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Caarls, K.; Mazzucato, V.

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MAFE Working Paper 37

**Transnational marriages and reunification:
Ghanaian couples between Ghana and
Europe**

Kim Caarls¹ (Maastrich University -Nidi), Valentina Mazzucato
(Maastrich University)

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¹caarls@nidi.nl

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1.1 Introduction

In the context of international migration, transnational relationships in which couples *living apart together across borders* are common because of limited possibilities of migrating together. In recent decades, migration laws in Europe have become stricter, creating barriers to entry and limited possibilities for family reunification (Kraler, 2010; Leerkes & Kulu-Glasgow, 2011). These limitations apply especially to couples coming from developing countries. As a result, transnational relationships are gaining prominence (Kofman, Kraler, Kohli & Schmoll, 2011). At the same time, living transnationally might be a choice for some couples, such as when geographical separation is a continuation of previous spousal living arrangements. This choice may particularly be the case where marital relationships have an independent and fluid character, as has been documented in some parts of Africa.

This paper investigates couples' transnational living arrangements and to what extent couples reunify or remain transnational. Generally, studies that address couples and migration do not explicitly consider the variety of living arrangements that may result from migration. Studies often focus on couples who migrate either jointly or successively (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; González-Ferrer, 2007), and these studies concentrate on the labour market outcomes of either or both partners (Boyle, Feng & Gayle, 2009; Wagner & Mulder, 1993). Moreover, it is generally assumed that couples have been living together before migration and that all couples aspire to reunify (Landolt & Wei Da, 2005). Questions regarding how these living arrangements might be shaped by the situation in the sending or receiving country are often left unanswered.

We study transnational relationships of Ghanaian migrants. Although family separations because of international migration have increasingly received scholarly attention, these studies mostly focus on migration from Latin America or Asia (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Migration between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe has received scant attention, even though migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa constitute one of the largest migrant populations of Europe. Moreover, Ghanaian couples are particularly interesting to study because multilocal residence is a common practice among Ghanaian couples irrespective of migration, which may facilitate people's decisions regarding LATAB relationships (Oppong, 1983).

We examine the prevalence of transnational couples and to what extent they reunify. Through this study, we explore whether these living arrangements are the consequence of migrants' choice or whether socio-economic or policy-related characteristics in the receiving country shape migrants' spousal living arrangements. We adopt a historical perspective, using biographic life history data from the MAFE-Ghana project. We examine Ghanaian couples ($N=291$) who have experienced, or are experiencing, a period of transnationality. We also estimate discrete-time logistic event history models to estimate the probability of reunification in the receiving country, which is either the Netherlands or the UK. We include individual, couple and context characteristics that influence couples' probability of reunifying in the receiving country. We include information regarding couples' living arrangements before migration to study the role of the sending country context. Additionally, we explore the role of the receiving country context by comparing couples who migrated to either the UK or the Netherlands, and investigate whether their legal status and the period of migration affect the probability of reunification.

1.2 The sending country context

Norms regarding conjugal life in Ghana

Family norms in migrants' origin countries are important for understanding choices around transnational family life. These context-specific norms are not usually considered in demographic studies concerning couple migration (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Consequently, transnational family life is usually seen as stressful, problematic, and a 'second-best' option whereas this is not always the case. As Dreby and Adkins (2010) show, transnational families are either discussed as households that, despite the different constraints they face, continue to function as cooperative units or as households where geographical separation creates or exacerbates conflict.

In conjugal life in Ghana, spousal geographic separation, as in many parts of West Africa, is common (Coe, 2011; Oppong, 1983). Marriages are often arrangements between families, serving to create and maintain alliances between them. In these cases, geographical distance between spouses can be the rule rather than the

exception, and too much intimacy between a husband and wife might reduce the loyalty to the respective families of the spouses (Oppong, 1983). Despite the lack of co-presence, husbands and wives share productive and reproductive obligations and responsibilities (Fortes, 1950).

Marriages in Ghana are not necessarily formally arranged; they tend to have a fluid character. Divorce occurs relatively easily and frequently (Clark, 1994). According to Takyi and Gyimah (2007), divorce is even more prevalent among Ghanaians from matrilineal lineages, such as the Akan (Takyi & Gyimah, 2007). The high prevalence of divorce might be the result of external factors such as the spread of Western norms concerning individualism or a consequence of the informal and fluid character of marriages combined with the importance of lineage ties (Bleek, 1987; Oppong, 1980). Others attribute these higher levels of divorce to the reputed independence and autonomy of Ghanaian women both from patrilineal and matrilineal descent (Clark, 1994; Oppong, 1970).

The practice of living apart together is, of course, not an exclusively African phenomenon. Demographers also have studied non-residential relationships among predominantly Western populations in Western countries. Previously, individuals were narrowly conceptualized as either single, in a cohabiting union or married, thereby assuming that partnership and co-residence coincide (Roseneil, 2006). However, emerging studies have identified increasing social acceptance of these LAT relationships (Duncan & Phillips, 2011; Latten & Mulder, 2013; Levin, 2004).²

Explanations for why people are involved in LAT relationships differ considerably between African and Western contexts. Non-residential relationships in many parts of Africa are generally ascribed to loyalty towards the wider family. In contrast, research on this type of relationship in Western countries generally identifies different reasons, such as the need for autonomy of both spouses. Although motivations for being in LAT relationships vary between countries and over the course of a person's life, they tend to occur more frequently among the young, the higher

² We use the terms 'LAT relationships' and 'non-residential relationships' interchangeably. Additionally, we refer to multilocal practices when discussing LAT relationships.

educated, or the divorced (Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran & Mays, 2009). These studies distinguish between LAT relationships that exist because of economic constraints and those that exist because both partners choose this particular lifestyle (Levin, 2004).

Both studies on African and Western non-residential relationships focus primarily on relationships occurring inside nation-state borders, thus omitting cases of *LATAB* couples. Origin-context familial norms might encourage transnational relationships for Ghanaian migrants because multilocal residence is a socially accepted and widespread practice among couples. However, motivations to live apart together across borders might also align with motivations found among LAT couples in a Western context.

1.3 Living apart together across borders

Few studies have explicitly incorporated the family and family separation when distinguishing between different types of migrants. Previous migration scholars have used different typologies to classify migration that were based on labour outcomes, the duration of migration, legal status, or other factors (e.g., Cohen, 1996; King, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), one of the first scholars to unravel how men and women create and recreate family life in the context of international migration, placed transnational family life at the forefront of her study. She differentiated between three types of migration: 1) *independent migration*, referring to unmarried migrant men or women who migrate independently; 2) *family unit migration*, which captures intact families who migrate as a whole; and 3) *family stage migration*, referring to cases where the husband migrates and his wife and children follow later. These typologies determine how family life across borders functions and what type of transnational ties and practices are maintained.

Hondagneu-Sotelo's category of *family stage migration* encompasses the reunification of families, at some point, in the receiving country. This consideration corresponds to the common assumption that transnational families are a temporary phenomenon, with the implicit belief that 1) migrants desire to reunify with their family and 2) this desire is always directed towards the receiving country (Landolt & Wei Da, 2005; Mazzucato et al., 2014a). However, for some migrants, living transnationally

might be favoured over reunification because of constraining circumstances or choices. As Levitt (2001a) noted, transnational lifestyles are no longer exceptional but a common way of life. Moreover, many migrants also return to their origin country, where they reunify with their family. Consequently, families may stay separated for extended periods of time, may not reunify at all, or may reunify in the origin country.

Considering these aspects, two additions can be made to Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) typology. First, with female migration increasing, *family stage migration* can also refer to women who migrate while leaving a husband and/or children behind. Second, recognizing transnationalism as a lifestyle, a fourth category can be added: 4) *families living apart together across borders*. This category refers to transnational family life that is characterized by long-term separations or transnational families for whom reunification is not the goal. Furthermore, reunification in the origin country could be an additional category, which is beyond the scope of this paper, but a category that is starting to be addressed (Baizan et al., 2014; Caarls et al., in press).

Little is known about the reunification behaviour of *LATAB couples*. Information regarding the prevalence of transnational couples is rare, and we have limited knowledge regarding the factors that influence the decision to either stay separated or reunite. Comparing spousal reunification patterns of immigrants in Spain, González-Ferrer (2011) found that immigrants from African countries are most likely to stay separate compared with immigrants from other EU countries. In addition, African migrants take the longest time to reunify. This length of time could be a result of stricter rules that apply to this particular group of migrants. This length of time could also be related to cultural practices, such as the frequent occurrence of non-residential relationships among West Africans that makes African migrants more inclined towards *LATAB* relationships (Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Coe, 2011).

Baizan et al. (2014) have found that *LATAB relationships* are a significant phenomenon for Senegalese male migrants in Europe; these relationships are characterized by long-term separations. Reunification in the receiving country is most likely for the most 'integrated' migrants, which the authors defined as migrants who have enough resources, tertiary education and a high socio-economic status.

Characteristics of family members 'back home' also seem to have an effect on reunification. Baizan et al. (2014) found that Senegalese migrants with partners in the origin country, who have the potential to adapt to the labour market circumstances in Europe, are more likely to reunify, while having children did not increase the likelihood of reunification in the receiving country. Children increase the costs of family life and thus, motivate migrants to stay abroad generating income. Kanaiaupuni (2000) found that the non-migrant wives of Mexican migrants in the U.S. are central to the initiation and perpetuation of transnational households.

1.4 The receiving context

International migration and changing gender norms

Both family separation and reunification are gendered processes. The impact of international migration on gender roles has been investigated by transnational family studies, generally focusing on the dynamics in transnational relationships (e.g., Gallo, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kanaiaupuni, 2000; Pribilsky, 2004). Studies have shown that gender norms affect not only women's migration experience but also women's transnational practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Landolt & Wei Da, 2005; Parreñas, 2001; Wong, 2006). Wong (2006), for example, studying remittance behaviour of Ghanaian women, revealed that women continue to fulfil their gendered obligations to their extended kin by investing remittances predominantly in transnational household reproduction. Being able to remit empowers these women, providing them with decision-making authority. At the same time, obligations to remit can burden these women, making the socioeconomic reality of life abroad increasingly difficult.

The context of international migration can introduce important changes in gendered household roles. One change that has been documented is the pooling of resources, such as joint bank accounts, because of a difficult socio-economic situation in the receiving country. This pooling of resources is different from the way couples in Ghana usually organize their resources, where men and women tend to keep their resources separate (Manuh, 1999; Wong, 2006). This pooling of resources can have several consequences. Women lose the opportunity to independently make decisions

regarding their incomes, men are no longer able to assume their role as the main breadwinner, and conjugal bonds are prioritized over lineage obligations (Wong, 2006). These changes in gender roles can cause tensions in transnational families.

With the feminization of migration, women are increasingly migrating internationally, with and without their husbands. Previous studies have shown that the way transnational families function differs between situations of independent female migration compared with situations of independent male migration. For example, Ghanaian transnational couples have a higher likelihood of divorce when the wife migrates independently compared with couples without a migration experience and compared with transnational couples where the husband migrates independently (Caarls & Mazzucato, in press).

Although most studies concentrate on migrant women's experiences, few have specifically addressed men's experiences. Gender norms influence both men's and women's migration experiences, and these experiences can be empowering, disempowering, or both (Gallo, 2006; Hirsch, 2003; Zontini, 2010; Wong, 2006). Because of changing gender norms in response to migration, men can also feel diminished, undervalued and their masculinity threatened (Charsley, 2005; Gallo, 2006; George, 2000; Manuh, 1999).

Despite these reported differences between men and women, González-Ferrer's (2011) study on reunification in Spain found no significant differences between the probability of reunification behaviour of male and female pioneer migrants. This similarity might be related to the fact that women pioneer migrants are in more egalitarian relationships compared with women who do not migrate or who follow their husbands. Thus, female pioneer migrants might be equally likely to reunify as their male counterparts. However, differences were found in the pace of reunification: women reunify sooner with their husbands in the receiving country than men reunify with their wives (González-Ferrer, 2011).

Migration policies

In order to investigate the role of receiving country context, we compare Ghanaian migrants living in two receiving countries: the Netherlands and the UK. Both countries

have been among the primary destinations of Ghanaian migrants since the 1990s (Akyeampong, 2000).

One particular aspect of the receiving country context that influences the decision to reunite or live transnationally is migration policies. Little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between family reunification policies and the actual family reunification behaviour of migrants (Strik et al., 2013). In 2003, the European Council passed the Right to Family Reunification Directive (European Council, 2003). Although in this directive the right of family reunification for third country nationals is acknowledged, family reunification has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, in most member states (Bernhard, Goldring & Landolt, 2005) including the Netherlands and the UK. The Netherlands adopted this Family Reunification Directive, but the UK did not (Strik et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the Netherlands had stricter policies compared with the UK, especially in the years prior to 2012. For example, between 2004 and 2010, migrants wishing to bring their spouse were subject to exceptionally stringent income requirements (i.e., sponsors needed to earn 120% of the minimum wage) (see De Hart et al., 2012; Sibley et al., 2012).

Several studies emphasize that female migrants experience greater difficulties in the process of reunification (Kraler, 2010; Van Walsum, 2006). Although migration policies are considered to be gender-neutral, some have argued they are highly gendered, particularly regarding the treatment of migrant women (Morris, 2014). Migrant women more often work in feminized domains of the labour market, such as domestic or care work, and these domains are typically more precarious, under-regulated, low-status and low-paid (Lutz, 2010). Consequently, it is often more difficult for female migrants to meet the income requirements for family reunification policies (Kraler, 2010; Van Walsum, 2006).

However, migrants do not only reunify through family reunification policies. An important distinction must be made between *de jure* reunification and *de facto* reunification (Baizan et al., 2014; González-Ferrer, 2011). *De facto* reunification refers to reunification by any means available, even through irregular migration. Few studies have examined *de facto* reunification. For immigrants in Spain, surprisingly, legal status did not result in a higher probability of reunification in Europe, which might be an

indication that many migrants are able to circumvent the legal route (González-Ferrer, 2011). Similarly, for Senegalese migrants in Spain, Italy or France, legal status did not affect the likelihood of reunification (Baizan et al., 2014). This paper will investigate to what extent having legal status encourages reunification for Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands and the UK.

1.5 Ghanaian migration

Historical ties between the UK and Ghana have resulted in a longer history of migration compared with the Netherlands. The Ghanaian migrant population is also larger in the UK. Estimates show that in 2003, 35,474 Ghanaians lived in the Netherlands compared with 109,382 in the UK (Twum-Baah, 2005). In general, Ghanaians in the UK are more often higher educated than in the Netherlands. Migrants in the UK are more often students or high-skilled professionals, such as nurses and doctors (Schans et al., 2013).

What little is known about the reunification behaviour of African migrants comes from two countries: Senegal and Congo (Baizan et al., 2014; Beauchemin et al., 2014).³ Ghanaian migration differs in several respects from these two migration flows. The composition of Ghanaian migration differs, with Ghanaian migrants being, on average, higher educated and older (Mazzucato et al., 2014a). Furthermore, Ghanaian migration involves an increased feminization of migration (Anarfi et al., 2003; Wong, 2006). Most importantly, norms surrounding family life vary. Although many West African countries can be characterized as being more patriarchal with strict hierarchical gender structures (Beauchemin, Caarls & Mazzucato, 2013), in Ghana, women have historically experienced greater independence (Oppong, 1970).

Ghanaian migrants are also reputed to have a “profound transnational engagement”, being connected to both the receiving country and Ghana (Wong, 2006, p. 359). Ghanaian migrants are extensively involved in supporting their families back home, participating in hometown organizations, transnational political organizations, and buying property and houses in Ghana (Caarls et al., in press; Mazzucato, 2008a; Orozco, 2005). However, transnational practices, such as long-distance communication

³ With the exception of González-Ferrer (2011), who examines other African migration flows (see p. 201 for an overview)

and travel, are shaped by the policies of nation-states (Mazzucato et al., 2004). Although globalization is often heralded for easing long-distance communication and travel, this improvement does not apply equally to all migrants. Especially for poorer and undocumented migrants, maintaining familial relationships over long distances may be problematic (Poeze & Mazzucato, 2012). Considering these characteristics of Ghanaian migration, the Ghanaian case may provide new insights in the factors that affect reunification or separation of couples across borders.

1.6 Data & methods

We used a longitudinal dataset that was collected in 2009-2010 as part of the MAFE-Ghana project. For this paper, we used the biographic surveys that were collected from Ghanaians in the UK and the Netherlands. The surveys were conducted in the urban areas of the Netherlands (Amsterdam, The Hague, and Almere) and the UK (London), focusing on major cities where Ghanaian migrants live. We interviewed current migrants and asked them identical biographical questions retrospectively, for each year since birth until the year of the survey. Questions focused on domains such as housing, education, marital status and migration experience.

No suitable sampling frame was available in the Netherlands and the UK; therefore, quota sampling was used. In both countries, quotas were set by age and gender to reflect the characteristics of the migrant populations in the respective countries. Respondents were eligible if they were between 25 and 75 years old and born in Ghana. To ensure a variety of types of respondents, different recruitment methods and types of recruiters were employed. In total, 422 Ghanaian migrants were surveyed in Europe, 273 in the Netherlands and 149 in the UK (for more details about the data collection, please see Beauchemin, 2012; Schoumaker & Diagne, 2010).

Analytical Sample

To answer questions regarding a couple's probability of reunification, a specific analytical sample was created, consisting of couples who experienced a period of living-together transnationally for at least 1 year. Having a sub-sample of these 'transnational

couples' allows for comparing couples who did not reunify with couples who reunified in the receiving country.

First, respondents needed to be in or have been in a *relationship*, either a consensual union or marriage, for at least one year.⁴ Second, we selected couples who were *LATAB* for at least one year. Third, from these *LATAB couples*, we selected *LATAB couples* where the *respondent was the pioneer*. This selection means we omitted cases where the respondent was the spouse who joined the pioneer migrant in the receiving country. We omitted these cases because of the way the questionnaire was administered; we did not collect all of the same information when the pioneer migrant was the spouse as when he/she was the respondent. Data include detailed retrospective information regarding all the modules, including remittance-sending behaviour, whether short return visits took place, and whether the respondent possessed a residence permit/visa. Data also include basic socio-demographic information, referring to the situation at the time the marriage started, and retrospective information concerning migration histories.

Our analytical sample thus includes 291 couples who experienced a *LATAB* period.⁵ To estimate the probability of reunification, we considered couples from the year they started their *LATAB* period until reunification occurred, or when observations are censored. Observations are censored at the time of survey, when the relationship dissolved because of the death of a spouse or divorce, or when the migrant returned to Ghana. We constructed a couple-year-file consisting of 927 couple-years. Table 6.1 shows the number of respondents reunified in the receiving country as well as the number of respondents censored, presented both by receiving country and by sex.

Table 6.1. Prevalence of reunification in the receiving country

Full sample		By receiving country				By sex			
		Netherlands		UK		Male		Female	
<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%

⁴ Respondents who were involved in polygamous relationships (n=14) were not included (analyses (not shown) including these respondents did not result in substantially different results). We also excluded couples who had incomplete information concerning start and end years of their union formation and migration periods (n=13).

⁵ Respondents could be involved in more than one relationship successively; the sample consists of 232 respondents.

Reunified in the receiving country	31	10.7	15	9.0	16	12.8	20	10.7	11	10.5
Not reunified in the receiving country:										
Still LATAB	201	69.1	123	74.1	78	62.4	127	68.3	74	70.5
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	55	18.9	28	16.9	27	21.6	37	19.9	18	17.1
Returned to Ghana	4	1.4	-	-	4	3.2	2	1.1	2	1.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>291</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>166</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MAFE-Ghana data, 2009-2010

Estimation strategy

We first examined the extent to which couples reunify after a period of transnational separation using Kaplan-Meier estimates. Next, we estimated the probability of reunification in the receiving country with a discrete-time logistic event-history model (Singer & Willett, 2003). When estimating the models, we included both time-constant and time-varying covariates. All time-varying variables were lagged one year, following standard event-history procedures, which rest on the assumption that changes in the covariates in the previous year will affect the probability of reunification in the current year (Singer & Willett, 2003).

To examine the factors that determine reunification in the receiving country, we first included basic socio-demographic information for respondents and their spouse. Table 6.2 presents descriptive statistics for all the variables used. For the time-varying variables, information is presented regarding the year that the *LATAB* period started.

Table 6.2. Overview of the independent variables

	Full sample		UK		NL		Men		Women	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>										
<i>Sex</i>										
Male	186	63.9	72	57.6	114	68.7	-	-	-	-
Female	105	36.1	53	42.4	52	31.3	-	-	-	-
<i>Respondents' education</i>										
Secondary or less	148	50.9	59	47.2	89	53.61	97	52.2	51	48.6
Tertiary	143	49.1	66	52.8	77	46.39	89	47.9	54	51.4
<i>Spouse's education</i>										
Secondary or less	157	54.0	46	36.8	111	66.9	110	59.1	47	44.8
Tertiary	129	44.3	75	60.0	54	32.5	72	38.7	57	54.3
Missing	5	1.7	4	3.2	1	0.6	4	2.2	1	1.0
<i>Subjective wealth status*</i>										
Depended/Not at all (ref.)	85	29.2	41	32.8	44	26.5	50	26.9	35	33.3
Absolutely	201	69.1	82	65.6	119	71.7	133	71.5	68	64.8
Missing	5	1.7	2	1.6	3	1.8	3	1.6	2	1.9
<i>Multilocal residence</i>										

No	110	37.8	45	36.0	65	39.2	72	38.7	38	36.2
Yes	181	62.2	80	64.0	101	60.8	114	61.3	67	63.8
<i>Couple's characteristics</i>										
<i>Marital status*</i>										
Unmarried	130	44.7	62	49.6	68	41.0	89	47.9	41	39.1
Married	161	55.3	63	50.4	98	59.0	97	52.2	64	61.0
<i>Children*</i>										
No children	155	53.3	67	53.6	88	53.0	97	52.2	58	55.2
At least one child in Ghana	53	18.2	19	15.2	34	20.5	37	19.9	16	15.2
All children receiving country	83	28.5	39	31.2	44	26.5	52	28.0	31	29.5
<i>Receiving country characteristics</i>										
<i>Receiving country</i>										
UK	125	43.0	-	-	-	-	72	38.7	53	50.5
the Netherlands	166	57.0	-	-	-	-	114	61.3	52	49.5
<i>Period*</i>										
≤ 2003	96	33.0	41	32.8	55	33.1	65	35.0	31	29.5
≥ 2004	195	67.0	84	67.2	111	66.9	121	65.1	74	70.5
<i>Legal status*</i>										
Undocumented	30	10.3	6	4.8	24	14.5	23	12.4	7	6.7
Documented	257	88.3	116	92.8	141	84.9	162	87.1	95	90.5
Missing	4	1.4	3	2.4	1	0.6	1	0.5	3	2.9
<i>Short return visits</i>										
No	198	68.0	79	63.2	119	71.7	125	67.2	73	69.5
Yes	93	32.0	46	36.8	47	28.3	61	32.8	32	30.5
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
Duration of LATAB ⁺	5.42	5.95	5.47	6.54	5.38	5.48	5.00	5.30	6.12	6.85
Duration of the union ⁺⁺	9.62	7.83	9.72	8.82	9.55	7.04	9.14	7.30	10.43	8.60

Source: MAFE-Ghana data, 2009-2010

Notes: *Time-varying variable. Information for all time-varying variables is presented in this Table for the year the LATAB period started; ⁺ range = 1 to 31; ⁺⁺ range = 1 to 47.

Duration of LATAB was captured in the models using the years of separation and a squared term of the years of separation. These variables fit the data best, and they reflect that reunification is more likely at first, but after a certain period of time, the transnational arrangement may become more stable, and reunification becomes less likely.

Sex refers to the sex of the respondent, with 1 = *male* and 2 = *female*. For education, we included time-constant variables for both the respondent and the spouse. The respondent's educational level refers to the highest level attained during the LATAB period, with 0 = *secondary schooling or less* and 1 = *tertiary schooling*. The spouse's educational level was measured at the time the marriage started, using the same values as the variable capturing respondent's education. It is difficult to reliably capture respondents' objective income with a retrospective survey; therefore, we use the respondents' replies concerning their *subjective wealth-status*. This variable is time-

varying and indicates the subjective wealth-status of the respondent for each year. The following question was asked: 'Would you say that during this period you had enough to live on?' We used two response categories: 0 = *it depended/not at all* and 1 = *absolutely*. *Multilocal residence before migration* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent experienced multilocal residence in Ghana prior to the separation because of migration: 0 = *no experience with multilocal residence* and 1 = *experience with multilocal residence*. If couples started their marriage/relationship while being geographically separated because of migration, they were categorized as having multilocal residence before migration.

Information regarding the couple includes a variable stating the *marital status* of the couple. 'Marriage' is a self-reported status; no distinction was made in the questionnaire between customary, religious, or civic marriages, as respondents would report being married in each case. This variable is time-varying and can take the value 1 = *unmarried* and 2 = *married*. *Having at least one child* is a time-varying variable that indicates whether the couple has 0 = *no children*, 1 = *at least 1 child in Ghana*, and 2 = *all children in the receiving country*. The *duration of the union* is a continuous time-varying variable referring to the number of years the relationship has lasted.

Finally, we examined several receiving country characteristics. A dichotomous variable captures the receiving country: 1 = *the UK* and 2 = *the Netherlands*. To capture transnational practices, we considered whether the respondent was able to make short return visits (visits back to Ghana while abroad that lasted less than a year) during the *LATAB* period: 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*.⁶ A dichotomous variable captured the documented status of the respondent, with 0 = *undocumented* and 1 = *documented*.⁷ We investigated whether there is a difference in reunification behaviour for the period before and after

⁶ Sending remittances is another example of a transnational practice that could affect the probability of reunification. We estimated whether sending remittances has a significant influence on the probability of reunification, but the results of this variable were not significant (available upon request). Corresponding to our relatively small sample size, we intended to estimate a parsimonious model to not overestimate our model. Therefore, we decided to exclude the remittance variable. Similarly, we also excluded age of the respondent and reasons for migration, both of which yielded no significant results.

⁷ Documented status was derived from the respondents' answers concerning their residence permit, and it included the following categories: 'no residence permit needed for this country', 'residence permit', 'visa', and 'other permit'. Undocumented status referred to 'having no permit'.

2003, when the Family Reunification Directive was passed (European Council, 2003). Several scholars have shown that family reunification has become more strenuous in most member states, including the Netherlands and the UK (Bernhard et al., 2005). This effect was measured using a time-varying variable referring to 0 = *the period until 2003* and 1 = *the period from 2004 forward*.

1.7 Findings

Descriptive findings

Previous studies have already identified the prevalence of transnational ties among Ghanaians, both migrants and non-migrants (Caarls et al., in press; Mazzucato, 2008a; Orozco, 2005; Wong, 2006). These ties are also reflected in our study. To have experienced a *LATAB* period was quite common among Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands and the UK. Of the 422 migrants surveyed in these countries, 389 were in at least one relationship (either married or in a union). Of these 389 migrants, 88.2% (n=343) experienced at least one period of *LATAB* compared with 11.8% who did not. Moreover, these *LATAB* periods ranged from 1 to 48 years, with an average of 22 years (s.d. 9.97).

In the subsequent analyses, we concentrate on Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands and the UK who experienced a *LATAB* period of at least one year. We observed *LATAB* couples ranging from 1 and 31 years. Kaplan-Meier estimates (Figure 6.1) revealed that just over half of our sample reunified in the receiving country (55.8%), and approximately half did not reunify (44.2%). Those who reunified did so within 13 years since the start of their *LATAB*. Furthermore, separation can occur for extensive periods of time.

Figure 6.1. Kaplan-Meier survival estimate

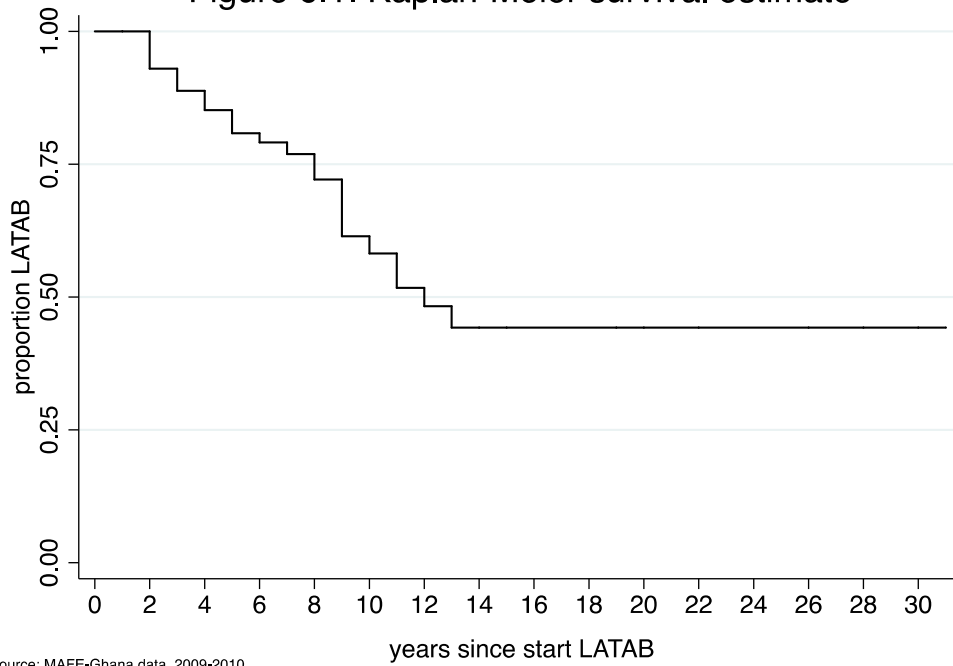


Figure 6.2. Kaplan-Meier survival estimates by destination country

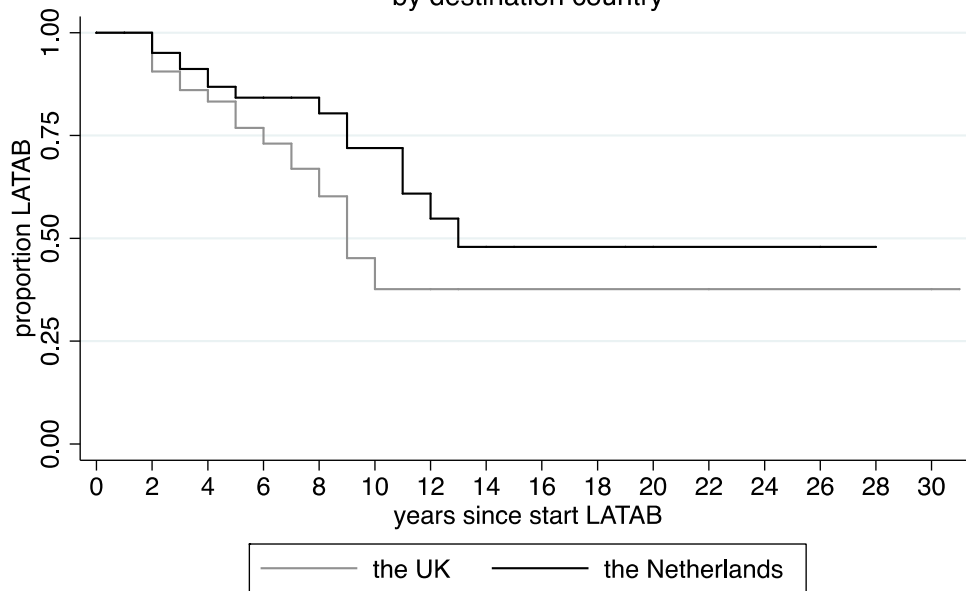
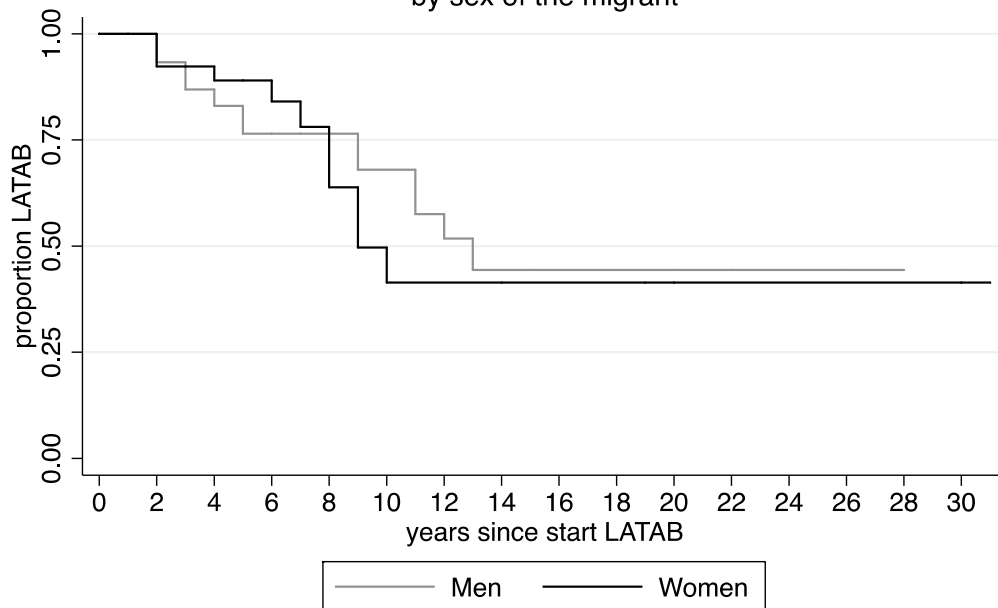


Figure 6.3. Kaplan-Meier survival estimates
by sex of the migrant



Note: Difference between men and women not statistically significant ($p = 0.46$)
Source: MAFE-Ghana data, 2009-2010

Additionally, we examined to what extent the timing of reunification differed for men and women and by receiving countries. The results are presented in Figures 6.2 and 6.3. In Figure 6.2, we see that after 5 years, 23% of the couples had reunified in the UK, compared with 16% of the couples in the Netherlands. The difference between these two countries is significant and continues over time. The difference between men and women is much smaller and not significant (Figure 6.3).

Probability of reunification in the receiving country

We estimate discrete-time logistic event-history models using a stepwise approach to determine what factors influence the probability of reunification in the receiving country, with the results presented in Table 6.3. All models controlled for duration, showing that the probability of reunification increases during the first years of separation but decreases as time passes (see the negative sign for duration of LATAB (squared)).

In Model 1A, we included gender and the receiving country. There appear no significant differences between male and female migrants regarding their probability to

migrate. This effect remains constant for all models, which corresponds to previous findings for African immigrants in Spain (González-Ferrer, 2011). Initially, we find no significant effect of the receiving country, but with the inclusion of education (Model 1B), the effect turns significant and shows that reunification is less likely in the Netherlands. Model 1B also shows that migrants with higher levels of education are more likely to reunify. Higher educated migrants are also more likely to be in the UK (Mazzucato et al., 2014a). The significance of the receiving country after including education in Model 1B is likely caused by a confounding relationship between education and the receiving country.

The effect of the respondent's education disappears when we consider multilocal residence prior to migration and subjective wealth (Model 1C); only multilocal residence is significant. Contrary to what we anticipated, having had prior experience with multilocal residence increases the probability of reunification in the receiving country. Education of the spouse (Model 1B) is a strong and significant predictor of the likelihood of reunification and continues to remain so in subsequent models. Migrants with higher educated spouses are more likely to remain *LATAB*.

Being married increases the probability of reunification compared with couples who are not formally married but in a union (Models 1D and 1E). Having children makes reunification between partners less likely, regardless of where the children are located, whether with the respondent or in Ghana. The duration of the union is also positively related to the likelihood of reunification (Model 1E), meaning that the longer a couple has been together prior to the *LATAB*, the more probable reunification in the receiving country becomes.

Next to the receiving country, we also examined three other receiving country characteristics. First, we find that reunification has become less likely from 2004 onwards. Second, legal status does not make reunification more probable. Third, short return visits increase the likelihood of staying *LATAB*.

Table 6.3. Estimating the probability of reunification in the receiving country

	Model 1A		Model 1B		Model 1C		Model 1D		Model 1E	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Duration of LATAB	0.578***	0.117	0.561***	0.123	0.630***	0.133	0.685***	0.126	0.755***	0.156
Duration of LATAB (squared)	-0.034***	0.008	-0.033***	0.008297	-0.036***	0.009	-0.037***	0.009	-0.042***	0.011
Socio-demographic variables										
Sex (Male, ref.)										
Female	-0.186	0.381	-0.278	0.404	-0.237	0.451	-0.206	0.471	0.068	0.483
Education (Secondary or less, ref.)										
Tertiary			0.771*	0.433	0.408	0.456	0.345	0.480	0.393	0.486
Spouse's education (Secondary or less, ref.)										
Tertiary			-0.797**	0.395	-1.104**	0.462	-1.256***	0.511	-1.131**	0.479
Subjective wealth status (Depended/Not at all, ref.)										
Absolutely					0.651	0.522	0.706	0.510	0.805	0.527
Multilocal residence before migration (No, ref.)										
Yes					1.724***	0.600	1.766***	0.585	1.595**	0.680
Couple's characteristics										
Marital status (Unmarried, ref.)										
Married							0.990*	0.558	1.315**	0.591
Children (No children, ref.)										
At least one child in Ghana							-1.474***	0.541	-2.027***	0.610
All children in receiving country							-1.500**	0.738	-1.998**	0.841
Duration of the union							0.014	0.029	0.058*	0.032
Receiving country characteristics										
Receiving country (UK, ref.)										
the Netherlands	-0.594	0.382	-0.897**	0.405	-1.079***	0.445	-1.584***	0.597	-1.779**	0.736
Period (\leq 2003, ref.)										
\geq 2004									-1.519***	0.509
Legal status (Undocumented, ref.)										
Documented									-0.056	0.602
Short return visits (No, ref.)										
Yes									-0.906**	0.466
Constant	-4.278***	0.740	-4.101***	0.776	-5.775***	0.883	-5.799***	0.966	-5.680	1.134
Model characteristics										
Log likelihood	-126.1609		-121.84621		-110.03623		-104.93205		-97.936698	
<i>N</i> (couple-years)	927		917		905		905		868	
<i>N</i> (couples)	291		286		281		281		278	
Pseudo R ²	0.07		0.10		0.17		0.20		0.25	

Source: MAFE-Ghana data, 2009-2010

Notes: Robust standard errors reported; *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$ (two-tailed)

1.8 Discussion

In this paper, we examined Ghanaian migrants' reunification behaviour over time. We first examined the prevalence of Ghanaian couples living transnationally, which 88.2% of Ghanaian migrants in our sample had experienced at least once, which highlights the significance of this phenomenon. Contrary to common assumptions, these living arrangements across borders are not necessarily short-term. Rather, as our analyses of transnational couples have shown, a significant proportion of migrants are in long-term *LATAB* relationships.

Focusing on transnational couples, with one spouse living in the Netherlands or the UK and the other spouse remaining in Ghana, we found the same pattern: couples remain separated for extended periods of time. Using Kaplan-Meier estimates, we found that although just over half of the couples reunified either in the Netherlands or in the UK, approximately half did not. This finding demonstrates that *LATAB* is a substantial phenomenon, and staying separate is an established arrangement for a significant number of migrants.

Because of the significant prevalence of couples living transnationally, we argue that it is useful to include this type of arrangement as a separate category when describing migration patterns. Elaborating on Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) typology, we suggest including *LATAB* as a fourth type of migration. This type of migration is characterized by long-term separations where living transnationally as a couple is a stable arrangement. Although we concentrated on couples, including other family members, such as children or elderly parents, could easily extend this category.

Subsequently, we addressed the factors that influence the couples' decision to stay transnational or not. *LATAB* relationships can be a couples' choice, a consequence of socio-economic circumstances, or a constrained situation due to reunification policies. It is difficult to disentangle these separate influences, yet we made a first attempt in this paper to examine the factors that facilitate and impede a couple's reunification. The educational level of the left-behind spouse proved to be a strong and significant factor: having a higher educated spouse decreases the chance of reunification in the receiving country. This finding signifies the importance of adopting a transnational lens to explicitly incorporate spouses who are left-behind when assessing migration-related processes (Levitt, 2001a; Kanaiaupuni, 2000). Being higher educated might signal more bargaining power for spouses who are left-behind and

more prospects in the labour market in the sending country, which would decrease the need and desire to migrate.

This contradicts what Baizan et al. (2014) and Beauchemin et al. (2014) found for Senegalese male migrants, whose probability to reunify in Europe increases with higher educated wives. This might be related to norms in the sending country. Senegal is characterized by strong patriarchal customs, which might make it desirable for higher educated women to leave. In comparison, in Ghana, norms concerning female employment are more favourable (Oppong, 1970). Our finding pertains to both men and women, which can be attributed to more employment opportunities in Ghana for the higher educated compared with Senegal. These opportunities make it more attractive for higher educated spouses to remain in Ghana and for Senegalese spouses to migrate to Europe. Similarly, research on non-residential relationships in a Western context found that LAT relationships are generally associated with higher levels of education (Strohm et al., 2009). Future research should be encouraged to further examine the role of migrant spouse's education. The important role of the left-behind spouse indicates that whether to reunify is not a decision made in isolation by the migrant in the receiving country, but spouses in the sending country are actively engaged in the decision-making process.

We also examined the extent to which the reunification behaviour of Ghanaian migrants is gendered. Because Ghanaian women are reputedly independent and the Ghanaian migration flow constitutes a large number of females (Anarfi et al., 2003; Manuh, 1999; Oppong, 1970; Wong, 2006), it is particularly interesting to examine the gender dimension of their reunification behaviour. However, we found that the probability of reunification does not differ between male and female migrants. Although previous studies similarly did not find a difference between men and women (González-Ferrer, 2011), this finding is surprising considering studies that indicate that reunification is more difficult for women (e.g., Kraler, 2010; Van Walsum, 2006). These studies associate the difficulties of female migrants to reunify with the fact that meeting the income requirements is more challenging for women (Kraler, 2010; Kofman et al., 2011). Thus, reunification may be more difficult for poorer women. Separate analyses by gender would be necessary to further scrutinize whether income or other factors affect the reunification behaviour of men and women differently. Our small sample size unfortunately did not allow for these analyses.

In this paper, we considered the role of family norms in the sending country, which could play an important role in shaping reunification decisions. In Ghana, the practice of multilocal residence between couples is widespread (Coe, 2011; Manuh, 1999; Opong, 1970). Thus, non-residential unions are not necessarily considered problematic. Our findings are counterintuitive, showing that having had prior experience with multilocal residence increases the probability of reunification in the receiving country. Future research should further investigate this surprising result.

Previous studies have argued that when the motivation to migrate is to increase income, staying separated would be more lucrative because reunification in the receiving country would increase costs (Baizan et al., 2014). No effects of subjective wealth status were found: feeling well-off does not influence the likelihood of reunification. We did find strong negative effects of having children, indicating that having children significantly reduced the odds of reunification in the receiving country. Interestingly, it does not matter whether the children are with the migrant in the receiving country or whether at least one child is in Ghana. Children in the receiving country are also expensive, and partner reunification would further increase the costs. Reunification can be a costly affair (for example, a family reunification procedure in the Netherlands was approximately €1,970 before 2012 (De Hart et al., 2012)). Not reunifying while there are children in the sending country can also reflect that one of the partners is caring for the children in the sending country, thus discouraging spousal reunification in the receiving country. Marital relationships, which include customary and civil marriages, increase the likelihood of reunification. This could reflect that marriages are often more stable than unions, but this result might also indicate that legal reunification is easier for married couples.

We also investigated the importance of the receiving context. We examined two receiving countries, the UK and the Netherlands, which are among the most popular destinations for Ghanaian migrants (Akyeampong, 2000). We found that the probability of reunification is lower for migrants living in the Netherlands. Our data cannot completely uncover the differences between these two receiving contexts, but several factors are likely to influence migrants' decision to remain transnational. Dutch migration policies in general have been stricter than those in the UK, and meeting family reunification requirements is more difficult in the Netherlands (De Hart et al., 2012). Additionally, previous research indicated that migrants are reluctant to reunify

with their families in the Netherlands because of difficulties at school and in the labour market (Dito et al., in press). These difficulties are more profound in the Netherlands compared with the UK because of not speaking the Dutch language and the problems migrants report with getting their educational credentials recognized in the Netherlands (Mazzucato, 2008a).

Other factors further show the importance of the receiving country context: the period of migration, the documented status of the migrant and the ability to make short return visits to Ghana. Migrating after 2004, a period when legislation in most European member states became more restrictive (De Hart et al., 2012; Sibley et al., 2012) decreases the likelihood of reunification. The significant result of this variable could reflect these increasingly difficult circumstances for reunification.

We examined whether the documented status of migrants affected their reunification behaviour. Confirming previous studies (González-Ferrer, 2011; Baizan et al., 2014), legal status did not prove to either facilitate or impede reunification. Most likely, migrants are able to reunify through alternative routes outside the legal framework of family reunification. Although it was not possible to distinguish between *de jure* and *de facto* reunification, our findings suggest that both are occurring.

We examined the significance of short return visits to Ghana. Extensive transnational ties and activities of migrants facilitate a transnational lifestyle (Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008). This fact is corroborated by our findings that show that the ability to make short return visits increases the likelihood that couples will live transnationally. This finding might indicate that for some couples, geographical separation is not necessarily problematic and might be a conscious choice.

These four findings taken together lead to two hypotheses regarding the role of family reunification laws in the Global North. First, the period after stricter family reunification legislation was implemented is associated with fewer reunifications, indicating the law's effectiveness; yet legal status of migrants does not seem to make a difference in reunification. This may indicate that the income requirement of family reunification legislation is the higher impediment to reunification. Furthermore, lower income also prevents people from reunifying through informal channels, as this too requires finances. Second, those migrants who engage in short-term visits can be assumed to have legal status and enough income to permit them the travel. Plausibly then, they would meet family reunification legislation requirements. Yet, our findings

show that these people are less likely to reunify, indicating a choice not to do so. This attests to the fact that it is more than laws that affect people's decision-making around transnational family life and that reunification is not always the preferred option.

Our findings provide several interesting avenues through which research on migrants' reunification behaviour could be advanced. Although our small sample size limited the possibilities to run separate analyses, future studies should further investigate the differences between men and women and between the two countries. Our results revealed that certain receiving context characteristics indicate the success of restrictive policies. However, documented status, an important state-control mechanism, did not influence couples' reunification. Further research could examine the effects of nation-state policies in greater detail. Additionally, we could not assess the role of objective income measures because of the retrospective nature of our data. However, considering increasing income requirements, future research should explore the effect of income. Finally, our study did not include reunification in the sending country. Studying the relative importance of reunification in the receiving country compared with reunification in the sending country can further help to understand migrants' choices and constraints around transnational living (e.g., see Baizan et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding these limitations, our study is among the few that examine the reunification behaviour of migrants, and specifically, that examine this behaviour in two different receiving contexts. The MAFE-Ghana project allowed for this comparison. This comparison emphasizes the importance of including both sending country and receiving country characteristics when investigating migrants' decisions concerning living transnationally or reunifying in the receiving country.

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