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'London the Leveller:
Ghanaian work strategies and
community solidarity

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Abstract

In Britain, there is much concern, both in policy and public discourses, about immigrant integration and social cohesion. But how do immigrants themselves perceive the process of settlement in the UK? This question is examined through an exploration of the work strategies developed by Ghanaian immigrants in London, in their quest to live a decent life. In this paper, we explore three questions. The first is concerned with how Ghanaians negotiate relations of power in the process of developing viable work strategies in London. Secondly, how are their work strategies shaped or mediated by family and community ties and social networks, and in what ways do they provide the basis of 'integration' into their ethnic communities and into the broader 'imagined community'? Thirdly, how do Ghanaians themselves define and live 'integration' and cohesion? Our results indicate that Ghanaians experience a 'levelling' process in their work lives in London where they continually juggle between various levels of job exploitation, racism and adequate pay. In addition, Ghanaians maintain strong family and community ties, a tradition carried over from Ghana. In distinction to Granovetter's idea that weak ties outside of one's community are likely to provide the more relevant and adequate information and resources, we found that weak ties *within* the community provide the same function. Finally, immigrants tend to define 'integration' differently from 'sense of belonging'.

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Introduction

Throughout Europe there is a general preoccupation with the process of immigrant integration and social cohesion. An anxiety has emerged, mainly to do with identity and specifically with ethnic or religious identities versus the perceived homogenous national identity. One fear is that western democratic values will be destroyed by too many foreigners or by immigrants whose values, perceived to be different or inferior, may threaten national identity and have a damaging effect on social cohesion, possibly leading to violence and to a loss of freedom. On the other hand, some contend that immigrants and ethnic minorities have not done what they were meant to do – that is, to become more like 'us'. Many believe that migrants have not met their responsibility to integrate, thus segregating themselves from the receiving society. In order to deal with all these fears and problems in the UK, there has been a shift away from multiculturalism towards an emphasis on integration and social cohesion.

But how do immigrants themselves perceive the process of settlement in the UK? This question is examined through an exploration of the work strategies developed by Ghanaian immigrants in London, in their quest to live a decent life. Ghanaians have been migrating to the UK over the past four decades for a number of reasons, including economic downturn and poor governance in Ghana, and the long historical links and common language with Britain. However, the principle reason for Ghanaian migration to London is to work, attracted by the availability of a vibrant economy and the existence of a strong core Ghanaian community already settled in the UK. But migrants' transnational existence is not without 'objective vulnerabilities'. Ghanaians in London form part of the migrant workforce faced with diverse obstacles ranging from lack of work permits, job exploitation and racism. As a result, they have developed productive work strategies in order to provide a reasonable living for themselves and for their families back home.

The focus of the paper emerges from a broader project which aimed to investigate how immigrant work strategies (in both formal and informal employment) are shaped or mediated by their social networks in the process of settlement and integration in London.[1] As part of their broader immigration trajectory, immigrants develop work strategies or work plans that include decisions about the type of job, work conditions, amount of pay,

all in relation to levels of exploitation and how they manoeuvre their way around this. In this paper, we explore three questions. The first is concerned with how relations of power (class, gender, ethnic, cultural) operate at the everyday level for immigrant Ghanaian men and women in their quest to find viable and relevant work in London. In other words, how do they negotiate these relations of power in the process of developing work strategies in London?

Secondly, Ghanaians are known to be family and community oriented. How are their work strategies shaped or mediated by family and community ties and social networks, and in what ways do they provide the basis of integration for immigrants into their ethnic/immigrant communities and into the broader 'imagined community'? Ghanaians activate family and community networks when necessary or develop new ties as needed. Strong ties and networks are considered necessary for immigrants to receive relevant information and help, but they can play an ambivalent role by both facilitating or hindering work strategies and participation. Using Granovetter's notion of the 'strength of weak ties', we explore how solidarity operates within the Ghanaian community in London. How do their networks operate – do their high levels of solidarity always positively facilitate work and integration strategies or is there a 'weakness of strong ties' that can hinder work plans and integration into UK society?

Finally, immigrants, both regular and irregular, construct and contest the degree and intensity of participation in their new social context. Currently, with the swing away from multiculturalism and with the desire that immigrants should integrate into Britishness or British identity, there is a general perception that immigrants are not making the effort to integrate. There is a drive towards social cohesion,[2] but how do Ghanaians themselves define and live integration and cohesion?

Background on Ghanaian migration

Ghana is both a country of immigration and emigration (Akyeampong 2000; Anarfi, et al. 2003; Manuh, et al. 2005; Mazzucato 2004, 9-10; Tiemoko 2004). Its vibrant economy in the 1950s attracted labour migrants from other British West African colonies as well as workers from French West

African colonies. Migrants came from Nigeria, Liberia, Togo, Mali, Sierra Leone and Benin to take up agricultural and mining jobs. This trend, however, reversed within the first decade of Ghana's independence, attained in 1957. Intermittent changes in government and adverse economic fortunes have defined the pace and character of Ghanaian migration over the last three decades. Ghana was hard hit by an 'economic crisis of an unprecedented magnitude' owing to oil price hikes in the 1970s as well as a prolonged drought (Anarfi, et al. 2000). These, together with bad governance and corruption, marked its economic downturn (Alderman 1994; Fosu 1992). The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1983 by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) worsened the plight of Ghanaians and ultimately led to increased emigration, the scale of which led to labour being classified as 'Ghana's other export' after cocoa and gold (Gagakuma 1984). The persistent out-migration of Ghanaians to other West African countries initially and later to Europe and North America was mainly for employment, education and training purposes (Nuro 1999). The overwhelming majority of Ghanaian emigrants in the 1980s were professionals like lawyers, teachers and administrators. These professionals were particularly drawn to newly independent countries like Uganda, Botswana, Nigeria and Zambia where their services were in high demand (Anarfi, et al. 2000).

A wide trail of Ghanaian migration can be traced to several countries in Europe and North America as well as newer destinations like Japan, South Africa, Taiwan, Israel, Australia and New Zealand among others. Increasing numbers of registered Ghanaian migrants in most of the destination countries have ranged between 14,000 and 150,000 (Anarfi, et al. 2003; Manuh 2003; Peil 1995; Van Dijk 1997). One main problem has emerged from the structure, curriculum, funding and management of the Ghanaian education system (Dovlo and Nyonator 2003a; Dovlo and Nyonator 2003b; Nyonator and Dovlo 2005; Osei 2004). Inadequate funding of education has led to frequent industrial action by teachers and university lecturers thus disrupting the academic calendar. Also mass production of university graduates without a corresponding increase in growth of the Ghanaian economy has led to high unemployment rates, making the prospect of emigrating to 'greener pastures' all the more attractive

The population of Ghanaian migrants in Greater London have been concentrated in the boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth, Newham, Hackney, Haringey, Lewisham, Croydon and Brent (Van Hear, et al. 2004). The London economy, and in particular the informal sector, has served as a very strong pull factor that is sometimes characterised by undocumented work, cash-in-hand jobs, tax free payments, extra hours on top of full time work, and employment of cheap labour that lacks the legal right to work. The informal labour market in London, like that of the formal one, is hierarchical (OECD 2000; Williams and Windebank 1998). As Moulier-Boutang (1991, 117) notes, 'the emergence of the a hidden economy is part of a complex process of labour market hierarchisation and the bypassing of regulations directed at responding to competition through achieving greater flexibility in production and pay'.

In addition, Ghanaians are drawn to work in London due to the enhanced social mobility they enjoy upon their return home. Successful 'returnees' are accorded much respect during public gatherings and awarded a higher status in the public arena. For example, they are offered front row seats in church, many are made chairperson at community harvest festivals, yet others are listed as chief mourners at funeral celebrations. This is one reason why Ghanaians consider it a nightmare for a migrant to return home empty-handed. As a result, individuals who were previously categorised as lower skilled prior to their sojourn suddenly experience a more fluid social mobility between the middle and upper classes. This experience is aptly captured by Akyeampong who describes the diaspora as 'an important space to remake one-self, even to overcome the social liabilities of birth' (Akyeampong 2000, 186). However, the diaspora also serves as a social space within which some Ghanaians have faced demonisation, racism, criminalisation and blame for living off 'the sweat of hardworking citizens' (Manuh 2000, 25). These experiences strengthen migrants' resolve to return where they believe they will regain their self-esteem.

Meanwhile the existence of networks (both strong and weak) of Ghanaians in London facilitates and often defines their work strategies. Family and friends are usually central to the migration experience (Henry and Mohan 2003; Herbert, et al. 2006). Apart from praying for a migrant's safe journey to the UK and placing a curse on those who wish him/her evil (Manuh

2000), family networks play vital practical roles in supporting financially or otherwise migrant housing, employment, health and social needs. Ghanaian associations in London foster a very strong sense of community thus encouraging chain migration largely through family reunion. However, general descriptions of social groups and networks, risk masking divisions that can exist along ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional lines (Van Hear, et al. 2004).

'The Power Of The Pound' - How And Why They Came

The loss of large and small fortunes during the 1970s and 1980s left Ghanaians with an insecurity that has remained to the present (Akyeampong 2000, 206). Approximately 250,000 Ghanaians have migrated to the US, Canada and the UK alone (Black, et al. 2004), forming significant 'new African diasporas' within and beyond the African continent (Koser 2003). Ghana's political fortunes changed in 1992 with the change from a military government. While the economy slowly improved, recovery was too slow for many industrious Ghanaians.

Ghanaian arrivals of the past ten to fifteen years form a 'labour diaspora'. Many, however, have had to find creative solutions to get around the numerous barriers to entry (Manuh 2000). Stricter entry and asylum procedures in Europe in the 1990s has meant that many arrivals have had to diversify their means of entry, '...so that, like other migrants, they may enter illegally, or arrive on visitors' or students' visas and stay on; others are helped by relatives legally resident, by 'fixers' in the migration industry...' (Van Hear 1998, 209). With the exception of the two returning citizens, and regardless of the visas obtained, the majority of our sample came to work and to study. Among the Ghanaian sample of 31, nearly all arrived legally, and some have overstayed their visa (Table 1).

Table 1: How they arrived

Channel of Immigration	Male	Female	Total
Tourist	3	7	10
Work permit	2	-	2
Asylum	2	-	2
Student	2	5	7
Family visits	3	3	6
Citizen returning	2	0	2
Illegal	1	1	2
Total	**15**	**16**	**31**

Work Strategies and networks (WSN) sample

The decision to migrate is often based on family or household factors as the emigrant is initially dependant on financial support from the family. Most of our sample was assisted to migrate by family and friends, both in Ghana and in the UK, consistent with Tiemoko's results of a study of Ghanaian and Ivorian migrants in London and Paris (Tiemoko 2004, 155-174). The UK labour market is a strong 'pull' factor. Apart from the strong exchange value of the pound in Ghana, the 'power of the pound' is often used as a euphemism for the openness of the London labour market, with the implication 'there is plenty of work and we have come to work'. Several reasons for migration were echoed by many respondents in all our samples, even if the reference to the colonial masters was said 'tongue-in-cheek', as in the remarks of one respondent:

> ...coming back to your question 'what is it that pulls people' you remember I mentioned *the power of the pound*... the pound is very powerful...the language factor was very crucial... Maybe another factor was that ...the British happened to be our colonial masters so there is that kind of strong bond between Ghanaians and the British so one couldn't have chosen anywhere else apart from Britain...I have most of my relatives here in London... and also we want to be closer to home...

Reasons for migrating to the UK fall into the five categories (Table 2). Many stated quite clearly that they came to the UK to work, study or to have a better life. Nearly all who came as tourists, to study or to visit family and friends have ended up working in the London labour market.

Table 2: Why they came to the UK[3] WSN sample

Reasons for migrating	Male	Female	Total
To work/for a better life	8	2	10
Study	2	6	8
Visit/family & friends	4	3	7
Tourist	1	4	5
Returning citizen	1	-	1
Total			**31**

With some exceptions, the majority came to work in order to achieve several goals:

> I wanted more. I wanted to go to school, I wanted to work to support my family, and that is the main issue…I wanted to support my family back home, as I said I have a sick mum. I have two kids to support at home. And then I wanted to continue my education.

Ghanaians are reliable sources of remittances and numerous research studies have revealed the importance of remittances for household incomes in Ghana (Agyeman 1993; Higazi 2005; Opoku-Dapaah 1993). Three-quarters of our sample send remittances home. Eleven men and eleven women help to support among them 31 adults and thirty-three children in Ghana. One woman works at a second job simply to send remittances:

> Because the money [from one job] wouldn't be enough, I have to use one to pay my bills and rent and then send some to Ghana for our parents and brothers and sisters in school to pay their school fees. If not they will not be in school…I send money home every time, for example, that they are going to reopen school, I send money mid-terms.

Many will also save to buy houses or to set up businesses, such as schools and hospitals, when they return to Ghana. It is worth noting that whilst the decision to return can generate benefits, it can also yield negative results if inadequate opportunities exist in the home country for migrant resources to be constructively utilised (Henry and Mohan 2003, 620). One female

respondent who had been employed by the Ghanaian government back home, complained that her monthly wage had only arrived intermittently. Thus she came to London in order to study (to re-train from secretary to nurse), to work and to earn a consistent wage:

> You know the money I will get in Ghana nursing would not be like the money I will get in the UK so I would just prefer to work in the UK for some few years and to get money to go and maybe probably open my own clinic or my midwifery house for people to come there. I would not like to go and work at the government over there any more.

Her dreams, however, differ from her current reality. This respondent over-stayed, has been in the UK for five years and has not yet begun her studies as she originally intended. She has rented a National Insurance number so that she could work and pay taxes (see Vasta 2006).[4] Currently, she is trying to 'sort out her papers', that is, she has applied for 'leave to remain':

> There is nothing I can do about it now. When I even turn the clock back, everything is too late, so I just have to make up my mind. I'm just here to do my education. I just want to go to school and go back home. That is the only thing I need.

Others who could not afford to continue their education in Ghana, believing they could earn enough here to work and study at the same time, have all ended up working and their dream to study has been frustrated by long and physically hard work, and by low and exploitative wages. As their dreams recede, they become ambivalent migrants, missing loved ones at home, forever trying to attain their (possibly unattainable) goals:

> I miss my parents and children. I wish my children will join me one day. If I had papers I would love to stay maybe 5 years. If I finish my education I could go and get a job and impart the skills I have acquired onto other keen learners.

Even if their dreams to study have been thwarted, Ghanaians do not shun hard work. Lower qualified Ghanaian migrants tend to perceive hard work and financial accumulation as amounting to the same as academic pursuits which develop one's skills and hopefully increases one's earnings (Manuh 2000, 68).

Ghanaians at work in London

Up to 46 per cent of the 'elementary' jobs in London are filled by foreign-born migrants. This has contributed to a segmentation of the labour market with certain immigrant groups working in specific industries, with lower pay and poorer work conditions (May, et al. 2006, 9-10). May et al. found a tendency towards ethnic segregation at the lower end of the London labour market where, for example, a large proportion of cleaners in the London underground are mainly Black Africans, in particular, Nigerians and Ghanaians. Segregation also occurs between men and women, who are involved in quite different jobs. Finally, their results reveal that 'The lowest rates of pay and worst conditions of employment were found in the hotel and hospitality sector and on the London Underground, where processes of sub-contraction and the use of agency staff are most developed' (May, et al. 2006, 18-19).

At the 2001 census, 46,513 Ghanaians were recorded in Greater London (55,537 in England and Wales). The London Labour Force Survey (LFS) reveals that 72.2 per cent of Ghanaians in Greater London are employed, while 11 per cent are unemployed.[5] The London unemployment rate is 7.3 per cent (Spence 2005, 41, 52). Furthermore, 33.3 per cent of Ghanaians have higher level qualifications while 48.2 per cent have lower level qualifications. Table 3 simply provides a picture of how our sample compares with those of the broader Ghanaian London population at the last census.

Table 3: Qualifications of Ghanaians in Greater London

	Labour Force Survey	WSN Project
Higher level qualifications	33.3%	51.6%
Lower level qualifications	48.2%	48.4%
No qualifications	18.5%	0%

(London Labour Force Survey and Census data, (Spence 2005) and WSN Project)[6]

Our sample is mainly Asante/Akan and most are under 45 years of age. Thirteen arrived before 2000 and 18 arrived between 2000 and 2003. The majority were single and seventeen of our respondents have children. Some

have irregular immigration status, others leave to remain and 4 have British citizenship.

Downward mobility and de-skilling

The London Labour Force Survey (see Table 4) shows that 31.8 per cent of Greater London Ghanaians are in managerial, professional or associated professional jobs (Spence 2005, 113). Approximately 68.3 per cent of Ghanaians are in occupation categories 4-9, while the Greater London average is 50 per cent. For categories 6-9, the Ghanaian rate is 50 per cent, while the average for all the London population in that category is 26.4 per cent (Spence 2005, 65). Thus, Ghanaians are over-represented in the lower-skilled categories. This trend is similar to the characteristics of the WSN sample, though our sample shows a much higher incidence of Ghanaians in the lower skilled categories, specifically in category 9. What is of significance in the WSN sample, is the downward mobility and the de-skilling that has occurred for many in this group since their arrival in the UK. There is disappointment that after a number of years they are still unable to find work to match their skills and qualifications. Their experiences are similar to those of Ghanaian migrants in Toronto, many of whom resign themselves to seeking jobs in 'lowly occupations' (Manuh 2000, 9).

Table 4 reveals that for the WSN sample, even though 38.7 per cent were in the combined categories 1-3 before they left Ghana for the UK, none are in those three categories today. Eight of the twelve respondents originally in categories 1-3 in Ghana have moved directly down to category 9 – elementary occupations. Thus, there has been downward mobility for respondents in both sets of higher skilled occupations 1-3 and 4-5. Given that two-thirds of the sample arrived before 2003, de-skilling has occurred for those who fell into skill categories 1-5.[7] Nor have the majority of those in categories 4-5 bounced back to their former employment, for six respondents from those categories have also shifted down to the elementary (6-9) occupations. Even though fifteen of our respondents (6 men and 9 females) have completed trade or vocational training in the UK (see also Herbert, et al. 2006), for a majority this had not led to relevant jobs in the UK. Our findings are contrary to those of the OECD (2000, 8) where it is suggested that sufficiently skilled migrants remain competitive and that it is only unskilled

migrants who are employed in the most onerous conditions with increasingly remote prospects of upward social mobility.

Table 4: Ghanaian Sample: job mobility

Type of Employment	WSN Last job in Ghana N %	WSN First job in UK N %	WSN Current job in UK N %	2001 Census Labour Force Survey % sub-total %
1.Manager/ senior official	**4**	-	-	**8.7**
2.Professional	**3**	-	-	**9.5**
3.Assoc. Prof	**5** (38.7)	-	-	**13.6** (31.8)
4.Administrative	**5**	**1**	**2**	**12.4**
5.Skilled Trades	**5** (32.6)	**1** (6.4)	**1** (9.7)	**5.6** (18)
6.Personal services	**-**	**2**	**3**	**12.4**
7.Sales	**1**	**6**	**6**	**8.1**
8.Process/plant	**-**	**-**	**-**	**6.6**
9.Elementary	**1** (6.4)	**21** (93.6)	**19** (90.3)	**23.2** (50.4)
10. Student/not working	**7** (22.6)	-	**-**	**-**
Total	**31**	**31**	**31**	

(London Labour Force Survey/Census 2001, (Spence, 2005) and WSN Project)[8]

One main reason for this downward mobility is that overstayers find it difficult to use their skills in a segmented informal London labour market which thrives on migrant labour (May, et al. 2006; Vasta 2004). Irregular immigration status and/or work in informal employment is often a barrier to work in their qualified field. Having to present papers to prove legality in terms of qualifications frequently requires papers to prove legal immigration status:

> The job I am doing is a factory job. Although I am a university graduate, I qualify to work in an office. I think that I am multi-skilled, I can do anything in an office administration, clerical anything but one needs to start from somewhere and I decided to start from the factory…I think I have lost a lot! Apart from acting I was doing community work and also doing a lot of workshop facilitation and I haven't practised these all this while but, yes, I have lost a lot…

London the leveller

These constraints on black social mobility have had an enormous impact on our London sample, leading to common usage of the phrase, 'London the leveller'. Akyeampong discusses how these constraints have led to this description (2000, 186):

> Menial jobs that an African would decline back in the homeland are eagerly sought in the West as valuable foreign currencies translate into comfortable incomes in devalued homeland currencies....It erases all class distinctions African immigrants brought from their homelands. The educated and the semi-literate, the highborn and the lowborn, rub shoulders as they vie for the same menial jobs.

Thus, many Ghanaian migrants of all social classes work and live together across tribal, class, socio-political, regional, and gender divisions. The following female respondent fits this scenario:

> I think it's part of the learning curve or whatever because when you come to London if you see yourself back in Ghana you have your good office, you have your car, you have everything at your disposal and the moment you come to London nobody even knows you. You do jobs you are not supposed to do. It makes you cry for some time. It makes you miserable because when you are back home in Ghana we think when you come to London it's like heaven, you know, we are coming to get good jobs, live in good homes, and live well, that is what I should say, but when you enter this country everything turns round.

'Levelling', as used by Ghanaians, is slightly different from its usage in the UK which usually means the levelling out of inequalities or the removal of distinctions based on class, status or privilege. Our research reveals that 'levelling' applies as a broader social process than just the intermingling of social classes working at the same menial jobs or simply the crossing of such divides in everyday life. Levelling also refers to the set of barriers or constraints, the social exclusion experienced by Ghanaian workers in London. We found that in addition to highly qualified migrants working at lower skilled jobs, levelling also occurs due to the unexpected high cost of living. The popular belief among immigrants, usually prior to their departure, is one of abundant work and unlimited opportunities in destination countries (Anarfi, et al. 2003, 28). Thus, levelling is concerned with the effects of unforeseen exploitative work conditions, low wages and, for some, continual racism.

Finally, for some, those who dream of returning home to an adequate life style have also experienced a levelling effect.

Levelling or flattening?

When discussing life in London, one of our respondents claimed that low wages and the high cost of living came as a shock:

> Yeah, it's really levelled me. It didn't level me, it flattened me, it really flattened me... *It flattened me* for the first two years I came to this country wasn't easy because sometimes you don't even get money to buy this common chicken and chips, you know? You have to work, you have to buy your pass, and you don't get enough money to provide all that...if you work far, you have to go by the train and you have to eat, you have to buy something for yourself and the weather changes in this country, so you have to buy new clothing all the time so if you know what I'm talking about you could see it's not very easy when you come to this country for the first two or three years...

Datta et al. found that migrants develop income–maximising mechanisms such as working longer hours or working at two jobs (Datta, et al. 2006). Similarly, our sample developed such strategies, mainly working in security, catering, and retail with 12 of the 15 females and 6 of the16 males working two jobs:

> Yes, I really feel pushed to do a second job because...I need to send some money back home to my parents, to my children, to my husband and even to take care of some of my nephew and my nieces, so if I don't do a second job means I can't do anything to help the family...When I'm even tired, I have to think of the people back home to strengthen myself to do the work, to get the money for them, you know.

Others will change jobs in order to earn more:

> No! I left there. I want big money! (laughter) I don't work in the hospital anymore ...Its just because of the money, that's why I am here. I don't like it here! (in a supermarket)

Levelling occurs through exploitative work, which migrants confront on a daily basis. Such exploitation has led some to conclude that they are 'just existing and not living'. One respondent complained she received a flat rate when she should have been paid the weekend rate; another had work hours

reduced without explanation. Many complained of long hours and low pay, some doing physically demanding and hard work:

> I did cleaning and I work in these coffee bars and coffee shops, you do some hours you don't really want to do, which is really ridiculous. How many hours is...twelve hours standing on your feet cleaning, washing, doing all sorts of odd jobs which you will never do it to anyone in Ghana. Here you stand on your feet to do these hard jobs and they just give you about £4.50 an hour.

Many spoke of a relentless tiredness:

> Life in the UK is tough actually. It is totally different from life in Ghana...Every day you have to work. If you don't work you won't eat. I am not saying that you shouldn't work but every time you are tired, every time you are tired. It's tough actually. And when you are here, they are pulling you back at home, they need money.

Deteriorating health is on the rise, particularly among irregular migrants who abstain from accessing health care services for fear of being identified by the authorities. According to a religious minister, this has led to a high incidence of deaths among Ghanaians in London. While some feel trapped, others knowingly accept certain levels of exploitation in the London labour market as long as they feel they are financially ahead. They therefore assess the levels of exploitation they can manage.

The myth of return has its own levelling effects as far afield as Ghana itself. We will illustrate this through a case study based on 'Wematu's' experience, a woman who in 2001 ostensibly came to visit family on a three-month visa but overstayed by 2 months working when she was recalled by her supervisor to return to Ghana to complete her Master's thesis. Back home, after completing the thesis, she soon realised that things had changed and returned to the UK within the year:

> Ah yes, yes I feel like going back but as I was telling you, the problem is, when we went to Ghana in January, we realised that our mates, they've moved on. So if you go with nothing, the situation is going to be worse. So we had to come and work for money before we go [back]...but now that we've stayed here for a very long time you realise that you spend any money that you get. And if you don't take care by the time you go back home, the people back home would have been [become] much better [off] than you.

'Wematu's' problems were exacerbated by her irregular status. Since she was an overstayer, an irregular migrant, she could not open up a bank account.

Levelling can have positive outcomes. Whereas in Ghana people generally associate only with their tribes' people or their fellow brethren, in London the boundaries between tribal and other associations and organizations are flexible. Many are pleased there is much more interaction between social groups in the UK than back in Ghana.

Racism

Exploitation in the labour market and racism often go hand in hand for many Ghanaians. Racism has become a key 'leveller' - when applying for jobs; outright racism on account of their colour; but also due to their irregular status. Sometimes discrimination occurs at the point of entry into the labour market where one woman, for example, reveals 'and they listen to your English and if you are not saying 'init, init' (isn't it) you won't even… maybe it might not be the reason why they didn't employ me but I think the English too is a factor'. On the other hand, the problem can work in the reverse:

> Certain [work] places it affects [being black] and certain places it doesn't affect. Because there are some places that the job is so difficult that the whites don't like it, that's the places the moment they see you they don't care, you understand?

Once in the work place, discrimination against blacks is a recurring theme:

> Yeah, like when you work with these whites you know how hard blacks can really work but when you want something and the white also need something they have to provide for that person first before you get it no matter how urgent yours [need] is, they will never attend to yours, so they finish with the white first before they will look for you, so…

And:

> As for the racism and, not the racism, as for the discrimination, I think it comes in subtle forms, because they dare not stand in your face and preach it…Then there's, you know, dishing it out, I've managed it and now I think I just overlook it because if you set your mind to it, it will destroy you, and you find that you're always in conflict with people, and they will label you, they call you names, they make fun behind you, and all that, so…

The effects of racism have led to the separation of some families. Numerous Ghanaians send their children home to attend school in Ghana and to be cared for by relatives. On the one hand, the strategy acts as a form of protection against racism and the harshness of London life:

> I don't want my children to go through the same thing. I don't want my children to be doing cleaning and for people to disrespect them. So I want to lay a good foundation for them.

On the other hand, it is also a way of ensuring the children remain immersed in Ghanaian culture, by learning respect for their elders and their culture. Similarly, many of the parents who have sent their children back claim they do not want to expose them to 'the social vices, insolence, drug addiction, racism and discrimination that have plagued mostly black youth in London'.

Although much racism does come from whites, contrary to Herbert et al's results (Herbert, et al. 2006, 18) indicating that 'the barrier …was not with other migrant workers but with the white British', we found on numerous occasions that Ghanaians also experienced racist remarks from other 'non-white' ethnic minorities. In some cases, their job application was rejected by 'Asians' because they were black. In one case, one of our respondents working in a restaurant was referred to as a 'black slave' by her Thai boss:

> Yes, and from that day, I regretted for coming to this country… Yes that's the problem because, I don't know but this country, I think there are… they portray Blacks as lazy, drug dealers, and other things. So when you are Black, the Indians and the Thai people, they don't respect you

Our respondent explains that since 'blacks' are generally seen as lazy etc by the English, others, that is ethnic minorities and other immigrants, will also see them in that light, revealing how racism works as a dominant ideology against 'blacks'. Dominant group cultural practices and processes that exclude or discriminate against certain groups form part of a dominant ideology (Castles 1996, 31-32; see also Goldberg 1993). It was the 'black on black' racism that upset her most, causing her the most regret about her decision to migrate to the UK. Thus it is possible that shades of skin colour correspond with shades of otherness.

A similar problem arose for another Ghanaian woman when she was told that she would have been given a waitressing job had she had lighter skin. Such racist remarks have led many to believe they are not welcome and that no matter the effort they put into integrating with the British, they will always be regarded as 'other'. Herbert et al state that '[t]he current political discourse focuses attention on minority ethnic groups as causing fundamental problems for integration, yet white Britons continue to evade scrutiny in this respect' (Herbert, et al. 2006, 19).

Community networks

Immigrants tend to rely heavily on their communities and transnational networks, not only as a means of transferring information and resources but to provide sanctuary, especially from racism, particularly in the early years of migration and settlement. Racism and social exclusion can prompt a 'reactive ethnic formation' (Portes, et al. 1999, 232), though migrant communities can be a source of identity, of shared meanings and mutual cooperation, as well as providing refuge from the difficulties of daily life. Akyeampong notes that immigrants use their new community abroad as an important base or space to transform themselves and to prevail over the 'social vulnerabilities of birth' (2000, 186).

The notion of community is ubiquitous, with no fewer than ninety-four definitions (Bell and Newby 1971, 27). Baumann cautions against using the term too loosely, since immigrant groups experience the same cross-cutting social cleavages, economic, political, cultural and others, as occur in the broader society (Baumann 1996). Nevertheless, we found that the use of the term, among the Ghanaians we interviewed, corresponds most closely with the colloquial usage of 'spirit of community', where there is a sense of commonality among a group of people, signifying characteristics of commonality such as language, the migration experience, ethnicity, and class experience (Vasta 2000). Despite the recognised differences within the Ghanaian London community, we often heard reference made to 'my people', meaning the broad Ghanaian immigrant community in London.

Networks also need to be put under similar scrutiny. Portes suggest that 'networks are important in economic life because they are sources for the acquisition of scarce means, such as capital and information, and because they simultaneously impose effective constraints on the unrestricted pursuit of personal gain' (Portes 1995, 8). Immigrant networks can be locally based or more transnational in character and they are closely linked to integration (Guarnizo, et al. 2003; Snel, et al. 2006). They can be empowering in that individuals are able to take advantage of their networks through a positive flow of information, resources and links. As discussed below, they can also be constraining due to structural factors or where members of networks and communities, as well as the state, act as gatekeepers to the flow of resources (Meagher 2004a). [9]

Generosity and reciprocity

One characteristic strongly felt by many with regard to a 'sense of community' can be captured in the prominent proverbs: '*umo simbaro na we soĝo bagani, indi suah mo*' meaning 'when one's sibling is on a tree, one eats only ripe fruit' or '*Ni tuo ba jeah*' meaning 'one who can speak never goes missing'. These are just a few of the cultural demands that are placed on migrants to help new comers as well as to perceive one another as brothers and sisters once they find themselves in a foreign land. As a result, individual, family, alumni, community, tribal and religious networks play a major role in supporting Ghanaian migrants to find accommodation, find first and later jobs, deal with racism, celebrate a birth, solemnize a marriage or even to mourn the dead whilst abroad. Constant interaction and close association among Ghanaian migrants help to cement their attachment to their home country and also for some to focus their attention on planning for their eventual return (Manuh 2000,73).

Such cultural practices were confirmed by our respondents:

> Those who helped me out were Ghanaians…it wasn't only one person, like apart from my partner and a friend of mine and through my cousin, I got to know another lady who was also in town but I didn't know her till I came here.

Two strong qualities fuel Ghanaian 'labour' migration – the desire to succeed and generosity, which is linked to reciprocity. Generosity and reciprocity are important cultural practices in Ghana that assume the same significance in the diaspora. All grow up with the importance of being generous. For example, remittances are generally based on the importance of reciprocity particularly to one's parents. Interestingly, among compatriots, reciprocity is acceptably flexible. The loan of money, for instance, can be repaid by finding a job for the lender. Nevertheless, as in Ghana, generosity comes with a price tag:

> Yes, because it's just like somebody is sinking and you've thrown a rope to rescue them. When he lands he would ask you, 'How much do you want?' you know?… It does get pushed too far because…sometimes it can be in good faith, or it can be taken badly because people think that OK, well, whatever it is…*it's payback time*… So *it's time to pay back your due* and then move on.

Some claimed, however, that with hardship experienced by many in the UK, these cultural traditions have changed:

> You know Ghana is a family country and whether you are working or not when you live in Ghana distress is not so much because if you don't have the food to eat or you don't have a place to sleep you just walk into your sister, your friend, your cousin or whatever, they will try to help you. Unlike Britain, when you think somebody wants to help you the person is scared, you know. So when you are in hardship in Britain it's not easy. You can't really get somebody to help you immediately like in Ghana.

Community change

Many mourn the changes in Ghanaian customs and traditions – 'Someone might be working on Saturday so you don't expect that person to join you for a naming ceremony'. Some complain of a loss of community:

> Um, maybe might be work. It is work, work, work. Helping somebody to acquire a job, that's the only time that there is a bond (chuckle). But you know, after getting him the job, you don't really see each other.

Such changes have led to an ambivalent attitude towards their community, similar to Levitt's 'mistrustful solidarity' comprising strong community ties

with a high degree of scepticism (Levitt 2001, 118). Of the groups we interviewed, Ghanaians appear to have the strongest community ties in that they spend much time together, share information and resources and help (high levels of social capital), and were less mistrustful of each other. Their main scepticism revolves around money, with claims that money is the one factor driving a wedge in the community in the UK - 'It looks like we are obsessed with money'. Thus, in a different but related way, the 'power of the pound' pervades immigrant family and community relations.

For example, one respondent was very grateful that his brother had prepared a room for his arrival in London, 'But it wasn't for free. At the end of the month I had to contribute towards the mortgage. But…when I see what landlords charge for rooms, what I was paying was really peanuts'. His general comment about the Ghanaian community was that support was there, though the drive for money can lead to community exploitation:

> They are both ways, both ways [competitive and supportive]. They are supportive in terms of when you come and you are looking for help, when they see that they can make some money off you they wouldn't let the chance slip by…They are supportive when you find yourself in trouble…I think that the Ghanaian community around here mostly people are only interested in making money, and therefore whatever they would do to make the money, they would do. They don't mind cheating their own fellow country men.

Our research indicates that community exploitation, that is taking advantage of each other, mainly resulted from the restrictive effects some UK policies had on the migrants, and specifically on problems experienced by irregular migrants. One major problem for irregular migrants is that they cannot open their own bank accounts. As a result many generous family members and friends 'lend' or 'rent' their bank accounts to their irregular compatriots. While some do not pay for the service, accepting a relationship based on trust, others are expected to pay for it. There is a body of literature that challenges the 'solidarity thesis', that is, that networks have positive outcomes only, since 'contemporary networks are differentiated by class, gender and place, rather than by ethnic identity alone' (Meagher 2004b). In other words, while social networks consist of high levels of social capital, they can also be exploitative and marginalizing of various members; there may be

unequal forms of political control and unfair redistribution of resources. We heard of only two cases of severe exploitation among compatriots.

Despite the stated ambivalence of Ghanaians about their 'community' in London, it is in fact made up of various networks, groups and organizations, strongly patronized by local Ghanaians. There are over fifty Ghanaian organizations and networks in London including the Ghana Union, the Ghana Refugee Welfare Group, the Ghanaian Nurses Association and the Wives of Ghanaian Diplomats Association (Van Hear, et al. 2004). And there are numerous religious organisations that also play an integrative role.

Strong and weak ties

Many of the issues discussed so far about community solidarity centre on an idea about the strength of community ties and on the importance of strong ties. In his article on 'the strength of weak ties', Granovetter (1973) introduced a new dimension to the analysis of networks. Previously, strong ties had been considered to be more effective in the transfer of information and resources, and in achieving community cohesion. Granovetter speculated that if strong ties exist within a tight-knit group that does not mix much with others outside the group, crucial information and resources are less likely to flow into such a community or network (Granovetter 1973, 1367).[10]   He found that the strong-knit Italian community in Boston were unable to defend themselves against urban renewal because they had not developed adequate connections with people outside of their community. This issue was explored in this project particularly among the Ghanaians, some of whom have irregular immigration status and many of whom experience unrelenting racism, to see if they have the tendency to interact mainly within their own community, and whether there is a sense of community closure. In turn, such closure would have an effect on the integration and participation patterns of this group. Our results indicate that strong and weak ties have variable outcomes. As mentioned earlier, Ghanaians maintain very strong family and community links, a tradition carried over from Ghana. However, these can sometimes have detrimental effects.

One respondent – 'Aweniga' - who has been here for less than five years, and who has developed friendships with people from other ethnic groups, discussed how he relies heavily on the support and guidance of his

immediate family members who have lived in the UK for a long period of time. 'Aweniga' had good work at home where he was a social worker with an international non-governmental organisation. He arrived three years ago and has since been doing unskilled factory work. His original aim for migrating was to save his money so he could return to Ghana to do a post-graduate course, to ensure a better job in the future. His brothers and sisters in London, on the other hand, have persuaded him to spend his money on a passport, so he can work 'legally', earning enough money to set himself up back in Ghana where he has a wife and child.

His close ties, he says, have been supportive but at the same time they have served as a hindrance to pursuing his own plans. He believes he would have realized his dual goals of making money and doing a Masters Degree faster, if he had broken away from his close ties:

> So that's why I say that they haven't helped me much, you know, this thing with them hasn't helped me much. Perhaps if I were to be in a place where I am a bit distant from them may be I will probably be taking my own decision, like enough of the money making and let's go to school. Probably by now I would have been in school or something.

'Aweniga' is caught up in strong family ties that are preventing him from achieving his preferred life strategies. This is a classical example of the barriers created by strong family and community ties - a case where strong ties have yielded weak outcomes.

But unlike Granovetter's Boston Italians, Ghanaians in London have networks that provide a strong flow of information and resources. They select the most relevant sources of information, though they tend to rely on family and friends for information on doctors, lawyers and jobs. They will use the internet to seek information, for instance, less than the British-born and Romanians in this project, and more than the Turks and the Portuguese groups, who hardly use it at all. But when needing information about rights at work etc, they would go to a relevant work colleague first. More than in any of the other groups, Ghanaians are prone to meeting 'friends of friends of friends' from back home or from networks in the UK which include non-Ghanaians. They often mention that they did not previously know the person who helped them out. Thus, in distinction to Granovetter's idea that weak ties

outside of one's community are likely to provide the more relevant and adequate information and resources, we found that weak ties *within* the community provide the same function:

> ...the first time I came she sent me to some cleaning job for two or three hours but...I had to rely on other friends. You know when you start with something, it is through that that you meet one person then through that you meet other people. It was through that morning one [job] that I was able to meet other people.

Whatever their problems, Ghanaian community networks provide strong levels of trust. This is a community that is socially and culturally heterogeneous, has very specific work goals, experiences high levels of racism, work very long hours and/or at two jobs, finding it difficult to develop inter-community social spaces. Through inter-tribal and other ethnic interactions, this social and cultural heterogeneity has introduced a broader set of networks and community involvement in London than they ever had in Ghana. Many Ghanaians have developed both strong and weak links with other Ghanaians across previous tribal boundaries and with other black Africans. Accessing weak ties mainly within the community but also to a small extent outside their own community, links up with the debates about segregation and separatism and the need to engineer community cohesion.

Integration and participation

The process of integration in a culturally diverse society is often seen as a path to be taken only by immigrants, in the process of settling into the host society. Although it should work as a two-way process which involves 'change in values, norms and behaviour for both newcomers and members of the existing society' (Castles, et al. 2003, 15), it is generally understood as one-way process in which immigrants assimilate into the dominant culture and institutions of the receiving society, shedding their own values and norms, cultures and traditions for those of the receiving society.

Immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, usually construct and contest the degree and intensity of their participation in the new context. Instead of understanding immigrant inclusion as a typically passive form of

integration, immigrant agency operates through the construction of social, economic, political practices and conditions of everyday life. Networks can be emergent structures, operating as constructive and productive processes. Smith reminds us that people practice 'multiple forms of accommodation and resistance to dominant power relations' at the local level (Smith 2002, 118-119).

In the UK, as in numerous other European countries of immigration, there is a desire to engineer community cohesion (Amin 2002, 968). For example, in the Cantle Report (Home Office 2001) the aim was to bring communities together by attempting to develop common goals and shared visions among diverse groups in multi-ethnic or 'mixed' neighbourhoods. Community interaction and the emergence of trust, shared values and sense of belonging can only emerge from the people themselves, at the grassroots level. As Amin says, it cannot be engineered (Amin 2002, 972):

> Mixed neighbourhoods need to be accepted as the spatially open, culturally heterogeneous, and socially variegated spaces that they are, not imagined as future cohesive or integrated communities. There are limits to how far community cohesion – rooted in common values, a shared sense of place, and local networks of trust – can become the basis of living with difference in such neighbourhoods.

Similarly, the concept of 'Britishness' and citizenship tests are not only engineered symbolism, they are directed only at immigrants. While citizenship packs will be available to all those eligible to vote, only immigrants have to 'demonstrate good behaviour and a willingness to integrate' (Wintour and Travis Tuesday June 5, 2007):

> Under plans to be unveiled this week, every teenager in the UK would be given a citizenship pack when they become eligible to vote, and migrants would only be able to vote and become British citizens if they could demonstrate good behaviour and a willingness to integrate.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion, although concerned about equality in its interim statement, asserts that 'interaction is key' in the process of immigrant integration and cohesion (Department of Communities and Local Government 2007, 22). This is not necessarily how immigrants experience or define the process of integration and cohesion. Immigrants

tend to define 'integration' differently from 'sense of belonging'. For many of our respondents, integration is instrumental – it means 'getting a job', 'being part of the system', it means having a commitment to being a good worker, a good citizen and contributing to the receiving society. This commitment is so strong that some of the undocumented migrants attempt to become part of the system by regularizing their status within the constraints of their irregular immigration and labour market status, a process characterised as *irregular formality*. For example, overstayers, those without National Insurance numbers, and those who do not declare a second job or whose employer does not declare an employee's job, continually attempt to find ways to 'regularise' themselves by buying or renting documents (Vasta 2006).

Sense of belonging, on the other hand, is much more difficult to achieve, and many claimed that racism is a major barrier. In the first quote, this woman experiences discrimination because her qualifications are not accepted and due to wage exploitation. The woman in the second quote reveals the effects of continually being reminded that she is black:

> Some times it depends, when you are somewhere and you are happy with yourself, you can describe the place as your home but the way things are going there's no way I can describe this place as home. Sometimes if you're able to use your certificate to work, you get better pay, live in a good area that's where you can describe here as home.

> The second issue is discrimination and racism…whatever that you do, you're still referred to as that black woman…It doesn't bother me being called a black woman, because I am black…It doesn't bother me, but I don't want to be referred to as a black woman all the time. Because I know I'm black. You don't have to tell me I'm black. I want to be seen as any other person.

Conclusion

Crucially, the conditions where immigrants resettle shape their identity and affect their life choices in that place. Recent Ghanaian immigrants, arriving over the past ten to fifteen years, came to work and to study. Their work strategies, their development of community networks and their participation in London life reveals a remarkable and complex picture. Drawn by the need to visit family and by the needs of the London economy, many expected that

if they worked hard, they could make it - be it in the UK or back in Ghana. The reality is that this goal takes longer and proves harder to achieve. Along the way, many experience downward mobility, de-skilling, job exploitation and racism.

Like many immigrant groups, however, Ghanaians actively construct participation and accommodation in the receiving society through family ties and community networks.

Nonetheless, contradictions and ambivalences arise with how they develop community networks and how they negotiate the process of integration. Typically, their networks are both transnational and local. Ghanaians, who develop and maintain their networks and ties with ease, are extremely adept at tapping into them when needed. Utilizing and developing weak and strong networks that span several countries, tribes, and other immigrant groups, Ghanaians develop relevant work and life strategies. Through their local and global networks, they construct cultural meanings and work strategies as part of a process of accommodation and resistance to dominant modes of power relations, as well as creating the grounds for their participation. Ghanaians are eager to integrate, but find many obstacles in their path. Sense of belonging is more elusive.

Inequality, that is, difficulties in finding work because they are black, not having their qualifications accepted, being barred from legal work in the UK, exploitation at work, dealing with racism constitute an ambivalent and at times rather difficult 'levelling' process for many Ghanaians. As a result, inequality acts as a barrier to achieving a sense of belonging and developing solidarity and interaction with other groups. To achieve integration, solidarity and a sense of belonging, equality is key.

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Endnotes:

[1] Ghanaians, Portuguese, Romanians, Turks and a sample of British-born people were surveyed (155 in total) for the Work Strategies and Networks project (WSN). A snowball technique was adopted to find respondents, with at least 2 interviewers for each group in order to avoid sample and interviewer bias. We used a semi-structured questionnaire for approx. 30 in each group (equal gender split) in late 2004 and later selected 10 respondents from each groups to conduct in-depth interviews in each group in 2005/6. We conducted 10 in-depths interviews from the 31 Ghanaians surveyed.

[2] There is a plethora of Community Cohesion guidelines, strategies, and programmes: **Local Government Association** 2002 'Guidance on Community Cohesion', London: Local Government Association.; **Home Office Community Cohesion Unit** 2003 'Building a picture of community cohesion', London: Home Office.; **Community Cohesion Panel** 2004 'The End of Parallel Lives? The Report of the Community Cohesion Panel', London: Independent panel, **Home Office** 2004 'Strength in Diversity - towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy ': Home Office UK..

[3] We note that the data does not always tally between questions due to the rather sensitive position of some of our respondents.

[4] Some people make their documents (ie national insurance numbers) available to irregular immigrants and charge them a rental fee for the duration of use.

[5] The Census and Labour Force Survey figures compiled by Spence (**Spence, L.** 2005 'Country of Birth and Labour Market Outcomes in London: An analysis of Labour Force Survey and Census data', in G. L. A. Data Management and Analaysis Group (ed): Greater London Authority.) combines data from the Labour Force Survey 2002/3 and from the 2001 Census.

[6] In some tables we have included the Labour Force and Census data simply to show where our sample fits in relation to the census and Labour Force data.

[7] There is concern about a brain drain in Ghana, particularly among health professionals and people in the higher education sector, see **Manuh, T., Asante, R. and Djangmah, J.** 2005 'The Brain Drain in the Higher Education Sector in Ghana', in T. Manuh (ed) *At Home in the World: International Migration and Development in Concemporary Ghana and West Africa*, Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, **Nyonator, F. and Dovlo, D.** 2005 'The Health of the Nation and the Brain Drain in the Health Sector', in T. Manuh (ed) *At Home in the World: International Migration and Development in Contemporary Ghana and West Africa*, Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers.

[8] Although this is a small sample, the percentages provide an easier reading of the changes in mobility across the three job periods.

[9] Thanks to Kate Meagher for the many interesting and helpful discussions we have had on 'networks'. Her thesis work provided an excellent understanding of the various theoretical approaches and provided much inspiration.

[10] Granovetter's work is not too dissimilar to Putnam's later definition of social capital **Putnam, R.** 1993 *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press..