could easily access his school's mobile phone to call his migrant parents for free because his brother, the school prefect, had the school phone in his custody.

While some participants received smartphones from their parents, others had to purchase their phones with their own income or pocket money. In fact, most of the young people in our study got their phones from sources other than their parents, especially after secondary school. These sources included romantic partners and extended family members. Sometimes young people were creative in their attempts to get a smartphone from their parents, as in the case of Pippy:

For a few months, Pippy (18 years old, male) lost his smartphone and could not stay in touch frequently with his migrant parents. Pippy's parents wanted to keep in touch. So, they offered to buy him a simple cellphone. Pippy rejected this offer because the phone did not support social media. Pippy thus borrowed the smartphones of his caregiver and a friend to reach out to his migrant family until he was able to buy a smartphone out of his savings. When Pippy's parents asked him how he got the phone, he lied that a friend lent him a phone so that his parents would still get him a smartphone during his mother's home visit. (Fieldnote about Pippy, July 2019)

When parents do give a phone to their stayer children, it can cause friction if only one child gets a phone. Jina made this clear when she explained that she felt her father wanted to cause enmity between her paternal half-brother and herself when her father chose to give the younger half-brother a phone and ignored her several requests for one.

### 3.4 Youth Agency in WhatsApp-Mediated Interactions

There are various ways that young people exert agency through their use of WhatsApp to influence communication with their parents abroad. Below we discuss the five ways that emerged from our data. Young people exert agency: (a) by using their technical abilities; (b) through the way they time their communications; (c) through the actual content of the communication, including what they don't say or say only partially; (d) by using their siblings to facilitate communication and (e) by using silence and brevity to show their dissatisfaction.

#### 3.4.1 Technical Abilities

The participants in our study used the various functions of WhatsApp to engage with their parents. Below we show how some young people expressly chose to use specific WhatsApp functionalities that matched their parents' technical literacy. Others used their own technical know-how to search, find and connect with their parents after many years of separation. Sometimes also parents took the initiative to reconnect with their children after long times of separation using new technologies. Additionally, WhatsApp was a medium for children to monitor their parents' online presence to increase the likelihood of receiving replies to text messages.

Young people were found to adapt the ways of sending messages, to adapt to their parents' abilities. Marble, for example, would send voice messages instead of text messages, as her migrant father is illiterate. She explains,

My father didn't go to school ... that's what I have heard, and I do not know if he can chat ... When I call him, and he doesn't answer, I will just send audio [a voice message] to tell him that I was calling to find out how he is doing. (Marble, 22 years old, female, July 2019)

Young people also use social media to gather information about their parents when they have had no contact with their parents for years and wish to re-establish communication. They gather details to find their parents online. Mape and his stayer brother did this through Facebook and WhatsApp.

Although Mape (19 years old, male) was 3 years old when his father migrated abroad, the first time Mape heard from him was when Mape was already in university. To make the father's call possible, Mape and his younger brother had gathered their father's full name, nickname and country of residence from their mother in order to find him on Facebook.

Mape's younger brother was the one who searched and found their father on Facebook. The younger brother then moved his communication with his father from Facebook to WhatsApp after requesting his father's WhatsApp details. During their interaction on WhatsApp, the father at one point requested Mape's contact details and established contact with Mape on WhatsApp. It took several more months for Mape's father to finally call him. This being the very first time they had ever communicated, the father sent Mape a picture of himself so that Mape could confirm with his mother that he was indeed his father. Mape was happy to hear from his father, who told him about the shop that he had in Kumasi and invited Mape to go there from time to time. Instantly, Mape thought that help had come his way through the unexpected call from his father. When Mape went home over the weekend from his university campus, he told his mum and showed her the picture of his dad. Mape's mother confirmed that the man was his father but had a sad look in her eye. She advised Mape to stay away from the man who called himself his father and instead focus on his education. And in fact, the mother's advice was a premonition for what happened. After that call on WhatsApp, the father vanished into thin air without calling or chatting to Mape again. (Fieldnotes about Mape, February 2019).

Mape and his brother actively sought out their father's details to establish contact with him. They succeeded, but as their case shows, this does not necessarily mean that such work will lead to continuing relationships. Below we will discuss the emotional toll that this can have on young people.

Some young people rely on the functionalities of WhatsApp to monitor and surveil their parents' interactions with them. When parents are not responsive to digital conversations, some young people resort to monitoring their parents' online presence to decide whether or not they should continue calling or messaging their parents. Mape again provides an example. He sends text and voice messages and calls to his father to request money for educational needs and to ask how his father is doing. Despite the numerous calls and messages, Mape's father has never replied after their first phone contact. Mape checks the ticks on his WhatsApp and therefore sees that while his father has read and heard his messages, he still does not respond. This disengagement hurts. Mape continues to contact his father, hoping that one day his father will respond.

Goshie also monitors his father's lack of communication, but unlike Mape, Goshie is fed up with his father for not responding to his calls. Instead of continuously calling and messaging his father, Goshie prefers solely to monitor his father's online presence via his WhatsApp status. Goshie monitors his father, who was separated from him at the age of 3 years, but says, he will not make contact again if his father will not contact him, his mother or sister. Goshie thinks that his father does not care about them.

The last time I heard from him was last year. I was trying to [tell] him that there are these people who normally don't get parental intervention: no control from the parents. They are on their own ... We [Goshie and his biological sister] have never had a dad.. .we

don't have a dad to do those kinds of things with us ... he has been calling [my paternal step-siblings], he chats them on WhatsApp. But I don't chat him. (Goshie, 16 years old, male, March 2019)

Goshie: He is not aware of anything happening in my life. But when I post stuff at my WhatsApp status, he watches it but never comments. I always laugh when that happens. I don't chat with him [and] neither does he.

Interviewer: Do you also look at his status?

Goshie: No way! Actually, he seldom posts status. He rather watches mine, and it makes me laugh. I don't even know why he watches because with the way he is behaving, it depicts that he has forgotten all about me. So, I don't get why he watches my status. It tells me he is available, but he does not want to contact me.

Interviewer: And how does that make you feel?

Goshie: I am used to it since this has been the situation from the time I was a child. (Interview conversation with Goshie, July 2019)

Some young people wait to see that their parents are online on WhatsApp before connecting with them. For those whose parents prefer receiving text messages, young people sometimes expect an immediate response to their texts. Yet, when this does not happen, it can lead to hurt feelings. For example, Trendy has active text messaging interaction with her father on WhatsApp as her father asked her to send him messages instead of calls. Trendy becomes sad when her father is online but does not respond immediately to her messages. However, although the reply might take longer than she expects, Trendy knows that her father will reply in his own time even if he chooses not to respond immediately.

New media, with monitoring or surveillance functions, bring public online spaces to merge with private ones in building and sustaining transnational relationships. However, this combination can lead to negative emotions, such as feeling hurt when a parent seems to be online but does not respond. New media also allow members of transnational families to stay connected in the background, to have 'discretionary co-presence', as Baldassar (2016) calls it, when 'active co-presence' is impossible or denied. In the past, when phone calls were the main medium of communication, if a call was not answered, the caller could not know whether the receiver was unable to take the call or was avoiding them. WhatsApp, in contrast, allows users to check whether recipients receive and read messages, and to view status updates that people post about themselves. This functionality gives non-response a different meaning, bringing greater suspicion of being ignored or abandoned.

### 3.4.2 *The Timing of Communication*

As Licoppe and Smoreda (2005) suggest, the timing of a message can also be a way of communicating a message to someone. For example, some young people choose to delay replying to their parents' calls or messages if they are unhappy about the content of messages received. When Gusta's mother sent a message that she was unhappy about something,

Gusta did not reply immediately. When his mother sent him messages stating she did not like his hairstyle in his profile picture, Gusta never replied. In another instance, when his mother asked him how he was progressing with his business plan, he took several days to respond. Gusta took the time to think of the most appropriate response so that his mother would not over-react.

Some young people take note of the times their parents are free to talk. Neelde, for example, considers the most appropriate time to call and talk to his mother so that they can have meaningful interactions, as Neelde depends on his mother for emotional support. Working parents are available at specific times of the week, especially after regular working hours in weekday evenings or in weekends. As Madianou and Miller (2011) found, weekend conversations are common in the transnational families we studied. Weekends were generally when young people conversed with their parents, invoking shared jokes and memories of when they lived together in Ghana. Some young people prefer to wait for their parents to call them even when they have needs. These young people do not necessarily lack money for communication. Rather, they expect parents to call them and not vice versa, as Reso told us:

Every day he [Reso's migrant father] calls us. He calls my mum, my sister and me too: at times, in the morning, afternoon or evening. Today, I told him my phone is spoilt [broken] so ... yeah. As for him, he is always expecting us [Reso and her sister] to call. For my mum, he calls her. For my sister and I, he is expecting us to call him and not he calling us. We rather wait for his call on our mother's phone. Just greeting and maybe if I want something, I will ask. At times, just greeting, asking of his health, yeah, and at times maybe when he wants to tell me something. (Reso, 18 years old, female, June 2019)

Reso and her sister are mostly at home when their father calls their mother through WhatsApp. By making sure they are at home when their father talks to their mother, these young women get the opportunity to speak to their father. They expect their father to call them and do not anticipate calling him. Reso never reported calling her father directly. Although, the majority of the participants actively called their parents, Reso's case suggests that not all young people instigate communication.

### 3.4.3 *Content of Communication*

During WhatsApp-mediated communication, migrant parents and stayer youth text or talk about their favourite games and about things happening at home or abroad. Young people make their needs heard, make requests, receive information about remittances, ask or receive advice or receive words of encouragement.

Oje regularly speaks with her father overseas. Given the frequency of his calls, Oje has the opportunity to tell her father about her needs and to request money to pay for her daily necessities, school admission fees and remedial classes. Through their regular conversations, Oje also discusses her future career plans with her father. Interestingly, it was only after her



father visited Ghana that this frequent communication began. Oje's father uses WhatsApp voice calls to speak to Oje on her caregiver's phone. Oje knows her father calls her mother about her too because she sees her mother whenever she goes to the market for food to cook for her household.

He pays my school fees, he calls me to check on me, and everything. Shelter and food ... He calls every month, multiple, to my real mum ... my aunty (caregiver), and now me. (Oje, 18 years old, female, October 2018)

When young people perceive that their migrant parents have limited time for conversation but are willing to provide for their material needs, some young people limit their communication to requests. These young people mostly request money for their education, food or household utilities like electricity. Veeka only contacts her father to request money for school fees, electricity bills and food. Veeka's father is a busy Christian missionary in the United Kingdom. Knowing her father's willingness to provide materially, but his lack of time to engage emotionally, Veeka only contacts her father when she has a material request. Veeka receives video calls from her mother in Germany almost every day, during which they speak for an extended time about family related and unrelated matters. Veeka appreciates her father's availability for her material needs. In another instance, Jina observed that her father only engages her if she calls to ask for money for her education.

Some young people, including Jina, tell lies to obtain much needed remittances from migrant parents for their own and their siblings' needs. Jina adds extra amounts to her demands for education whenever her father cannot verify how much she needs through a paternal cousin and uses the extra to pay for her beauty needs. In another case, Trendy brings forward the deadline for tuition fee payments for her and her sibling's school by two weeks, knowing that their father is always late with remittances. Before every vacation, Trendy tells her father the school will re-open two weeks earlier than it actually does, and communicates all their educational needs, such as books and hostel fees. Throughout vacations, Trendy sends voice notes and text messages to their father to remind him of their needs, especially for school fees, the deadlines for payment and consequences attached to late payment of fees.

#### *3.4.4 Connecting through Siblings*

Youth show agency in choosing to connect to migrant parents via siblings living in Ghana or abroad. These siblings act as mediators between stayer youth and migrant parents. If migrant parents are hard to reach, some young people connect to their parents through siblings who have also moved overseas. Pippy, for example, maintains regular contact with his migrant parents via his younger sister, who lives with their parents. His parents are WhatsApp users too, but Pippy chooses to go through his sister in order to find out when his parents are home and available. Pippy explains that there is another advantage. By contacting his sister, Pippy gets the opportunity to hear the voices of his parents as his sister lets him talk to

them directly. At other times, Pippy gets to hear his parents' voice as his sister's background noise while Pippy talks to his sister via WhatsApp voice calls. Over the weekends, Pippy mostly talks to both parents on WhatsApp video calls through his sister's phone. At other times, his mother calls him over the weekend to see how he is doing and to talk about how other family members are doing. When Pippy has a financial request to make, he always checks first with his sister via WhatsApp to get her assessment of whether their parents are in a position to support him or not. The sister never says that Pippy should not ask, but she sometimes advises him to adjust the timing of his demands if she thinks that their parents are going through a difficult time. Pippy explains that he trusts his sister's judgement and delays his request until the sister tells him that the parents can afford it. He notes that this strategy results in his parents responding to his needs most of the time.

Where parents lack the technical capacity for WhatsApp interaction, young people sometimes connect through migrant siblings, as Sonna describes.

Sometimes I would video call my sister, and then I will tell her to give the phone to my mother, so I could speak to her. It is like, my mother is not that knowledgeable. She is not that educated. So, it was difficult for her to use the android phone that was given to her unless she gets someone to assist her. (Sonna, July 2019)

Local siblings, those who remain in Ghana, also play a role in communications with a parent abroad. For example, Trendy liaises between her father and her twin brother, Master, to help her brother get what he needs. Trendy has an easier relationship with her father than does Master. When Master talks to his father, the father sometimes asks him to shave his hair before he will give him what he wants or scolds him about his educational performance or supposed mental health problems. To avoid a scolding, Master chooses to communicate his needs through his sister. Throughout our fieldwork, Master communicated everything he needed from the migrant father, including renewal of his optical lenses, through his sister.

Some youth, like Gusta, try to protect their younger siblings from negative experiences and the harsh realities some parents live in overseas. Such youth act as intermediaries between stayer siblings and migrant parents. Gusta wants to uphold a positive image of his migrant mother to his brother; therefore, he lies occasionally to his brother about his communication with his mother. Gusta's mother resides illegally abroad and calls Gusta less often than Gusta tells his brother.

Even when my mum calls or she texts me or uses a voice note, sometimes she mentions it [that she does not have documentation], [...] but whenever my brother calls, I am like, oh mum called and says hello and then kind things. So, I just try to keep him in that state where he thinks that okay, my mom is somewhere, she is facing some kind of difficulty, so when that is done, then we will all be cool, and he is cool [...] He tries to get our mum's contact from me. But the way we put the story is like she is trying to get her paperwork.

So even if she will call, then it will be a landline or something, and sometimes too she is broke, she doesn't have money for credit. She is really going through some really tough times so when you say that, he will be like, oh Charlie, no lie, [...] We always put up a story, but the story should be good [...] I should say that it is on a need to know basis [...] Like if it will affect you directly, then you need to know. If it doesn't affect you that directly then you don't need to know [...] So occasionally, when mum calls, she speaks to him. When I get a message, I tell him. So, in his mind, my mum is always calling to check up. So, what he needs to know is that mum checks upon him all the time. It is a standard. But what he doesn't need to know is that it is not that often as we make it seem. [...] It is not cool, but sometimes we have to do it to derive certain things, and when he grows up, he will understand. (Gusta, 21 years old, male, March 2019)

#### 3.4.5 *Silence and Brevity*

Lastly, young people express agency through limiting interaction, via silences or brevity in their communications, with migrant parents. Young people, just like parents, make use of silences or short messages when they do want to stay connected. The young people either stop communicating with migrant parents or are brief in their responses to calls to let parents know they are unhappy about something. Examples are Ntonsu and Cross, who disengaged by not contacting and responding to contact from their migrant mother and father for weeks due to disagreements about their job plans and their appearance, respectively. In another case, Gusta became upset that his migrant mother hardly supported his stayer father financially in caring for him and his younger brother. Subsequently, Gusta stopped communicating with his mother for some years during his tertiary education. Gusta pretended his mother did not exist by not responding to her messages, despite his father and friends telling him he should reply to her. Gusta even told some friends he did not have a mother. Interestingly, Gusta checked up on his mother during this period of non-communication by monitoring her online presence via WhatsApp status tool.

Another example is Venta, who was also unhappy about the care that his migrant father provided. When we asked Venta how often he contacts his father, Venta chuckled and said 'me and him... no!'. Venta's migrant father speaks mostly to his mum over the phone; only five times in 2018 did Venta speak to his father. When his stayer mother and father were communicating via WhatsApp audio calls, his father would ask his mother whether he could talk to Venta. If Venta was in, he could not get out of talking to his father even though he preferred not to. However, Venta made these father-son engagements brief because he did not want his father to know what he was doing in life.

### 3.5 Conclusion

We started this paper with the premise that we cannot understand transnational family life and transnational parent-child relations without taking young people's perspectives into

account, something other authors also advocate (e.g. Dreby, 2006; Haikkola, 2011). Moreover, we argued that the proliferation of social media applications and increasing adoption and use of such media by youth all over the world, including stayer youth, merits attention. We need to know how these youth use social media applications to interact with their parents overseas. Only a limited number of studies have investigated stayer youth in transnational families: most studies focus on their parents abroad. Even more, only a few studies have looked at how stayer youth interact with migrant parents through ICTs, even though information communication technology is one of the main ways transnational families sustain their relationships. We applied a similar approach to Licoppe and Smoreda (2005), focusing on how, when and what people communicate via ICTs in order to understand the strategies that young people employ to shape their communication with their overseas parents. As such, we recognise the asymmetries that exist between family members, but we give an agentic voice to young people who have heretofore been mainly seen as passive receivers of parent-initiated communications.

The findings of this chapter show how stayer youth are agentic in transnational parent–child relationships. To understand how communication sustains transnational relationships, it is vital to know the media ecology, i.e., the accessibility of ICTs, their affordability and the technical literacy of the people involved. While intermittent mobile phone calls are still used by parents and children, our participants mostly engaged with their parents via WhatsApp on smartphones. Participants even used WhatsApp to communicate with parents who were illiterate, i.e., parents who have never been to school or could not read and write. In general, WhatsApp was used because it was more affordable than traditional international calls and SMS within the Ghanaian media ecology, though some participants had difficulties affording smartphone and internet costs. Participants who did not own smartphones relied on social networks in Ghana to use WhatsApp, nonetheless. This impacted the frequencies with which these youth could connect to their migrant parents.

Given the media ecology within which Ghanaian youth operate, we found that stayer youth exercise agency over communication with parents abroad in five main ways. First, young people displayed agency in the ways they applied their WhatsApp know-how. They used WhatsApp's monitoring and surveillance functionalities to stay connected to migrant parents in the background or foreground. Second, young people timed their communications with their parents in strategic ways to stay connected or to express discontent. Some closely observed their parents' interactions to figure out the best times to call and to ensure their parents' maximum attention. Others delayed responding or never responded to messages from parents to show their displeasure. Third, some young people exhibited agency by raising specific topics during their communications with their parents. Some mostly called to make requests and receive advice or words of encouragement from migrant parents. Fourth, some young people deliberately chose to connect to parents through siblings in Ghana and abroad. Siblings who had a good relationship with their parents, or siblings who were currently living with the parent abroad, could mediate communications by providing information

about the parents' situation or suggesting the best time to make a request. Others tried to protect younger siblings from unpleasant information about the parents' conditions abroad. Finally, silence and brevity were strategies used by those who did not want to connect or who were having disagreements with their parents. Silences, i.e., never responding to messages, allowed young people to express their disinterest in transnational communication. Others opted to keep interactions brief if they could not avoid communication completely.

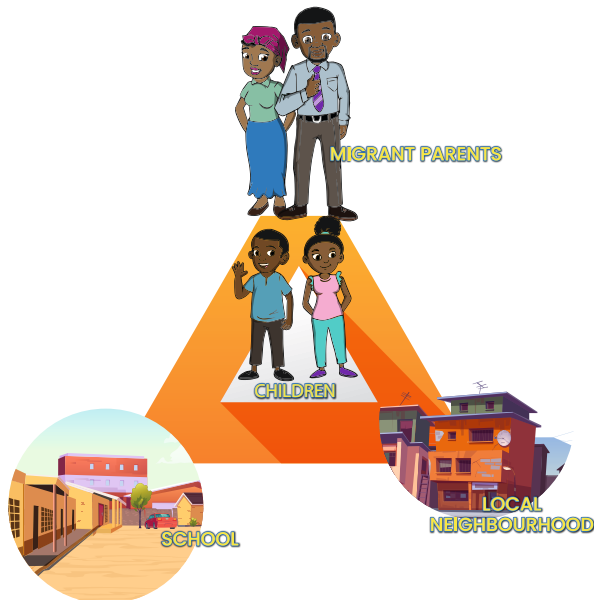
There are also some downsides to using new communications media such as smartphones and WhatsApp for transnational connections. Poeze *et al.* (2017) noted some of these for migrant parents who have a hard time assessing stayer children's complaints about their caregivers and acting upon them without offending the caregivers. Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) also observed that social media can aggravate feelings of hurt, distance and abandonment. Through monitoring their parents' online presence, WhatsApp provides some young people with evidence of their parents' neglect, provoking negative or hurt feelings. WhatsApp also makes it easy for young people to express their hurt feelings. Silence, brevity and sometimes timing were strategic ways of expressing feelings of hurt, abandonment or dissatisfaction with the care they receive. This shows that while new communication technologies can empower youth, they may make relationships more complex, which can have adverse effects. The downsides of new media communication have received relatively little attention, while they can redefine transnational relations and are therefore worthy of further research.

Our study points to another aspect that requires further research: how sibling relationships are affected by new media and transnational communication. There are currently no studies on this. We found two contrasting dynamics. As communication technologies, such as smartphone and internet, are not cost free, when parents gift smartphones to only one child, this may give rise to rivalry between siblings or hurt feelings towards a parent. In other cases, we detected collaboration between siblings, both those living in Ghana and those living abroad with the migrant parents. One sibling would make use of their different or privileged position vis-à-vis their parent in order to help the other sibling make requests via social media. These findings show that in order to investigate transnational parent-child relationships it is at times necessary to go beyond the dyad or triad of parent-child or parent-caregiver-child, which have been the main focus of studies on stayer youth.

In sum, the stayer young people we studied are agentic in transnational parent-child relationships rather than merely receivers of communications from their migrant parents, as is often portrayed in the literature. Through a youth-centric approach, we showed how young people access new media, even when they have difficulties affording it, and use their technical literacy in order to actively shape parent-child communications and relationships.

# 4

## Overcoming interruptions in educational trajectories: Youth in Ghana with international migrant parents



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## 4.0 Introduction

Amongst the many effects that parental migration can have, it impacts the education of the so-called ‘left behind’, that is children of migrants who remain in the country of origin. We refer to such youth as ‘stayer youth’ to avoid the negative connotation associated with ‘left behind’ (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2020). Two decades of research show that parental migration influences the educational attainments of stayer youth in various ways. On the one hand, migrant parents’ remittances can improve stayer youth’s educational performance by providing access to better schools and academic supplies (e.g., Graham & Jordan, 2011; Kroeger & Anderson, 2014; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011; Yang, 2008). On the other hand, stayer youth can perform poorly in school because their caregivers do not have the competencies to help them with schoolwork, they are immersed in their migration aspirations, or their well-being is impacted negatively (see Asis, 2006; Gao *et al.*, 2010; Heymann *et al.*, 2009; Jordan *et al.*, 2018). These studies focus on educational outcomes at specific moments of the youth’s biographies, yet specific outcomes result from processes that take place over time. By looking into youth’s pathways through educational systems, it is possible to reconstruct the hurdles that youth face and how they try to overcome them. We address this issue by studying stayer youth’s educational trajectories, that is the moves over time and space between schools, what motivates such actions, and how they agentially try to influence these moves.

While the general education literature has identified that parents are key in the educational success of their children (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Grolnick *et al.*, 2000; Jeynes, 2007; Krane & Klevan, 2019), the question is what happens in the case of stayer youth whose parents are physically absent. The education literature shows that parental support is critical when youth go through school transitions or experience difficulties in their education. Yet this research has mostly been conducted in the Global North, mainly amongst youth living with both parents. When migration is considered, the literature focuses on the children of immigrants living with their parents in the Global North, not on stayer youth. What happens when stayer youth experience hurdles in their educational trajectories, that is when their parents are not physically present due to international migration? How do stayer youth activate their social networks consisting of, for example, other family members, peers, and teachers to compensate for what they lack within their transnational families?

Transnational families literature has indicated that migrant parents and their stayer children remain engaged in each other’s lives (Boccagni, 2012; Dreby, 2006; Schmalzbauer, 2004). Yet little is known about the specific educational trajectories of stayer youth and how they are related to parents’ migration. Furthermore, most studies on transnational families foreground the perspective of the migrant parent, leaving stayer youth’s views under-researched (but see Madianou & Miller, 2011; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2014). Advancing transnational family studies, this paper focuses on the educational trajectories of stayer youth in Ghana and how they overcome hurdles causing interruptions in their educational

trajectories. We use a youth-centric perspective to show how parental migration relates to educational hurdles and when and how stayer youth exert agency by activating their social networks. We indicate when extra social network support complements the support stayer youth gain from their migrant parents for their education or makes up for lack of parental support. By taking a youth-centric approach, we make the agency of stayer youth central to understanding when and how they activate educational support from their social networks.

Many children in the Global South live without one or both biological parents due to parental migration. Ghana is no exception, with up to a quarter of youth in secondary schools living without one of their parents due to international migration (GSS *et al.*, 2015). A study showed that half of some Ghanaian stayer youth attending secondary school in large urban centres in the south of Ghana had changed caregivers throughout parental migration, and such changes were associated with lower psychological well-being (Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016). As we will show in this article, changes in caregivers result in school changes. Based on a 15-month ethnography amongst 38 stayer youth in Ghana, we explored the causes of interruptions in stayer youth's educational trajectories, and how they dealt with such hurdles through interviews, observations, and spending time with these youth through hangouts. While not all 38 young people in our sample experienced schooling interruptions, we focus on the extreme cases of 11 young people who changed school frequently by attending four or more schools throughout their primary–secondary educational trajectories. These cases provide a magnifying lens through which to study how stayer youth overcome educational hurdles during parental migration, including activating their local social network for support.

#### 4.1 Parental Migration and Stayer Youth's Education

Worldwide, if students want to reach their highest educational potential, parents are central. Research shows that when parents are involved in their children's education through helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school events, and motivating their child, youth's school performance rises, regardless of other factors such as ethnicity or socioeconomic class (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; López *et al.*, 2001). Findings are similar for youth of migrant background in migrant-receiving countries, where studies show that parents' limited knowledge of the educational system, the local language, and conflicting home–school cultures make parental involvement in their children's education difficult, leading to worse educational outcomes (Hamilton, 2013; Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Yet, what happens when the parent is not physically present at home to provide this support? While studies investigating the education of children of migrants in the Global North are plentiful, less research has been performed on stayer youth.

Two decades of research show that the relationship between parental migration and stayer youth's education is ambiguous. On the one hand, parental migration from the Global South to the Global North can increase stayer youth's years of education and educational performance through remittances. Remittances can pay for enrolment in high-quality schools



leading to close supervision, regular school attendance, and as a result, high academic performance (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2010; Antman, 2012; Cortés, 2013; Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Lam & Yeoh, 2019). Furthermore, remittances reduce financial constraints and the need for child labour (Kandel & Kao, 2001; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). In addition, academic achievement of stayer youth is enhanced through both the moral support stayer youth receive from their parents and through the sending of remittances (Murphy, 2014). For example, it has been found that stayer youth who receive remittances for schooling finish more school years (Kandel & Kao, 2001).

On the other hand, parental migration can decrease educational performance through changing school behaviour, lack of parental advice, and the psychological costs of separation. Some stayer youth lack educational motivation as they see their parents earn much more abroad through jobs requiring no or little education (Dreby, 2006). Instead of focusing on their education, these youth pursue their international migration aspirations (Robles & Oropesa, 2011). Also, care for younger siblings affects older stayer youth's studying opportunities (Chen, 2013). Furthermore, various studies have shown that stayer youth, especially children of migrant mothers, can experience lower well-being due to missing their parents' love and care, which can interfere with their educational performance (Battistella & Gastardo-Conaco, 1998; Jampaklay, 2006; Khatia *et al.*, 2020).

Parental migration does not always lead to lower well-being and lower educational outcomes. A lot depends on the transnational family form: who cares for the child and how often the child changes caregivers (Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016). No or limited transnational parenting and inadequate local caregiving negatively affect stayer youth's education (Peng, 2021). This research demonstrates how stayer youth receiving insufficient care from migrant parents or caregivers remain in school until they graduate high school. Unfortunately, the existing literature scarcely addresses this topic.

Transnational family studies have shown that local care and support for stayer youth mitigate the effects of parental migration on their educational performance (Dreby, 2006). Having a good social network with local actors can play an important role in supporting transnational families to continue operating as families. For example, stayer children's caregivers play a crucial role in the daily operation of transnational families, thereby enhancing migrant parent–stayer child relationships (Dankyi *et al.*, 2017; Dreby, 2006; Hoang & Yeoh, 2012). Essentially, local caregivers ensure that transnational families continue to operate like families. While these studies do not investigate schooling specifically, they find that the wellbeing of all members of a transnational family improves when families function well (Dito *et al.*, 2016; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016).

Local social networks and especially caregivers can help stayer youth improve their educational performance. Caregivers help mitigate the negative impacts of parent–child separation on stayer children's school performance by monitoring and disciplining them (Lam & Yeoh, 2019). Siblings may also offer educational support, even if most studies explore siblings' roles in accomplishing day-to-day care (e.g. Boccagni, 2012; Parreñas, 2005;

Schmalzbauer, 2004). Zhao and colleagues (2017) found that community clubs in China help stayer children overcome studying problems through the support of community volunteers. Teachers have also been found to offer support to the children of migrants (Abotsi, 2020).

Additionally, stayer youth are agentic in shaping their own lives (Lam & Yeoh, 2018, 2019; Osei *et al.*, 2023; Wu *et al.*, 2014). Yet how they apply their agency in education has not received attention. Lam and Yeoh (2019, p. 3085) recently argued that stayer children show agency based on how they ‘understand, engage, and react’ to parental migration within their social constructions and constraints. This paper contributes to this emerging body of literature by showing which hurdles stayer youth identify as constraining their educational performance and how they deal with these hurdles. Based on the insights above, we pay specific attention to how stayer youth actively mobilize local social support for their education to complement or even substitute migrant parents’ assistance. Moreover, most of the above studies have tended to study the effects of parental migration and other family characteristics on educational outcomes at a point in time. Instead, we focus on the process that leads to such outcomes by studying stayer youth’s educational trajectories and how they try to overcome schooling hurdles over time.

We know that frequent school changes, or ‘school instability’, put youth at risk of dropping out (Ananga, 2011). Educational studies show that school instability can be costly for all students, especially for youth who have migration backgrounds or are economically disadvantaged. Hanushek *et al.* (2004, p. 1722) argue that school instability coupled with financial pressures and frequent changes in place of residence reduces the prospects for academic success. It is precisely at these times that parental support is of utmost importance, for example, through parent–teacher meetings (Bariham *et al.*, 2017; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Grolnick *et al.*, 2000; Jeynes, 2007; Krane & Klevan, 2019). Without the physical presence of migrant parents, how do stayer youth overcome the educational hurdles they encounter to finish their secondary schooling?

## 4.2 Research Context and Methodology

To better understand our research participants’ educational trajectories, we provide an overview of Ghana’s educational system. We then describe our methodology and how we operationalized the central concept of educational trajectories. We end with a description of our sample.

### 4.2.1 Ghana’s Education System

Primary and secondary education typically consists of 12 or 13 years of schooling in Ghana: 6 years of primary, 3 years of Junior High School (JHS), and 3 years of Senior High School (SHS) education as our participants enrolled in SHS after policy changes reducing SHS from 4 to 3 years. Children start schooling in grade 1 at age 6. The major schooling transitions occur at grades 6 and 9 when youth should be 12 and 15 years old entering JHS and SHS,

respectively. Some schools offer primary and JHS education only, and a very limited number of schools include SHS in the same facility. Therefore, students ordinarily attend one, two, or three schools in their primary–secondary educational trajectories.

Towards the end of JHS education, schools are responsible for registering their pupils' SHS choices at a fee for the basic education certificate examination (BECE), which they need to pass to enter SHS. After the BECE, the JHS graduates typically travel some distance from their homes to attend a boarding SHS, which is allocated to them by the Ghana Education Service via a computerized placement system that tries to consider their school choice. Until recent policy changes, only a few JHS graduates attended day SHS. In 2017, a policy change made SHS free of charge, just like public JHS because the fees of public SHS schools had become just as high as private schools, impeding many from attending SHS. Primary school dropout in Ghana continues to be a problem, particularly among girls (Bariham *et al.*, 2017). About 27% of students who qualified for SHS in 2015 could not enrol (Kwegyiriba, 2021). Due to free SHS, JHS-to-SHS dropout decreased to 14.7% in 2017 causing an enrolment increase of 11%, translated as 470,000 students, which is the highest record in Ghana's education history (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The policy has a target of placing 30% of public JHS graduates in high-quality SHS, mostly public, based on their BECE performance. In Ghana, the top-ranked schools are both public and private. Although there are no fees for attending public SHS today, schools continue to request money from students for extra tuition, parent–teacher associations, toiletries, school uniforms, and mattresses.

At the end of SHS education, students take a common higher education entrance examination, the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), subject to paid registration through a school. WASSCE is compulsory for all SHS attendees, irrespective of whether they wish to attend higher education or not. Those who do not pass WASSCE the first time may decide to register for the remedial examination organized by the same West African Examination Council (WAEC) for private candidates. The popular November–December remedial lessons and examination registration, offered by private schools, are more expensive than regular SHS attendance and registration. Despite Ghana's seemingly high cost of primary and secondary schooling, all families consider educating their children an imperative, including parents and caregivers with low socio-economic backgrounds (Abotsi, 2020).

#### 4.2.2 *Participants and Methodology*

This paper specifically studies how stayer youth experience interruptions in their primary–secondary school trajectories during parental migration. We therefore collected data from 38 stayer young people aged 18–23 years over 15 months (May 2018 and August 2019). While we do not include a control group of youth who do not have migrant parents, we ethnographically studied participants' lives to understand how not having one or both of their parents physically present impacted their educational trajectories. To our knowledge, this is the first study to focus on stayer youth's experiences in schooling trajectories. Participants

were selected from a previous panel survey conducted in eight JHS and SHS schools in cities with high out-migration: Accra, Sunyani, and Kumasi (www.tcra.nl). The 2015 database contained 442 students, 87 of which were stayer young people. We were able to trace 38 stayer young people for this project. This article focuses on 11 stayer young people who experienced four or more interruptions during their primary and secondary schooling. These extreme cases offer us a magnifying lens through which to study why stayer youth encounter educational hurdles and how they deal with such experiences.

We used mobility trajectory mapping along with interviews, participant observation, and network mapping. Youth mobility trajectory mapping entailed collecting systematic data about changes in schools, houses, caregivers, and family constellations throughout youth's lives (Mazzucato *et al.*, 2022). Mobility trajectory mapping allowed us to visualize how family constellations changed with every move, either that of the child or the parent, and how this interacted with changes in schools. For every change of school, we recorded who decided which school the young people would attend. Figure 4.1 gives an example of a mobility trajectory map.

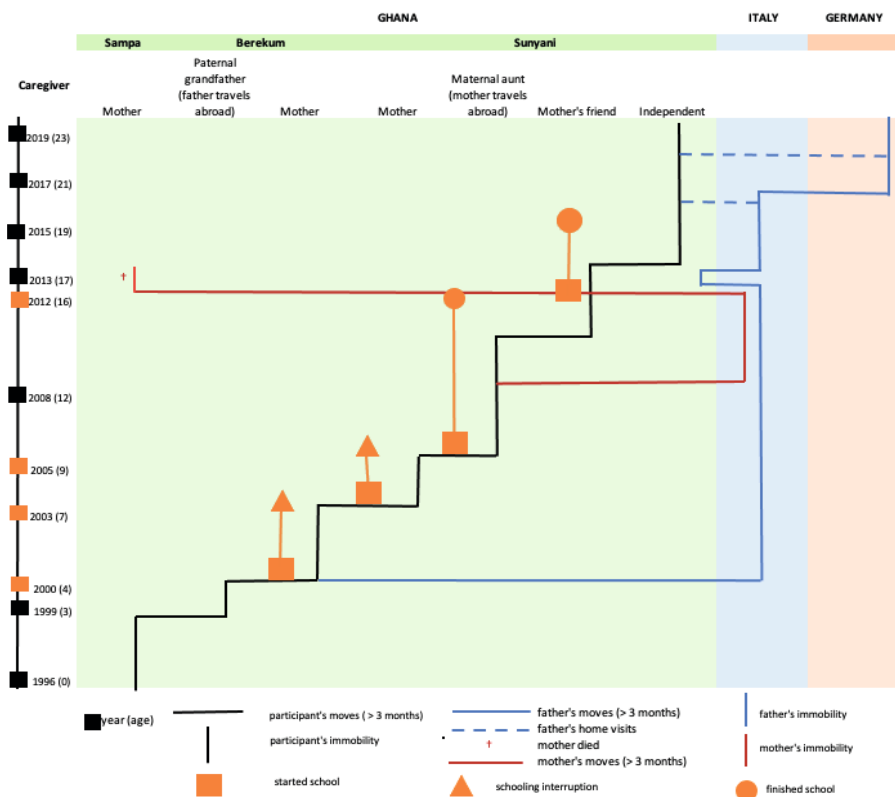


Figure 4.1: Wappy's mobility trajectory map

Source: Fieldwork 2018-2019

These maps served as visual guides for our in-depth interviews and conversations with stayer youth. We pointed to school changes and parental migration on the maps and collected narrative information on how participants experienced their school changes and transitions in relation to parental migration. Participant observation was conducted by accompanying participants on outings, to remedial schools and university, or at their homes. Social network mapping was conducted through a concentric circle tool to investigate the importance of various relationships in participants' lives, including their education. Some participants were followed more intensively throughout fieldwork for several interviews and observations based on their availability. All participants were interviewed at least once and participated in the trajectory mapping exercise. Table 4.1 summarizes the characteristics of our participants. Table A1 in the Supporting Information gives more details about each participant.

*Table 4.1 Participants' characteristics*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
Sex	Male (5), Females (6)
Age range	18–23 years old
Location	Kumasi, Sunyani, and Accra
Location of parents	Europe (7), North America (2), Africa (2)
Type of transnational family	Mother-away (1) Father-away (8) Both parents-away (2)
Length of separation	0–24 years
Types of caregivers	Stayer parents, stayer siblings, uncles and aunts, grandparents, migrant parents' friends, and neighbours

*Source:* Fieldwork 2018-2019

We triangulated data from the social network and trajectory maps, interviews, and observations to produce rich contextualization of each participant's circumstances and their changes over time. Data analysis included a combination of inductively and deductively identified themes on the specific hurdles faced by stayer youth related to the interruptions in their educational trajectories, and how they dealt with these difficulties. The study received ethical approval from the European Research Council, the Ethics Review Committee Inner City faculties of Maastricht University, and the University of Ghana Ethics Committee.

### **4.3 Hurdles Encountered by Stayer Youth with Interrupted Educational Trajectories**

Before showing how stayer youth overcome interruptions in their educational trajectories, we first discuss the hurdles that cause interruptions in their educational trajectories. We find three main hurdles faced by stayer youth: (1) frequent changes in residence or household,

usually accompanied by a change in caregiver and in schools; (2) financial difficulties; and (3) lack of educational guidance and support. In this section, we discuss each hurdle in turn for clarity of argument, though they often intertwine and together cause school changes.

#### 4.3.1 *Frequent Changes In Housing Or Caregiver*

Similar to what has been found on transnational care arrangements (Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2016), the 38 participants in our study changed residence or family composition when their parents migrated. Yet, these changes did not only occur at the time of a parent's migration. Some young people changed houses frequently, sometimes associated with changing caregivers and schools (see Table B1 in the Supporting Information for details). Previous caregivers, including migrant parents, usually decided on these changes such as which school to attend, who would be the main caregiver, and where the young person would reside, reflecting their financial or moral involvement in the youth's education. Some migrant parents' inability to support caregivers of stayer youth caused schooling interruptions like Wappy (aged 22, male) experienced soon after his father's migration.

Wappy changed residence a total of six times and attended four schools as shown in Figure 4.1. Wappy's father moved to Europe when Wappy was 4 years old and did not or could not send money home immediately, as often migrants need time to settle before they can start sending remittances (Mazzucato, 2008). As a result, Wappy's paternal grandfather took over the decision of where Wappy schooled and stayed until his migrant father could support his stayer mother to care for him. His grandfather decided that Wappy should attend a school owned by a paternal uncle in the same town as his grandfather. Wappy's father eventually started to send remittances via Wappy's mother, so that she could afford Wappy's education. Wappy's story confirms how care and the education of children in Ghana fall on migrant parents, when they are able to, and stayer relatives (Coe, 2011). Yet, like others in our study, Wappy kept on changing houses and schools while his migrant father contributed to his education. This indicates that receiving remittance does not necessarily stabilize the housing or caregiving conditions of stayer youth and can have implications for the changes in schools.

Decision-making about various moves stayer youth undergo, whether in houses, schools, or caregivers, was at times influenced by the youth themselves. Again, taking Wappy's case, when he was still in primary school and he was at his fifth residence, his mother migrated to join his father and arranged for a maternal aunt to move into her apartment, to care for Wappy and his siblings. According to Wappy, this caregiver mistreated him at times, especially compared to how she treated her own children. Unlike his cousins, Wappy had to work by selling water and ice cream and was sometimes denied pocket money. He did not have direct contact with his migrant parents to report this maltreatment. As soon as Wappy had direct contact through mobile phone communication, he requested a change in caregiver. Without hesitation, Wappy's migrant mother arranged for him to change house and caregiver without changing school because his new home was close to his school.

While Wappy was eventually able to influence where he lived, some stayer youth had no say about changing caregivers, houses, and schools, which worried them. Veeka (aged 18, female), who had been living with her mom and had a migrant father, expressed:

I didn't want to be in school X at that time. My [migrant] daddy forced me to stay with his sister. I didn't want to be in the city of school X in the first place. But it was my dad who said I should go. So, my mum sent me there. I left but I wasn't happy about the whole idea of being in the city of school X. Instead, .....I wanted to stay with my mum then. (Veeka, Sunyani, July 2019)

The father of Veeka mostly financed her school expenses. So, her stayer mother complied with her migrant father's directive to facilitate Veeka's transitions to new caregivers. Although Veeka dislikes changing carers and residences, her narrative indicates that remitting parents exert power in deciding when stayer youth change caregivers, who becomes their caregivers during remitting periods, and how long they live with a particular caregiver. Through their remittances, migrant parents wield control over their children's geographical movements across time and space for caregiving, ensuring that these children remain in school while changing caregivers (Antman, 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2001).

The youth in our study saw their moves as impacting them in various ways. Veeka and Wappy indicated that the frequent changes in school affected their academic performance due to the different teaching strategies the schools employed. Wappy felt these changes affected him emotionally because he needed time to adjust to the new learning environment each time.

Guess (aged 19, female) was also unhappy about changing schools because she lost the friends in her previous schools. Guess changed places of residence five times and lived with four different sets of caregivers. She attended five schools and repeated class twice. Guess's class repetitions were not based on her schoolteachers' assessment of her academic performance. Her migrant father and a previous caregiver decided she would repeat class, for unknown reasons. Guess regretted that decisions had been made without her and wished she had been consulted about changing caregivers, houses, and schools.

Overall, migrant parents and caregivers hardly engage stayer youth in decisions leading to schooling interruptions. However, sometimes decisions are forced by financial need such as when migrant parents withdraw or reduce their support for stayer youth's education. In those cases, caregivers are placed under great financial difficulties (Dankyi *et al.*, 2017) and forced to make decisions that cause schooling interruptions.

#### 4.3.2 *Financial Difficulties*

All of the youth who experienced interrupted educational trajectories received infrequent and limited remittances, which had significant implications for their education as the cases above depict. Ntonsu (aged 22, female) is another example. With her mother overseas but unable to send money home regularly for her school needs, she did not have anyone to finance

her primary and secondary education. Ntonsu's schooling almost ended abruptly after she completed middle school because her undocumented migrant mother was unemployed and had no money to enrol her in SHS. Ntonsu made efforts to stay in school by calling on her stayer father and extended relatives to help. She managed to complete SHS, albeit with poor grades and failed her WASSCE examination. Because Ntonsu aspired to enter tertiary education, she used her savings, earned from working after SHS, for remedial lessons to re-sit the examination. Unfortunately, she dropped out of her first remedial school due to her inability to make the full payments. Ntonsu's only option was to wait until her migrant mother could raise enough money for her to start remedial classes at another school.

Pearl's (aged 22, female) case also shows the effects of a lack of financial resources from migrant parents for education. Pearl changed houses and schools seven times because her stayer mother could not afford to pay for her education. Like some other youth in our sample, Pearl's migrant father was uninvolved materially and emotionally in her education. The only time her father contributed to her education was during a home visit when he gave her half of her tuition fees for the academic term. Yet, when Pearl's father returned to Europe, he disappeared from her life again. Pearl's stayer mother's situation was so dire that she depended on extended family members (Pearl's maternal aunts and uncles) to cater for Pearl's educational needs, including school fees, food, and shelter. Thus, while remittances have been found to help youth attend school (Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Graham & Jordan, 2011), we also note that not always are remittances forthcoming. In such situations, stayer youth and their caregivers need to find alternative solutions.

#### 4.3.3 *Limited Educational Guidance and Support*

Stayer youth did not always receive much educational guidance and support from their migrant parents. Some received more support than others. The absence of emotional support, mentoring, and guidance from parents weighed heavily on firstborns in our sample because they did not have older siblings' support. Wappy provides an example. Wappy could not easily reach his parents overseas when he was in primary school. All of his communication with them had to go through his caregiver. As a result, he could not get the support for his studies that he wished for, and his caregiver was not interested or incapable of helping him in his studies. But even later when he could communicate freely with his parents, he observed that they could not advise him about which programmes to pursue at the end of JHS or which SHS to choose. Therefore, Wappy relied on others for educational advice, as we later discuss.

When parents migrate, young people may lose an educational advisor. For example, when Guess lived with her father, he was her primary academic advisor, so when he migrated to Europe in 2011, she lost an important source of support. Compounding this was her father's initial inability to send remittances, which meant the two of them did not frequently communicate, which often happens when migrant parents cannot send remittances (Dreby, 2006). Guess's mother, her caregiver, could not help either as her understanding of the Ghanaian educational system was limited. Indeed, previous studies have also found



that caregivers do not always have the social and cultural capital to be able to provide the educational guidance that stayer youth need (Dreby, 2006).

## 4.4 Activating Local Social Support Networks

The 11 youth experienced the hurdles described above marking such experiences as interrupted educational trajectories. Yet they all managed to complete their secondary education. So, how do stayer youth overcome schooling obstacles and manage to complete despite having interrupted trajectories? In this section, we elucidate how stayer youth used their local social networks to complement or make up for lack of migrant parents' support for their education. We find that their local social networks are composed of caregivers, extended family members, siblings, teachers, and friends.

### 4.4.1 Caregivers

Caregivers can be important for stayer youth's education, sometimes financing their schooling and providing guidance, motivation, shelter, and food. Wappy's paternal grandfather provided financial and emotional support while Wappy lived with him. At this time, Wappy's migrant father and stayer mother could not afford his basic schooling. When Wappy moved out of his grandfather's house, his grandfather remained an important person for Wappy's educational needs, advising him through phone calls and visits and whenever opportunities presented themselves. During festive seasons, Wappy reported, his grandfather visited him and his younger siblings and encouraged them to be studious to ensure a better future for themselves. This experience like others indicates how previous caregivers can provide continuing support to stayer youth in their educational trajectories.

However, Wappy did not only rely on his grandfather. He also sought help from his subsequent caregivers. When Wappy was living with his mother's friend, he asked her for advice on which study programmes and which SHS he should attend after JHS. When, Wappy's parents did not or could not help him, he followed the advice of his caregiver. Wappy felt positive about his relationship with his mother's friend and paternal grandfather because of their care and educational support. Indeed, Wappy continues to receive care and attention from his mother's friend and grandfather. They advise on his higher education and his younger siblings' primary and secondary education, though from a distance because Wappy and his siblings stopped living under adult supervision.

Pearl went to live with her maternal aunts and uncles, whom she helped with housework in exchange for educational support. By paying for Pearl's school fees, food, and lodging, her aunts and uncles helped her to complete SHS. Pearl helped so much that these caregivers sometimes also supported Pearl's younger siblings' educational needs, relieving Pearl of any such responsibility which she may have faced as an elder sister.

Some stayer youth, like Ntonsu, choose not to strain their relationships with caregivers by making financial requests for their education. They feel that caregivers already provide

them with food, lodging, and emotional support, so they refrain from asking their caregivers for financial help and try other means first. Only when they are unsuccessful in gaining help from other sources do these young people reluctantly ask their caregivers to cover school costs, as Ntonsu did. Ntonsu's migrant mother catered for her educational needs more than any other person in her social network. As Ntonsu's mother was undocumented and faced financial difficulties, Ntonsu also relied on others for educational support, although this proved difficult. Ntonsu's father remarried and was more concerned with the education of Ntonsu's half-siblings. Ntonsu dealt with limited care from her parents through prayer. Religion plays an important role in Ghanaian society (Oti-Boadi & Oppong Asante, 2017), and Ntonsu, as with other stayer youth, constantly prayed for her undocumented mother's stay to be regularized so that her financial strain could be relieved. Only when Ntonsu had no other option did she call on her caregiver for money. When she rarely requested, Ntonsu's caregiver provided a small amount to buy items for her vocational education.

Generally, caregivers are an important source of financial and emotional support when they can, as also found in other contexts (Dreby, 2006; Lam & Yeoh, 2019). What we find is that youth can agentically seek support from their caregivers, but also seek not to overwhelm them with requests, recognizing caregivers' own difficulties (Dankyi *et al.*, 2017). Some youth also turned to God asking to create opportunities for their migrant parents to adequately care for them.

#### 4.4.2 *Extended family members*

Not always can stayer youth rely on caregivers. Stayer youth can suffer from a lack of care or poor care from migrant parents and caregivers for their education (Peng, 2021). We find that stayer youth in such situations agentically seek support from extended family members. Veeka's story is indicative of how extended family members become important sources of learning inspiration and guidance for stayer youth's educational advancement when migrant parents' care is insufficient. When Veeka's father moved to Europe as a pastor, he could not adequately take care of her and her sibling's needs, including their need for food and accommodation. Therefore, her mother decided to migrate within Ghana to find additional resources for the family. Sometimes, Veeka's mother had to place Veeka and her siblings in the care of aunts for shelter and home-study support until she raised enough money to rent their own living space. As a result, Veeka and her siblings changed residence and schools frequently. Although Veeka's father remitted money for her education when he settled in Europe, he did not have time for in-depth conversations about her educational and other struggles. Like other stayer youth who turned to grandparents, Veeka received educational motivation and inspiration from her grandmother.

Master (aged 18, male) and his twin sister Trendy also depended on extended family members for their educational needs, in addition to the help they received from siblings, their stayer mother (caregiver), and their migrant father. Their father was often late with paying school fees, no matter how often they reminded him. Therefore, Trendy called on

her older maternal half-siblings, who live both in Ghana and abroad, and on other extended relatives to pay their fees. Trendy repaid them when she received her father's remittances for their education. Their father either sent money to Trendy or a paternal uncle. The uncle also advised the father about the schools his children should attend.

This advice was often followed. Once, the uncle took a loan to pay for Master's SHS tuition when his father was unable to send remittances. That extended family members' help in caring for stayer youth in Ghana has been documented (Dankyi *et al.*, 2017). This study adds that stayer youth play an active role in activating a broader support network for their development. Such agency has gone unnoticed to now given the focus of transnational family studies on what adults, that is the migrants or caregivers, do for stayer youth, with much less attention given to stayer youth's agency within these families.

#### 4.4.3 Siblings

Siblings can play an essential role in each other's educational trajectories (Trinitapoli *et al.*, 2014), although this has not yet been studied in the context of stayer youth. They often assist financially, especially when they are older. They also advise younger siblings in choosing secondary schools and study programmes. This is particularly valuable to stayer youth who lack other sources of advice, as older siblings raised in Ghana have a good understanding of the Ghanaian education system, unlike some elder family members or migrant parents. Tin's (aged 23, male) elder brother provides an example. He acts as Tin's academic advisor. Although Tin's brother joined his mother in the United States after the death of their migrant father, he continues to guide and advise Tin about Ghanaian education via WhatsApp. Tin does not often call his brother to seek advice, but the brother feels obliged to assist Tin and other siblings in honour of their deceased father's educational vision. This brother scolds Tin for spending too much time on social media instead of education. Despite their differences, Tin almost always follows his brother's advice. He trusts his brother's knowledge of Ghana's educational system and values his experiences.

Siblings can be important role models for stayer youth (Mogu rou & Santelli, 2015). Ntonsu regarded her half-sister as her 'secret' role model having observed her sister's struggles to become a professional nurse. By drawing inspiration from her sister's experiences and achievements, Ntonsu remained hopeful that she would succeed in her primary–secondary education despite the limited support she received from her migrant mother and local social networks. In addition to being a role model, Ntonsu's older sister directly intervened in her academic affairs. For example, she gave Ntonsu advice when she failed to pass her SHS examination. After much consideration, Ntonsu took her sister's advice and attended remedial school, eventually passing her exam and entering into tertiary education.

#### 4.4.4 Teachers

Besides family members and caregivers, young people also rely on schoolteachers for academic support. Teachers provide extra learning instruction, motivation, inspiration,

advice, and even financial support. Sometimes, when stayer youth are struggling academically and there is nobody to assist them, schoolteachers approach them and offer to help. Some stayer youth also actively approach teachers. Ntonsu, for example, asked and accepted support from five teachers when her migrant mother and her father could not help as much as she needed. These teachers provided emotional, financial, and study support to help her to catch up with her classmates. They helped ease the stress Ntonsu faced during her primary and secondary educational trajectory due to her mother's migration.

In another case, Jina's JHS schoolteacher intervened during SHS selection to help her choose an appropriate school. While her migrant father sent remittances to cover her education costs, Jina relied mainly on her stayer mother for other educational needs, including motivation. But because Jina's mother did not know much about the Ghanaian education system, Jina sought assistance from a schoolteacher when she needed to choose an SHS and a study programme at the end of JHS. When Jina told the teacher about the schools she wished to attend, the teacher encouraged her to choose other schools she was more likely to be admitted. Jina struggled with some core subjects which are a prerequisite for admission into many schools, especially the first-class schools she wished to attend. Jina like others reveal that schoolteachers are vital in supporting migrants' children in their educational trajectories (Abotsi, 2020).

#### 4.4.5 *Friends*

As researchers have found for youth in the Global North (Zimmerman, 2003), we also find that friendships are vital for helping stayer youth overcome certain educational hurdles, like learning and motivational issues. Dusty (aged 18, male) steadfastly pursued his education, despite challenges, because he made friends with older people within the community who gave him the motivation to continue. Dusty's narrative connects with the growing literature that emphasizes the significance of friendships for youth's education. I always get motivation from one friend because he was much older than me. He was always talking to me that I shouldn't worry. Things will be very good. I should just focus on what I want to be [tertiary graduate or a professional footballer]. Very soon, things will be okay for me. So, it was a friend who always motivated me. (Dusty, May 2018)

Some young people who were struggling in school befriended classmates who were excelling. Tin, for example, received help in mathematics from a friend. Additionally, Tin and his housemates studied together at his remedial school. While Tin received advice from his older brother, he weighed it against his friends' advice to make a final decision on which study course to pursue. My brother advised me that Business Management is very good. Hearing from people and advice from my friends who are doing the same, I think it is very good ... If there is no change of mind, I'm going to do Business Management. (Tin, May 2018).

Like Tin, Guess also had friends who could advise her, but some of those friends were able to assist her with food and finances as well. Guess agentically reciprocates in the way she can. Unlike the material reciprocity between migrant parents and stayer youth's caretakers

(Dankyi *et al.*, 2017), this reciprocity entails stayer youth covering up bad deeds of supportive schoolmates to continue receiving their help for schooling.

She [friend] usually pays for my transportation back home and sometimes gave me money to take care of myself. She allows me to sometimes even wear her clothing and even wear her shirt when mine is dirty. I remember I helped her by setting up her table for her during practical because she went out to sleep with her guy. She only had to come and write the exams. She would not have written the exams if I had not covered for her. (Guess, July 2019)

Stayer youth also found emotional support in friends with whom they could talk about the limited involvement of migrant parents in their education. Even young people who only shared their worries reluctantly ended up talking to friends. Initially, Oje hardly talked about the difficulties she experienced because she had been separated from her migrant father and did not receive parental help for schooling. She felt that it was better to keep her struggles to herself while she received minimal care from her maternal aunt. But when Oje's emotional difficulties started affecting her academic performance, she opened up to her closest friend from primary school. Oje did this intermittently and only when she was really struggling.

Thus, friends seemed particularly important for stayer youth's motivation, learning, and emotional struggles. Such support has been found to continue even in cases where young people end up migrating themselves. They continue to seek motivational support from their peers in Ghana (Ogden & Mazzucato, 2020).

## 4.5 Conclusion

While the study of the effects of parental migration on educational outcomes of stayer youth is an established field (Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2019; Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016; Kandel & Kao, 2001; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2011), less attention has been given to the processes leading to such outcomes. Furthermore, most of what is known about the relationship between parental migration and educational outcomes is either from large data sets or from interrogating adults such as migrant parents or the caregivers in the country of origin. In this paper, we took a youth-centric approach to investigate the hurdles that stayer youth experience in their educational trajectories and how they deal with such hurdles. Based on ethnographic data on 38 stayer young people in Ghana, we focused on 11 cases who experienced interruptions in their educational trajectories, and yet, were able to complete their secondary schooling. These are cases that enable us to study both the hurdles that stayer youth incur and the way they agentically overcome these hurdles. We collected systematic data on youth's educational trajectories, or the moves over time and space between schools, what motivated such moves, who the caregivers were, and how youth experienced each of the moves. This analytical approach revealed the diversity of challenges youth face in their educational trajectories

due to parental migration relating to frequently changing housing and caregivers, financial difficulties, and receiving limited educational guidance.

While most studies focus on how remittances affect stayer youth's schooling, only recently are studies showing what happens when migrant parents are less involved in stayer youth's education (Peng, 2021). We followed how stayer youth with interrupted educational trajectories deal with the hurdles they encounter and found that they actively mobilize local networks of support to add to or compensate for lack of support from migrant parents for their education. Studies on transnational migration have tended to focus on what migrants do for their families at home. By focusing on the way stayer youth activate their local networks, we contribute to studies on 'reverse remittances' (Dankyi *et al.*, 2017; Mazzucato, 2010; Pallash & Baby-Collin, 2018), that show that transnational families and networks comprise of both, the care and resources that come from migrants but also the care and support offered by people within local social networks. Both are key for making transnational phenomena such as families and networks function.

Various actors are important in stayer youth's networks. Caregivers play a crucial role in supporting stayer youth financially but also emotionally (Dankyi *et al.*, 2017; Graham *et al.*, 2013). Yet, they are not the only important actors. Some caregivers invest in the lives of stayer youth, while others do so in only a limited way. When faced with limited caregiver support, stayer youth exercise agency by asking their parents to make alternative care arrangements or actively seeking local help themselves. Like Ogden and Mazzucato (2022), who investigated Ghanaian youth with a migration background in the Global North, we found that stayer children depend on peers, especially siblings and friends, to supplement the care they receive from caregivers. Local social networks also include extended family members and teachers.

Importantly, stayer youth are agentic in requesting and activating help from diverse local social networks to complement the support they receive from their migrant parents, or even to substitute for migrant parents' lack of support, to advance their education. Such agency exerted by stayer youth to mobilize support for their own education has gone unnoticed until now given the adult-centric focus of transnational family studies that has mainly sought the voices of migrants and adult caregivers including grandparents, with much less attention for stayer youth's voices. By focusing on how various social networks assist stayer youth in their educational pathways, our approach paves the way for a more in-depth analysis of the relationships between identified categories for the education of stayer youth.

It is thus important to recognize all educational support stayer youth receive, both local and transnational, to overcome their educational hurdles. Too often in migration studies, the focus is on what migrant parents do for their children, with the other local actors that make transnational families feasible often neglected (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). We call for researchers in transnational family and migration studies to extend their focus beyond the triad of parents, children, and caregivers and to explore how a broader social network contributes to the well-being of members of transnational families.



# 5

## Aspiring while waiting: Temporality and pacing of Ghanaian stayer youth's migration aspirations



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## 5.0 Introduction

Literature on “left-behind” youth highlights that these youth have international migration aspirations influenced by information from their parents and larger social networks (e.g., Böhme, 2015; Dreby & Stutz, 2012; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). But while many “left-behind” youth aspire to migrate, little is known about how parental migration shapes their migration aspirations (Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021; Sun *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, their aspirations have mainly been studied as though they are static: Once youth desire to migrate, they always desire to migrate (Kandel & Kao, 2001; Robles & Oropesa, 2011). However, how stayer youth’s migration aspirations change over time and what strategies they employ when their aspirations are frustrated are questions that have received little to no attention. In this article, we use the term “stayer youth” instead of “left-behind” to avoid the negative connotations of the latter term.

In this article, we analyse how stayer youth navigate “waiting” to migrate and the actions they take while trying to realise their aspirations. Following the recommendations of scholars in contemporary migration studies, we investigate aspirations in tandem with capabilities (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2021). Migration aspirations combined with the ability or capability to migrate determine who experiences mobility or immobility. We study young people’s migration aspirations by considering the local context in terms of opportunity structures available to youth facilitated by their transnational family characteristics, social networks, access to information, and personal motivations (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). Capability here refers to young people’s agency and their freedom to decide to move or stay based on their financial, human, and social resources, or “capital” (de Haas, 2021). Using this framework, we discuss stayer youth’s initial migration aspirations and follow changes over time as they try to align their migration aspirations and capabilities.

We conducted 15 months of ethnographic data collection in Ghana, where close to a quarter of all secondary school-age children have at least one parent who has migrated (Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service, & ICF International, 2015). We focus on stayer youth who have transitioned out of secondary school, between the ages of 16 and 23 years old, and their decision-making over time. Most of the literature presents stayer youth’s aspirations as dependent on the plans of their parents, caregivers, and relatives abroad. Researchers provide adult-centric perspectives (Böhme, 2015; Dreby, 2010; Kandel & Massey, 2002) and, as a result, depict young people as passive actors whose lives are fully planned by adults. Little is known about how stayer youth agentically plan for their migration. In adapting their aspirations while waiting to migrate, stayer youth in early adulthood may pursue their migration aspirations together with significant others, especially migrant parents, or they may pursue them independently. In this article, we explore how stayer youth decide to emigrate over time based on their socio-economic background, parental support, and educational competence. We examine when and how young people

involve migrant parents, local caregivers, and wider social networks in their migration decisions, and how they adapt their strategies over time.

We also extend current research by showing how stayer youth themselves adapt while waiting to migrate based on the temporalities of their migration aspirations and capabilities. The aspirations and capabilities framework we draw on conceptualises people as either moving or not moving. Yet work on temporalities has argued that movement is better studied in terms of the varying forms, durations, and timings of movement. Amit and Salazar (2020) propose the concept of “pacing” when investigating diverse temporalities of mobility. For stayer youth, this means they do not simply “wait” but have various paces: They wait for longer or shorter periods, develop strategies to deal with these, and adapt their migration aspirations accordingly. Hence, they agentially shape their lives even when waiting. They do not sit and do nothing. We explore the pacing of their migration aspirations and decisions by first distinguishing initial aspirations according to when youth aim to move. Secondly, we follow stayer youth as they try to fulfil their aspirations and observe how they adapt their strategies to ensure these align with their capabilities while also adapting the pacing of their aspirations. Finally, we show how stayer youth make decisions about when, for how long, and where to move depending on their realisation of their capabilities. By studying how stayer youth try to align their migration aspirations and capabilities over time, this article shows how they pace their lives while waiting to migrate.

## 5.1 Youth in “Waithood”

Our article focuses on how stayer youth in Ghana pace and adapt their migration aspirations while waiting to migrate. Youth in the Global South have been described as “stuck” or “entrapped” in their developmental trajectories because they mostly focus on futuristic visions rather than their present lives (Hage, 2009; Hansen, 2005; Sommers, 2012). The term “waithood” was developed to denote a liminal state between childhood and adulthood in which youth feel trapped by prevailing economic, political, and social structures in many African countries (Honwana, 2012). African youth are mostly more educated than their parents but also more likely to encounter youth unemployment. This situation leads to great frustration for these youth, who perceive themselves as just as literate and employable as their Global North peers but with fewer chances to develop themselves. Hence, they develop waiting tactics, or agentic strategies of dealing with waiting, until they become employed or take advantage of opportunities to emigrate. Honwana (2012) calls for more studies on youth “waithood” and how different groups of African youth apply diverse tactics to cope with waiting.

Within the field of critical youth studies, various scholars have taken up this call to investigate how those in the Global South manage waiting. Barford *et al.* (2021) found that youth “in waiting” adapt to changing social contexts both on their own or by relying on social network support. In other studies, waiting youth preoccupy themselves with playing, talking, scheming, or working in order to derive some benefits from waiting or simply to keep their

minds “off the stresses” (Stasik *et al.*, 2020; Rodan & Huijsmans, 2021; Zharkevich, 2020). A range of concepts point to the strategies youth in the Global South use to cope with waiting: “killing time” and “building solidarity” (Ralph, 2008), doing “timepass” (Jeffery, 2010), “hustling to survive” (Munive, 2010), and “zigzagging” or meandering through available opportunities and forms of entrepreneurship (Jeffery & Dyson, 2013). By exercising their agency through self-help and drawing on social network support, youth waiting to migrate cannot be categorised as “stuck.” Hence, by using an agentic lens and studying what youth actually do, we seek to contribute to works that show that youth in the Global South are not passive victims. Rather, they put varying forms of human agency to use when encountering life hurdles like “waithood.”

## 5.2 Linking Migration Aspirations With Capabilities

For waithood to end, migration aspirations and capabilities need to align. Migration aspirations and the capability to migrate determine who experiences mobility or immobility and whether it is experienced voluntarily or involuntarily. Carling (2002) shows how socio-cultural factors like family support, gender, age, personal dispositions, educational background, migration policies, and psychological motivations to stay or move shape migration aspirations, which refer to people’s desires, wishes, dreams, or plans to emigrate. Carling defines migration ability as a set of opportunities (requirements) and constraints (barriers) that varies from person to person and affects migration aspirations (Carling, 2002). Meanwhile, de Haas (2021) defines migration capability as the capacity to exercise certain freedoms which give people the agency to become mobile. Aspiration and (cap)ability must align for migration aspirations to become actual mobility (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021). Here, “mobility” refers to people’s freedom to choose where to live, which includes the option to stay, rather than the act of moving or migrating itself (de Haas, 2021). This perspective conceptualises moving and staying as complementary manifestations of people’s migratory agency. Key to turning migrant aspirations into actual migrations are the resources aspirants have and are available through their social networks, like material support and information to help overcome structural immigration constraints or barriers (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Francisco-Menchavez, 2020). These resources range from social (other people) and cultural (ideas, knowledge, and skills) to economic (material).

We extend this literature on aspirations and capabilities by focusing on the pacing of aspirations. As we discussed above, movement and mobility can best be understood through pacing, i.e., the process through which a certain pace is strived for, maintained, or reacted against (Amit & Salazar, 2020, p.3). By showing the temporal shifts in stayer youth’s migration aspirations, we identify how stayer youth strategise to migrate, and when and how they adapt their migration aspirations to their capabilities over time. We use the term “stayer youth” in the narrow sense to refer to youth who stay in the country of origin while their parents migrate abroad.

## 5.3 Research Context and Methodology

### 5.3.1 *Structural Opportunities and Constraints That Secondary School Graduates Encounter in Ghana*

For senior high school (SHS) graduates in Ghana, entering higher education, obtaining employment, or emigrating are priorities before marriage or starting a family (Dadzie *et al.*, 2020; Honorati & de Silva, 2016; Palmer, 2005; Rhoda, 1980). However, it is difficult for all SHS graduates to enter local higher education (universities, polytechnics, and colleges, private or public) due to entrance examination requirements, financial costs, and limited admission slots. In addition, high youth unemployment rates and limited chances of finding a desirable local career push youth in Ghana to consider emigration (Dako-Gyeke, 2016).

### 5.3.2 *Data Collection and Analysis*

We conducted 15 months of fieldwork in 2018–2019 with 38 stayer youth aged 16 to 23 years. All participants were SHS graduates. We recruited participants from a previous survey which collected data from eight randomly selected schools in two cities in the southern part of Ghana: Sunyani and Kumasi. We followed up with students from the last wave of this survey ([www.tcra.nl](http://www.tcra.nl)) conducted in 2015. Out of the 442 students in this survey, 87 were stayer youth, i.e., children of migrants staying in the origin country. During fieldwork, we learned that some stayer youth had moved abroad for family reunification or further schooling. Others in Ghana refused to participate in the research. In the end, we were able to trace 38 young people who were living or schooling in five Ghanaian cities—Sunyani, Kumasi, Accra, Tamale, and Ho—while one or both parents resided abroad.

After obtaining the necessary ethics approvals, we collected our data primarily through in-depth interviews, offline and online conversations, and participant observation. As is the practice in long-term ethnographic research, we approached informed consent as a process by regularly reminding participants about the research aims and asking for their oral consent. We conducted the research in homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces like gyms and stadiums. After participants completed SHS, the first author joined them as they searched for jobs, worked, and engaged in leisure activities. Such occasions enabled the researcher to collect observational data and participants to develop trust in the researcher. We also conducted interviews to deepen some of the themes emerging from the research.

Data analysis was conducted in two phases. First, we hand-coded details about young people's migration aspirations, including which significant others shaped those aspirations. In a second phase, we coded all the activities that young people engaged in while "waiting" to migrate. The final analysis entailed case-by-case profiling and case comparisons. We wrote 38 vignettes highlighting why participants were waiting to migrate and how they pragmatically adapted to waiting. To decipher patterns, the three authors discussed these vignettes in detail on several occasions. Afterwards, we compared the 38 cases studied

using a table in Excel that summarised participants' main characteristics, their aspirations, and the strategies and activities in which they engaged during their wait.

All participants aspired to migrate. However, they took advantage of the time between their high school graduation and when we met them in the field (between one to three years after graduation) to adapt their aspirations as they came to better understand their actual migration capabilities. Two decided to move later on in life with the consent and support of their migrant parents. The remaining 36 young people wished to migrate right after high school graduation. Of the 36, seven could not get the help and approval of their migrant parents for their international migration aspirations, even if these parents could have assisted them if they had agreed with their children's aspirations. A set of 18 young people had consenting migrant parents who lacked the economic capital to aid their children to migrate. The remaining 11 young people could not count on their migrant parents for any help to realise their international migration aspirations. Young people in each category shifted their strategies over time to try and align their migration aspirations with their capabilities. Although youth do not have full control over which strategies to employ, we highlight youth's agency, even in waiting to migrate.

## 5.4 Adapting While Waiting to Migrate

Like Somaiah and Yeoh (2021), we observed that stayer youth differed in their migration aspirations and capabilities. We assessed capability by considering participants' secondary school examination performance, as this opens or closes certain possibilities for post-secondary school transitions, as well as the financial and moral support offered by migrant parents for their children's migration aspirations and local career development. Stayer youth's migration aspirations shifted over time, both in terms of when and how they wanted to migrate and in reaction to their changing understanding of their migration capability. In waiting to emigrate, they aligned their migration aspirations with their shifting perceptions of their capabilities. We identified different alignment strategies used by four groups of stayer youth (see Supplementary File, Table C1).

The first group comprises stayer youth whose migrant parents both support their children's migration aspirations and have the financial means to help them realise those aspirations. The second group consists of stayer youth whose migrant parents have the means but disagree with their children's migration decisions. The third group of young people has migrant parents who agree with their aspirations but do not have the means to assist their children's migration. Finally, the fourth category consists of young people who do not have much contact with their migrant parents. Stayer youth in the first category do not need to alter or adapt their aspirations as they concur with their capabilities. They often plan an eventual migration sometime after graduating from SHS to give themselves the time to first develop themselves in Ghana. In contrast, those in the other categories often aspired to emigrate right after secondary school completion. But lacking the capability, then they

decided to postpone their migration project and turned to finding local career opportunities to not passively wait. This section discusses each group's initial migration aspirations and the adaptation strategies they employed while waiting to migrate.

#### *5.4.1 When Migrant Parents Agree With Stayer Youth's Migration Aspirations and Have the Means to Help*

This category of stayer youth represents the most privileged in our sample because their parents both agreed with their desire to migrate and had the means to help. Two participants, Cutter (aged 18, male) and Trendy (aged 19, female), felt confident in their ability to migrate and therefore chose to time their migration to best suit their aspirations. They both chose to first focus on obtaining a higher degree in Ghana. Thus, their aspirations could be seen as involving voluntary waiting. Also, the type of migration these young people aspired was different from that of their counterparts discussed below. They preferred to travel as tourists or for temporary migration. Trendy wanted to explore the world, while Cutter aimed to find employment abroad in nursing due to the better-earning possibilities. Cutter perceived this as a temporary plan that would allow him to earn enough money to save for his return to Ghana to marry and start a business.

Cutter's migration aspirations are akin to those of other youth who perceive higher returns from an education in their home country (ILO, 2013). Like others in our sample, Cutter aspired to migrate because his migrant parents encouraged him. But his parents preferred that he began university in Ghana and occasionally visited his family in the UK to acquaint himself with the UK context. They advised him to relocate to the UK only after obtaining his nursing degree, as entering university in the UK would be more difficult. Once in the UK, he could do some additional courses before joining the UK nursing workforce. For Cutter, this plan was also a way for him to reunify with his family abroad. He also saw it as a stepping stone to establishing his own family and future. With his UK income, he could marry and establish a business back in Ghana. Yet something got in the way of Cutter's plans when he did not get admitted into his locally desired university programme. Subsequently, he made an alternative plan with his parents: file for family reunification immediately while he still qualified age-wise. Two weeks after his mother visited him in Ghana, Cutter departed for the UK in her company to pursue an international college education. His parents thought it was better to continue schooling within the UK right away rather than stay home for one year in Ghana before reapplying.

Trendy, meanwhile, wanted to travel and experience Western culture. Trendy explicitly mentioned that she did not want to move abroad to join her family or to get an international education because she felt that people who travel for these reasons face racial discrimination, while tourists do not. While travel might not be considered migration, Trendy's case highlights that some young people aim to be mobile without necessarily migrating. Unlike Cutter, whose parents influenced the nature and timing of his migration aspirations, Trendy decided to discuss her plans with her migrant father only when the time was right for her.

Trendy preferred to travel when she could finance it fully herself or with only partial support from her father. She therefore first sought to finish her university degree and find a job in Ghana.

Trendy and Cutter also show that structural factors can influence how stayer youth strategise and shift their aspirations. When the structure of the Ghanaian educational system meant Cutter did not gain admission to his desired programme after secondary school completion, he resorted to changing the timing of his migration aspirations. To avoid racism, which she equated with working and educational structures abroad, Trendy planned to travel at a time when she could go as a tourist. Similar to Kandel and Kao's (2000) findings, Cutter and Trendy had extensive knowledge about the possibilities offered by Ghana's educational landscape as well as ideas about what they would encounter overseas, which motivated them to consider pursuing their university education at home before travelling.

#### *5.4.2 When Migrant Parents Have the Means to Help But Disagree With Their Children's Migration Aspirations*

The stayer youth in this category aimed to pursue additional education abroad and/or reunify with their family. While their migrant parents had the required documentation and financial means to support their children's migration plans, they disagreed with their aspirations. They often encouraged them to pursue local schooling or professional training. But the young people refused to forego their migration aspirations and tried to persuade their parents to sponsor their moves abroad. When they realised their parents would not change their minds, they started to comply with their parents' wishes. They adapted by attending local teacher or nursing training schools like Pippy (aged 18, male), getting apprenticeship training like Lassy (aged 22, female), or joining online sewing classes like Marble (aged 22, female). They therefore postponed their migration aspirations (Pippy and Lassy) or replaced moving plans with plans for staying (Marble). This process of shifting and postponing their aspirations to fit their capabilities, as determined by the help their parents were willing to give, lasted from a few months to four years after SHS.

Pippy aimed to pursue higher education right after secondary school graduation in a country different from where his migrant parents resided. He did not want to go through the process of family reunification, which would entail living with his controlling migrant parents. He preferred to migrate individually to study to become a lawyer. Yet, he ended up enrolling in a local teacher training college, as his mother had recommended, after his parents clearly indicated that they would not sponsor his migration. After training, Pippy's mum encouraged him to find a government job, which would be easier to get as a public college trainee. As a government employee, Pippy's mother thought he would be able to save for his future international migration and legal career. Pippy's trajectory was not without bumps. After a year of fruitlessly trying to persuade his parents to allow him to migrate, Pippy gave up and followed his parents' advice to pursue his self-development locally through teaching or nursing training. Pippy chose to follow his migrant parents'



instructions not as a renunciation of his own aspirations to migrate, but in order not to lose his parents' support. Pippy simply delayed his plans for migration, which he hoped to finance himself later.

Lassy aimed to reunify with her family in the UK. She missed them and wanted to be physically close for emotional support, like her younger siblings who resided with their parents overseas. Lassy conceived her plan for family reunification while in secondary school. For about three years, she tried to persuade her parents to support her migration, including arguing that her siblings were receiving a better education than she was in Ghana. Yet, her parents insisted on her staying in Ghana. She also did not pass her secondary school examination after three re-sit attempts. After the third re-sit, Lassy accepted to enter a local apprenticeship training, as her parents directed. Although her parents did not share her views, Lassy thought that the local apprenticeship training and a subsequent entrepreneurship plan would equip her with relevant skills to obtain international employment whenever she gets an opportunity to emigrate.

Although youth in this category feel disappointed by their migrant parents' lack of support, they recognise, with time, that persuasion cannot motivate their parents to help them migrate. They therefore comply with their parents' instructions to be assured of parental support for their daily needs. Yet, they perceive staying in Ghana as a temporary solution, probably due to a local substantial migration culture, and often do not abandon their aspirations to migrate. Rather, they pace their migration aspirations through delaying strategies.

#### 5.4.3 *When Migrant Parents Agree With Their Children's Migration Aspirations But Do Not Have the Means to Help*

Some stayer youth aspire to migrate, and while their migrant parents agree with their children's plans, they lack the means to help. These parents offer young people hope that family reunification is realistic, but they often face financial and legal constraints, especially those migrant parents who are undocumented (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). Some youth in this category latch on to the hope offered by their parents and put off finding alternative opportunities in Ghana. Donna (aged 18, female) attached herself strongly to her father's promises and did nothing for a while after secondary school completion. While waiting, Donna helped her maternal grandmother, her local caregiver, with sales in a small kiosk in front of a rented room. After one year, Donna grew dismayed with her father's promises and applied and gained admission to study business at a local university. Donna seemed proud of her decision to return to school instead of waiting for family reunification:

At first, I liked the idea that my father was there [abroad], and every time he would tell us that he would come and take us. Now he has made me forget about travelling. Now I am not relying on him. Last time he said I should look for someone to do a passport for my younger sister. My sister told me that I should stop because my father is deceiving us.... We have waited for things to change, but nothing has changed. Things are just as they are.



Donna did not abandon her aspiration to migrate. On the contrary, she hoped a local degree would make her better placed to later apply to do an international master's degree. Donna gained admission to a local university with the financial and moral support of her migrant father.

Ntonsu (aged 22, female) similarly grew dismayed with her mother's empty promises and decided to take her aspirations into her own hands. What seemed most achievable to her was the romantic partner pathway. Ntonsu's mother lived in the UK as an asylum seeker. She lacked the required financial resources to support Ntonsu's migration aspirations but promised Ntonsu that she would assist her to move to the UK as soon as she became a documented migrant. This promise started as soon as Ntonsu's mother arrived in the UK, when Ntonsu was about 10 years old. Ntonsu's fervent desire to join her mother influenced her decision to accept a long-distance romantic relationship proposal from a young Ghanaian man living in Italy. They started their relationship online and met physically on his occasional visits to Ghana. However, she stopped the relationship when she realised that he was married. Now Ntonsu is pursuing a diploma to become a medical counter assistant. Through her work, she hopes to save enough for further local training to become a licensed nurse like her sister. Ntonsu hopes her nursing salary will then help her to save for her migration dream.

A clear pattern amongst the youth in this category is their strong desire to reunite with their parents abroad and belief that family reunification will be possible, largely encouraged by their migrant parents' assurances. Yet, when they realise that the situation is not as hopeful as they initially thought, they re-strategise about when and how to move. They take actions based on what they perceive to be their capabilities and pace their migration aspirations from family reunification to education or labour migration at a later date.

#### *5.4.4 When Migrant Parents are Detached From Their Children's Migration Aspirations*

This group consists of two sets of stayer youth: (a) those who are not encouraged by their parents in their migration aspirations because these parents cannot afford to sponsor their children's migration and (b) those who barely have contact with their migrant parents. In both cases, the young people get inspiration and capabilities for migration from other sources.

Dusty's father does not have the resources to support his son financially. Yet, unlike the parents of young people in the third category above, he also does not offer any promises. Dusty (aged 18, male) therefore turns elsewhere for his inspiration:

He [the migrant father] is not performing. Sometimes we have disagreements with him ... The person who inspires me was my senior at SHS. We used to play in the same team. But he was my senior. He too moved to Accra. He came to settle here [Accra]. Later, he was able to get the chance to go abroad [Italy] and play football. So, he has been inspiring me to, like, work hard so that I can come outside [abroad] and play.

Young people like Dusty pursue their migration aspirations by relying on moral and financial support from adults in their local and international networks, like his football manager (current caregiver), church members living in Ghana and abroad, and stayer mother. Dusty got financial support from his stayer mother and her partner to obtain a passport. His manager arranges matches for him. In the quote above, his previous teammate provides him with tips and tricks he can implement in Ghana to get an international football opportunity. Additionally, members of his church encourage him to remain hopeful.

All the youth in this category consider migrant parents' support for their migration aspirations to be inaccessible. Feeling abandoned by their migrant parents, these youth still aspire to migrate. Education provides a pathway, as Gusta (aged 21, male) and Mape (aged 19, male) told us. Realising that it is impossible to travel for international bachelor's degrees right after secondary school, as they initially hoped to do, Gusta and Mape gained admission into two different public universities in Ghana to study chemistry and computer science, respectively. They studied with their stayer parents' financial and moral support and that of extended relatives in the diaspora. Unlike Gusta, who shifted from aiming to migrate by pursuing an international education degree to pursuing a musical career abroad in an unknown future, Mape received a promise from a maternal aunt residing in South Africa that she would assist him financially to follow an international master's programme after he successfully completed a local bachelor's degree. This promise was Mape's main motivation to remain studious and hopeful about emigrating soon.

Goshie (aged 16, male) was less lucky. He did not manage to qualify for university entrance in Ghana, which he attributed to his migrant father's neglect. Lacking support from his father for his education and daily survival, Goshie failed an examination required for him to enter a local university or polytechnic. He now hopes that his stayer mother can raise the needed finances for him to apply for study abroad scholarships. Goshie knew his mother was too poor to help him financially but urged her to call on her rich friends and family members for money. His mother did everything possible, but the help was not forthcoming. Goshie therefore decided to look for local jobs, including street sales and primary school teaching, to save money for his future migration project. Goshie felt it was worth working hard to align his migration aspirations and capabilities rather than bemoaning his migrant father's abandonment of his family in Ghana.

Given the lack of support from their migrant parents, youth in this category pace their migration aspirations via delaying and replacement while continuously strategising to increase their migration capabilities. They rely on broad social network support, including from caregivers and friends, for information, money and motivation for their migration plans (Böhme, 2015; Francisco-Menchavez, 2020).

## 5.5 Conclusion

The aspirations of youth in the Global South, including those of stayer youth, are shaped by their capabilities, which stem from family support, access to migration information, gender and academic achievements (e.g., Böhme, 2015; Kandel & Kao, 2000; Somaiah *et al.*, 2020). Yet, aspirations are too often treated as unchanging: either you aspire to migrate or you do not. Simultaneously, youth in the Global South have been characterised as being in “waithood”—a state of limbo between childhood and adulthood—due to a lack of opportunities at home and restrictive policies in the Global North (Batan, 2010; Honwana, 2012). Focusing on when youth aim to migrate and the strategies they use to realise their migration aspirations, we unpack what waithood looks like for stayer youth and uncover the diverse activities and strategies entailed in waiting (Stasik *et al.*, 2020). First, we categorised participants according to their initial capabilities. Then we studied how stayer youth adapted their migration strategies given their migration capabilities, resulting in the pacing of their migration aspirations (Amit & Salazar, 2020).

Using a temporal lens that considers how aspirations change over time, our ethnographic study found that stayer youth’s migration aspirations were paced differently based on their capabilities. Parental emotional and financial support determined stayer youth’s initial migration capabilities upon completing secondary school. After secondary school completion, some participants aspired to migrate immediately. Others preferred to wait until they had achieved a particular milestone in Ghana, be it a tertiary degree or the acquisition of other skills that would better equip them for finding a job abroad. Stayer youth then employ agency based on their socio-economic status to pace their migration aspirations to better align them with their capabilities. Privileged participants had parents who agreed with their aspirations and had the means to support them. As a result, these youth experienced voluntary waiting. The other youth we studied encountered involuntary waiting. They lacked the ability to migrate due to transnational family power struggles, financial or legal constraints, or detached parenting. Consequently, these stayer youth resorted to shifting by delaying or replacing their aspirations in line with their capabilities. They thereby expressed their agency through various strategies to cope with waiting while aspiring (Cooper *et al.*, 2021; Lam & Yeoh, 2018; Osei *et al.*, 2023).

This article thus contributes to transnational migration studies that overlook stayer youth’s agency and their ability to cope with and shape forces structuring their lives. While structural forces constrain or encourage youth’s migration aspirations, youth demonstrate agency in aspiring to move, irrespective of whether such aspirations are realised and become actual migration (Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2021; Setrana, 2021). Literature on stayer youth’s aspirations has mainly emphasised that youth aspire to migrate because their parents reside abroad. Yet, by studying the perspectives of stayer youth and observing what they do to realise their migration aspirations, we find that they may start with unrealistic ideas of their migration capabilities. But as time progresses, they adapt and strategise to

align their aspirations with their capabilities. In so doing, they actively pace their aspirations (Amit & Salazar, 2020). Stayer youth have been conceived of as being in a state of waithood: stationary and largely reacting to their parents. By focusing on the perspectives of stayer youth, we contribute to recent calls in critical youth studies to unpack waiting. Even in waiting, youth express agency.



# 6

## Conclusions

## 6.0 Introduction

For the past three decades, evidence suggests growing numbers of “stayer” children and youth worldwide, young people belonging to transnational families who remain in their country of origin when their parents migrate abroad (e.g.; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; UNICEF, 2007 & n.d; Zhang, 2015). These stayer youth are primarily located in the Global South because migration laws and regulations in the Global North make it difficult for most parents to bring their children with them when they relocate overseas. Yet, despite the significant numbers of stayer youth, we know little about their perspectives, experiences and aspirations.

Stayer youth’s experiences and aspirations are often portrayed as static and unchanging throughout the period of parental migration. There is considerable evidence about their experiences at specific times in young people’s lives based on cross-sectional surveys or one-off interviews. However, these methods make it difficult to account for any dynamics in young people’s experiences and aspirations. Moreover, static representations or narratives obscure the agency stayer youth exercise in shaping their lives during parental migration. For example, there is little research on the roles stayer youth play in shaping their own educational trajectories, a key theme in this dissertation. Furthermore, any agency young people exercise as their migration aspirations change over time has not received sufficient academic attention. Nor are stayer youth portrayed as actively involved in sustaining transnational parent-child relationships through their use of digital technologies, with a few exceptions (e.g., Horst, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2011).

Most knowledge about stayer youth is based on what migrant parents and local caregivers say and do for these children and how these adults sustain transnational parent-child relationships. Transnational family studies have too often been adult-centric. As scholars often study stayer youth through the parents and local caregivers, the literature rarely accounts for the perspectives and agency of young people themselves. The existing literature does not also explore how stayer youth’s experiences and aspirations change over the life course.

This dissertation has employed a youth-centric and temporal approach to extend existing knowledge about stayer youth’s experiences and aspirations. I put young people’s voices at the centre of the research and I asked about and observed how their experiences and aspirations evolved over time. The latter I did through collecting their life stories and their educational trajectories. The dissertation has explored how stayer youth actively attempt to shape transnational parent-child relationships over time using digital media and different strategies. It has explored stayer youth’s agency in shaping their educational trajectories and migration aspirations over time by activating social network support to complement or substitute for that of migrant parents.

Ghana provided an excellent focus for my research. Ghana is a high out-migration country (e.g., Awumbila *et al.*, 2011). Transnational forms of child-raising are commonplace in urban

areas (e.g., Cebotari & Mazzucato, 2016), where most of this study's 38 participants lived and studied or worked. My research has contributed both an African and a youth perspective to a growing field about stayer children and youth (e.g., Khatia *et al.*, 2020; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I highlight the main findings of the three empirical chapters of this dissertation (section 6.1). Then I outline the study's methodological and theoretical implications (section 6.2). Finally, I close with the study's limitations, suggesting potential areas for future investigation (section 6.3).

## **6.1 Transnational parent-child relationships, educational trajectories and changing aspirations**

Chapter three of this thesis analysed how stayer youth actively shape transnational relationships with their parents through digital communication, specifically WhatsApp. Chapter four showed how stayer youth activate their agency to shape their primary and secondary school trajectories, especially to overcome schooling interruptions. The final empirical chapter, Chapter five, revealed how stayer youth actively pace their migration aspirations to align with their capabilities.

In Chapter three, I found that WhatsApp was the digital media that youth most used to remain connected to their migrant parents due to its affordability and accessibility. The chapter presented key communication strategies through which stayer youth try to sustain relationships with their migrant parents. These strategies depended on young people's technical abilities and involved timing communications with parents, drawing on local and transnational sibling support, and the use of silence and brevity.

Stayer youth who had a distant relationship with their migrant parents and received limited support expressed agency by using silence, keeping conversations brief and calling or messaging parents only at specific moments based on their knowledge of the best times to get in touch. Some relied on their siblings in origin and destination countries for information about appropriate times to connect with migrant parents. When a sibling had a good relationship with the migrant parents, stayer youth sometimes asked the sibling to communicate and make requests on their behalf. Whatever the nature of the stayer youth's relationship with their parents, they all enacted their agency through digital communication, trying to maintain or shape the relationship over time.

Chapter four identified three main hurdles in stayer youth's educational trajectories that often led to interruptions in their schooling: frequent changes in housing and caregivers, financial constraints, and limited educational guidance and support. All three are the result of parental migration.

Stayer youth exercise agency throughout their educational trajectories and draw on broad social networks to deal with the problems they encounter. Sometimes they find that the educational support migrant parents offer them is inadequate, as is that of local caregivers. In



response, they seek assistance from other adults, siblings and peers. They seek adult support for their schooling from schoolteachers and other extended family members, and they draw on local and international siblings and friends for support with schooling too. Hence, stayer youth activate their agency by seeking and accepting other people's help to augment the support they receive from migrant parents and local caregivers. Moreover, after secondary school completion, most stayer youth still rely on extended social networks for the resources they need to navigate post-secondary school transitions.

Chapter five examined stayer youth's migration aspirations. Like in other countries, youth in Ghana often aspire to migrate internationally. But very few move when they hope to because they lack the resources and ability to migrate. The literature often represents aspirations as monolithic: young people either aspire to move or they do not. In Chapter five, I discovered that things are not so simple. A range of conditions shape the migration aspirations of stayer youth, on the basis of which I divided them into four groups. Some youth had migrant parents who agreed with their desire to migrate and had the means to help them actualise their desires. Another group of young people had migrant parents who had the means to help but disagreed with their migration aspirations. A third group had migrant parents who agreed with their aspirations but did not have the means to help turn their desires into reality. The final group are those whose migrant parents are little involved in their daily lives or are detached from their children and aspirations.

Using a temporal approach, I discovered that stayer youth are also agentic and actively adapt their migration aspirations over time based on changing realisations of their own capabilities. Some stayer youth who had their parents' moral and financial support exercised agency by choosing to stay in Ghana and migrate later in life when they deemed the time was right for them. They waited voluntarily, postponing their plans until after completing higher education. Young people who had migrant parents who could afford to support their migration but disapproved of their aspirations experienced involuntary waiting. Youth also waited involuntarily when their parents could not afford to support their migration even though they morally supported their children's desires to migrate. Those experiencing involuntary waiting wanted to reunify with their parents or to gain an international education after finishing secondary school.

Over time, stayer youth who aspired to migrate but lacked the ability to do so realised their lack of ability and exercised agency by adapting their aspirations. For example, Guess, whose story I presented in the Introduction to this thesis, changed from aspiring to join her migrant father right after secondary school completion to seeking a path to migration through a romantic partner. Her actions over time can be understood as attempts to build her capacity to migrate once she realised her parents could not help her. Once stayer youth realise that there are misalignments between their migration aspirations and abilities, they depend on local opportunities to gain the skills and capital they require, pursuing higher education or apprenticeship programmes in Ghana and activating broad social networks. Some stayer youth focus on re-sitting secondary school exams to open possibilities for

gaining scholarships for international post-secondary education or for attending local tertiary institutions.

## 6.2 Youth-centricity, a temporal lens and transnational and local social networks

There are three broad contributions to knowledge that this dissertation makes. The first regards the gains in knowledge to be had through a youth-centric approach that reveals the agency of stayer youth. The second centres on the importance of a temporal approach to understanding how stayer youth's experiences and aspirations change and are shaped by them over time. The final contribution of this dissertation is to demonstrate the importance to young people of local and transnational social networks that extend beyond the usual parent-child-caregiver relationships that have been the focus of transnational family literature.

### 6.2.1 *Using youth-centricity to understand the agency of stayer youth as members of transnational families*

Using a youth-centric approach to understand stayer youth's perspectives reveals their agency. The existing literature focuses on what migrant parents and local caregivers, including older siblings, do for stayer youth to help them achieve specific life outcomes (e.g., Jordan *et al.*, 2018; Poeze, Dankyi & Mazzucato, 2017). A youth-centric approach reveals what stayer youth do for themselves during parental migration. It shows how stayer youth seek and accept help from a broad social network to realise their aspirations, and how they activate their agency for personal growth or self-development.

This youth-centric approach helps understand how international parent migration affects stayer youth in varying ways, and when, how and why they employ their agency at specific moments or in specific ways when their parents are overseas. Stayer youth adapt various strategies to steer their lives in desirable ways, thereby taking an agentic stance. For example, young people who receive little support from migrant parents activate their agency by taking specific actions without parental consent, often relying on others. But stayer youth who do receive support from their parents also exercise agency, just in different ways. Some choose to contact their parents for money to pay for educational costs. Others choose to comply with their parents' wishes, so that they continue to receive parental support. I argue that opportunities and challenges in transnational families determine how stayer youth activate their agency over time.

### 6.2.2 *A temporal perspective on stayer youth's experiences and aspirations*

A temporal lens also serves to highlight stayer youth's agency (Lam & Yeoh, 2018). Only a few studies use such a lens to understand stayer youth's lives (Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021). Some show the importance of time (age of separation) and timing (duration of separation) in how stayer youth react to parental migration (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Ling, Fu

and Zhang, 2015). Others find that younger stayers face higher risks of emotional and peer relationship problems than their older peers and that younger stayers seem more emotionally vulnerable to extended parental migration than older peers (Fan *et al.*, 2010; Liu & Gee, 2009). And research shows that, over time, stayer youth aspire to stay or move because of how the migration of parents has affected them (Somaiah & Yeoh, 2021). This dissertation has extended this limited and nascent literature by showing how temporal data are useful for identifying and explaining stayer youth's agency, experiences and aspirations.

Temporal data have allowed me to observe changes in stayer youth's experiences and aspirations and to show the dynamic nature of transnational digital communication, parent-child relationships, educational trajectories and migration aspirations. A temporal approach also made it possible to observe activities stayer youth engage in while their parents are abroad to achieve specific outcomes, like school completion or emotional well-being. Such activities help young people to ensure security in life, e.g., when they draw on broad social networks to overcome interruptions in educational trajectories. A temporal approach also offers opportunities to observe other significant people's efforts in providing care at different points in a young person's life.

### 6.2.3 *Broad local and transnational social network support for stayer youth*

Stayer youth rely on diverse transnational and local social networks for support. Social capital and resources are concepts often used in migration and family studies to discuss the different sources of support children and youth receive (e.g., Ogden & Mazzucato, 2020). But studies of stayer youth barely consider the role of broader social networks in helping youth. Instead, they focus on the transnational family, i.e., the care provided by migrant parents or local caregivers (e.g., Dito, Mazzucato & Schans 2016; Haagsman & Mazzucato 2014; Mazzucato & Cebotari 2016). Like a few others, I discovered that stayer youth receive assistance and support from various sources, including extended relatives who are not caregivers, school teachers, friends and siblings at origin and abroad (e.g., Zhao *et al.*, 2017). This support complements that provided by migrant parents and local caregivers. And I have argued that stayer youth are agentic in activating the support of diverse peers and adults within their transnational and local social networks for their experiences and aspirations.

Studying stayer youth's reliance on broad social network support was vital to understanding better how those with limited or no support from migrant parents activated their "navigation capacities" to overcome life's hurdles (Swartz, 2021). Stayer youth drew on their networks to ensure they could continue schooling and avoid becoming dropouts (Ananga, 2011). They also relied on broad social networks to address the various challenges of transnational digital parent-child relationships, and to try and align their abilities with their migration aspirations.

My research thus shows a need to go beyond dyad (parent-child) and triad (parent-child-caregiver) relationships within transnational families if we are to understand stayer youth's

experiences and aspirations. By exploring broader networks, transnational family scholars can better comprehend the experiences and aspirations of stayer youth.

### 6.3 Limitations and further research

Despite advancing the nascent literature on stayer youth's agency, this dissertation has limitations that are worth discussing. Due to my sampling strategy, I had a sample of stayer youth who all attended secondary school. My sample did not include drop-outs or young people who never attended secondary school. Future studies should try to include stayer youth who dropped out of school when their parents migrated to explore how they exercise agency to shape their lives.

While my study included both young men and women, the data I collected did not permit a gendered analysis of stayer youth's experiences and aspirations. Yet some results suggest that young men might have different reasons for wanting to migrate than young women. For example, some young men emphasised their desire for further schooling, while some young women seemed more interested in reunifying with their families after completing secondary school. Future studies might conduct gendered investigations to advance what we know about stayer youth, including potential differences in how young men and women use digital communication in their transnational family life.

Lastly, through my youth-centric perspective, I found that some stayer youth who had limited communication with migrant parents felt abandoned or neglected. Their feelings were based on their observations and reflections about their parents' lack of care for them. Future studies might focus on this group of stayer youth to investigate how they cope over time and whether there are longer term effects on their wellbeing.

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In sum, using youth-centricity and a temporal lens, I have shown how stayer youth exercise agency to shape their experiences and aspirations and to draw on varied support over time, both from within their transnational families and from their broader social networks. The agency of stayer youth lies in their ability to apply coping or adaptative strategies to overcome social and economic challenges in their life trajectories. These adaptative strategies see young people deciding to act in their best interests and trying to align their migration aspirations with actual capabilities over time or striving to complete schooling by any possible means. Stayer youth also express agency in the ways they shape their relationships with migrant parents through digital media. While some of their strategies make them feel closer to their parents, others make them feel abandoned or neglected. But the reality is stayer youth often exercise their agency to shape their lives in the local and transnational social fields they inhabit. This dissertation contributes to bringing this agency to the front and centre of research inquiry about young people who live under conditions of parental migration that affect many in the Global South.



# 7

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# Appendices







Supplementary Materials  
Chapter 2

Table A1: Participants' background information

Pseudonyms	Completed age during fieldwork (years)	Sex	Completed age at separation (years)	Transnational family typology (current)	Legal status of migrant parents	Current caregiver	Number of schools attended until SHS completion	Ever repeated or skipped a class	Educational aspiration set in SHS	Educational expectation set in SHS
1 Pearl	22	Female	0	Father away	Documented	Self	8	Yes	UG	UG
2 Jina	19	Female	13	Father away	Documented	Mother	6	No	UNER	UNER
3 Veeka	18	Female	0:age	Both parents away	Documented	Self	6	No	UG	UG
4 Master	19	Male	0	Father away	Documented	Mother, uncle & aunt	6	No	KNUST	KNUST
5 Wappy	23	Male	4	Father away	Documented	Self	5	No	KNUST	UEW
6 Goshie	17	Male	3	Father away	Unknown	Mother & maternal grandparents	3	Yes	UG	UG
7 Zozo	19	Female	19	Father away	Undocumented	Mother	3	Yes	KNUST	KNUST
8 Venta	19	Male	17	Father away	Unknown	Mother	5	Yes	KNUST	KNUST
9 Guess	19	Female	13	Father away	Undocumented	Mother	6	Yes	KNUST	KNUST
10 Moses	21	Male	12	Father away	Documented	Mother	3	No	Kintampo college of health	Kintampo college of health
11 Gusta	21	Male	5	Mother away	Documented	Father	3	Yes	KNUST	KNUST
12 Oje	18	Female	0	Father away	Documented	Maternal aunt & her husband	4	No	KNUST / Nursing	KNUST/ Armed Forces
13 Tin	23	Male	7	Mother away	Documented	Maternal aunt	4	Yes	University (any)	University (any)
14 Nero	18	Male	4	Mother away	Undocumented	Paternal uncle & grandparents	4	No	UCC	UCC
15 Crot	18	Female	0	Father away	Unknown	Mother	4	No	KNUST	KNUST

Table A1: Continued.

Pseudonyms	Completed age during fieldwork (years)	Sex	Completed age at separation (years)	Transnational family typology (current)	Legal status of migrant parents	Current caregiver	Number of schools attended until SHS completion	Ever repeated or skipped a class	Educational aspiration set in SHS	Educational expectation set in SHS
16 Sonna	22	Male	21	Mother away	Documented	Self	3	No	KNUST	KNUST
17 Muzzy	22	Female	6	Father away	Unknown	Mother	3	Yes	UDS	UDS
18 Velosa	20	Male	5	Father away	Documented	Mother	3	No	KNUST	KNUST
19 Marble	22	Female	17	Mother	Documented	Self	3	No	UCC	UCC
20 Reso	18	Female	10	Father	Unknown	Mother	3	No	UNER	KNUST
21 Lima	19	Male	6:12	Both parents away	Unknown	Maternal aunt	3	No	University of Ghana	University of Ghana
22 Dusty	18	Male	2	Father away	Documented	Career manager, mother & stepfather	5	No	UEW	UEW
23 Lassy	22	Female	0:9	Both parent away	Documented	Maternal grandmother	3	No	Nursing training	Nursing training
24 Neelde	17	Male	12:12	both	Undocumented	Maternal uncle and aunt	3	No	Become a professional footballer	Become a professional footballer
25 Cutter	18	Male	7:9	both	Documented	Maternal grandmother	3	Yes	UG	UG
26 Dank	19	Male	0	Father	Unknown	Mother & stepfather	3	No	KNUST	KNUST
27 Kriky	22	Female	6	Father away	Documented	Mother	3	Yes	Holy Trinity Nursing & midwifery training college	Holy Trinity Nursing & midwifery training college

Table A1: Continued.

Pseudonyms	Completed age during fieldwork (years)	Sex	Completed age at separation (years)	Transnational family typology (current)	Legal status of migrant parents	Current caregiver	Number of schools attended until SHS completion	Ever repeated or skipped a class	Educational aspiration set in SHS	Educational expectation set in SHS
28 Trendy	19	Female	0	Father away	Documented	Mother, uncle and aunt	3	No	UG	UG
29 Cross	18	Male	1	Father away	Documented	Mother	3	Yes	UG	UG
30 Pippy	18	Male	0:12	Both parents away	Documented	Maternal aunt	3	No	KNUST	KNUST
31 Teeth	19	Female	0	Father away	Unknown	Mother	3	No	Nursing training college	Nursing training college
32 Mape	19	Male	3	Father away	Documented	Mother & aunt	3	No	UG	UG
33 Tita	19	Male	6:12	Both parents away	Unknown	Maternal aunt	3	No	UG	UG
34 Downa	20	Male	2:2	Both parents away	Unknown	Maternal aunt & her husband	3	No	UCC	Training college
35 Donna	18	Female	0	Father away	Documented	Maternal grandmother	3	No	KNUST	KNUST
36 Kezo	20	Female	0	Father away	Unknown	Mother	3	No	KNUST	KNUST
37 Ntonsu	22	Female	12	Mother away	Undocumented	Maternal grandmother	5	No	Nursing training	Kumasi Polytechnic
38 Thread	18	Female	0:11	Both parents away	Documented	Maternal aunt & her husband	3	No	UG	UG

**Key**

Desirable tertiary career plans during secondary schooling: **UG** = University of Ghana; **UCC** = University of Cape Coast; **UDS** = University of Development Studies; **KNUST** = Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology; **STU** = Sunyani Technical University; **UEW** = University of Education Winneba; **UNER** = University of Natural and Energy Resources

## **A1: Form for seeking consent in writing from participants (phase one)**

**Name of Interviewer:**

**Name of Participant:**

**Questionnaire number:**

Section A– Background and consent to participate in research

### **What is MO-TRAYL?**

**MO-TRAYL** stands for the mobility trajectories of young lives, life chances of transnational youth in the Global North and South. MO-TRAYL is a five-year project (2017-2021) that aims to understand how migration shapes young people’s lives in Ghana, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands.

In this interview, I will spend close to three hours in two days with you to learn about your day-to-day life. I will talk to you about your moves, travels, relationship with your parents, other social connections, education and what you plan(ed) to do after secondary school. This is the first phase of this research where only interviews are being conducted. You may be selected for a second phase if one of your parents currently lives abroad. Should this be the case, then I will contact you to see if you would like to participate

You are selected for this project because you participated in the TCRA project in 2015 at your school and gave your consent for us to contact you in the future for further study.

Finally, you will not derive any monetary benefits from this research for your participation.

### **What about your privacy?**

Participation in this research is always voluntary. Only people who freely agree to participate will be involved in this study. In the course of my work, you can tell me if you would not like to answer a particular question or if you would not like to participate anymore. Your name and contact information will be kept private and not shared with others except for members of the MO-TRAYL project team. Your data will be kept in accordance with data protection legislation and stored in a data archive only for the purposes of data verification and not made accessible for research by third parties. Your name and personal details will not be used in the final publications from this project.

**Thank you**

### Contact for Additional Information

#### *PhD Researcher*

Onallia Esther Osei, Centre for Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University, The Netherlands.

Mobile: 0244 47 2791; Email: o.osei@maastrichtuniversity.nl

#### *The Principal Investigator of MO-TRAY project:*

Prof. Valentina Mazzucato, Director of the Centre for Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University, The Netherlands.

Mobile: +31(0)43 3883381; Email: v.mazzucato@maastrichtuniversity.nl

For additional information about the study, you can contact

*If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at ech@isser.edu.gh / ech@ug.edu.gh / dopai-tetteh@ug.edu.gh or 00233- 303-933-866.*

### Contact hours

8am-5pm

### Section B- VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

**“I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records.”**

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Name of Volunteer

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Signature or mark of volunteer

---

Date

Will you like to take part in this study?

**Yes** (*fill consent form on behalf of participant*).

**No** (fill a consent form indicating no with possible reasons that you can gathered from your interaction with the selected person).

*Once consent is given, the interviewer must fill in the oral consent form, sign and appropriately file the consent sheet with all other data collected about each participant after the data collection.*

*Give a brochure and contact details form to the participant if he or she is interested to take them for more information about the project.*



## A2: Project brochure accompanying written form for seeking consent

**Why is it important to know your story?**

It is already known that many young people in Ghana have at least one parent who has lived abroad while they stay in the home country. But, little is known about how this experience affects young people.

Through my research I hope to learn more about young people's stories to help schools and policy makers better understand the effects of parent's travel on young people's lives.




MO-TRAYL has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 101019232)

**For more information:**

If you are you interested in participating in this research or have any questions, please get in touch with me.

I am a PhD researcher at Maastricht University (The Netherlands) and will be doing the case study in Ghana.

**Onallia Esther Osei**  
**+31 (0)43 388 25 31**  
**+233 (0)244 47 27 91**  
**o.osei@maastrichtuniversity.nl**



You can also find more information about MO-TRAYL at [www.motrayl.com](http://www.motrayl.com)







**YOUTH, TRAVELS, ICT USE & EDUCATION**

**MO-TRAYL is a five-year project (2017-2021) that aims to understand how migration shapes young people's lives in Ghana, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands.**


As part of MO-TRAYL, I am researching youth in Ghana who have at least one parent who has lived abroad. I will like to know more about the youth's personal travel experiences. I am also interested in learning about how these youth use ICT to connect with their parents abroad.



Finally, I want to learn about young people's relationships with family and friends, schooling and what they choose to do after school. To do these things, I will listen to young people's views and stories.

**How will I learn about your story?**

I will spend time with young people to learn what their day-to-day life is like. I will also talk to them about their travels, their relationships with family members in Ghana and abroad, their education and what they plan to do after school.



**What about your privacy?**


Participation in this research is always voluntary. Only youth who freely agree to participate will be involved in this study. In the course of my work, you can tell me if you do not like to participate anymore and always decide to drop out of the research. Your name and contact information will be kept private and not shared with others.

**Who can be involved?**

I will be doing this research with young people who:

- have a Ghanaian background\*
- are 18-25 years old
- whose parent ever lived abroad
- have some experience traveling in Ghana and/or abroad
- are attending or have finished school

\* For this project, 'Ghanaian background' means both your parents were born in Ghana.



### A3: Empty youth mobility trajectory grid

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	MOTRATI mobility and location grid																
2	date																
3	Place of birth																
4	Country																
5	Region																
6	Neighbourhood																
7	City																
8	Country																
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## **A4: Guiding questions for youth mobility trajectory mapping (phase one)**

### **PART I**

#### **Youth mobility and educational trajectory mapping**

##### **General impression of about the young people's trajectories**

Did you ever change houses or place of residence?      (1) Yes                      (2) No

Did you ever travel abroad?                                      (1) Yes                      (2) No

Did you every change school?                                      (1) Yes                      (2) No

##### **Place where you have lived (for 3 months or more)**

In which year were you born?

Where were you living when you were born (i.e., neighbourhood, city and country)?

Who was taking care of you at the place that you were living when you were born?

Where did you live next (i.e., neighbourhood, city and country)?

In which year did you move to this next place or house?

Who was taking care of you at this next place or house?

##### **Short trips abroad** (*Trips abroad for less than 3 months*)

At what age or in which year, did you make your first trip abroad?

How long was this trip?

Where did you travel to?

What was the purpose of that trip? (Choose from: family visit, study, internship, vacation, or other.)

Whom did you travel with?

Who did you live with on this trip?

##### **Education trajectory**

When did you start attending your first school (year vis-à-vis age)?

Where was this school located?

What type of school was it?

What level or class did you first enter in this school?

Who decided that you attend this school?

*Repeat instructions 'b' to 'f' for each school attended; continuing with the second one. Keep the instruction about boarding and neighbourhoods.*

Did you ever repeat or skip a year in any of the schools you attended?

Did you ever change a profile in any of the schools you attended?

Were you ever attending any of the schools that we talked about as a boarder?

**Family members' moves & locations**

Starting with your mother, I will like you to tell me where she was living when you were born. From this place, where did she move to stay and when?

*(Repeat the last instruction until the respondent has told you all about the places that the mother ever lived until the current residential location)*

*Repeat the same instructions for the father.*

*Repeat the same instructions for each sibling.*

*(Siblings include anyone the participant considers a sibling, including half- or step-siblings)*

Did you any of these people ever visit Ghana while they were living abroad?

*When was or were the visit(s)? (Probe for the specific years and mark in the grid with short dashes)*

*How long was each visit? (Indicate the months and/ or weeks to fill the transcription form)*

*Were you living in the same house or neighbourhood as any of these members of your family who visited Ghana while she or he was living abroad?*

1. Same house or place
2. Different house or place
3. Both 1 and 2

*Did you see the person who came to visit Ghana?*

*Yes*

*No*

*What was the purpose of each visit to Ghana?*

**PART II****General questions about mapped mobility trajectories****YOUTH MOBILITY TRAJECTORY**

Looking back at this period (*pointing to place 1*), could you tell me what your life was like; focusing on:

your living condition:

*What was your living condition at this place?*

*Did you feel you always had enough to eat?*

*Did you feel you were treated well?*

Good periods, and why? (*To have them talking, ask about the best moments*)

difficult periods, and why?

How did you **deal** with the difficult periods?

Were there any particular people who were helpful to you here? (*Probe for family, friend, church mate, work colleague, teacher, neighbour and so on*), (*Repeat for each place*)

## **YOUTH EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORY**

Looking back at the years or months that you spent at school 1 (*pointing to the line connecting schools 1 and 2*), could you tell me about your experiences here; focusing on:

The conditions at the school:

*Did you like the classrooms? And why?*

*Did you like the teachers? And why?*

*Were you happy about attending the school during this period of your life? And why?*

Good periods, and why? (*To have them talking, ask about the best moments*)

difficult periods, and why?

How did you **deal** with the difficult periods?

Were there any particular people who were helpful to you in your education? (*Probe for family, friend, church mate, work colleague, teacher, neighbour and so on*), (*Repeat for each place*)

Referring to the move from JHS to SHS, what were the considerations in making this choice? (*Probe for the reasons why the respondent decided to attend a particular SHS*)

**A5: Additional interview guide for phase one****YOUTH TRAVELS, ICT USE & EDUCATION****(MO-TRAYL)****Name of Interviewer:****Name of Participant:****Identity code of participant:****ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS****Background information**

**Interview date:**            /            /  
    Day/    Month/ Year

**Start Time:**            :**First Name:****Middle Name:****Family name or surname:****Sex:**                    **(1)** Female                    **(2)** Male                    **(3)** Other, specify**Marital status:**    **(1)** Single                    **(2)** Married                    **(3)** Co-habiting**Number of biological children:****Date of birth:**            /            /**Age:****Highest class completed in school:****Who are you currently live with?**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
<b>1</b>			
<b>2</b>			
<b>3</b>			
<b>4</b>			
<b>5</b>			
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<b>8</b>			
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<b>10</b>			
<b>11</b>			

<i>Rate of language use</i>	<b>Spoken</b>			<b>Read</b>			<b>Written</b>		
	<i>Most often</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>Less often</i>	<i>Most often</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>Less often</i>	<i>Most often</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>Less often</i>
<b>Language</b>									
<b>Language</b>									
<b>Language</b>									

**Relationship codes**

1 Mother only	11 Father only	21 Mother and father, both
2 Mother’s mother	12 Father’s mother	22 Pastor/church elder
3 Mother’s father	13 Father’s father	23 Your friend
4 Mother’s sister	14 Father’s sister	24 Teacher
5 Mother’s brother	15 Father’s brother	25 Other adult
6 Your sister	16 Your brother	26 Other child/youth
7 Stepmother	17 Stepfather	27 Nobody
8a Half-sister (mother)	18a Half-sister (father)	28 Don’t know
8b Half-brother (mother)	18b Half-brother (father)	
9 Other female relative mother’s side	19 Other female relative father’s side	
10 Other male relative mother’s side	20 Other male relative father’s side	

**In total, how many siblings do you have including half or step siblings?**

**{i}How many of your extended family members ever lived outside of Ghana?**

**{ii} Where did most of them travel abroad to stay?**

**Most reliable personal mobile phone number:**

**Frequently used social media handle**

Type:

Name:

contact:

**Languages proficiency****Codes of languages used in Ghana**

Code	Language	Code	Language
5	Akwapim Twi (Akan)	11	Hausa
3	Asante Twi (Akan)	6	Mfantse (Akan)
4	Bono	10	Nzema (Akan)
14	Dagaare	12	Pidgin English
13	Dagbani	16	Other 1, specify .....
1	English	17	Other 2, specify .....
9	Ewe	18	Other 3, specify .....
2	French	19	Other 4, specify .....
7	Ga	20	Other 5, specify .....
8	Ga-Adangbe	21	Other 6, specify .....
15	Gonja		

**TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD: EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS****FOR THOSE WHO HAVE COMPLETED SHS**

What have you been DOING since you completed SHS? (*Probe to know about schooling, work, starting a family, etc.*)

For EACH THING THEY DID,

what was it, when and where?

How did you DECIDE to do this or these thing(s)?

Was there ANYONE OR EVENT OR EXPERIENCE that was particularly INFLUENTIAL in making this or these choice(s)?

Does what you are DOING NOW COINCIDE with what you had HOPED to do when you were finishing SHS?

If no, why are you not doing what you had HOPED to?

What do you EXPECT will be your next step in life? (*Probe to know about schooling, occupation, starting a family, etc.*)

What experiences or people have influenced you in deciding to take this or these next step(s)?

**OR**

**VIII. FOR THOSE WHO ARE YET TO FINISH SHS**

What do you HOPE you will do once you finish SHS?

What do you EXPECT to do once you finish SHS?

If the two are not the same, why not?

What experience or what person is particularly influencing you in what you hope to achieve after SHS?

**OR**



### **VIII. FOR THOSE WHO NEVER ENTERED OR COMPLETED SHS**

What have you been DOING since you completed JHS or dropped out of SHS? (*Probe to know about schooling, work, starting a family, etc.*)

For EACH THING THEY DID,

what was it, when and where?

How did you DECIDE to do this or these thing(s)?

Was there ANYONE OR EVENT OR EXPERIENCE that was particularly INFLUENTIAL in making this or these choice(s)?

Does what you are DOING NOW COINCIDE with what you had HOPED to do when you were finishing JHS or dropped out of SHS?

Whiles you were completing JHS, were you hoping to go to SHS until you complete with a WASSCE certificate? And why?

Whiles you were completing JHS, were you thinking of going to SHS until you complete with a WASSCE certificate? And why?

If no, why are you not doing what you had HOPED to?

What do you EXPECT will be your next step in life? (*Probe to know about schooling, occupation, starting a family, etc.*)

What experiences or people have influenced you in deciding to take this or these next step(s)?

### **FOR ALL**

Migration

Would you like to travel abroad and live there?

If yes, when, where and why would you like to go?

If yes, what would you like to do when you go there?

Who or what experience influences you in your desire to travel and live abroad?

If we look at all of the answers that you have given above about your hopes and expectations, are there any people who would not be happy with these choices? (*Probe for education, jobs, start a family and migration*)

What do you think your life will be like in 5 to 10 years?

Do you some time worry about the future?

What do you think are your greatest achievement in life?

### **PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS**

How was your relationship with your mother or father or both before he or she or they travelled to live overseas?

*If both of your parents live abroad, is there a difference between them how they related to you before they went to stay outside of Ghana?*

What did you LIKE MOST about your relationship with the parent abroad before he or she travelled to go and stay there?

What did you DISLIKE MOST about your relationship with the parent abroad before the person went to live abroad?

How has your relationship with your biological parent been ever since he or she or they travelled abroad?

If there was a chance for you to tell your parent abroad, what you MOST LIKE about your current relationship with him or her or they, what would you say to the person(s)?

If there was a chance for you to tell your parent abroad, what you MOST DISLIKE about your current relationship with him or her or they, what would you say to the person(s)?

How often are you in contact with the said parent abroad?

What media do you use to connect to each other?

Who often initiates the communication between the 2 or 3 of you; and with what media is it often done?

How has how your communication with your parents abroad change over time? ***How do you feel about such changes?***

During your communication with your parent abroad, what information do you exchange with each other? Which media helps to exchange which information better?

Overall, how do you feel when you use the said media to communicate about the various topics that you mentioned to me, with your parent abroad?

### ADDITIONAL CONTACT DETAILS

We have now completed this first part of the interview. But before we go on, I will like to collect your addresses and other contact details so that we can easily contact you in case we would like to interview you again. At that time, you will be asked again if you would like to participate. If you agree, kindly tell us the following:

No.	Type of contact	Details
	House Address	
	Postal address	
	Email Address	
	WhatsApp	
	Facebook	
	Twitter	
	Instagram	
	Snap chat	
	Imo	
	Viber	
	Skype	
	Facetime	
	Yahoo Messenger	
	Windows Messenger	
	Google Hangout	
	WeChat	
	Tango	

**End time:** \_\_\_\_\_ :

**Thank you**

### Comment by the interviewer about the mobility trajectory mapping and interview(s) with a participant

NB: Interviewers must observe and report on the following issues after interactions with the participant:

General impression<sup>2</sup> of the interviewee:

presumed audience<sup>3</sup>:

- 
- 2 Here, take note of memory recollection, facial expression or appearance and reception towards you as an interviewer or a researcher during data collection.
  - 3 Does the participating youth talk to you like he or she is addressing a researcher, government representative, NGO, friend, colleague, sibling, unfamiliar adult whom the youth doesn't seem to trust, etc.

**Summary of the respondent's story and reflections**

During interviews, interviewers must keep in mind a summary of the respondent's story to write here. You must also note the questions that arises out of your conversation with the respondent here for follow up. A summary of the respondent's story with reflection question for follow-up:

## A6: Participants' oral consent form for phase two



**RESEARCHER ORAL CONSENT FORM**  
**MOBILITY TRAJECTORIES OF YOUNG LIVES PROJECT (MO-TRAYL)**

I hereby acknowledge that the participant understands what this study is about and has given oral consent to the following (where applicable):

- |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Taking part in the above research;</li> <li>2. The participant has received a copy of the project information sheet that explains the use of the data in this research;</li> <li>3. The participant has had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and has had time to think about his/her participation;</li> <li>4. The participant has been informed of the voluntary nature of his/her participation and his/her right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason;</li> <li>5. The participant has been informed that his/her name will not be used in the research, that data will be kept confidential and only shared with the research team, that data will be kept in accordance with data protection legislation and stored in a data archive only for the purposes of data verification and not made accessible for research by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties;</li> <li>6. The participant has been informed that if photos or videos will be taken during the course of the project in which he/she figures in the foreground, he/she will be asked for consent and should he/she prefer, his/her face (eyes) will be blurred on the video/photographs;</li> <li>7. The participant has been informed that he/she will not derive any monetary benefits from this research.</li> </ol> | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 180px;"> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 25px;"></td></tr> </table> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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*Please tick against the appropriate box.*

The respondent is:

- |   |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Youth (18 years)</b></p> <p><b>Young Adult (above 18 years)</b></p> <p><b>Parent/Guardian</b></p> | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> </table> |  |  |  |
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\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name and Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

Identification Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Language used: \_\_\_\_\_

## A7: Instruction sheet for social network mapping (phase 2)

The researcher shows the concentric circle map (see next page) and explains that **ego** (i.e., the participant) is in the middle. After this, the following steps should be followed:

Ask the participant to: “**Write down the names of all of the people that are important to you on this sheet, inside these three circles. The more important they are to you, the closer to the centre they should be.**” Don’t define what ‘important’ means and don’t specify a period. If the participant does not know how to make sense of a (changing) relationship (e.g., when someone used to be important to the participant but suddenly lost contact with this person), he/she will still be encouraged to put the name in one of the three circles.

Ask the participant to “**Write down the names of people you have difficulties or a difficult relationships within the circle in the bottom right corner of the page.**”

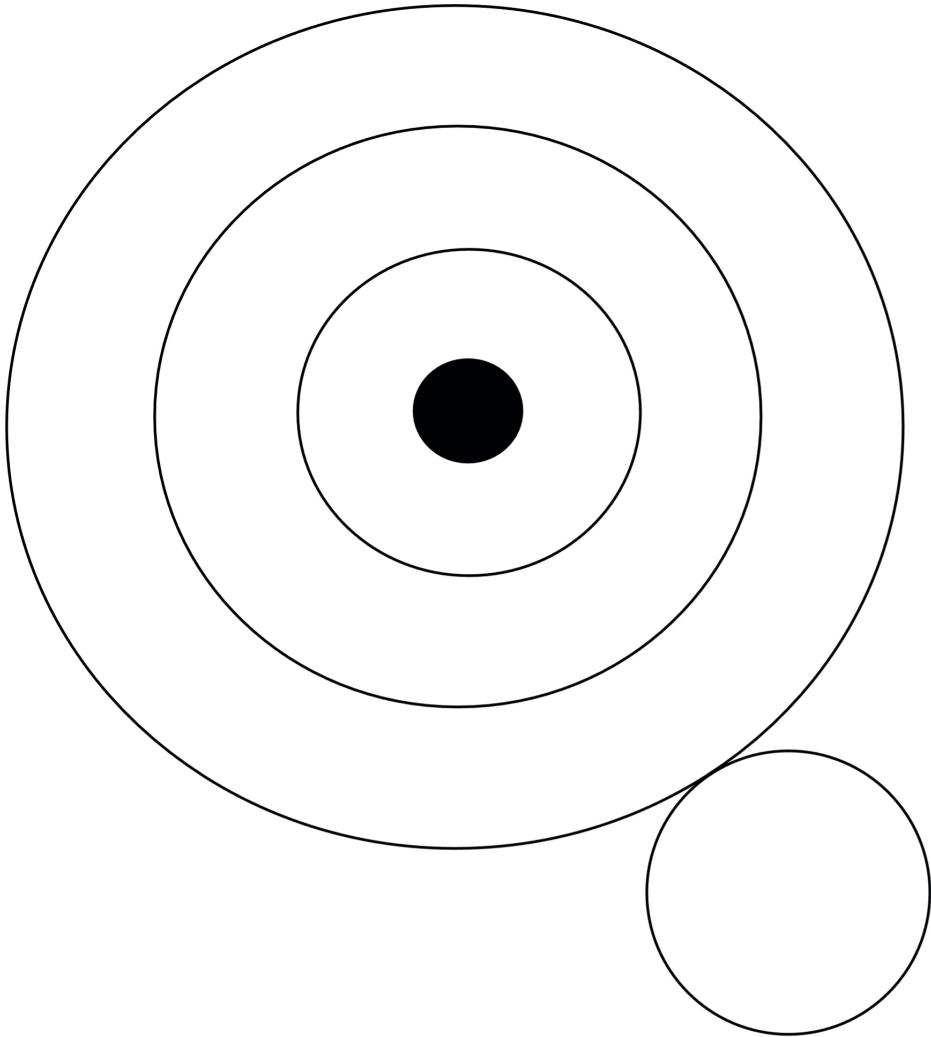
After arranging the names according to importance in ego’s life, the researcher uses the following probing questions to gain information<sup>4</sup> about the names in the circle and elicit more names in specific areas of interest:

<b>Mobility trajectory</b>	<b>Resilience</b>	<b>Aspirations</b>	<b>Educational trajectory</b>
In which country and region/city do each of these people live? How do you stay in touch with people who live far away? How often are you in contact? Through what means? (Go in-depth on a few examples) How often are you in touch with them? Who do you stay in touch with most? Why? Have you seen/visited them? If yes, when and why?	Who do you go to for support/how do you get support (about school, family, friends, the future and choices after school)? (Address these different categories one by one and colour-code them)	Can you tell me about someone you admire/ a role model? What do you admire about them? Why?	Who do you go to for help with your homework? Who gives you advice/provides guidance related to your education/ career? Who attends your meetings with your teacher/mentor in school?

*\*Differentiate between names added in the first round (in response to the general question) and those added through probing questions. The researcher should take separate notes about participants’ reasoning/explanations (of placement of names) and responses to probing questions.*

<sup>4</sup> Gather the following characteristics about each actor in the concentric circle: gender, age (if possible) and relationship to ego (for an example, see the relationship code document on the P-Drive).

**A8: concentric circle map for social network mapping**



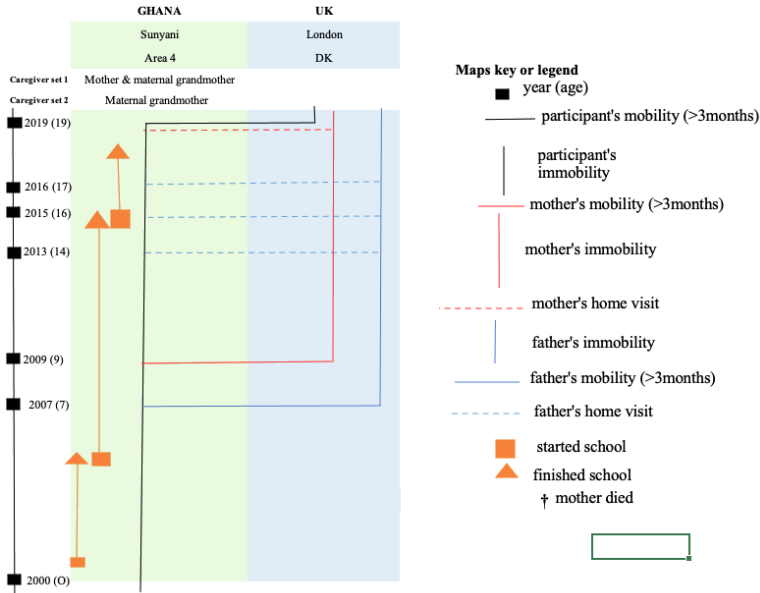


Figure A1: An example of a mobility trajectory map depicting one change in caregiver throughout transnational parent-child separation (Cutter's map)

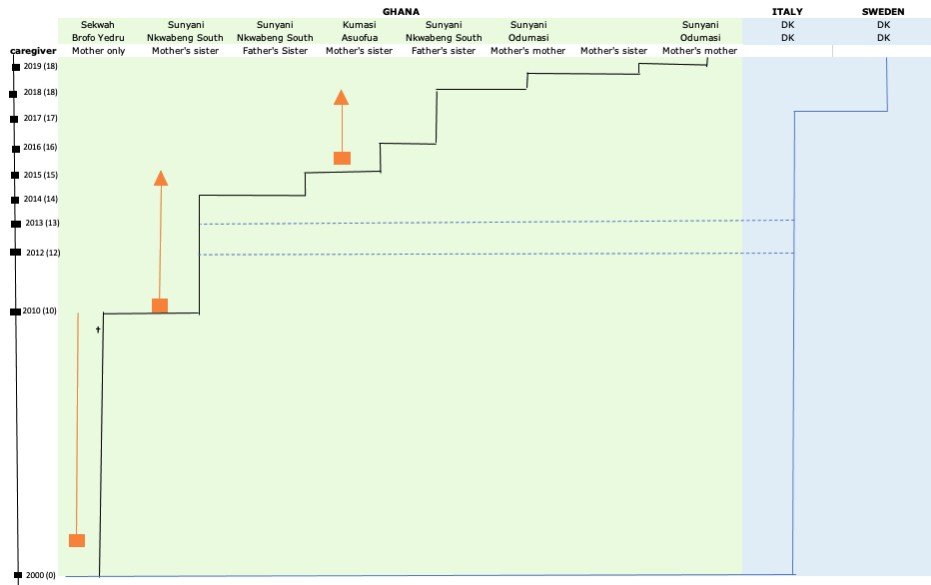


Figure A2: An example of a mobility trajectory map depicting many changes in caregiver throughout transnational parent-child separation (Donna's map)



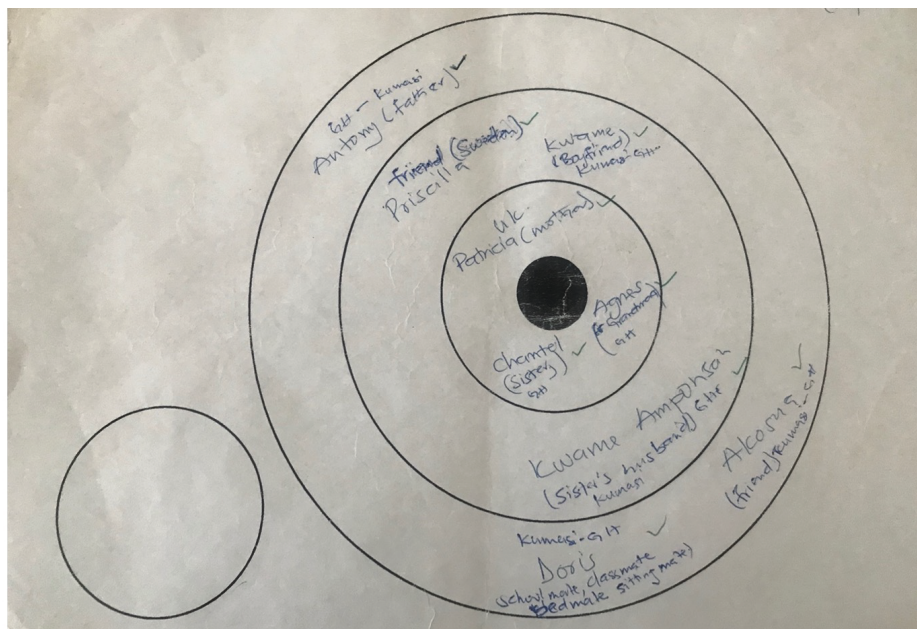


Figure A3: An example of a concentric circle depicting a closely related relationship with a migrant parent and caregiver (Ntsonu)

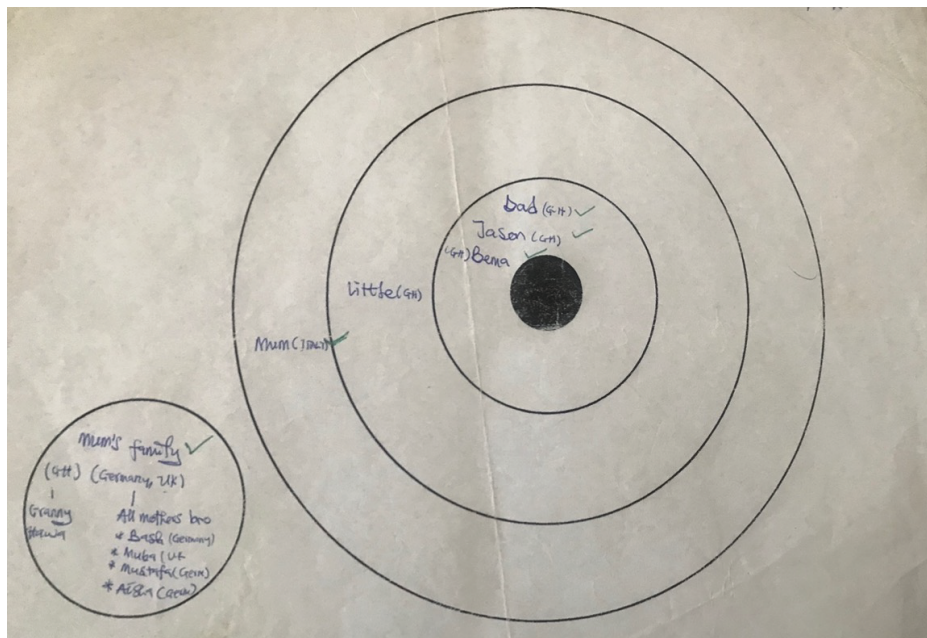


Figure A4: An example of a concentric circle depicting a distant relationship with a migrant parent and maternal extended relatives (Gusta)

# B

## Supplementary Materials Chapter 4

Table B1: Participants' characteristics and changes in houses, caregivers and schools before and during parental migration

Pseudonyms	Sex	Age	Year of separation	Changes in houses			Changes in caregivers			Changes in primary and secondary schools attended		
				Total	Before	During	Total	Before	During	Total	Before	During
Pearl	F	22	1998	7	1	6	6	1	5	7	0	7
Jina	F	19	2012	6	3	3	3	1	2	5	3	2
Guess	F	19	2011	5	4	1	4	3	1	5	3	2
Veeka	F	18	2002	7	1	6	2	1	1	5	0	5
Master	M	18	2001	2	1	1	1	1	0	5	0	5
Tin	M	23	1995	2	0	2	3	0	3	5	0	5
Oje	F	18	2000	3	0	3	2	0	2	4	0	4
Wappy	M	22	2000	6	1	5	5	1	4	4	0	4
Dusty	M	19	1999	5	1	4	4	1	3	4	0	4
Nronsu	F	22	2006	1	0	0	3	0	3	4	0	4
Venta	m	19	2015	4	3	1	1	1	0	4	1	3

# C

## Supplementary Materials Chapter 5

Table C1: Summary of empirical results showing shifting relationships between migration aspirations and capabilities

Groups	Parents' views of their children's migration aspirations	Young people's initial plans: timing of migration and motivations	Capabilities: parental support and examination performance	Change in aspirations over time and expressions of agency
1	Parents agree with children's aspirations and can help	Plans to travel later for tourism, family reunification or work	Parents provide moral and financial support for their children's international migration and local career development. Good examination scores enable youth to participate in local higher education, or poor grades hinder their participation.	Children move abroad immediately instead of later when confronted with barriers to their pursuit of local opportunities
2	Parents disagree and can help	Plans to migrate as soon as possible for international education and family reunification	Parents provide moral and financial support for local career development only. Examination performance is the same as above.	Children try to persuade migrant parents for help to move but finally accept it is not forthcoming. They then delay their migration plans
3	Parents agree but lack the means to help	Plans to migrate as soon as possible for family reunification, work and education	Parents provide moral support for international migration and moral and financial support for local career development. Examination performance is the same as above.	Children attempt to ensure parental support for their immediate migration and change plans when they recognise support is not forthcoming.
4	Limited or no contact with migrant parents	Plans to migrate as soon as possible for work	Limited or no parental support for local and international desires. Examination performance is the same as above.	Children seek alternative support from their networks, locally or internationally, for their migration aspirations and shift their plans about when to migrate.

## Impact paragraph

This section is about the societal contributions I have made using this dissertation's content and valorising the outcomes of this study. First, I discuss my contributions to existing literature through conferences, workshops, seminars, guest lectures and open-access publications. Secondly, I valorise the overall implications of the study for social actors, particularly origin and host country governments. Finally, I indicate how this work will continue contributing to knowledge production, including using unpublished data.

This dissertation has resulted in four publications in international journals and as chapters in books, extending nascent literature about stayer youth, i.e., migrants' children living in origin countries. Three of the four publications form the empirical bases of this dissertation, specifically their agency for transnational digital parent-child communication, educational trajectories and migration aspirations-capabilities alignment. All empirical chapters of this dissertation are co-authored and freely accessible online through two international journals and a Springer book chapter. The fourth publication, a book chapter not part of the dissertation, explains our research methodologies on the mobilities of children of migrants in the Global South and North. Overall, the methodological paper shows how quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method researchers can collect mobility data using the MO-TRAYL project's trajectory method.

So far, I have shared published study results in local and international academic meetings, including conferences, seminars and guest lectures. I presented my emerging findings at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' Transnational Migration research group throughout my fieldwork and afterwards. Furthermore, I shared the study results at four international conferences, International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion (IMISCOE) 2021 and 2022 and Development Studies Association (DSA) 2022. and Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) 2021. I also offered guest lectures at Maastricht University (Globalisation and Development Studies master and minor programmes) and Leiden University College (Governance and Global Affairs) based on some of my study results. In preparing and delivering my lectures to these students, I sought to highlight and discuss how my observations related to or differed from existing adult-centric and Global North-based literature on transnational families. By doing so, I demonstrated to the students how they could design their research to extend existing knowledge.

This dissertation, constituting three open-access publications, improves existing knowledge by uncovering what stayer youth's agency entails for desirable life chances momentarily (for example, at schooling transition points) and for shorter or longer periods of parental migration. Thus conceptually, this dissertation extends knowledge about stayer youth by arguing that they are agentic if scholars critically consider how they adapt to transnational family life by relying on a broad social support network. By extending nascent knowledge about stayer youth's agency for transnational family life, this project also demarcates limitations of the youth's agency for further investigation. Through this

qualitative investigation, this work enhances understanding of stayer youth's experiences and aspirations.

By gleaning through why stayer youth activated their agency through extended social network support for their lives, I reflect here on the policy implications of my work. My work shows that some stayer youth have limited support in their transnational families for their education and migration aspirations due to their parents' living abroad as irregular migrants. Such parents do not have the financial resources to be able to remit and at times, break off, at least temporarily, through communication with their stayer children. It is important for destination governments to understand the full repercussions of their migration governance. The effects are also felt outside of their nation-state borders through the effects that migrant parents' undocumented status has on stayer youth.

At the same time, my work has implications for origin country governments' policies. Stayer youth can face life difficulties, including low or lacking migrant parent support and inadequate local caregiver support. Therefore, programmes in the origin countries available to children and youth in need must not assume that having a migrant parent necessarily means that young people are financially taken care of. Local caregiver support is not always available and enough. Existing youth social protection programmes should include every child and young person in need, including stayers, to get the required security or opportunities for upward social mobility.

Stayer youth's migration aspirations often stemmed from their inability to see a viable future for themselves in the studied origin country, Ghana. Therefore, it is important to address social and economic problems facing youth transitioning out of secondary and tertiary schools in origin countries. Stayer youth continue to aspire to emigrate because they find inadequate social and economic opportunities for life advancement in their local environments, especially after secondary and higher education completion. These stayer youth compare their local contexts to realities abroad, which they find online, and through what migrant peers (friends and family members like siblings and cousins) say about living overseas.

Global migration policies and programs that strive to improve life opportunities for migrants' children make little mention of stayer youth, if at all. Likewise, African countries' state policies about migration, children or youth development hardly consider stayer youth. My dissertation shows that this is a particular group worthy of specialised attention based on their demographic status, lived experiences or life aspirations. The detailed information about stayer youth in this dissertation offers some contextual information to think about how to improve stayer youth development.

During my 15 months of fieldwork as part of the ERC-funded MO-TRAYL project, I also piloted and collected a quantitative dataset that I will use in future publications. After my PhD, I will use the quantitative dataset and remaining ethnographic data for publications. I am currently working on two articles with Maastricht University scholars and the final project book with the MO-TRAYL team, besides personal ideas for individual publications.

Lastly, I have teamed up with other researchers at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University, who are also working on migrants' children, to organise a workshop with the Centre for Migration Studies at the University of Ghana on 13-16 June 2023. This workshop comprises a societal impact panel where I will discuss the policy implications of my work with academic and non-academic audiences. The last day of the workshop is dedicated to early career researchers at the University of Ghana. I am co-organising a methodology training for early career researchers based on the mobility trajectory methodology developed in the MO-TRAYL project. A second workshop will be dedicated to helping early career scholars to publish their work by providing training and specific feedback on the drafts of their work to encourage them to publish.



## English summary

Most of the information on stayer youth is based on what migrant parents and local caregivers do for and say about these youth's experiences and aspirations. The current body of literature rarely considers the agency of stayer youth and whether and how it evolves. Therefore, this dissertation examines how stayer youth's experiences and aspirations develop over their lives using youth-centric and temporal approaches to highlight the youth's agency in shaping their lives. Taking the case of stayer youth in Ghana, where stayer youth compose as high as 16% of the urban population of school-age youth, this work specifically looks at the agency of stayer youth in shaping their educational trajectories and migration aspirations over time using their social support networks which supplement or complement the support or the lack of support from their migrant parents. This dissertation also shows the agency of stayer youth through digital media, specifically WhatsApp, in sustaining transnational parent-child relationships over time, i.e., maintaining a connection across borders.

I conducted this research by compiling life stories, including youth mobility trajectory maps, interviews, observation, hang-out and conversation moments using trajectory grid, social network maps and interview guides. The most innovative method was youth mobility trajectory mapping, i.e., gathering information about the participants' changing places of residence, caregivers, family constellations, and educational trajectories. Mapping the youth's educational trajectories entailed showing changing schools, educational tracks, transitions, and pathways in each study participant's life, including who decided each school a participant attended throughout the life course. With all the information I collected about each person using several tools and strategies for 15 months, it was imperative to put stayer youth's agency at the forefront of this dissertation. On the one hand, this investigation relates to the youth's changing experiences and aspirations throughout the time they were separated from their migrant parents. On the other hand, it concerns how they decided to interact with people in their network, including caregivers and parents and other kin, teachers and friends, for resources for their experiences and aspirations. Below, I summarise the key conclusions of this dissertation's empirical and concluding remarks.

The third chapter of this dissertation examined how WhatsApp helps stayer youth to actively sustain their ties with their parents across international borders. Due to WhatsApp's widespread accessibility and low cost, I discovered that most young people used this digital medium or platform to stay in touch with their migrant parents. Furthermore, they strategically used different tools WhatsApp offers to support their existing relationships with migrant parents or modify their relationships with their parents. These tactics, which were dependent on the technical ability of the young people, included scheduling moments of contact with parents, enlisting local and international sibling support, and using silence and brevity (succinctness) to signal a certain message.

Stayer youth who received little support and had a distant relationship with their migrant parents showed agency by having brief discussions, remaining silent, and only contacting their

parents in times of need. Others relied on their siblings in their country of origin and abroad for advice on the best times to contact their migrant parents. Stayer youth occasionally requested their siblings to make requests on their behalf when the migrant parents and siblings got along well. Others in a good or relatively good relationship with their migrant parents sustained their bonds based on agreed understandings of the most effective time for communication. No matter how stayer youth maintained their ties with migrant parents through accessible and affordable digital communication tools, they often tried to exercise their agency through possible varying strategies to sustain whatever bonds they could have over time.

In chapter four, the dissertation proved how stayer youth use their agency to shape their primary and secondary education trajectories, mainly to deal with interruptions in schooling. I discovered three key obstacles that often caused interruptions in stayer youth's educational trajectories: frequent changes in housing and caregivers, financial limitations, and a lack of learning support. Each of the three is an outcome of parental migration, although they often interact and shape schooling interruptions together.

Stayer youth exercise their agency by relying on extensive social network support to overcome observed interruptions. They occasionally discover that local caregivers' and migrant parents' educational help is insufficient for schooling. As a result, these youth ask their siblings, extended relatives who are not caregivers, teachers, and friends for help. These youth do so by enlisting the help of local and internationally based siblings and friends, school instructors, and other adult family members to help them with their schoolwork. Therefore, stayer youth exercise their agency by asking for and accepting help from significant others to supplement the care they receive from local caregivers and migrant parents. Furthermore, even after finishing secondary school, most stayer youth still rely on their extended social network support for the required information to transition into adulthood, including pursuing post-secondary education and planning their own migration projects.

In chapter five, the dissertation shows how stayer youth intentionally pace their desire to migrate to match their actual capabilities. Stayer youth in origin countries, including Ghana, often wish to migrate abroad. But since they often lack the means to move when they conceive these plans, extremely few people really move out of their origin country. The literature, therefore, often portrays migration aspirations as binary: either youth in origin settings want to move or they do not. However, I learned that things are not as straightforward. The migration aspirations, dreams or desires of stayer youth are influenced by various factors discussed through four identified categories or typologies. Some stayer youth have migrant parents who support their wish to migrate and have the resources to enable them to do so at a time that the stayer youth prefer. Another group of young people have migrant parents who can afford but disapprove of the youth's desire to migrate. A third group have migrant parents who support their dreams but lack the resources to help them make such dreams come true. The last group consists of young people whose migrant parents are either not involved in their everyday life or have distanced themselves from these youth's daily lives and aspirations.

Despite the varying background of identified categories, all stayer youth exercise some agency for their migration aspirations and actions over time. Stayer youth in the first category initially preferred to delay their plans, thereby choosing to wait voluntarily and move out after local higher education completion. But when they encounter higher education difficulties in their origin country, they switch their plan of migrating later to migrating now through the parental support they can get. Those who recognised misalignments between their migration aspirations and needed abilities (the three other typologies) choose to delay their migration while waiting in Ghana for a later opportunity. While waiting involuntarily, these youth take advantage of local career advancement opportunities and a broad social network support to get the required resources for evolving migration desires. Given the evidence, all stayer youth exercise agency for their migration decisions and actions whenever possible.

Overall, this study employed youth-centricity and temporality to show how stayer youth's experiences and aspiration change over time, i.e., dynamics associated with sustaining cross-border parent-child relationships through digital communication technologies, educational trajectories and migration aspirations. Using a youth-centric lens to show how stayer youth experiences and aspirations change over time, this dissertation proves how stayer youth are agents in shaping their lives, even when they are in a vulnerable position due to parental migration. The methodology of youth-centricity and temporality, applied in the dissertation, made it possible to observe and explain what stayer youth do to attain particular outcomes and set specific goals, like finishing high school or aspiring to move through a broad social network support while their parents are away. Moreover, by relying on a wide social network for their experiences and aspirations, stayer youth gain a sense of security in life. Therefore, this work has shown that stayer youth are agentic by how they try to adapt to parental migration over time. Hence, instead of just making policy and applying it to them, these youth should be actively consulted, part of policy making, and engage with pertinent stakeholders to share their needs.

## Nederlandse samenvatting (Dutch Summary)

Het gros van de informatie over *stayer youth*, ofwel jongeren die in het land van herkomst achterblijven terwijl hun ouders migreren, is gebaseerd op wat migrantenouders en lokale verzorgers doen en zeggen over de ervaringen en aspiraties van deze jongeren. Tot op heden beschouwt de literatuur nauwelijks de *agency* (de mogelijkheid om je leven zelf richting te geven) van achterblijvende jongeren en hoe die zich ontwikkelt. Daarom onderzoekt deze dissertatie hoe de ervaringen en aspiraties van deze jongeren zich tijdens hun leven evolueert. Het doet dit door een tijdslenzen te gebruiken alsook een perspectief waarin jongeren centraal staan om zo te kunnen bestuderen hoe jongeren hun leven actief vormgeven. Met als casus achterblijvende jongeren in Ghana, die hier 16 procent van de schoolgaande stedelijke bevolking vormen, richt dit werk zich vooral op de *agency* van deze achterblijvende jongeren. Het kijkt hoe zij in hun sociale netwerk tappen om hun onderwijs en migratieaspiraties vorm te geven en complementeert of vervangt daarbij de steun die zij al dan niet van hun migrantenouders ontvangen. Deze dissertatie toont ook dat achterblijvende jongeren *agency* disponeren door het gebruik van sociale media (vooral *Whatsapp*) in het onderhouden van transnationale ouder-kind relaties over de tijd heen. Met andere woorden behouden zij een band over de grenzen heen.

Ik heb dit onderzoek uitgevoerd door levensverhalen te verzamelen, die verkregen zijn door methoden zoals het letterlijk in kaart brengen van jeugdmobiliteitstrajecten en sociale netwerken, interviews, observaties, tijd doorbrengen met de jongeren en gewoon te kletsen en door interviewguides. De meest innovatieve methode die gebruikt is in deze studie is het in kaart brengen van jeugdmobiliteitstrajecten. Wat inhield dat informatie werd verzameld over verhuizingen, veranderende verzorgers, familieconstellaties en onderwijstrajecten over de tijd heen. Het in kaart brengen van onderwijstrajecten behelsde het opschrijven van veranderingen over de tijd heen in school, onderwijsniveau en andere transitieën in de participant zijn/haar leven, inclusief wie de school koos. Met al de informatie die ik van elke participant heb verzameld over de 15 maanden veldwerk was het zeer van belang dat hun *agency* centraal stond. Aan de ene kant, verhoudt dit onderzoek zich tot de veranderende ervaringen en aspiraties tijdens de geografische scheiding van hun migrantenouders. Aan de andere kant staat centraal hoe zij hun sociale netwerk activeren om de nodige hulp te krijgen voor het realiseren van hun aspiraties. Hieronder zal ik de belangrijkste bevindingen en conclusies van de dissertatie samenvatten.

Het derde hoofdstuk van deze dissertatie bestudeerde hoe *Whatsapp* achtergebleven jongeren helpt om actief de banden met hun ouders te behouden die in het buitenland zijn. Doordat *Whatsapp* wijdverbreid toegankelijk en goedkoop is, vond ik dat de meeste jongeren dit platform gebruiken om in contact te blijven met hun migrantenouders. Bovendien gebruikten zij de verschillende functies die *Whatsapp* biedt om hun bestaande relaties met hun ouders te behouden of om deze relatie te veranderen. Deze tactieken, die afhingen van hun technische vaardigheden, bevatten bijvoorbeeld het strategisch inplannen van

contactmomenten met hun ouders, het gebruik maken van broers of zussen zowel wonend met de migrantenouders als elders, en het gebruiken van momenten van stilte en beknoptheid om een bepaald signaal af te geven.

Achtergebleven jongeren die weinig steun kregen van hun migrantenouders en een afstandelijke relatie hadden toonden *agency* door hun berichtgeving kort te houden, door stil te blijven en enkel hun ouders te benaderen wanneer er nood aan de man was. Soms rekenden deze jongeren op hun broers en zussen die konden bemiddelen of verzoeken konden indienen bij de ouders als hun relatie met de ouders goed was. Anderen achtergeblevenen die een goede relatie met hun ouders hadden behielden hun banden doordat ze goed begrepen wanneer en hoe ze het beste met hun ouders konden communiceren. Hoe deze jeugd de banden ook behield, ze gebruikten hun *agency* vaak door verschillende strategieën te gebruiken om hun band met hun ouders te behouden.

Hoofdstuk vier bewijst dat achterblijvende jeugd hun *agency* gebruiken om hun basis en voortgezet onderwijs te vormen. Vooral om om te gaan met onderbrekingen in hun onderwijs. Ik heb drie primaire obstakels ontdekt die vaak tot deze onderbrekingen leidden: het frequent veranderen van huisvesting en verzorger, financiële beperkingen, en een gebrek aan leerondersteuning. Elk van de drie is een gevolg van oudermigratie, alhoewel ze vaak interacteren en samen de schoolonderbrekingen vormgeven.

Om weer terug te komen van de schoolonderbrekingen maken de achtergebleven jeugd gebruik van hun uitgebreide sociale netwerk. Ze komen er soms achter dat de hulp die ze krijgen van hun ouders en verzorgers te kort schiet om hun onderwijs te behalen. Daarom vragen zij hun broers en zussen, familieleden, docenten en vrienden voor hulp, zowel lokaal als in het buitenland. Ze helpen bijvoorbeeld met het huiswerk of financieel door (een deel van) het schoolgeld te betalen. Dus door het vragen en accepteren van hulp oefenen ze *agency* uit. Zelfs na het afmaken van de middelbare school maken deze jongeren gebruik van deze netwerken voor het realiseren voor hun migratie- en onderwijsaspiraties.

In hoofdstuk vijf laat de dissertatie zien dat achtergebleven jongeren bewust hun verlangen om te migreren aanpassen aan hun werkelijke capaciteiten. Vaak willen jongeren waarvan de ouders zijn gemigreerd ook migreren. Omdat ze echter vaak de middelen niet hebben om te emigreren wanneer ze deze plannen ontwikkelen, migreren er echt maar enkele mensen. De literatuur schildert deze migratieaspiraties vaak af als binair: of je wilt migreren of je wilt dat niet. Niettemin leerde ik dat dit niet zo zwart-wit is. De migratieaspiraties, dromen en verlangens van achtergebleven jeugd worden beïnvloed door verschillende factoren die in te delen zijn in 4 typologieën. Sommige van hen hebben migrantenouders die hun wens ondersteunen om te migreren en hebben ook de middelen om dit te realiseren wanneer de jongeren dat willen. Een andere groep heeft migrantenouders die hen wel zouden kunnen helpen die droom te realiseren maar hun wens afkeuren. Een derde groep heeft migrantenouders die wel willen helpen hun droom te realiseren maar gewoonweg de middelen niet hebben. Ten slotte bestaat er een groep waarvan de ouders niet betrokken zijn in het alledaagse leven van hun achtergebleven kinderen of afstand van hen genomen hebben.

Ondanks de verschillende achtergronden van de bovengenoemde categorieën oefenden alle jongeren *agency* uit in het vormgeven van hun migratieaspiraties en de acties die ze ondernomen hebben om die te bereiken. De jongeren in de eerste categorie wilden hun plannen eerst uitstellen en wachten tot hun onderwijs afgerond is. Echter wanneer ze moeilijkheden ondervinden bij het behalen van hun diploma's in het hoger onderwijs, veranderen ze hun plan en willen meteen migreren met behulp van hun ouders. Degenen die beseffen dat hun aspiraties en capaciteiten niet op één lijn liggen kiezen ervoor om hun migratieplannen uit te stellen en te wachten op een latere kans. Terwijl zij onvrijwillig aan het wachten zijn, maken de jeugd gebruik van lokale mogelijkheden tot het bouwen van een carrière en hun uitgebreide sociale netwerk die hen kan ondersteunen met hun queeste. Nogmaals laat dit zien dat deze jongeren agentisch zijn waar mogelijk.

Gebruikmakend van temporale methoden die de jongeren centraal stelt kon deze studie aantonen dat de ervaringen en aspiraties die jongeren hebben veranderen door de tijd. We zagen dat in hoe ze de relaties met hun ouders vormgeven door sociale media, hun onderwijstrajecten vormgeven en hun migratieaspiraties aanpassen. Door deze lens gericht op jongeren laat deze dissertatie zien hoe jongeren hun eigen leven vormgeven ook al zitten ze in een precaire situatie door de migratie van hun ouders. Deze methoden maakten het mogelijk om te observeren wat jongeren eigenlijk doen om bepaalde dromen te realiseren, zoals hun middelbare school afmaken met de hulp van hun bredere sociale netwerk. Bovendien verkrijgen de jongeren een gevoel van zekerheid in hun leven door dit netwerk. Daarom laat dit werk zien dat jongeren *agency* beoefenen omdat ze zich moeten blijven aanpassen aan de afwezigheid van hun ouders. Vandaar dat we jongeren actief moeten consulteren, hun deel moeten maken van het vormgeven van beleid en hen in gesprek moeten laten gaan met belanghebbenden zodat zij kunnen delen wat zij nodig hebben en het niet weer een 'volwassene' is die beslist wat nodig is. Want zoals deze dissertatie toont zijn zij heel capabel in het maken van beslissingen en strategieën.

## Acknowledgements

*I am most grateful to my Lord and personal Savior, Jesus Christ, Son of The Living God, for completing this phase of my academic career development.*

Besides my personal Lord and Saviour, I could not have achieved the award of a PhD degree without the support of many people in and outside of Maastricht University. In this section of my dissertation, I express my sincere gratitude to everyone and all institutions for their diverse contributions into PhD journey.

Firstly, I am most grateful to my supervisors, Prof. Valentina Mazzucato & Dr. Karlijn Haagsman, for their care and academic mentoring. From the first supervision meeting until the last, I have learned many things which have become part of my academic lifestyle. I am incredibly grateful to my supervisors for how much they cared about my wellbeing. Above all, their professional guidance and insights always assured me that I could manage to spearhead the topic I proposed to investigate for this PhD degree. Their commitment to meeting me often to discuss my ideas was admirable, especially from the onset until they became convinced after my first publication that I could manage many things as an independent researcher or academic. They were always available to read my work and send me some feedback which guided our meetings. After each session, I had ideas of how to revise my drafts for further comments or publication, and eventually, the final assessment leading to the award of the certificate of honour.

This PhD, as part of the MO-TRAYL project, led by the principal investigator, Prof. Valentina Mazzucato, will not be possible without the financial support of the European Union through its European Research Council Consolidator Grant (No. 682982) at the prestigious Universiteit Maastricht (Maastricht University). Therefore, I thank the funder and the university for supporting my desire to become a PhD holder.

From the first day I reported to work at Maastricht University (1 March 2027) until my public defence ceremony (20 June 2023), I have received the support of many academic and non-academic staff. My first encounter with the Graduate School office staff, Sabine Kuipers, was amazing and assuring. When I also first arrived, I had not yet secured a stable accommodation. Therefore, I rotated sleeping in the houses of different colleagues, starting with my promotor. When I had to leave my promotor's house, a new colleague on the MO-TRAYL project as myself, Gladys Akom Ankobrey, asked me to move in and live with her if I did not mind for the time being until I found my apartment or studio. Fortunately, I found a studio within a reasonable amount of time with the support of several colleagues. I am grateful to both of you for the accommodation.

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## About the author

Onallia Esther Osei (1990) was born in Ghana. She obtained her undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Ghana, and moved to the Netherlands in 2017 to start her PhD studies at Maastricht University.

After completing her bachelor's degree in Geography and Resource Development with Information Studies in 2010 at the University of Ghana, Onallia served as a national service personnel at the University of Ghana, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER). This National Service Programme is a compulsory one-year service required of all citizens of Ghana aged 18 years and older at the time of completing or obtaining their first tertiary education degree or diploma. After national service, Onallia continued to work as a research assistant at ISSER on internationally funded research projects until she departed for The Netherlands to pursue this PhD.

On March 1, 2017, Onallia started as a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), Maastricht University. Onallia's PhD is about the agency of international migrants' children staying in their origin countries, using the case of Ghana. Using a youth-centric perspective, Onallia conducted 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork and published two articles and two book chapters about stayer youth's agency. In addition, Onallia has given guest lectures in the Netherlands, specifically at Maastricht University and Leiden University College. She has also co-organised workshops about migration and development at conferences and webinars, besides presenting her work at international conferences.

Onallia looks forward to using the new knowledge collected during her PhD to engage with academic and policy actors concerning stayer youth's development. She already uses and will continue to rely on her data to show how stayer youth's reunification with their parents abroad builds on diverse pre-migration biographies.



