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The role of transnational networks and legal status in securing a living: Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands

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Abstract

Transnational studies have shown that migrants are doubly engaged in both the receiving country and their country of origin. This paper adopts such a perspective in exploring how securing a living for Ghanaian migrants is affected by conditions in The Netherlands, as well as in Ghana. Securing a living, or livelihood security, we define as: employment security, housing security and ability to solve a crisis. The paper investigates how various personal and network characteristics of migrants relate to these three aspects of life in the receiving country. The paper analyzes transaction, network and life history data collected from both migrants and the people they are tied to back home. The paper shows that two characteristics are most related to securing a living: 1) the migrant's legal standing in Dutch society; 2) the migrant's positioning within a transnational network of actors. Both these conditions affect migrant objectives and actions on the one hand and the means at a migrant's disposal to realize these objectives (and therefore outcomes) on the other. Furthermore, the paper argues that increasingly stringent migration policies in The Netherlands, and more generally in the European Union, lead to a retreat of the state as a provider of basic needs and increasingly basic needs of migrants are being provided by social networks that span national territories. There is a risk that these informal networks become overly strained leading to a decreased ability of migrants to secure a living.

Keywords:

Transnationalism, illegal migrants, livelihood security, networks, Ghana, The Netherlands

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Introduction¹

Work on illegal migrants in Europe can be categorized in three broad groups. The first focuses on estimating how many they are and where they are located (Cruyff and van der Heijden 2004; Delaunay and Tapinos 1998; Pinkerton et al. 2004; Sinn et al. 2005, Musterd and Deurloo 2002). The second and most numerous set of studies looks at these migrants' ability to integrate within the receiving country society through their participation in labour and housing markets (Burgers 1998, 1999; Bolt and van Kempen 2002; Lianos et al. 1996; Markova 2005; Entorf and Moebert 2004), in entrepreneurial activities (Staring 1999; Kloosterman et al 1998; Massey 1987), and, representing the negative side of integration, their taking part in criminal activity (Aalberts and Dijkhoff 1993; Engbersen and van der Leun 2001). The third set of studies focuses on how European migration policy shapes the life courses and decisions of illegal migrants (Calavitta 2003; Lianos 2001; Jordan and Vogel 1997). This paper aims to contribute to the second set of studies by exploring how legal status and migrant transnational networks are related to migrants' ability to secure a living. We define a secure living as having secure employment, secure housing and being able to resolve crisis situations. Most studies looking into issues of integration tend to focus on the migrants' circumstances in the country of residence with little consideration to the contacts that migrants have outside of the country of residence and how these contacts impact the migrants' ability to integrate.

More recently, transnational studies have instead drawn attention to the fact that migrants' are engaged in two or more countries at the same time (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Levitt 2001; Vertovec 2001; Mazzucato 2005). This implies that to understand migrants' livelihood strategies, their objectives and their abilities to obtain their goals it is necessary to look at migrants' activities, relationships and resources beyond the boundaries of one nation, the receiving country. Studies such as Snel et al. (2006), for example, question whether migrants' transnational

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engagement affects their ability to integrate in the receiving country. Portes and Guarnizo (1991) look at how migrants' entrepreneurial activities are affected by their ties with their home country. This study aims to contribute to the literature on transnationalism by focusing on illegal migrants and how their transnational involvement is related to their ability to secure a living for themselves in the receiving country.

Specifically, this paper looks at how Ghanaian migrants are able to secure a living in The Netherlands. It presents results from an in-depth study of 29 migrants and their network members in Ghana who were followed between 2003 and 2005. Roughly half of these migrants have illegal status.

The context: Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands

The focus on Ghanaian migrants partially fills an important gap in studies on migrants in The Netherlands because most studies have focused on guest workers and people from former Dutch colonies. Both these groups have a much longer history of migration in The Netherlands. New groups are increasingly migrating to the country (van Kessel and Tellegen 2000) and they exhibit different dynamics and face different contextual factors than these older migrant groups. In 1995 these new migrant groups amounted to 435,000 'legal' migrants in The Netherlands coming from the Third World and Eastern Europe, as compared to 280,000 from Turkey, 233,000 from Morocco, 287,000 from Surinam, and 95,000 from the Antilles (SCP 1998: 241). Ghanaians are an important group amongst the new migrants, and in 2003 there were around 18,000 recorded (<http://statline.cbs.nl>). Because there are also a large number of undocumented migrants, this number is certainly an underestimate. A more reliable estimate of the total number of migrants in 2000 is 40,000 based on Ghanaians in the Netherlands who registered to vote at the Ghanaian embassy for the presidential elections in Ghana in 2000 (the official estimate for that year was around 17,000).

Ghanaian migrants are economic migrants, as distinct from the case of Moroccan and Turkish "guest workers" recruited to The Netherlands in the 1960s to help the country deal with a labour shortfall during a period of economic boom. Guest workers exhibit different dynamics than new migrant groups. First, they faced different conditions when they arrived. They were given official status upon arrival

and were part of the state system from the very beginning. Second, they are now of pension age, make use of the Dutch welfare state, and have children of working age that form the second generation.

The main difference with Ghanaian migrants, and all new migrant groups entering The Netherlands since the 1980s, is that they need to contend with a state that from the beginning, albeit to varying degrees, has wanted to keep them out. They started arriving in the 1980s when the economies of Ghana as well as of Nigeria, where many were working, were experiencing an economic downturn. Most migrants are still in their prime working years, they consist of both women and men and the eldest of the second generation are now reaching high school completion. Furthermore, due to stringent migration policies of the Netherlands, a large number of Ghanaian migrants have “illegal” status. As will be shown later in the paper, the difference between migrants with legal and illegal status is predominantly based on the timing of their entry into the Netherlands reflecting the shifts in Dutch migration policies throughout the 1990s. Both the fact that they are a relatively “young” group and that many do not have legal status, means they make relatively little use of the Dutch welfare state.

Methodology

The basic unit of analysis is the migrant network. No baseline survey of Ghanaians in The Netherlands exists and a large part of the population is undocumented. We therefore first conducted a network survey of 100 migrants. The survey consisted of 17 name-generator questions. We expressly did not want to go through snowball sampling to avoid the usual pitfall of over-sampling those migrants who are well connected. The survey was thus conducted by randomly selecting migrants encountered through different gateways (church, community leaders, hometown associations, randomly encountered migrants in markets or at the workplace). The diversity of gateways increases the likelihood that the sample is indeed random.

The networks of thirty-three migrants were selected based on individual (sex, age, wealth, education and length of migration period) and network characteristics (size and density). Of these, 4 migrants did not want to work with us. We therefore ended up with 29 migrants of which roughly 40% (11 respondents) were women. We selected Akan migrants only as we did not want differences in

cultural background amongst respondents to influence our results. Akan come from the central and southern parts of Ghana as they are the first to have migrated in overseas destinations in large numbers and they form the largest migrant group from Ghana in The Netherlands (Nimako 2000).

The program involved collecting data from both ends of the migration process: from friends, family and others in Ghana and the migrant in The Netherlands. The program was thus composed of three projects based in three important nodes of Ghanaian migrants' transnational networks: Amsterdam where most Ghanaians in the Netherlands reside; Accra, the capital city of Ghana, where most migrants have lived or passed through; and rural to semi-urban villages in the Ashanti Region of Ghana to which many migrants trace their roots. The same methods were conducted with respondents in all locations.

First, a network survey, similar to the one conducted with migrants, was conducted with their network members in Ghana. A transaction study recorded all transactions on a monthly basis conducted in eight domains important in the lives of migrants and their network members: housing, business, funerals, church, health care, education, communication and community development projects. These data were collected during the period July 2003 to June 2004. Second, in-depth interviews were carried out on the eight domains. Third, life histories were conducted with a special focus on crisis moments in their lifetimes and if and how they were resolved. Fourth, observation and participation in social events were employed in Amsterdam from June 2002 to February 2005 and in locations in Ghana from May 2003 to August 2004.

Livelihood security is composed of employment and housing security and ability to solve crisis events. Employment security is defined as having a permanent job or receiving social security benefits from the Dutch government. Both provide secure sources of income that cannot be taken away from one day to the next. Secure housing is defined as being the officially registered renter or owner of a house or apartment by the end of the research period. Again, being officially registered means one cannot be easily kicked out of one's living quarters. A crisis event is defined as those situations that our respondents experienced while living in The Netherlands that needed to be resolved quickly otherwise their ability to secure a living there would be jeopardized. The following events are crisis events that

respondents encountered: obtaining a trustworthy marriage partner for a “paper marriage”²; needing to get back the money in a marriage deal gone wrong; organizing a funeral for an important family member back home; losing a job and therefore needing help with daily subsistence; and getting released from prison. All of the above crisis situations represent a large problem for the migrant and if unsolved can lead to a vulnerable and unstable livelihood.

Some of the above situations are self-explanatory, like needing help with every-day subsistence needs such as money to purchase food or to pay rent, or needing help to get out of prison. Marriage deals are important because they represent one of the options for a migrant to obtain legal status, having failed to get such status through formal channels. However, in such deals, a migrant puts herself in a vulnerable position because the money involved in such deals is usually paid up front, while the rights to residence and working permits independent of the marriage partner are only acquired after 3 years of being married. If the partner divorces or does something wrong before that time period, the migrant foregoes her rights to stay in The Netherlands. It happens that marriage partners take advantage of this vulnerable position of migrants and do not maintain their part of the deal once they receive the money, as the official judicial system does not protect the rights of migrants in this situation. The only means available to a migrant to obtain her money back is by exerting pressure on the resident through her social network. From our interviews marriage deals regularly go wrong. In our sample of 29 people there were 12 paper marriages, 7 of which were male migrants marrying a woman resident. Four of these 12 paper marriages went wrong, of which 3 were cases of a woman migrant being duped by a male resident. It seems thus that both men and women marry for papers.

Another crisis event involves having to finance a funeral of an important kin member. Much time and money is invested in such funerals because well-performed funerals are one of the main ways of obtaining respect and status in Akan culture (de Witte 2001; van der Geest 2000). Much of the financial burden of such funerals falls on the migrant who is relatively richer than other family members back home (Mazzucato et al. 2006). However, for migrants it is often not easy to come up with

² A marriage conducted to obtain residence and working permits.

the funds necessary to pay for the funeral costs, which often run into the thousands of euros, and he may have to activate his network in order to raise such funds. Illegal status is defined as a migrant who does not have a residence or a working permit. Since the early 1990s, it is not possible to have one permit without the other in the Netherlands. Legal status was not one of the selection criteria because it was not possible to collect reliable information on status at the beginning of the research project due to the sensitivity of the information. Only once we had gained the trust of respondents through repeated and frequent visits, did we come to know about their legal status. The fact that roughly half of the sample of migrants turned out to be illegal is a further indication that our sample is close to random given the diversity of gateways into the community that we used. Official statistics of total numbers of 'legal' Ghanaians in the Netherlands are about half of the number of migrants who registered to vote with the Ghanaian embassy in 2000 reported above, indicating that probably about half of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands do not have legal status.

In the sections that follow we present some cross tabulations for variables derived from the network survey, the transaction study and the life histories together with observations. We explore relationships between the three variables representing livelihood security: employment security, housing security and successful resolution of a crisis event and the following variables: legal status, income, level of education, sex, years in The Netherlands, the Ghanaian orientation of a respondent and network characteristics (size, density, degree of Ghana-based network, degree of family-based network). We focus the discussion on those relationships we found to be significant. Because of the small sample size, we can confidently report on those relationships that were found to be significant but not on those that were not significant. We explain the findings on the basis of the observations and interviews that we conducted with each respondent during the two-year period.

Table 1. Variables

Variable	Description
Employment security	Permanent employment or not
Housing security	Official owner or renter of a house/apartment
Occurrence of crisis event	Whether a crisis event occurred during fieldwork
Individual characteristics:	
Legal status	Owning residence and working permits
Income	Amount earned yearly
Level of education	Years of schooling
Sex	Male, female
Years in The Netherlands	Number of years in The Netherlands
Ghana oriented	In Ghana: having children of school-going age, donating to a community development project, owning a business or built/building a house.
Network characteristics:	
Size	How many people in the network
Density	How many people know each other in the network
Degree of Ghana-based network	% people in the network who live in Ghana
Degree of kin-based network	% people in the network who are kin relations to the migrant

Secure employment

Having legal status is significantly related to having secure employment (Table 2). This is not a surprising result, as having residency and work permits (hereafter referred to as papers) entitles migrants to work in jobs that are protected by labour laws. This means they cannot as easily be fired or discriminated against as in black market jobs³.

³ Black market jobs are those where migrants can work without having legal status. Examples of such jobs in The Netherlands with respect to Ghanaian migrants are jobs in the cleaning, tourism (hotel), floriculture and meat packing sectors.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of employment security and legal status (N=29)

Employment security	N	Legal status		Size of network		Proportion of kin in network	
		Legal (%)	Illegal (%)	Small ^a (%)	Large ^b (%)	Few kin ^c (%)	Many kin ^d (%)
Insecure	13	8	92	38	62	77	23
Secure	16	100	0	81	19	31	69
<i>Total</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>49</i>
Significance							
Chi-square		25.19		5.58		5.99	
d.f.		1		1		1	
probability		< .0000		< .02		< .02	

Source: In-depth interviews (2003-2005) and network survey (2003).

^a24 members or lower. ^b25 members or higher. ^c49% or lower are kin relations.

^d50% or more are kin relations.

Conceivably the relationship between papers and employment may be due to some other effect such as years of education or years a respondent has been in the Netherlands however, these latter variables were not found to be significantly related to having papers. While it could be due to the small sample size, the non significance of these variables seems likely in light of Dutch immigration policy.

First, The Netherlands has not implemented a quota policy in which it tries to select the kinds of migrants it allows into its territory. The result is that being highly educated has not up to now increased one's chances of being granted a residency permit. Secondly, The Netherlands began implementing a restrictive visa policy with respect to Ghanaians in 1996 by requiring birth certificates to be legalized before one could apply for a long-term (i.e. non-tourist) visa. This policy, in a country such as Ghana where the registration of births only recently became common practice, required applicants to amend and create documents, and gave rise to a booming economy of detectives (on the part of the Dutch embassy) and counter-detectives (on the part of migrants), the former trying to discover inconsistencies in applications, the latter helping migrants to make sure their documentation was consistent. This policy made it much more difficult for Ghanaians to obtain legal status in The Netherlands. Table 3 shows that while the average time to obtain residency permits in The Netherlands remained around 5 years both for those arriving before and after 1996, the number of people who remain without papers is much greater for those arriving after 1996.

Table 3. Years it takes to get a residency permit in The Netherlands (N=29)

	Arrived before 1996	Arrived in 1996 or later
Average number of years to get residency permit	5	5.3
People without papers	13 %	55 % ^a
People with papers	87 %	45 %
<i>Total</i>	<i>100 %</i>	<i>100 %</i>

Source: In-depth interviews (2003-2005).

^a All of these respondents arrived more than 5 years ago.

In addition to legal status, two network variables are significantly related to employment security (Table 2): having a small network and a relatively large percentage of kin-related members. While we are not sure if and why a small network is important, our interview and observations confirm the importance of having kin-related network members. Indeed information about job openings goes by word of mouth amongst Ghanaians. If a job opening arises where a migrant is employed, this migrant will first give this information to a kin-related network member who may be in need of a job. This does not exclude non-kin related ties from receiving relevant job information, because migrants may not have any job-seeking kin-relation at the time of a job opening. Increasingly throughout the 1990s and 2000s jobs for migrants became scarcer partly due to the slowing down of the Dutch economy and partly due to increasing frequency of police raids in typically migrant-sector jobs. This makes information about job openings more valuable and all the more reason to first offer it to kin-members.

Why kin? First, kin-ties are often paired with altruistic feelings of wanting to help out. In Akan culture, matrilineal ties are especially important, and therefore these altruistic feelings extend to many people comprising the matriliney. Second, there is the practice amongst Ghanaian extended families of passing on the responsibility for maintaining the family back home to the last arrived migrant kin member. As long as this last member does not have a job, the responsibility remains that of the former migrant. Therefore kin migrants have a personal interest in making sure that the last-arrived migrant finds a job.

Housing security

Housing security is strongly related to having legal status (Table 4). This is because having papers means that migrants can register housing, whether rental or purchased, under their own names. This eliminates the risk of getting kicked out of an apartment. Migrants without papers sublet rooms or apartments from Ghanaians who either own a house or are renting it out under their own name. Rents for a room during the period 2003-2004 were around Euro 250. Often these apartments are in the less salubrious parts of the Bijlmermeer neighbourhood (K-neighbourhood) where high-rise apartment blocks have not yet undergone the renovation that is underway in the Bijlmermeer. This part of the neighbourhood is ridden with petty theft. It is known in the neighbourhood that many Ghanaians are illegal and are thus easy targets as they will be too scared to report attacks to the police. Throughout the research period there were three incidents of respondents getting robbed. One woman was robbed at gunpoint in front of her four-year old child, and for months following the event was too scared to leave her apartment. Another man was stabbed six times with a knife and needed to be rushed to the emergency room.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation of housing security with legal status

Housing security	N	Legal status	
		Legal (%)	Illegal (%)
Insecure	13	25	75
Secure	16	100	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>41</i>
Significance			
Chi-square		16.63	
d.f.		1	
probability		< .0000	

Source: In-depth interviews (2003-2005).

Another characteristic of sublet rooms or apartments is that respondents have little right to demand better conditions. An example is a woman subletting an apartment that had very dirty wall-to-wall carpeting that was detrimental for her asthma. Her landlord refused to change the carpeting and as a consequence the woman had often to stay home from work with bouts of asthma. She ultimately lost her job due to her absences. Another woman lived in an apartment with bare cement floors, as the landlord did not want to spend money on floor covering.

Finally, and importantly, subletting is risky as one can get asked to leave at any time. The bad conditions and the risk of being kicked out mean that people who are subletting tend to move apartments quite often. Of the 16 people who had insecure housing, 9 moved more than once during the two-year study period.

It is important to note that not all those who are legal have secure housing. This is the case when a migrant may have found a ‘good’ landlord and likes the place where she had been living before getting legal status and therefore never moved. In other cases the migrant is in the phase of a paper marriage in which she has papers but cannot yet apply for a house under her own name as she must be registered as living with her “husband”. In 1998 the government passed the Linking Act, which links various administrations, making it easier to detect illegal migrants. In this case, housing contracts can be cross-referenced with the marriage registry to detect if a marriage is a fake one.

Crisis events: occurrence and solution

Having papers is significantly related to the occurrence of crisis events, as people with papers have fewer crises. This is not surprising as most insurance events are incurred precisely because people do not have papers, such as needing a marriage partner for a paper marriage, having to retrieve money in a marriage deal gone wrong and being put in prison.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of occurrence of a crisis event with legal status

	N	Legal status	
		Legal (%)	Illegal (%)
Occurrence of crisis event			
Occurred	11	27	73
Did not occur	18	78	22
<i>Total</i>	29	59	41
		Significance	
Chi-square		7.18	
d.f.		1	
probability		< .01	

Source: In-depth interviews (2003-2005) and monthly transaction study (2003-2004).

Unresolved crises lead to unstable living conditions. Therefore we now turn to an analysis of if and how crisis situations are solved. Eleven respondents incurred at least one of the crisis events outlined in the methodology section, during the

course of the research period. Here we delve into how they were able to solve these events.

Financial help

Qualitative interviews regarding these crisis events indicate that people use different parts of their network to solve different kinds of crises. There are two kinds of crisis events (Table 6). One type requires help in the form of money. This involves the problem of losing a job or having to organize a funeral for an important family member. For this kind of help people make use of their Netherlands and overseas-based network members. As one respondent explained, “money goes down, it does not go up” meaning that a migrant is expected to send money to Ghana, not to ask for monetary help from Ghana. This leaves network members who are in The Netherlands or in other western destinations to whom a migrant can request monetary assistance. Indeed, we found that respondents needing monetary assistance got it from kin members, neighbours or hometown association members living in The Netherlands or kin members living elsewhere in the West, such as Germany, the UK and US.

Table 6. Crisis events and help needed

Crisis event	N ¹	Type of help	From whom
<i>Services</i>			
Getting a residence permit on the black market	12	Finding a trustworthy candidate	Family and friends in Ghana and The Netherlands
A marriage deal gone wrong	4	Arbitration	Family and friends in Ghana and The Netherlands
Getting put in prison	2	Getting you out of prison	Family and friends in Ghana and The Netherlands
Something happening to child in Ghana	2	Helping child	Family and friends in Ghana
<i>Financial</i>			
Funeral of an important family member	2	Paying for the funeral	Family and friends in The Netherlands
Losing job	6	Subsistence	Family and friends in The Netherlands

¹Number of events.

Role of churches and hometown associations

Churches and migrant organizations are also networks that migrants can tap into. In fact, studies of Ghanaian churches in The Netherlands indicate that they offer help to their members and it has even been suggested that the Dutch government should work through these churches to reach the needy in migrant neighbourhoods (Ter Haar 2005, van Dijk 2002).

This study approached the topic of help from associations and churches from another angle. Rather than starting from the actual associations (as is done by the studies mentioned above), we studied random people in the Ghanaian community of Amsterdam and investigated what role these associations play in their daily life. What we note is the relative absence of help coming from churches. Amongst our respondents we found a high degree of donations being made to churches but very little help coming from them in a crisis situation. Respondents donate through their monthly tithe payments, special collections made at specific moments in the year, and their membership dues to the fellowship groups pertaining to the church such as the choir, men's and women's fellowship, youth, and bible study groups. Yet only one needy respondent received help from a church elder in the form of 20 or 30 euros paid to her three times in a year for her to purchase food.

Hometown associations are also typically considered to be places where needy migrants can obtain help. Indeed, when a migrant is brought to one of the two Ghanaian umbrella organizations in Amsterdam, the first thing these organizations do is establish where the migrant comes from and then refer him to members of the hometown association pertaining to the appropriate region/town/village. Interviews with chairmen of these associations reveal that indeed these associations receive many newly arrived migrants and arrange for the initial temporary housing, often not charging migrants any rent until they are able to find a job. They also advise newly arrived migrants on how and where to get a job. However, some associations, especially the larger ones showed a trend of encountering increasing difficulties. It is difficult to keep members actively engaged and pay their monthly dues. At the same time, they are overwhelmed with requests for help from newly arrived migrants while their financial resources are limited. One secretary of a hometown association explained, "We give and give to those who just arrive, then when they find their way, nobody sees them again! We have now decided that we are no longer going to

help those who just arrive.” The secretary’s comments show how some associations are being squeezed of their resources by requests for help while they have difficulty in obtaining active membership, their only source of funds.

Help in services

The second type of crisis event necessitates people to conduct services for the migrant. These events are: needing to find a marriage partner, retrieving money from a marriage deal gone wrong and getting out of prison. Each of these events requires a service in order to resolve the problem. Finding a marriage partner necessitates having people in one’s network who know an eligible and trustworthy candidate and can negotiate the deal. Getting good advice on a candidate results in avoiding a marriage deal gone wrong. Our interviews reveal that such people in advisory roles can be both located in Ghana, or, more often, in The Netherlands.

In the event of a marriage deal gone wrong, one needs intermediaries to mediate between the migrant and the marriage partner to try to put pressure on the marriage partner to return the money that was paid to him or her. The mediators are often the same people in the advisory role above. Also in this case, mediators can be located in Ghana or in The Netherlands. Even when mediators are located in The Netherlands, they are most effective when they can exert pressure on the marriage partner through his or her network members in Ghana. An example is Harvey, at the time under the age of 18, who had arranged to be adopted⁴ by a Ghanaian man living in The Netherlands. After paying Euro 4,000, or half of the agreed sum, the man left The Netherlands. Harvey’s parents in Kumasi visited the family of the potential adopter and through them, were able to exert pressure on the man to return the money. After two years, Harvey’s parents were given the money.

Getting help to be released from prison also requires various services. A migrant needs someone to purchase calling cards for them to call people on a public phone from prison, to contact a migration lawyer and make sure the case gets handled with rapidity, to call their employer(s) to explain that they will momentarily not be able to come to work, and other small services such as visiting them in

⁴ Although less common, adoption was also a way to obtain residence and working permits. Respondents have indicated that it is now more difficult for these adoptions to work. Indeed most cases encountered were of marriages.

prison, bringing them goods, etc.. All these people are part of a migrant's network based in The Netherlands. However, there are other services that are deemed equally important, if not more so, having to do with religion and invoking the help of a powerful pastor who may help them to get released through the pastor's intermediary role with God. Although there are many pastors in The Netherlands, with almost 40 Ghanaian churches just in Amsterdam, pastors in Ghana are reputed to have special powers especially for migration issues (van Dijk 1997). One respondent who was put in jail in the course of the research, asked her father and mother to attend a prayer camp of one such pastor in Ghana to help her with "her problem". Her father and mother went to the prayer camp for two weeks where they fasted and prayed all day and made financial donations to the pastor. Shortly after this event, the respondent was released from prison. Another respondent obtained the same services from her mother to help her with obtaining her papers as she had been waiting over 10 years for them.

In 4 cases people did not succeed in obtaining help to solve their crisis. Two people were not able to retrieve the money they had spent on a marriage deal gone wrong. This attests to the fact that there is a limit to the pressure network members can exert on marriage partners who do not hold up to their part of the deal. Without a legal system to punish violators of these deals, and as long as papers are hard to get through legal means, renegeing on marriage deals will remain a lucrative business.

The other two cases of an unresolved crisis event relate to two women who had asked many favours of their network members to solve other crisis events. They had not been in a situation to reciprocate the help they had received and were now faced with another crisis event for which it was difficult to find members who were willing to help them yet again. This attests to the fact that networks can run thin; they do not provide an unlimited amount of help.

In summary, to be able to solve crisis events, it is important for a migrant to have people in her network both in The Netherlands and in Ghana. In The Netherlands network members provide financial help as well as services, while in Ghana, people provide services. However, networks and the mechanisms through which they work, such as peer pressure, are not always powerful enough to solve all

problems such as getting money back from a deal gone wrong, nor are networks an unlimited source of help. They can get overused.

Conclusions

Below follows a summary of the main points of the paper ending with three policy and research implications. Legal status is significantly related to livelihood security as defined by secure employment, secure housing and ability to solve crisis events. Migrants with illegal status changed jobs more frequently, had to move houses involuntarily more often and incurred more crisis events than migrants with legal status.

Having a network with 50% or more kin relations was significantly related to employment security. This is due to the scarcity of jobs in sectors typically employing migrants in the Netherlands at the time of this study, making information on job opportunities a scarce and valuable resource. The Ghanaian custom of taking turns in caring for family members back home encourages Ghanaian migrants to pass job-related information to kin migrants so they can take on the responsibility of caring for the family in Ghana. The relationship between livelihood security and other variables such as education, income, years in the Netherlands, sex, Ghana orientation and size and density of social networks was found not to be significant, however, the small sample size does not allow us to conclude definitively that they are indeed not significant.

The findings on the relationship between legal status and employment and housing security concur with those of other studies (Sinn et al. 2005, Calavitta 2003, Burgers and Engbersen 1999). This study additionally investigated the relationship between legal status and the occurrence of crisis events. Crisis events are not usually focused upon in literature on migrants with illegal status. In migration literature crisis events are taken into consideration in studies investigating whether migration is a form of insurance for people staying behind (Doss 2001, Hoddinott 1994, Lucas and Stark 1985, Stark and Lucas 1988, Gubert 2002). In this literature, thus, crisis events are those incurred by families back home and generally relate to crop failures, illness and death. In this paper, instead, we look at crises affecting migrants. We found that these to relate to finding a residence permit on the black market, a marriage deal gone wrong, being imprisoned, losing a job, and a funeral of a family member. The

occurrence of a crisis event was significantly related to a migrants' legal status with undocumented migrants incurring crises more frequently. We investigated, on the basis of qualitative material, how migrants solved these crises or, failing to do so, why. Migrants' networks were fundamental in helping them address crises. Those crises requiring financial assistance were mainly addressed by asking Netherlands based network members while crises requiring services such as mediation, advice or prayers were addressed by asking Ghana based network members.

Three implications are drawn for research and policy on undocumented migrants. First, an effective way for improving the livelihood security of migrants is by providing migrants with undocumented status a way to regularize their stay. In the case of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, such measures would allow them to be protected by Dutch labour laws and qualify them for legal housing arrangements.

Second, Ghana-based network members' services to secure migrants' livelihoods are a form of "reverse remittances", i.e. flows going from migrant-sending countries to migrant-receiving countries. These flows represent costs of migration for migrant sending countries as these services take time away from the productive activities of network members in Ghana. Yet reverse remittances are hardly documented in migration studies because they are difficult to capture with standard research techniques and are not quantifiable. The more precarious migrants' lives are in the receiving country, the more likely they are to make use of these reverse remittances to secure their living. Our limited sample indicates that stringent Dutch migration policies are increasing the numbers of migrants remaining in illegality. This implies that increasingly migrants need to make requests to network members in their home country to secure a living. This phenomenon needs more investigation to estimate more accurately the costs of migration for sending countries.

Finally, there is a limit to the crisis solving possibilities through networks. First, we noted that when injustices occur towards migrants such as a marriage deal gone wrong, or being robbed, or fired under false accusations, migrants' networks are often not effective in correcting the injustice. Second, we noted some indication that support networks are beginning to run thin. One cannot ask too much of network members without some reciprocation. Migrants who frequently need assistance and are not in a condition to reciprocate, run into a situation in which they do not have anyone to ask for help when a crisis occurs. Furthermore, the

resources of migrant organizations are running dry and churches did not always provide material help to their needy members. Policies and laws are needed to cover some of the areas in which social networks are not effective. This requires flexible solutions that allow for undocumented migrants that are not currently covered by justice systems, to nonetheless receive some sort of protection by laws and policies. Furthermore, funds should be made available to those migrant organizations providing social security to their members but whose funds are currently running dry due to the overabundance of need. These organizations need to be compensated for taking over the role traditionally reserved to government of providing security to members of society.

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