‘Why Are You Not Crying?’

Understanding Young People’s Transnational Engagements through Funeral Visits to Ghana

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Abstract

This article analyses the ways in which young people with a migration background develop their own transnational engagement with their or their parents’ country of origin. Drawing on 17-months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands and Ghana, we add to the emerging literature on ‘return’ mobilities by analysing young people of Ghanaian background, irrespective of whether they or their parents migrated, and by looking at an under-researched form of mobility that they engage in: that of attending funerals in Ghana. Funerals occupy a central role in Ghanaian society, and thus allow young people to gain knowledge about cultural practices, both by observing and embodying them, and develop their relationships with people in Ghana. Rather than reproducing their parents’ transnational attachments, young people recreate these according to their own needs, which involves dealing with tensions. Peer relationships—which have largely gone unnoticed in transnational migration studies—play a significant role in this process.

Keywords

youth mobility – transnational engagement – transnational attachment – funerals – peer relationships – Ghana – the Netherlands

Résumé

Cet article étudie les manières dont des jeunes issus de l'immigration développent leur propre engagement transnational avec leur pays d'origine ou celui de leur parents. À partir d'une enquête ethnographique multi-située de seize mois entre les Pays-Bas et le Ghana, cet article contribue à une littérature émergente sur les mobilités « de retour » des jeunes de la première et seconde génération en analysant une forme inexplorée de mobilité dans laquelle les jeunes d'origine ghanéenne s'engagent : la célébration de funérailles au Ghana. Ces funérailles, qui occupent une place centrale dans la société ghanéenne, permettent aux jeunes d'acquérir des connaissances sur les pratiques culturelles du pays—tant en les observant qu'en les incorporant—et de développer leur réseau de relations sur place. L'enquête révèle que ces jeunes ne cherchent pas à reproduire les attachements transnationaux de leurs parents ; ils les recréent plutôt selon leurs propres besoins, générant des tensions. Les relations avec les pairs, qui ont été largement négligées dans l'étude transnationale des migrations, jouent un rôle significatif dans ce processus.

Mots-clés

mobilité des jeunes – engagement transnational – attachement transnational – funérailles – relations avec les pairs – Ghana – Pays-Bas

1 Introduction

It was an emotional rollercoaster. I didn't like to go back to Bekwai. When [my boyfriend] came to pick me up again, I was a mess, you know. You go from funeral vibes to "needing to act fun again." It was really confronting to go back to my [grandmother's] place. She was always there during trips to Ghana. You feel something is missing.

Field interview, 28 February 2020, Amsterdam

Priscilla, quoted above, is 19 years old and grew up in the Netherlands. She has made eight trips to Ghana during her lifetime. Her last trip, for her grand-

mother's funeral, was an intense experience for her. Prior to meeting her Ghanaian boyfriend, her grandmother had been the main reason for her to visit Ghana. The death of her grandmother forced Priscilla to make sense of her changing relationship to both Ghana and family. She expressed her struggle to divide time between her boyfriend and relatives in the hometown, and experienced a challenging grieving process. Ultimately, the death of her grandmother contributed to a transformed sense of attachment to Ghana.

Priscilla's story is an example of the shifting ways in which young people engage with their or their parents' 'home' country. Like Priscilla, many of our research participants engaged in mobility between Ghana and the Netherlands. Some were born from immigrant parents in the Netherlands, while others had moved themselves. Aside from their (or their parents') international move, these young people have travelled back and forth between these countries. However, dominant notions of youth with a migration background conceptualise youth as either immobile or as only moving once, which obscures the diversity of young people's mobility experiences (van Geel and Mazzucato 2018; Mazzucato 2015). Priscilla's story and those of others documented in this article, illustrate how these mobilities are not simply uni-directional and how they can be motivated by young people's own independent engagements with their or their parents' country of origin.

To investigate these mobility experiences, the cases selected here revolve around youth's mobility to attend one of the most important family events in Ghanaian and Akan social and cultural life: funerals. These are major public events centered around norms of solidarity and respect for the dead (De Witte 2001). Unlike kinship celebrations such as weddings, funerals are characterised by a need to show one's emotional engagement, as they take place during moments of crisis. As such, visiting funerals are social obligations that need to be fulfilled, even by those living abroad (Mazzucato et al. 2006). Rituals such as funerals have attracted much attention from anthropologists because they provide insight into people's understanding of social order as well as their position within it (Turner 1967 in Olwig 2009). Although scholars have acknowledged that funerals offer a key opportunity to reinforce transnational connections and orientations (Saraiva 2016; Olwig 2009; Mazzucato et al. 2006), transnational youth's experiences of these events have received little attention. In fact, youth are rarely the sole subjects of investigation (Haikkola 2011: 1202) and tend to be approached as persons "still too young to know what kind of relationship they will have to their ancestral homelands" (Levitt and Waters 2002: 3). As such, this analysis contributes to understanding how young people express their agency as transnational actors (Reynolds and Zontini 2016: 383).

Funerals provide a lens through which to address these gaps. The cultural significance of funerals in Ghana make them events that are imbued with learning and meaning-making for transnational young people in which they reaffirm ties to family and Ghana. They also challenge these ties, resulting in shifts in the ways they engage with Ghana. As such, funerals are a microcosm of transnational engagement that we have observed more widely during trips to Ghana. Drawing on seventeen months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in The Hague, the Netherlands and the Greater Accra, Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana, with 36 young Dutch-Ghanaians, we examine both how young people enact their sense of connectedness as transnational actors and how they are engaging in their own mobilities to do so.

Focusing on how young people enact their transnational engagement, we argue that they do not simply reproduce transnational attachments gained from their parents but reshape and create new forms of engagement through mobility and according to their own needs. We find that peer relationships—which are under researched in transnational migration studies—play a significant role in this process. Young people increasingly seek out their peers during such trips, while their engagement with elderly family members waned.

2 Redefining Transnational Engagement through Youth Mobility Trajectories

The ways in which migrants engage with their families and communities back 'home' while living elsewhere has been the focus of study of transnational migration scholars. Transnationalism as a concept emerged from a need to describe how migrants are simultaneously embedded in multiple societies (Mazzucato et al. 2004; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999; Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Over two decades of transnational migration scholarship has shown that there are different ways of engaging transnationally. People can connect simultaneously to more than one country through the imagination (Appadurai 1999) and the maintenance of hybrid identities (Clifford 1994), and do not need to be physically mobile in order to do so (Dahinden 2009). Levitt and Waters (2002: 20) point out that an immobile way of expressing one's transnational identity is particularly important when considering the 'second' and subsequent generations, who may not engage in physical mobility. As such quite some literature has investigated the use of information and communication technologies as facilitating affective relationships across borders, keeping a sense of 'familyhood' alive (Madianou and Miller 2012; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

Studies focusing on the second generation have examined the ways in which young people establish and maintain ties to their parents' country of origin (Zontini and Reynolds 2018; Levitt 2009; Levitt and Waters 2002). They find that the transmission of cultural values and stories about the achievements of family members in the country of origin allow young people to connect to their 'homeland' and can serve as sources of empowerment to face structural barriers in the country of residence (Levitt 2009; Fernández-Kelly 2008). By deploying a transnational lens, these studies show that transnational engagement shapes young people's social mobility and integration in the country of residence (Reynolds and Zontini 2016: 381; Vathi and King 2011: 504).

Yet, the emphasis on immobile ways of being transnational or on young people's incorporation into their country of residence has left underexamined the actual mobility that young people engage in. Most studies use a simplified notion of young people's mobility, focusing on their first international move (when they follow their parents or move independently) or when they 'stay behind' while their parents migrate (van Geel and Mazzucato 2018; Mazzucato 2015). As a result, there is little known about the ways in which young people, whether first or second generation, continue to be mobile and how such mobility shapes the way they engage with their or their parents' country of origin. While not all young people have the experience of visiting their parents' country of origin (Vathi and King 2011: 505), many have multiple mobility experiences ranging from brief holidays to lengthy periods of (re)settlement for the purpose of education (van Geel and Mazzucato 2018). Our participants include both first and second generation young people who have engaged in back-and-forth moves between Ghana and the Netherlands, including short trips. In order to account for the geographical moves across space and time that young people engage in, the concept of 'youth mobility trajectory' (Mazzucato 2015) is used here to highlight the possibility for multiple moves of different durations and directions across localities.

We build on a recent strand of transnational migration research, that has focused on 'second generation returns' showing how transnational engagement among second generation (young) adults can result in diaspora-tourism (Huang et al. 2015; Wagner 2008), return migration (Wessendorf 2007; Christou and King 2006) and contributions to the development of the parents' country of origin as 'agents of change' (Conway and Potter 2007; Potter 2005). Such research has also investigated the visits of migrant families to their homeland in the context of the everyday lives of younger members of the second generation, including children. These visits are seen as key features of transnational family life and shape young people's relationship to the parents' country of origin (Baldassar 2011; Haikkola 2011). They allow migrants and their children to rein-

force ties to family and the hometown, and to strengthen their ethnic identity. This work broadly argues that family trips lay the foundation for young people's subsequent transnational engagements.

While visits to their or their parents' country of origin may initially mostly center around notions of family and obligation, young people are better able to use their agency to develop their own transnational engagement once they become less dependent on their parents. However, little is known about the processes leading up to this, and the tensions and frictions that it may involve (van Geel and Mazzucato 2020; Wagner 2008). As life-cycle rituals, funerals are considered useful contexts for ethnographic research because they prompt people to reflect upon their social relations and sites of identification. For example, Olwig (2009) shows that individuals make claims for membership to a community but also reject this in the context of funerals. Generally, family visits and particularly those that include participation in the funeral of a family member, are emotionally loaded. For example, they may activate a deeper sense of the reciprocal obligations of family and community (Baldassar 2011: 12; Mazzucato et al. 2006) but also trigger the desire to escape these (see for example Vathi and King 2011: 510). While more recent studies have shown that young people also engage in non-family-oriented activities, even during trips undertaken for the main purpose of visiting family, these are still under-researched (Wagner 2008). In order to address this gap, we focus on what actually transpires during trips. Here, particular attention is drawn to key moments within the context of the funeral as representing the dynamic of transnational attachment.

Since most studies focus on transnational mobility within family and kinship networks, transnational engagements centered around friendships (Robertson et al. 2018: 211) and other type of peer relationships are neglected. Only few scholars have shown that young diasporic individuals actively nurture peer relationships during trips as they grow older and seek romantic encounters with others visiting the homeland for example (Wagner 2018) or even potential marriage candidates at funerals in the hometown (Mazzucato et al. 2006: 1065). This relates to the often overlooked idea that expressions of attachment shift through stages in the life cycle, such as from youth to adulthood (Levitt and Waters 2002). Although parents may have facilitated young people's initial connection to their homeland (Baldassar 2011: 2), young people do not necessarily rely on them when it comes to being transnational (Haikkola 2011). In order to give voice to young people's own views about their experiences, our research employs a youth-centric perspective. Rather than taking their parents' transnational experience as the norm, we seek to highlight young people's central role as social actors in transnational processes.

3 Methodology

In order to investigate young people's roles as independent actors in transnational mobilities, this project uses multiple qualitative methods, including the first author's mobility between multiple sites, to gather and observe young people's perspectives and practices. This paper is based on empirical data collected as part of the Mobility Trajectories of Young Lives (MO-TRAYL) project (www.motrayl.com), which focuses on the relationship between youth mobility trajectories and life-chances and is led by the second author. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by the first author between January 2018 and October 2019 among young people of Ghanaian background who lived in The Hague, and greater area. In the months following the 'official' end of fieldwork (from October 2019 till May 2020), the first author still conducted a handful of follow-up interviews and conversations, mostly via information and communication technologies, and participated in several online follow-up events that were relevant for the research. This study deploys a multi-sited research design during which the first author accompanied young people on their trips to Ghana, directly observing their lived experiences in Ghana, with relatives and friends there, while also following their daily lives in The Hague. The first author lived close to the neighborhood where many participants reside, enabling her to participate in young people's everyday activities such as helping with homework, sharing meals, joining weekly meetings at youth organisations, attending church services and cultural events to gain a deeper understanding of their life worlds. Being a young woman with Ghanaian roots herself, she participated in a Facebook Group for young Dutch-Ghanaian women and organised a visual storytelling project through a local Ghanaian-run organisation, both of which helped her in entering the field. The three trips to Ghana that she undertook with her participants consisted of a total of two months of fieldwork.

The sample consists of 36 participants aged 14–25 years old, who were either born in Ghana themselves or had parents who were both born in Ghana, with the exception of two participants whose mothers were born in a neighboring country. Most participants lived in social housing and their parents occupied blue-collar jobs. Many of them belonged to one of the largest Ghanaian ethnic groups in Ghana, the Akan. Participants needed to have engaged in at least one international move to and/or from Ghana, which includes being born in Ghana and moving to the Netherlands as well as being born in the Netherlands and engaging in trips, either long or short, to Ghana. This criterion means that we include in our study both participants who would be categorised as belonging to the so-called first (or 1.5) and second generation. Besides this, eligible participants included those who attended or have attended secondary school in

the Netherlands. Though not a selection criteria, most participants identified as Christians and belonged to diverse denominations, including Pentecostalism and Methodism, and were active churchgoers. The study received ethical approval from Maastricht University's Ethics Committee. To ensure anonymity we use pseudonyms for participants and obscured any identifiable details.

The main methods of data collection consisted of participant observation and different types of interviews—semi-structured life-histories, and thematic ones—and ego-centric network maps using concentric circles. Young people's mobility trajectories were also mapped, to document their moves through space and over time both before and after their first international move. Towards the end of fieldwork, photo-elicitation interviews (Harper 2002) were conducted with several participants as an alternative tool to elicit memories and emotions. We allowed participants to think and reflect prior to the interview and convey their thoughts through a visual image that they considered said something about their connection or disconnection to Ghana.

Funeral experiences in particular were not explicitly pursued as a topic in this data collection. They emerged as significant events from some participants' accounts of their transnational relationships to Ghana and family. Furthermore, four participants went to funerals in Ghana during the fieldwork period, including one that was attended by the first author, and shared their experiences of their trips. The analysis mainly draws on the narratives of eight participants who attended funerals in Ghana in their late teens and/or early twenties. While inductively coding for expressions of young people's relationship to Ghana and family, funerals recurred as a significant site. Out of these, we have chosen two cases that illustrate the full diversity of themes that we identified in our larger sample of how visiting Ghana for a funeral contributed to participants' development of their own transnational engagement. These are presented as vignettes and are composites of field notes and interviews from multiple occasions.

4 Young People Developing Their Own Transnational Engagement

In the following section, we present two vignettes that each illustrate the different elements of the processes through which young people develop their own transnational engagement during funeral visits. As emotional events, funerals activated feelings of grief as the dead were mourned and positive memories recalled. They also provided contexts for cultural learning as participants were presented with various elements of what they perceive as their culture. In the analysis that follows, the selected vignettes and supporting examples aim to

show how these processes of learning and meaning-making reaffirm young people's ties to family and Ghana, as well as challenge these ties as young people shift their ways of engaging with Ghana through mobility. It is through young people's experiences of negotiating family and cultural practices that their attachment to family and Ghana shifts, bringing to the fore the significance of peer relationships.

Alex's story

Alex, a 23-year old tall, broad shouldered young man, walked straight and briskly in my direction when he saw me sitting in our meeting spot, this time a café in Amsterdam. He wore aviator glasses with a golden frame and heavy gold earrings bearing Adinkra symbols, which are commonly used to express the connection between the visual and verbal in the Akan culture (Ghana). For as long as Alex could remember, he had made yearly trips from the Netherlands to Ghana with his mother. This stopped after his grandparents had died, as his mother abandoned the tradition of visiting Ghana during the summer holidays and Alex (temporarily) lost the urge to return to the country. After we had sat down and ended our catch-up session, Alex pulled his phone out of his pocket and showed me a picture, which marked the start of my photo-elicitation interview with him.

While chilling in a bar in a popular neighbourhood in the capital city of Ghana with his cousin and cousin's friend in the summer of 2013, Alex took a picture of them. For the first time, he had the freedom to explore the country outside of family settings. "Why did you chose this picture? What does it say about your connection or rather disconnection with Ghana?" In a serious tone he said: "It reminds me of that time. My grandmother [mother's mother] had passed away, that's why we went to Ghana. I experienced the death of someone close for the first time. I have known her, danced with her. She is someone who had seen me grow up [...]. I carried her body, together with my cousins and a few uncles. I can tell you, it was heavy [...]." Considering his physique, Alex was not surprised when he was asked to carry the body and accepted the request without hesitation. As his mother's only son, Alex felt it was his duty to support her by fulfilling this role. The funeral marked a turning point in his life: "You're gonna pull your own weight ... I'm still the son of but I am also my own man. I'm not that little boy anymore from the Netherlands that comes here on holidays and doesn't know anything and can't do anything." Along with this realisation came a new understanding of his relationship with Ghana, one that decentered his family.

FIGURE 1 The picture that Alex took of his cousin and cousin's friend during one of his trips to Ghana
ALEX

Jill's story

Jill and Ama, both 21 years old, were close friends who met during their studies at a university in the Netherlands. While Jill was born in Ghana and moved to the Netherlands at the age of two, Ama had lived her entire life in the Netherlands. From a young age, Jill had made biannual trips to Ghana to visit her grandmother. It became a welcome routine; after staying in Ghana, Jill always felt recharged. It was her grandmother, who Jill saw as her second mother, who made her feel this way and pulled her to Ghana. The sudden death of her grandmother therefore came as a great shock to Jill. In order to move on, it was important for Jill to say goodbye to her grandmother one last time. Since Ama and I were also in Ghana around the time of the funeral, we were able to join her. The funeral took place in a small town where most of Jill's relatives resided. During the main ceremony, Jill sat in a section for family members but provided Ama and me with a live commentary through a WhatsApp chat she created on the spot. As we watched chiefs dancing, Jill sent us messages about the meaning behind the movements: "Each movement [expresses] grief, I think, or respect."

A month after the funeral, Jill and I met up at the university in the Netherlands where she studied. After finding a spot, we started talking

FIGURE 2 View from our seats at the funeral of Jill's grandmother,
10 August 2019
FIRST AUTHOR

about the funeral of Jill's grandmother. Although Jill expressed increased pride in her cultural heritage after having observed the funeral rituals, she remained critical about certain practices. "I knew my grandmother was a queen mother but I did not know the meaning behind it and how special it is to be [one]. I thought it was culturally meaningful but I also heard about the non-Christian side of it so I wasn't so enthusiastic about this. Yet, I know it is very beautiful to be a queen mother in the Ghanaian culture. So, I kind of felt proud but also had mixed feelings."

These two vignettes show that funerals in Ghana can be critical moments in young people's mobility trajectories. On one hand, Jill attempted to make sense of the cultural practices she was exposed to while dealing with the reality of her grandmother's death. Alex, on the other hand, was introduced to a side of Ghana that better suited his changing interests after fulfilling his 'duties' at the funeral. Though manifesting in different ways, both shared the experience of having to reconfigure their relationship to family and their country as their grandparents were motivating factors for their trips to Ghana.

Most cases in this article are about young people attending the funeral of their maternal grandmother. This needs to be understood in relation to the matrilineal social structure of the Akan, which most participants belonged to. Descent and belonging is traced through the mother's bloodline, the *mmusua* (sing. *abusua*), which means that children of parents belong to the mother's family (De Witte 2001: 52). Members of the *abusua* share the collective responsibility for the organisation of a family member's funeral, even those living abroad, which is reflected in participants' accounts. In one case, this concerned

the funeral of a queen mother, known as *Ohemaa* in Twi (a dialect of the Akan language). Queen mothers are publicly recognised female leaders and play an important role in traditional politics (Steegstra 2009). Although the nature of the Akan queen mother varies somewhat from one kingdom to the other, they generally enjoy prestige and community recognition. As such, funerals of queen mothers tend to be more extravagant and larger in scale than funerals of 'ordinary' members (De Witte 2001: 89–90). It is important to mention that there were also participants who had attended the funeral of their maternal grandfather. This sometimes reflected their attachment to the elderly family members, which they developed throughout their mobility trajectories, rather than only cultural norms.

The next sections show that while funerals allow young people to reaffirm ties to family and Ghana by expressing and learning family and cultural practices of membership, they also transform their sense of attachment.

4.1 *Reaffirming Ties to Family and Ghana*

As important social and cultural events, funerals bring family members together, both those living in Ghana as well as abroad (Mazzucato et al. 2006: 1065). Participants mentioned being reunited with and meeting relatives from all over Ghana and the world, who they knew from previous trips or were introduced to during their current trip. These reunions can also happen at other life-events such as weddings and festivities honoring a queen mother that participants attended throughout their mobility trajectories. Yet funerals have a different emotional character. Travelling to Ghana for a funeral can therefore invoke mixed feelings: it is the death of a loved one that makes the family reunion possible. Although Jill valued the opportunity to reconnect with family, she struggled to come to terms with her grandmother's death: "When I saw my family, I thought: I've missed them. I was also happy to see family whom I had not seen before. But it wasn't like that made me happier or something when I was there."

4.1.1 Family Membership

Both Alex and Jill felt prompted to express their family membership in the context of the funeral. Due to the nature of the event, they stressed the need to support their mothers and close relatives. By being physically there, they were able to directly observe the effect of the death of their grandparent on the family and the value of their presence. For example, as his mother's only son and one of the more muscular men in the family, Alex felt he needed to show his strength by carrying his grandmother's body. "If you're scared, you shouldn't do it [carry the death body], but I'm not gonna chicken out."

As with many other participants, the deceased person—usually a grandparent—played an important role in their sense of belonging to family. Grandparents have an important role as they embody the family memory (Souralova 2020: 369). In the wake of their loss, young people were reminded of, and reminisced about, the bond they shared with the grandparent. They invoked positive memories of their grandparents, such as introducing them to their romantic partner, or eating their food. Jill, who saw her grandmother as a second mother, best remembered “how warm-hearted she was, especially to the grandchildren.” She added that her grandmother’s ever-present food was another expression of her love. Holding on to memories of the deceased person can be of significance for the emotional well-being of the bereaved and their understanding of the transnational family configuration (Giralt 2018: 587). Like other relatives in Ghana, the respective family member may not have played an active role in young people’s daily lives; most participants mentioned being caught up in their own lives or did not feel like they had much to talk about with them on the phone for example. While the value of phone and video calls has been emphasised in the transnational migration literature (Haikkola 2011: 1207; Madianou and Miller 2011), young people seemed to value face-to-face interaction. Yet, young people still characterised their relationship with their grandparent in highly positive terms. Tina, 23 years old, who had moved from Ghana to the Netherlands at the age of twelve and had made four trips to Ghana since then, also exemplified this feeling in an interview:

I was so close to my grandfather [...]. I grew up with him [...]. I dreamt about him the night before he died. We used to call each other but not as often [as in the year before he died]. Something told me: he won’t live so long anymore.

Field interview, 19 March 2020, telephone

Participants were also confronted with (sudden) feelings of grief and sadness by seeing their grandparent laying in the casket. Although Alex had carried his grandmother’s body, he avoided looking in her casket as he feared this would “fade all the positive memories he had of her away.” Similarly, Eric, 25 years old—who grew up in the Netherlands and got to know his grandmother through the five trips he made to Ghana and occasional phone calls—recalled how, contrary to his expectations, his grandmother’s funeral had a profound impact on him:

One thing I clearly remember is that when your grandmother or someone dies, one of the grandchildren imitates [that person]. One of my cousins

did that for the whole day. It started out funny [but] at one point you just broke down. [...], you just start crying.

Field interview, 9 May 2018, The Hague

Being physically in Ghana in the build-up to and during the funeral appeared to have strengthened familial ties. As close relatives of the deceased person, young people were encouraged to express their belonging to their family by performing tasks during the funeral. For example, as one of the grandchildren, Priscilla wrote a memorial tribute to her deceased grandmother for a booklet that was handed out at the funeral. Some participants were also recognised as members of the bereaved family by friends and/or romantic partners, who came to pay their respects. This shows that peer support is not limited to the locality where young people reside (Ogden and Mazzucato 2021a). For example, Ama—Jill's close friend from the Netherlands—sought to support Jill emotionally by being present at her grandmother's funeral and offering her condolences to the family. Following the advice of Ama's family friend, Ama and the first author had also brought money to donate to Jill's family, a common practice at Ghanaian funerals (Mazzucato et al. 2006; De Witte 2001: 86). In addition, in order to set themselves apart as family members, participants wore special funeral attire. During a photo-elicitation interview with Mary about her connection to Ghana, she showed a picture of herself at her grandmother's funeral, wearing a nicely-shaped long dress in black and red funeral cloth, with a sticker of her grandmother pasted above her chest. She explained that all the immediate family members wore the same cloth but got to choose their own design. Homeland visits are thus a "performative act of belonging" (Souralova 2020: 374).

Funerals are not the only sites that generate a sense of collective membership. For example, Kimberly (19) shared that she was pleasantly surprised when she was asked to hold and move a large fan during a large parade as the granddaughter of the queen mother, who was honored through this festive activity among other things. Her grandmother had been on the throne for more than forty years, and was well respected in her community. Prior to the celebration, Kimberly knew little about queen mothership and the cultural meaning behind it, despite the fact that her mother used to proudly share information about this with her children. Kimberly's experience of participating in the celebration and being recognised as the granddaughter of the queen mother, enhanced her understanding of the queen mother tradition and increased her interest in learning more about her family history. Visits to the 'home' country are thus not merely about notions of family and obligation but also about gaining knowledge about customs and history through first-hand experiences (van Geel and Mazzucato 2020; Baldassar 2011: 17).

4.1.2 Cultural Membership

Like other life-cycle events, funerals not only allowed young people to reconnect with family but also with their perceived cultural heritage. Akan funerals for example bring together diverse forms of expression and arts, and have grown in scale over the years (De Witte 2001: 6–7). Hence, much preparation, time, effort and money are involved in them. They usually start with a one-week ceremony held just after the person's death, during which the family of the deceased plan a date for the funeral and ending with a one-year celebration that marks the official end to the mourning period. The funeral itself consists of a private wake-keeping on Friday, the laying-in-state ceremony, burial and funeral rites at a public place on Saturday, and a thanksgiving service in church on Sunday, usually in the person's hometown (Mazzucato et al. 2006: 1052; De Witte 2001: 60–61). Although funeral practices have changed over time, they were commonly presented as 'traditional' (De Witte 2001). Like Jill, most participants put themselves in the position of 'learner' by asking relatives around them countless questions based on their observations. As such young people's behavior during 'homeland' visits is shaped by their exposure to cultural practices during previous stays in Ghana, that is, throughout their mobility trajectories. Jill, who was sitting next to her aunties and was unfamiliar with most funeral rites, shared all the information she received from them about this in the WhatsApp group Jill and I were part of. Similarly, Mary, seventeen years old, quoted above, who was born and raised in The Hague and had made three trips to Ghana, was determined to observe everything that happened at her grandmother's funeral from up-close. Unlike for her younger cousins from Ghana and other children, she proudly stated there was no discussion about whether or not she was allowed to do so. As someone coming from abroad, her family wanted to give her the opportunity to learn about how "they do funerals there." She was therefore allowed to attend the laying-in-state ceremony, which is usually not open to young people, and even took pictures (also unusual) upon the encouragement from her auntie.

Young people were not simply put in touch with cultural practices through adults, or passively observing them (Vathi and King 2011: 505), but also learned by embodying them. For example, since crying is associated with the worthiness of the deceased person on Earth, it is deemed important to cry out loud and even use specific grieving gestures (De Witte 2001: 47). Similarly, the act of crying figured as a central feature of Mary's impression of 'Ghanaian funerals'. "People in Ghana really exaggerate when they cry; they scream, they run around in circles," Mary explained to me. In fact, in participants' accounts, crying was both encouraged as well as discouraged by people around them, which sometimes led to feelings of frustration. Alex mentioned the cultural significance of

showing no weakness by crying as a man. In contrast to women, men are not supposed to cry, at least not in public, to uphold dominant norms of masculinity (ibid.: 48). Mary, on the other hand, described her auntie's outraged response when she noted Mary's behavior in the heaven-inspired white room where her grandmother's body was displayed for visitors: "Then, my auntie came in: 'why are you not crying? [...]. I don't get why you are not crying. Bladiebla,'" Mary said with rolling eyes. "I thought: do we need to cry then?" Mary initially attempted to resist the pressure to cry as she did not want others, such as her boyfriend from the Netherlands who also attended the funeral, to see her in that state. Yet, triggered by the sight of people crying and the realisation that her grandmother was gone, Mary eventually shed tears as she stood next to her grandmother's bed while a cameraman was recording the happening, and even pressured her cousin to do the same later that day.

Funerals contributed to young people's desire to gain knowledge about their perceived cultural heritage and feelings of pride: "This [the funeral] is only a small part of the culture. If this is already so beautiful, let alone the rest. It forms part of my identity and history. I think it is something that I should know, should want to know, where I am from [...]." (Jill). Ama, wondered "how much of a country your parents can give to you." Ama had made four trips to the country, which mostly revolved around her father's housebuilding activities. In contrast to Jill, Ama hardly knew her relatives and longed for a familial connection while growing up. Instead of relying on her parents, she actively nurtured her relationship with Ghana in her own ways. She felt connected to the country on a deeper level by participating in the funeral of Jill's grandmother, which introduced her to a part of the culture she had been unfamiliar with.

Others simply appreciated having become more aware of cultural practices as it reinforced their connection to Ghana, like Mary. All the videos and pictures she had taken during the funeral served as visual diaries, which she occasionally watched to relive those special memories. Despite some of the challenges participants themselves had encountered, which will be addressed in the next section, most acknowledged the importance of such family visits. However, it is important to mention here that some only did retrospectively. They shared that it was only after having become more 'mature' and having (re)gained interest in Ghana, that they understood the value of knowing "where they come from," or their "point of reference." This shows the importance of taking into account the timing of mobility in order to better understand its impact on young people's sense of self.

Participation in kinship rituals and celebrations thus allows young people to establish and reinforce transnational connections (Reynolds 2006). This shows that expressions of attachment may ebb and flow in response to particular inci-

dents or crises (Levitt and Waters 2002). Yet, in the process of learning and meaning-making in the context of the funeral, participants were presented with cultural and family practices that not only facilitated but also challenged their attachment to family and Ghana. The next section discusses how young people's experiences of dealing with such tensions opens up space for the creation of their own ways of being transnational.

4.2 *Shifting Engagements*

Time and again, participants invoked a sense of having 'mixed feelings' in relation to their experiences of attending funerals in Ghana. This was not only due to the nature of the event (i.e., a family reunion under sad circumstances) but also linked to their observations at the funerals and changing needs. Through this meaning-making process, they developed their own transnational engagement.

4.2.1 Negotiating Cultural Practices

During funerals in Ghana, participants were prompted to reflect on how they positioned themselves vis-a-vis their 'culture', which funerals represented to them. As young Christians who were involved in a socio-religious space that connects the Netherlands and Ghana (Agyeman and Owusu Kyei 2019), some considered certain funeral practices to be pagan and even dangerous. While witnessing a ritual during the funeral of Jill's grandmother, Ama sent Jill—who was sitting far away from us—a WhatsApp message with a fearful look on her eyes. [10-08-2019 17:31] Ama: "Im just pleading blood of jesus over here omg :'(im such a baby." By pleading the 'blood of Jesus', Ama expressed the need to receive protection from God. Within less than a minute, Jill, who related to Ama's fears, reassured Jill that "they were not doing Juju," a spiritual belief system that is also known as black magic. Nevertheless, considering the desire to stay away from practices such as the worship of ancestors, these participants preferred a more 'Christian-inspired' funeral. Consequently, meeting peers from abroad who share similar values, attitudes and ideas can create a sense of being part of the same 'group' (Graf 2017: 2721). Other participants, however, stressed the value of preserving traditions and not letting them get swallowed up by 'Western' beliefs. Alex, for example, appreciated having been exposed to ancestral rites as a result of "the things his grandmother did as a ghost." Regardless of their stances in this debate, which were also echoed by dominant players in Ghanaian society such as churches and the government (De Witte 2001), participants generally still valued the funeral for promoting the richness of 'Ghanaian culture'. Here, they particularly referred to the 'traditional' dances that were performed and the beautifully patterned hand-

woven funeral cloth. As such young people's experiences during 'homeland' trips can simultaneously generate feelings of attachment but also detachment (Souralova 2020: 374; Wagner 2008).

Participants often shared their opinions about what they believed to be the appropriate size and nature of a funeral in discussing their attachment to Ghana. Since the funeral can bestow prestige or shame on the family, it should be grand and successful (van der Geest 2000). On the one hand, funerals attended by a large number of mourners—considered 'typically Ghanaian'—were seen as having succeeded in giving honour to their loved ones. They would also show the strength of the perceived collectivist nature of 'Ghanaian culture' in the eyes of some:

Ama: In Ghana you just join a friend because you want to support that friend. You don't have to know the person who died personally. [...]. Everyone is one family, there is more unity. This is less the case in European countries.

Field interview, 25 March 2020, telephone

On the other hand, grand funerals were considered 'over-the-top', wasteful cultural events that hindered the ability to grieve properly, which often reminded them of what made them different. "You know how easy it can be [organising funerals in the Netherlands] and if you're there and witness all the rules and everything that needs to be thought through—that can really clash." (Jill). Participants particularly struggled to make sense of the contrast between mourning and celebrating at funerals. While visitors were crying and weeping—behavior young people associated with 'being at a funeral'—they acted as if they attended a party at another point; visitors would dance to popular songs, eat their fill and drink.

While the funeral continues to be an incentive for migrants to seek respect from their home community (Mazzucato et al. 2006: 1066), some participants questioned this. Having grown up in Ghana, Tina saw the 'typical Ghanaian funeral' as an element of 'her culture' that needed to change. She described in an angry voice how her mother's heavy responsibility of spending large amounts of time, effort and money on organising the funeral of her father as a close family member and migrant, while being physically and emotionally distressed, resulted in her mother suffering from a burnout. Considering everything her mother had been through, Tina deemed it important to re-evaluate her attachment to Ghana and family as a "Ghanaian living in the Netherlands," through the lens of the funeral:

I don't know if I want to be buried in Ghana. I don't want to put him [fiancé who lives in Ghana] and my [future] children through that [organising the funeral]. [...]. I definitely don't want to be buried in the village [mother's hometown]. Hell to the no. Maybe somewhere in Accra then.

Field interview, 19 March 2020, telephone

Although they gave rise to tensions and frictions in several cases, participants often came to understand the value of their perceived unique perspectives in the context of funerals. Having spent time in both the Netherlands and Ghana among other places, they developed the ability to be aware of and draw from diverse cultural norms, albeit in varying degrees. Mobility thus allows young people to adopt multiple frames in their meaning-making (van Geel and Maz-zucato 2020).

4.2.2 Transforming Attachments to Family and Peers

Funerals of a central figure in young people's transnational network, especially grandparents, are sites of identification in which young people make sense of their transformed attachments not only to Ghana, as described above, but more particularly to family. Funerals bring to light the shifting ways in which participants seek to engage with family. In some cases, young people's engagement with their family waned while peer relationships beyond the family framework became more significant. Participants had established love relationships with local young Ghanaians during trips to Ghana, for example, as highlighted in the opening quote. Friends that knew each other from the Netherlands also engaged in mobility within Ghana to meet each other. As such the mobilities of migrant-background youth can intersect with that of their co-ethnic peers. For example, Ama, one of the few participants who did not have a relationship with family members to begin with, reconnected with Jill in Ghana at the funeral of Jill's grandmother, as shown in the previous section. In other cases, relatives belonging to the same generation such as cousins came to occupy a more central role in young people's experiences in Ghana. Relationships with cousins are not only about kinship but also about shared interests (Haikkola 2011), such as enjoying leisure time like they would with peers in the country of residence as reflected in Alex's story. Mary, for example, bonded with her teenage cousin in Ghana and sought to reconnect with her during the one-year anniversary of their grandmother's death. However, after finding out that her cousin would not be attending the anniversary due to her move abroad, Mary reconsidered her travel plans. Instead of staying in the village for six weeks like her mother did, Mary only saw herself staying there for a maximum of two weeks without the presence of her cousin.

Funeral experiences also accentuated pre-existing tensions between participants and their relatives based on their privileged status as (children of) migrants and the expectations that came with this. Expected financial contributions are embedded in the migratory project which bind the migrant and remaining family members back 'home' together in a web of obligations (Mazzucato et al. 2006). In Tina's case, this was reflected in the financial and mental pressures that her mother experienced from relatives in Ghana, which were exacerbated at the funeral as shown in the previous section. After the funeral, Tina expressed wanting to diminish her ties with her extended family as she felt they were too demanding, among other things. In fact, in a subsequent independent trip to Ghana with her friends and Ghanaian fiancé, Tina donated supplies to a school in her mother's hometown while nervously attempting to avoid relatives who were living there, and who she had not informed about her visit.

Considering their grandparents' central role in creating family unity, many participants felt that their grandparents' death had left a void in their ties to the family. For example, Jill attributed to her grandmother the fact that she was close to her relatives and knew all their names. In Jill's view, her grandmother was the one who kept the family together. Without her grandmother, she believed family visits would not be the same. Despite having built a stronger relationship with extended family members in the hometown, and her young cousins in particular, through their shared grieving experience, the painful absence of her grandmother had nevertheless contributed to Jill's shifting engagement with Ghana:

In a sense, I have a new reason [close relatives] to travel to the place [Ghana]. [...]. [But] now that my grandmother is not here anymore, it is more difficult for me to [do so]. I'm less focused on travelling to Ghana every two years.

Field interview, 6 September 2019, Amsterdam

Jill's story could have easily been interpreted as an example of decreased transnational ties. However, this ignores the possibility that young people's attachment can shift over time (Ogden and Mazzucato 2021b). For example, after not having travelled to Ghana for four years following the funeral of his grandmother, Alex made his first independent trip to Ghana together with his friends from the Netherlands to fully immerse himself in the city's party scene among other things, with intentions to turn this into a yearly tradition. Peers can thus play an important role in inspiring 'return' visits (Graf 2017).

Young people's attachment to family and Ghana are linked to their life-course in which the death of someone important to them, especially grand-

parents, instigate shifts in their attachments. As such, funerals are sites where these shifts are enacted and become evident. This should be understood in relation to young people's broader mobility trajectories. Peer relationships do not necessarily replace relationships with older family members, but when trips to Ghana occur as young people enter into adulthood, peer relationships become more prominent. As the examples above show, grandparents often held a special role in young people's transnational experience as they had nurtured their relationship with them during previous family visits. Yet, the changing nature of familial ties following funerals and the fact that participants were in stages of their lives in which they were less dependent on their parents, meant that they were in a position to choose and shift who they spent time with and how they did so while in Ghana. Many participants preferred learning about the country's history by touring and doing sightseeing like 'tourists' over family visits. "I know so little about Ghana, it's not even ok [...]. And I can't blame my parents because they don't have the time and resources to travel to Ghana on a yearly basis and bring me everywhere, but I can make it happen myself now," Alex noted. This quote exemplifies how young people use their agency to take charge of their own learning experiences in Ghana.

5 Conclusion

Visits to Ghana significantly shape young people's relationship to family and Ghana, and in turn their transnational engagements. Funerals in Ghana are important cultural events in which extended families and communities reunite. As such they present an observational moment that encapsulates many of the dynamics that we observed in other moments during young people's travels to Ghana. Funerals are sites in which young people make sense of the changing nature of their transnational relationships and critically engage with cultural knowledge, in terms of kinship, beliefs and in embodied forms. Young people's experiences of attending these funerals were emotional processes that often left them with mixed feelings. Despite the sad occasion, they were reunited with beloved relatives from all over the world and got to know new relatives. Expressing forms of affection and care played an even more critical role in the context of the funeral considering the need to grieve (Giralt 2019). It enabled social bonding via both recalling and creating shared memories. Often the deceased grandparent was remembered by the young people as a special companion during holidays in Ghana.

Young people encountered both opportunities as well as challenges in the context of the funeral. They expressed and learned about family and cultural

practices of membership, and gave meaning to these in the process. Contrary to most of the second-generation literature, which presents migrant-background youth as passive receivers of cultural customs (Zontini and Reynolds 2018; Haikkola 2011: 1202), young people used their experience of participating in a life-cycle event to position themselves (Wessendorf 2007). They selectively picked and chose elements of their perceived culture and rejected others, which gave rise to new ways of relating to Ghana (Anthias 2008: 10–11). Different cultural elements are not simply brought together but rather integrated over time and across space, acquiring new meanings.

Although funerals reaffirmed ties, their engagement with family in Ghana nevertheless shifted. In fact, funerals contributed to young people's transformed attachment to family and Ghana. However, this did not imply that they rejected Ghana altogether but rather engaged with the country in a way that suited their own interests. While trips to Ghana had previously centered around family and/or their parents' other transnational activities, tourism and leisure increasingly became an important feature of their experiences there (Huang et al. 2015, Wagner 2008). Relationships that interwove kinship and friendship ties were often nurtured during such trips (Vathi and King 2011). In order to advance the discussion on young people's transnational engagement, the complex and shifting nature of their positionalities thus need to be taken into account.

In discussing young people's agency, parents' efforts in facilitating their connection to their country of origin cannot be denied (Baldassar 2011). Nevertheless, young people did not necessarily rely on them when it comes to being transnational. This shows the importance of looking at young people's experiences as part of their broader mobility trajectories. Their attachment to Ghana was enhanced through peer relationships due to the stage in their lives they were in and often built on previous trips that they had undertaken. Hence, the timing of young people's trips (when they entered into adulthood) and the ability to compare mobility experiences, significantly shaped the creation of young people's new and shifting engagements with Ghana. As shown, participants spent time together with peers at funerals and other places in the country as young adults. These peers included Ghanaian-background friends from the Netherlands as well as young relatives from Ghana. We have focused on young people's mobility between the Netherlands and Ghana, yet our research suggests that young people are also mobile within Ghana. Despite the significance of such experiences for young people's sense of transnational attachment (van Geel and Mazzucato 2018; Haikkola 2011), migration studies tends to focus on transnational mobility within the family and kinship framework, neglecting peer relationships. Youth studies on the other hand, has drawn attention to

the changing nature of young people's social relations but overlooked the continued importance of family in their lives (Robertson et al. 2018: 211). Further research could investigate the different types of networks that young people establish through transnational mobility, both in terms of mobility between countries and mobility within the homeland, as well as the constraints on their transnational engagement.

Furthermore, young people's sense of 'Ghana' was less fixed to one place such as a hometown or family house but stretched to other places around the country. Rather than attributing these alternative transnational ways of being simply to generational differences, we stress the importance of considering what happens during trips. This allows for an understanding of transnational attachment that not only recognises the emerging significance of peer relationships but that is dynamic, transforming through the life-course and in response to critical life events. Making young people's physical mobility as it unfolds a central focus of research, brings greater understanding of the processes underlying their evolving transnational engagements.

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