DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
A peer-reviewed, open-access journal of population sciences

DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

VOLUME 34, ARTICLE 21, PAGES 587–614
PUBLISHED 24 MARCH 2016
http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol34/21/
DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2016.34.21

Research Article

Transnational relationships and reunification: Ghanaian couples between Ghana and Europe

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Demographic Research: Volume 34, Article 21
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Abstract

BACKGROUND
The ability of couples to migrate together or to reunify in the destination country is increasingly limited because family reunification laws are becoming more stringent, especially for those moving from the Global South to the North. However, little is known regarding migrants' reunification behavior.

OBJECTIVE
We examine the prevalence of couples living-apart-together-across-borders (LATAB), the duration of their separation, and under which conditions they remain transnational or reunify in the destination country.

METHODS
Using data from the MAFE-Ghana project, we focus on LATAB couples among Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands and the UK (n=291). Event history analyses are used to examine the probability of reunification. We consider characteristics of the migrant, the left-behind spouse, their relationship, and the receiving country context.

RESULTS
Couples remain separated for extended periods of time. Just over half of the couples in the Netherlands and the UK reunified: approximately half did not. Reunification is less likely in the Netherlands than the U.K. and is less likely since 2004, when reunification policies became stricter. Spouse's education is a significant factor in explaining reunification, but, surprisingly, legal status is not. Being able to maintain transnational ties through short return visits increases the likelihood of LATAB.

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CONCLUSIONS
Findings reveal that LATAB relationships are a common, long-term arrangement among Ghanaian migrants.

1. Introduction

In the context of international migration, transnational relationships in which couples live apart together across borders (LATAB) are common because of the limited possibilities of migrating together. In recent decades migration laws in Europe have become stricter, creating barriers to entry and limiting possibilities for family reunification (Kraler 2010; Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011). These limitations apply especially to couples coming from developing countries. As a result, transnational relationships are gaining prominence (Kofman et al. 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 explores the extent to which transnational couples reunify or remain transnational. Generally, studies that address couples and migration do not explicitly consider the transnational living arrangements that may result from migration. Studies often focus on couples that migrate either jointly or successively (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; González-Ferrer 2007), and these studies concentrate on the labor market outcomes of either or both partners (Boyle, Feng, and Gayle 2009; Wagner and Mulder 1993). This is largely due to a lack of adequate data, since information about family members living at destination as well as at origin is needed to assess the prevalence of transnational relationships. Most survey data or administrative data do not capture this, which is why there is still limited insight into the extent to which family reunification takes place, since this would require information about those that reunify and those that remain transnational (Beauchemin et al. 2015).

Moreover, it is generally assumed that couples have been living together before migration and that all couples aspire to reunify (Landolt and Wei Da 2005). Questions regarding how these living arrangements might be shaped by the situation in the origin or destination country are often left unanswered. This explorative study examines the factors that influence couples' reunification in the country of destination. We investigate to what extent living transnationally or not is the consequence of migrants' choice or whether socio-economic or policy-related characteristics in the destination country shape migrants' spousal living arrangements.

We aim to contribute to the literature on migration and family life in three ways. First, in line with studies from the field of transnationalism, we consider it crucial to study not only migrants but also partners who remained in the country of origin (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Levitt 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Family members who stay behind are an integral part of transnational relationships as they can play an important role in maintaining households across borders: for instance, by being involved in decision-making processes, financial or otherwise. Additionally, couples are influenced by norms regarding conjugal life in their origin country. We use historical-anthropological insights to contextualize our findings and examine to what extent conjugal practices from the origin country influence the decision to live transnationally or to reunify in Europe. Second, we consider the process of self-selection in deciding to live transnationally. In western studies on LAT relationships the distinction between choice and constraints as explanations of living apart is already common (Levin 2004; Strohm et al. 2009). We extend the notion of LAT by examining whether similar factors play a role when couples live apart together across borders. Additionally, we consider economic theories on migration (e.g., New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM)). Although these theories do not explain reunification, the choice to live transnationally could be explained by considering migration as a household strategy and living transnationally as contributing to the aim of enhancing the household's income. Third, empirical research on the reunification behavior of migrants remains limited. Legal studies have emphasized the role of family reunification policies in shaping migrants' ability to reunify or not. These studies scrutinized the legal conditions for reunification (Strik, De Hart, and Nissen 2013), but they typically focus on case law and legal reunification only. We add to this body of literature by focusing on the actual behavior of both documented and undocumented migrants.

We study transnational relationships of Ghanaian migrants. Previous studies on family separations resulting from international migration have mostly focused on migration from Latin America or Asia (Mazzucato and 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. Ghanaian couples are particularly interesting to study because multi-local residence is a common practice among Ghanaian couples irrespective of migration, which may facilitate people's decisions regarding LATAB relationships (Oppong 1983).

We adopt a historical perspective, using retrospective 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. Discrete-time event history models are used to estimate the probability of reunification in the destination

country, which is either the Netherlands or the UK. We include individual, couple, and context characteristics that influence couples' probability of reunifying in the destination country, such as information regarding couples' living arrangements before migration, to study the role of the origin-country context. We also explore the role of the receiving-country context by comparing couples that migrated to the UK and the Netherlands, to investigate whether their legal status and the period of migration affect the probability of reunification.

2. Living apart together across borders

2.1 Economic theories on migration

Although the family has been underexposed in economic theories on migration, the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) considers migration as a household strategy. Migration of one of the household members is deemed beneficial for the economic well-being of the household. Migration is seen as a collective household strategy to exploit economic opportunities abroad in order to maximize the household income and to protect it against economic shocks by diversifying (Stark 1991; Stark and Bloom 1985). According to the NELM approach, the goal for migrants is to return as soon as their economic objectives have been met. Living transnationally makes sense from this perspective, since this allows the household to enhance its earnings.

Following this logic, even though NELM does not explicitly account for reunification at destination, reunification would counter the NELM logic of diversifying income. Moreover, reunification can be a costly affair (for example, pre-2012 the price of a family reunification procedure in the Netherlands was approximately €1,970 (De Hart, Strik, and Pankratz 2012)). However, hypotheses regarding reunification at destination are difficult to derive from these economic approaches to migration. Additionally, such approaches pay little attention to family dynamics in origin countries, which often deviate from Western nuclear families. In a later section we discuss motivations for living apart together, referring to socio-cultural explanations.

2.2 Previous studies on LATAB couples

Little is known about the reunification behavior 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 to 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 the result of the stricter rules that apply to this particular group of migrants. It 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 and Sow 2011; Coe 2011).

Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer (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 destination country is most likely for the most 'integrated' migrants, which the authors define as migrants who have sufficient resources, tertiary education, and high socio-economic status.

It is important to include partners who remained in the country of origin when aiming to understand transnational and reunified couples (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Levitt 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Prior to the emergence of transnational migration studies, migration scholars typically focused on those who migrated, paying scant attention to those who did not migrate but were attached through family ties to those who did (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008; Kanaiaupuni 2000). The inclusion of left-behind spouses is particularly relevant in relation to transnational couples because spouses who stay behind are a vital part of the transnational relationship.

Characteristics of family members 'back home' also seem to have an effect on reunification. Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer (2014) found that Senegalese migrants with partners in the origin country who have the potential to adapt to labor market circumstances in Europe are more likely to reunify, while having children did not increase the likelihood of reunification in the destination 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.

3. The origin context: Living apart together 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 and Schans 2011; Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012). Consequently, transnational family life is usually seen as stressful, problematic, and a 'second-best' option, whereas this is not

always the case. 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. 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; Clark 1994).

The practice of living apart together (LAT) 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 and Phillips 2011; Latten and Mulder 2013; Levin 2004).[3]

Explanations of 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. By contrast, research on this type of relationship in Western countries generally identifies different reasons, such as both spouses' need for autonomy. 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-educated, or the divorced (Strohm et al. 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).

Studies on both 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 multi-local 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.

[3] We use the terms "LAT relationships" and "non-residential relationships" interchangeably. Additionally, we refer to multi-local practices when discussing LAT relationships.

4. The receiving context

4.1 International migration and changing gender norms

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 is different for independent female migration and 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 and Mazzucato 2015).

Most studies concentrate on migrant women's experiences and 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 male and female pioneer migrants' probability-of-reunification behaviors. 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 as likely to reunify as their male counterparts. However, differences were found in the pace of reunification: women reunify sooner with their husbands in the destination country than men reunify with their wives (ibid.).

4.2 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 policy. Little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between family reunification policies and the actual family reunification behavior of migrants (Strik, De Hart, and Nissen 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, and Landolt 2005), including the Netherlands and the UK. The Netherlands adopted this Family Reunification Directive, but the UK did not (Strik, De Hart, and Nissen 2013). Nonetheless, the Netherlands had stricter policies than 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, Strik, and Pankratz 2012; Sibley, Fenelon, and Mole 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 that they are highly gendered, particularly regarding the treatment of migrant women (Morris 2014). Migrant women tend to work in feminized domains of the labor 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 of 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, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer 2014; González-Ferrer 2011). While de jure reunification refers to reunifying through the legal procedure of family reunification, de facto reunification refers to reunification by any means available outside legal family reunification channels, 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, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer 2014). This paper will investigate to what extent having legal status encourages reunification for Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands and the UK.

5. Background: Ghanaian migration

Historical ties between the UK and Ghana have resulted in a longer history of migration compared to 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

to 109,382 in the UK (Twum-Baah 2005). In general, Ghanaians in the UK are more often higher educated than those 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 behavior of African migrants is mainly based on two countries, Senegal and Congo (Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer 2014; Beauchemin, Caarls, and Mazzucato 2016).[4] Ghanaian migration differs in several respects from these two migration flows. Ghanaian migrants are, on average, higher-educated and older (Mazzucato et al. 2015). Furthermore, Ghanaian migration involves an increased feminization of migration (Anarfi et al. 2003; Wong 2006). Most importantly, norms surrounding family life are different. Although many West African countries can be characterized as patriarchal with strict hierarchical gender structures (Beauchemin, Caarls, and Mazzucato 2016), in Ghana women have historically experienced greater independence (Oppong 1970; Clark 1994).

Ghanaian migrants are also reputed to have a "profound transnational engagement", being connected to both the country of destination and Ghana (Wong 2006: pp. 359). Ghanaian migrants are extensively involved in supporting their families back home, participating in hometown organizations and transnational political organizations, and buying property and houses in Ghana (Caarls et al. 2016; Mazzucato 2008; Orozco 2005). However, transnational practices such as long-distance communication and travel are shaped by the policies of nation states (Mazzucato et al. 2004). Although globalization is often heralded as 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 and Mazzucato 2016). Considering these characteristics of Ghanaian migration, the Ghanaian case may provide new insights into the factors that affect reunification or separation of couples across borders.

6. Method

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

[4] With the exception of González-Ferrer (2011), who examines other African migration flows (see pp. 201 for an overview)

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, so 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 type of respondent, different recruitment methods and types of recruiter 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 see Beauchemin 2012; Schoumaker and Diagne 2010).

6.1 Analytical sample

To answer questions regarding a couple's probability of reunification, a specific analytical sample was created. Since our retrospective data was captured annually, we included couples that had lived together transnationally for at least 1 year. Having a sub-sample of these 'transnational couples' allows for comparing couples that did not reunify with couples that reunified in the destination country.

First, respondents needed to be in or have been in a relationship, either a consensual union or marriage, for at least one year.[5] Second, we selected couples that 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 destination 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 behavior, 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 that experienced a LATAB period.[6] To estimate the probability of reunification we considered couples from the

[5] 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).

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

year they started their LATAB period until reunification occurred, or when observations are censored. Observations are censored at the time of survey (2009–2010), 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 1 shows the number of respondents reunified in the destination country and the number of respondents censored, presented both by destination country and by sex.

Table 1: Prevalence of Reunification at destination

			By destination country				By sex			
	Full sample		Netherlands		UK		Male		Female	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Reunified at destination	31	10.7	15	9.0	16	12.8	20	10.7	11	10.5
Not reunified at destination:										
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
Total	*291*	*100*	*166*	*100*	*125*	*100*	*186*	*100*	*105*	*100*

Source: MAFE-Ghana data, 2009–2010.

6.2 Estimation strategy

We first examined the extent to which couples reunify after a period of transnational separation using Kaplan-Meier estimates. Next, given our retrospective data, which provides us with full life histories of our respondents, we applied event-history analysis (see, e.g., Blossfeld, Golsch, and Rohwer 2007; Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004; Singer and Willett 2003). This analysis allows us to study both the timing and the occurrence of reunification over a life course, and event history models allow for including both time-varying and time-constant variables. Since our dependent variable is binary, we used a discrete-time logistic approach. 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 (ibid.).

To examine the factors that determine reunification in the destination country we first included basic socio-demographic information on respondents and their spouses. 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 show 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 0 = male and 1 = 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. 'Multi-local residence before migration' is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent experienced multi-local residence in Ghana prior to the separation because of migration: 0 = no experience with multi-local residence and 1 = experience with multi-local residence. If couples started their marriage/relationship while being geographically separated because of migration they were categorized as having multi-local 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 0 = unmarried and 1 = 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 destination country. While couples could also have children that live neither at destination nor at origin, we found no such cases in our sample and therefore did not define this additional category. 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 country of destination: 0 = the UK and 1 = 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.[7] A dichotomous variable captured the

[7] 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.

documented status of the respondent, with 0 = undocumented and 1 = documented.[8] We investigated whether there is a difference in reunification behavior for the periods before and after 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, Goldring and Landolt 2005). This effect was measured using a time-varying variable referring to 0 = the period until 2003 and 1 = the period from 2004 onwards. Table 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.

7. Findings

7.1 Descriptive findings

Previous studies have already identified the prevalence of transnational ties among both migrant and non-migrant Ghanaians (Caarls et al. 2016; Mazzucato 2008; 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 and 11.8% did not. 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 had experienced a LATAB period of at least one year. We observed couples with a LATAB period ranging from 1 to 31 years. Kaplan-Meier estimates (Figure 1) revealed that just over half of our sample reunified in the destination country (55.8%) and approximately half did not reunify (44.2%). Those who reunified did so within 13 years of the start of their LATAB period. Furthermore, separation can occur for extensive periods of time.

[8] 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".

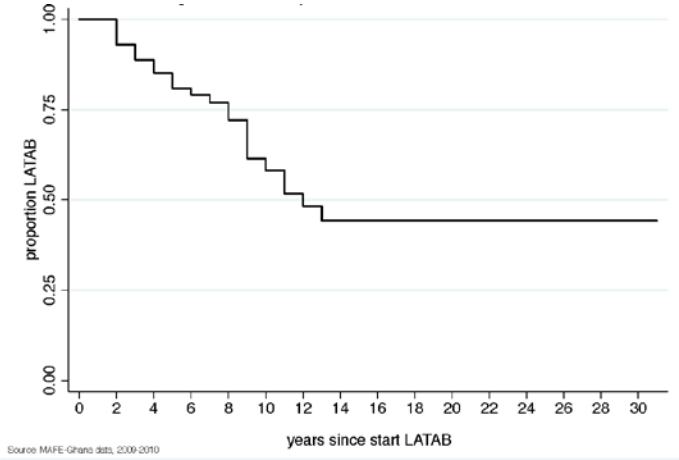
Table 2: Overview of the independent variables

	Full sample		UK		NL		Men		Women	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
Socio-demographic variables										
Sex										
Male	186	63.9	72	57.6	114	68.7	-	-	-	-
Female	105	36.1	53	42.4	52	31.3	-	-	-	-
Respondents' education										
Secondary or less	148	50.9	59	47.2	89	53.6	97	52.2	51	48.6
Tertiary	143	49.1	66	52.8	77	46.3	89	47.9	54	51.4
Spouse's education										
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
Subjective wealth status*										
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
Multilocal residence										
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
Couple's characteristics										
Marital status*										
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
Children*										
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 at destination	83	28.5	39	31.2	44	26.5	52	28.0	31	29.5
Receiving country										
Destination										
UK	125	43.0	-	-	-	-	72	38.7	53	50.5
the Netherlands	166	57.0	-	-	-	-	114	61.3	52	49.5
Period*										
≦ 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
Legal status*										
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
Short return visits										
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

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.

Source: MAFE-Ghana data, 2009–2010.

Figure 1: Kaplan-Meier survival estimate



Additionally, we examined to what extent the timing of reunification differed for men and women and by destination country. The results are presented in Figures 2 and 3 below. In Figure 2 we see that after 5 years, 23% of the couples had reunified in the UK compared with 16% 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 3).

Figure 2: Kaplan-Meier survival estimates by destination country

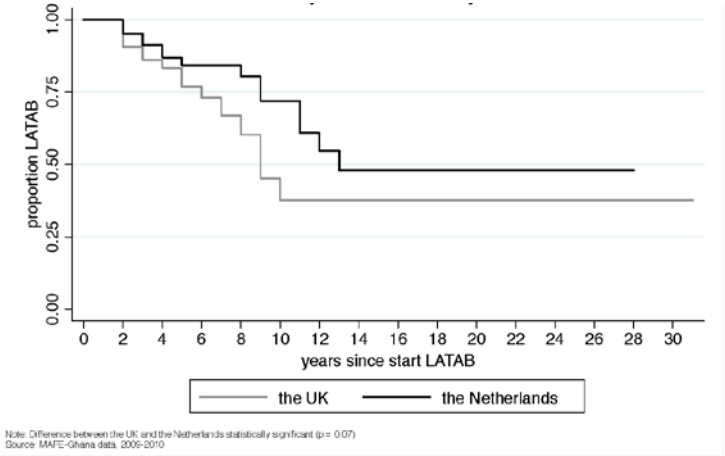
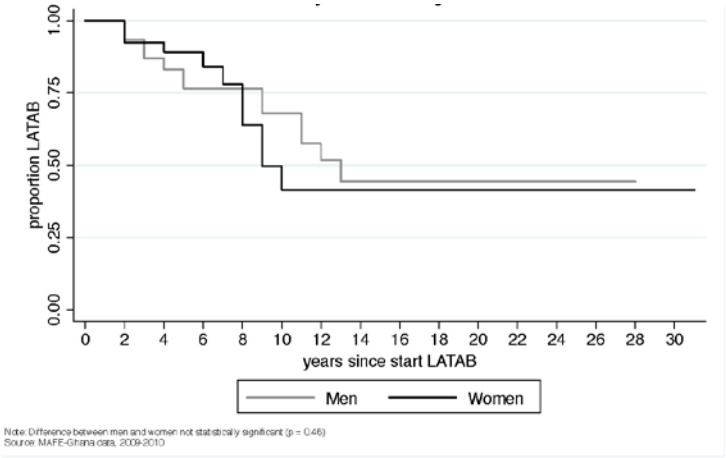


Figure 3: Kaplan-Meier survival estimates by sex of the migrant



7.2 Probability of reunification in the destination country

We estimated discrete-time logistic event history models using a stepwise approach to determine what factors influence the probability of reunification in the destination country, with the results presented in Table 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)).[9]

In Model 1A we included gender and the destination country. There appear to be 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 destination 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

[9] Three variables have missing values: education of the spouse, subjective wealth status, and legal status, which add up to 6.4% (n=59). We found small to moderate correlations between the missing values on these three variables and all the other variables. This could indicate that these missing values are random, but it does not rule out that unobserved variables are related to missing values. We assessed several methods to deal with missing values (results available upon request). Considering the minor differences between the different methods and the fact that the conclusions from these models do not differ, we decided to opt for listwise deletion in our models.

more likely to reunify. Higher-educated migrants are also more likely to be in the UK (Mazzucato et al. 2015). The significance of the destination country after including education in Model 1B is likely caused by a confounding relationship between education and the destination country.

The effect of the respondent's education disappears when we consider multi-local residence prior to migration and subjective wealth (Model 1C): only multi-local residence is significant. Since the practice of multi-local residence between couples is widespread in Ghana (Coe 2011; Manuh 1999; Oppong 1970), we expected that non-residential unions are not necessarily considered problematic. Yet our findings are counterintuitive, showing that having had prior experience with multi-local residence increases the probability of reunification in the destination country. Future research should further investigate this surprising result. 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 whether the children are located 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 destination country becomes.

Next to the destination country, we also examined three other receiving-country characteristics. First, we find that reunification becomes 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 3: Estimating the probability of reunification at destination

	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	0.631***	0.132	0.688***	0.126	0.755***	0.154
Duration of LATAB (squared)	-0.034***	0.008	-0.033***	0.008	-0.036***	0.009	-0.037***	0.009	-0.042***	0.010
Socio-demographic variables										
Sex (Male, ref.)										
Female	-0.186	0.381	-0.263	0.397	-0.232	0.451	-0.203	0.468	0.077	0.481
Education (Secondary or less, ref.)										
Tertiary			0.620*	0.418	0.251	0.448	0.169	0.467	0.237	0.476
Spouse's education (Secondary or less, ref.)										
Tertiary			-0.800**	0.394	-1.131**	0.464	-1.290***	0.518	-1.153**	0.483
Subjective wealth status (Depended/Not at all, ref.)										
Absolutely					0.695	0.519	0.752	0.504	0.847	0.519
Multilocal residence before migration (No, ref.)										
Yes					1.740***	0.603	1.772***	0.581	1.582**	0.676
Couple's characteristics										
Marital status (Unmarried, ref.)										
Married							0.995*	0.561	1.337**	0.598
Children (No children, ref.)										
At least one child in Ghana							-1.501***	0.544	-2.054***	0.613
All children at destination							-1.491**	0.731	-2.001**	0.830
Duration of the union							0.015	0.029	0.061*	0.032
Receiving country characteristics										
Destination (UK, ref.)										
the Netherlands	-0.594	0.382	-0.889**	0.398	-1.070***	0.442	-1.555***	0.582	-1.760**	0.726
Period (≦ 2003, ref.)										
≧ 2004									-1.547***	0.514
Legal status (Undocumented, ref.)										
Documented									-0.065	0.595
Short return visits (No, ref.)										
Yes									-0.875**	0.466
Constant	-4.464***	0.493	-4.283***	0.582	-5.959***	0.709	-5.952***	0.768	-5.557	0.905
Model characteristics										
Log likelihood	-126.1609		-122.48589		-110.31633		-105.1548		-98.158148	
N (couple-years)	927		917		905		905		868	
N (couples)	291		286		281		281		278	
Pseudo R2	0.07		0.10		0.16		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).

8. Discussion

In this paper we examined Ghanaian migrants' reunification behavior 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, highlighting the significance of this phenomenon. 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. Contrary to common assumptions, these living arrangements across borders are not necessarily short-term. Rather, these findings demonstrate that LATAB is a substantial phenomenon and staying separate is an established arrangement for a significant number of migrants.

Subsequently, we explored which factors influence the decision of whether or not to stay transnational. 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, but in this paper we made a first attempt to examine the factors that facilitate and impede a couple's reunification, which adds to the literature on family and migration in three important ways. First, studies on transnational families have emphasized the importance of including those left behind as well as taking into account familial norms and practices in the origin country. We develop these studies by examining the rather understudied subject of migrants' reunification behavior. Second, studies on LAT relationships have studied the self-selective nature of these relationships, but only in Western contexts. A non-Western context such as Ghana is particularly interesting to study, as LAT relationships are frequent in the Ghanaian context. Third, we contribute to legal studies on family reunification by considering the actual reunification behavior of both documented and undocumented migrants. Our explorative analyses point to four important findings.

First, 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 destination 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 2001; Kanaiaupuni 2000). Being higher-educated might signal more bargaining power for spouses who are left behind and more prospects in the labor market in the origin country, which would decrease the need and desire to migrate.

This contradicts what Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer (2014) and Beauchemin et al. (2015) found for Senegalese male migrants, whose probability of reunifying in Europe increases with higher-educated wives. This might be related to norms in the origin country. Senegal is characterized by strong patriarchal customs,

which might make it desirable for higher-educated women to leave. By comparison, in Ghana norms concerning female employment are more favorable (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. Future research should be encouraged to further examine the role of the 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 destination country but spouses in the origin country are actively engaged in the decision-making process.

Second, we considered to what extent migrants self-select into a transnational relationship. 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). Additionally, previous economic studies on migration have argued that when the motivation to migrate is to increase income, staying separated would be more lucrative because reunification in the destination country would increase costs (Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer 2014). Our findings are partly consistent: while having a spouse with higher education makes LAT more likely, migrants' own education does not significantly affect the probability of reunification, nor does subjective wealth status. Having children did significantly reduce the odds of reunification in the destination country. Interestingly, it does not matter whether the children are with the migrant in the destination country or whether at least one child is in Ghana. Children in the destination country are also expensive, and partner reunification would further increase the costs, as reunification can be very costly. Not reunifying while there are children in the origin country can also reflect that one of the partners is caring for the children in the origin country, thus discouraging spousal reunification in the destination country.

We also examined the significance of short return visits to Ghana. Extensive transnational ties and activities of migrants facilitate a transnational lifestyle (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008). This fact is corroborated by our findings, which 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.

Third, we also investigated the importance of the receiving context. We examined two popular destination countries, the UK and the Netherlands (Akyeampong 2000). We found that the probability of reunification is lower for migrants living in the Netherlands and when migrants arrived after 2004 when legislation in most European member states became more restrictive (De Hart, Strik, and Pankratz 2012; Sibley,

Fenelon and Mole 2012). The significant result of this latter variable could reflect these increasingly difficult circumstances for reunification.

Our data cannot completely uncover the differences between the 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 used to be more difficult in the Netherlands (De Hart, Strik, and Pankratz 2012). Additionally, previous research has indicated that migrants are reluctant to reunify with their families in the Netherlands because of difficulties at school and in the labor market (Dito, Mazzucato, and Schans 2016). These difficulties are more profound in the Netherlands than in the UK because of not speaking the Dutch language and the problems migrants report getting their educational credentials recognized in the Netherlands (Mazzucato 2008).

Confirming previous studies (González-Ferrer 2011; Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer 2014), legal status was not shown 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. Marital relationships, which include customary and civil marriages, increase the likelihood of reunification. This could reflect the fact that marriages are often more stable than unions, but this result might also indicate that legal reunification is easier for married couples.

Fourth, the probability of reunification does not differ for male and female migrants. Although consistent with previous studies (González-Ferrer 2011), this finding is surprising, considering legal studies that indicate that reunification is more difficult for women because they find meeting the income requirements more challenging (e.g., Kraler 2010; Kofman et al. 2011; Van Walsum 2006). Specifically, reunification might be more difficult for poorer women, yet separate analyses by gender would be necessary to further scrutinize whether income or other factors affect the reunification behavior of men and women differently. Unfortunately our small sample size did not allow these analyses.

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 behavior could be advanced. Our results reveal 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 origin country. Studying the relative importance of reunification in the destination country compared with reunification in the country of origin can further help to understand migrants' choices and constraints around transnational living (e.g., see Baizan, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer 2014).

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

9. Acknowledgements

Results presented in this paper have been obtained within the Migration between Africa and Europe project (MAFE). The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement 217206. The MAFE project is coordinated by INED (C. Beauchemin) and is formed additionally by the Université catholique de Louvain (B. Schoumaker), Maastricht University (V. Mazzucato), the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (P. Sakho), the Université de Kinshasa (J. Mangalu), the University of Ghana (P. Quartey), the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (P. Baizan), the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (A. González-Ferrer), FIERI (Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'Immigrazione; E. Castagnone), and the University of Sussex (R. Black).

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