

# Transnational youth mobility trajectories

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## Impact paragraph

This dissertation analyses the transnational mobility of young people with a migration background between Ghana and Germany. By studying migrant youth's mobility trajectories – that is, their geographic moves over time and space, and the family constellations that accompany these moves – the thesis analyses their mobility patterns, how they experience mobility, and the ways in which mobility affects their lives. Recent research indicates that the majority of migrant youth in Europe, including those who have migrated themselves and the children of migrants, are regularly mobile to and from their or their parents' country of origin. Yet most research and public debate about migrant youth excludes their experience in the country of origin, instead focusing on the local factors that shape their lives, or on how they stay connected to transnational networks and influences from within their country of residence.

The objective of this thesis is to contribute to understandings of migrant youth in ways that more accurately reflect their transnationally mobile lives. To do so, I bring migrant transnationalism research and mobility studies into dialogue and draw on other bodies of research to analyse the patterns, experiences and effects of mobility in the lives of young people of Ghanaian background living in Hamburg, Germany. My findings address important research gaps, including the absence of mobility in much research seeking to understand migrant youth's lives; the adult-centricity of migration and mobility research; and a lack of empirical data about an increasingly important yet understudied group and migration flow: African-background youth in Europe, and more specifically, Ghanaian-background youth in Germany. In this section, I outline the achieved and potential scientific and societal impact of my research.

First, the study reveals how physical mobility is woven into the lives of migrant youth, highlights its diverse forms and effects, and reveals the changing role mobility plays in young people's lives over time. This finding has the potential to contribute to various bodies of research, including those not specifically focused on mobility but which seek to understand migrant youth's lives. Second, the study shows that mobility provides migrant youth with transnational resources, such as confidence, adaptability, educational motivation and transnational frames of reference. These resources are gained in one country and then translated to and used within another, highlighting the importance of using a transnational mobility lens in research about migrant youth. Such a lens reveals that the contexts in which young people develop resources extend far beyond the boundaries of their country of residence. Third, the study reveals young people's agency in translating and using their transnational resources between the countries of origin and residence, highlighting the need to study migrant youth's lives and mobility from their own perspectives. Fourth, young

people's transnational mobility trajectories help identify the mechanisms at work in how migrant youth's different social positions in the countries of origin and residence are interconnected. For example, they access resources like confidence and discipline through their relatively high social-class positions in Ghana, which they then use to navigate their school transitions in Germany, where they occupy lower social-class positions. Finally, my youth-centric and mobile methodology presents various promising techniques for studying the diverse and complex mobility trajectories of migrant youth. These methods can be adapted to multi- and single-sited research and quantitative and qualitative studies across various disciplines to better account for the role of mobility in young lives. These findings are all relevant to transnational migration research and mobility studies, as well as to other disciplines that seek to understand young people's lives, including youth studies and education research.

My findings are also relevant to those working with transnationally mobile migrant youth in various contexts, particularly in education. While I intend to further develop this line of impact in consultation with educators and policymakers themselves, here I offer some preliminary food-for-thought. Most teachers do incredible work under enormous workloads, multiple pressures and significant resource constraints. They operate in complex and bureaucratic policy environments. Yet small changes to the way they understand and interact with migrant youth could make significant differences to students' outcomes. First, being alert to the transnational resources that nurture their students' education and well-being can be achieved by expanding their view of students' support systems to include ongoing relationships with people abroad (e.g., peers or former caregivers) and by recognising that many migrant students occupy higher social-class positions in their countries of origin than in their countries of residence. Finally, adopting a pro-mobility stance that enables students' ongoing mobility to the country of origin would help facilitate the flow of transnational resources and the maintenance of transnational relationships that contribute so much to young people's educational outcomes. This can be achieved by, for example, making flexible policies on student absences, providing mobile learning resources, and including students' mobility experiences into the curriculum.

I have pursued making academic impact with my research through various channels. Two of my empirical chapters have been published in international peer-reviewed journals and I co-authored a chapter with MO-TRAYL colleagues in a forthcoming book on innovative methodologies for studying migration and education. My chapter "Changing relationships to the country of origin through transnational mobility: migrant youth's visits to Ghana" (co-authored with Prof. Valentina Mazzucato) was shortlisted for the Rinus Penninx Best Paper Award at the IMISCOE 2021 conference. Throughout my PhD, I presented my research at eight international conferences covering diverse academic disciplines, including African studies, childhood studies, migration, and education. My research has also made impact

through my teaching, including in courses at the University College Maastricht and in the inter-faculty Bachelor of Global Studies, and in guest lectures at various universities.

I have also tried to ensure my research has societal impact, both collaboratively within the MO-TRAYL project and individually. Together with my MO-TRAYL colleagues, I designed and implemented Finding Your Voice – a 3-day storytelling workshop for participants from MO-TRAYL’s European case studies, during which I ran podcast and interview trainings. The workshop resulted in a website and (e)book, which share young people’s stories of growing up transnationally and insights on using arts/science collaborations to engage with young people.<sup>50</sup> Finding Your Voice won the 2021 Valorisation Prize of Maastricht University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences as an outstanding example of research impact. In 2021, I published an article on the science communication website, *The Conversation – Africa*, entitled “Young Ghanaians in Europe travel ‘home’ a lot: why their mobility matters.”<sup>51</sup> The piece has been viewed more than 3,700 times by readers around the world. My research was also featured in a 2019 article, “De kracht van veldwerk? Being there [The power of fieldwork? Being there],” in Maastricht University’s newspaper, *The Observant*.<sup>52</sup> I have actively sought to share my research findings and related insights with diverse audiences through presenting in forums such as PechaKucha Maastricht (2020) and at Lumiere Cinema (2019, 2020). Finally, I am one of four finalists for the NWO’s (Dutch Research Council) Synergy Award 2022 for societal impact of PhD projects, based on my application, “From Generations to Trajectories: Rethinking the way we categorise migrant youth,” which proposes a collaborative project with my fellow MO-TRAYL PhDs involving the Dutch public, policymakers, and educators.

A two-year postdoctoral position with the MO-TRAYL project will provide further opportunities to make scientific and societal impact with my research. I will co-organise and present at the MO-TRAYL conference in 2022 involving academics, policymakers, educators, and research participants. I have secured funding from the Erasmus+ staff mobility scheme to visit the Granada Center for Visual Anthropology (UK) to edit an ethnographic film using footage shot during my fieldwork. The film will be used to share the MO-TRAYL project’s research with broader audiences, including through public channels (e.g., website, film festivals), in teaching, and through academic networks (e.g., conferences, presentations). During my post-doc, comparative research will be conducted across the MO-TRAYL case studies, expanding the contribution of my thesis by exploring the particularities of the Hamburg case in view of the Belgian, Dutch, and Ghanaian cases. The post-doc

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<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.motrayl.com/stories/youth-workshop> and [https://www.motrayl.com/upload/Finding your Voice\\_ebook.pdf](https://www.motrayl.com/upload/Finding_your_Voice_ebook.pdf) (accessed 12 January 2022).

<sup>51</sup> <https://theconversation.com/young-ghanaians-in-europe-travel-home-a-lot-why-their-mobility-matters-169367> (accessed 12 January 2022).

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.observantonline.nl/Home/Artikelen/id/54613> (accessed 12 January 2022).

position will also enable me to continue publishing based on my PhD data, including as part of a co-authored book and in single- and co-authored peer-reviewed publications. I will continue to share my research insights with students in liberal-arts and interdisciplinary undergraduate programs. My plans for creating societal impact include contributing to the recently established MO-TRAYL podcast, presenting my research at the schools, educational institutions, and Ghanaian organisations in Hamburg that participated in my PhD, and writing policy briefs in consultation with educators that report on my research findings and offer practical recommendations for how educational institutions can learn from migrant youth's transnational mobility trajectories.

Research valorisation is a topic close to my heart. My prior work experience in arts and international development and my training in visual ethnography have given me a strong conviction that scholarship must endeavour to engage with the 'real world'. This can be done by finding creative and accessible ways to share research findings and involving diverse stakeholders in the research process itself. Throughout my PhD trajectory, I have actively sought to increase my knowledge and skills regarding valorisation and to contribute to the development of university valorisation initiatives. For example, I was selected to participate in a masterclass on "Community engagement in your research?" organized by the Maastricht Platform for Community-Engaged Research (MPCER) in 2020. In 2021 I was invited to create a video about research impact for PhD candidates as part of the Maastricht University Library's 'Science Communication and Impact' training module.<sup>53</sup> Finally, I was recently appointed to the Faculty of Arts and Social Science's Valorisation Prize Committee for 2022-2023, through which I aim to further support other researchers' valorisation activities and advocate for creative, cross-disciplinary, and collaborative approaches to research impact.

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<sup>53</sup> See 'MO-TRAYL's societal impact: Finding Your Voice' on <https://www.motrayl.com/gallery> (accessed 12 January 2022).