

Transnational contacts of Ghanaian migrants

A study of meanings and identity in Amsterdam Zuidoost

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Abstract

Family is important to Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The migrants retain close relationships with their families in Ghana. This study focuses on the meaning that Ghanaian migrants give to these contacts and the affects the migration process has on the identity of the Ghanaian migrants.

The approach to this research is that of symbolic interactionism. Humans do not simply act or react, but interpret and give meaning to action. Symbols are objects people derive meanings from (Blumer, 1969). I have looked at the symbols Ghanaian migrants and their family attach to migration and how meaning is derived from these symbols.

The meanings that Ghanaian migrants attach to transnational contacts are linked to the expectations that family members have of life in Europe. For the family in Ghana, migration means the opportunity to improve your life and the lives of your family members. Remittances symbolise these expectations of improvement and financial means. This leads to the construction of the identity of a good migrant; a migrants that sends regular remittances to his family in Ghana and invests in the community. This behaviour is rewarded with a grand funeral, which is very important for Ghanaians.

The main features Ghanaian identity are: respect, religious identity and strong family ties. Respect is linked to a desired moral identity that my respondents assign to themselves and other people from Ghana. Ghanaian migrants draw up boundaries between themselves and the 'whites' on the basis of these features and have limited interaction with the Dutch.

The Ghanaian migrants identify themselves as travellers, indicating that they see themselves as temporarily outside their country but not as permanent residents in the Netherlands. Ghana is seen as home, the Promised Land to which the migrant will be returning, even if a person has lived in the Netherlands for thirty years. Therefore it is important for a Ghanaian migrant to invest in the relationship with family in Ghana and other Ghanaians in the Netherlands and maintain his identity as a Ghanaian. After all, the goal is to eventually return home to Ghana.

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	5
2. Theoretical framework.....	6
2.1. Key Concepts	7
3. Research methodology.....	9
3.1. Research site.....	9
3.2. Participant observation	10
3.3. Interviews	11
3.4. Recording data.....	12
3.5. Role as a researcher.....	12
3.6. Data analysis.....	13
4. Findings – Identity	14
4.1. Respect	14
4.2. Religious identity	17
4.3. Ethnicity	19
4.4. Travellers	20
4.5. The notion of home	21
4.6. Ghanaian community in Amsterdam	23
4.7. Summary findings – identity	27
5. Findings - Expectations and Transnational contacts.....	29
5.1 Migrants expectations	29
5.1.1. Expectations before leaving Ghana	29
5.1.2. Expectations of Europe in Ghana	32
5.1.3. Communication about life in the Netherlands.....	33
5.1.4. Summary findings - Expectations.....	35
5.2. Transnational contacts	36
5.2.1. Family in Ghana	36
5.2.2. Support family.....	37
5.2.3. Transnational child – parent relationships.....	40
5.2.4. Visits to family.....	41
5.2.5. Funerals	41
5.2.6. Investing in Ghana	43
5.2.7. Summary – findings transnational contacts.....	45
6. Conclusion and discussion	46
7. Recommendations for further research	50
8. References.....	51
Appendix I: Interview guide.....	52

1. Introduction

There are over 20.000 Ghanaians living in the Netherlands. The actual numbers are most likely higher since undocumented migrants are not included in the statistics of the migrant population (CBS StatLine, May 2011). Migration from Ghana to the Netherlands started in the late 1980s, early 1990s. Before then Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands was sporadic. Most Ghanaians live in the large cities in the Netherlands, with Amsterdam as the main city of residence. Amsterdam Zuidoost has a large Ghanaian community and has different Ghanaian organisations and Ghanaian churches.

This study is the first of two theses focussing on migration to complete my master Development and Rural Innovation. I chose to focus on Ghanaian migrant because there is a large population of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, allowing me to study the same migrant group in both the host country and in the country of origin. This first thesis looks at migration from the perspective of Ghanaian migrants in the Amsterdam Zuidoost, the Netherlands. The second thesis will focus on the on aspiring migrants before they leave Ghana to Europe or the Netherlands.

Ghanaian migrants are, in most cases, economic migrants and classified by Mazzucato (2008) as a new type of migrant to the Netherlands. Opposed to the former guest workers from Morocco and Turkey these new migrants do not have a job lined up for them when they arrive in the Netherlands. They organize their own journey, housing and employing in the Netherlands either in the formal or informal sector. However, most Ghanaians have a friend, relative or at least a contact in the Netherlands before they arrive to help them get started.

Family is very important for a Ghanaian. Migrants stay in close contact with their families in Ghana while living abroad (Mazzucato, 2008). The objective of this research is to understand how the contact between Ghanaian migrants and their home country affects the lives of Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This research focuses on the meaning that Ghanaian migrants give to these contacts and the affects of the migration process on the identity of the Ghanaian migrants.

Research questions

To achieve my research objective this study focuses on the following research questions.

1. How do Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands give meaning to the transnational contacts with the people 'left behind' in Ghana?
2. How is the social identity of Ghanaian migrants constructed and how does transnationalism affect their identities?

Sub-questions

- Who are the important people in the lives of Ghanaian migrants?
- What does it mean to be a migrant?
- What do migrants expect from their migration; and how has this changed before and after the migration?
- What role does migration play in their social identity?
- How do migrants influence each other in giving meaning to their migration?
- What are the perceived expectations that of important others in Ghana have of the migrants?
- How do migrants react to the perceived expectations of important others in Ghana?

2. Theoretical framework

In the first part of this chapter I will explain the overall theoretical approach to the research problem; interpretative sociology and symbolic interactionism. The second part of this chapter focuses on the main concepts used in this study of meaning and identity among Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidooost.

Interpretative Sociology

The theoretical approach to my research is symbolic interactionism which is rooted in interpretative sociology. These theories emerged in the 1960s when views of sociological theorists started to change. During this period the relationship between an individual and society became a very important theme, more specifically the tension between the two. The contemporary theorists focused on interactions rather than on abstract social systems or structures. Moreover, they were interested in the ways people constructed meanings and created meaning in social interaction (Calhoun et al, 2007).

People give meaning to the objects or interactions that make up their world. Action is the process through which people interact, interpret, give meaning and determine situations. Another important conception is that the interpretation and interaction form institutions and networks (Blumer, 1969). The process of shaping institutions is caused by people repeating actions. These repeated actions ultimately form a pattern among individuals. Eventually the patterns of interaction are adopted by more individuals and the interaction becomes an institution: a mutual understanding of how things are done and what they mean (Berger and Luckman, 1966). These institutions not fixed but are constantly negotiated and reshaped through further interaction and interpretation. They never reach one final point but are constantly changing and reforming as interaction takes place between people (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism assumes that humans do not simply act or react. Another person's action is interpreted and is given meaning. The process of interpretation and giving meaning to an action determines the response (Blumer, 1969).

The process of deriving meaning from interaction is what makes the interaction symbolic. Symbols are means for deriving meaning, for example the use of language. These symbols are used by humans to construct meaning in the process of preparing for interaction, interacting with another person and reflecting on that interaction. This is different to the classical stimulus response-model from behavioural psychology and biology that assumes that a certain action always leads to reaction in specific way (Blumer, 1969). For example Pavlov's' dogs salivating when they hear the bell ring.

The unit of analysis in this theoretical approach is the shared meanings of individuals. These meanings are created through the process of interaction. People acting the same way in society is mostly the result of previous interaction that has led to a common understanding of how to act in particular situations (Blumer, 1969). In my research interactions and meanings of interest are the meanings attached to migration and the common understanding of how to do migration, or be a migrant.

The main notion of symbolic interactionism is that action is based on the meaning people give to the objects or interactions that make up their world. This has implications for the method of research in symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1969) stresses the necessity for the researcher to get close to the empirical world of the people being studied. To make sense of the interactions, situations, group existence in their natural setting he states this as a prerequisite to understanding the meanings.

Blumer (1969) however takes naturalism a bit further than I think is realistically possible. He takes the view that the researcher must totally be submerged in the social world of the people being researched and must completely understand and see the world as the research subjects do. However, taking this research problem as the example, it is not possible to completely see the world of the Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidooost as they see it. Regardless of the extended to which I am able to adapt to the culture, behaviour and expectations of the Ghanaian migrants; since I am not a (African) migrant nor I am from Ghana, I cannot draw on the same experiences or interactions that have shaped their social world.

However, having said this, it remains important to understand the social world of the Ghanaian migrant in Amsterdam Zuidoost as much as possible. As an outsider I am not expected to understand the meanings migrants have constructed and can ask questions on issues the Ghanaian migrants have taken for granted. I cannot become a migrant but I can learn to understand a large part of their social world. This is important during data collection, since I would otherwise be guided by my own ideas and assumptions about Ghanaian migrants. Consequently, not collecting valid data that reflects the meaning Ghanaian migrants give to their transnational interaction (Seale 1998, Blumer 1969).

Using symbolic interactionism allows me to analyse the interaction migrants have with each other and with the people that they have left behind in Ghana. By taking meanings as the main focal point I can gain insight into the importance these contacts with Ghana have in the social world of the migrant. I will look at the symbols Ghanaian migrants and their families in Ghana attach to migration and how meaning derived from these symbols. This approach provides me with more insight into why transnational contacts are important and why they take on the form that they have. Symbolic interactionism provides data that will allow for analysis of meanings given to transnationalism as opposed to an overview of transnational activities undertaken (Blumer, 1969).

2.1. Key Concepts

During the rise of the contemporary theorist, a different interest in race and ethnicity emerged. Sociologists started to change their view on migration. Assimilation was no longer seen as the only possible outcome of successful migration. Sociologists started to focus on and recognise cultural differences between people and how these differences were socially constructed (Calhoun et al, 2007). My research focuses on shared meaning and identity of Ghanaian migrants and not on their assimilation to Dutch society. The key concepts important for my research are transnationalism and identity.

Transnationalism

Like many contemporary theorists Portes et al. (1999) take the view that the success of a migrant is not dependent on assimilation, but on their ability to preserve their own culture and navigate their way in a second. Transnationalism is not necessarily a new occurrence, but it has become more visible and easier to engage in since the increase and availability of communication technology. Large distances can be bridged and more migrants have the opportunity to interact with their home country. Although migrants might have engaged in transnational activity throughout history, transnationalism provides a new lens for looking at migration and the 'dual lives' (Portes et al, 1999:217) of migrants.

Portes et al. (1999) identifies two types of transnationalism and with that two ways of analysing transnational activity of migrants: transnationalism from above and from below. The first type refers to transnationalism of economic corporations and governments. The latter refers to transnational activities initiated by and between individuals. My research focuses on transnationalism from below, concentrating on the interaction of individual Ghanaian migrants and investigating the meaning that Ghanaian migrants give to the contacts with the people that they have left behind in Ghana.

Although transnational activity refers to the initiatives of individuals taken across national borders for their own benefit (Portes, 2001), it is possible to include the interaction between migrants in the host country in the concept (Mascini et al. 2009). For my specific case I believe it will add to understanding how transnationalism gains meaning among the Ghanaian migrants. Meanings are constructed by interaction; however it is possible that meanings are not only shaped by interacting with the home country. Migrants living in the Netherlands might also shape the meaning this has for them through interaction with each other. Perceived expectations that people in Ghana might have of the migrants might be shaped by the transnational contacts with the people in Ghana and the interaction that the migrants have among themselves about these transnational contacts (Mazzucato, 2008).

Mazzucato's study (2008) of the double engagement between Ghana and the Netherlands focuses on Ghanaian migrants engaging in transnational activity. She refers to them as economic migrants that have to negotiate their way in the Dutch society. The main focus of her research is this economic aspect to transnationalism and centres around the question how remittances sent by Ghanaian migrants are used. The research provides

insights how migrants provide material and financial support to their family in Ghana. However, the socially constructed reasons why migrants do this and expectations of people in Ghana are only lightly touched upon in her research. The main topic is the outcome of transnational activity in terms of spending remittances.

My research does not concentrate on the outcomes of migration of transnational activity, but on the meanings that are attached to transnational activity and contacts with important others. The focus is on understanding why Ghanaian migrants invest in transnational contacts, the meaning transnational contacts have for them as migrants and how interacting in two nation-states, leading Portes' duals lives (1999), affects their role and identity in their social world.

Identity

A person's identity is dynamic. It is constantly changing and reshaped throughout someone's lifespan. It is shaped by the experiences a person has, but a person's identity also shapes the reflection on those experiences. Information about an individual's notion of identity can be found in people's stories about themselves. Stories in which they themselves or people that they identify with ('we') play the leading role. Stories of self and an individual's life and experiences gives a researcher insight into the reflection of self-hood (Ferguson 2009).

The term migrant is an identity that has been the focus of different studies. This identity brings with it certain expectations, stories and aspirations. However, it is not just a reflection on one's self that shapes this identity. The interaction an individual has with others also contributes to the construction of identity (Blumer 1969, Calhoun 2007, Ferguson 2009).

What makes the identity of migrant complicated is that he lives 'in more than one place at a time, in two or more continents or countries, simultaneously being here and there' (Riccio, 2001:583). Transnational activities and contacts affect migrants' identity and these identities are as Vertovec (2001:573) states: 'negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place'. In the word negotiation lies precisely that assumption that an individual's identity is not only dependent on their notion of self-hood but is linked to the opinions and reflections of others upon the individual (Vertovec 2001, Riccio 2001).

The reflection of others on an individual also means a migrant can have multiple identities. In Riccio's study of Senegalese migrants, the migrant has a different identity in the host country than in the country of origin. For example the migrant returning to spend his earnings in Senegal is seen as a prosperous migrant who has acquired wealth. He is not seen as the migrant that works long hours, lives in small and cheap accommodation in Europe to save the money he will later use in Senegal (Ricco 2001, Ferguson 2009). This identity is not shaped by interactions that these migrants have with people in the country of origin, but is reserved for interactions in the host country.

This study of Senegalese migrants provides another intriguing example. Upon arrival in Europe the Senegalese rely on existing migrants to show them the ropes and help them get started. This is interesting since Riccio states that the identity of a Senegalese trader is characterised by working independently. Yet to acquire this 'identity', the migrant relies on the other Senegalese migrants, who already established in the host country, to reach that goal. His identity as a trader is shaped by the interaction and help he receives from his fellow migrants (Riccio 2001).

My research will explore how transnational interactions affect the construction of the social identity of Ghanaian migrants. As in Riccio's (2001) case study I will not limit myself to the interactions that take place in one country. I will focus on the construction of identity in interaction with important others in Ghana but also look at the interaction with important others here in the Netherlands.

3. Research methodology

In order to answer the research questions I chose to use qualitative research. This choice relates to the theoretical approach to the research problem. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interpretation of actions and the meaning people give to these actions. The interpretation awarded to an action can vary between individuals, thus there is a variation in ways that different people view their social world. This variation in meanings and interpretations does not mean that one view or description is more valid than the other. The aim is to examine these accounts to understand the social world through these variations in meanings (Blumer, 1969).

A quantitative approach would not uncover the possible variation in meanings that migrants give to their transnational contacts. A quantitative approach would standardise these meanings into pre-determined or measurable answers. This would not take into account that variation in how actors see the world (Seale, 1998).

An important part of qualitative research is doing fieldwork. The importance of this lies in the alternative view of social scientists on the nature of research. Human actions are based upon or infused by social or cultural meanings. According to naturalism, in order to understand people's behaviour, a researcher must use an approach that provides access to the meanings that guide people's behaviour (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This involves observing and taking part in everyday lives of people to understand the issues being studied.

As discussed in the theoretical framework (chapter 2) Blumer takes naturalism further than that I feel is possible. Blumer (1969) stresses that researchers need to understand the world and interactions as the people under study do. However, regardless of the extent to which I adopt the behaviour and meet expectations of my respondent, I cannot actually become a Ghanaian migrant and draw on the same interactions that have shaped their social world. However, I have made every attempt to make sense of the interactions, situations and group existence to understand the meanings awarded to them by the Ghanaian migrants. By getting to know the world of the Ghanaian migrants I reduced the risk of being lead by my own assumptions about the social construction of their world (Seale, 1998).

3.1. Research site

My study focuses on Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost, considering the presence of a large Ghanaian migrant population there (CBS, StatLine, May 2011). Since I was not familiar with the community of Amsterdam Zuidoost and would have few natural encounters with the migrant population living there, identifying respondents in a public domain would be challenging. Therefore, I chose to gather my data in private settings. My two main research sites were: a Ghanaian church and a migrant organisation for Ghanaians in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

Church

I considered churches and migrant organisations as ideal starting points to access the migrant community. The church since I assumed that it would be easily accessible and visitors are generally welcome there. Before I embarked on my data collection I considered that a possible difficulty with using the church would be the issue of gatekeepers (Seale, 1998). I expected to negotiate access to the church members via the pastor. Although I could attend the church services and talk to people without his permission, I wanted him on board with the research. I thought a religious setting it might be sensitive to ask personal question about the lives of the congregation.

Most churches hold their services in the afternoon; therefore it was not possible to attend more than one service on a Sunday. It took a long time to build rapport with people from the church therefore I decided to focus on one church and attend their services every Sunday. People became familiar with me and eventually I was asked to introduce my research to the members of the congregation during the service.

Interviews with people of the church took a long time to arrange. Without the consent of the pastor it appeared that people would not talk to me about my research topic. Finding respondents was made more challenging by the lack of natural social interaction before and after the service. People came in at their leisure

during the service and after it was over everybody went home or elsewhere. Perhaps they meet somewhere socially during the week or later in the day but I was not able to discover where and when.

Migrant organisation

Another important research site was a migrant organisation in Amsterdam Zuidoost. It is an umbrella organisation for smaller organisations and churches for Ghanaian migrants in the area. Access to the migrant organisation was not complicated. An explanation of my research and an interview with the chairman provided me with access to the organisation. I was granted full access to the facility and could mention his name if people asked what I was doing there.

Sampling

By using snowball sampling and, after familiarising myself with the community, I hoped to interview people from outside of the church and migrant organisation to reduce the possibility of missing respondents who fall outside of these networks. However, it proved a challenge to find respondents in the churches and some people in the migrant organisation were a bit hesitant to speak to me at first. One church even turned me away completely. I did manage to obtain the odd phone number or contact details of people outside of the church and the migrant organisation. But even when I managed to contact these people they were not willing to be interviewed.

A possible effect could be sampling bias and a possible impact of which could relate to the accounts of the Ghanaian migrants regarding the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam Zuidoost. As I will discuss in the findings, this community plays an important role in preserving the Ghanaian identity of my respondents. My respondents value and have a role in this community due to their connection to the church and the migrant organisation. Other Ghanaian migrants outside these settings will perhaps have different accounts or give other meanings to their interaction with other Ghanaians in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

3.2. Participant observation

Participant observation provided insights about the behaviours and habits Ghanaian migrants. Information that might not be given in an interview because it is viewed as mundane or normal could be collected through observation. Also what people say and what people do might not be one and the same (Seale, 1998)

I attended a few languages classes at the migrant organisation, but sitting in on the actual class was not very useful as a regular observation site. Therefore I started meeting with my respondents after their classes were over.

As a white Dutch student I do not blend in during observations. People were immediately curious about my presence in church and in language classes in the migrant organisation. In the language classes the Ghanaian migrants came to talk to me themselves and were willing to tell me about their experiences as migrants.

Attending church services was my main possibility to interact and observe Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. In the church however people were a bit wary of me. In the church a few people came to talk to me, but were quick to refer me to the pastor if I want to know anything. The difference in the reception I received in the two places was most likely linked to the people that are there. In the migrant organisation the classes are part of an integration course offered by the government so people following it are not here illegally. In the church I had to reassure the elders that I was not from the Dutch government. Once it was clearly established that I am a student and I gained their trust people started to talk to me and on one occasion I was invited to have dinner at the house of a Ghanaian family and was able to join in their family life on a Sunday afternoon.

3.3. Interviews

I was interested in respondents' accounts to understand behaviour, choices and to understand their social world from their perspective. This type of data could not be collected in a natural setting during observation. Expectations that migrants think people in Ghana have of them and the meaning given to transnationalism cannot be investigated by observation alone. An interview provides access to feelings, ideas and thoughts that help understand the meaning Ghanaian migrants attach to transnational contacts (Seale, 1998).

I conducted ten in-depth interviews with eleven Ghanaian migrants living in Amsterdam Zuidoost (one interview was with a married couple). For these interviews I used an interview guide containing topics to be discussed and possible questions (see appendix 1). However, the order of topics and the phrasing of questions depended on the conversational flow. This type of interview gave me flexibility to ask for further explanation on topics and discover new topics that the respondent might address (Seale, 1998).

To make sure whether or not I understood the world of the Ghanaian migrants I used two strategies to check. The first strategy was summarising a respondent's answer in my own words during an interview to see if I had understood it as the person intended. In some situations I found that I had misinterpreted the respondent's story and further explanation was needed for me to fully grasp what my respondent actually meant.

The second strategy I used was to relate data from another interview to another Ghanaian migrant to see if they recognised the social world being portrayed. However, I did not discard data immediately if another respondent did not recognise the response of another. It might not be favourable for a respondent to have the social world described in another way or the person might not have had the same experience and therefore not recognise the social world described (Seale and Kelly, 1998).

Interview respondents

The criteria for the respondents was that they are migrants from Ghana in Amsterdam Zuidoost. To limit the possibility of bias by only collecting data from one specific sub-group of migrants I strived for as much diversity in the respondents as possible.

I conducted ten in-depth interviews with respondents in the following categories of variation:

- Male /Female
- Legal /Illegal
- Recent arrivals (less than 2 years)
- Settled migrants (between 2 and 10 years)
- Long stay in the Netherlands (10 years or more)
- Employed /Unemployed
- Nuclear family in the Netherlands / Alone in the Netherlands

Although I strived for as much diversity as possible it was difficult to arrange interviews with women. I had expected that my own gender would make interviewing women easy. However, that was not the case. In the migrant organisation the majority of migrants were male. In the church I attempted to interview women but I had limited interaction with them. There was an occasion when I had finally secured an interview with a woman and upon arrival she directed me to her husband since she thought he had more information about the topic and disappeared. Therefore the data is predominately a male perspective on identity and transnational contacts. However, with eleven interview respondents it is hard to claim statements about differences between categories or to trace patterns. The data provides an in-depth perspective on migrants' lives, but generalisation on the basis of these accounts is not possible.

Table 1: Interview respondents

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Length of time in NL</i>	<i>Employed</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Permit</i>
<i>Respondent 1</i>	Male	48	21 years	Employed	High	Yes
<i>Respondent 2</i>	Male	28	3 years	Unemployed	Low	No
<i>Respondent 3</i>	Female	43	7 years	Employed informal sector	Low	No
<i>Respondent 4</i>	Male	29	2 years & 3 years elsewhere in Europe	Employed	High	No
<i>Respondent 5</i>	Female	25	From birth	Student	High	Yes, national
<i>Respondent 6</i>	Male	68	+ 30 years	Retired	High	Yes
<i>Respondent 7</i>	Male	19	7 months	Unemployed	Low	Yes
<i>Respondent 8</i>	Male	53	20 years	Employed	Low	Yes
<i>Respondent 9</i>	Male	63	25 years	Employed	High	Yes
<i>Respondent 10</i>	Female	46	20 years	Employed	Low	Yes
<i>Respondent 11</i>	Male	46	20 years	Employed	Low	Yes

3.4. Recording data

Observations were recorded as field notes. For interviews, with the exception of two, I used audio recording with permission of the respondents. An advantage of using audio recording was that it enabled me to focus on the interview conversation, probing questions and allowed me to note impressions and situations that cannot be recorded on tape.

The advantage of transcribing the interviews was that I could start to familiarise myself with the data while transcribing. This contributed to the reshaping of the interview guide and formulation of additional questions and topics to be included in later interviews. Using a literal transcription of the interview also allowed for analysis of how people described things and if certain themes or terms reoccurred during the different interviews (Seale, 1998).

3.5. Role as a researcher

I introduced myself as a student, but to find some common ground I also as told my respondents that I originally came from England and moved to the Netherlands as a child. In doing so I placed myself outside of their definition of being Dutch. Respondents directly categorised me as being English, despite having lived here since childhood. By adding this to my introduction I hoped to create more room to talk about what life is like for them in the Netherlands.

As a white person in a community of Ghanaians it was not possible to blend in. I adopted the role of student and interested stranger. This allowed me to ask questions about interactions, situations and actions that are regarded as normal by my respondents.

3.6. Data analysis

The choice of using qualitative data collection methods had consequences for the data analysis. The data was collected in an unstructured manner. To make sense of the data, I first transcribed all of the interview recordings. Then I coded my field notes and the interviews transcripts using the coding software Atlas TI.

To code the data I developed a coding scheme. This coding scheme allowed for identifying relevant and reoccurring topics. Seale and Kelly (1998) distinguish two ways to analyse interview data. The first is using the interview as a resource. This means using the interview to gather information and insights about behaviour, social interaction and meanings that take place in the social world of the respondent, outside of the interview setting. Using the interview as topic requires that the researcher sees the interview itself as an object of analysis. The phrasing of answers provides insights into the way the respondent views his or her world and how he or she wishes to represent it. The latter is mainly used in discourse analysis, however the two do not have to be mutually exclusive.

I analysed my interview data mainly as a topic. The in-depth interview allowed me to ask about personal feelings and the giving of meaning to the contacts migrants have with people in Ghana. However, looking for common words, phrases and representations of these contacts provided extra insights into meanings (Seale and Kelly, 1998). The Netherlands, for example, is described as being seen as a place 'like heaven' by family members and people that have not been to Europe before. In heaven there is an abundance of everything, thus the use of this word indicates the expectations and meaning that is attached to having a family member in the Netherlands.

4. Findings – Identity

The following two chapters contain the findings of my fieldwork in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The main focus of my research was how migrants' transnational activities affect their everyday lives. This first chapter focuses on the identity of the Ghanaian migrant. These findings focus on the characteristics and typologies that my respondents assign to themselves as Ghanaian people and as migrants.

The quotes in these chapters are taken from the interview transcripts. I have made the occasional small grammatical alteration to improve the readability. Two interviews were conducted in Dutch. Quotes from these interviews have been translated into English, with the original language included in footnotes.

A person's identity, their notion of who they are, is not only shaped by the reflections a person has on one's self. Interactions with others also shape a person's identity (Blumer, 1969) and thereby also the way a person reflects on themselves. A person's identity is a dynamic concept always changing and being shaped by the interactions an individual has with others and the reflection on these interactions. This process of negotiation for migrants also takes place transnationally. A migrants' notion of self-hood is not only negotiated within the boundary of one nation state but spans two since migrants live what Portes et al. (1999) describe as 'dual lives'.

In my interviews with Ghanaian migrants I came across a few central features of the identity of Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. They are described by Ghanaian migrants as the characteristics that make a person 'Ghanaian'. These features are: respect, religious identity, ethnicity, migrants as travellers, the notion of home and the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam. These features will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

4.1. Respect

Respect is an important part of a Ghanaian's identity. When asked about the culture, the Ghanaian community or life in the Netherlands, respondents brought up the importance of having respect: a Ghanaian is a respectful person. In the first place being a respectful person means showing respect for their elders. A person that is older is treated with reverence and has more privileges than a person who is younger. This does not only apply to parents or the elderly, but to everybody that is older than you; your older brother, your teacher, your boss and the lady next door. The way a Ghanaian person interacts with an older person is shaped by this respect a person is expected to show. A man or woman older than yourself is addressed with sir or madam or, if you are more familiar, with ma (mother) or da (father).

'The most important thing in my culture is that Ghanaians were trained to be very respectful due to our culture. [...] When you insult an elderly and he speaks curse on you it surely works. So we were not used to so many things in our culture, so it made us very respectful. That is what I like about our culture'

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

This respect is taught from an early age and is reinforced by (threats of) curses or stories of bad things that can happen to a person if they are not respectful. Respect is linked to a desired moral identity that my respondents assign to themselves and other people from Ghana. The importance of respect also shapes the interaction within a family. No matter what the age of a person, he or she is still expected to show respect to people that are older than him or her.

'Look I am still young. I'm not on my own. My family is controlling me. I am not married yet so I need to obey what my family say'

Ghanaian man, 28 years old, respondent 2

This quote illustrates that even though my respondent is a grown man, he is expected to do as his parents or his older siblings tell him. This respect and obedience as a desired moral behaviour also applies to contacts that Ghanaian migrants have with their family still living in Ghana. Every family has a head, the eldest member that makes the majority of decisions in that family. If this person is absent, for example by migrating to the Netherlands, this does not mean that the migrant is relieved from expected duties or that another family member can take his place. The head of the household still needs to be consulted on matters and needs to be obeyed, even if he or she lives thousands of miles away.

‘We have the queens, kings but beside that every family have the head. And if there is a problem within the family, we all sit under him and we discuss the issue. He will give us advise what we should do. In the better way that it will help the family. So as I am not in Ghana my head family he knows that I am here. So if anything or I have to pay money with a number of the family they count me in, I am included.’

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

An example consulting the head of the household is the story that a respondent told me regarding the decisions that had to be made concerning his mother’s funeral.

‘When my mother was alive she told us that when she died we shouldn’t put her in the freezer. We should go and bury her at once, because she didn’t want to be in the deepfreeze. [...] You have to prepare. Because it don’t just happen like that. My brother is in America. We can’t just go and bury her just like that. We have to wait, because he is the senior among us and says I’m coming. I am the junior, I will say, do it. Otherwise I am disrespecting my brother.’

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

A Ghanaian man listening to the interview found the actions of my respondent disrespectful. His mother had requested that she be buried immediately. However, her eldest child, now the head of the family, said that the family should wait until could he come from abroad. My respondent decided to obey his brother. His mother was now dead, so would be none the wiser and but he could not disobey his brother since he is the head of the family. This shows that in the interest of being or appearing respectful, Ghanaian migrants have to make decisions on which elder needs to be shown the most respect in a certain situation.

Respect and child rearing

Teaching respect is an important part of child rearing for my respondents. Children are not expected to talk back to their parents. They must listen and obey their parents, whatever they say. Respect also applies in interaction between siblings. An older child always sits in the front of the car, no discussion, and the oldest child makes most of the decisions for his or her siblings. My respondents describe children in the Netherlands as disrespectful towards their parents, they talk back, and they do not listen to their teachers. The children in the Netherlands do not have the Ghanaian characteristic of showing respect.

‘They go loose. They can stray. They become delinquents, they don’t go to school. And then you see them out on the street corners smoking weed. I detest.’

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

Part of this undesired behaviour is perceived by respondents as a lack of responsibility on the part of the parents in the Netherlands. However, if a Ghanaian child 'goes loose' this is not described as a failure of the part of Ghanaian parents. It is the 'other' parents that are seen as being not strict enough with the children. The school system is also perceived as causing the differences between raising children in Ghana and in the Netherlands.

'Children go wayward in school as well. They don't have respect for their teachers.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

A respondent was surprised that in the Netherlands a child can address a teacher by their first name instead of saying sir and bowing which illustrates the respect children are expected to show to their teachers. This respect is enforced in Ghana by the use of corporal punishment. In Ghana children are beaten with the cane at school if they do not show respect.

My respondents give conflicting accounts on the best way to raise children to be respectful. Some Ghanaians choose to send their children away to school, either to a boarding school in Ghana or, if the means and immigration papers permit it, to England.

'When the police came, my son said: I have the right to call my friend and my parents are worrying me so I am not happy in the house. They police believe his story. Things like that. My wife and I were like; what? We brought him here to be something good for the future, not to be a liability on society. Now he is getting support from the police. You go to school and he is not being looked after and what he says is what they believe in. My wife and I sit down and say we better make a proper planning. We were even compelled to send him to England. Today we are very happy. He had become a progressive life. Even he, at this stage, has realised that we did him a lot of good to send him to England. Now that he has grown. He said: that is very good to send me out.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

Not being respectful is equated here with being a liability on society. Instead of battling this undesired behaviour in the Netherlands this Ghanaian man sent his son to England. He felt that by doing so his son's behaviour would improve since he would no longer be interacting with others who do not show the respectful characteristics of a Ghanaian. He is not the only one to do so. The children either stay with friends and family or they are placed in a boarding school.

There is ambiguity in the opinions my respondents have about what is the best way to make sure a child grows up as a respectful individual. Some respondents thought that their parental guidance would be best, while others thought that the child leaving the country would be more beneficial. The respondents from the church feel that it is better to keep the child with them so that they can teach them 'the way of God' at home. This also might be due to the opinion of the pastor of the church. He does not agree with people sending their children away. He feels that it is not good and as a pastor he has a certain amount of influence on what the members of his church do and do not do.

Although respondents differ in their opinion about transnational parenting or raising the child themselves in the Netherlands, my respondents have in common that they see the 'African way' as the best way to 'straight a child'. They draw up a symbolic boundary between themselves as respectful Ghanaians and others in Dutch society with regards to being respectful and the way they raise their children.

4.2. Religious identity

Though not the focus of my study, the strong religious beliefs of my respondents make it impossible not to mention. In nearly every interview the respondents made references to God or their Christian beliefs. These beliefs were often not the topic of conversation and usually did not serve to explain their religion to me. Rather religious practices or God were mentioned as part of their everyday life, more or less in passing. Even though I expected religion to come up in conversation with the people I interviewed from the church I was surprised at the extent to which God was mentioned in everyday situations or in answering questions that - in my assumption - had little to do with religious beliefs or religious practices. For example a teacher of a Dutch language class made a reference to working hard and mastering the language by quoting a verse from the Bible about the importance and reward of working hard. This was used to motivate the students to spend more time on their Dutch language homework.

The Christian beliefs of the respondents also play a role in their interactions with people in or from Ghana. The Ghanaian and African churches scattered all over Amsterdam Zuidoost are the most visible example of this. Every Sunday the Ghanaians in the area meet in one of the churches to worship together. However religion is also present in the interaction with family in Ghana. Families pray for each other when apart or pray together on the phone or on Skype.

‘If I am sick then they will call and maybe we pray in the night. Because we can’t do anything without God. Maybe once a week on Sunday evening or Saturday evening we just make a light worship and then everyone will sleep’

Ghanaian man, 28 years old, respondent 2

A respondent defined Ghana as being ‘warmer’ (not referring to the weather) than the Netherlands since everybody there believes in God. Her reasoning being that more people in Ghana are Christians and therefore it creates a warm-hearted climate.

‘It is much warmer there because nearly everybody believes. You have different denominations and also Muslims, but the majority is Christian. You notice it; everything is God, God and God. They can be much happier than a person living here, despite the fact that they are so poor. Pure and simple because even if they don’t have a lot, they have faith in the Lord. There is a kind of joy and warmth there that we can learn a lot from here. We are always complaining. Moan, moan.’¹

Ghanaian woman, 25 years old, respondent 5

In this statement a construction of meaning is visible. Ghana is equated with warmth and a better place to be than in the Netherlands. The religion of Ghanaians as a predominant factor in the lives of people in Ghana is seen as making the country a friendlier and happier place to be and Ghana is awarded characteristics that support this.

My respondents say that they feel they cannot do anything without God. ‘Anything’ can refer to getting your papers, staying healthy and finding a job. They need the help of God to succeed and to obtain work or receive the correct papers.

¹ Original language: ‘Het is daar veel warmer ook omdat bijna iedereen gelovig is daar. Je hebt verschillende stromingen ook wel en moslim, maar grotendeels christen. Dat merk je ook wel, alles is God en God en God. Ondanks het feit dat ze o zo arm zijn kunnen ze gelukkiger zijn dan iemand die hier woont. Puur en alleen omdat ze het misschien niet breed hebben, maar ze hebben wel et vertrouwen in de Heer [...]. Er heerst gewoon een soort vreugde en warmte waar wij hier heel veel van kunnen leren. We klagen altijd. Klaag, klaag.’

'It is not easy. We can see that maybe we are human beings, but we are nothing. So if you haven't applied God in your life, you are nobody.'

Ghanaian man, 28 years old, respondent 2

For the Ghanaian migrants their Christian belief is part of their identity as a Ghanaian. Trusting in God and receiving his blessing is also seen as contributing to a migrant's success.

Church

Amsterdam Zuidoost has numerous Ghanaian and other African churches. The council recently built a new building that house at least ten of such churches. During my fieldwork I visited a church in the area every Sunday afternoon. The services that I visited were held in English and in Twi (Akan), the most common dialect in Ghana. What follows is taken from my field notes after visiting the church

A colourful and lively event to which people came dressed in their Sunday best. For most men this was a suit and sometimes a traditional robe. The women were mostly dressed in a skirts, dresses and smart trousers suits. Most of their clothing was made with traditional Ghanaian wax fabrics.

I expected robed gospel singers and a choir, however everybody in the congregation joins in the singing, can take a microphone and join. The women take a more active role in this than the men. A few women sing at the front of the church leading the worship. Other women signal to the man in charge of the sound system that they would like a microphone, and join in at full volume. Dancing is also part of the worship. This is also more of a woman's activity, but men do participate from time to time. Especially if the service is a special Sunday (such as Easter) or a thanksgiving service after a funeral. On these occasions the amount of people and the amount of dancing increases and becomes even more up tempo. I myself have been included in this ritual frequently on Sunday mornings. In the beginning people kept telling me this is how they do it in Ghana. Ghanaian migrants said that it was different than the Dutch way, but assured me I would get use to it. Assuming that I must be surprised at their way of doing things.

For the Ghanaian migrants going to church is an important activity.

'Like what we do in the community is as we meet here on Sunday is part of the integration. We go and join ourselves together to worship. We practice it for a longer time. And we have other things like if something happens to a friend, one is dead, we all mourn the person. [...]When somebody dies in Europe, it is a Ghanaian, we all organise ourselves up. Like, mourning the person, family, helping. We don't have anybody besides ourselves.'

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 11

It is interesting that my respondent refer to the service as part of integration. He is referring to integration in the Ghanaian community. Integration in this context means that a person becomes part of the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands and not the Dutch society. Dutch people rarely attend the church services. I was the only white person in the church building on most Sundays, despite there being eight or nine other services held in different rooms.

During the services the singing is nearly all in Twi. On Sundays when the preaching is in Twi and not in English, one of the members would translate the sermon to English of me so that I could follow. He explained to me that that for them Sunday service is a time to forget the troubles of the week:

‘On Sundays we come here and enjoy and praise the Lord. Life is hard for us here but on Sundays we don’t think about those things.’

Ghanaian man, 50+ years old, church member

There are different Dutch or English churches that Ghanaian migrants can go to in Amsterdam, yet Ghanaian migrants have created their own gatherings in the area. My respondents want to be free to practice their religion in their own language, dance during the service and hold the necessary special services for funerals and births as done in Ghana. This indicates that the Ghanaian migrants find it important to do things the same way as in Ghana and worship with people from their country. When saying ‘This is how we do it in Ghana. You will see also when you go there’ my respondents are creating a link between what they doing thing and what is done in Ghana. By doing it the same way as in Ghana my respondents are reaffirming their identification with the Ghana.

Telling migrants that I have been visiting a Ghanaian church was met with surprise. A respondent told me he thought that whites did not value going to church much and a woman asked if my University had Christians since I, a white person, had come to a church. The religious identity is not only that of a Christian but a *Ghanaian* Christian. References were made to the ‘whites’ not doing things and to help and care for other people and their family. Whereas ‘we’ as Ghanaian help these people. In doing so a boundary is drawn up between the Ghanaians and the ‘whites’. Ghanaian migrants say ‘we’ do things differently and care for others, whereas ‘the whites’ do not have these characteristics.

4.3. Ethnicity

‘As Ghanaians we do get on very well even though we come from different cultural backgrounds, but we regard ourselves as Ghanaians.’

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

Ghana has ten different regions; each region has its own ethnic group or tribe. My respondents stressed that they are ‘all Ghanaian here’. In the Netherlands it does not matter where in Ghana you are from, you are from Ghana and that is what matters. For my respondents it is important to socialise with other Ghanaians.

Respondents refer to other Ghanaian migrants and the need to socialise as: ‘so that we see ourselves’. The word ‘ourselves’ is used continually by respondents to refer to other Ghanaians and reflects the strong ties that Ghanaians describe having with family and other Ghanaians, I will elaborate more on those ties in the next chapter. There is a strong identification of ‘we’ and connection to the identity of a Ghanaian.

It appears that possible ethnic boundaries have dissolved (if they were there) among Ghanaians in the Netherlands. However, another boundary was stressed by my respondents. This was not linked to tribes and regions in Ghana, but to the colour of a person's skin. In the Netherlands, or at least in my experience, it is not common to point out the difference in skin colour. You describe someone as an African or an European, but rarely will you say: black and white, it is considered politically incorrect. However, very early on the data collection, references were made to the colour of their skin ('we blacks') and the colour of mine ('you whites'). These classifications of 'blacks' and 'whites' were used to illustrate the differences in approach to family and community between Ghanaians and the Dutch as a demarcation between the Ghanaians and the Dutch.

'I have learned you whites depend more in your nuclear family, but us we have more of the extended family'

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

Interesting about the boundaries drawn up between 'blacks' and 'whites' is that physical appearance is linked to cultural behaviour. 'Blacks' include the extended family, whereas whites do not. Some of my respondents call the family in the Netherlands more divided than in Ghana. This is seen as another attribute, next to religion that set Ghanaians apart.

'The family is split more in Europe I guess. The family sometimes only meets once a year. Even here, the mother may be living in Amsterdam and the child, son or daughter may be in Utrecht. Maybe they visit only once in a year. I know a friend and his mother is here in Amsterdam and they talk on the phone but to see her mother is maybe once in a year at Christmas time or with mother's day.'

Ghanaian man, 46 years old, respondent 11

The boundary between black and white is also reflected in the most common Ghanaian dialect, Twi, the word for stranger: *Obroni* is also the word that Ghanaian will use to address or refer to a white person. The word *Obibini* is used to describe a person with black skin. I have been learning the Twi dialect and observed that in Amsterdam Zuidooost the Ghanaian migrants also use the word *Obroni* while talking among themselves. Most likely referring to me since I was often the only *Obroni* around.

4.4. Travellers

'We believe in travelling. So everybody likes to travel, no matter the country. Because Ghana people, we are like adventurous people. We like being in adventure. So we like travelling a lot but not particular to a specific country, but we like travelling around the world. That is Ghanaian.'

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

Looking at the identity of Ghanaian migrants I found that precisely the word 'migrants' is one my respondents did not identify with. Introducing my research as a study about migration led to confusion. My respondents thought I was interested in integration or were quick to point out that they had papers. People did not want to talk to me and people from a Ghanaian church even checked if I was not from the government. However when keeping the topic more open and saying that I wanted to learn about life in the Netherlands for people from Ghana, the word traveller started to come up in conversation. My respondents referred to themselves as travellers and talked about their experiences travelling.

‘But if you also travel, you will also get more ideas and more experience. In travelling you get more experience, yeah. And you know how people are. You know how to manage, you know how to save money.’

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

Travelling is used to describe the migration from Ghana to the Netherlands. The word traveller reflects an idea of a temporary stay. Life in the Netherlands is not always what the Ghanaian migrants expected it to be, as I will describe in the next chapter. However, my respondents refer to their experiences as that of a traveller staying in a foreign land. As a traveller they are able to learn new things, get experience and personal growth. This raises the question whether or not seeing oneself as a traveller and identifying with the temporality of a situation is a way of dealing with expectations and strangeness that my respondents experience through their migration.

4.5. The notion of home

In my conversations with respondents they referred to Ghana as home, not the Netherlands. There is no difference between people that have live in the Netherlands for less than a year and Ghanaians who have been here for over thirty years. My respondents’ notion of home is linked to Ghana.

Home is described with positive words: ‘it’s is warmer there (socially), you feel at peace, it is hospitable, in Ghana you are not lonely, when you have had enough you go home, your family is there. It sounds almost as if Ghana has become the ‘promised land’. In the Netherlands Ghanaian migrants spend time with each other and help each other where possible. The presence of other Ghanaians is important but apparently it does not replace the presence and interaction a person can have with family. Being close to your family and going to visit them dispels this feeling of loneliness.

‘If we are sick in Ghana someone will come to your house. And if somebody wants to visit you in Ghana they will not call and say I want to come visit you. You just take it and come and visit. It is normal in Ghana. Anytime you can go visit your brother, your mother anybody. It is so nice. But maybe here they accept things are not like that.’

Ghanaian woman, 46 years old, respondent 10

The most striking use of the word ‘home’ was in an interview with a young woman who is a second generation migrant. In her early adult life she has been to visit Ghana on three occasions and hopes to visit more often in the future, as often as every other year. When asked why Ghana and why this frequent she replies that she feels at home in Ghana, despite being born and raised in the Netherlands. She continued saying that she might as well:

‘If you are going on holiday and spending a lot of money on a ticket then go to your own country. Where the people are pleased to see you.’²

Ghanaian woman, 25 years old, respondent 5

² Original language: ‘Als je dan op vakantie gaat en dan heel veel geld uitgeeft aan een ticket, ga dan naar je eigen land. Waar mensen nog blij zijn om je te zien.’

When asking respondents what it means that Ghana is home, they replied that Ghana is their homeland. It is where they have come from. Being born in a place has a certain amount of significance to the respondents. It is important 'not to forget after you have left'.

'It is where I was born, home. I am not a Netherlander. I have lived here and it is my second home, but Ghana is my home.'

Ghanaian man, 63 years old, respondent 9

Respondents also speak about 'going home' when they are old. My respondents wish to return to Ghana where they feel they will be taken care of and have everything they need close at hand.

'It is the lifestyle. The lifestyle is that you grow and it is changing. You choose to decide. Now the children are first with you, you are full. And then your children are leaving you and then you are alone with your wife and your wife is old. You also are old. You feel like, why? we are too tired here. Now, you decide to go back simply because you have more contacts as you go back to your land with everything you need. You go back and everything is at the market, everything is at one place. '

Ghanaian man, 46 years old, respondent 11

The Dutch retirement homes come up frequently during the interviews. My respondents point out that they do not have this 'at home' (in Ghana). In Ghana old people live in their own homes and family members take care of them. When they grow old they plan to go home, go back to Ghana and live out their last days on this earth in their own county. Despite the familiarity of Europe and the amount of time that they have spent in the Netherlands, there is a sense of belonging in Ghana. Europe may be a means to achieve a better live for when one goes home or a means to take care of and meet family responsibilities.

'Your home is your home. You can even invite people to come and stay at your house. In Ghana they don't have a, where you put the old woman and old men, bejaardenhuis. In Ghana an old one is living in her own home. You have grandchildren around. She don't worry. If you go you will see. The old woman has a house and she is there. She as grandchildren they are all there and they care for her. She don't need to go and pay somewhere to take care of her. And the weather there is good. When the sun comes up she can sit outside in the fresh air. It is outdoor life. When someone is old here you see that the person comes back home, because then the person will be more happy than living here cold and alone in your house.'

Ghanaian woman, 46 years old, respondent 10

Mentioning the retirement homes that the Dutch people have is also a symbolic boundary to separate the Ghanaian identity from the Dutch. Ghanaian's care for their family and show respect for the elderly by taking care of them when a person old. My respondents point out that is a Ghanaian feature and the Dutch do not have this characteristic.

4.6. Ghanaian community in Amsterdam

Amsterdam Zuidoost has a large Ghanaian population. The Ghanaian community fulfils different roles and the interaction with other Ghanaians is important to my respondents.

‘It is important because we are Ghanaian. We have to see ourselves here. Like our neighbour is a Dutch, second floor they are Surinam. We have a lot of tribes living in this block. In our building we are the only Ghanaians. [...] So it is important that we Ghanaians join ourselves together. In the other block we have a Ghanaian family we met, so we are all nice. Sometimes they can come here with the children.’

Ghanaian man, 46 years old, respondent 11

Interesting here is the use of the word ‘ourselves’. Respondents used this word a numbers of times in interviews to refer to Ghanaians. The use of this word ties in with other typologies that are giving to Ghanaians. Such as the term brothers for people who are from the same village. There is a strong identification of ‘we’ and connection to the identity of a Ghanaian. The Ghanaians are strangers in the Netherlands and seek familiarity. In Anderson’s (2001) of domestic workers in London she states that contact with the migrant community provides a link to home. Home for Ghanaians is Ghana. Ghana is awarded certain attributes such as social warmth, caring people and feeling of peace. The community in Amsterdam embodies these characteristics away from ‘home’

‘You cannot neglect your country members. I feel very comfortable when I am with them because we can speak our language and remember our old times in Ghana. Or maybe, sometimes the person will be your family member. That extended family, maybe your uncles or...but you will not know. Through conversation you may find out. Some people even come from your hometown. But you may not know. So maybe you ask: ‘Where are you from?’ ‘Oh, I am from this place’. Oh I am also from this place! Oh we are brothers. So I feel very good when I am with my countrymen.’

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

A second generation migrant I interviewed also seeks out the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam and feels a sense of belonging there.

‘Because I don’t have many cousins here, it is at events and festival that I have the opportunity to be among my Ghanaian people and then I always notice a warm atmosphere. Because everybody could have been your mother or could have been your father or sister or brother. That is the general sentiment. I feel, for example I always feel at home when I am in the Poort [shopping centre in the Bijlmer]. It is always: ‘Ete te san?’ You know.’³

Ghanaian woman, 25 years old, respondent 5

Despite never living in Ghana and not having that much Ghanaian family in the Netherlands, she still has a strong sense of belonging to the Ghanaian community. This is reflected in her choice of words when she calls Ghanaian ‘her people’. She was born in the Netherlands, but she feels a sense of belonging to people from Ghana and the community.

³ ‘Omdat ik niet zo veel neefjes en nichtjes heb hier, moet ik het echt hebben van evenementen en festivals dat ik met mijn Ghanese mensen ben en dan merk ik wel gewoon een warme sfeer. Want iedereen had je moeder kunnen zijn of iedereen had je vader kunnen zijn of zus of je broer en dat heerst er wel heel erg. Ik voel me wel, als ik bijvoorbeeld in de Poort ben in de Bijlmer voel ik me altijd thuis. Dan is het altijd ‘Ete te san?’. Weet je wel.’

Social contact and loneliness

Another role of the community linked to the feeling of belonging, is dealing with loneliness. Through interviews respondents refer to a feeling of being alone in the Netherlands without their family here.

‘We are social. So we have to get close so that we can talk, we can discuss issues that matter personally home and abroad. As for me there is a certain place when I travel and I see the houses I find it miserable to be there alone. For instance, Weesp, there are no Ghanaians there and if I go there I will be lonely. So when you get closer you can visit your friend. Sometimes you have some games, you can pray, you can talk, you can learn from each other.’

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

I interviewed a Ghanaian man after his language class. He has been in Amsterdam for two years and all of his family is still living in Ghana. Considering the importance of family for Ghanaian migrants, being here by himself has been a lonely experience for him. The church has provided him with a feeling that he has some form of family:

‘Here I have made friends and most of all I go to church so with my church members. The pastor likes me so much that he is like my dad now. Yeah he is now my everything. Apart from God, he is my everything. Actually I didn’t know him but when I came here and begin to attend the church he took me like his own son. So he is also like my dad. [...] Like he talked to me, he encourage me, we go to church together. Sometimes he invites me to his house to go and eat together. He has a nice family here, but he also, I am like the family too. He has three girls and one boy and a nice wife. He sometime invites me to the house just for me not to lonely. So that I feel that I have somebody here. Because I told you all my family is in Ghana so he is like my dad and everything.’

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

The friendships in the church have become this respondents’ lifeline. Without it he would feel very lonely. In his statement about the pastor lies the importance of parents and family. He calls the pastor his everything, apart from God. This pastor has become a surrogate for the relationships he misses now that he is outside of Ghana. The connection with the pastor is important for his well-being. Having somebody he can talk to, encourage him and take on the role of a parent when his own parents are not around makes him feel like he belongs to a family unit.

‘Because other than that you can sometime feel like why am I lonely. All my family are in Ghana and I am alone here. But with him I sometimes feel ok, that I have somebody. Because it is not easy to live without your family and stay here alone. But if you think of that too much it is not good. That is how it is.’

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

The social interaction also provides this respondent with a distraction. This respondent said it is not good to dwell on being in the Netherlands without family. On the other hand my respondents often utter the statement ‘That is how it is’. It appears as if the situation of how things is something that is to be accepted for Ghanaian migrants, but is not supposed to be dwelled on. Feelings of loneliness and sadness are mentioned but are not discussed in detail. Life is hard, my respondents have told me, but exactly what is so hard, why and how they feel is not talked about. This raises the question whether or not it is acceptable for Ghanaian migrants to share negative emotions about their situation or life.

Network to get you started

The Ghanaian community started to take shape in the early 1990s. This means that now the Ghanaians are already an established migrant community. New migrants travelling to the Netherlands can rely on their transnational contacts with people already in the community to help them find the way in Netherlands (Mascini et al, 2009). A Ghanaian migrant who moved to the Netherlands in the early years reflects on the current situation:

‘Hopefully you will meet somebody who will take you in or a Ghanaian or somebody who will take you in and say: ‘I will help you with a job or something. And that is how it starts. Lately that is not so common. Most people know somebody here so go to somebody. But in the beginning that was how it was.’⁴

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

The current situation of people going to stay with family or friends in the Netherlands was also reflected on in the interview.

‘It was new for me too, but it wasn’t so scary. In England I had my uncle, I lived with my uncle, but when I came here I also had somebody’⁵

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

Sometimes the contacts are not direct, but if a migrant knows somebody who knows somebody they can use those contacts.

‘My friend, she knew people here. We stayed with them for the first few weeks. The church also helps’

Ghanaian woman, 43 years old, respondent 3

‘A very good friend of mine in Ghana, his brother is living in Rotterdam so he directed me to go there, to go to his brother. So went to him in Rotterdam but it wasn’t easy for him too. He is also married to white woman and we cannot stay in the same house because it is only one bedroom apartment so I cannot stay there. So he also called somebody here in Amsterdam, so I came to that person.’

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

⁴ Original language: ‘Hopelijk kom je iemand tegen die jou in huis neemt, of een Ghanees of iemand neemt je in huis en die zegt: ik wil helpen met een baantje of zo. En zo begint het. De laatste tijd komt dat niet meer zo vaak voor, de meest mensen kennen iemand hier dus komen terecht bij iemand. Maar in het begin was het gewoon zo.’

⁵ Original language: ‘Voor mij was het ook nieuw, maar was niet zo eng. In Engeland had mijn oom, ik heb bij mijn oom gewoond, maar toen ik hier kwam had ik ook iemand.’

Migrant organisation

The Ghanaian community has migrant organisations in Amsterdam Zuidoost. One of the larger organisations is an umbrella organisation and answers questions migrants might have. There are fixed days that people can drop by with their legal documents and applications for residency. Voluntary staff is present to provide legal aid and advice. The organisation also provides assistance in finding employment and offers people the opportunity to do an apprenticeship within the organisation. They provide language lessons for Ghanaian migrants, though others are welcome. The classes are given in English but the teachers originate from Ghana so they are able to revert to the local dialects if necessary.

Under the umbrella of this organisation are numerous smaller social organisations or gatherings where people can meet each other socially. Either based on regional and tribal origin, gender or other common factors. Everybody that works at the migrant organisation is a volunteer. Most of them work at a fulltime job during the week. After 17.00hrs and on Saturdays they come to the organisation to take care of business there. One of the projects that the umbrella organisation has focuses on youth not finishing their education.

‘Reducing school dropout is a project of the local council, but they don’t see it. It is that, but we approach it in a positive way. Look, if I say we are organising something for dropouts, somebody that has dropped out of school does not want to be there. They think if I go there then everybody will know that have dropped out. We are not going to do that. That is a bit negative and they won’t come. But if you say: Oh we are going to give the youth that come some kind of reward or let them present, then somebody who is not doing well will come. Because if he does, everyone will think: oh, he is doing well. It is the message that you send. You send the message: these boys gave done well in school, you all have to, and you all can be like that. So even somebody that has dropped out of school will look and think: oh, I will also do that. So it is a positive way of doing things.’⁶

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

Interesting in the description of the chosen approach to the problem is that it does not appear to be acceptable for the organisation to address the problem of dropping out of school. The approach that the board has chosen focuses on the students that have done well. By using them as an example they hope to motivate other young people to do the same. This is an example of what appears to be a taboo on addressing problems and negative emotions. The sentiment here seems to be that doing so will scare youth away entirely. Perhaps that is the case, but the point here is that negative stories appear to have little room among my respondents. They do not address what is not working and not going well.

The quote also shows a boundary that is draw up between the Ghanaian community and the council of Amsterdam Zuidoost. The migrant organisation draws this boundary by stipulating that they know what is best for Ghanaian youth and have adjusted the approach to their methods so it will work better.

⁶ Original language: ‘Het bestrijden van schooluitval dat is project van het Stadsdeel, maar zien het niet. Het is wel dat, maar wij zien het op een positieve manier. Kijk ik zeg nu, wij willen iets organiseren voor schooluitval, iemand die uit school is gevallen die wil daar niet zijn. Die denkt dat als ik daar ga zitten, dan weet iedereen dat ik een school uitval ben. Dat gaan we niet doe. Dat is een beetje negatief en dus dan komt die niet. Maar als je zegt, oh we gaan de jongeren die het heel goed doen een soort cadeautjes geven of presenteren. Ja, iemand die het ook niet goed doet die komt zitten. Want als hij daar is dan denk iedereen oh, hij doet het ook goed. Maar dan ligt het aan de boodschap die jij geeft. Je geeft de boodschap deze jongens hebben heel goed op school gepresteerd, jullie moeten allemaal, jullie kunnen allemaal zo worden. Dus iemand die zelfs uit school is gevallen die kijkt en denk oh ik ga dat ook doen. Dus het is een positieve manier van doen.’

Contributing to the community

My respondents also talked about contributing to the community in Amsterdam Zuidoost. One of my respondents is a second generation migrant. For her it is important to do something in and for the Ghanaian community. She does not live in the community itself, but says she feels at home among Ghanaian and goes when she can. She is a fulltime student but in her free times she teaches a Dutch language class one evening a week in the office of the migrant organisation.

'If things have worked out well for you it doesn't mean that you don't have to ignore the people that don't have it yet. No. It is also because of your faith. If you are a Christian I think it is important to help other people. I am not a doctor. I can't help people in the medical department and I am not wonder woman who can magically provide people with a residence permit. But this is what I can do and you do what you can.'⁷

Ghanaian woman, 25 years old, respondent 5

Investing in the people in the community and doing something for other Ghanaians is linked to the same sentiments as investing in Ghana and doing something for others. Looking out for people who are not as fortunate as you is a part of the religious and cultural identity of the Ghanaian migrants. They are acting on the expectations and requirements of their identity as Ghanaian migrants. The importance of working for the community is also reflected in the time that volunteers spend working in the migrants offices. All the staff works there voluntary, but do it alongside a fulltime job. This requires a considerable time investment that migrants must feel is worth it.

4.7. Summary findings – identity

The central features of a Ghanaian migrant's identity are: respect, religious identity, ethnicity, migrants as travellers, the notion of home and the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam.

Respect is an attribute that is classed as being specifically Ghanaian. Migrants are not excluded from this and have to be respectful to their elders, whether they are living in the country or not. My respondents stress that this is not how they do things in Ghana when talking about a child misbehaving. Parents make choices about what to do to achieve the best results in child rearing that will reproduce the respectfulness.

Ethnic divides that might exist in Ghana (if there are any) fall away in the Netherlands. However, my respondents do draw symbolic boundaries between themselves as Ghanaians and the 'whites'. These boundaries are based on physical appearance of being white. These boundaries are drawn up in different areas: through respectful behaviour, raising children and investing in family relationships.

The boundaries that Ghanaian migrants create also serve to reaffirm their identity as Ghanaians. Ghana is referred to as warmer due to more people being Christian there. By attributing these characteristics to Ghana migrants are constructing meaning to their religion and the role it plays in their society. The Ghanaian migrants reaffirm and reproduce their religious identity in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Ghanaian migrants have their own churches in and refer to their practices in church as doing things the same way as people do in Ghana.

The Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam do not identify with the term migrant. They refer to themselves as travellers. A traveller is described as an adventurous person and moves from place to place. This description

⁷ 'Het is niet zo dat als het met jou wel goed is gegaan dat je niet verder hoeft te kijken naar de mensen die het nog niet hebben. Nee het is ook vanuit je geloof. Als je christen bent, denk ik dat het sowieso belangrijk is andere mensen te helpen. Ik ben geen arts, ik kan mensen niet helpen op het gebied van geneeskunde en ik ben geen wonder woman dat mensen wonderbaarlijk aan verblijfsvergunningen kan helpen maar dit is wat ik kan en je doet wat je kan.'

reflects the Ghanaian meaning attached to the migration process. It is temporary. Everything he does in the Netherlands is as a traveller, not a permanent resident.

Within the Ghanaian community migrants also construct the meaning of home. Ghana is seen as home not the Netherlands, even if the person has been in the Netherlands for thirty years or more. The experiences that the migrants have had reshaped how they give meaning to Ghana and the country is awarded attributes it might not have had before leaving. It almost takes on the form of the Promised Land in the stories of migrants.

5. Findings - Expectations and Transnational contacts

5.1 Migrants expectations

Before discussing the transnational contacts of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands I will first briefly discuss my findings regarding the expectations migrants had before coming to the Netherlands. The expectations the migrants had before leaving Ghana have changed since arriving here. These expectations and their actual prospects differ. The family and other contacts in Ghana only have a mental picture of the Netherlands and the stories of relatives to go by. These expectations, or to put it more accurately, the expectations migrants perceive family to have, influence the interaction that they have with their relatives and important others in Ghana.

5.1.1. Expectations before leaving Ghana

Ghanaian migrants come to the Netherlands in the hope of creating a better life for themselves by earning money in Europe. Before coming to the Netherlands my respondents expected that work would be easy to find and the salaries would be a lot higher than in Ghana. The expectation was that they would be able to earn money quickly.

‘Ghanaians come here to earn a lot of money and then go back home, but that has not worked.’

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

The initial goal appears to be a temporary stay. Once enough money has been earned the plan is to return to Ghana. Some of my respondents came to the Netherlands with a specific goal in mind for which they wanted to earn money, for example to earn the starting capital for their own business. One Ghanaian man set out for Europe to realise his ambition of keeping livestock in Ghana.

‘Because I have a lot of knowledge also in raising animals. Like pig and guinea fowls, I have knowledge. I wanted to raise some money, go back and maybe start something small, but it’s quite difficult to save money here.’

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 7

For others the aim is not linked to a personal investment goal, but is linked to improving their situation or the quality of living for their family. Education is also seen as a way for a person to improve their situation and come to Europe. According to respondents, people in Ghana believe that education at a European University enhances prospects. Managing to obtain a degree means that you can improve your job opportunities and your financial position.

My main objective was to go to Europe and study. Because in the early stages of my infancy I grew up to know that those who acquire or are able to obtain some form of education are able to get lucrative work, healthy profitable occupations. We see many a time after Ghanaian independence that Ghanaian that came abroad where able to study something and get a diploma to certify that. They study that and that, able to gain very good position or workplaces.’

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

Whatever the initial reasons for coming to Europe and the Netherlands their expectations were fairly similar: to improve their financial situation, either by earning working in the Netherlands or obtaining a degree elsewhere in Europe. However, often it does not work out like that and Ghanaian migrants are not able to achieve what they came here for.

'I thought it was like heaven. But when you land here then you see as it is. When you are in Ghana people come back and say: 'there is much work' and they have nice clothes. You then also want that. But when you land you see that it is hard work here.'

Ghanaian woman, 45 years old, respondent 3

The expectations of my respondents had of life in the Netherlands before migration did not appear improbable to them while they were living in Ghana. These expectations were based on what they had heard from other people in Ghana and the migrants they have seen coming back to Ghana. My respondents had seen people returning with nice clothes, money to build a house and the family had received money from the person abroad. If this is the image you see why wouldn't a person try their luck somewhere else? Go abroad for a number of years and then return with the money you have made? My respondents thought that the Netherlands was the place to come to and realise the dreams you had.

Before looking at migrants perspectives upon arrival I would first like to focus on what has shaped these expectations. The interaction with migrants returning from Europe, seeing what they are able to do and obtain appears to have shaped the expectations in the stories of my respondents. These may not but the only contribution factors to the formation of the migrants expectations, but are the main sources of information named by my respondents.

The migration of Ghanaians to the Netherlands appears not only to affect the person migrating. The community in the country of is also affected by the stories circulating in the country or origin. Vertovec (2001) refers to the impacts that transnational connections have on the lives of migrants, their families and the communities in which they participate. He names the flows of remittances that migrants send as the most significant. Looking at the expectations of my respondents these remittances have come to symbolise a better life for the sender, the potential migrant. Transnational contacts and meanings given to remittances are more complex than solely economic means.

One of my respondents talked about the contribution that he himself makes to the image people in Ghana have of Europe:

'When we come from abroad, we are rich. That is what they see. You know, you have nice clothes. So for them it is like: I also have to go abroad or to Europe. If I do that then I will get rich'⁸

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

Initial expectations migrants had before coming to Europe appeared to be a difficult subject. Sometimes my respondents seemed to be avoiding answering the question or said that they didn't know what they thought before coming to the Netherlands. However, if I asked less directly and informed about stories in Ghana about Europe or people still living there they started to tell me their personal accounts.

⁸ Original language: 'Als wij van het buitenland komen dan wij zijn rijk. Dat is het beeld dat ze zien. Of je hebt mooie kleren, weet je. Dus voor hen is het: ik moet ook naar buitenland of Europa en als ik daar ga dan word ik rijk.'

These accounts were not always consistent when it came to the prevailing idea that people in Ghana have about Europe and the Netherlands. One respondent switched his story when I ask more directly about the expectations. First he told me that people think Europe is like heaven, which is consistent with the view other respondents had before migrating. However, when I ask him to elaborate more on why people see Europe as heaven he tells me that it is not quite like that. Yes, people do see Europe as green pastures but that is not so much the idea now. At the moment, according to my respondent, some people feel that migrating will cause more problems and that people feel more inclined to stay at home.

'Maybe at one time or another people were overzealous or anxious to go abroad and see a livelihood, but that idea has died out now.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

This statement surprised me since this respondent volunteers his time at a migrant organisation and assists new (young) migrants with obtaining papers and related legal matters. I had become a regular visitor myself, since a number of my respondents attend classes there. My observation was that the people coming in to the office for assistance of any kind are mostly under the age of thirty and have only been in the Netherlands a few years. If the idea had died out, why were people still coming from Ghana?

Further up in the conversation my respondent appeared to change his mind again and talks about the younger generation still wanting to come to Europe. The older generation, he thinks will prefer to stay in Ghana, for them it is too hard to adjust to life in the Netherlands and leave the family in Ghana behind. However, he does stress the reason for coming is necessity. This necessity was described by another respondent as a lack of jobs in Ghana. The youth have finished their education but have no job possibilities in Ghana and leave the country to find another way of providing for themselves.

After arrival

Whatever the reason for leaving Ghana or expectations of what awaits them, my respondents say that once they arrived in the Netherlands, life was different than they had expected.

'It is an illusion, that is how it is'⁹

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

This simple quote captures how migrants feel the situation in the Netherlands once they have arrived. In the experience of my respondents it was not easy to find work, especially if a person does not have a residence permit. The living expenses in the Netherlands are higher than in Ghana which makes it harder for a person to put aside a certain part of his or her salary to send to family in Ghana or save money for future investments.

'It does also follow that if a person comes here for economic necessity it may not end up well with that person and he regrets that he has come here. Not long ago I met a guy from Ghana and then he said he had lived in the UK for 22 years. Then he said: Oh, now I regret I came. I could have lived better in Ghana.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

⁹ 'Het is een illusie, dat is gewoon zo'

To illustrate this further I will use the story of one of my respondents, I will use the pseudonym 'Peter'. Peter came to Europe to raise money to start his own business and buy livestock in Ghana. He wanted to purchase his own livestock once he had saved enough of the money he expected to make working in Europe.

Peter left his job at the farmer field school at an international NGO in Ghana. His journey to Europe took him through different African countries and eventually he ended up in Spain. Peter worked there for a couple of years until the debt crisis hit Europe. He lost his job at a construction company and started to look for other alternatives to Spain. Peter asked around to find out which country would be beneficial to travel to and some people advised him to go the Netherlands. He expected that there would be more job opportunities here and he had heard that there are many Ghanaians in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

Peter has been living in Amsterdam Zuidoost for about two years and has found a job as a cleaner. He would rather do something else but, he tells me, that the language barrier prevents this. In Spain he learned the language and interacted with the Spanish 'even though they are more racist than here'. In the Netherlands, the process starts over again. He is taking classes and hopes that once he has learned the language he will be able to get a job that pays more.

'The income is small and the expenditure here is more. So it is quite difficult. Like here, if you work four hours [a day] you are earning like 650 – 700 euro's. You pay your accommodation, you buy food. At the end of the month you see that all that money is gone. You keep trying, but it is not that easy. So that is how it is. It is not easy for you to say, I will keep 150 or 100 euro per month.'

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

5.1.2. Expectations of Europe in Ghana

The Ghanaian migrants say that the image people in Ghana have of life in Europe is becoming more realistic. The radio stations talk about the debt crisis and the difficulties of finding work. On the other hand, many still come here and some of my respondents have only come recently. This raises the question whether or not expectations of the Netherlands and possible Europe are changing. Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands might think that it is more realistic considering that their own view is altered by the experiences they have had.

I wonder if that applies to Ghanaian still living in Ghana. After all people in Ghana cannot see what life is actually like in the Netherlands. The current migrants have based their migration on what they have heard and seen of people returning from Europe and stories they have heard. People in Ghana have a picture in their mind about the Netherlands and Europe, and it is confirmed (in their mind) by the gifts they receive from migrants. If a migrant is sending expensive goods and money to meet the expectations of a migrants being successful and on the other hand is telling a person that life is hard for them and money tight, it can be misinterpreted. Not believing the stories of false expectations but receiving gifts could make relatives think that a migrant wants to keep the money he has earned for himself. This adds to the tension between expectations in Ghana and the perspectives of migrants living in Amsterdam.

A Ghanaian woman explains that people in Ghana that have not been to Europe before think that money is easy to get.

'They always need big big things from you. Big money from you. [...] So they think everybody here can do big big things. But they don't know the work the person is doing here. They don't think that. So if they see you they think you have money, so they will ask you. 'Can you give me this?' If you say no they say you are wicked.'

Ghanaian woman, 46 years old, respondent 10

According to a respondent the family expects a Ghanaian migrant to send money every month. If a person fails to do so then the family will call and ask where the money is: why haven't they received anything yet.

'Yeah, because they bel [call] you and say. I cannot do it every month. My mother and my father are dead but apart from that, because everybody there is: 'Please help'. They want you; they think that maybe here there is a lot of money here. That's what they think. It's Europe so we have everything and we have a lot of money. That is what they think because they have not been here before. That's why they do that. They don't know we are suffering to pay bills and if you don't pay your rent; the incasso and so. We have children here. If you tell them, they think you are lying. Like if you go there and they see you people we start asking you for money. They think you have a lot of money and some of them will start asking you. Some say they don't have anything and you feel pity for them and you give 10 euro.'

Ghanaian woman, 46 years old, respondent 10

This quote illustrates that migrants experience pressure from family members. There are certain expectations that they are supposed to meet. Meeting these expectations can cause tension for a migrant, since his situation might not permit him to do all that is expected of him as a migrant.

5.1.3. Communication about life in the Netherlands

I noticed that life in the Netherlands is not really discussed in detail with family in Ghana by my respondents. My respondents talk about praying together with family, telling them about the language, weather and inquiring about the others health. However, when I inform about stories that they tell people in Ghana about life in the Netherlands, I am told that the radio tells the family of the situation in Europe. The role of the migrant in informing family about their opportunities and the discrepancy between their expectations and situations does not appear to be discussed at great length. It appears that stories of failure or disappointment are taboo. Perhaps this is related to the investment that the migrant or perhaps the family has made in the migration process. Failure would mean the loss of that investment, whereas hoping to improve the situation might pay off.

One of my respondents reflects on the relationship with family members in the event of not being able to send remittances. According to him the family thinks a person is not being truthful.

'They think you do nothing. That you spoil your life and they do not respect you. If you are not able to send money, the family does not believe that you don't have.'

Ghanaian man, 63 years old, respondent 6

The loss of respect for a family member is relevant to note here. As already discussed respect is an important characteristic and part of Ghanaian identity. A person is required to be respectful to their elders. Losing this respect would most likely be painful and socially unacceptable.

One of my respondents was a migrant of 19 years who moved to the Netherlands seven months ago to join his mother. His mother sent for him after living by herself in the Netherlands for a number of years. I was able to ask him about his expectations and what his mother had told him about the Netherlands. His mother has told him very little about her life in the Netherlands, however he has high expectations of the Netherlands

'You know, everybody travels to have a better life. So I didn't expect anything, but to have a better life. To at least make something for myself. I am not expecting anything more than that, just to have a better life. That is all.'

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

This young man says that he does not expect very much. Just a better life, that is all. However, he does not explain what a better life is, even when asked to elaborate. The statement seems so simple as if life will be better in the Netherlands, no matter what.

‘Ok. She hasn’t told me much. So far but all I know is that it is not easy everywhere. But it depends on the person, the effort you put in life. She has already told me it is not easy and I also see it myself. So I’m just trying to do something good.’

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

Despite being told that life in the Netherlands is not easy he relates it to life being hard everywhere. Whether he earns money and does something good depends on him. What is interesting in the man’s approach to his new found role as a migrant. It is almost as if a migrant can work his way up in the world in the same manner as in a job. My respondents expect that if he works hard and put in the effort, you can do what other migrants have done; earn money and invest it in Ghana.

Although what to expect in the Netherlands or the disappointing situation upon arrival is not discussed in detail with family, migrants do give advice about coming or not coming to the Netherlands.

‘You talk to somebody, maybe they will say I will not listen. But plenty of them listen because now radios are announcing that Europe is difficult because of the crisis. This is not easy.’

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

This particular respondent was advised himself not to come to Europe. He started in Spain and now lives in the Netherlands. In Ghana his education was supported by a reverend mother (by this I assume he means a nun, the mother superior) who advised against his travel. I asked him how he felt about the choices he made. He says that she gave him good advice and he expresses regret for not listening to her. Now he advises his friends to stay in Ghana and not come to the Netherlands to find work.

‘Europe is nowadays not so easy to come by. Good things have passed. It’s not easy nowadays. So if you are in Ghana and God has helped you to do something and depend upon, then live, it is better. To come here you struggle sometimes. If you are here illegal it’s a big problem. Nowadays things are changed that when you are sick maybe you can go to hospital to get checked, it’s not like that. Some things are changing for better, some are changing for worse. Even if I apply for visa for my son to come here it’s so long problem. You have to procedure and in the end it doesn’t go through. That’s why he can’t come here to visit me.’

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

This respondent appeared to be momentarily taken aback by his honesty and quickly continued to say that he has learned a lot during his travels. If he had remained in Ghana he would not have had the same experiences and would not have grown in the same way. He rationalises the choice and stresses that it was still a good one since he has now matured as a person. It appears to me that he does not want to see his choice as a possible failure.

Another interesting point in this man’s narrative is that he refers to Europe as something that is hard to come by. Referring to Europe in this way makes it sound like a commodity instead of a place to live. This fits with the above discussed expectations people have of the Netherlands and Europe in general. The Ghanaian migrants come to earn money and then (intend to) leave.

Despite life in the Netherlands not being how my respondents had expected to be they chose to stay and try to make it. They have made the investment to come and try to make the most of it and find ways to improve their situation. They do not wish to return to Ghana just yet and not empty handed. Otherwise the investment they have made is a waste.

You have nothing to lose. That is how it is. You have an image and an expectation. This is what I want to do or I am going to work very hard. It is all inside your head, so if you come to a point where you have to sleep on the street you will do it. You are going to put everything into it, because you have to realise your goal.¹⁰

Ghanaian man, 48 years old, respondent 1

The expectation among many of my respondents is that if they can speak the Dutch language well they can get a better job, thereby improving their situation and prospects. However, considering that quite a few of my respondents take part in Dutch language classes, might mean these migrants are already more focussed on the language.

5.1.4. Summary findings - Expectations

In short, it appears that Ghanaian migrants had high expectations of the Netherlands before they came to the country. They undertook the journey expecting to find job opportunities and means to improve their life in Ghana. These expectations are based on what my respondents have seen and heard about the Netherlands from other migrants while still in Ghana. However, for most the life they had pictured for themselves is not the life they lead now. Expenses are high and it is difficult to find a job that covers living expenses, remittances and earns enough for personal investments. However, my respondents feel that they can make things work for themselves through personal effort. Their move to the Netherlands is an investment that they have made. Returning without anything means that the investment was wasted, so my respondents remain here, for the time being at least, and try what they can to improve their perspectives.

The Ghanaian migrants do not share negatives stories or situations of failure easily. The migrants in the Netherlands will refer to things being hard, but do not explain what it is that is hard. It appears that there is a taboo on failure as a Ghanaian migrant. If a migrant tells family in Ghana that the Netherlands is not as expected he is not believed. The migrants that have 'made it' are valued more and used as an example of what can be achieved. The importance of success is linked to Mazzucato's (2008) description of rewards. A migrant investing in Ghana and taking care of family is honoured after death. Therefore trying to succeed despite the 'hard life', can benefit the migrant in terms of receiving a reward if he can meet the expectations.

¹⁰ 'Je hebt niets te verliezen. Dat is gewoon zo. Je hebt een beeld, je hebt een verwachting. Dit wil ik doen, of ik ga heel hard werken. Het zit eigenlijk in je hoofd. Dus als je op een plek komt waar je op straat moet slapen, ga je het doen. Je gaat alles erin zetten, want je moet jouw doel realiseren.'

5.2. Transnational contacts

This is part of my findings focuses on the question of the meanings that Ghanaian migrants give to their transnational contacts. The important others in the lives of Ghanaians are mainly family members. The family is an important part of the lives of Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost and the transnational relationship that my respondents invest in the most. Transnational relationships with family members take on different forms. I have identified the following and will elaborate on them in the subsequent paragraphs: family in Ghana, support to family, transnational child - parent relationships, visits to family, funerals and investing in Ghana.

5.2.1. Family in Ghana

The family plays an important part of the lives of Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The importance of family and the closeness within a family is reflected in the way my respondents talk about relatives. My respondents when describing their nuclear family refer to the amount of siblings as 'we are six' or 'we are two'. The choice of the words 'we are' reflects identification with the members of the family as part of themselves. An extension of a persons' own identity. Another observation when looking at the family is that the migrant's definition of family is not limited to their nuclear family. Communication also takes place between the migrant and the extended family or close friends seen as family. As one of my respondent explained to me:

'We have the extended family system. We don't restrict ourselves that you and your wife and children are the whole family, but your uncles and so. So when you go there on holiday you and see your distant relation and they say: O, this one when you left married' and you meet at lot of people who are your cousins, your distant uncles and that and that. '

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

The importance of looking after family was also reflected during one of the church services that I attended. The Bible study was in Twi and the person sitting next to me, also one of my interview respondents, was kind enough to translate the general message to me. The message was about caring for others and not being selfish. My translator illustrated the point that was being made with an example:

'The Bible talks about not being selfish. I am married and maybe I only help my family and I don't want to help my wife's family. This is not good. It should not be like that. I should not be selfish. I must also help my wife's family.'

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

From my 'white Western' point of view, helping your own family is usually seen a selfless act. Extending that to the family of your spouse even more so. It is selfish when a person only looks out for themselves and to care about other people, including family, is a good and non-selfish thing. However, for my respondent selfishness has a different meaning. It is when you only care for your immediate family. This is in line with what I described above as the family being part of the persons' identity.

My respondents maintain regular contact with their family in Ghana while they are in the Netherlands. Most of the migrants contact their family at least few times a week to talk on the phone, arrange matters with the family and to organise financial support.

'On Sunday I call my brother. [...] Every Sunday after church, after the service. Even if I don't call he will call me. But my dad, maybe in the month I will call him like twice and my mom too.'

Ghanaian man, 29 years old, respondent 4

My father does. He of course has contact with them [his family], I wouldn't say daily, but he has a lot of contact with them. ¹¹

Ghanaian woman, 25 years old, respondent 5

5.2.2. Support family

Expectations of migrants living in the Netherlands and the expectations of family members in Ghana are often linked to remittances.

The support and sending of remittances is more complex than sending money at stipulated times and for certain occasions. In the interviews what a person send and what the family expected seemed to be a sensitive subject. People were reluctant to talk it about at first. It took numerous attempts on the subject to learn more about the meaning and expectations of remittances.

There is a certain amount of ambivalence in the accounts of my respondents. Some respondents state that they do not come from a poor family. Therefore they do not have to send anything as to support them.

'Oh, my family don't need anything. Because the little money that we get we try to manage it. Everybody is working. Let me say something; to whom? Let's be assuming maybe all of your family, everybody is working and you want to send telephone. What are you going to do that for? I'm having telephone. It is not necessary because maybe I am working good. I have my car, I have my telephone and give it to you is a waste of money. In my behalf, in my family everybody is working so... My families are in University and working in the bank, so it's not necessary.'

Ghanaian man, 28 years old, respondent 2

Respondents also tell me that they support their family, but that they are not expected to do so. Only if they are able to and have the financial means do they send money to families. At least that is what my respondents usually told me when I asked directly. However, throughout their stories of their contacts with their (extended) family I found that there are some expectations they feel they have to meet. Perhaps they are not always conscious of their perceived expectations or they don't want to share them with me when I ask them directly. Uncovering the meanings and tensions with remittances was made complicated by contradicting narratives within the same interview.

'Yeah you contribute. Like if I go home and I go and see an auntie that is very old and has nothing to live on. If I have anything I can donate to the person. I can give her clothing. I can give money. If I can afford, only if I can afford.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

In the same interview the respondent also talks about expectations that family members have. Even though he has told me that a migrant only gives when he can afford the following quote from the interview transcript shows that there are expectations. Whether it is compulsory to meet them is another matter, but there is certainly pressure put on the Ghanaian migrants to contribute to the lives of family members in Ghana.

¹¹ Original langzame: 'Mijn vader wel. Die heeft gewoon natuurlijk, nou dagelijks wil ik niet zeggen, maar die heeft gewoon heel veel contact met ze.'

'It may depend on the individuals because not everyone has got a very poor background. There are ups and downs in every home. So we expect you: we don't have shelter. If you are able, you are at home, something to live on or do you have something for us to shelter us. Some will expect that. There are those who can afford to build their own home, but their enjoyment is your presence coming home safely and happily. It is a pleasure.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

In this quote there is a certain amount of tension. The respondents says he only have to give if is able but on the other hand he talks of being expected to do certain things. In another interview with a respondent refers the pressure of sending remittances as a burden for the migrants.

'So sometimes it becomes a burden for people. We have to help our youngsters. We have to help our younger brothers, maybe your sister's daughter and son. In Africa we have so much depending on us, but we don't depend on only our nuclear family. We also go back to our extended family. Maybe if I can offer some help to some people but I learned the whites are not like that. Because here at the time you are 18 you already have your work and everything but it's not so in Ghana. So it makes life somehow very difficult but it's not all that difficult as people can live there'

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

The dependency of the nuclear and the extended family and the expectations that the family has of a migrant is an extra weight. It people in Ghana are depending on you for their income and calling you to send them money it is pressure on the migrants. Not being discusses the difficulties that my respondents have had in finding employment and saving money adds further to this tension. The man talks about youngsters despite only being 19 years old himself. As explain in the chapter focusing on identity, Ghanaian culture respect it is customary to show respect to a person older than you. As an older family member you are in turn expected to take care of the younger family members.

This is reflected in the role of the head of the family. The eldest living member of the family makes the decisions about what is best for the family and who should contribute what.

'Every family have the head. And if there is a problem within the family, we all sit under him and we discuss the issue. He will give us advise what we should do. In the better way that it will help the family. So as I am not in Ghana my head family he knows that I am here. So if anything or I have to pay money with a number of the family they count me in, I am included.'

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

Not physically being in Ghana does not exclude a person from their duties to contribute. The head of the family will contact the migrant and tell them what they are expected to contribute. The narratives of how family members requests thing differ between respondents. Respondents have told me about their family constantly calling them and the migrants send money to parents or children and sometimes the extended family. On the other hand respondents others say that they only do so when they can afford it, but what exactly qualifies as affording in not clear. It could be a difference in the wealth of the families and how much they need it as reflected in the quote at the beginning of this paragraph. It could also be that my respondents have different definitions on what is a necessary contribution to the family in Ghana.

‘With your question it is very clear to know that it is necessary for us to help other family in Africa, it is necessary. But it is on calls. Like if somebody calls you and he says he is sick then it is not necessary to ask: Why should you send money? And then if YOU want then you do it. Just to keep the person fit.’

Ghanaian man, 46 years old, respondent 11

It is necessary for people to support family in Ghana and you need not question the persons need or intentions if he is sick. On the other hand he stresses that it is the choice of the migrant. The person living in the Netherlands can make the decision whether or not to send money. The process of decision making for a migrant is interestingly captured in the words of a respondent:

‘For me not because I don’t see them as my parents. Because you know when you parents are there then you choose to help them. But the extended family, they are not going to accept it, be appreciative to it. Your parents know you don’t have, so you send and say ‘Mama this is what I have’ and your mother say thank you. But the extended family maybe they want more from us. They don’t know our situation here. So why must we do it. I mean for me that is my mind. I don’t choose to do it. [...] I choose not to send simply because sending does not bring good news to me. The person will expect more and I am not working with high salary. So you choose to keep what little you have. But when it is necessary you choose to do it. When it is not necessary then it’s not need for you to make a point of every month you send money. And also it is not good because the person will be relying on you but they know that every month you will bring it’

Ghanaian man, 46 years old, respondent 11

In earlier statement he said that it was necessary but here he says that you have a choice. It appears that there is some room for manoeuvre. Since he stresses that his parents would always receive remittances from him, but not the extended family it would seem that the room for negotiation lies in the relationship with the person who is requesting the money.

What is also interesting in this particular statement is that the migrant refers to the risk of dependency of the family on the migrant living in the Netherlands. He has adopted a different language and during the interview talked about the importance of seeing that money is well spend and what you have earn is not wasted.

Hope. If something happens to them and they end up in hospital they have hope that somebody on the other side of the world can make sure that at least the bill get paid so that they can get treatment. In short: hope. Hope that you will not died of hunger and that there is always somebody that can send you money so you can eat’¹²

Ghanaian woman, 25 years old, respondent 5

The meaning of having family in the Netherlands is described as hope for the family in Ghana. It is however also a form of social security. The family in Ghana has insurance in the form of a migrated family member since there is always somebody to fall back on if the times are hard.

¹² Original language: ‘Hoop. Mochten hen iets overkomen waardoor zij in het ziekenhuis belanden, hoop date r dan iemand is aan de andere kant van de wereld die ervoor kan zorgen dat er in ieder geval de rekeningen betaalt, zodat zij geholpen kunnen worden. Heel kort in een woord: hoop. Hoop dat je niet zal uitsterven van de honger als het erop aankomt dat er altijd iemand is die je geld kan sturen zodat je wel goed kan eten’

5.2.3. Transnational child – parent relationships

Children are expected to take care of their parents. Unlike ‘the whites’ the Ghanaians do not put their elderly in a retirement home but make sure he or she is provided for at home. One way of providing care for the parents is by sending a grandchild to live with them. (Grand)Parents help their children with the child rearing while they sons and daughters are living in the Netherlands.

I spoke to a Ghanaian woman in her early forties about her family situation. She has been in the Netherlands for about seven years. This lady was not able to earn enough money for her family in Ghana. A friend suggested that they come to Europe together. She had heard stories that Europe was ‘like heaven’ and thought coming to the Netherlands would be a good opportunity for her. At moment her stay in the Netherlands is uncertain while she waits for her residence papers. She has five children ranging from 10 years old and upwards. Her children are living with her mother, their grandmother, while she is in Europe. This lady talks to her children regularly over the phone, but has not seen them since she left for the Netherlands seven years ago. She tells me she cannot go to visit them without her residence papers.

During the interview I imagined that it must have been hard for her not to see her children for that long. Her ten year old has not seen his mother since he was three and I remarked that it must be hard for her not to see her children. However, she responded with surprise that I should think that. It was much better like this. They were doing much better now that she was living in Amsterdam Zuidoost:

‘No, I can talk to them and send them things and they me. I can do better financially and they listen to me better now I am here. I say do as I tell you or I will not send you’

Ghanaian woman, 43 years old, respondent 3

The children are always asking her to send things to them. It appears that being able to support her children financially is more important than being there with her children. She is able to get them to listen to her better by using the means and money she earns in Europe to wield control and get good behaviour from them. Parenting for Ghanaian migrants appears to be a transnational activity with not only the parents involved. To facilitate the migration of their children, grandparents will help with the child rearing. The feeling of separation and idea’s about sending children to school or to live with family varies among my respondents.

Another Ghanaian woman and her husband also sent their daughter to live were her (grand) mother for awhile when they first lived in the Netherlands. For them however, it was a different experience. She had the baby after they had just moved to the Netherlands, over 20 years ago. She had to work after having the baby and could not afford child care. Therefore she decided to send the child to Ghana so that her parents could look after their daughter. The daughter stayed with her grandparents in Ghana for six years until she came to the Netherlands to join her parents.

The couple said that for them it was a difficult decision to make. They did not feel they had another choice. The man shares his feeling about the situation with me and how forgot that he sent her to Ghana:

‘One day I went to the shop and they make an aanbieding [discount] and I bought everything for kids, pampers, Nutrion. On that day I bought a lot of things and I came home, my daughter was not home. I wept. I thought this is crazy for me. [...] I took it all back to the shop. I said this is not good. You buy something for your daughter and she is not home with you. You have to send and whether he or she is enjoying it you don’t know. It is not good advice to separate the family.’

Ghanaian man, 46 years old, respondent 11

I was not able to ask their daughter how she felt about spending the first part or her life in Ghana with her grandmother. However, I did interview a young man who had lived in Ghana while his mother was in the Netherlands. He is 19 years old and lived in with his grandmother in Ghana from the age of ten.

'We were staying with our grandmother, my mother's mother. Because our mother left us when we are very young.'

Ghanaian man, 19 years old, respondent 7

The young man and two of his sisters joined his mother a few months ago. In Ghana he went to boarding school and lived with his grandmother. He reflects on the time he spend at boarding school as having an advantage was that he had learned how to look after himself (cook, clear and manage money). Skills that he would not have learned if he had been living with his mother. Now he was able to take care of himself. He does not find it strange that he no longer lives with his grandmother. He says always knew a time would come when he wasn't living with her. Now he has his mother and is pleased that he is now reunited with her. When I ask him about his feelings about being apart from his mother he does not share his feelings about being separated for so long. According to him 'everybody needs a mother's love'. However, he says that it doesn't mean he doesn't miss his grandmother. She is able to take care of herself so he is not worried, but he does miss her.

5.2.4. Visits to family

Most of my respondents make frequent visits to Ghana. Those that have a resident permit that is, without it they will have to stay in the Netherlands access back in the country will be denied, once they leave. Those who are able to travel do so every few years. Families in Ghana are eager to see them again according to my respondents. When they go, my respondents don't just go to visit their parents. A visit to all family members is expected, since the extended family also wants to see you.

I asked a Ghanaian man in his late sixties, early seventies about his visits to Ghana. He said that he did not go often, only once a year. Considering the effort and years it takes migrants to get to the Netherlands and the expenses of travel it seems an investment the Ghanaian migrants find important.

Well, on special holidays then it's important to go to your family. Maybe try two years or once a year to go and see your family. If you don't have any family then it is your own decision. If not you have been created by God, somebody gave birth to you. You have to.

Ghanaian man, 28 years old, respondent 3

5.2.5. Funerals

A specific example of the transnational contact with families in Ghana is that of a funeral. For Ghanaians a funeral is an important ceremony. A Ghanaian funeral is seen as the most important event in a person's lifetime, despite taking place after it is over.

'The Ghanaians believe that it is the last time that one has to give one a due respect and salutation. To give you a send off and for that reason our funerals are highly congregated.'

Ghanaian man, 68 years old, respondent 6

Paying your respects is a generally excepted idea of a funeral in many cultures. However the way that a funeral is held is what makes a funeral Ghanaian, not the act of a funeral itself. It is more than showing your respect. A Ghanaian funeral is also a social event. Everybody in the community is expected to attend, both in Ghana and in the Netherlands. If family members are living abroad and the deceased is a close relative they are expected to come to Ghana to attend the funeral and often to help with the preparations.

'If someone from my family is dead, the family has to sit down. Arrange. For the date they will bury the dead person. If those cases if some of the family, maybe the children are in Europe, sometimes they extend the date. [...]Because the family are expecting you. Maybe I'm the eldest son or eldest daughter here and I have to go and bury my father. That is way, when it happens like that, some of them leave here and go. Mostly those people at home also help. Because you are in the country here, sometimes you don't go to funeral there. So those people who are there will take the full control over whatever they want to do there and then you just help them with the money that you have.

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

For Ghanaians a funeral is a large gathering that spans a number of days. A respondent explained to me that a funeral is held on a Saturday. The family of the person that has passed away advertises the 'event'. In the morning of the funeral the family gathers to pay their respects before the funeral service. Later in the day the family holds a reception and everybody is expected to come. This reception is more of a party with enough food and drinks for everyone and continues into the night. The guests at the funeral bring gifts, usually money, to contribute to the costs of the funeral.

I asked my respondents about the contribution that people living in the Netherlands make to funerals. From their responses it appears that it is expected that you contribute in some way, depending on your relationship with the deceased. One man said it was important to contribute: Just to show your love. Does this mean that in not contributing you are expressing that you feel less love for the person? Then the expectation is not more implicit pressure to contribute a lot of money otherwise you say that you do not care about the personal that has passed away.

In the situation where a Ghanaian person dies in the Netherlands, the families in Ghana sometimes request that the person is buried over there.

'It is a demand. They think she is their loved one. She cannot be buried outside of the country. They bring her back home. It is costly, but if the family demand it, you have to do it for them. If you don't do it for them you just bring a very big problem for the family, between you and the family.'

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

The person in charge of taking the body to Ghana is most likely a spouse or child. This demand made by a family member of the deceased is pressure on the migrant. If he fails to comply with the wishes of the family it will cause problems. In most cases respondents say that people are insured but if that is not the case the migrant is expected to pay for this expensive transport.

'Maybe he is not insured, then the family is demanding from you. Maybe you have to go to AMRO bank and ask for money.'

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

The morning after a thanksgiving service is held in the church. I have been able to attend such a service in a church in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Everyone is instructed to wear black and white clothing at request of the mourning family (thankfully someone informed me of this beforehand).

During the service a short biography of the person is read aloud. The family express their thanks to the church. Family members and church members that wish to stand around the family as they speak are invited to do so. A woman from the church told me it was to help them. She involved me in this custom and I found myself standing with half of the church at the front to 'support' the family. The fact that I had no idea whose family it was seem irrelevant to the person that had taken me to the front.

The church members had seemingly contributed to the funeral costs. I usually sat behind the man in charge of church funds and often witness people paying their monthly dues during the service. During this service I had seen more money and often 10, 20 and 50 euro bills being past to this man. It soon became clear what this money was for. After the speeches and prayers a person from the church offered the amount had been collected by the church members

5.2.6. Investing in Ghana

It is not only the family or the extended family that Ghanaians support. Where possible they try to do something for other people in their country and or the village where they were born. The Ghanaian migrants feel a strong sense of belonging in Ghana since it is the country they were born. This attitude also applies to the villages the Ghanaian migrants grew up in. This is reflected in the Netherlands by the interaction between two men from the same village. They will refer to each others as brothers. Considering the importance of family ties it appears that they include these people in their families. Investing in the villages appears also to be of significance

'Yeah, it's very important. What I may say, you were born in the village. You have been bred, grew up in the village. When you came up, you saw some people having stores, winkel. People have opened a company and some of us were able to work there. So it is very important as you come here, and by Gods grace you have enough to open a company or establish a store, is also a credit to you yourself. You are helping your village. So most of us, some of them, I think are able to do that. If you have enough money and you help someone God will also bless you.'

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

The migrant investing or contributing to their home community is a portrayal of themselves that is linked to what they can do for people less fortunate than themselves. In the quote lies the implication that you are doing something good for the place you were born, but in doing so you are 'a credit to yourself'. A migrant is able to show what has become of him or her and is helping others. Through that help the migrant can be blessed by God.

Being blessed by God is very important for Ghanaian migrants. In just about all interviews, participants observations and casual conversations a reference is made to God and the Christian beliefs of my respondents. In Christian religion it is important to give to others and look after thy neighbour. My respondent told me that he also gives money to the orphans or the widows. He spends what he has with them.

Another man sitting in the same room during the interview responded to that comment by saying:

'As a Christian he understands the principles of Christianity. When you know all these principals it make it very easier to do something good.'

Ghanaian man, 50 years old, church member

The general idea in their Christian faith is that good deeds will be rewarded when getting to heaven. Therefore having a little to spend on earth is not a bad thing if you spend it helping the poor. You will later be rewarded for it after death.

A man I talked to after a church service told me that he had brought electricity to his town. He had also taken care of building a school. The villagers had offered to put a plaque on the wall of the building stating his name as benefactor, but, he said he declined. After all the recognition for his good deed came from God and He would reward him in the end. However, the fact that the good deed had to be mentioned in the very brief encounter that we had suggested that the image of him as a doing something for his village was important to him.

Those not able to invest in their hometown find other ways to contribute. The orphanages of Ghana are supported by the Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Nearly all my respondents talked about giving money to orphanages in Ghana and one man buys cheap second hand clothing to send to his village.

'Sometimes I also give money to the orphans or the widows. That what I have, I have to spend with them'

Ghanaian man, 53 years old, respondent 8

A pastor in the Ghanaian community is working on a plan to set up long term support for orphanages in the area he originates from. He is mobilising the church and other members of the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam Zuidoost to support. He represents the project in Ghana and was eager to show me his work there by provided me with a DVD of pictures of him at the orphanage in his home town.

As discussed above, funerals are a very serious business in Ghana. The grander the funeral that is held, the greater the success in a persons' live. The size of a funeral depends on how much a migrant has contributed to family member or his hometown during his life. This makes it even more important for migrants to meet the expectations of the extended family in Ghana. Eventually they will benefit from their success in the Netherlands or been shamed by their failure. It is after all the family that decide the extent of the funeral after a persons' death. (Mazzucato, 2008)

5.2.7. Summary – findings transnational contacts

Family relationships are very important for a Ghanaian migrant. The migrants remain in close contact with their family in Ghana while in the Netherlands. Situations are often different for Ghanaian migrants that they expected upon arrival in the Netherlands. Yet the Ghanaian migrants try to conform to the patterns that are expected of them.

The transnational contacts with family revolve for a large part around the interaction between parents and children. Parenting is a task that is shared by the family. For my respondents this form of parenting can be transnational. Parents send or leave their children with family or in a boarding school and go to the Netherlands.

The emotions of sending the children away to school are not dwelled upon for long. This is similar to the taboo on talking about failure or hardships migrants experience. Negative or painful feelings and emotions are not talked about by respondents and when they are mentioned it is always followed with a rationalisation of the choice that has been made. By sending their children away the Ghanaian migrants are able to focus on what they have come to the Netherlands for to improve their lives and that of the family. Transnational contact with families in parenting is a way for a migrant to achieve the goal he or she came to the Netherlands for. It all serves a purpose to be a 'good migrant'.

Remittances symbolise the expectations of improvements and financial means. Remittances are therefore a more complex process than just money and goods being exchanged over borders. They signify the meanings and expectations attached to the process of migration. The family hold certain expectations of the migrant. There appears to be no punishment for those who don't remit. However, the stories of Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost indicate that there are rewards for those who do things 'as they should'. These rewards are not in material things but are attached to the religious and social identity of the migrants.

6. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this research was to explore how transnational contacts of Ghanaian migrants affect their everyday lives. To analyse this I concentrated on the meanings given to transnational contacts with important others in Ghana and the Ghanaian migrants construction of their identity. I will focus on the most significant findings: migrant identity, demarcation, the good migrant, travellers, home and continuing family relationships.

6.1. Identity

Ghanaian migrants attribute certain characteristics to themselves that make them Ghanaian. Ethnic divides that might exist in Ghana on the basis of regions or tribes (in so far these divisions are present in Ghana) fall away in the Netherlands. Migrants living in Amsterdam Zuidoost do not make distinctions between Ghanaians, but seen themselves as belonging to the same group. The main features of this group are: respect, religious identity and strong family ties.

Respect is linked to a desired moral identity that my respondents assign to themselves and other people from Ghana. Respect is described as a part of a hierarchy that is based on a persons' age. To illustrate; in an interaction between two people, the younger person will have a high regard for the older person. The older Ghanaian will have more privileges and the younger person must shows respect by, for example, obeying what the older person says. The same rule applies in parenting; a child is expected to obey a parent and not talk back, if he does this is considered to be disrespectful.

Over a period of time, respect has emerged into an understanding of 'how we do things' as Ghanaians. This common understanding in the interactions between Ghanaians has, over time, become a pattern. This pattern, adopted as a common 'rule', indicates that the interaction has become institutionalised (Berger and Luckman 1966). This institutionalised interaction refers to interaction that has over time been adopted by many individuals and has become the *way things are done*. For Ghanaian migrants this institutionalisation is visible by not excluded migrants from this pattern. They have to be respectful towards their family even if they are not living in the same country or on the same continent.

The Ghanaian community in Amsterdam plays an important role in constructing and preserving the Ghanaian migrants' identity. As Blumer (1969) asserts the identity of an individual is shaped by the interaction with others. The Ghanaian migrants demonstrate this in the way they reproduce their Ghanaian identity through interaction with others migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This is apparent in another feature of Ghanaian identity; their religious identity. Practicing religion is done together with family members in Ghana and other Ghanaians in the Netherlands. Ghana is referred to as warmer due to the people being Christian there. By attributing these characteristics to Ghana, migrants are constructing the meaning of their religion and the role it plays in their social world. This religious identity of my respondents is not merely a Christian identity but a *Ghanaian* Christian identity. Ghanaian migrants have their own churches in Amsterdam Zuidoost and refer to their practices in church as 'doing things the same as people are doing Ghana'. By making this connection they reaffirm their Ghanaian Christianity, referring to shared meanings between themselves as migrants in the Netherlands and people living in Ghana.

6.2. Demarcation

Ghanaian migrants use the features of their identity to draw a symbolic boundary between 'them' (Ghanaians) and 'others' (in the Dutch society). This demarcation is the strongest between Ghanaians and those my respondents described as 'the whites'. This demarcation is based on physical appearance; a person has white skin, but the differentiation is also linked to the behaving a certain way: being Ghanaian. The described features of Ghanaian identity: respectfulness, religion and strong family connections, do not apply to the whites according to my respondents.

The extent of this demarcation is visible in the limited interaction between the Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost and Dutch people. My respondents seek out each other and spend their time together with other Ghanaian migrants. Integration in the Netherlands is referred to as integrating in the Ghanaian community in Amsterdam Zuidoost. This definition of integration used by my respondents contrasts the use of the word integration used in Dutch society, where its common use is; the extent in which a migrant has assimilated to the Dutch society. For Ghanaian migrants it does not appear to be important to interact with the Dutch. It is more important to find a place within the Ghanaian community and adjust to living in the Netherlands among fellow Ghanaian migrants.

6.3. Travellers

The Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost do not identify with the term migrant. My respondents refer to themselves as travellers. A traveller is described as an adventurous person and moves from place to place. This description reflects the meaning Ghanaian migrants have given to the migration process; their situation is a temporary state of being. Everything the Ghanaian does in the Netherlands is as a traveller, not a permanent dweller. Not being a permanent resident, in the mind of the Ghanaian, affects the way a migrant sees their role in the Dutch society. By limiting their interaction with other people than other Ghanaians, whether intentional or not, the Ghanaian migrants can maintain their Ghanaian identity and view the rest of the world from a distance without feeling the need to take part.

The identity of a traveller is reflected in the symbolic boundaries described above. The demarcation between the 'whites' and the Ghanaian migrants and the words migrants use to describe themselves reflect the idea that their situation is only temporary. The demarcations also uphold their identity as Ghanaians. Although the Ghanaian migrants I interviewed interact with important others in two or more countries these interactions appear to be predominately with Ghanaians. The transnational interactions appear to be mostly between Ghanaians in different nation-states and less of an engagement with the 'whites'. I consider it is possible for the Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost to remain more or less in Ghana. They interact predominantly with each other, have set up their own organisations and places of worship.

6.4. Home

Connected to the identity of the traveller is the way the meaning of home is constructed by Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost. For migrants, Ghana is no longer the country they live in, but the country they came from. However, Ghana is seen as home, not the Netherlands even if a Ghanaian migrant has been in Netherlands for thirty years or more.

Migration strengthens the identification with home, more so than if a person was living in Ghana. This notion of Ghana as home is constructed by the migration process itself. What constitutes as home is perhaps not constructed on a conscious level until a person no longer lives in the country that he or she has grown up in. Blumer (1969) refers to meaning being shaped by (shared) experiences. This is visible in the sense that migrants have reshaped how they give meaning to home as a person living outside of Ghana. A Ghanaian in Ghana could attach a different meaning to home since he or she has not shared the same experiences. The experience of migration for Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost has led to a reversal of an idealised destination. Before leaving Ghana the Ghanaian migrants saw their destination (the Netherlands) as 'a place like heaven'. They idealised their destination, but were disappointed in the situation and possibilities after arrival.

Now that the Ghanaian migrants have come to the Netherlands it appears that Ghana is rewarded attributes that the country might not have had for the migrants before leaving Ghana. In stories migrants tell about Ghana, a feeling of warmth and community in Ghana is described. Social life is considered to be better in Ghana and migrants look forward to going home. Instead of Europe it appears that now Ghana takes on the form of the 'Promised Land'.

6.5. The good migrant

For Ghanaian migrants living in Amsterdam Zuidoost family relationships are important. My respondents continue the relationships with their family in Ghana, while living in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The Ghanaian migrants I interviewed indicate that when they were in Ghana, other migrants returning to Ghana (not necessarily permanently) seemed to have money. Interactions with these migrants, the families of migrants or stories about migrants shape the expectations people in Ghana have about the Netherlands. The meaning given to migration to the Netherlands is; a way of obtaining prosperity and having opportunities. However, situations are often different for Ghanaian migrants upon arrival than they expected and the picture in their mind appears to be an illusion. Yet despite this the Ghanaian migrants try to conform to the patterns that are expected of them. The expectations that family members have of a migrant living in the Netherlands and a migrant the ability to of a migrant to meet these expectations leads to tension in the relationship. Part of this tension relates to the meaning that the family of Ghanaian migrants have given to the Netherlands; a place to earn more money than in Ghana.

Attached to this meaning given to Europe are remittances. Remittances symbolise the expectations of improvements and financial means. They signify the meanings and expectations attached to the process of migration and that which the family derives meaning from (Blumer, 1969). In the interaction between family members in Ghana and Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost, remittances are therefore a more complex process than money and goods simply being exchanged over borders. The remittances have become symbols through which a migrant can show that they are successful and ultimately; a good migrant. A good migrant invests in the community he or she has come from and sends regular remittances to the family in Ghana.

Physically meeting expectations is not the only tension in the relationships with family. Talking about the disappointments Ghanaian migrants feel or having regrets about migrating appears to be a taboo. The Ghanaian migrants do not share negative stories or situations of failure easily. During the interviews Ghanaian migrants referred to things being hard in the Netherlands, but did not elaborate. Feelings about their hardships were rarely voiced and those that did elaborate were quick to gloss over the subject after they had talk about it and say it had all served a purpose in their personal growth.

This taboo on failure also upholds the shared meaning of Europe. If a migrant manages to make it then he is a success in his hometown and among his family members. Perhaps this perception is valued as more important than painting 'realistic' picture of Europe. On the other hand if a migrant tell family in Ghana that the Netherlands is not as expected he is not believed. The migrants that have 'made it' are valued more and used as an example of what can be achieved. It appears that migrants are in a double bind. It is taboo to talk about failure as a migrant and the difficulties in meeting the expectations of family members, but if a migrant does break this taboo and talk about failure the family perceives the person as being untruthful and not a good migrant. The importance of not breaking this taboo and being perceived as a successful migrant is linked to what Mazzucato (2008) describes as rewards. A migrant investing in Ghana and taking care of family is honoured after death. This reward is a grand funeral once the migrant has passed away. This privilege can only be obtained by having sent enough remittances.

My findings indicate that a grand funeral is not the only motivation for the migrant to want to be perceived as a good migrant. There appears to be no punishment for Ghanaian migrants who don't remit. However, the stories of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands indicate that there are rewards for those who do things 'as they should'. These rewards are not in material things but are attached to the religious and social identity of the migrants. During their lifetime God will reward them with blessings. The idea being that if the migrant looks after his family and hometown, God will in turn provide enough for him. If a migrant is eventually successful then he will become an example for others of a person that is a good migrant.

6.6. Continuing family relationships

The transnational contacts with family revolve for a large part around the interaction between parents and children. Parenting is a task that is shared by the family – not just the parents of children but also grandparents or aunts etc. are involved in child care. What is interesting is that for the Ghanaian migrants in Amsterdam Zuidoost this form of parenting can be transnational. Parents send or leave their children with family or in a boarding school and go to the Netherlands. The emotions of sending the children away to school are not dwelled upon for long. Some parents I interviewed said it was hard for them but still made the choice to be separated from their children. As mentioned above, negative or painful feelings and emotions are rarely

discussed by respondents. When these feelings are mentioned, they are followed by a rationalisation of the choice that has been made. By sending their children away the Ghanaian migrants are able to focus on what they have come to the Netherlands for; improving their lives and that of the family. Transnational contacts with families in parenting is a way for a migrant to achieve the goal he or she comes to the Netherlands for. This shows the strength of the patterns of how migrants are expected to do things. The choices a migrant makes and the things he or she endures, serves the purpose of making use of the investment that has been made and being a good migrant.

6.7. Transnationalism

Portes (2001) states that studying transnationalism is important. It affects the ways in which a migrant integrates in the host country. Portes refers here to the interaction of the migrant in both the society in the country of origin and the host country. This raises questions about what should be considered as the society in the host country and how integration should be interpreted. In my findings the affects of transnationalism point to limited participation in the Dutch society, but Ghanaians do consider themselves integrated in Amsterdam Zuidoost, albeit in the Ghanaian community. Other Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands are the people that the Ghanaian migrants interact with.

Based on my findings regarding the interaction with other Ghanaian migrants I am inclined to take the approach of Mascini et al (2009) in their study of Burundi refugees. Transnational contacts are not limited to the interaction a migrant has with important others outside of the country he or she is residing in. The contacts that a migrant has with fellow countrymen the host country can be included in the study of transnationalism since these interactions influence and strengthen the connection with the country of origin.

6.8. The research questions

This research was centred around two main research questions:

1. How do Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands give meaning to the transnational contacts with the people 'left behind' in Ghana?
2. How is the social identity of Ghanaian migrants constructed and how does transnationalism affect their identities?

The meanings that Ghanaian migrants attach to transnational contacts are linked to the expectations that family members have of life in Europe. For the family in Ghana, migration means the opportunity to improve your life and the lives of your family members. Remittances symbolise the expectations of improvement and financial means. The strong connections that the migrants maintain with the family prolong the process of trying to meet the expected pattern of migration. For Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands, sending remittances is a way through which a migrant can show that they are successful. This leads to the construction of the identity of a good migrant.

Ghanaian migrants reaffirm their Ghanaian identity through interaction with others, in Ghana and other Ghanaian migrants in the community of Amsterdam Zuidoost. The main features of Ghanaian identity are: respect, religious identity and strong family ties. The boundaries that the Ghanaians draw up between themselves and the whites, the limited interaction with the Dutch and the migrants' identity as travellers also indicate that they see themselves as Ghanaians temporarily outside their country. Even if migrants eventually spend years in Amsterdam Zuidoost, their position and identity in the Netherlands is still described as that of a temporary resident who will eventually go back to Ghana. Ghana is seen as home, the Promised Land to which the migrant will be returning. Therefore it is more important for a Ghanaian migrant to invest in the relationship with family in Ghana and other Ghanaians in the Netherlands in order to maintain his identity as a Ghanaian during the time he is in the Netherlands. After all, the goal is to eventually return home to Ghana.

7. Recommendations for further research

This study raises interesting questions that cannot be explored within the scope of this research. The first is how meanings given to Europe and the Netherlands are constructed in Ghana, especially remittances as symbols of migration. My research shows that remittances are more than money being exchanged over borders. Remittances are symbols that are interpreted and given meaning by migrants and their families. Further research on this topic, focusing on the construction of meaning in Ghana would provide insights into the construction of the notion of 'good migrants' and the extent to which this identity is valued.

Perhaps this would also shed light on the taboo there appears to be on failure. Do families in Ghana dismiss failure of migrants to uphold the identity of the good migrant and enforce the desired behaviour that accompanies it; the sending of remittances and investing in the community? Perhaps families are unaware of the situation in the Netherlands.

Research on the construction of shared meanings in Ghana could lead to insights on what the 'double bind' looks like from the perspective of people in Ghana. Ultimately this could lead to a better understand of the dual lives migrants live. Not just in terms of taking part in the host society and the society of origin but also in terms of understanding the complexity of the migration process.

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Appendix I: Interview guide

The following topics were discussed during the in-depth interviews:

1. Personal migration to the Netherlands
2. Expectations before migration
3. Contact with family, friends etc. in Ghana
 - a. Frequency
 - b. Interaction and reasons
 - c. Perceived expectations
4. Contact with other Ghanaian migrants

During the interview I left room for more information shared by the interviewee apart from this topic list. The sequence of the topics was not necessary in the order listed about. It all depended on the conversation flow and the responses from the interviewee.

Each interview started with an introduction of myself and the research. I also explained to the interviewee that his or her responses will be used anonymously in the research.

Topic 1 – Personal life and migration to the Netherlands

- How long have you lived in the Netherlands?
- What do you do in the Netherlands?
 - Study, work etc.
- What did you do in Ghana?
- Did you come to the Netherlands alone?
 - If no: who did you come to the Netherlands with?
- What is it like for you as a Ghanaian living in the Netherlands?

Topic 2 – Expectations / life in the Netherlands

- Can you tell me about your decision to come to the Netherlands?
 - How did you make that decision? With whom and why?
- How do you prepare for the trip?
 - Did you already have connections in the Netherlands?
 - Prompts: papers, jobs etc.
 - Financing of the journey
- Could you tell me how you found your way in the Netherlands?
 - Prompts: finding a place to live, employment etc.
- Did you have relatives or friends living in the Netherlands before you came from Ghana?
 - Did they provide you with help/support?
 - What kind of help?
- What were your expectations of the Netherlands?
 - What kind of opportunities did you expect to have in the Netherlands?
 - Prompts: job opportunities, studying, social life
- Is that different from the life you expect to have now you are in the Netherlands?

Topic 3 - Contact with family, friends etc. in Ghana

- Do you have family in Ghana?
 - Could you tell me about your family?
 - Prompts: size, professions, nuclear family/extended family
 -
- Who else do you contact in Ghana?
 - Prompts: business contacts, friends
 - Why do you remain in contact with these people?
- How do you stay in contact with people in Ghana?
 - Through what channels, frequency?
 - Topics of conversation/reasons to speak to each other
- When was the last time you spoke to somebody still living in Ghana?
 - What did you talk about?
- What do people in Ghana think the Netherlands is like?
- What do you think people in Ghana think your life in the Netherlands is like?
 - Do you tell them about your life here?
 - What do you tell them?
- Have you been back to visit Ghana since you moved to the Netherlands?
 - If yes: was there a special occasion?
 - Did you bring anything with you from the Netherlands
 - Why these goods, ideas etc.?
 - If no: would you like to go back to Ghana?
 - Visit or stay?
 - Why?
- Do you support or help people in Ghana?
 - If yes: who and what kind of support?
 - Do you help them financially? What do you contribute to most?
 - Why do you contribute to this?
- What happens when someone is not able to contribute to family in Ghana?
- Is it important to give back to people in Ghana?

Topic 4 Contact with other Ghanaian migrants

- Do you know many Ghanaians in The Netherlands?
- Where do you know them from? Where do you meet?
- Is it important to spend time with others from Ghana
 - Why or why not?
 - What do you talk about?
 - With whom (ethnicity)?